



Company: Westland

Media Evaluation:

Publication:
Sunday Indian ExpressPage No :
11

JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL

'Intolerance', Rohith death dominate Day 3 discussion

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JAIPUR, JANUARY 23

THE DEBATE over "rising intolerance" and the suicide of Rohith Vemula, research scholar at Hyderabad Central University, were the main talking points on the third day of Zee Jaipur Literature Festival.

Ashok Vajpeyi reiterated his decision to not take back the Sahitya Akademi award he had returned, saying that intolerance remains a burning issue. "Look at what happened to a Dalit student. This too is intolerance. I believe this young Dalit scholar was driven to suicide. Now they are saying a judicial commission will look into his death, which is good. But why have you waited six days for this event to simmer?" he said.

The poet and writer has returned the D. Litt conferred on his by Hyderabad Central University in protest against the partisan attitude towards Dalit students. "The PM emphasised the fact that a mother has lost a son, but he underplayed the Dalit part of it. It must be a part of his (main) approach to the problem," Vajpeyi said.

Vajpeyi, who was among the earliest of about 40 writers who returned their Sahitya Akademi



Author Ashwin Sanghi and actor Kajol at the Jaipur Literature Festival on Saturday. Rohit Jain Paras

awards to protest the institution's silence over writer M M Kalburgi's murder, said there is an unprecedented "intolerance of excellence" in India as well as an "intolerance of minorities, not merely of religion or faith but also of ideas and belief."

At a session titled, The Need to Listen: Dialogue versus Rhetoric, moderated by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, former BJP spokesperson Pinky Anand said Vemula's death need not be made into an "anti-Dalit exercise" since such incidents cannot be judged on the basis of community or religion. Dalit writer and activist P Sivakami countered:

"We are not talking in the air. Classifications exist and we must acknowledge it."

Writer and columnist Sudheendra Kulkarni, whose face was smeared with ink by Shiv Sena activists after he organised the launch of former Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri's book, said, "If we continue on the path of intolerance, India will not be the India we know."

At the launch of Ashwin Sanghi's book, *The Sialkot Saga*, actor Kajol said: "These days, people seem to have become oversensitive. As public personalities, it is our duty to speak well and correctly," she said.