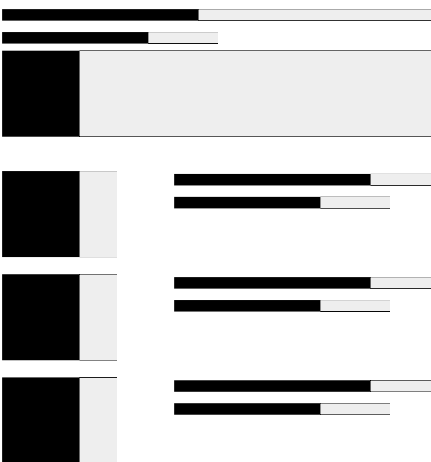


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Bengal professor's 'offending' picture goes viral

TNN | Apr 16, 2012, 04:25AM IST



KOLKATA: The 'Sonar Kella' joke that landed Ambikesh Mahapatra in the lock-up has gone viral on the Net with Facebookers sharing, posting and re-posting the picture with a vengeance. And while netizens minced no words while expressing their outrage, there's nothing the vindictive Bengal government or 'hurt' Trinamool cadres can do about it. There are simply too many of them.

The common threads in all the comments on Facebook and Twitter were condemnation of the attack on and arrest of the Jadavpur University professor, brutal mockery of the [Trinamool Congress](#) chief's "dictatorial" attitude and her "intolerance" and severe criticism of this "attack on democratic rights".

The 'offending' picture on Shan Saha's Facebook Wall comes with a mock warning: "Uni Hirak Rani, deben amader ei pic share korar jonno thengani" (she's the queen of Hirak and will spank us for sharing this picture) - an obvious takeoff on Satyajit Ray's 'Hirak Rajar Deshe'.

Many posted news reports of Mahapatra's arrest and asked in disbelief, "Is this an April fool joke or what?" The anger and sarcasm was evident in posts like: "Shubho noboborsho Ambikesh Mahapatra".

Netizens like Shamik Bag said going to prison for sharing the picture would be "more edifying than the company of goons who are roaming free". Many recalled the anarchy spread by political goons during the turbulent 1970s and warned Bengal against sliding back to those dark ages.

"This is the first sign of an insecure and embattled government trying to stifle criticism and letting loose its goons on dissenters and critics," posted Dwijen Banerjee, an elderly person, on his Facebook Wall. Rajesh Jha from Nagpur wrote that Bengal seemed to be headed for the infamous [Bihar](#) of the past.

Several other 'offending' cartoons have cropped up, including one that shows the Bengal chief minister with a Hitler-like moustache. Another showed [Satyajit Ray](#) asking Mamata whether it had been wrong to name the character in his film Mukul.

Hundreds of jokes are doing the rounds on social networking sites about the chief minister and the administration. If those who posted some of these live outside Bengal, there were jokes about how they could be arrested when they land in Kolkata next.

It wasn't only Facebookers and the Twitterati who exploded in anger. News portals saw equally angry reactions. What infuriated them was not merely the arrest, but the manner in which Trinamool cadres attacked the professor and manhandled him before the law-keepers stepped in.

"You cannot prove the harsh charges against him. Sharing cartoons is a democratic freedom guaranteed by the Constitution. The Mamata government has taken a very wrong step," wrote Sudhir Tailang, a leading cartoonist, on a portal. Close on his heels, K Kameshwar Iyer wrote: "Mamata should be ignored. Once she gets cut off from the local media, she cannot go about doing whatever she likes. She does not deserve such attention. Once again, she has proved she is merely a street fighter".

Pawan Duggal, an eminent cyber law expert in the country, also wondered whether the act of merely forwarding a cartoon strip called for slapping Section 66 of the IT Act, 2000. While a defamation suit should be filed by the aggrieved victim himself, police should ideally consult legal experts before slapping the IT Act, he said.

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