

Rules of Law

I wrote about Judicial Corruption and Overreach. And they called my University. They wanted it taken down immediately. But it is not going anywhere.

Rishi A. Kumar · Mar 22, 2026

Few days ago, I wrote a piece about the Supreme Court banning an NCERT civics textbook chapter. The chapter had mentioned corruption in the judiciary. But not really. For context, in an 18-page long chapter, there were exactly two sentences that mentioned corruption. The Court's response was to ban the book chapter and blacklist its authors. You have to admit; this is a very odd way of proving you have nothing to hide.

I would recommend reading the original piece before going any further. Because this sets the context for everything that has happened since, and I do not want to trivialize what I wrote or how I wrote it.

TL;DR: I argued that this ban was unconstitutional and that these three authors being blacklisted without a hearing was a denial of due process. I also showed that judicial corruption in India, which the Court was so offended by, is a well-documented and a very real problem.

But I had also written about the broader failure of institutions. For example, this whole thing started because senior members of the Bar walked into court and instigated the bench into taking action, without even properly reading what was actually in the book. I had also criticized the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education for caving in and publicly backing this ban, in complete contravention of their oath to the Constitution. To put it simply, the judiciary, the executive, and the Bar were all to blame for this episode of educational censorship.

What Happened Next

I am a law student with a Substack that my friends occasionally read out of loyalty. I usually write about law related to commercial matters. This was clearly not my usual thing. I wrote it during an exam study break and went back to preparing for exams. I wrote it because I honestly believed that this was wrong. When I spoke to my friends,

they all felt the same way. They all believed that what was happening was wrong. But I had absolutely no expectations when I wrote it.

But, somehow, the piece spread. I do not know exactly how, but it reached people I deeply respect. People were talking about it on Instagram. I had people from so different parts of the world messaging me about how they felt the same. This matters so much. It tells you about the whole mood surrounding this issue. People were uncomfortably watching this whole thing go down and that they were just waiting for someone to say what they already had in their mind. This made me far more confident that what I had written was not wrong.

Brotherhood of The Robes in Action Again

Naturally, not everyone was pleased. There were lots of people who disagreed with what I said and gave their reasons. I read what they said and responded as much as I could. That is how it is supposed to work. You write something, people respond, you engage. That is the marketplace of ideas functioning as intended.

But then it went a step further. Yesterday, my university administration wrote to me an email. They informed me that they have been receiving a "spate of phone calls from Advocates of the Supreme Court and various High Courts as well as a few Judges" who were complaining about and criticising my article. He told me that the "reputation of the institution is at stake." He requested me to "take down the article immediately" and he framed it as being in the "best interest of the university and yourself."

I want you guys to think through this for a moment.

So, few judges, and advocates of the Supreme Court and High Courts, and some law students were unhappy with a piece I wrote on my personal Substack. They found my personal details, found the university I study in, got the contact details of authorities there, picked up their phones and called them to pressure me into silence. They did not engage with my argument. They did not explain why I was wrong. They did not even call or email me directly even once.

Is any of this making sense? Judges in this country are issuing de-facto "takedown" orders to students through their universities, simply because he criticised them. At least the SC order earlier had the form of a legal proceeding. It was at least happening in public. But this? What exactly is this? What do you even call it? In what version of a functioning

democracy is any of this normal?

Criticising a court order for something that is clearly wrong should never be contempt. It is the most basic functions of a free press and an academia. If judges cannot bear to have their orders or their words scrutinised, that is a problem with the judges and the judiciary, not with my criticism. It seems that when some of them have spent their whole career in an institution that is so unaccustomed to criticism, pressure and intimidation is completely normal response.

The email did all its work in one phrase. It said, I should take it down immediately in the "best interest of the university and yourself." What does that even mean? Why is a student being spoken to like this for expressing an honest opinion? And most importantly why is concern being used to mask pressure? Someone chose those words deliberately. Someone who knows exactly how much pressure it takes to make a student comply quietly. My friend called it for what it is: a veiled threat.

But this is not just about me. The message being sent to is that your voice is conditional. That you may speak, but only within limits set by the people you might one day criticise. That your career and your affiliation can be used as leverage if you step out of line.

The Structural Problem

I have had the good fortune of working under some very remarkable judges. I do not write any of this lightly or with any pleasure. But an institution is not only its best people. It is also its worst impulses that is left unchecked.

I want to be fair to my university. They are supposed to be a line of defense for their students. They did not do that job. But these are not anonymous internet trolls. These are judges and advocates of the Supreme Court and High Courts exerting real and credible institutional pressure. One cannot just ignore it.

