



# All-India Feminist Alliance

(National Alliance of People's Movements)

**Struggle – Solidarity – Sisterhood**

**ALIFA**

*Dismantle Manuvad-Patriarchy, Enable Gender & Social Justice*

**NAPM**

**Ensure Justice to the RG Kar Hospital deceased doctor NOW!**

**Arrest all accused and Initiate Action against police and hospital officials who violated the law and committed irregularities**

**ALIFA Calls for an end to the culture of violence in healthcare NOW: Address systemic issues and ensure safety for all women health professionals**

**Stop drawing 'political mileage' out of gender-based crimes and violence!**

**17<sup>th</sup> August, 2024: Deeply shattered by the recent incident at RG Kar Hospital, ALIFA demands justice for the violated and deceased doctor in West Bengal as well as prompt action against all individual and institutional violators, in the case. We would also like to highlight the systemic issues of violence in healthcare (against all healthcare workers and patients) that remains unaddressed.**

All India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA - NAPM) strongly condemns the brutal incident of gangrape and murder of the doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata. As reported by multiple sources, on the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2024, a resident doctor on a 36-hour shift, after having finished with her work, went to rest in the Seminar room of the hospital at about 2 am. In the morning, her parents were informed that she was very unwell and that they should come. Later after making them wait for more than three hours at the hospital, they were informed that the doctor had 'committed suicide'. Shocked by this news, the father pleaded that he got a glimpse of his daughter, which is when he saw, that the young doctor was semi-nude, her legs were at right angle, blood had been oozing from her eyes and that there were innumerable injuries around her neck and body, her bones seemed broken.

One cannot imagine the plight of the father, watching the body of his daughter, with her legs pulled apart with a force that broke her pelvis, her spectacles crushed into her eyes, while all she did was save the lives of the others. The parents knew that they were being fooled. After rushing to the police station to lodge an FIR, the parents were told that an 'unnatural death' report had already been recorded and not an FIR for homicide. The brazen manner in which the Hospital administration and the police were complicit in changing the character of the crime and misleading the agencies, is shocking. The postmortem was also conducted only the next night, despite Supreme Court guidelines regarding transparency and accountability. The autopsy report indicated the possibility of gangrape, strangulation and that more than one person was involved in causing multiple injuries to her body. The police have arrested a 33-year-old police (civil) volunteer called Sanjoy Roy, who was said to have access to most departments of the hospital and was tracked from the CCTV footage.

**There were serious flaws and delays in the initial stages of investigation including the brazen manner in which the cover up was underway by the hospital authorities and the police.** The Principal Dr. Sandeep Ghosh blamed the deceased doctor for her rape and murder and stated that "it was

*irresponsible of the girl to go to the seminar hall alone at night”* and also called her psychotic. The other doctors of the hospital in shock and outrage started a protest on the 9<sup>th</sup> itself, which spread to all hospitals in Kolkata and has now spread nation-wide. When the investigation did not proceed any further, the family moved the High Court, demanding a CBI probe, which was ordered by the Calcutta High Court on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 2024.

So brazen has been the attempt to wipe out evidence from the scene of crime, the Seminar hall, that the hospital authorities broke down sections of the seminar hall, in the name of ‘maintenance’. Similarly on the 14<sup>th</sup> night, when the women of the entire city were out on the streets to reclaim the night, a huge mob entered the premise of the RG Kar hospital and vandalised the emergency, the protest site in the compound, heckled and beat up patients in the wards, to demoralise and teach the protesting doctors and staff a lesson!

That issue of gang rape and murder of a young woman doctor itself is very grave and requires corrective action for healthcare and workplaces to be safe for women, gender-diverse, trans, queer individuals and people of oppressed caste/religion/class backgrounds. To add to this, the sequence of events and the fierceness with which the State Government has been resistant to protests make it clear that the issue at hand is more than the gang rape and murder of a young women doctor. The attacks on RG Kar on 14<sup>th</sup> and ABHAYA (the deceased doctor’s name given by her colleagues) and the past history of this hospital make it clear that there are also huge benefits that flow from the hospital to the party in power and to the officials within the health system. Rumours and newspapers speak about drug trafficking, making of pornographic films at night within the hospital premises, illegal siphoning off of medicines and equipment, illegal tendering, paying touts for admission and treatment etc. The involvement of thugs from nearby areas who receive a small portion of these benefits, is widely believed to be the reason of the attack on 14<sup>th</sup> night.

This is also evident through the fact that the Principal Sandip Ghosh, who resigned from the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, was appointed as Principal of another hospital, showing how highly favoured he is politically. **The way this has been dealt so far is drenched in patriarchy, lawlessness and complete lack of accountability at every level of intervention by the state.**

The Medical College and Hospital gangrape and murder case, has brought back the horrors of the **Aruna Shanbaug case**, who in 1973 was raped and brutally assaulted by a ward boy in the KEM, hospital of Mumbai. She went into a coma that night and lived 42 years in that condition, before she passed away. **But even five decades later**, women in healthcare remain so unsafe, that such a brutal case of rape and murder happened in the heart of Kolkata. **We extend our heartfelt and complete solidarity to all healthcare professionals, not just in Kolkata, but all over the country, who are protesting in outrage at what happened and are demanding justice for the deceased doctor. At this point, it is not just about doctors anymore. Such incidents would make anyone ashamed, and quiver in horror, no matter what part of the globe they are from, and put into question whether we have made any progress, when it comes to the safety of women, if at all.**

**We, the undersigned, see this case as a serious failure of due diligence and failure of the state response to this heinous crime, that our first appeal is to the Calcutta High Court who should monitor the CBI investigation of the case, as increasingly most investigation agencies work under a lot of political interference and pressure.**

**It is well-established that women and queer staff are most vulnerable when basic facilities and amenities are absent and they end up in spaces which are unsafe, increasing their vulnerability, which is what happened in this case. When the victim doctor at 1 am wanted to rest, and so went to**

sleep in the seminar room as there was no other space. The RG Kar College has poorly lit spaces and does not have proper on-call rooms with attached bathroom. It is in fact the bounden duty of any employer to take all necessary preventive measures under the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Further, in terms of the implementation of the Act, we note that the Internal Committee constituted under the law, includes the Principal, which has the potential of compromising the impartiality of the Committee. The employer has to issue show cause notice and initiate disciplinary action based on the findings and recommendations of the Internal Committee. The Internal Committee's acts get compromised if Principal as the Head of the Institution is a member of the Committee.

