

LSE academics sign open letter to Vice-Chancellor of University of Hyderabad

LSE academics, including International Development Assistant Professor Sohini Kar, have joined colleagues from across the globe in signing an open letter to the Vice-Chancellor of University of Hyderabad, expressing their shock and anguish following the suicide of a Dalit scholar, Rohith Vemula, and demanding that justice be done.

“We of the global scholarly community make an urgent appeal that justice be done in the most recent case of caste discrimination in Indian higher education, that of the University of Hyderabad’s prejudicial suspension of five young Dalit men pursuing PhDs. It was ordered under political pressure, without even allowing the young men in question to speak in their own defense. It directly contravened an earlier decision made by the University administration itself, which had exonerated them of any charges of wrongdoing-charges which had been trumped up by political rivals opposed to the activism of these young men.

This prejudice has now exacted a terrible price. One of the five, a scholar of great promise, Rohith Vemula, committed suicide on January 17. Unable to bear the despair of having his one chance at a future snatched from him, of his value being reduced, in his own eloquent parting words, to nothing but “a vote” and “an immediate identity,” he took his own life. As scholars we know that individual actions are never just that. This suicide is not an individual act. It is the failure of premier higher educational institutions in democratic India to meet their most basic obligation: to foster the intellectual and personal growth of India’s most vulnerable young people. Instead, Rohith now joins a long list of victims of prejudice at premier institutions in the country, where pervasive discrimination drives so many Dalit students to depression and suicide, when not simply forcing them to quietly drop out.

As international scholars of South Asia, we ask the authorities at the University of Hyderabad to immediately reinstate Mr. Vemula’s four peers, to provide support to his family, and to launch a police investigation into his passing. But that is not enough. The University of Hyderabad must ensure not only that justice be done now, but that further injustice be rigorously prevented. It is vital to the life of any academic institution to actively nurture students exactly like Rohith, whose contribution to civic life and healthy political debate made the university the place of learning and personal transformation it should be. Measures must be implemented to ensure that such students are supported and allowed to thrive when they enter what is all too often the hostile, casteist environment of higher education in India. A university where students turn away from life with the regularity they have at the University of Hyderabad requires urgent and massive rehauling.

The involvement of political leaders in buttressing caste discrimination in Indian universities, and the double standards applied by university administrations to anti-caste student activity, directly contribute to the negative reputation India is earning among scholars worldwide. We urge the University of Hyderabad to restore our confidence by living up to its obligation to end institutionalized discrimination, to educate all students in a climate of respect and empathy, and to resist political pressures to do otherwise. We are all watching.”

A full list of signatories can be found on [The Hindu website](#)



