



All India People's Science Network (AIPSN) Statement

Scientific temper is under unprecedented attack in India today.

20th August is being observed as National Scientific Temper Day in honour of Dr.Narendra Dabholkar, champion of scientific temper, who was killed in an act of premeditated murder by right-wing communal terrorist forces, on this day five years ago in 2013. The killing shocked the nation, but more rude shocks came when several similar murders were committed over the next several years. Govind Pansare, who worked to support inter-caste marriages, delivered lecture on the true legacy of Shivaji, and condemned the glorification of the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, was killed in 2015. M.M.Kalburgi, a scholar who studied socio-religious reform movements of the 12th century in Karnataka and the related challenge to dominant narratives, was murdered in 2016. And Gauri Lankesh, fearless journalist and fierce critic of communal bigotry, was gunned down in 2017. It has now come to light that at least some of these murders were probably committed by the same extremist group. But the common thread definitely was the threat these forces felt from these campaigners for reason and scientific temper, and against bigotry and intolerance.

These murders are extremist expressions of the intolerance openly displayed by some mainstream communal forces, including persons holding high political office, targeting sometimes with violence all those who question their prejudice, communal hate campaigns, and continuous dissemination of fake news, “alternative facts” and falsified histories, including in science.

An imaginary golden past of “Vedic science” is being propagated by these forces. Real and great achievements in science and technology, and rich traditions of rational thought, emanating from the Indian sub-continent are being sidelined, while obviously fake achievements are being proclaimed by top-level Central and State Ministers, Chief Ministers and political functionaries, substituting myth for history, such as that the Ganesh deity was the product of plastic surgery, that aviation and space technology, television and internet existed in India from the time of the Mahabharata, that ancient India had in vitro fertilization etc, and all this several thousands of years before any recorded history. Many other fantastic claims have been made by some state and central leaders, such as that the theory of evolution is wrong and that the Vedas contained theories “better than” Einstein’s $E=mc^2$!

In sharp contrast, real and important contributions to science and technology in India emanating from not just the Vedic-Brahmanic tradition but from many different strands of culture in the sub-continent, such as the Jaina, Buddhist, Islamic, peasant, adivasi and from other working people are being ignored. Contributions of the artisan communities in India, who were actively involved in the development of

crafts, technologies and productive forces, are also ignored, revealing persistent social blind-spots and prejudices. Many other civilizations too have made important even seminal contributions. Understanding and highlighting the many real contributions from India to the universal body of S&T knowledge is tribute enough to India's civilizational past, without having to invent any.

Scientists, eminent scholars and others from India and abroad, including Nobel Laureates, who express their disagreement with such views, have been attacked as anti-national, western-oriented, and "sons of Macaulay". Pseudo-histories and anti-scientific views are being incorporated into school curricula and college/ university teaching. So-called "research" to "prove" pseudo-scientific claims in both the sciences and social sciences are being officially funded by government. Universities have become arenas of constant assault, often literally, on intellectual autonomy and critical thinking.

The aggressive anti-science and anti-rational atmosphere whipped up by obscurantist forces with official support has generated a climate of intimidation and even violence in an attempt to suppress a scientific outlook and critical thinking in our educational and intellectual institutions. Funding for scientific research is being cut, while social science research is being throttled.

Developmental programmes are being formulated without significant S&T and other research inputs. Mega projects like the Bullet Train, Smart Cities, Make in India etc., are being undertaken with no scientific inputs in the public domain. Development policies in industry and agriculture, in key infrastructure areas like energy, coal, oil and gas, power, transport and for basic needs like food, water and health are being driven by corporate interests with little concern for the poor or for the common citizen and without any public scientific debate. Environmental concerns are being systematically sidelined. This systematic devaluation of S&T and research, and the suffocation of critical thinking in educational institutions and in society at large, will severely hamper the future of the country, especially of its youth in this knowledge era.

We assert that promoting scientific temper, defending plurality, harmony and composite culture is a fundamental duty of all citizens, and especially of professional scientists and social scientists, as enjoined in the Directive Principles of our Constitution. The right and duty to question is basic, not only for science, but also for democracy.

It is essential that this onslaught on scientific temper, critical thinking and plurality, be vigorously resisted. Science has an important role to play today in defending democracy and the Indian Constitution. AIPSN appeals to all organizations, institutions and individuals committed to promoting scientific temper to come together for observing the National Scientific Temper Day, and working together in the days to come to defeat the ideology of communal hate politics and build an India of reason and humanity with well informed and empowered citizens.