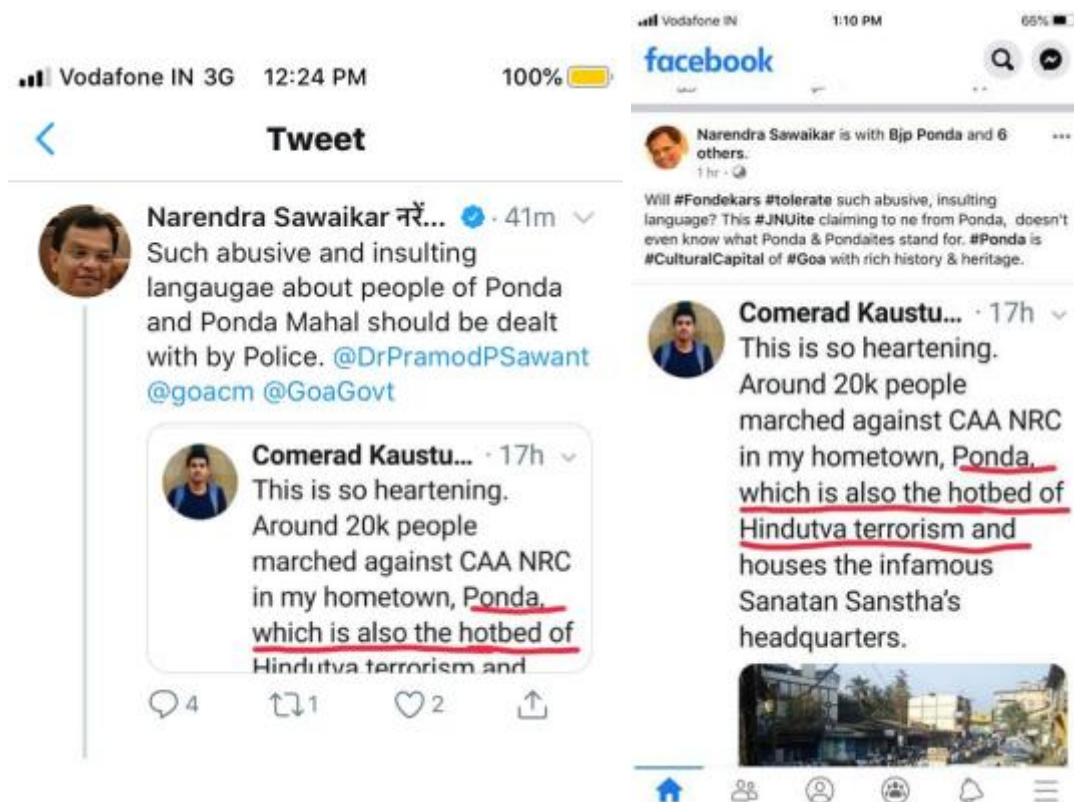


The Al-Zulaij Collective condemns the dangerously irresponsible response by Mr. Narendra Sawaikar (General Secretary of the BJP, NRI Commissioner holding the post of cabinet rank, and former Member of Parliament) to a tweet by Kaustubh Naik, research scholar and member of the Al-Zulaij Collective. Naik's tweet celebrated the peaceful protest against the CAA-NRC-NPR in Ponda and also noted that it was especially heartening given that Ponda is also 'the hotbed of Hindutva terrorism' and houses the infamous Sanatan Sanstha's headquarters. In response, Sawaikar called for official action: "Such abusive and insulting language about the people of Ponda and Ponda Mahal should be dealt with by Police. @DrPramod Sawant @goacm [current Chief Minister of Goa] @GoaGovt".

On Facebook, Sawaikar went a step further, apparently calling for mob action: "Will #Fondekars #tolerate such abusive, insulting language? This #JNUite claiming to be from Ponda, doesn't even know what Ponda & Pondaite stand for. #Ponda is #CulturalCapital of #Goa with rich history & heritage."



Sawaikar's statements show his contempt for the norms of democracy where the individual has the freedom of speech, his Brahmanical arrogance that gives him the right to challenge anybody's background, and also his ignorance of Goa's and Ponda's history and culture. It is almost amusing that he should challenge the Fondekar roots of Kaustubh who happens to be a member of a very well-known Ponda family that established the Hauns Sangeet Natya Mandal in 1950 to continue an already existing tradition of Marathi natak in Goa. This is the oldest surviving theater company that was established in Goa for performing Marathi natak. Anyone familiar with the history of Ponda will know how critical Marathi natak has been for

the Hindu community, especially the Bahujan communities.



Statement on the Comments of Narendra Sawaikar, former MP and NRI Commissioner
Kaustubh's grandfather, Vishwanath Naik, made an immense contribution to the reformation of bahujan community in Goa. Following on this initiative, Kaustubh's family was, along with Dayanand Bhandodkar, also closely associated with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party. The family has also been involved for years in the annual Virbhadrar ritual of Warkhanded, Ponda, which happens at the end of the Dhalo festival. Kaustubh Naik is also the nephew of the late Vishnu Wagh, who can rightly be said to be one of the foremost voices of Bahujan litterateurs in Goa. Significantly, Wagh was also hounded for his political, especially anti-caste, positions before his untimely demise.

This recounting of Kaustubh's family background is not to say that one's family should matter, but just to point out the overwhelming ignorance displayed by Sawaikar. That he should refer to Kaustubh as just a 'JNUite' shows even more. Yes, Kaustubh is a JNUite because he is an incredibly intelligent young man who cracked an all-India test to gain a seat in the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has won national and international scholarships to take part in theatre workshops and academic conferences in India, Europe, and Northern America. He has more recently gained acclaim for his adaptation for the stage of Amita Kanekar's "A Spoke in the Wheel", a novel on the Buddha. This play has also won several awards in Goa, Maharashtra, and at an all India level.

There is little doubt that Sawaikar was well-aware that his posts would leave Kaustubh and his family open to trolls and hate-mongering. Given that this is exactly what happened, not only do we hold Sawaikar responsible for these attacks, some of which were directed at Kaustubh's recently widowed mother. It is surprising that those who claim to uphold the values of Bharat Mata seem to show no regard for real mothers.

Saiwaikar also demonstrated other signs of bad leadership in his baseless claims and aspersions against Kaustubh, his background and his stellar academic and non-academic achievements. These claims have demonstrated that Sawaikar is anti-student, anti-youth, anti-intellectual, and to the extent that he is unaware of the rich local history of Goa, anti-Goa. This is not the kind of leadership that Goans deserve.

Finally, we would like to point out that the formulation of his attack has demonstrated Sawaikar's deep feudal and Brahmanical biases. In casting doubts about Kaustubh's belonging to Ponda, Sawakar is asking a very old feudal and casteist question: *Tum khuincho re?—Where are you from?* Meaning, how dare you raise your voice when I can decide if you belong or not? The people of Goa, and especially the Bahujan samaj, have over the years put in huge efforts to challenge this kind of rampant casteis and Brahmanical hegemony, and it is unfortunate that Sawaikar and his ilk insist on reviving these social evils, taking us back in

time, and shackling us to a casteist way of life.



Statement on the Comments of Narendra Sawaikar, former MP and NRI Commissioner
Regardless of our differences, it is critical that we recognize individual liberty and dignity in life, and the right of not only Kaustubh but all, whether Fondekar or not, whether Goan or not, to express their opinions without fear. We strongly urge Sawaikar and his supporters to refrain from making such bigoted, ignorant, and irresponsible statements.



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