

2026 LiveLaw (SC) 56

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION
J.B. PARDIWALA; J., R. MAHADEVAN; J.**

15 January, 2026.

CRIMINAL APPEAL NO. 1425 OF 2025 (Arising out of S.L.P. (Criminal) No. 13324 of 2024)

AMIT KUMAR & ORS. *versus* UNION OF INDIA & ORS.

Campus Suicide – Mandatory registration of FIR – Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) - Institutional Responsibility vs. Student Autonomy - Mandatory Directions under Article 142 - The Supreme Court addressed the alarming rise in student suicides across Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in India - Recognized student suicide as the "visible tip of a much larger iceberg of student distress," Supreme Court noted that the legal and moral obligation of educational authorities to create safe, inclusive, and nurturing environments - Supreme Court reviewed an interim report by a National Task Force (NTF) and issued several mandatory directions under Article 142 of the Constitution to address structural, social, and academic stressors - Key Legal Issues & Rulings held – i. Mandatory Registration of F.I.R. for Campus Suicides – Noted that educational institutions have an unequivocal legal obligation to promptly lodge an F.I.R. with appropriate authorities if an incident of suicide occurs on campus - This follows the clarification of law regarding mandatory registration of F.I.R.s in the event of disclosure of a cognizable offence; ii. Institutional Responsibility vs. Student Autonomy - Supreme Court criticized the tendency of HEIs to "shift the blame" onto the individual autonomy of the deceased student to avoid institutional responsibility - held that HEIs cannot shirk their fundamental duty to ensure institutions are safe and conducive spaces for learning; iii. Mandatory Directions under Article 142 - Data Maintenance: SRS data on suicides for the 15-29 age group must be centrally maintained - The NCRB must distinguish between school-going and higher education students in its reports; iv. Reporting Protocol - HEIs must report all student suicides or unnatural deaths (on or off-campus) to police immediately - Annual reports of such incidents must be submitted to regulatory bodies like UGC, NMC, BCI, etc; v. Faculty Vacancies - All vacant faculty positions, with priority to reserved categories (SC/ST/OBC/PwD), must be filled within four months; vi. Scholarship Disbursements: Pending scholarship backlogs must be cleared within four months - HEIs are strictly prohibited from barring students from exams or hostels due to administrative delays in scholarship disbursements; vii. Regulatory Compliance - HEIs must strictly adhere to UGC regulations concerning Ragging (2009), Equity (2012), Sexual Harassment (2016), and Grievance Redressal (2023); viii. Accessibility and Mental Health - Supreme Court mandated accessibility audits for marginalized groups (PwDs and Transgender students) and emphasized the need for student-friendly mental health services provided by qualified professionals rather than untrained faculty members. [Relied on *Sukdeb Saha v. The State of Andhra Pradesh*, 2025 SCC OnLine SC 1515; Paras 19-39; 44, 45]

For Appellant(s): Mr. Mehmood Pracha, Adv. Mr. R. H. A. Sikander, AOR Mr. Jatin Bhatt, Adv. Mr. Sanawar, Adv. Mr. Kshitij Singh, Adv. Ms. Nujhat Naseem, Adv. Mr. Sikander Raza, Adv. Mr. Faisal Mohammad, Adv. Mr. Kumail Abbas, Adv.

For Respondent(s) :Mr. K .M. Nataraj, A.S.G. Mr. Chitransh Sharma, Adv. Mr. Vatsal Joshi, Adv. Mr. Anuj Srinivas Udupa, Adv. Ms. Ruchi Kohli, Adv. Mr. Arvind Kumar Sharma, AOR Ms. Mrinal Gopal Elker, AOR Ms. Silpi S Swain, Adv. Mr. Brijender Chahar, A.S.G. Mr. Mukesh Kumar Maroria, AOR Mr. Amit Sharma

