



The Quest for JMISU – The Uncertain Future of a Legitimate Demand

Since 12 October 2026, five Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) students have initiated a hunger strike¹ for the reinstatement of Jamia Millia Islamia's Students' Union (JMISU) which has been inactive since 2006 due to violence and unrest amongst students.² After two decades, the demand for JMISU has resurged following the recent reinstatement of Aligarh Muslim University Students' Union (AMUSU).³ The major reasons behind this demand are the throttling of student voices on campus and the reclamation of Muslim student political spaces. The demand is well-intentioned and genuine considering the fact that universities like Delhi University (DU) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) have student unions and it is only that Muslim-dominated universities are being denied that right. But can this demand ensure compliance with the spirit that drives this movement?

The Erosion of JMI's Institutional Legacy

Laurence Gautier, in her book *'Between Nation and Community'* writes that Jamia's founders envisioned the institution as a vehicle to strive for the nation's freedom and to give meaning and content to that freedom once it was achieved. Jamia's students have, time and again, strived towards materialising the objective behind the institution's intellectual and political foundation.⁴ JMI's administration has often cracked down on student activism by issuing notices, suspensions, university shutdowns, academic threats and even the public display of students' information, including that of female students.⁵

In the same vein, on 17 October, the students' protest site at the Gulistan-e-Ghalib lawn was vandalised by the proctorial team and some unidentified people who were neither in police uniform nor the university's security team uniform.⁶ The brutal action of forcing students out of the lawn, beating them and manhandling them was followed by a university shutdown and students – whether protesters or not were denied the right to enter the university. The Chief Proctor Mr. Asad Malik has not yet commented on the arbitrary use of force and police deployment in front of the campus.

Mr Malik who is a constitutional law professor at the faculty of law, teaches the invaluable constitutional principles with unparalleled enthusiasm. His eloquent delivery of ratios upholding the freedom of speech, life, liberty and education would naturally make one believe in the constitutional grounding of such a person. Mr. Malik's flair for Urdu poetry allows him to invoke relevant Urdu couplets while teaching, especially in the context of accountability of those in authority. One of his commonly cited couplets by Shayar Jamali is:

“Tum aasmaan ki bulandion se jald hi laut aana; Humein zameen ke masail pe baat karni hai”

(You must return soon from the lofty heights of the sky; we have matters of the earth to discuss)

Before being vested with the responsibility of proctorship, he regularly emphasised the quote '*Power corrupts absolute power corrupts absolutely*' while teaching rule of law.

Such couplets and quotes should become a means of introspection for him and other administrative officers who are adamant on diluting the institution's legacy.

Can the Student Unity Continue?

Despite the fact that JMI's administration has acted arbitrarily in this matter, it becomes equally important to question the student movement from the perspective of the institution's ground reality, that to some extent forms a part of the administration's hesitance as well. JMI annually conducts elections for the posts of vice president, joint secretary, general secretary and class representatives throughout the institution for different faculties. This is the most evident manifestation of student politics in JMI. Despite the insignificance of these elections, they have been unnecessarily divisive and occasionally violent.

A Few years ago, during the election at the faculty of law, a major dispute occurred between the Mewati and the West UP flank, leading to gunshots and severe injuries.⁷ Such divisions within the institution are common and have often led to violent clashes. Vote appeals on the basis of origin, states and language are ubiquitous. The entry of unruly crowds comprising non-JMI students have led to safety concerns for students. Amid this prevalent situation, the demand for JMISU casts doubts about the manner in which students will conduct themselves in the future.

The Question of 'Muslim Political Revival'

One prominent justification for the students' union has been the revival of Muslim politics. As promising as this vision may sound, it is marred by an ugly reality. Organised student groups at JMI majorly comprise of youth wings of major political parties such as the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) (backed by Congress), All India Revolutionary Students' Organisation (AIRSO), All India Students' Association (AISA) and Students' Federation of India (SFI) (backed by communist parties), and ABVP (backed by the BJP). Organisations that are foundationally based on Muslim identity such as the Fraternity Movement, Students' Islamic Organisation (SIO) and Muslim Students' Federation (MSF) (backed by the Indian Union Muslim League) are obscure and don't enjoy the leverage that other student organisations like NSUI, AISA and AIRSO have – both in terms of resources and appeal.⁸

ABVP's approach and affiliation remains clear. The confusion arises in the case of centrist and leftist parties. Recently, during a protest near JMI's central canteen regarding irregularities in spot admission, SIO students joined a protest led by the NSUI. NSUI students including their Secretary Ebin Basil, objected to SIO's presence in the protest citing it as a religious party.⁹ On October 19, Ronak Khatri, the former President of Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU), visited the campus in solidarity with the ongoing protest. Khatri's gesture was followed by chants of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram', the very slogans that are used to compel Muslims to submit to the dilution of their beliefs.¹⁰

Parties like AISA and AIRSO, that may prima facie unite for Muslim causes, have deep communist-atheistic roots. AISA's inherent Islamophobia became the reason behind Sharjeel Imam's abandonment of the same. Sharjeel, while recounting his JNU phase, mentioned how AISA members considered the Quran as a 'defected' book and Muslims as misogynistic. Sharjeel further revealed how the then JNUSU president and AISA leader did not support Najeeb prior to his forced disappearance.¹¹ Niranjana, a student leader of the AIRSO, who has been at the forefront of the ongoing students' protest, has mockingly written '*La Ilaaha!*' (There is no God) in his Instagram caption.¹²

