

“...IN the last few months several unpleasant things have happened, but in many ways the memory of **Manushi** gave me a special assurance and never let me despair.

I find myself now in the midst of darkness. Last month my friend Khurshid Jahan and I left the university women’s hostel and took a flat together. Khurshid is 26 years old. She teaches in a private school, and has done her MA BEd. She is now doing research. She belongs to a conservative feudal Muslim family which is opposed to the idea of her educating herself and earning her own living. Since 1978 Khurshid has not been taking any money from her family. She has been supporting herself by doing translations and tuitions. Her family members have been constantly trying to pressurise her to go home to their village Harpwr in district Purnea, and stay there. Her brother Shabir Alam and her brothers-in-law Rais Ahmed and Bhola Haji used to threaten to kill her if she did not listen to them.

In June 1982 the family had written to Khurshid, saying that her mother was dying. When she rushed home she found that her mother was quite well. The family had plotted to send Khurshid to the man to whom she had been married when she was 10 years old. At that time, Khurshid wrote to me, and I, along with Manimala, Saroj, Suresh Bhatt and Ramchandra, went to the village. In the meanwhile her father had discovered that her so called husband had married a second wife. So Khurshid was allowed to come back to Patna.

On September 13, '83 at 8.30 a.m. Khurshid’s brother Shabir Alam, her sister Ahmed Begum with her husband and three year old daughter came to our house, and told Khurshid that her father was seriously ill, had been admitted into Patna Medical College Hospital, and wanted to see her. To allay her suspicions, they even said that the doctors had advised him complete rest, so he might be kept in our house for a few days if we had no objection. Khurshid went with them. She told me she would ring me up in the evening at the press, to tell me how

Abducted By Her Family —Khurshid Jahan’s Struggle

*Kiran Shaheen is a very active supporter and distributor of **Manushi**. She has been involved with women’s issues for several years, and is convenor of the Mahila Mukti Manch, Patna. She runs her own printing press in Patna. On September 24 we got a letter from Kiran about her friend Khurshid’s abduction. We reprint here some extracts from Kiran’s letter, translated from Hindi.*

her father was. But she neither rang up nor came home.

I was full of anxiety all night, and next morning rang up her paternal uncle Ghulam Rasool who is a doctor in Patna city. He said that Khurshid’s father had come on September 13, but had left for home the same day. This discrepant account made me suspect that all was not well with Khurshid. I spent the whole day checking every ward in Patna Medical College Hospital but could not find Khurshid’s father anywhere. I then checked all the nursing homes and hospitals in Patna, with no better success. On September 15

to take place. I was sure that if Khurshid was in Patna, she would come for the interview, I waited for the entire two hours fixed for the interview but Khurshid did not come. I was now convinced that Khurshid must have been forcibly taken home. Her village is in a very remote area and her family members are influential landlords there, so I discussed the matter with Suresh Bhatt, an executive member of the People’s Union Of Civil Liberties, and he agreed to accompany me. We left Patna the night of September 16 and reached Purnea at 11 a.m. on September 18.

As soon as we entered the house, her brother Shabir Alam met us and told us to sit in the outer room which is the men’s quarters. I asked to meet Khurshid but received no response. So I went into the house and began to call out to her. Finally she was brought out of an inner room. As soon as she saw me she said: “Why have you come here? These people will kill you. They are threatening to kill me if I go on shaming the family by being so bold and independent.” She told me that on September 13 her relatives had taken her straight to a lodge where her father was waiting. He was perfectly well. There were some armed young men in the room. Khurshid was not allowed to ask any questions. Her purse containing some money and the keys of our flat was snatched away. The whole day she was confined to the room and not given food or water. At 3 a.m. she was told that she would have to go with them to the village. She was then given an injection and a cloth was tied round her mouth. She was



Khurshid Jahan

Khurshid was supposed to appear for an interview for a government school teacher’s post. I took her certificates and went to the school where the interview was

carried and put in a car with her father, brother, sister and brothers-in-law. The armed men accompanied them in another car. She was in a semi-conscious state but she heard them abusing me, threatening to kill me, and also threatening to kill her if she tried to contact me. Their main charge was that I fancy myself as a leader and because of me, their daughter takes part in demonstrations and dishonours herself. All this because Khurshid is an activist of the Mahila Mukti Manch.

