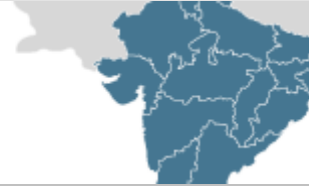


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'Those in power easily get away': Current rules at Delhi University are not sufficient for protecting students and staff from sexual harassment

By SHASWATI DAS

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Eight months after B.R. Ambedkar College's former laboratory assistant Pavitra Bhardwaj set herself ablaze to protest against alleged sexual and mental harassment by principal G.K. Arora, the B.L. Garg judicial commission had cleared him of the charges.

Bhardwaj, who was a lab assistant in the college's geography department, had alleged that Arora sexually harassed her on numerous occasions.

When her repeated appeals went unheard, Bhardwaj had immolated herself outside the Delhi Secretariat on September 30 last year and later succumbed to her injuries on October 7.

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Current rules at Delhi University are not sufficient to protect students as well as staff from sexual harassment (picture for representation only)

In the entire episode, Arora had maintained that he had done nothing wrong.

Earlier, he had stated that the misconduct that he had been charged with, was something he could not have fathomed committing.

Not the first incident

This, however, was not the first incident of its kind.

Yet, housed in the Delhi University's sanctum sanctorum were several such cases involving alleged misconduct by college authorities, senior officials and professors.

One of the first unsavoury incidents to have come to light figured Ramjas College vice-principal B. N. Ray in 2007.

Male students from Ramjas and other colleges had accused him of 'sexual harassment'.

The varsity had constituted a sexual harassment ordinance 15(D), based on the Vishaka judgment.

Accordingly, the complaint committees in colleges were made independent, and they were to conduct probe into allegations of sexual harassment.

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But things changed soon after when the ordinance was scrapped.

What now exists is a watered down version of the previous ordinance.

"If a student now files a complaint, the committee is constituted by the principal and it includes his or her handpicked members, which could heavily colour the probe. In addition to that, it is not gender neutral. This means that it neither recognises sodomy nor does it allow room for a male student to complain against a female professor," Naveen Gaur, professor in Dyal Singh College, said.

Earlier this year, a student of Dyal Singh College pressed sexual harassment charges against the college's political science professor Mani Bhushan, who was later arrested.

Bhushan denies the allegations.

There were also three female professors from the college who were allegedly hand in glove with Bhushan.

Safety remains a far cry for not just DU students, but for its teaching and non-teaching staff as well.

The B. N. Ray case remains in cold storage after the high court had ordered a fresh probe into the matter.

No followup have taken place.

"There is no recourse for students. If there is a sexual harassment complaint against someone who happens to be close to the principal, then the probe will be extremely biased because the principal will handpick the committee that will discuss the complaint," Gaur added.

High Court asks DU to revoke Arora's suspension

'Those in power easily get away'

MONTHS after a former Delhi University laboratory assistant allegedly committed suicide leading to the suspension of the college Principal G.K. Arora, Delhi University teachers feel that justice is still a far fetched dream for all those connected to the case.

Teachers, who had led the protests demanding the suspension of the principal said there is no end in sight on the larger issue of sexual harassment of women in campuses.

"The larger issue is that people get away even after committing such crimes. People in power always find a way out and that encourages such incidents on campus. We hope justice is delivered in this case to serve as an example for others," Nandita Narain, president Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA), said.

Arora was suspended on October 11 by the DU administration till the completion of a judicial probe in the case. The Delhi government on October 9 had ordered a judicial probe into the case of 35-year-old Pavitra Bhardwaj who had set herself on fire outside the Delhi Secretariat on September 30.

Arora was given a clean chit on Friday.

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By Ayesha Arvind

In a major relief to G.K. Arora, the former Principal of BR Ambedkar College, the Delhi High Court has directed the Delhi University authorities to hold governing general body meeting at the earliest to consider revoking Arora's suspension.

Arora was suspended by the university in the Pavitra Bhardwaj self-immolation case.

The high court order that came recently follows a plea filed by Arora after he was exonerated of all charges of sexual harassment by the BL Garg judicial committee set up by the state government to look into the same charges.

In his plea he had sought that since he has been granted a clean chit in the matter by several inquiry bodies, the university and college authorities be directed to hold the general body meeting and revoke his suspension.

According to the details of the Garg committee report submitted in court by Arora's counsel, advocate R.K. Saini, Arora was exonerated of the charges of sexual harassment by the committee on April 30 this year.

Arora further submitted before the court that even the apex complaints committee against sexual harassment of the University had exonerated him. The Court also took note of the fact that an inquiry conducted by the National Commission for Women into the matter had also granted a clean chit to Arora in November last year.

"Having regard to the aforesaid averments, it appears that there is no impediment in the governing body in considering the inquiry report of B.L. Garg, ADJ (Retd.). The governing body will hold the meeting, in accordance with law, keeping in mind the duties it has to discharge as a governing body. The needful will be done as soon as it is feasible," Justice Manmohan of the Delhi High Court said in his order.

The university authorities and representatives of Ambedkar College further told the court that the "college had convened a general body meeting on May 6 this year to consider revocation of Arora's suspension orders.

However, the meeting could not be conducted as some people disrupted the same by protesting against Arora."

PAVITRA BHARDWAJ CASE

- **SEPTEMBER 30, 2014** Pavitra Bhardwaj, a lab assistant at DU's BR Ambedkar College, set herself ablaze outside the Delhi Chief Minister's office.
- **OCTOBER 7, 2013** Bhardwaj succumbed to her injuries at the LNJP Hospital.
- **OCTOBER 9, 2013** The Delhi government ordered a judicial probe in the matter. It asked retired additional district judge B.L. Garg to carry out the inquiry into all aspects and circumstances of the case.
- **OCTOBER 11, 2013** The Delhi University suspended G.K. Arora.
- **OCTOBER 17, 2013** The police registered a case against Ambedkar College Principal G.K. Arora, who was accused by Bhardwaj of molesting and sexually harassing her.
- **NOVEMBER 6, 2013** NCW gave a clean chit to Arora. It concluded that it was following the administrative and disciplinary action taken by the college administration against her that she "desperately started writing to every possible authority regarding (her sacking). Finding no relief anywhere, she took the drastic step of self-immolation."
- **APRIL 30, 2014** The B.L. Garg committee granted a clean chit to Arora in its final probe report.
- **MAY 6, 2014** College authorities convened a general body meeting to consider revoking Arora's suspension order. The same however, was disrupted by protesters.
- **MAY 29, 2014** The HC ordered the college and university authorities to conduct the general body meeting to consider revoking Arora's suspension.

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"NCW had also investigated and exonerated him and the Delhi Police has also told the Court that it is filing a closure report saying that the case was that of suicide. NCW had observed that sexual harassment of Bhardwaj by Arora, was unlikely as the allegations were not substantiated in her earlier letters, where there is no mention of any sexual harassment.

"Yet no steps have been taken so far to revoke Arora's suspension. Hence, we were forced to approach the court. We are hopeful that the same will be done now following the court's directions," Advocate Saini said.

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