

# 'AMU can act as catalyst but can't educate 200 mn Muslims. We need more universities'

AMU Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor dismisses the Jinnah portrait row as a 'non-issue', discusses the minority institution debate, says freedom of speech must have boundaries, regrets presence of 'anti-social elements' in academic institutions, and believes NEET will help improve quality of medical education



Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor with Deputy Editor Muzamil Jaleel at *The Indian Express* office. *Abhinav Saha*

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Aligarh Muslim University was recently at the centre of a political controversy over Muhammad Ali Jinnah's portrait. In the present political scenario, what role do you see for one of the premier minority institutions in the country?

AMU has to play an important role now. It must inculcate the principles of democracy, secularism, tolerance in youth. These values were relevant earlier too, but I think they are more relevant now. We are a diverse university. We have students from 31 states and Union territories. We have 1,000 students from Kashmir, 800 from Assam, 1,000 from West Bengal... So we are a diverse and cosmopolitan university. So whatever message we send out and how we behave, it will have an impact on our national polity.

We all have to live together. We are living together on campus in a harmonious manner and we are a secular, modern institution imparting scientific education. We have 103 departments and centres, including medical school, dental school etc. We have a diverse faculty and we are a diverse university in every way. We have to act in a responsible, mature and tolerant manner.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** How has politics outside the campus affected AMU?

Definitely what happens outside the campus impacts us in some way or the other. Not only outside the campus, whatever happens in India impacts all of us.

**AMRITH LAL:** How do you see the controversy over Jinnah's portrait? What triggered it?

Actually, the matter is irrelevant and a non-issue. The portrait has been there since 1938... There are dozens of portraits. I don't think it has any relevance. A local Member of Parliament (Satish Gautam) wrote a letter and released it before I received it. He was a member of the AMU Court as well; we have six members of the Lok Sabha in our Court. He never raised the issue when he was a member of the Court. In September 2017, the said matter of the portrait of Jinnah had appeared in local newspapers but died down since nobody took any notice of it. Before that even I did not know that there was a portrait of Jinnah (in the AMU students' union office).

I don't know why it has come up again. Only he (Gautam) can answer. Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji also visited the same hall when he was in the Janata Party. He was also conferred life membership. Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar, the King of Saudi Arabia and several other important personalities also have life memberships.

**AMRITH LAL:** You mentioned that students from all over the country, and not just Muslims, study at AMU. Is the cosmopolitan aspect of the university not being projected sufficiently now?

We are a diverse university, cosmopolitan in nature, with students from all states, regions, castes. We always project it.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** With a predominantly Muslim student community, are there any specific

## WHY TARIQ MANSOOR

In a letter to Tariq Mansoor last month, Aligarh MP Satish Gautam sought an explanation for the portrait of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah hanging in the students' union office. AMU noted that Jinnah was a founder member of the University Court who had been given life membership of the union 80

years ago, and that his portrait had been there for decades.

This was followed by violence after students objected to protests by Hindu Yuva Vahini, demanding removal of the portrait. Mansoor, a surgeon and a member of Medical Council of India, who has been AMU V-C for a year, dismisses the row as 'irrelevant'



**problems that you're facing?**

Generally, we have a very peaceful atmosphere at the university and there is no violence. Of course, there is always some difference of opinion on campus.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Did you speak to the government about the controversy?

Yes, yes, we spoke to the government. I wrote a letter to the chief secretary. I met the Union Home Minister as well.

**LALMANI VERMA:** In April, RSS activists sought permission to organise a *shikha* on the AMU campus. Earlier, in 2014, there was a demand to celebrate the 128th birth anniversary of Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh, one of the donors to the varsity. How do you see these developments?

In a democratic society, we cannot stop any person from making a statement. But we don't take note of irrelevant statements and we do not react.

**UMA VISHNU:** How do you see the political and legal debate over the minority status to AMU?

There is no political debate at the moment because the matter is sub judice. The case is pending in the Supreme Court. Section 2 of the 1982 Act (passed by Parliament) clearly states that AMU has been established by Muslims. There are other sections which state that it has the specific duty to promote cultural and educational advancement of Muslims. Then, the Act was struck down by the High Court. The university went to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court stayed the HC order. So we are still a minority institution and the Supreme Court is going to take up the matter. (In 2016, the Central government argued that AMU and Jamia Millia Islamia were not minority educational institutions as they had been set up by an Act of Parliament, not by Muslims.)

**LALMANI VERMA:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also sought removal of the Jinnah portrait.

We have nothing to do with the UP government. We are a Central university like Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Banaras Hindu University. We

are under the HRD Ministry. So the UP government is not part of our administration.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** What are the challenges before Muslims, especially youth, as far as education goes?

Earlier, there were very few universities and AMU was one of them. But now the Muslim community in India is huge — 200 million people. One university is not sufficient for them. We need hundreds of universities and Muslims have to study in colleges and universities everywhere. Education is the answer to many of the problems of our country. AMU can act as a catalyst but it cannot satisfy the educational needs of such a huge community.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** Universities have recently got involved in the mainstream political discourse. This has raised questions as to whether students should get involved in politics at all. What is your view?

In various universities, students' union elections and teachers' body elections are held on party lines — at Delhi University, JNU, Allahabad University, Lucknow University. But at AMU students' union elections are never held on party lines. Students contest individually. Political parties don't fund these elections. Later, some of the students may join political parties.

**VANDITA MISHRA:** But campuses have been drawn into political controversy not just because elections are held on party lines. For instance, at JNU, students raised certain slogans which many in the government felt were not permissible on a campus. Do you think there should be boundaries for what students can say on campus?