li, Adv. Mrs. Bani Dikshit, Adv. Mr. Varun Chugh, Adv. Mr. Gaurang Bhushan, Adv. Mr. Jagdish Chandra, Adv. Mr. Sameer Abhyankar, AOR Mr. Aryan Srivastava, Adv. Mr. Krishna Rastogi, Adv. Mr. Rahul Kumar, Adv. Mr. Brijender Chahar, A.S.G. Mr. Abhijeet Pandove, Adv. Mr. Amit Sharma B, Adv. Mr. Gaurang Bhushan, Adv. Ms. Bani Dikshit, Adv. Mr. Jagdish Chandra, Adv. Mr. Karan Chahar, Adv. Mr. Sudarshan Lamba, AOR Mr. Pukhrambam Ramesh Kumar, AOR Mr. Karun Sharma, Adv. Ms. Anupama Ngangom, Adv. Ms. Rajkumari Divyasana, Adv. Ms. K. Enatoli Sema, AOR Mr. Amit Kumar Singh, Adv. Ms. Chubalemla Chang, Adv. Mr. Prang Newmai, Adv. Ms. Yanmi Phazang, Adv. Ms. Vidushi Bajpai, AOR Mr. Lokesh Sinhal, Sr. A.A.G. Mr. Samar Vijay Singh, AOR Ms. Sabarni Som, Adv. Mr. Aman Dev Sharma, Adv. Mr. Nikunj Gupta, Adv. Mr. Sarthak Arya, Adv. Mr. Gaj Singh, Adv. Ms. Ishika Gupta, Adv. Mr. Amith Krishnan H , AOR Mr. Parmanand Gaur, AOR Ms. Megha Gaur, Adv. Mr. Vibhav Mishra, Adv. Mr. K.m Nataraj, A.S.G. Mr. Shiv Mangal Sharma, A.A.G. Ms. Nidhi Jaswal, AOR Mr. Rudraditya Khare, D.A.G. Mr. Arkaj Kumar, Adv. Mr. Parth Awasthi, Adv. Mr. Pashupathi Nath Razdan, AOR Ms. Maitreyee Jagat Joshi, Adv. Mr. Astik Gupta, Adv. Ms. Akanksha Tomar, Adv. Mr. Mahesh Agarwal, Adv. Mr. Rishi Agrawala, Adv. Ms. Madhavi Agarwal, Adv. Mr. Sanjeevi Seshadri, Adv. Mr. Akshay Agarwal, Adv. Mr. Manish Sharma, Adv. Mr. E. C. Agrawala, AOR Mr. Akshay Amritanshu , AOR Mr. Mayank Sapra, AOR Ms. Karishma Maria, Adv. Ms. Haridas Medha, Adv. Ms. Lalima Das, Adv. Mr. Anil Shrivastav, A.A.G. Ms. Disha Singh, AOR Ms. Eliza Bar, Adv. Ms. Swati Ghildiyal, AOR Ms. Neha Singh, Adv. Mr. Aman Panwar, A.A.G. Mr. Sanchit Garga, AOR Mr. Abhinav Kumar, Adv. Mr. Manav Kaushik, Adv. Mr. Kunal Rana, Adv. Mr. Shashwat Jaiswal, Adv. Mr. Kaushal Gautam, Adv. Ms. Snehpreet Kaur, AOR Mr. Prashant Alai, Adv. Mr. Kunal Mimani, AOR Mr. Shrirang B. Varma, Adv. Mr. Siddharth Dharmadhikari, Adv. Mr. Aaditya Aniruddha Pande, AOR Mr. Avijit Mani Tripathi, AOR Mr. T.k. Nayak, Adv. Ms. Marbiang Khongwir, Adv. Mr. Nishe Rajen Shonker, AOR Mrs. Anu K Joy, Adv. Mr. Santhosh K, Adv. Mr. Alim Anvar, Adv. Mrs. Devika A.I., Adv. Mr. Sanpreet Singh Ajmani, AOR Mr. Amit Kumar, Adv. Ms. Amitoz Kaur, Adv. Mr. Sandeep Malik, Adv. Ms. Shivani Agraphari, Adv. Mr. Gurmeet Singh, Adv.

ORDER

J.B. PARDIWALA & R. MAHADEVAN, J.J. :-

1. By our judgment and order dated 24.03.2025, we had clarified the law as regards the mandatory registration of an F.I.R. in the event of disclosure of a cognizable offence and simultaneously, reminded the administration of every educational institution that, it is their unequivocal moral and legal obligation to promptly lodge an F.I.R. with the appropriate authorities, if an incident of suicide occurs on campus.
2. While holding so, we had taken note of the disturbing pattern of student suicides being reported from various educational institutions across the country and deemed it necessary to understand what could be the underlying causes contributing to distress amongst students. This was done with a view to propel some affirmative action through the formulation of comprehensive and effective guidelines/strategies that would address the core of the problem and build a robust institutionalized response for ensuring the mental well-being of students studying in Higher Educational Institutions (hereinafter, the “HEIs”).
3. In light of the same, a National Task Force (hereinafter, the “NTF”) to address the mental health concerns of students and prevent the commission of suicides in HEIs, was constituted by this Court. Their remit broadly included the (a) identification of the predominant causes leading to the commission of suicides by students; (b) analysis of the existing legal and institutional frameworks along with its (in)adequacies; and (c) recommendations for strengthening protections from a preventive, remedial and reformatory perspective, all which ensured inclusivity, accountability and student well-being in HEIs.
4. The NTF has prepared and placed before us an interim report in pursuance of the aforesaid.

