



**Kamla**

ON the night of November 11, 1985, while the whole town of Pithoragarh was getting ready to celebrate Diwali the next day, preparations were underway for a fiery end to Kamla, daughter-in-law of Shankar Dutt Punetha of Gaithna village.

In the Kumaon Hills, it is a custom for married daughters to visit their parents' home after Diwali for the Bhaiya Duj ceremony. Kamla's parents, brothers and sisters were waiting for her on November 12 when they learnt from a passerby that she had died of burns early that morning. Her corpse in the morgue was barely identifiable.

Kamla's in-laws stated that an accident in the haystack had caused Kamla's death. Their report became the official police report. But a local shopkeeper alleged that Kamla had committed suicide while Kamla's sister alleged that Kamla had been murdered by her in-laws for having brought very little dowry. On the basis of this allegation, Kamla's in-laws were arrested briefly but, as the police had recorded that Kamla's death was accidental, they were released on bail.

Kamla's brother, Ganesh Dutt, has

## Bride Burning on Diwali

stated that ever since her marriage three years ago, she had been constantly harassed for having brought inadequate dowry. When visiting her parents in May 1984, she implored them not to send her back to her in-laws. She gave harrowing details of her humiliation and maltreatment. Ganesh Dutt persuaded her father-in-law to return without her but, in order not to spoil the relationship, did not report the matter.

One year later, Kamla's husband came to fetch her and four months later, Kamla was dead. Why did the in-laws not inform Kamla's family on her death? Why did the police inspector handling the case refuse to divulge anything to Kamla's parents, saying all details would be filed at the police station? There is a strong suspicion that the police have been bribed to record a false report which

has enabled the investigating officers to treat Kamla's death as an accidental one. The matter is now in court. Some local toughs are trying to intimidate Kamla's people. No one is willing to be a witness for them even though it was some local villagers who brought Kamla to the hospital and stated that she had made a statement before dying. In the last year, there have been 20 reported dowry deaths in the Kumaon hills.

The Nari Chetna Sangathan, in collaboration with the District Trade Union Coordination Committee, has made plans to launch an effective campaign to mobilise public opinion against dowry deaths. The Sangathan has demanded a CBI inquiry into Kamla's death and punishment of the guilty. A demand for the security of Kamla's parents has also been made.

**-Uma Pandey**

### The Well Digger

*The frogs in the well  
See no rivers or tides  
Flowing in the world outside.  
What a home, the well.  
Nowhere to run, nowhere to play  
No sunlight, not even a ray.  
The water is deep, but still  
It's safe, snug and tranquil:  
One day, the well will become dry  
And one by one, the frogs will die  
In another place, close to hell  
The well digger digs another well.*

**—Rasna Warah**



*This thing is more  
than loneliness.  
It is the silence  
of weeping stone  
in the dark hard black  
of night.  
It is the sound of  
muscles straining,  
twisting and tearing  
in the effort  
of hammering stars  
into the night.*

**-Vishwapriya**

*(Written while working amongst child labourers in fireworks factories in Sivakasi)*