

How AWAG Dealt with a Rapist

by
Ila Pathak, Amina Amin

SOUNDS of slogans like “*Hat, Anwar, Hai, ffai*” rent the silence of the early morning of February 10, 1990, in a low income group housing colony called Barah Blocks in the Bapunagar area of Ahmedabad. Anwar, a middle aged man had raped a five year old girl Farida. The mother of Farida was so unnerved that she decided to move out of the locality and go to live some distance away.

It was on January 31, at about 4.30 in the afternoon that Anwar pulled Farida inside his room from his court-yard where she was playing with another girl. Anwar lived opposite Farida’s house and Farida and her friend had strayed into his courtyard while playing. Anwar made Farida undress and gagged her mouth as she started crying.

Jamilabanu, the mother of Farida, was inside her home with her other younger children. When one of the kids started crying, Jamilabanu needed Farida to look after her so she called out for Farida. When Farida did not respond to her calls, the mother came out of her house and dealt again. Farida’s friend Farzana informed her that Anwar had pulled her into his house. Jamila started knocking at the door of Anwar’s house. As he did not open it, she turned to the window and forced it open. In a flash she saw what Anwar had done to Farida.

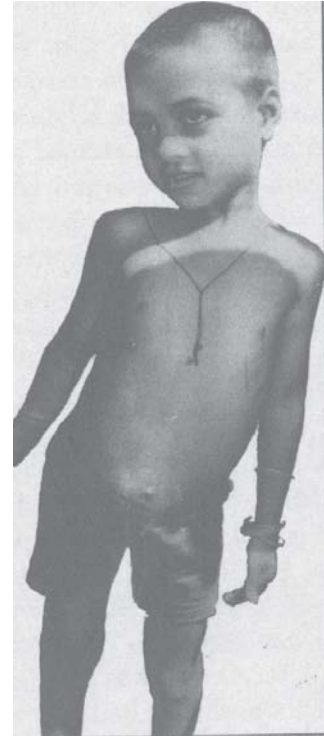
Jamilabanu took her weeping daughter home and pacified her. A few minutes later, Jamilabanu again went to Anwar with the soiled pajama of Farida. Anwar threatened her to keep quiet or he would teach her a lesson. Jamila-banu was so scared that she kept quiet till her husband returned home two days later.

Abdul, Farida’s father, on hearing what had happened, rushed to Anwar and started beating him up. Neighbours

gathered and the police also came, for Jamilabanu meanwhile had rushed to the police station. A little later, Jamila-banu and her husband were sent away from the police station. They were told that they would be called again when necessary. No case was registered. Anwar came back home from the police station a few hours later. From the next day onward Anwar once again began lording it over the neighbours.

Ahmedabad Women’s Action Group (AWAG) organiser Sara Baldiwala who lives and works in Bapunagar came to hear about the incident and also the fact that Jamilabanu had quit the locality. This was atrocious. The victim’s parents had fled the place while the criminal had not only gone unpunished but was also growing more menacing. AWAG decided to make enquiries. Ila Pathak and Sara Baldiwala of AWAG went to Farida’s parents, to the neighbours of Anwar and also to the police station. The women in the neighbourhood of Anwar were so frightened that they continuously kept a watch over the movements of their own daughters and daughters-in-law. They were sure that the police had done nothing. People suspected that the police had been paid a huge amount for not registering the case. It was also being said that this was the fourth case of rape committed by Anwar. The other girls were older and so the victims were themselves blamed for what had happened to them. In these cases such an allegation could not be made. Nobody wanted to say a word to Anwar as they were terrified of him and his gang.

When AWAG proposed that they should protest and show him that they could not continue to behave the way he did,



Farida

the women said that they very much wanted to teach him a lesson but fear had always gripped them. They said that they would support the AWAG women if AWAG took the lead. At the police station, the station diary and the FIR book were looked into. As expected, it was found that this particular case was not registered at the police station. Higher authorities could not be contacted as it was already 6 p.m. when most offices close down. The next day was a second Saturday so for two more days no other help was going to be available. AWAG decided to take an action which would make Anwar realise that he could not misbehave with women and that he could not get away after committing so heinous a crime. It was then decided by the group that they would reach Anwar’s house the next morning and take him to task.