5. Before giving a broad overview of the interim report prepared by the NTF, we are deeply saddened to acknowledge that we have come across several more incidents of student suicides which have been reported to have occurred in educational institutions across the country. Such repeated unfortunate incidents, time and again, reminds us of the gravity and enormity of the issue that we have been presented with in the present matter.
6. Youth and young adulthood, are increasingly recognised as vulnerable phases, with most mental health conditions emerging before the age of 24. The 2022 National Suicide Prevention Strategy, also identifies the youth and students as priority groups while recommending multisectoral interventions. However, in such multi-sectoral interventions, it is found that academic campus-based efforts in India are fragmented and under-evaluated.
7. While some discourse surrounding the mental well-being of students studying in HEIs and its close nexus with the incidence of suicides already exists in academia, the NTF has moved one step further to look into the sub-merged sections of the 'ice-berg of student distress' in order to offer some structural, preventive and sustainable solutions to the system and functioning of higher education in India. This is in acknowledgment of the fact that student suicide represents only the visible tip of a much larger ice-berg of student distress and well-being. Other manifestations of student distress and consequential low student academic integration would include increased drop-out rates, poor academic outcomes etc.
8. Although the suicide epidemic must be looked at from a mental health or a public health perspective, yet it is equally important to explore what the social, economic and other determinants of such behaviours are, especially if we wish to holistically address the occurrences of suicides in HEIs.
9. Many of the ills that beset the student are admittedly larger societal issues. However, within the metaphorical four walls of the educational institution, there are many things that remain within the immediate control of the educational authorities. Therefore, scope for much reform rests with the administrative and other authorities of the HEIs, at least insofar as creating a nurturing and responsive environment for students is concerned.
10. There also exists some debate as regards the extent or nature of responsibility that the HEIs hold in ensuring the mental well-being of students. The tussle in particular is regarding whether a clear line can be drawn between student autonomy and institutional responsibility respectively. This dilemma between the aforesaid is especially accentuated in the aftermath of the occurrence of any suicide, during which, there is a heightened tendency to ascribe a larger role to the individual autonomy of the deceased and remove any direct or even incidental institutional responsibility. In other words, there exists a predisposition to "shift the blame" and individualise the incident i.e., to attribute individual-specific reasons and personal short-comings as the closely-related cause. There is hardly any introspection into the institutionally normalised 'stressors' which may have had any contributory effect. However, irrespective of upon whom the culpability may lie from a strict penal perspective, all that we are trying to convey is that HEIs cannot shirk away from their fundamental duty to ensure that their institutions as a whole are safe, equitable, inclusive and conducive spaces of learning.
11. The NTF has approached the task assigned to them from both an academic and a practical lens. Along with conducting a detailed review of all the laws, policies, guidelines,

recommendations, previous reports etc., and examining the public data on student suicides from Sample Registration Surveys (for short, the “**SRS**”), the National Crime Records Bureau (for short, the “**NCRB**”) and online newspaper reports, the NTF also launched a dedicated website to gather inputs *via* tailored surveys from five stakeholder groups i.e., students, faculty, parents, mental health providers and HEIs all over the country. Although the response rate of the HEIs was relatively low i.e., 3.5% of 60,383 HEIs, yet they give us a good representative idea of the reality in HEIs in this country. Some valuable perspectives that have been particularly insightful have emerged through these surveys. Further supplementing the aforesaid, the NTF has also conducted a series of institutional visits and stakeholder consultations, more precisely, a total of 30 meetings at 19 institutional sites, spanning different States, institutions and disciplines.

12. The NTF has also taken due note of the elaborate guidelines issued by this Court in ***Sukdeb Saha v. The State of Andhra Pradesh*** reported in **2025 SCC OnLine SC 1515**.

I. IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING CONTRIBUTORS TO THE INCREASED INCIDENCE OF STUDENT SUICIDES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

13. Upon analysing SRS data, the NTF has found that in the 15-29 age group, suicides are either the second highest cause of death in the case of men or, the highest cause of death in the case of women, with medical reasons falling far behind. Such is not the case in any other age group, where medical reasons visibly occupy a greater role. It is also pertinent to mention that the suicide rate in India is way ahead of the global rates pertaining to this age group.

14. According to NCRB data for the year 2022, the total number of student suicides stood at an alarming 13,000 cases. The youth of this country are increasingly becoming vulnerable to suicides than the overall population. Several studies also seem to indicate that such a rise in the number of student suicides is occurring at a time when the proportion of the youth in the overall population is seeing a decline.

i. The manner of Expansion of the Higher Education System in India

15. In setting the context for further discussion, the NTF has begun by highlighting that the unique complexities of higher education has its genesis in the way in which it has expanded in the past few decades. The “massification” and “privatisation” of the higher education system in India has brought in unprecedented levels of student enrolment. India is already the world’s second largest higher education system in terms of student enrolment. In addition to this, the National Education Policy, 2020 (for short, the “**NEP, 2020**”) has also set an ambitious target of achieving a 50 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (for short, “**GER**”) by the year 2035. There is no doubt that this expansion coupled with affirmative action has also translated into the increased enrolment of students belong to disadvantaged groups including SC/ST/OBCs, PwDs, transgender persons, individuals from rural and remote areas etc.

