

“I Will Stand on My Own Feet...”

How Usha Survived

This report was written by a woman activist who has met Usha and her family. She enclosed a note from Usha in which, after describing how she had been beaten and tortured, she says: “I do not wish to return to that house. I do not consider that man my husband. When I recover, I will study and stand on my own feet.” Her writing is extremely unclear because her fingers have been damaged by torture, and her mental balance has been disturbed.

Usha, aged 22, daughter of Gopal Das Budhiya of Ramgarh, was married on July 6, 1983, to Rajendra Kumar, son of Brij Mohan Aggarwal, of Hazaribagh. The bride and groom had not even seen each other before the marriage, because the marriage was arranged solely on the basis of financial agreements. The groom's demands were met and Rs 50,000 paid in cash.

But as soon as Usha crossed her in-laws' threshold, her troubles began. They demanded Rs 20,000 more, and treated Usha worse than a domestic servant. She was made to work without rest all day long, and at

night was given two dry rotis to eat. She was made to sleep in a dark, stinking cowshed. Also, she was continually beaten, abused, insulted and tortured. She was sexually tortured and on several occasions, her husband and brother-in-law caught her by the throat and threatened to kill her. She used to be beaten with hot iron rods, sticks, rolling pins or whatever else came to hand.

Usha was sent to her parental home only once after marriage. She did not tell her parents of her sufferings because she did not wish to dishonour them, and she took

seriously the religious injunctions given at the time of marriage according to which a wife should be dutiful and patient. On the pretext of household expenses, she managed to get Rs 4,000 from her parents, but they refused to give more.

Finally, one day, the dam of her endurance broke when she heard her husband and in-laws plotting to burn her to death. She wrote a letter to her father, telling him her life was in danger. Her father immediately came to Hazaribagh but Usha's mother-in-law refused to let him meet Usha. On the advice of some friends, he then filed a first information report with the local police, attaching Usha's letter. On December 12, the police registered a case of cruelty under the Penal Code, and another case under the Dowry Prohibition Act. They immediately arrested Usha's husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law from the marketplace. Her mother-in-law, however, managed to escape, after locking her in the cowshed.

When the police released Usha from the shed, she was in a terrible condition. Her father could barely recognise her, so emaciated was she, clad in filthy rags, stinking, with matted hair, pus filled wounds on her body, fingers, and toes twisted out of shape. Only her eyes appeared to be alive and eager for life. Medical examination revealed that she had been subjected to slow poisoning through injectible and oral drugs which had induced physical and mental distortions in her.

On January 3, 1985, the Marwari community held a meeting and decided that the guilty family should pay a compensation of Rs 50,000 and should be socially boycotted. The community also undertook the responsibility of paying for Usha's higher education and equipping her to become economically independent.

(translated from Hindi)



Usha before marriage, and after she was rescued when clothes, bangles and bindi in the second photo were put on her