

# Durgapur Medical College Rape Sparks Outrage over Women's Safety in Bengal

*Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay*

The alleged gang rape of a second-year student of a private medical college in Durgapur is yet another case highlighting the rise of [violence against women](#) in West Bengal. The crime took place in October 2025, just four months after a first-year student of a government-run law college in south Kolkata was gang-raped inside the college premises, and 14 months after the rape and murder of a trainee doctor inside [R.G. Kar Medical College](#) and Hospital in August 2024. The incident has once again raised questions about women's safety in West Bengal and the State's claim of being one of the safest places for women.

The survivor, who hails from Jaleswar in Odisha, was allegedly raped when she stepped out of the campus on October 10, sending shockwaves across the country. Chief Minister and [Trinamool Congress supremo](#) Mamata Banerjee's initial reaction added fresh controversy.

Condemning the crime, she said, "I am shocked about the incident, but private medical colleges also have to take care of their students, especially the girl child. They should not be allowed to come out at night. They have to protect themselves also. Those students who come from other States, I will request them not to venture out at night."

The comment sparked widespread criticism, with Opposition parties and civil society interpreting it as atavistic and patriarchal, and an admission of failure in combating the declining law and order situation in the State.

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Mamata later claimed that her words were "distorted" and deliberately taken out of context. But senior Trinamool leader and Lok Sabha MP Saugata Roy echoed them, saying, "In Bengal, the issue of safety of women is much better than in other States. The R.G. Kar incident took place one year ago, and then this happened. Both are very unfortunate. But women should also not come out of their colleges so late at night. The police cannot be present everywhere, and so they should also be a little careful."

Though Mamata had indicated the student had gone out at 12:30 in the morning, the college authorities stated that the survivor and her classmate, Wasif Ali, had stepped out around 7:58 pm to have dinner. Wasif returned alone around 8:42 pm, loitered near the main gate for about five minutes, then left again. Both returned around 9:29 pm.

The rape allegedly took place more than a kilometre from the campus, committed by three men who had followed them on bikes. They dragged the survivor to a secluded spot where one of them raped her while the other two watched. Later two others joined them and tried to extort money from her.

Wasif, who had “abandoned” the survivor, returned later to bring her back to campus. In her police report, the survivor alleged that Wasif had refused to take her call twice and only answered on her third attempt. Six people have been arrested as of October 15, including Wasif, who was arrested on October 14.

Mamata’s statement urging the “girl child” not to venture out at night is of particular significance, given the protests following the R.G. Kar rape and murder, under the title “Reclaim the Night”. Her appeal is being interpreted as the government’s “surrender” in the face of growing crimes.

Former Trinamool Rajya Sabha MP Jawhar Sircar told *Frontline*: “Rather than make the nights safe for women, the Chief Minister’s words raise the question as to who has the right to move in the night. After the R.G. Kar case, the whole of Bengal came out to seize the night; but now, almost as a retort after a year, Mamata seems to be saying that the night belongs to the prowler, so don’t step out.”

After the R.G. Kar case, her government had issued guidelines to minimise night duty for women wherever possible. The direction was later altered at the Supreme Court’s intervention.

## **A pattern of victim-blaming**

Mamata and Saugata’s comments drew criticism from academics and activists. Academic and writer Sampa Sen pointed out that since 2011, when Trinamool came to power, a culture of victim-blaming has been established in Bengal.

“We have been seeing how survivors are being blamed by the top administration, as though they were responsible for their fate. In the R.G. Kar case, there was a clear attempt to hush up the matter by destroying evidence, and a very clear message was driven home: ‘It is the absolute rule of the guilty here,’” Sen told *Frontline*.

The State government’s initial reaction in many cases of attacks on women has been either denial or aggressively defensive. In 2012, Mamata dismissed the Park Street rape case as a “fabricated incident”.

A year later, when confronted by local women of Kamduni in North 24 Parganas district following the rape and murder of a 20-year-old college student, Mamata claimed that the protest was a plot to kill her: “The Maoists, along with the CPI(M), had planned to kill me when I visited the survivor’s family.”

In 2022, when a 14-year-old girl from Hanskhali in Nadia district died after being raped by the son of a Trinamool gram panchayat leader, Mamata said: “...but I heard there was a love affair between the boy and the girl. Was it an actual rape? Or was she pregnant? Even her family members knew she was having an affair.”

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Jawhar Sircar pointed out that Mamata’s “overreaction” in times of crisis has always been “worrisome”.

“Where women are concerned, Mamata Banerjee seems to have a self-contradictory attitude. On the one hand, she extends her full support for a woman in her personal life, but if she feels feminine issues are being used against her, her attitude becomes archaic and patriarchal. This is something we have been seeing from the Park Street rape case in 2012. She is very liberal as long as it does not hurt her,” said Sircar.

## **An outdated social order**

According to sociologist and author Surajit C. Mukhopadhyay, Mamata's words were not only "insensitive" but also harked back to an antiquated patriarchal conception of "how a decent woman should behave, and the hours she should keep in her social life".

"If you look at the past, there was a system of 'gender-based time-keeping'—unwritten societal norms restricting a woman's movement beyond a certain hour of the day. What modernity has done is disturb the way we have slotted time according to gender. We are transitioning into an era when women and men work, or move around, or enjoy themselves at all times of the day. The 'time-keeping' of the past has become much more fluid, but our public culture has not yet caught up with this," Mukhopadhyay told *Frontline*.

He feels that such an attitude reflects society's inability to cope with the changing times. "Public culture needs to be created. Our public culture is still grappling with the idea of women being autonomous and independent. It is as if they are living from a memory that has long been gathering dust."

The crime and the Chief Minister's subsequent comments sparked widespread political and public outrage. Protest marches took place in different parts of the State, and the twin issues of women's safety and law and order once again came to the fore in election-bound Bengal.

Referring to the rape, West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose said, "This is not the first of its kind. In the recent past, we have had very bad similar experiences. This does not augur well for Bengal society. Bengal should be made a place which is safe for the girl child. Now, I cannot say with confidence that Bengal is safe. We have to own up responsibility and see that justice is given to the survivor."

The BJP, the main Opposition in the State, launched "Operation Lal Mirch"—a programme in which they distributed red chilli powder to women to protect themselves. The saffron party tried to add a communal colour to the crime by highlighting that five of the six accused happen to be Muslim.

Suwendu Adhikari, the leader of the Opposition in the Bengal Assembly, left out the name of the Hindu accused, Appu Barui, in his social media post: "Note the identity of those accused in the Durgapur private medical college gang rape: Sk. Nasimuddin, Sk. Riazuddin, Sk. Firdaus, Sk. Safiqul. In Mamata Banerjee's own words, one should not object to their kicks." Adhikari was referring to a statement Mamata had made in 2019: "I will appease Muslims a hundred times, I'm even ready to be kicked by the cow that gives milk."

However, the most damning comment came from the survivor's father: "Let 'sonar Bangla' (Golden Bengal) remain *sonar*. We are returning to Odisha. It was with a lot of hope and expectation that we came here with our daughter to make her a doctor. We will leave Bengal as soon as we can and not come back. Please ensure justice for my daughter. I do not want any other girl in Bengal to suffer the fate my daughter had."