16. However, this growth has brought with itself some substantial challenges and unprecedented pressure on academic standards. The purely quantitative expansion without any adequate institutional support framework, has left students vulnerable, as is directly evidenced by the recurring instances of campus tragedies.

17. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that our myopic focus on quantity does not eclipse the creation of qualitative support systems or reforms within our higher education system. Numerical progress would only superficially fulfil legal requirements and policy

goals. What we must strive to achieve is the “substantive and full participation” of all students within the higher education learning environment as envisioned within our constitutional ideals.

ii. Structural and social inequalities

18. It is in this context, that it becomes necessary to address the persistent structural inequalities that students may be confronted with, post their entry into college. In simple terms, we must acknowledge that all students entering college life may not be similarly placed in all aspects. The lived realities of students belonging to marginalised groups (SC/ST/OBC), persons with disabilities (for short, “**PwDs**”), transgender persons, women, students from rural backgrounds, nonEnglish speaking students etc. remain different even within the college atmosphere. Affirmative action cannot stop at merely ensuring their entry into higher education. It must also reflect in the creation of adequate support systems which ameliorate instead of exacerbate existing inequities. The existence of such systems would significantly disarm a significant host of stressors which disproportionately affect students from marginalised groups and disadvantaged communities and as a consequence, ensure their overall mental well-being.

19. Such support systems would range from:

i. the existence of well-functioning Equal Opportunity Cells/Centres (for short, “**EOCs**”) as mandated by the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012;

ii. The existence of a well-functioning, independent and effective Internal Complaints Committee (for short, “**ICCs**”) as mandated by the University Grants Commission (Prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment of women employees and students in higher educational institutions) Regulations, 2015;

iii. Proportionate representation of marginalised groups in faculty and other positions of administrative authority within HEIs which attempt to close the educator-student mismatch and create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment;

iv. A representative and non-skewed social composition of the student body;

v. Accessible infrastructure for PwDs not just in terms of a few ramps and handrails but also with careful attention paid to tactile paths, signage, lifts, digital accessibility etc.;

vi. Initiatives that foster more inclusivity including but not limited to language development centres and structured initiatives that facilitate English language training for students educated in vernacular/regional languages so that they can handle the exclusively English-medium pedagogy and English-dominated social environment; robust faculty and student mentorship initiatives that offer academic and other necessary forms of support; absence of barriers to membership and full participation in extra-curricular activities, co-curricular activities, clubs etc.; institutionally created ‘safe spaces’ to build community which would include separate infrastructural facilities which are to be created by college authorities along with the promotion a culture of non-academic activities and initiatives which encourage socialisation etc.

20. One might argue that aforesaid support systems, all predominantly exist in most HEIs, in some form or the other. However, such an averment would be visibly distant from the truth as the work of the NTF has itself revealed that they either only exist on paper, or not at all; even when they exist in actuality, they are merely tokenistic.

21. Especially in the context of EOCs and ICCs, what has been gathered from some first-hand accounts of students and faculty members from the online survey and the institutional visits of the NTF, is deeply disheartening. Though these bodies may find existence in several institutions, they lack independence and often work to favour the perpetrators or aggressors rather than the students for whom it was created. Cases are suppressed and proceedings are often biased. This also induces fears of academic or social backlash in students and prevents them from accessing grievance redressal mechanisms. Even if such bodies are constituted with the right members, they are said to lack any real authority in the larger administrative framework of the HEIs to take any action, rendering them virtually powerless when faced with any incident of sexual harassment or discrimination.

22. This discloses the very sad reality that inclusion often remains more symbolic than real and brings to the fore the fragility of higher education in India –those that are attitudinal, infrastructural and procedural.

iii. Ragging

23. The menace of ragging still seems to persist within several HEIs with the same also being normalised and touted as a “bonding exercise” or a “friendly ice-breaking effort”. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that significant steps have been taken to rid educational campuses of the problem of ragging. However, what seems to be the concern of many is that while HEIs obtain anti-ragging declarations from students on paper, in the event of such incidents occurring, they are not properly addressed and the consequences for erring students are minimal or absent.

iv. Increased academic pressure

24. The transition from school to university is a phase in young adulthood that brings with it some unique responsibilities, challenges and difficulties but without proper support systems. During the NTF’s institutional visits, many students shared how they go from being academically exceptional to one of many over-achievers at their college/university. This combined with the institutional culture which persistently creates anxiety and heightened stress levels to compete and excel, brings about a sharp rise in mental health issues.

