

Remember Rohith Vemula and Cry Death to Brahmanism: Dalit Suicides Are Systemic and must be resisted by making Anti-casteism a Core Issue of Social Movements

Details

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Radical Socialist condemns the state and University organised repressions on Dalit students that culminated in the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar of the University of Hyderabad (UoH) and member of Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA). The Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA) has been, and is continuing to be subjected to vicious attacks, by Ministers and MPs, by the Vice Chancellor, Executive Council and officials of the University of Hyderabad and by forces of Brahmanism on media and social media.

The background is the screening of Muzzafarnagar Baaqi Hai by the ASA — (a documentary which shows, using footage of speech made by BJP leaders, that the riots in Shamli and Muzaffarnagar were orchestrated for electoral gains in the run-up to the 2014 elections)—which was resisted by the goons of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student arm of the RSS. They attacked the ASA and also used verbal violence. The ASA response compelled them to apologise in public. This “public humiliation” of Hindutvavadis before dalits, whom they treat as subhumans, resulted in sustained attacks. A fraudulent complaint was lodged, which resulted in an inquiry in which the ASA members could not be found guilty. Thereafter, several letters came from the Union Ministry of Human Resource Developments, in flagrant violation of the least autonomy of institutions of higher education, demanding action against so called anti-nationals. One issue currently being held up against the ASA is its opposition to the hanging of Yakub Memon. Anyone opposed capital punishment on principle are deemed anti-national by the current government and its MPs.

Eventually, after a change of Vice Chancellor, the Centre's handpicked man, Appa Rao Podile, took action against five ASA members, all PhD scholars. Despite the fact that the Proctor's report actually said: “The board **could not get any hard evidence of beating of Mr. Susheel Kumar** either from Mr Krishna Chaitanya or from the reports submitted by Dr. Anupama. Dr. Anupama's reports also could not link or suggest that the surgery of the Susheel Kumar is the direct result of the beating.”, by decision of the University Executive Council, the five were denied access to hostels on the campus except their classrooms and workshops related to their subject of study. This amounted to a social boycott with the students being denied access to hostels and forced to sleep in a makeshift tent.

While carrying on agitations, Rohith clearly felt devastated by what was happening to him, as his suicide note tells us. His suicide note also recounts that his Junior Research Fellowship was stopped for the last 7 months and he had contracted debt, by borrowing from his friends. Rohith grew up in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh and his mother is the sole breadwinner of the family who did sewing to support the household. This is the tale of a majority of dalit's including the Vemulas who have to bear heavy economic burden. In this context we need to understand that this is not a one off incident, and that institutional murders of Dalit students, and at a lesser level the institutional and systemic attacks in their attempts to be educated, have been rampant in India. The UoH alone has seen nine Dalit students committing suicide in a decade. One remembers Dalits constantly failing in IITs, violence on Dalits and adivasis in numerous ways

everywhere, such as the threats and the conscious failing and abuse of Chuni Kotal in West Bengal (resulting in her suicide), and other incidents.

In India, no genuinely revolutionary Marxist organisation can be built; no real social emancipatory struggle can be generated, unless it also makes opposition to Brahmanism and the real overcoming of the exploitation of Dalits and Adivasis a core component. Indeed, no struggle against communalism will be complete unless we realise the tacit bonds between wider savarna circles and aggressive communal-fascists, and unless we consciously seek to become parts of Dalit struggles as well as anti-communal struggles. Radical Socialist accordingly joins the militants of ASA, and all militant students in Indian campuses, in condemning Brahmanism on campus, the institutional murder of Rohith, and demands:

- • Resignation of Smriti Irani and Bandaru Dattatreya as Union Ministers
- • Resignation/sacking of Appa Rao Podile
- • Immediate revocation of the punitive action on all the other Dalit students
- • Action against the police for snatching Rohith's body and disposing of it instead of handing it over to his family
- • Thorough judicial inquiry into the complicity of persons in abetting Rohith's suicide.