Every university has different issues. In a democracy, of course, there is freedom of speech but there should be some boundaries. Freedom of expression is always there but it should not come down to violence. Violence is not acceptable.

But, otherwise, if someone wants to express a view... I don't know what slogans were raised or not raised. But I don't think any provocative or anti-national slogans should be raised. Everything has to be done within a legal framework. Law is the most

important thing in society.

**SABA RAHMAN:** Why should AMU not have party-based politics? It is such a big centre of Muslim politics.

There is no ban on it. It has been a convention.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Can you tell us some of the research projects that the university is involved with?

We have diverse departments and so there is a lot of scope for interdisciplinary research. There is research going on in all the fields — medicine, agricultural sciences, dental sciences. We are one of the few universities with a centre for women studies. They are conducting research on the economic, social condition of women, many other parameters. Apart from this, we are doing research on climate change, food security etc. The centre for nanotechnology was recently established. Every year we admit 600-800 PhD students.

The total number of students at AMU is around 23,000. Of these, 16,500 live in hostels and we have to manage all of them... At least 30 per cent of our students are girls. The number has increased dramatically. In some faculties, in the post-graduate courses — Botany, Zoology — a majority are girls. In the medical faculty also, most are girls. We have an undergraduate Women's College only for girls.

**UMA VISHNU:** Is there gender equality on campus? Can women contest student union elections?

We are committed to gender equality. Yes, women can contest elections. We have two women executive members who are part of the union.



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**MONOJIT MAJUMDAR:** Do girls and boys have different hostel timings?

We have restrictions for both boys and girls. As per rules, even the boys are not allowed to go out after a certain time.

**MONOJIT MAJUMDAR:** What kind of research is being conducted in the field of social sciences? Is there a movement away from it to maths and science?

The History Department is doing a lot of research in medieval and modern history. The department is well known all over the world. There is no movement away from that. In traditional universities (like AMU) — BHU, DU and JNU — we have to give importance to classical departments such as history, philosophy, languages etc. We are known for these departments.

**AMRITH LAL:** Can you tell us about your off-site campuses?

We have three as of now — Malappuram, Murshidabad and Kishanganj. They have a limited number of courses such as management and law. We have submitted a proposal to the government for funds for expansion of these centres. They have asked us to submit a specific plan. We have sought Rs 100 crore for each centre. A committee has been appointed to look into each centre.

In Malappuram we have about 400 students and about 350 in Murshidabad. At the Kishanganj centre we are facing some problems because the location is not suitable; there are 250-odd students there. It is a flood-prone area and we had to vacate it for two months. We have asked the state government to build an embankment.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** There were reports of a proposal to set up a Centre for National Security Studies at JNU, and that 'Islamic Terrorism' would be taught as a subject there. Have there been any such proposals for AMU?

No, nobody has made any such a demand to me. The government has never asked me to introduce or remove a course. No religion or faith must be associated with terrorism... I can't comment on JNU, only the vice-chancellor there can respond.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** You have been the AMU vice-chancellor for a year. What is your vision for the institution?

I want AMU to be known for its academic excellence. I want AMU students to be known for their dignified behaviour, by their culture. We should be known for our traditions and conventions — respect for seniors, love for juniors and the bonding among the AMU alumni network across the world, in the US, Europe and even in smaller countries such as Mauritius and New Zealand.

**VANDITA MISHRA:** Is student politics a part of AMU or do you see it as a disruption to academics?

There are some problems regarding this issue in Indian universities. We want to create world-class institutions and the activities in some universities are not in line with it. There are some anti-social elements disturbing the academic peace. I am not talk-

ing of AMU, I am talking about all campuses in India, especially state universities. I have been in the academic field for the last 35 years. I have seen this in many other universities as well. There is a problem of anti-social elements in academic institutions and we have to take care of it, sort it out.

In any academic institution, there are about 5 per cent students who are not interested in studies, and even if you suspend them, they aren't bothered. 95-97 per cent students are very good. Students now are career-oriented and they don't want to waste their time. But the 2-3 per cent students create all sorts of problems. They take admission in one course and when they complete it, they take admission in some other course... There should be democracy but we have to take care of the anti-social elements.

**SANDEEP SINGH:** There is a lot of debate about job creation now. What is AMU doing about it?

There are problems in certain branches such as engineering, management etc. Earlier, there was a lot of demand... If there is oversupply of something, there will be stagnation. And, there is an over-supply. We too are affected.

**MONOJIT MAJUMDAR:** You have been a teacher of medicine. What is wrong with medical education in India?

Medical education in India is not satisfactory. There are government colleges which select students on merit. Good students are graduating from AIIMS, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, and AMU, and doing great work. But the quality of education at some of the private medical colleges is not satisfactory. They may have very good infrastructure, libraries, lecture theatres, but they don't have the patients, the laboratories. And, unless you have patients, you can't get good training.

The regulation is in place... NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) will improve the quality of education. The fees at private medical colleges is, say Rs 10 lakh, but taken under the table. Only those with money are getting through... It is not on merit. But with NEET, even these students will have to get minimum marks.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** What is your view on the National Health Protection Mission, to be launched later this year?

The main problem is of funding and implementation. There are certain grey areas. But ultimately, I think, it is a very good idea to provide health insurance to the deprived sections of society.

We are lagging behind in medical facilities. Go to any district in Uttar Pradesh and you will see that the medical facility is in a very deplorable state. At some places it doesn't even exist. The doctors posted at these places are not doing their jobs and instead work elsewhere. We need to pay attention to the health sector. Corporate hospitals take care of only 5-10 per cent of the people. We don't just need medical care but also affordable medical care. We are far behind and I think the insurance scheme is a good beginning.