25. Extremely rigid attendance policies, overburdening and unplanned phasing/scheduling of the academic curriculum, exam assessment methodologies, faculty shortage, vacant teaching posts, excessive reliance on inexperienced guest faculty, non-transparent or non-existent placement processes etc. were all pointed out as stressors by the responses received by the NTF from students. Medical students, in particular, spoke about the entrenched borderline exploitative academic culture coupled with on-call hours being stretched well beyond the prescribed limit – going as far as 36-48 hours at a go. In technical institutions offering PhD programmes, it was pointed out that high research demands, burnout, financial difficulties were combined with uneven and inconsistent relationship with their supervisors, lack of adequate lab equipment etc. Engineering college going students also highlighted the intense nature of academic expectations heavily driven by placements and salary packages. Several other course-specific and discipline-specific issues were raised in these responses.

26. All of the aforesaid are not shockingly new findings – discussions around these issues have long pre-occupied policy makers and educators alike but with no long-lasting or real solution.

27. A by-product of this competitive culture is the difficulty in building healthy peer groups which then directly translates into social isolation. When institutional spaces have no space for camaraderie, all students suffer and especially, students from diverse social and economic backgrounds suffer more.

28. Such a competitive culture is, no doubt, also carried over due to parental pressure regarding career prospects etc. While we recognise that sensitising parents is equally important, there is much that we can do to change the normalised institutional culture at these places of learning.

v. Failure to properly redress mental health concerns of student by HEIs.

29. The role of Mental Health Service Providers (for short, the “MHSPs”) in campus ecosystems is especially important if one conceptualises student mental health as a continuum, extending beyond clinical diagnoses to encompass broader well-being and suicide prevention efforts.

30. The NTF has highlighted that there is a persistent and significant treatment gap for common mental health concerns in HEIs, driven both by supply-side barriers (scarcity of trained professionals, uneven service distribution, etc.) and demand-side barriers (stigma, low prioritization, fear of academic repercussions etc.). Any strategy must focus on a combination of reforms which addresses both these barriers equally.

31. The survey conducted by the NTF and the preliminary responses indicate that around 65% of the institutes surveyed currently do not provide access to any MHSPs. Furthermore, the lack of presence of any full-time MHSPs was indicated in 73% of the surveyed HEIs. Preliminary figures also suggested a poor uptake of these services, even in institutes where they existed. However, such a sub-optimal utilisation may stem from several factors which include *inter-alia* poor awareness about its existence within the student community, the positioning of these services, lack of trust in administration, doubts regarding the maintenance of confidentiality, apprehensions about negative academic or social consequences, quality of services and corresponding satisfaction, its student-friendliness in terms of location/timing/appointment procedures/nature of services etc. In the absence of in-campus presence, even the presence of any formal liaison or external linkages with MHSPs were reported in less than 20% of the HEIs.

32. On the other hand, it must be mentioned that a handful of HEIs seem to have also embraced an overreaching approach – by adopting an overly standardised method and mandating that all students be sent to counselling centres to undergo psychiatric evaluation, irrespective of their individual needs. Such approaches fail to understand that mental health problems need to be tailored to the subjective needs of students instead of taking a ‘one size fits all’ outlook with a view to minimise on-paper culpability.

33. In this context, we must also mention that views from several faculty members given to the NTF are also noteworthy. In the absence of MHSPs, the faculty members themselves felt unprepared to offer support, especially for sensitive and severe problems, including crises such as suicidal ideation. They stated that they are equally overextended with academic workloads and other administrative responsibilities. Therefore, we must be cognisant before holding the faculty members solely responsible for the students’ mental health outcomes as well. Having said so, they are important stakeholders within the HEI environment who must be trained to identify signs of mental health risk and refer such students to MHSPs in appropriate cases.

vi. Financial Stress

34. Financial stress was also frequently brought as a recurring theme directly impacting the mental well-being of several students, especially those belonging to rural and middle-income backgrounds. In several HEIs, they were extensive delays, inconsistencies and inequities in scholarship disbursement. Some HEIs even have institutional policies wherein the students are held accountable for the payment of fees when reimbursements/disbursements from the government faced any administrative delays. The absence of any support on other costs which are equally high such as hostel fees, exam and administrative fees etc. were also said to exacerbate financial pressure.

35. The NTF also received several e-mail communications from students themselves (which have been annexed in the interim report) complaining of scholarship lapses due to systemic failures. The necessity for immediate and time-bound grievance redressal was an anguished plea on part of many students relying on such benefits for the pursuance of their studies.

