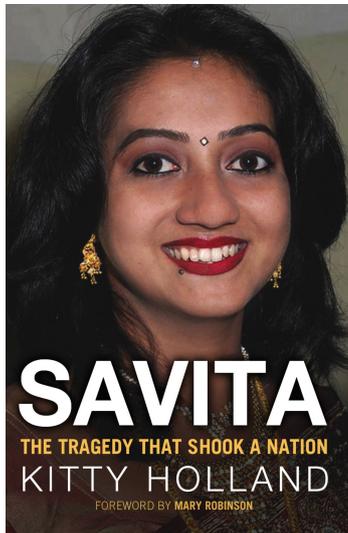


# Review: Kitty Holland, *Savita - The Tragedy that Shook a Nation*

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Kitty Holland, *Savita - The Tragedy that Shook a Nation*  
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Kitty Holland's new book, *Savita*, reveals for the first time, in full and in sequence the hour by hour, day by day, medical notes recorded by Savita's multidisciplinary-team, in Galway University Hospital.

This book is about a thirty one year old pregnant woman admitted to hospital having a miscarriage. It is an educational manual filled with Indian culture and Irish history.

The notes make gruesome reading. They toll the knell of her dying. Holland uses large black type to draw our attention in this medical diary to those unmistakable signals of her life ebbing away. The reader recoils in horror, asks why nobody noticed, and there are no answers. No individual in University College Hospital has yet been held responsible for the five day catalogue of errors, incompetence, and delays in treatment. These led to the death of a vibrant, healthy, young woman under the eyes and ears and hands of those charged with her care. She shivered, stiffened, bloated, discoloured, and cried out in pain and terror as her hands hardened, and

feet went cold .

The sparse scholarly text of Holland's book is eminently suited to the narrative. Centuries of Irish history are sketched clearly when she provides an invaluable context of the Great Hunger and the Penal Laws, as an explanation of why that Church became ingrained in the Irish DNA. Decades of Irish conservative politics are also sketched out to provide accounts of the mismanagement of raped children and the inhumane treatment of women to uphold the power of the church.

Her history of abortion legislation and evolving attitudes to it is admirably clear, concise and exact. Her account of the anti-abortion movement in all its manifestations is equally comprehensive.

The book raises questions which have yet to be answered. Notably, why was nothing done when Savita and her husband Praveen asked on the Monday morning for a termination of the pregnancy, This was not nailed down during the inquest, nor during the inquiry. The disparity outlined in the inquest between whether the termination was requested on the Monday or Tuesday is irrelevant. Simply put, what was already lawful and constitutional wasn't defined or guided by legislation and because of this the consultant and Savita were unprotected. The hiding and fudging on the issue by government parties led to these circumstances. The question of responsibility will have to wait.

Praveen, a gentle soul whose demeanour so impressed and moved the Irish people, wonders if Savita was born to achieve justice for Irish women. Kitty Holland has done justice to us all. As a journalist and author, she has helped turn a page of history, and helped to bring change.

In the meantime, this book deserves to be widely read. It will open a floodgate of dry tears.