

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **AIDWA, SFI, DYFI, DSMM hold Statewide Protests to Demand Justice for Dr Payal Tadvi**

**Sonya Gill**

The AIDWA, SFI, DYFI, JASS (Jati Ant Sangharsh Samiti) held an angry protest demonstration outside Nair Hospital in Mumbai on May 27 to condemn the harassment, casteist humiliation and threats meted out to Dr Payal Tadvi by three senior women colleagues in the Topiwala National Medical College (TNMC) and BYL Nair Charitable Hospital, that ultimately drove her to commit suicide on May 22 in her hostel room. Dr Payal was an Adivasi girl hailing from the Jalgaon district of Maharashtra.

Over the past year since joining the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department in TNMC as a Resident doctor, she was harassed with impunity over her tribal community background and constantly threatened with denial of opportunities to conduct deliveries or perform surgeries so as to destroy her career. The callous inaction of the college authorities to whom she had made oral complaints about the abuse that she was facing has been strongly criticised by the organisations.

During the protest demonstration on May 27, a delegation consisting of AIDWA National General Secretary Mariam Dhawale and State Vice President Sonya Gill, DYFI State Secretary Preethy Shekhar, SFI State Joint Secretary Kavita Ware, SFI Mumbai President Pratiksha Pawar and JASS leaders Shailendra Kamble and Subodh More met the TNMC authorities Dr Parikh, officiating for the Dean and other senior doctors, Dr Pankaja, Dr Kamble and Dr Sarika Patel and handed them a memorandum.

The delegation demanded immediate arrest of the three absconding accused doctors as per the provisions of Sec 306 IPC, the SC/ST Atrocities Act etc., their dismissal from the college and recommendation from the college to the Maharashtra Medical Council for the cancellation of their licences. A strong demand was made for fixing accountability and taking strict action against the senior doctors and other authorities for their negligence in addressing Payal's harassment which amounts to a case of institutional murder. It was pointed out that public medical institutions were the only guarantors that could ensure entry into professional education of students from Adivasi and other vulnerable communities. Therefore, a strong message had to go out into the college community and wider society that there would be no tolerance shown to any casteist abuse and oppression. The delegation

pointed that out that both ragging and caste abuse were implicated here and there had been a complete failure on part of the medical colleges and the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) to establish effective mechanisms to address ragging and caste harassment, such as UGC-recommended Equal Opportunity Cells/SC-ST cells. The authorities and the police have been warned that the agitations will be intensified if there is any further delay in arresting the accused and fixing accountability.

Responding to a call given by the SFI State Committee, protest actions were held on May 27 in Beed, Nanded, Aurangabad, Solapur and Nagpur and memorandums were submitted to the District Collectors. DYFI and AIDWA also participated in various districts while in Pune the JASS-DSMM and AIDWA were part of a broad protest action by different groups.

The very next day on May 28, all the three accused senior doctors, Dr Bhakti Mehare, Dr Hema Ahuja and Dr Ankita Khandelwal were arrested. The trio was booked under relevant provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Anti-Ragging Act, the IT Act and Section 306 (abetment to suicide) of the Indian Penal Code. As promised to the delegation, the inquiry report by the Anti-Ragging Committee of the Hospital was submitted to the MUHS the same day.