II. EXISTING LEGAL, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ALONG WITH THEIR GAPS, IF ANY.

36. The global measures for suicide prevention have all been aligned with the World Health Organisation (for short, the “WHO”) policy on suicide prevention. The NTF has identified that the nature of interventions, however vary, with some countries framing a legal statute (e.g., Japan, South Korea, the US, Canada, Argentina etc.) and others relying on policies (e.g., UK, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Thailand etc.). In the particular context of suicide prevention measures in colleges and universities, it is found that the system rests on a layered structure but universities themselves, across these diverse contexts, have converged on a set of common practices which include the establishment of counselling and psychological services, strong referral systems to external mental health providers, gatekeeper training, crisis helplines, awareness initiatives and structured postvention protocols.

37. What we have noticed from the interim report is that policies and measures to ensure student well-being in India, do exist to a very large extent, but they are scattered across several individual documents and therefore, its implementation and accountability for non-compliance slips through the cracks. Just to give an idea of the measures which already exist, the NTF has identified the following policies, several that have been spearheaded by the University Grants Commission (for short, the “UGC”), which address suicides and the issues leading to suicides in India:

- i. The UGC Regulation on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions, 2009;
- ii. The UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012;
- iii. The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), 1982;
- iv. The National Mental Health Policy, 2014;
- v. UGC (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2016;
- vi. National Education Policy, 2020;
- vii. Nasha Mukti Abhiyaan Task Force and Nasha Mukti Bharat campaign;
- viii. The UGC Accessibility Guidelines and Standards for Higher Education Institutions and Universities, 2022;
- ix. National Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2022;
- x. National Tele Mental Health Programme (Tele MANAS), 2022;

- xi. UGC (Redressal of Grievances of Students) Regulations, 2023; and
 - xii. The Ministry of Education's Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme (MMTTP) and its component on Capacity Building Programme for Promoting Positive Mental Health Resilience and Well-being in HEIs;
38. Some relevant legislations also include, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989; the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992; the National Trust Act, 1999; the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017; and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.
39. It is of relevance to also note that some prior reports on issues related to mental health and prevention of suicides in HEIs have also been looked into by the NTF which include *inter-alia* the MHRD Task Force on Centrally Funded Technical Institutions, 2012; Medical Institutions Task Force under the National Medical Commission, 2024; independent study conducted by IIT, Delhi in 2024; Report on Mental Health Services at NLSIU Bengaluru (November, 2024); Reformation of National Common Entrance Examination Testing (NEET) Report by the Department of Higher Education, MHRD (October, 2024); Sexual Harassment (Saksham Report) by the UGC, 2013; and the Psycho-social study of Ragging released by the UGC, 2017.
40. These seven reports provide certain benchmarks with which the work of the NTF has progressed. Furthermore, the NTF seeks to draw from these prior efforts to see what needs to be strengthened and where new directions are called for, especially to ensure that the same wheels are not reinvented or recycled.
41. A significant gap as regards the previous reports, recommendations and guidelines on student well-being, which has been identified by the NTF is that, more often than not, the discussions remain prescriptive in nature without any mechanism outlined for effective implementation. To put it simply, there is no implementation roadmap or any guiding operating procedures which could help with a universal and modelled response. The existing measures stop at identifying the issues and provide no guidance on the next step – its effective redressal.
42. Even if a roadmap or some procedural nitty-gritties are outlined, they do not find any strict real-world application, in the absence of accountability being fixed on HEIs. To put it simply, most interventions are generic, abstract and reactive. Although several of these measures are statutory regulations which have a binding effect, they are not taken seriously because HEIs do not run the risk of any adverse consequences for non-compliance. When it comes to guidelines, its enforcement obviously throws up some serious challenges.
43. However, if we are to keep student well-being in HEIs at the forefront, we would have to close these gaps, with the help of the NTF and the Union of India, and put all HEIs to notice that non-compliance will carry some commensurate and serious consequences. We have taken such a firm view also considering that a majority of the HEIs have not even shown any initiative in doing the bare-minimum i.e., providing relevant information by responding to the online survey conducted by the NTF, despite several reminders given on behalf of the Union of India. We are deeply disappointed with the apathetic attitude of most HEIs, which serve as a reminder of the deep-rooted complexities and formidable barriers that hinder the implementation of any national-level initiative aimed at strengthening student mental health support systems within HEIs.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NTF

44. The NTF has made some valuable recommendations in its interim report after their preliminary study. These recommendations are over and above the guidelines which have been issued in the decision of this Court in **Sukdeb Saha** (*supra*).