This blatant belittling of Islamic symbols, Muslims and Muslim organisations, followed by the assertion of campus politics dominance by youth wings sponsored by mainstream political parties, makes one question the true nature of Muslim politics that will emerge in JMI, a university that still cherishes its Islamic character and derives its teleological value of education from the Quranic verse, '*He has taught man that which he knew not,*' still enshrined on the institution's logo.¹³

Will the JMISU really be a vehicle to revive Muslim politics in JMI or will it become the home ground of a centrist or leftist party that will subliminally erode the 'Muslimness' of the institution and supplant it with its own political agenda? The question is not just about voicing concern for Muslim causes and administrative issues but it's an ideological question that goes beyond the binary (centre or left) choice that is generally presented to Muslims in the garb of representation.

Towards Muslim Political Agency

Historically, JMI and AMU have acted as intermediaries between the State and the Muslim community to initiate and settle dialogues. JMI's future students' union politics should be determined by a Muslim voice that continues this tradition. It should not be subject to any hypothetical whips issued by centrist and leftist organisations that don't have an intimate connection with the institution or the causes associated with the Muslim community.

Whether it be an organisation like the Fraternity Movement, SIO, MSF or any other organisation, its aim should be to reinstate JMI's legacy and be a flag bearer of the emerging Muslim political dimension of the country. Its scope must go beyond the shallow notions of origin, state, gender and language. It must view this as an opportunity to redefine JMI's campus politics and return to the community what has long been seized from it – Muslim political agency and an unapologetic voice.

¹ Maryam Hassan, 'After AMU, Jamia's Students Demand Union Elections' (*The Print*, 16 October 2026) <<https://theprint.in/feature/after-amu-jamias-students-demand-union-elections/3074035/>> accessed 21 October 2026.

² 'After AMU, Jamia Students Launch Hunger Strike over Union Elections' (*The Hindu*, 17 October 2026) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/after-amu-jamia-students-launch-hunger-strike-over-union-elections/article71580793.ece>> accessed 21 October 2026.

³ Gargi Shukla, 'Ex-Jamia Union President Backs Students' Demand for Campus Election Restoration' (*Hindustan Times*, 20 October 2026) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/exjamia-union-president-backs-students-demand-for-campus-election-restoration-101792384993687.html>> accessed 21 October 2026.

⁴ Laurence Gautier, *Between Nation and 'Community': Muslim Universities and Indian Politics after Partition* (Cambridge University Press 2024).

⁵ 'Jamia Students Detained during Protest over Students' Union, AISA Demands Chief Proctor's Resignation' (*The Print*, 17 October 2026) <<https://theprint.in/india/jamia-students-detained-during-protest-over-students-union-aisa-demands-chief-proctors-resignation/3074823/>> accessed 21 October 2026.

⁶ 'Internet Freedom Foundation Condemns Public Display of Details of JMI Students, Calls It Blatant Violation of Privacy' (*Maktoob Media*, 15 February 2025) <<https://maktoobmedia.com/post?id=98568&slug=internet-freedom-foundation-condemns-public-display-of-details-of-jmi-students-calls-it-blatant-violation-of-privacy>> accessed 21 October 2026.

⁷ 'Jamia Millia Islamia Expels 3 Students over Sept 2022 Scuffle between Two Groups' (*India Today*, 2 May 2023) <<https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/delhi/story/jamia-millia-islamia-expels-3-students-sept-2022-scuffle-between-two-groups-2367435-2023-05-02>> accessed 21 October 2026.

⁸ 'Jamia Millia Islamia Students, AISA Gherao Student Welfare Dean's Office over Spot Registration Admission Scam' (*ANI News*, 2 September 2026) <<https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/jamia-millia-islamia-students-aisa-gherao-student-welfare-deans-office-over-spot-registration-admission-scam20260902003820/>> accessed 21 October 2026; @abvpjmiofficial, 'Instagram Profile' (Instagram) <<https://www.instagram.com/abvpjmiofficial/>> accessed 21 October 2026.

⁹ The Observer Post (@theobserverpost), '[Opening Words of Caption / Description]' (*Instagram*, 26 August 2026) <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Dcfobe_pJDL/> accessed 21 October 2026.

¹⁰ Jamia Student Community (@jamiastudentcommunity), '[Opening Words of Caption / Description]' (*Instagram*, 19 October 2026) <<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DeRVdIwzCzi/>> accessed 21 October 2026.

¹¹ Sharjeel Imam, 'JNU and the Politics of Alienation: On AISA That Failed a Muslim Comrade' (*Medium*, 6 May 2017) <<https://medium.com/sharjeel-imam/jnu-and-the-politics-of-alienation-on-aisa-that-failed-a-muslim-comrade-firstpost-bd77c715fb05>> accessed 21 October 2026.

¹² Anjan Azad (@azad_anjan_airso), (*Instagram*) <https://www.instagram.com/azad_anjan_airso> accessed 21 October 2026.

¹³ Quran, Surah Al Alaq, Verse 5 (Translation from: Muhammad Taqi ud Din Al Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meaning of the Noble Quran in the English Language* (King Fahd Complex, Madinah (1417 Hijri)).