

Campus with a difference

JNU and HCU are being targeted because they attract and nurture students from lower castes.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Written by [Kancha Ilaiah](#) | Updated: April 6, 2016 4:53 am



Photo for representational purpose

Is there more than meets the eye in the [BJP](#) government targeting Jawaharlal Nehru University and Hyderabad Central University? Since the mid-1970s and early 1980s, these universities have become like Oxford and Cambridge for first-generation SC, ST and OBC aspirants of higher education. They are the most prestigious amongst the top five higher educational institutions in the rankings launched by the human resource development ministry on Monday.

In 1976, when I was in the final year of an MA at Osmania University, Hyderabad, the most serious aspirants for MPhil and PhD courses would dream of getting into JNU. To fulfil that dream, I took a loan and went to Delhi for the first time in my life. I had to expend more effort to go there than the upper-caste rich did to go to Oxford or Harvard. However, I could not make it.

The dream to go to JNU was not because it was a left-activist university, but because of its faculty's reputation and its academic environment. In the social sciences, several serious teachers were drawn from all over and were known for their credible research. Rasheeduddin Khan and K. Seshadri from Osmania were in political science at JNU. In history, S. Gopal, Bipan Chandra and Romila Thapar were famous. Economics, too, had well-known names. Why did we not dream of going to Banaras Hindu University? We never heard about great teachers there. Even from a rightwing point of view, not much credible work was done at BHU nor was an environment for rigorous research created there. No doubt, the present dispensation treats BHU as its favoured baby. But how many Dalit scholars who have done visible work has it produced? The only known Dalit politician who studied there was Babu Jagjivan Ram. He faced horrible caste discrimination and later shifted to the University of Calcutta, where he finished his BSc.

In a postcolonial nation like India, degrees of foreign universities were more respected than those of Indian universities. But for first-generation rural students, a foreign university education was impossible. The regional universities that SC, ST and OBC students could afford to reach were academically weak. The rigour of both the faculty and students was so poor that the emergence of a scholar of repute with good communication skills in English and grounding in theory and research methodologies was difficult. Not that exceptional scholars didn't emerge from regional universities at all. There were some. All my research degrees are from Osmania University. Narendra Jadhav, a Dalit economist, did an MA from Bombay University and a PhD from the US. But they were not producing scholars year after year. JNU began to do that.

HCU has gradually become the second-best university in science and social science teaching and research. Those who do not get admission in JNU try to get a place at HCU.

Over a period of 40 years, these two universities have produced some Dalit scholars who have done serious research and been engaged in transforming the life and status of the "untouchable" community. For example, JNU has produced Sukhadeo Thorat, a noted economist and the first Dalit chairman of the UGC, Gopal Guru, a well-known political theorist, Vivek Kumar, a noted sociologist, and so on.

Similarly, HCU products like N. Sukumar, an emerging political scientist presently at Delhi University, P. Keshav Kumar, a serious philosophy teacher, and Bhangya Bhukya, an upcoming tribal historian teaching at HCU, are good examples of the growing talent from among the SC/ ST communities.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE



RELATED ARTICLE



- politics on campus, put limits on campus stay'

Education panel: 'Curb



- announces universities ranking, JNU, HCU, IIT M, IIM B top the list

HRD Ministry



- the boil: VC Appa Rao says Kanhaiya can't enter campus

Hyderabad University on



- On campus, ABVP and JNUSU go up against each other, this time in verses



- Idea Exchange: Leaders of students wings of RSS, Congress and CPI-ML talk about unrest in universities and Kanhaiya



- Govt is telling us: If you speak against us, this is what we'll do, says HCU students' union president Zuhail



Education panel: 'Curb

politics on campus, put limits on campus stay'



HRD Ministry

announces universities ranking, JNU, HCU, IIT M, IIM B top the list



Hyderabad University on

the boil: VC Appa Rao says Kanhaiya can't enter campus



• On campus, ABVP and JNUSU go up against each other, this time in verses



• Idea Exchange: Leaders of students wings of RSS, Congress and CPI-ML talk about unrest in universities and Kanhaiya



• Govt is telling us: If you speak against us, this is what we'll do, says HCU students' union president Zuhail



Education panel: 'Curb

politics on campus, put limits on campus stay'



HRD Ministry

announces universities ranking, JNU, HCU, IIT M, IIM B top the list



Hyderabad University on

the boil: VC Appa Rao says Kanhaiya can't enter campus



- On campus, ABVP and JNUSU go up against each other, this time in verses



- Idea Exchange: Leaders of students wings of RSS, Congress and CPI-ML talk about unrest in universities and Kanhaiya



- Govt is telling us: If you speak against us, this is what we'll do, says HCU students' union president Zuhail

Apart from these scholars, several SC/ ST youth who studied in these universities joined the civil services. In fact, Udit Raj, a Dalit BJP MP and former revenue service officer, is a JNU product. Chandra Bhan Prasad, a noted journalist-writer and advocate of Dalit capitalism, is also a product of JNU. Almost all of these people came from first-generation Dalit/ tribal families and became what they are because of the academic environment these universities provided.

The BJP's accusation that these universities are producing "left-liberals" and are, therefore, anti-national is only one side of the story. The core social forces of the Sangh Parivar seem to dislike the intellectual emergence of the lower castes, particularly the untouchables. This core is also uncomfortable with reservations. Most of the Dalit scholars mentioned above came into these universities because of reservation. I did not get admission because, at that time, there was no OBC reservation.

There is no denying that most Dalit scholars are left-Ambedkarites; this will be so in future also. Let us assume that a neutral Dalit student reads *The Communist Manifesto* and M.S. Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts*. The former is written in the European context and the latter in the Indian context. Which appeals to her intellectually? Which holds potential for further research and theoretical enrichment? One needn't answer this question but ask a BJP JNU product like Nirmala Sitharaman (who has been strangely silent) to give her honest opinion. Theories of social change or development are not nation-specific. Marxism, a theory of universal appeal to minds that search for socio-economic change, whether in JNU, Oxford or Harvard, attracts global youth. No matter how much propaganda is spread, V.D. Savarkar or Golwalkar cannot reach the theoretical heights of Marx.

For a serious SC/ ST/ OBC mind, reading Marx and Ambedkar makes sense, and their writings have an intellectual kick. This attracts talented minds that are unhappy with existing hierarchies and inequalities. The young who work around the Sangh Parivar are taught to maintain the social status quo; they cannot even imagine how a change-hungry mind thinks. Naturally, to them, Marxism appears to be anti-national rubbish.

If the BJP government wants to dismantle these two universities and degrade every Central university to the level of a BHU or hand over even social science education to private universities that spend lots of money on advertisements and sell education, the greatest losers will be the SCs, STs and OBCs. This strategy is to stop them from becoming intellectuals without openly opposing reservation.

The BJP has every reason to oppose serious social science education because social scientists are not as easily amenable to religious fundamentalist theory and practice as natural scientists. The challenge before left-liberal and Dalit-bahujan social scientists is to stop the BJP's project of preventing "the other" from thinking.

The writer is director, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, and author of 'God As Political Philosopher: Buddha's Challenge to Brahminism'