Next morning, on February 10 1990, about 14 women gathered in AWAG’s income generation centre. They marched towards Anwar’s house and on approaching it two of them went to the rear of Anwar’s house. This was to stop him from using the back door to run

away. The group in the front first securely shut the door from outside and then started calling the women of the neighbourhood out of their houses. Soon a crowd gathered. Now Anwar's door was knocked at. He opened it and the women entered his house. The group had started shouting slogans and continued doing so but none of us could take the lead and beat Anwar as planned by us. When we faced him, something, as it were, stopped us.

A minute or two might have passed thus when Ila Pathak, the oldest of the group, took off her slipper and hit him on the face. With that there was, as if, a release. Other women then sprung into action. In about three minutes' time Anwar was pleading with folded hands that he had done nothing so he be spared. That, of course, was not acceptable to us. He was pulled and pushed, hit with slippers, and slogans were raised like: "*Hafizji nekyakiya, Quran ka apman kiya*".

The group then decided to take him round the Barah Blocks, the neighbourhood of the victim. On the way, his face was blackened with soot. Meanwhile, he was beaten and pushed about. Having arrived near his home, Anwar was told that he could not continue living in the same locality. So the slogan raised was: "*Ek, do, Anwar ko hatao*" Anwar was asked to apologise to the women gathered there and he admitted that he had pulled Farida inside his house. The anger of the group and the neighbourhood had not subsided. Soon the crowd wanted Anwar to be taken to Farida's parents to tender his apologies there. Again the procession started with Anwar in front. As they approached the locality outside his immediate neighbourhood, people began inquiring about Anwar. So a new slogan came into being: "*Pachas saal ke biiddlie ne kya kiya, Punch sal ki bachi pe balatkar kiya.*" Onlookers joined the procession from each locality on the way. In the end there were about 70 persons in the crowd including about

40 men. At Farida's house Anwar was made to ask for pardon. Farida's parents could not pardon him as this was a question of harassment as well as *izzat* for them. Thereafter, Anwar was allowed to go and the crowd dispersed.

Farida was taken to the hospital for a medical check-up. One after the other, eight doctors refused to have anything to do with her. AWAG then contacted the head of the department of gynaecology, Dr Leelaben Trivedi, who asked us to send the girl over to Civil Hospital. But when Farida was taken to the casualty department the medicos on duty refused to examine her. Dr Trivedi had to be contacted again. She instructed the junior doctors to take up the case. This automatically compelled

children. Abdul did not oblige him and the senior officer started taking down the complaint.

Now in the Barah Blocks community there is a hush and a sense of relief. The general feeling is that it was good that women taught Anwar a lesson. AWAG is happy that the guilty has been taken to task, women of the locality will no longer be afraid of him. The police in Bapunagar are more cooperative now.

The incident was widely reported in the local press. There is, however, an opinion that AWAG's action is questionable as in the process AWAG "lynched the law." We, in AWAG, do not think so. The legal machinery actually started working thereafter. What AWAG did was only to demonstrate that such



Farida with parents and younger sisters

the police to register the case.

It is interesting to note what steps the police took. They called Farida's father to the police station and asked him to withdraw his statement that he had earlier gone to the police station to get this case registered. When Abdul refused to budge, he was asked to identify the policeman whom he had contacted in the first instance. When the policeman was identified, he found himself trapped. The policeman pleaded with Abdul to save his job and save his wife and

deeds would no longer be condoned by women nor would the and younger sisters connivance of the police be tolerated. What we set out to do was to shake the society and the system out of its apathy towards violence against women. Did we adopt the right method? Is this the only method left to women to fight violence against them?

We invite readers to respond to the questions raised at the end of this report, so that these can be debated.

-Manushi