45. Keeping in view the recommendations of the NTF, we deem it fit to issue the following directions in exercise of our plenary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution of India:

i. The Sample Registration System data on Suicides, especially those falling within the age group of 15-29 years, must be centrally maintained for better and more accurate estimates of Deaths by Suicide of students in HEIs. The mechanisms for obtaining and maintaining the same, may be developed with the help of experts in the field of public health and demography.

ii. The NCRB, in its annual report, must distinguish between school-going students and students of higher education in its categorisation of “student suicides” in order to aid the study of the trends of student suicides in HEIs.

iii. All HEIs must report any incident of suicide or unnatural death of a student, regardless of the location of its occurrence (i.e. on campus, hostels, PG accommodations, or otherwise outside the institutional premises), to the police authorities no sooner they come to know about the incident. This should cover all students - irrespective of whether they are studying in the classroom, distance or online mode of learning.

iv. In addition to the above, an annual report of student suicides or unnatural deaths must also be submitted to the UGC & all other relevant regulatory bodies for professional courses (e.g. AICTE, NMC, DCI, BCI etc.). In case of Central Universities and Institutes of National Importance (for short, the “INIs”), or any HEI that does not fall within the above-mentioned framework, it must be reported to the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

v. Every residential HEI must have access to qualified medical help round the clock, if not on campus, then within a one-km radius to provide emergency medical health support to students.

vi. Keeping in mind the faculty shortages which have been reported in several HEIs, both public and private, it must be ensured that all vacant faculty positions (both teaching and non-teaching) be filled within a period of four months, with priority given to posts reserved for candidates from marginalized and underrepresented communities including those posts reserved for PwDs. Special recruitment drives may be held for faculty recruitment that come under various forms of reservations as per central and state government rules.

vii. Appointment and filling of vacancies of the post of Vice-Chancellor, Registrars, and other key institutional/administrative positions, must also be made within a period of four months. Moreover, it must be ensured as a matter of practice that, these positions are filled within a period of one month from the date on which the vacancy arises, in order to ensure the smooth functioning of HEIs. Since the date of retirement is known much ahead in time, recruitment processes must begin well in advance to ensure that such posts do not remain vacant for more than a month. All HEIs must report on an annual basis to the Central and relevant State Governments, as to how many reserved posts are vacant, how many are filled, reasons for non-filling, time taken, etc., so that periodic accountability is ensured.

viii. The backlog of any and all pending scholarship disbursements must be cleared within a period of four months by the relevant Central and State government authorities. If there exists any reason behind the non-disbursal of the same, a notice with reasons must be sent to the relevant HEI along with the student recipient, within a period of two months. It must be ensured that the disbursement of all future scholarships are done with clear timelines, without any delay by the relevant Central and State Government authorities. Disbursal dates and schedules must also be made known to the student recipient. Even in cases of unavoidable administrative delay, HEIs must not, as a policy, make the student recipients accountable for paying or clearing their fees. No student should be prevented from appearing in an examination, removed from hostels, barred from attending classes, or have their marksheets and degrees withheld because of delays in disbursal of scholarships. Any such institutional policy, may be viewed strictly.

ix. All HEIs, are particularly put to strict notice, to remain fully compliant with all the regulations that have a binding effect on them including *inter-alia* the UGC Regulation on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions, 2009; the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012; the UGC (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2016; the UGC (Redressal of Grievances of Students) Regulations, 2023, amongst others. More, particularly, the establishment of Anti-Ragging Committees and Anti-Ragging Squads, Anti-Discrimination Officers, Internal Complaints Committees and Student Grievance Redressal Committees along with the procedures detailed for the respective grievance redressal mechanisms, must be strictly adhered to.

46. The NTF has also made some other pertinent recommendations and the same is reproduced as thus:

“4. Inclusion and Accessibility for Marginalised Groups (including Students with Disability and Transgender Students)”

- *Conduct mandatory accessibility audits in all HEIs to ensure compliance with inclusivity standards.*
- *Following the audit, strengthen accessibility measures for students and staff from marginalized groups (including persons with disability and transgender students) across admission, reservation (wherever applicable), hostel accommodation, and campus facilities.*
- *Guarantee reasonable accommodation for all students with disability, including assistive technologies, accessible materials, and exam-related adjustments.*
- *Ensure that accommodation facilities, washrooms, sports facilities, etc are accessible to students with disability and gender-diverse students.*
- *Ensure that sufficient Scholarships are available and accessible to students from these marginalised sections.*

-xxx-

7. Faculty Sensitization and Training

- *Mandate training for faculty and administrative staff to recognize academic, financial, social, and discrimination related stressors affecting students, particularly those from disadvantaged groups.*
- *Training should equip faculty and administrative staff to provide appropriate referral, support, and early intervention for students in distress.*

- *The capacity building should equip the faculty and staff with existing applicable legislations, regulations, policies, and grievance redressal mechanisms.*