When they reached Harpur, Khurshid was confined to a bare room. She was not allowed to write to me. She was continually abused and scolded, and when she expressed a desire to go out, the family members threatened to kill her. They plan to marry her to someone in a remote village. While we were talking we heard an uproar outside and found that Rais Ahmed was abusing and beating Suresh Bhatt. Many villagers had collected. Suddenly Rais Ahmed came inside and started abusing me in a most obscene manner. He hit me with his fist on my shoulder and brandished a gun at me. He told me to take off my clothes and other villagers supported his order. Khurshid showed astonishing courage. She came between him and me, and told him he had no right to insult us. When she said this, he hit her too. Then he produced a blank paper and a pen and forced me at gun point to write a long statement saying that I had committed an offence by trying to meet Khurshid, that all the charges levelled against me are correct, that I had not been ill treated and all my possessions were intact. He snatched my bag and removed from it my pen, paper, two envelopes and about Rs 600.

We were then pushed out of the house. A big crowd had collected outside. Hardly had we walked a few steps when Rais Ahmed stopped us again and forced both of us to sign on two blank sheets each, which had revenue stamps affixed on them, and also took our thumb impressions on two blank papers each. He kept on insulting us, saying I am an immoral woman who traps other women into evil

ways. The rickshaw puller who had brought us to the house was also forced to give his thumb impression on a blank sheet. We were then told that if we dared go to the police we would not be allowed to live anywhere in the world, and we would be implicated in criminal cases on the basis of the blank sheets we had signed at gun point. We left Harpur at about 2.30 a.m. Right up to Purnea where we boarded a bus, we were followed by two ruffians. We did not go to the police at Purnea because we knew that this would be duly reported to Khurshid's family and then Khurshid might come to harm before anything could be done to help her.

When I reached Patna I met several lawyers. All of them declined to take action, and advised me not to go too far. They argued that a girl, regardless of her age, is



in her father's custody so no charges of abduction or wrongful confinement can be made out against a girl's parents. In 1982 when I had approached the district superintendent of police, Purnea, for help, under similar circumstances, he too had been unenthusiastic for the same reasons. He had also said that he was unwilling to get involved in a problem which might later take on a communal colouring. The problem is that Khurshid's family is a very influential one. Her paternal uncle Hafiz is a big landlord and a brick kiln contractor. He was the village headman during 1981-82. Her father Abdul Rashid is a landlord and a doctor. Her brother-in-law Bhola Haji is a probationary officer in the State Bank of India, Purnea district. He also owns a petrol pump and a large shop. Her brothers have considerable influence over the local police and administration. Also their village is in such a remote area that by the time a police jeep reaches there, the family will get to know and may well do away with Khurshid to protect their "honour!"

For me, personally, this is a big setback and I find darkness all around me. We both had decided to live together. I never imagined that such a thing could happen to her. People here cannot understand a girl's feeling of love and respect for another girl. Even other girls only laugh at such a feeling and consider it absurd. But I am sure you will understand my suffering..."

Kiran came to Delhi, and filed a habeas corpus petition in the supreme court for the release of Khurshid from the illegal confinement under which she has been kept by her family members.

The petition seeks to enforce the rights to life and liberty of Khurshid Jahan under article 19 (1) (a) and article 21 of the constitution. It asks for the issue of a writ of habeas corpus and a direction to the respondents in the case, the state of Bihar, the district magistrate, Purnea, the district superintendent, Purnea, the station house officer, Ararhia sub division, Purnea, and Khurshid's father, Dr Abdul Rashid, to produce Khurshid in court. It asks that the local police be instructed to arrange for the safe conveyance of Khurshid from Purnea to Delhi. □