

Assistant professor, who 'abused' Goddess Durga, suspended

Kedar Kumar Mandal has been debarred from entering the premises of Dyal Singh College during the period of his suspension to avert a law-and-order situation

New Delhi: The governing body of Delhi University's Dyal Singh College suspended assistant professor Kedar Kumar Mandal on Monday. Mandal had received strong criticism over an 'offensive' Facebook post about Goddess Durga on Friday.

The governing body took the decision to suspend the controversial assistant professor unanimously. "The governing body members and many professors observed that Mandal had repeatedly made derogatory and defamatory reference to Hindu gods and goddesses. He should have exercised self-restraint as his FB post is bound to create a communal backlash," said a professor, requesting anonymity.

A 4-member inquiry committee has been constituted under the supervision of governing body member and senior journalist Surajit Dasgupta, which is supposed to submit its report to the chairman of the general body. The other members of the committee include Morning College principal IS Bakshi, Evening College principal Pawan Kumar Sharma and Mr Mangla, another governing body member.

According to sources, chairman of the governing body Amitabh Sinha will send the recommendation of Mandal's suspension to the Vice Chancellor. "Till the time the suspended assistant professor is in a state of suspension, he is also debarred from entering the college premises to avert any law and order situation," said another professor, who attended the meeting.

The governing body observed that Mandal was a habitual offender. "After an initial inquiry, it was found that this was not his maiden offensive post. Many of his earlier posts were also found objectionable. In one of his earlier post he had called Hindu gods '*ghooskhor*' (bribe-seeker)," said another member. He said that another post of Mandal began with an expletive.

Interestingly, Mandal had posted the objectionable post on Facebook as a public post, but while posting his apology, he changed the privacy setting and published his apology as a private post.

Following criticism from various quarters, after his controversial post on Facebook, Mandal had taken down the post. He had also sent his apology through an e-mail to the day college principal. However, sources said, the email was full of errors (spelling as well as grammatical mistakes), which is not expected of a teacher. "Leave alone grammatical mistakes, Mandal spelt 'hurt' as 'heart'," said a source.

In the 'apologetic' email, Mandal allegedly said that he had got the controversial idea from an article in a magazine. However, his Facebook record shows that he mostly posts one-liners without citations or quotes. The disputed and now-deleted post carried no reference either.

Student organisations like the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and National Students' Union of India (NSUI) had also called for Mandal's dismissal.

Sources said, Mandal, who is an orthopaedically challenged, had unsuccessfully sought a Bihar assembly election ticket in 2015 from RLSP president and union minister Upendra Kushwaha. Earlier, during his JNU days, he was associated with Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association (BAPSA).

An Ambedkarite student union leader and research scholar at the Jawaharlal Nehru University has posted on Facebook that Mandal is a Yadav, not a Scheduled Caste.

On emerging from the governing body meet, chairman Sinha said, "This does not appear to be a simple act of an individual. Several anti-Indian forces must be behind it. There is a pattern to the deaths of Narendra Dabholkar, MM Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh. They foist old people, women and the handicapped to gain public sympathy, and then they indulge in a suicide mission. You may note that none of these cases could be solved and the suspect arrested or tried in a court of law. Therefore, I fear that Kedar Kumar Mandal's life is at risk. The police must arrest him immediately so that he remains safe in their custody. It is a well-orchestrated attempt to tarnish the image of Dyal Singh College, which has been producing remarkable results of late. I am issuing this statement with due diligence, a lot of deliberation and full responsibility."

The BJP-affiliated National Democratic Teachers Front (NDTF) on Saturday had filed a police complaint against Mandal for allegedly writing an objectionable post on social media about Goddess Durga.

"This was an attempt to destroy the social and communal harmony of the society during Navratri. Many students had warned the college management that they won't attend the class of Mandal. We welcome the decision," said a member of ABVP. A member of the governing body echoed the sentiment and said Mandal had deliberately timed his offensive post to coincide with the ongoing festivities to create communal disharmony.

A member of the governing body said that the women professors of the college are deeply hurt by Mandal's post and they were of the opinion that his offence was "unpardonable" whereas his male colleagues wanted to give him a chance of defence but punish him nevertheless.

The governing body was unanimous in the decision that Mandal must be punished so that the college is not seen as defending him, which could create a law-and-order situation.