-XXX-

9. Campus Mental Health Services

- *Ensure that students have access to student-friendly mental health support services provided by qualified professionals, while avoiding the indiscriminate use of the term "counsellor." For instance, the current practice of labelling faculty members from diverse academic disciplines as counsellors - without standardized orientation, training, or supervision can create misleading impressions about the availability of mental health services.*
- *Establish periodic, anonymized feedback mechanisms to assess student satisfaction with campus mental health services and inform ongoing improvements in service delivery. Monitor overall service uptake and implement targeted programs to reduce stigma and raise awareness about when and how to seek support.*
- *Develop clear and transparent standard operating procedures for all stakeholders (students, administrators, service providers, and faculty) detailing measures to protect confidentiality for students who seek mental health services and outlining the specific circumstances (e.g., imminent suicide risk) under which the confidentiality clause may be ethically overridden.*
- *Strengthen the capacity of campus-based mental health professionals through ongoing, student-centred training in crisis intervention, and collaborative approaches to address academic and institutional stressors. Equip service providers with the skills to effectively liaise with administration and advocate for student wellbeing across campus systems rather than work in isolation."*

47. However, before we proceed to pass some detailed directions on the specific recommendations reproduced hereinabove, we require some further assistance from the NTF which they may incorporate in their final report. This is with a view to ensure that the painstaking exercise conducted by the NTF and our resultant directions do not suffer from the same problem that has already been identified i.e., that they do not remain prescriptive without any mechanism for implementation. We request the NTF to assist us in the following aspects:

- i. Creation of a model SOP for periodic "well-being audits" which may be conducted in HEIs. This would include aspects delineating which authority/body of persons would be empowered to conduct such an audit and their composition; the parameters of evaluation including but not limited to compliance with binding regulations and other measures necessary for inclusive education, the effectiveness of complaint resolution by the Anti-ragging Committee, Internal Complaints Committee, Anti-discrimination Officer, and Student Grievance Redressal Committee, infrastructural requirements etc.; post-audit feedback and necessary action to be taken by the HEIs including the mechanism for ensuring compliance in case any non-compliance is found; the overall scoring system or assessment methodology of the audit including the consequences for HEIs who perform poorly etc. Scores received in such audits may be directly imported to reflect in the NAAC grading scale for the concerned HEI.
- ii. Creation of a model SOP for faculty sensitisation and training which may include the frequency at which such training must be conducted; its scope in terms of including both faculty and nonfaculty members; the aspects or topics on which training would be given; how the effectiveness of the training and its translation into practice would be assessed etc.

iii. Creation of a model SOP for Mental Health Services which is to be provided for students in HEIs. This would begin from answering how gatekeeper training is to be provided to relevant stakeholders; the infrastructural facilities along with expert personnel requirements for mental health services which is to be made available on campus; the remote provision of services through online video-conferencing; external-referral linkages, whether they must be made free/subsidised and if so, to what extent; rules of confidentiality and when they may be breached; follow-up procedures; how the periodic and anonymized feedback mechanisms which assess student satisfaction with the mental health services offered must be conducted; how such feedback would be incorporated in further provision of mental health services; record keeping of wellness interventions, referrals etc.; including a list of measures that can improve overall service uptake by students and address the demand-side barriers etc.

48. The aforesaid would be in addition to the existing work of the NTF and what they plan to incorporate in their final report.

49. What we wish to achieve through the aforesaid and also hope from the NTF is that they suggest a model 'Universal Design Framework' or a model 'Suicide Prevention and Postvention Protocol' or a model 'Student well-being Protocol' which cohesively and comprehensively incorporates the aforementioned model SOPs, the existing guidelines on ragging, promotion of equity, sexual harassment, etc., and any other relevant measures which they may consider necessary, into one single guiding document. We would also request the NTF to leverage their study of the existing laws, policies, guidelines and recommendations, in this regard so that parallel bodies and mechanisms are not created over and above those that already exist.

50. If any need be, it will be upon the statutory professional bodies and sectoral organisations like UGC, All India Council for Technical Education (for short, the "**AICTE**"), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (for short, the "**ICAR**"), Pharmacy Council of India (for short, the "**PCI**"), Indian Nursing Council (for short, the "**INC**"), Dental Council of India (for short, the "**DCI**"), Central Council of Indian Medicine (for short, the "**CCIM**"), Council of Architecture (for short, the "**COA**"), National Council for Teacher Education (for short, the "**NCTE**"), National Medical Commission (for short, the "**NMC**"), Bar Council of India (for short, the "**BCI**") etc. to incorporate additional measures that address other specific issues which are unique to the HEIs and technical institutes under their purview.

51. We wish to record and express our deepest gratitude towards the Chairperson and all the members of the NTF for the resolute devotion with which they have been working to address the issue of student suicides in HEIs.

52. The Union of India and the respective State Governments shall make sure that the directions given by us in paragraph 45 of this order are communicated to all HEIs all over this country, at the earliest and appropriate action is taken in this regard.