Hope: The Collective Courage to Show Up

The placard reads, “Ignoring peaceful protest won’t protect your peace.” For me, it captures the essence of hope in higher education: the courage to question, dissent, and act when justice feels distant.

My understanding of hope has been shaped by attending two protests in Delhi, on 20 July and 10 October 2026. On 20 July, I joined the Chalo Sansad March alone. As strangers marched and raised slogans together, my fear gradually gave way to solidarity and oneness.

The July protests, led by students demanding accountability for examination irregularities, reminded me that collective voices can bring tangible change. On 25 July, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned amid mounting criticism over examination issues. For me, this reinforced the hope that sustained civic action can influence public accountability. In higher education, students' voices matter, institutions must be accountable, and fair examinations are fundamental to educational justice.

On 10 October, despite preparing for possible detention, I could not reach the protest site. Barricades, police personnel, and blocked routes stopped us. I returned home safely, realising that courage does not mean being fearless; it means acting despite fear.

The protest demanded the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and free and fair elections. Though we could not assemble at the designated site, our demands remain. We continue to hope for an electoral democracy where constitutional values are upheld, citizens can exercise their rights freely, and institutions remain accountable.

The first protest taught me the strength of finding one another; the second showed me that solidarity persists even when we cannot stand together physically.

For me, higher education must go beyond knowledge and employability. It must nurture critical consciousness, empathy, intellectual courage, and the agency to challenge injustice. Democratic values must be practised, not merely taught. When institutions fail to listen, streets become classrooms where we learn to exercise and defend our fundamental rights.

Hope is the courage to see what is, imagine what could be, and work towards what ought to be.

Hope is political. Hope is oneness. Hope is peaceful resistance.

Let's keep showing up!