

# Of Daughters, Wives, Mothers

## —Some Reports Sent To Us

### **We Told Her To Be Patient**

...This is to tell you about my sister's death at the hands of her husband. My sister, K.M. Umadevi, had discontinued her studies after SSLC, because she had to do the housework as our mother was ailing. Uma was married to Satyanarayana who works as a postal assistant in Shimoga head post office. My brother married the sister of Satyanarayana, so the question of dowry did not crop up.

Within three days of the marriage, Uma's in-laws began expressing dissatisfaction not for dowry but for other reasons. Uma was the youngest daughter-in-law and was bossed over by all members of the family. The eldest daughter-in-law had brought up Satyanarayana from his childhood and wielded a great influence over him. Whenever Uma wanted to come to our house, she had to take the permission of every member of the family. She was not allowed to write letters to her parents. She could write letters only to Satyanarayana's sister, who is married to my brother, and even those were censored.

We never treated Satyanarayana's sister in such a way. She visited her parents whenever she felt like it, and on a few occasions also carried reports to them of Uma's complaints to us, with the result that Uma was further harassed by them. After some time, Satyanarayana and Uma rented a house and started living separately but the relationship between them deteriorated further. He tortured Uma mentally and physically. He used to come home late at night, drunk, and used to beat Uma even when she was pregnant. Uma also mentioned that their sexual relation-

ship was not good. Of his total salary Rs 1,000, he used to give Uma only Rs 200, to manage the house.

Whenever she told us about her difficulties, we used to tell her to be patient. We even scolded her, saying that she should wait for a time when all would be well. In October 1982 a quarrel took place.



**Satyanarayana and Uma**

Satyanarayana beat Uma and finally went off to his parents, taking the baby with him. When she followed him there, she was not allowed to enter the house. The next day Satyanarayana came to our house, abused Uma, and told us to take her away as he had no wish to live with her. Uma stayed with us for eight days, during which time she told us all that she had suffered. We also managed to bring away the child. Then Uma's father-in-law died, and a telegram came from her brother-in-law, asking her to come home. My brothers decided that she should go so they took her to Shimoga and left her there.

After this we got only one letter from Uma. Five months later my uncle who lives in Shimoga informed us of her death. On April 15, 1983, my uncle happened to meet

Uma at the temple. She told him that her husband had stayed away from home for three days, and had just returned. The same night my uncle came to know that Uma had got burnt and was hospitalised. When my brother Mahesh went to see her, she was not able to talk. He did not take my mother and me to the hospital, as he did not want us to become hysterical. No one cared for Uma in the hospital, and she died a few days later. Her in-laws did not inform us about her death nor did they intimate us about the *shradh* ceremony.

They say Uma committed suicide but the hospital report says it was an accidental death. We suspect that the death was planned and directed. My brother says that even though Uma's body was burnt, her hair and feet were not burnt. On April 18 we made a complaint to the circle inspector of Shimoga, asking for an investigation of the case, but no action has been taken so far..

— K.M. Ramaniani, Bangalore

### **She Paid With Her Life**

On August 31, Urmila, 16 year old daughter of a landless labourer, Fakira Sahu, of village Fatehgarh in Orissa, was tortured and killed by the police in the lock up.

On August 28, the corpse of a male baby was found floating in a pond. The owner of the pond lodged a complaint and the police filed a case. The corpse was sent for post mortem. The report submitted on September 2 showed that the child was stillborn. However, without waiting for the report, P.K. Hota, police officer, ordered P.K. Mishra, the ASI, to bring Urmila, her

father and her lover, Chaitanya, for questioning. Fakira and Chaitanya say that they were brought to the police station and asked to pay Rs.3,000 so that the case could be hushed up. Urmila was interrogated in the police station without the presence of any female escort or policewoman. This is contrary to the law. Urmila said that she had delivered the still born child on the night of August 28. Wanting to avoid publicity, she put the corpse in an earthen vessel and went out to bury it in the funeral ground. She fell down thrice on the way due to exhaustion and fear. Finally she threw the corpse into the pond. Chaitanya and Urmila admitted they were in love and would have been married but for the calamitous drought last season. With the prospect of a good crop this year, were planning to marry in October.

