

Observe National Scientific temper day (NSTD) on 20th August, 2021.

We need Scientific Temper to fight Covid. Oppose promotion of Astrology by Governmental efforts.

All India People's Science Network (AIPSN) and all its constituent bodies note with concern the recent announcement by IGNOU to start 'MA-Jyotish' course from the current academic year. We also note similar courses have been running in at least a handful more public funded universities. We note that authorities in these universities are defending such courses by claiming that these courses fulfil the NEP 2020 recommendation of introduction of 'Indian Knowledge Systems' in curriculum at all stages.

India has a rich tradition of knowledge generation in multiple fields including astronomy, mathematics, metallurgy and philosophy. The tree of modern science is watered by all great cultures of the past in different ways and in different eras. Some of the Indian contributions to this collective knowledge are undeniably significant and they will occupy a crucial part in any wholesome learning of science.

However, making fantastic false claims about supposed scientific and technological discoveries in ancient India on the basis of our ancient myths (e.g. claims that ancient Indians had flying technology) or giving credence to patently pseudoscientific fields such as astrology ('phal' / 'hora' in Indian 'Jyotishastra') only does discredit to the real history of Indian science. Every minute our students spend learning something which is demonstrably false is a minute that could have been devoted to the real history of Indian science. The greatest irony of the whole situation is that the astrology part of Jyotishastra is not even an Indian product. There have been ample indicators that zodiac sign based horoscope making and prediction of future based on them was not practiced in India till about 4th century BCE, when these Chaldean and Greek ideas reached Indian shores.

Astrological predictions have been invariably shown to fail in any controlled statistical test. There is no scientific basis for believing that planets have any meaningful effect on the human body. Lastly, the astrological principle that the effect of planets would vary based on your birth chart even defies plain logic. Introducing such an unproven and illogical field as a teaching course by IGNOU is promoting superstition by governmental effort. Further, its introduction goes against Article 51a(h) of the Indian Constitution which stipulates that it is the fundamental duty of every Indian citizen to adhere to scientific temper. Promoting scientific temper, which is a fundamental duty for each one of us, requires us to oppose the promotion of pseudoscience, especially by governmental bodies.

We express our great concern in regard to the encouragement and promotion of fake data, pseudosciences and irresponsible decisions by the Central and some state governments, on the one hand which have contributed to the spread of the pandemic, and the neglect of a planned response based on scientific policy on the other. Covid cannot be fought without scientific temper. Fighting Covid scientifically requires the reversal of policies promoting private health care for profit leading to the neglect and decline of effective public healthcare systems in most states of India. Fighting Covid requires effective implementation of a national policy for universal free vaccination on a crash basis. It requires planning based on honest data collection. While wasting huge sums in self advertisement on free vaccination,

the Central government and several state governments are failing in practice at the ground level to ensure adequate supplies of vaccines, oxygen and even the proper disposal of the dead bodies of those who succumbed to Covid. Media organizations reporting accurately the situation on the ground are being systematically targeted and sought to be silenced by the misuse of the state apparatus. Thus the government itself is promoting fake data and actively trying to suppress the truth.

We, members of AIPSN and concerned citizens, demand that astrology (i.e. predictive part of Jyotishastra) related courses should be discontinued from every public funded university. Instead of that we demand the introduction of Astronomy in Indian universities. We demand the reversal of privatization policies and restoration of scientific policy for ensuring good quality public health care as a universal right. We further demand that the government stops its attacks on media reporting honestly on the Covid situation. We also demand that full respect be shown to our constitutional article 51a(h) for actively promoting scientific temper at a mass level in order to effectively combat and defeat the Covid pandemic. We appeal to all citizens, mass organizations and educational institutions to participate in the National Scientific Temper Day (NSTD) observances for August 20th for promoting scientific temper in these challenging times and to raise our voices against the brutal killing of Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Lankesh.

(Civilization is the encouragement of differences.-Mahatma Gandhi).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.