#### **WE DEMAND:**

1. A fair and just investigation by the CBI and immediate arrests of all the accused.
2. Probe into the manner in which college authorities, including the former principal tried to destroy evidence. It needs to be investigated on priority and criminal proceedings need to be initiated against them for overseeing the destruction of the crime scene.
3. The suspension and initiation of disciplinary proceedings against Kolkata State Police officers who committed serious legal violations and irregularities in the initial stages of investigation, tried to present a homicide case as suicide, and also tried to protect the real culprit.
4. An FIR be lodged against the Kolkata State Police Officers for misleading the track of investigation, attempting to destroy evidence in the initial stages as well as allowing for destruction of evidence at the scene of crime.
5. All the accused who vandalised the hospital and protest site at the RG Kar hospital be arrested at the earliest and the conspiracy of the attack be exposed.
6. Due Implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, in letter and spirit at the RG Kar Medical College. This must include provision of On-call and rest rooms with proper bathroom, and appropriate lighting in all spaces.
7. Due implementation of the Supreme Court orders to ensure that trans and queer health workers, besides women, have a safe working environment, with provision of rest rooms, toilets and on-call rooms.
8. Action be initiated against the Principal of RG Kar College to disqualify him from Principalship from all Educational Institutions.
9. Action be taken against those sharing fake, hateful and sexist posts on social media as well as revealing the identity of the deceased victim.

*Representatives of Women's, Feminist groups and ALIFA see the recent incident as a symptom of the existing complacency in the healthcare system that is not people-centric or justice oriented. Women, people of oppressed genders, castes, religions, class continue to face violence of all forms in our healthcare system, be it students, residents, doctors, nurses, community health workers, ASHAs, sanitation workers, paramedical staff or patients.*

*In this light, we demand that the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) take into account the issue of violence in a systematic manner and address it in healthcare and not summarily blame the patients and their families (as has been done in the Office Memorandum dt. 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2024 of MoHFW), as patients themselves face violence in healthcare on a daily basis.*

There are several reports (and several more unreported incidents) of sexual assault across the country in both public and private healthcare institutions perpetuated by the existing power hierarchies among

various cadres of healthcare workers and between healthcare workers and patients. Reports of nurses, sanitation workers, medical students, junior doctors, being sexually exploited by the staff in administration/management/ doctors with higher power, patients facing sexual assault, obstetric violence, verbal abuse and other forms of violence by healthcare professionals are continuing to occur. **These forms of violence are deeply rooted in oppressive structures of patriarchy, caste, class, capitalism, communalism, transphobia, ableism and ALIFA is committed to challenge these structures. We demand healthcare spaces to be safe for all those involved in the care process including the patients who often are at the receiving end of various forms of violence.**

We demand that all healthcare establishments including at the primary healthcare level **implement the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and Rules** in its true spirit and be accountable to creating a safe workplace environment that is free of violence. Additionally, we demand that the government ensures **constituting Local Complaints Committee (LCCs) in every district** which is required under the Rules of the PoSH Act. The committee and administration should also **ensure regular sensitisation workshops of staff on gender and sexual harassment** at workplace.

Administration should **ensure adequate infrastructure for safety** of the healthcare workers, students, and patients - hostel facilities, hospital departments, duty rooms, rest rooms for on-call night duty staff, toilets, wards, adequate lighting in all areas, safe transport facilities for healthcare staff in night duty, adequate security personnel, security cameras. Violence against healthcare staff is also linked to staff shortages and poor quality of healthcare. **We demand that adequate healthcare staff be ensured** so as to prevent violence and avoid long working hours and poor work conditions. **Administration should prevent exploitation of power hierarchies** within the medical colleges and healthcare establishments and create a positive workplace culture for better provision of healthcare.

Privatisation of the public healthcare system and increased contractual nature of work in the health sector has led to a higher out-of-pocket expenditure and lack of accountability by the system to both health workers and patients. **We condemn the spree of privatisation in the health sector and demand regularisation of all cadres of health workers.** Contractual workers (who are mostly women and many of oppressed castes) like sanitation workers, nurses, ASHAs etc suffer sexual and other forms of violence because of exploitative nature of work arrangement and job insecurity.

We demand **strict grievance redressal systems and legal mechanisms** for patients' safety and addressing sexual and other forms of violence.

***We stand for justice for the Kolkata doctor! And Action Against all her Violators!***

***We stand in solidarity with all those facing and resisting gendered and other forms of discrimination and violence in healthcare systems on a daily basis!***

***We call for immediate and serious action to prevent and end violence in healthcare!***

***As feminists, we call for focussed and united struggle on systemic gendered discrimination and violence, including on persons from diverse marginalized social locations.***

***We warn vested interests and political outfits, in particular right-wing forces, against drawing mileage out of gender-based crimes while not otherwise exhibiting any concern about increasing gender-based violence and taking any steps to redress the same.***

**Issued by: All India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA - NAPM)**

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