Chaitanya reports that Urmila insulted, kicked and tortured during interrogation, and batons shoved up her vagina. She was told "Name two or three more accomplices, otherwise how will our business run?" She was interrogated alone for about one and

a half hours. Fakira says both Hota and Mishra assaulted Urmila. At about 2 p.m. he was ordered to go and bring Rs 3,000 and some clothes for Urmila as she was to



be sent to hospital. Just then he heard a hiccup from the room where Urmila was confined, and entering, found her lying dead. She was taken to the hospital only two hours later. The body reached Nayagarh hospital for post mortem after five and a half hours though the distance is only 18 kilometres. The post mortem

report found bruises on her legs caused by a blunt weapon. Her stomach was empty, showing that she had not been given any food while she was in the police station for about 18 hours. This was less than two days after she had given birth. The inquest proved she had died an unnatural death, and had not died due to excessive bleeding or tetanus which are the two frequent causes of post natal death among rural women.

The dead body was not handed over to her parents as is customary. Instead it was thrown in the funeral ground to be eaten by dogs and jackals. On September 2 Fakira went to lodge a first information report in the Fatehgarh police station but the officer there refused to register it. Fakira sent the FIR by registered post to the S P, Puri. The police there disclaim any knowledge of the FIR. Ironically, the investigating officer of this case is Hota, one of the accused! Despite public protest, he and Mishra continue to remain in their posts, with full freedom to tamper with vital evidence.

*(from The Hindustan Times)*

## In Search Of Justice

On April 29, 1983, my daughter Suman Bala was married to Naresh Kumar, son of Om Prakash, resident of 92E Baba Kharag Singh marg, New Delhi. Naresh Kumar is a clerical worker at the Union Bank of India, Connaught Place branch. I gave more dowry than I could afford, but after the marriage, demands were made for costly items such as a colour television. I was unable to fulfil these demands. On the morning of 21.7.83, Naresh's younger brother Ashwini came and told us that Suman was no longer in this world. Before we could ask him how she died, he ran off without saying another word.

Naresh told the police that Suman had hanged herself by tying a



**Naresh Kumar**



**Suman Bala**

sari to the ceiling fan. He says that though he was sleeping on the same bed as she

was, he did not wake up until after she was dead. This seems to be highly

unlikely since the switching off of the fan and the jerk occasioned by her jumping off the bed would certainly have awakened anyone sleeping on the bed. Also, there was no sign of a sari having been tied to the fan. Therefore I strongly suspect that this was not a case of suicide

but of murder. I have written to many authorities including the president and the prime minister, asking for justice...

In spite of the case having been raised by several members of parliament, social service organisations and journalists, the police have not taken any action because

the husband's family is influential and is using threats as well as bribes to suppress evidence and to silence witnesses. My family is also in danger ever since the murder of my daughter...

—R.N. Sharma, Delhi  
(translated from Hindi)

With a heavy heart I am writing to tell you about my daughter's death. My daughter Kokila, aged 20, was working as a clerk in the advocate general's office. She was married in 1977 to Ramachandra, an employee of Canara Bank, Audigodi branch, Bangalore. They had an eight month old son. Kokila was very unhappy after her marriage. Ramachandra used to beat her mercilessly on the slightest pretext. Many times, elders of my family tried to intervene but to no avail. Ramachandra was planning to marry one of his relatives, and had even brought the girl home.

On November 5, 1980, police came to my house and told me that my daughter had committed suicide. They claimed that she had hanged herself in the latrine. However when I examined the place as well as the whole house, I found strong evidence of foul play. Kokila's face and body were covered with bleeding abrasions. There was a bleeding cut across the throat. There was a bloodstained silk sari concealed under the cot. I handed it over to the police. There were bloodstains all over one of the rooms of the house. There were broken bangle pieces strewn all over the house. I collected these too and handed them over to the police. Yet in spite of all these signs of a violent struggle rather than a simple suicide by strangulation, the police refused to let me register a case of murder. They also withheld the case from the press, until I later informed some reporters.

Secondly, the photographs taken by the police themselves are the strongest refutation of the suicide theory put forward by the police. The photos show that Kokila's feet were resting on the floor, and there was no platform from which she could have jumped off. It is impossible for anyone to die of hanging in such a

position. The body was hanging from the vertical flush pipe, not from any hook attached to the ceiling as is normally the case in hanging. A mug standing near the feet was still upright. The medical report, given nine days later, says the death was due to asphyxiation, which seems to be a physical impossibility, going by what the photographs show.

