



The Modi Government has waged war on campuses and on the right to dissent. If one young life – that of Rohith Vemula – was snuffed out in this war, several other young students charged with 'sedition' are facing vilification, arrest, and custodial violence.

But two historic mobilizations on the streets of Delhi – mainly by students and youth – offered a remarkable resistance to Modi's war on campuses.

On 18 February, defying the TV channels whipping up a frenzy against 'anti-national JNU', thousands of Delhi's students and young people, supported by working class men and women, intellectuals and citizens from all walks of life, marched on the streets of Delhi to show solidarity with JNU. They demanded the release of the JNUSU President and withdrawal of all sedition charges from students, and demanded that JNU revoke the arbitrary suspension of eight student activists. They asserted that shouting slogans was not sedition, and demanded repeal of the anti-sedition law. Above all, they asserted that true patriotism lay in the determination to dissent, to care for the rights of people, and to speak truth to power.

On 23 February, students from all over the country gathered in Delhi in response to the 'Chalo Delhi' call by the Joint Action Committee for Justice for Rohith Vemula. Thousands who marched in Delhi asserted that they would not allow the Modi Government to shrug off its responsibility for the suicide of the Dalit scholar and activist.

The march culminated in a public meeting – in which the dais was shared by two anguished parents whose sons are targets of a witch-hunt by the Modi Government: Radhika Vemula, mother of Rohith Vemula, and SQR Ilyasi, father of Umar Khalid, one of the JNU students who has since been arrested.

In his suicide note, Rohith had written about how the "value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity" – his caste. Umar, before his arrest, had also spoken of how he too had been 'reduced to his immediate identity' as a Muslim man, branded as a member of a Islamic terrorist outfit based purely on his name.

Rohith was expelled from his University based on faked 'injuries' by an ABVP leader. He was branded 'anti-national' based on slogans raised by his and his comrades in a protest against the hanging of Yakub Memon. Eight students including JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar, JNUSU General Secretary Rama Naga, former JNUSU President Ashutosh Kumar and former Vice President Anant Prakash Narayan, as well as Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya, have been suspended of their University and accused of sedition based on fake videos, fake tweets and fake 'intelligence reports'. As in Rohith's case, their slogans condemning the hanging of Afzal Guru have been branded as 'anti-national.' The vilification and expulsion of Rohith and the JNU students was incited by ABVP and led by BJP MPs. Far from learning its lesson from the tragic consequences of the witch-hunt of Rohith Vemula, the Modi Government has repeated the witch-hunt of student activists on an even more vicious scale in JNU.

The courageous student and youth movement in support of Rohith Vemula and JNU has effectively ripped off the cloak of 'nationalism' and exposed the Government's authoritarian agenda of cracking down on constitutional liberties, crushing voices of dissent against the Hindutva and pro-corporate

agenda, using assaults and murderous attacks by Sanghi thugs as well as the might of the police machinery.

This student movement has also thoroughly exposed the role of certain media channels in inciting hatred and violence against JNU students, using fabricated videos and other fabricated materials. This shameful conduct is in contrast to the courage shown by some journalists, including one young journalist who resigned from one such channel and exposed its role in manipulating videos to incite anti-JNU and anti-Left frenzy.

The Sanghi hate-campaign against JNU raises the issue of slogan of 'Jo Afzal ki baat karega, woh Afzal ki maut marega' (Anyone who speaks of Afzal Guru will meet Afzal Guru's fate), even as the BJP is poised to form Government in Jammu and Kashmir once again with the PDP, which calls Afzal's hanging a 'travesty of justice' and seeks to bring Afzal's remains back to Kashmir.

But it is no longer hidden that the hatred against 'Afzal ki baat' is only a pretext: **even 'Ambedkar ki baat' (ideas of Dr Ambedkar) are met with hatred and violence.** The Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha, youth wing of the BJP, fired at Prof Vivek Kumar of JNU in Gwalior recently, when he was about to speak at a public meeting on 'India of Ambedkar's Dreams', The BJYM vandalised copies of the Indian Constitution, as well as other writings of Dr Ambedkar.

The BJP, RSS and ABVP are unable to hide their hatred and disgust for Ambedkar and the Indian Constitution. By allowing 'lawyers' and a BJP MLA to beat up students, teachers and journalists unchecked inside Court premises, the Modi Government is sending a message of contempt for the Constitution.

One of the most prominent pro-BJP figures, actor Anupam Kher, has called the crackdown on campuses from HCU to JNU as 'pest control,' while leaders of BJP and ABVP have called for campuses to be 'purged' and 'sanitised' of Leftists and progressive activists. Was Rohith Vemula one of the 'pests' that the BJP purged from HCU to sanitise the campus? Such dehumanizing language is reminiscent of Hitler's Germany, and also of more recent remarks by BJP leaders comparing Dalit and Muslim victims to dogs, puppies and so on.

In the meeting of Vice Chancellors convened by the HRD Minister Smriti Irani, there was conspicuous silence on the burning issues of Dalit suicides on campuses, on the recommendations of the Thorat Committee report including the demand for enactment of a 'Rohith Act' to curb caste discrimination on campuses. There was also silence on the move to slash scholarships and impose WTO rules on India's higher education. Instead, the Minister shamefully sought to hide these burning issues under the diktat to fly the tricolour on all campuses – ignoring the fact that the tricolor already flies in most campuses.

The Sanghi Parivar and Modi Government, admirers of Savarkar and Godse, have always feared and hated the legacies of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh. Now, they are engaged in a desperate attempt to brand the followers of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh as 'anti-national.' They will certainly fail in this bid – and the brave young followers of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh will give them a fitting rebuff, and save democracy from the Sanghi onslaught.

Join Solidarity March Feb 24 Tonight 9.00 pm from Ganga Dhara

Sukrita, Jt. Secy, AISA, JNU

Join United Protest Dharna of Left Parties 25 Feb at Jantar Mantar 11 am

Vijay Kumar, Gen.Secy, AISA, JNU