

Oppose the firing of Professor Lora Santhakumar from India's SRM university for opposing India-Pakistan war

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The *World Socialist Web Site* strongly condemns the sacking of Assistant Professor Lora Santhakumar by the SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) in Chennai, India, and her subsequent expulsion from her place of residence.

Assistant Professor Santhakumar has been victimized for expressing opposition, in her personal WhatsApp account "Status," to the aggressive war that India's Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government launched against Pakistan in May 2025.

Professor Santhakumar noted that the principal victims of such military violence are the innocent and vulnerable.

The young academic, according to a *News Minute* website report, posted 12 anti-war messages. She warned of the real-life consequences of war such as economic crisis and dislocation and loss of innocent lives. In another message she denounced the celebration on Indian social media of the killing of civilians in Pakistan after an Indian military strike, calling this cowardice, not bravery.

Professor Santhakumar spoke to the WSWS at length and detailed her ordeal with SRMIST management:

On the morning of May 8, 2025, my HOD (Head of Department) called me to the office. The Director and another faculty member were there in the same room. They asked me what I was posting in my social media handle at that point. This was during Operation Sindoora (the government's name for India's attack on Pakistan).

I said, "I was posting antiwar messages and messages for peace. I am not posting anything bad, posting good stuff only."

For this, Director (Venkata Sastry) said, "You know well you were followed by many people and how much it will affect the University you are representing as a professor. **You have failed as a teacher**" (Emphasis added)

Later in the day, I was called by the HOD to the office around 2:30pm and I was given my suspension order around 3:00pm.

After receiving the suspension, I came to know through Prof. Kavitha that my WhatsApp screenshots went viral on Twitter (X). Someone had posted and tagged the post identifying it as SRMIST. She also sent the twitter post link of Bala (a BJP functionary). It was after that I understood why all this was happening.

The SRMIST charge memo against me stated that I posted against Indian armed forces tagging myself as an assistant professor of SRMIST with a fabricated image. This was completely false since they were painting me as the accused instead of a victim. I was accused by the SRM management itself. The BJP IT wing and other far right wingers, were witch-hunting me for being anti-war.

Then, I got a show cause notice saying, "Although she posted in her personal capacity, **she failed to disprove that she posted by tagging herself from SRMIST. Hence charges are proved**" (Emphasis added)

Professor Santhakumar continued:

The burden of proof lies in the hands of employer who level charges not on the accused employee. Management and the enquiry team haven't to date give me the source URL of the fabricated image.

After my suspension I started receiving abusive messages with curse-words like F__ and B__ to my email, Instagram and Facebook Messenger.

My supervisor called me and asked what was happening. I told her someone named Bala posted this and I am receiving abusive emails and threats on all my personal platforms. My supervisor said, "We women don't have freedom of speech even in our homes, how will we have it in our country."

The Modi regime launched its "Operation Sindoora" military assault on Pakistan on May 7, 2025, claiming that it was in retaliation for an April 22 terrorist attack in the northern Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This attack occurred in the scenic hill-station town of Pahalgam. Pahalgam attracts large numbers of tourists from other parts of India. Twenty-six of these innocent tourists were murdered and dozens injured when Islamic terrorists mounted a commando-style attack with the goal of killing civilians.

Without providing any proof, the Modi government immediately blamed Pakistan for the "cross-border terror attack" and seized on it as a means to pursue its goal of establishing New Delhi as the subcontinent's regional hegemon. On May 7, it launched massive illegal air strikes on multiple targets in Pakistan-held Kashmir and Pakistan's Punjab province. Fighting then raged for four days, bringing South Asia's nuclear-armed states to the brink of all-out war.

After her suspension last May, Lora Santhakumar was subjected by the university to multiple sham disciplinary hearings:

I was subjected to four humiliating hearings. One of my witnesses Mr. Madhusoodhanan informed the enquiry that he never saw my website profile screenshot or tagging myself as an

assistant professor of SRMIST anywhere. This was not documented at all.

The Law officer of SRMIST, Mr. Ravi, was present and he is the one who controlled the whole enquiry. He was intimidating by his presence, hence I opposed his presence during the third enquiry.

After the fourth enquiry, I was asked to meet founder chancellor Mr. Pachamuthu Avargal with my anti-war posts. I tried to obtain an appointment but to no avail. The enquiry ended with a negative report. I wrote a petition to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and to the State Commission for Women.

Subsequently Assistant Professor Santhakumar described the termination letter she received:

Then on December 5, (2025), I got the termination letter for my posts. The order stated that I am unfit to teach in the institute and that I could appeal to the appellate authority i.e., the Vice Chancellor of the University.

I have been asking for the Minutes of the (termination) meeting, documents of the enquiry meetings—key exhibits, none of which I have received.

I have been through wrongful suspension, illegal and partial enquiry process as well as unfair termination which lead to defamation, stigmatising my career, and my forceful eviction from my residence. I have been targeted because of my religion (Dalit Christian), and because of my anti-war posts.

I have also received notable support. Over 160 academics including professors from the IIT and others have issued condemnations of the humiliating treatment I have received.