And here is the structural problem: most NLUs, including mine, have a sitting High Court or Supreme Court judge as our nominal Chancellor. So many senior advocates sit on my university's councils and hold administrative positions. The very people who are being criticized and pressuring us are already embedded into our own institutional structure. I am not at all saying these are the people who did this. But the structure itself has a problem. How can the university be expected to push back effectively? They are quite literally the same groups of people acting in two different capacities.

I concede that such institutional structure does provide us with a level of access and support not possible for others. But that does not make this acceptable. Ever.

Because this would never happen at any university with the institutional capital and courage to simply say "NO". I think most people know what kinds of universities I am talking about. These judges and advocates will never go there. They came here, because they calculated that this university, and by extension its students, could be pushed around. That is the whole story really. It is about who can be pressured and who cannot. And they were almost right.

Some Updates on the Case

It was reported yesterday that the SC has disposed the suo moto case on the NCERT issue. There was not even a single mention about the authors whose fundamental rights were snatched without any due process. The list of critics and dissenters that the Court had spoken of was never created and never mentioned again. The Chief Justice said what he said from the bench, let it hang in the air long enough to do its damage on how we think, and he has now moved on.

Which tells you everything you need to know. It was never a legal proceeding in any meaningful sense. It had no basis and no follow-through. It was a threat issued from the highest court in the land, dressed like judicial concern. And it was abandoned the moment it had served its purpose.

The three authors remain blacklisted. No hearing. No explanation. No remedy. I am hoping the authors will challenge this. This cannot be on our books.

But there is a new committee.

The Union Government had announced the formation of a high-level committee. This one will redraft the NCERT chapter on the judiciary. I have joked around about my scepticism of committees being a solution to so many of our public policy issues. Usually, these committees are where inconvenient problems go to be quietly buried. Their reports are filed and forgotten. They give the appearance of some action, but nothing actually changes.

But let's see the members of this committee. Former Justice Indu Malhotra. Former Justice Aniruddha Bose. Former Attorney General KK Venugopal. All accomplished. All

distinguished. All members of the same brotherhood in robes.

Think about what is happening here. A chapter that mentioned corruption in the judiciary was banned by the judiciary. The judiciary then ordered the formation of a committee to rewrite that chapter. The committee consists entirely of former judges and senior members of the bar. They will now decide what version of themselves gets presented to millions of children across the country. This is a guild writing its own history and calling it education.

There is no independent academic voice on this committee. There is no civil society representative. There is no one whose career does not depend, in some way, on the goodwill of the institution being described. The conflict of interest is so glaring. And yet here we are, watching it happen in plain sight, with the full blessing of the Court. Even if there are going to be other members, we know who will do the heavy lifting. Does anyone really think this new chapter will contain any meaningful criticism? No. Of course not.

Ask yourself whether this is what a healthy and confident institution looks like. Ask yourself whether a court that is secure in its legitimacy needs to ban textbooks, blacklist academics, pressure students through their universities, and staff committees with its own retired members to control what is taught about it.

I think the answer is obvious.

And I would encourage everyone who has stayed quiet to think about why. I know the fear of this kind of pressure is real. But consider who that silence is serving. It is not serving you. It is serving exactly the people who need you to stay quiet.

I will not take my article down. I stand by every single word of that. They will never own my voice or my conscience. I wrote back saying exactly that. That article will be here forever on this internet, no matter what they do to me.

UPDATE — 23 March 2026

Update: In response to a query from ThePrint, the University issued a statement dated 23 March 2026. The university stated: "did not issue any directive or mandate requiring the student to take down the article. The communication referred to by the student was in the nature of a request and advisory, made in good faith. This was necessitated in light of representations received from certain members of the legal fraternity who had expressed

strong objections to the language employed in the article and had called upon the University to initiate action against the student. The university, however, categorically declined to take any punitive measures. The university takes pride in nurturing our students to be torchbearers of law, justice, and constitutional values, and does not, and will not, kowtow to the external pressures that seek to undermine these foundational principles."

This provides some clarity. I give benefit of the doubt to my University. But this also raises some questions.

If this was merely a "request made in good faith," then we must be equally honest about the context in which such requests operate. When a student is directed to "immediately" take down an article, framed as being in the "best interest of the university and yourself," against the backdrop of calls from judges and advocates, it carries unmistakable weight. It carries negative implications. And it is precisely that ambiguity which creates a chilling effect.

Everything else I have said about how concerning it is that judges and advocates are making such calls and the institutional pressure that creates remains same.

As for me, my position is unchanged. I will not be taking the article down.