

We, academicians, activists, artists and writers, condemn the ongoing brutal attacks on and unlawful detention of peacefully protesting faculty and students at the University of Hyderabad by the University administration and the police.

We also condemn the restriction of access to basic necessities such as water and food on campus. The students and faculty members of the University of Hyderabad were protesting the reinstatement of Dr. Appa Rao Podile as the Vice-Chancellor despite the ongoing judicial enquiry against him related to the circumstances leading to the death of the dalit student Rohith Vemula on January 17th, 2016.

Students and faculty members of the university community are concerned that this may provide him the opportunity to tamper with evidence and to influence witnesses. Suicides by dalit students have been recurring in the University of Hyderabad and other campuses across the country. The issue spiraled into a nationwide students' protest with the death of the dalit scholar Rohith Vemula. The protests have pushed into the foreground public discussion and debate on the persistence of caste-based discrimination in educational institutions, and surveillance and suppression of dissent and intellectual debate in university spaces.

Since the morning of March 22 when Dr. Appa Rao returned to campus, the students and staff have been in a siege-like situation. The peacefully protesting staff and students were brutally lathi-charged by the police, and 27 people were taken into custody.

The 27 detainees were untraceable for 48 hours, brutally tortured, and denied legal access. In short, all legal procedures of detention have been suspended. After the incident, the university has been locked down with no access to food, water, electricity, and Internet connectivity. Students were brutally assaulted when they opened community kitchens. Lawyers and members of human rights organization as well the ordinary citizens of the city were denied access to students. University of Hyderabad is one of India's biggest public universities.

We have followed, with deep concern, similar violent attacks and undemocratic crackdown on students on the campuses of Jawaharlal Nehru University, the Film and Television Institute of India, the University of Allahabad, Jadavpur University, Burdwan University, and others across the country. That the highest administrative authorities in the university have allowed the silencing of debate and dissent is unfortunate.

We are disturbed by the pattern of growing nexus between student vigilante groups, youth wing of the ruling party, state and university authorities in colleges and university campuses across the country in order to mobilize the state machinery against vulnerable students. This has created a climate of fear and oppression in the country, and continually violates fundamental human and Constitutional rights of students.

We stand in support of the protesting students, staff and faculty of the University of Hyderabad and demand the following:

1. Immediate withdrawal of police from the campus.
2. Immediate release of, and withdrawal of all cases against, all arrested students and faculty.
3. Suspension of the Vice-Chancellor P. Appa Rao.
4. Judicial enquiry into the role of the HRD Ministry, the HRD Minister and Mr. Bandaru Dattatreya in inciting violence against Dalits on campus.

5. Independent enquiry into the incidents of violence on the campus including the role of the ABVP in vandalising the Vice-Chancellor's office.
6. Action against police personnel named by students in their complaints.
7. Passage of the "Rohith Act" against caste discrimination in education.

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