

CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Kerala rape case: Social activist Agnivesh condemns Catholic Church for ‘victimising’ nuns

He claimed that the action against the nuns was the ‘present-day version of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ’.

by *Scroll Staff*

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Swami Agnivesh/Facebook

Social activist Agnivesh on Sunday condemned the Catholic Church for “victimising” five nuns who supported a complainant in a rape case in which former Bishop Franco Mulakkal is accused.

“The nuns who, incurring extreme risks, took the historic decision to stand by the victim, deserve the solidarity of all right-minded people,” Agnivesh said in a statement. He claimed that the action against the nuns was the “present-day version of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ”.

Stephen Kottakkal, the vicar of Karakkamala St Mary’s Church in Kerala’s Wayanad, on Sunday refuted reports that the Catholic Church had taken disciplinary action against a nun for protesting against Mulakkal. Lucy Kalappurakkal had claimed that the Franciscan Clarist congregation had barred her from participating in “prayer, worship and mass” after she participated in a **protest** against the former bishop.

Agnivesh said the church’s actions had reinforced the perception that it stood in solidarity with the perpetrator. “It has also taken a stand violative of the Indian Constitution and our democratic morality,” he said.

The social activist called on the Church to revoke the actions it had taken against the nuns “at once”. “I urge the people of Kerala to stay in solidarity with the targeted nuns,” he said. “I request the Pinarayi Vijayan government to ensure that the nun rape case is handled in an exemplary fashion.”

Here’s his full statement:

I am constrained to condemn the shocking move on the part of the Catholic church to victimize the five nuns for standing with the victim in the rape case. This step by the church exposes its vindictiveness and bias. It is disappointing that for the church hierarchy the agony of a violated nun is nothing in comparison to the vanity of an alleged aggressor in authority.

The nuns who, incurring extreme risks, took the historic decision to stand by the victim, deserve the solidarity of all right-minded people. The Catholic church as a whole should have done what they chose to do. Jesus Christ, whom the church professes to follow, is distinguished by his passion for justice and his keenness to be identified with the oppressed. The vindictive action against the nuns is the present-day version of the crucifixion of Jesus. The church is cutting a sorry figure in the eye of the nation.

By choosing the act in this manner, the church has reinforced the suspicion in the public domain that it is in solidarity with the aggressor. It has also taken a stand violative of the Indian Constitution and our democratic morality. Every citizen has the right to seek redressal of grievances and every citizen has the right to think and act according to one’s own conscience, subject to public order, health and morality. The targeted nuns are clearly within the ambit of the law of the land; whereas the church is straying beyond the remit of law. It is senseless for the church to claim totalitarian control over the life of its servants or members.

Ironically, this development invests the nuns with greater ethical and spiritual nobility. Surely, they knew how power-crazy, vindictive and unforgiving the male-dominated church is. Their decision to stand by the traumatized victim was in full awareness of it, which makes it all the more heroic.

I denounce this mean-minded and vindictive step and urge the authorities of the Catholic church to revoke it at once. I urge the people of Kerala to stay in solidarity with the targeted nuns in facing this unprovoked aggression. I request the Pinarayi Vijayan government to ensure that the nun-rape case is handled in an exemplary fashion.

The case

In June, the police **filed** charges against Mulakkal after a nun in the Missionaries of Jesus congregation filed a complaint accusing him of raping her 13 times between 2014 and 2016 in Kottayam. The congregation is based in Punjab’s Jalandhar district but it runs two convents in Kerala – one in Kottayam and the other in Kannur. The alleged abuse took place in Kottayam.

Mulakkal has denied the charges and accused the nun of taking revenge on him for ordering an inquiry into a complaint against her. He filed a complaint against the complainant and five other nuns, accusing them of framing him.

Mulakkal was **arrested** on Friday.

The Missionaries of Jesus has **said** its internal investigation found Mulakkal to be innocent. The organisation has also accused the nun of being in a relationship with a taxi driver.