Lora Santhakumar's blatant victimisation does not occur in isolation. It must be understood in the context of India's aggressive military posture toward Pakistan (the government insists Operation Sindoor is only "suspended"); the whipping up of chauvinist hysteria by the BJP government; and a systematic state crackdown on all expressions of dissent.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly warned during the course of the current escalation of the Indo-Pakistani conflict, the Modi government's bellicose actions are inseparable from intensified authoritarian measures at home, aimed at silencing opposition from workers, youth, students and intellectuals.

In December 2023, the government pushed a new "sedition law" through parliament, "Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023." Its aim is to suppress all dissent against the "Nation," which in practice means the Modi government. It documents a long list of criminal offences including "Offenses against the State, the Armed forces and Public Tranquility." As compared with India's previous sedition law, which was itself a reactionary carryover from the British colonial regime, the BNS imposes increased jail sentences for 33 offences, and increased fines for 83 offences.

The draconian BNS is now being routinely used to silence voices critical of the government's war mongering, communal incitement and repression.

Last April 23, an artist, Neha Singh Rathore, and University of Lucknow linguistics professor, Madri Kakoti, were booked under BNS charges that carry lengthy prison terms, after they questioned in social media posts the "government's role in not responding to intelligence warnings" of an impending terror attack. Reportedly the professor also "made a series of posts condemning atrocities committed against Kashmiris in the aftermath

(of the Pahalgam attack), purportedly using the term "saffron terrorists," a reference to BJP-linked Hindu-extremists who have been on a violent campaign against Muslims.

Then, after Operation Sindoor, Professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad was arrested under BNS. A Political Science professor at Ashoka University in Haryana, Mahmudabad remarked in a Facebook post on the false show of communal unity the Modi government tried to stage by having two female army officers, a Hindu and a Muslim, provide a briefing on the war.

The targeting of Professor Santhakumar and other antiwar academics is a concentrated expression of processes analysed by the WSWS throughout the Indo-Pakistan conflict. From the outset of Operation Sindoor, the BJP government has framed it as a test of "national unity," equating dissent with treachery. Corporate media outlets have acted as cheerleaders for the military, suppressing critical voices and amplifying calls for retaliation. Social media platforms have been monitored, journalists intimidated, and students and academics placed under surveillance.

This campaign is not driven by "national security" concerns but by the ruling class's fear of domestic opposition. India's conflict with Pakistan is bound up with the strategic interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and its alignment with US imperialism in the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, the government is enforcing brutal austerity measures, privatisation and pro-corporate restructuring, which have generated mounting social anger. War serves as a means of diverting social anger outward, while inciting communalism and justifying repression at home.

Universities occupy a critical position in this process. As centres of intellectual life and potential opposition, they are under particular pressure to conform. This phenomenon was widely displayed in the brutal suppression of protests against the imperialist-backed Gaza genocide at universities in the US, Europe and elsewhere.

Private universities such as SRMIST, deeply integrated into corporate networks and dependent on state patronage, are especially susceptible to political intimidation. By sacking Lora Santhakumar, the SRMIST administration sent a clear signal that opposition to the government's war policy will not be tolerated within its walls.

The targeting of Professor Santhakumar also intersects with entrenched social inequalities. She hails from a Dalit Christian family, a traditionally impoverished layer of the population subjected to ongoing discrimination. While the immediate trigger for her dismissal was her anti-war stance, the broader pattern of repression in India has consistently fallen most heavily on minorities, workers and those who challenge dominant nationalist narratives.

The response of the establishment parties and trade unions to Professor Santhakumar's victimization has been telling. The Congress Party, the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), its close ally, the CPI, and the DMK and Tamil Nadu's other ethno-regional parties have all failed to come to Lora Shanthakumar's defence. None have denounced the violation of her basic democratic rights.

This is in keeping with these parties own support for Operation Sindoor and the official war narrative of the Indian ruling class.

The defence of academic freedom cannot be separated from opposition to war itself. As long as the Indo-Pakistan conflict is prosecuted in the interests of the rival ruling classes, repression will intensify. Universities, media organisations and cultural institutions will be subordinated to the war effort, and individuals who speak out will face intimidation, dismissal or worse.

The defence of Lora Santhakumar is thus not a matter of a mere personal injustice. Nor should it be entrusted to the courts, university administrations or parliamentary maneuvers, all of which operate within the framework of the politics of a capitalist ruling class that is hurtling to the right.

It requires the independent mobilization of the working class, uniting workers, students, and academics across ethnic, religious and national

lines, and linking the fight for Santhakumar's immediate reinstatement to the fight against war, authoritarianism and communal reaction and for social equality. The same ruling classes that are driving India and Pakistan toward war are responsible for poverty, unemployment, and the dismantling of public health and education.

The WSWS calls for the immediate reinstatement of Lora Santhakumar with full back pay and the defence of her rights, and the right of all academics, university workers, and students to oppose war without fear of reprisal. We fight to fuse the defence of democratic rights with the building of a mass, international anti-war movement of the working class. Only through such a movement can the drive toward war and dictatorship be halted and the foundations laid for a society based on social equality and genuine democracy.



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