

21/08/2024

A Cry for Justice: The Brutal Rape and Murder of a Young Doctor in Kolkata

The recent and heart-wrenching incident in West Bengal, a state renowned for its rich cultural heritage, has sent shockwaves across the nation. The brutal rape and murder of a young doctor at R. G. Kar Medical College, Kolkata is a stark reminder of the ironical deteriorating socio-cultural landscape and the grave threats faced by women in West Bengal, which is not only the land of Goddess Durga, but also the birthplace of Rabindranath Tagore, who composed our national anthem.

This heinous crime is not merely a call for justice but also a desperate plea for immediate change. It is a wake-up call for the authorities to prioritize the safety and security of women of all castes and religions. The administration, including the police, has failed to demonstrate a genuine commitment to women and doctors' well-being, and their actions have raised serious concerns about their impartiality.

Initially, the horrific rape and murder were misclassified as a suicide. The victim's parents were subjected to a distressing wait of several hours before being permitted to view their daughter's body. A rushed arrest was made soon after, raising questions about the thoroughness of the investigation.

Alarmingly, construction work began just 20 meters from the crime scene within 24 hours of the incident, potentially compromising crucial evidence. This action was one of several missteps by the authorities, creating significant obstacles to conducting a smooth and effective investigation.

It took intervention from the Calcutta High Court to transfer the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), finally paving the way for a more rigorous probe. The delayed handover cost precious time during which the actual perpetrators could have been apprehended, and vital evidence remained vulnerable to tampering—all due to the West Bengal State administration's inefficacy.

In the aftermath, as doctors engaged in a peaceful protest—a right guaranteed by the Constitution—they were violently attacked by a mob. The Kolkata Police stood by as silent spectators during this assault, with allegations surfacing that attempts were made to suppress the doctors' voices and conceal evidence. This incident highlights the prevailing apathy, misgovernance, and lack of accountability in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal. The state's apparent inclination to shield perpetrators rather than protect victims is a grave miscarriage of justice.

This is not an isolated event in West Bengal. A common picture emerges where for the last so many years the State has witnessed violence in many spheres of public life. Right from the violence during the election period, to the recent rapes, the law-and-order situation in the state needs serious introspection and immediate corrective measures are required. Time and again Courts have to intervene in these situations. For any democratic polity these are not good signs.

Building a safer society requires comprehensive measures, including victim support services, legal aid, psychological counselling, and community awareness campaigns. It is imperative to review and strengthen existing policies for women's protection to ensure their effectiveness. The tragic loss of this young doctor highlights the vulnerability of healthcare professionals, who dedicate their lives to saving others.

Gender equality is a fundamental principle that guarantees the safety and dignity of women. This incident underscores the urgent need for societal change with reemphasis on family values to uphold these principles. Women must be free from fear and violence.

Specific Recommendations:

- Increase patrolling and security personnel in areas where doctors are on night duty.
- Provide separate and adequate washrooms for female and male doctors.
- Install functional intercom systems in doctors' rooms with emergency SOS features.
- Conduct thorough investigations into the administrative heads of institutions to assess their role in ensuring the safety of their staff.
- Reassess and reform the entire system to address the systemic failures that contribute to such tragedies.

The demoralization caused by this incident could have far-reaching consequences for the medical profession. It is crucial for policymakers in West Bengal to take decisive action to restore confidence and ensure the safety of healthcare workers.

Whereas it is a big blot over people in authority, we strongly believe that such incidents expose a darker side of society, how children are brought up, what education imparts upon them and if we are going in the right direction for the human race overall. Lastly and more importantly, it highlights if we as individuals are playing our part of the constitution which is fundamental duties or are always in anticipation of 'authorities' to come and redress an issue.

It is time for action. We demand a safer, more just society for all women. We demand the State authorities of West Bengal, to provide justice to our sister.

**Gopal Krishna,
Former Secretary,
Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways,
Government of India.
Mobile: 9903254000**

**Bhaswati Mukherjee
Former Ambassador
Mob: 8130104016**

-----**List of Signatories attached**-----