All this led me strongly to suspect that my son-in-law killed my daughter and bribed the police to connive with him in making the death appear a suicide. Kokila's

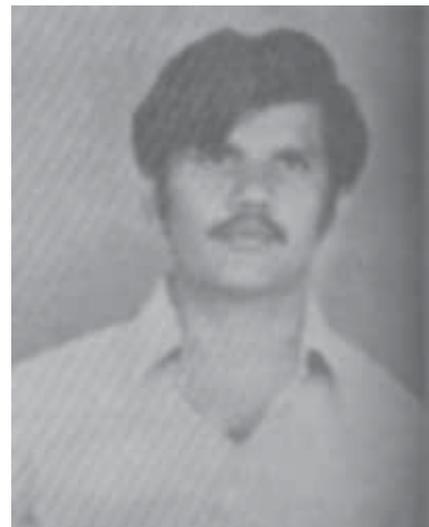
dishevelled state. Kokila agitatedly begged the milkman to tell the police that her husband had been beating her and intended to murder her. Thereupon Ramachandra angrily abused the milkman and told him to go away, saying he did not need anyone to interfere in his family quarrels. A neighbour also saw Kokila trying to run out of the house and being dragged back by her husband.

For 25 months I have been running from pillar to post in search of justice. Vimochana, a women's organisation, has

## A Life Or A File?



**Kokila**



**Ramchandra**

neighbours and colleagues all know how much she suffered at her husband's hands. The milkman told me that the day Kokila died, he had been to her house to deliver milk. He rang the bell for a long time before the door was opened. When Ramachandra opened the door, the milkman saw Kokila standing behind him. Both were in a

approached the chief minister but he has not responded. In March 1981, the government directed the COD to investigate the case. However, till date, repeated requests to the COD to give us the report of the investigation, if at all it has been conducted, have fallen on deaf

(Contd. on page 39)

## The Effect Of Police Intervention



Saraswati Mundain is a 17 year old adivasi girl who lives in Birsabasa, a labour colony in Bokaro city, and works as a headloading labourer under a contractor in a private company, BNT Enterprises. At 4 a.m. on August 24, 1983, Saraswati Mundain with her friend Saraswati Majhiain, as usual set out to go to work. When they were passing behind the

cooperative colony, they were surrounded by a gang of eight ruffians. Saraswati Majhiain managed to run away but Saraswati Mundain was caught, blindfolded, and taken to a nearby house. There she was gagged, and raped in turn by each one of the men.

Saraswati Majhiain rushed to inform the other adivasi's. The news spread like wild fire and in no time thousands of adivasis armed with bows and arrows sallied forth. They caught hold of one rapist, Shivbhajan Yadav, who was beaten and forced to reveal the identity of three others who were also caught and beaten. Meanwhile someone informed the police who arrived and took the four accused into custody. The crowd followed them to the police station and kept demanding immediate arrest of the four absconding culprits Paras Yadav, Triloki Yadav, Siddheshwar and Lallan Singh. Saraswati was medically examined and evidence of her having been raped was found.

All the eight accused are well known ruffians and dozens of cases are pending in the local police station against them. However the police released the four arrested persons, saying they were innocent, and till date the four absconding culprits have not yet been arrested, even though one of them, Lallan Singh, has worked as a contractor in Bokaro and is well known in the area.

In the month of August, a number of protest meetings and demonstrations were held by various adivasi organisations and trade unions. A large joint rally was also organised. The Adivasi Welfare Department has given Rs 2,000 as compensation to Saraswati. The question is, can money compensate for what she has suffered, or restore her social position? How is it that even though so many cases have been registered against them the culprits are still at large?

—C.A. Kumar, Dhanbad  
(translated from Hindi)

(Contd. from page 39)

ears. Each officer approached by me promised to do his best but as time went by they became colder and colder till they reached the point of insult. When I repeatedly visited the advocate general to request his help, he one day shouted at me, saying; "Don't bother me. For you it for you it may be a life but for us it has become a file. I sincerely advise you to forget the matter and save your expenses."

Meanwhile, Ramachandra has filed a suit in the city court, claiming that he and his minor son are the heirs to Kokila's gratuity, pension, and other benefits which total about Rs 17,000. Kokila had nominated me, her mother, as the person entitled to the funds but under the Hindu Succession Act, her husband claims a prior right. I have filed an objection, asking that the amount be kept in trust for my grandson, Vijaykumar, aged two. Only if there is a charge against



Photos of Kokila's body, refuting the suicide theory

Ramachandra for causing Kokila's death will he be disinherited, but the COD is flaying investigation indefinitely. I am now filing a writ in the high court asking that the COD be ordered to complete investigation soon. However it is likely that



all circumstantial evidence will have been destroyed, since two years have elapsed. I live in fear that if Ramachandra is let loose in society, some other mother's heart and soul will be rent with grief.

—G. Sharadamma