

# Caste on the menu card: JNU students screen documentary on beef after authorities deny permission

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Nearly 40 students formed a human chain to keep guards away. The screening started at about 10.15 pm. (Express Photo)

The documentary ‘Caste on the Menu Card’ — on beef-eating practices in Mumbai — was on Sunday denied permission to be screened at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), hours before it was scheduled to begin.

The students, however, defied the authorities and organised a screening . The documentary had earlier been dropped from the Jeevika Asia Livelihood Documentary Festival.

JNU authorities said the screening was cancelled because the organisers did not take permission from the relevant authorities. Students, however, said it was cancelled due to

socio-political reasons and went from hostel to hostel at night to mobilise an audience for the screening that was held in protest.

At about 9.30 pm, students got into a scuffle with guards who arrived to stop the screening. V P Yadav, who identified himself as a security instructor, said they were following orders as authorities had denied permission for the screening. The pushing and shoving lasted about half-an-hour, during which nearly 40 students formed a human chain around the projector and hurriedly tried to set up equipment.

The screening started at about 10.15 pm even as a bunch of students tried to keep the guards away from the screen. As the film went on, almost every dialogue was met with a loud cheer from the 250-odd people who had gathered. A student involved in organising the screening said they weren't given any reason for permission being denied.

She said it was rare for security personnel and students to get into a physical altercation as the one witnessed today. The screening wrapped up around 10.40 followed by a "beef anthem". Students also claimed there was a disruption by members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and JNU authorities before the protest screening and students were roughed up.

The ABVP, however, said it did not disrupt the screening and claimed police had called them with regard to the screening, after which they informed the guards. "They called me up to ask if the documentary was being screened. When I said yes, they said it's a banned film and can't be allowed. So then we informed the guards who did their duty," said Gaurav Jha from ABVP.

Officers at the Vasant Kunj police station denied making any such call.

"They had earlier given us permission but today they told us we couldn't screen it. They don't want any debate on topics like this. The film does not propagate vegetarianism which is the politically right thing today, and also talks of caste differentiations. That is the problem they have," said Chinmaya Mahanand from the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA).

The students had earlier been granted permission by the Sabarmati hostel warden for the documentary. The warden said he later pulled out as the hostel lawns do not fall under his jurisdiction.

"I had earlier granted permission since it's being screened at the Sabarmati lawns. I thought I could allow it since I am the warden of the hostel. I'm new to the post and did not know that it wasn't under my jurisdiction," said Deo Shankar Navin, the hostel warden.

JNU Vice-Chancellor S K Sopory said, “The students needed to seek permission from the dean, which they didn’t. The warden cannot do so.” Mahanand, however, said there were no such rules in place. “For years screenings have been organised with just signatures of the hostel president and the warden on a letter. These are new things the administration is coming up with to disallow what it doesn’t want,” he said.

Gargi Adhikari, a JNUSU councillor at the spot, said the practice of taking permission started only after the film, Muzaffarnagar Baaki Hai, ran into trouble at the college. Before that, she said, movies would be screened in the open without any need for permission. Then too, the students had gone ahead with the screening.