

CAMPUS

Daily-Wage Workers at BHU Continue Four-Month Struggle for Permanent Positions

BY SANGEETA BAROOAH PISHAROTY ON 15/11/2016 • [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

After multiple pleas to the authorities and the government, the protestors, many of whom have been working at the university for three decades, asked the president to allow them to “commit euthanasia” if they are denied justice any longer.



Activist Teesta Setalvad with the protestors on November 4. Credit: Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty

Varanasi: As many as 1,700 employees of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), many of whom have been on its daily wage payroll for over three decades, have been protesting for over 130 days, of which 38 were a hunger strike, demanding that their positions be made permanent.

A notification was issued by the university registrar in 1998 after a resolution was passed the previous year by the university's executive council to make their positions permanent, but no action has been taken on it since.

Sitting in a tent made of rags and old plastic set up just outside the BHU gate, the protesting employees have been seeking the attention of the university administration since July, with no luck. Besides writing many letters of appeal to BHU vice chancellor G.C. Tripathi and the

registrar, they have also written to Mahendra Nath Pandey, minister of state for human resource development minister, and to the union labour ministry seeking redress. Earlier this year in April, they also wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention as the university administration had held back their salaries for four months.

Frustrated at the lack of response from all quarters, the protesters wrote to President Pranab Mukherjee on August 22, asking him to intervene “and give justice” or else allow them “to commit euthanasia”.

“We have been demanding for a just cause. I have been working as a daily wager at BHU since June 1988, hoping some day I would get a permanent position. This has become my next home. Every time we plead for it, we are told by the administration that something will soon be done. We continued on that hope and many years have passed by in this way. Then, recently we got to know that a resolution was taken by the university’s executive council as far back as in 1997 to make our positions permanent. We learnt that a notification to that effect was issued by the then university registrar dated March 9, 1998. So we pleaded the present VC to honour that resolution. We are poor people, after all. But he has not done anything yet,” said Uma Shankar, one of the protesting workers.

“Instead the administration stopped our salaries for four months and then stopped renewing our contracts, pushing us along with our families to starve to death,” he added.

“For the last three decades, every 89th day, we were fired from our job and hired the next day,” said another employee, who hesitated to give his name to this correspondent.

Taking such a route allowed the university to deny them the benefits that permanent employees of a central university are entitled to, such as health benefits, housing, pension and so on.



Protestors outside BHU. Credit: Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty

“The daily wagers at BHU are divided into three categories – high skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. A high-skilled wagger like me used to get Rs 117 per day. Last year, the slabs have been raised, to Rs 424 per day, Rs 385 per day and Rs 195 per day respectively,” Uma Shankar said.

Leafing through a sheaf of papers – letters they have written to the varsity authorities so far, copies of the executive council resolution and memoranda to various organisations seeking support – another employee Virendra Kumar said, “Comparatively, I am in a better position as my son is beginning to earn something. So my family has at least something to eat every day even though I am neck deep in debt by now having taken loan to pay for my other sons’ school fees and house rent. Most others don’t have even that. People have stopped giving them anything

on credit. I ask the university authorities, what should they do? What should we all do after giving so many years at the service of the university?”

Although the protesters have not been able to get any positive response from the university administration so far, they are getting support from the community.

“We are getting a lot of public support. People have been coming to our tent to tell us that they can understand the dire state we are in,” Uma Shankar said, adding, “Some student bodies of BHU have shown support to us too; they have seen how hard we work, for so many hours in a day without any benefit. There has also been support from some activists.”

On October 29, after meeting the protesters who were then on hunger strike for over 30 days, Swaraj India co-founder Yogendra Yadav wrote to Modi seeking his intervention on the issue, as it is his parliamentary constituency.

“I am requesting you to take serious note of the issue and take necessary steps immediately to ensure that injustice is not meted out to the employees who have served the varsity for three decades and see that faith is restored in the university administration,” the letter said. Yadav drew Modi’s attention to the “euthanasia demand” made by the protesters if the administration didn’t pay heed to their plight.

Yadav told *The Wire* that he has not received any response from the prime minister’s office so far.

On November 4, human rights activist Teesta Setalvad, on a visit to Varanasi, also spoke to the protesters and pledged her support to their “just demands”.

Uma Shankar, who had been on hunger strike, said, “We gave it up because we all fell sick, we had to be hospitalised.”

Another employee Deepak Kumar said, “Our rights are being ignored by the university simply because we are poor. I sincerely pray to our prime minister to give us justice. After all, he represents us in parliament; he has a responsibility towards us, however poor and powerless we may be.”

A BHU student activist present at the protest site on November 4 who *The Wire* spoke to said, “The denial of rights and insensitive attitude of both the university and the central government towards these poor people has further pushed them to the margins of society. They are taking more and more debts for everyday survival. This is particularly unfortunate because it is happening in BHU, an institution which has produced so many luminaries. Instead of listening to their just plea, the university registrar recently made an insensitive comment referring to their protest. He said he can’t help it if someone wants to die.”

The registrar’s and vice-chancellor’s offices did not answer *The Wire*’s requests for a response.

What to read next:



At BHU, Women are Being Restricted by RSS's Chains In "Campus"



An RSS Show in Banaras Hindu University Tries to Set Right 'Myths' About the Sangh In "Politics"



Freedom Under Fire: Teesta Setalvad's NGO Loses FCRA Registration; Hyderabad University Faculty Back Suspended Teachers In "Rights"

📁 Categories: Campus (<http://thewire.in/category/society/campus/>), Labour (<http://thewire.in/category/labour/>)

🔖 Tagged as: Banaras Hindu University (<http://thewire.in/tag/banaras-hindu-university/>), BHU (<http://thewire.in/tag/bhu/>), contractualisation (<http://thewire.in/tag/contractualisation/>), Narendra Modi (<http://thewire.in/tag/narendra-modi/>), Pranab Mukherjee (<http://thewire.in/tag/pranab-mukherjee/>), Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty (<http://thewire.in/tag/sangeeta-barooah-pisharoty/>), Teesta Setalvad (<http://thewire.in/tag/teesta-setalvad/>), Yogendra Yadav (<http://thewire.in/tag/yogendra-yadav/>)

0 Comments The Wire

 Login ▾





 Recommend  Share

Sort by Best ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

 Subscribe  Add Disqus to your site  Add Disqus Add  Privacy