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Title: Need to allow freedom of expression on campuses.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): I want to raise an issue of grave importance concerning a systemic and rapidly escalating assault on institutions of higher learning in our country. These are not merely assaults on seats of education but also on the very values these institutions represent in our society. They are assaults on our future. We have, in the last year alone, witnessed a series of hugely disquieting instances of not only deepening illiberalism at an intellectual level but of deplorable violence on campuses across the country. There was, for instance, Hyderabad University, where hatred and discrimination culminated in the tragic death of a bright Dalit student, Rohit Vemula, who deserved an even brighter future, not suicide. There has been the banning of the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle at IIT Madras, where those in positions of authority at the institution chose to kowtow to power rather than uphold the rights of students to debate and dissent.

We have all seen, what unfolded at JNU, with intimidation, violence, and hate given free reign, and an environment generated where fear is fostered and students, professors, even parents are victims of untrammelled brutality. Just last month, we saw the chilling events at Ramjas College, where hooligans suppressed a peaceful march with unprecedented savagery, hitting even professors and parents. A martyr's daughter found herself abused and threatened for supporting student protest.

Such is the state of affairs that a professor in Jodhpur found himself suspended for merely inviting somebody whose views those in power resented. I am shocked to see the blind eye turned by this government to vigilantes who take it upon themselves to suppress thought along with the guaranteed intellectual and constitutional freedoms, through intimidation and violence. The argument made is that these students are saying anti-national things. But even if this were true, which is debatable, the answer to wrong words is right words, not violence. I urge this government to demonstrate effectively and immediately its commitment to ensuring the freedom of education and the freedom of expression. Let us go back to our students and professors with more than a mere assurance. Let us here, promise them that they have a right to question, a right to dissent, and a right to disagree. Even a right to be wrong. That is what true intellectual Freedom means, and we have a duty to protect it.