

All for Love – of Money

Kanchan Mala Hardy, 19, was burnt to death in the bathroom of CA 1/34, Tagore Garden, New Delhi. She died apparently because her parents who had given her clothes, jewellery and household articles worth Rs. 20,000 as dowry, could not afford to give a refrigerator, a TV set and Rs. 10,000 more.

Kanchan's was a 'love' marriage. She had met Sunil Hardy, 23 when she was studying at Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College and told her parents that she wanted to marry him. Her parents approved of him, but a month before the wedding, his elder sister tried to get it cancelled because she felt not enough was being given as dowry.



Kanchan Mala before marriage---

Barely two months after marriage, the trouble started. The parents got so tired of seeing their daughter unhappy that they bought a TV set and a refrigerator for her in-laws. Ms. Kapoor showed them to me – they were with her and had not yet been fully paid for.

One day, Kanchan came to her mother, saying she had been badly beaten with a belt by her husband. She stayed at home for three months and found a job, but three days after she started working, her husband came and persuaded her to go back and celebrate their first wedding anniversary. She went, and that was the last time her mother saw her.

MARRIED, MARKETED, MURDERED

On April 2, she was informed that Kanchan's hands were slightly burnt and she had been admitted in Lohia Hospital. When she reached there, a policeman asked her whether she would blame anyone for anything that might have happened to her daughter. She mentioned the dowry demands. She was then shown the terribly burnt body of her daughter. Her voice breaking, Ms. Kapoor said "It didn't look like her. I couldn't believe it was my daughter."

Kanchan's parents received an anonymous letter from someone in Tagore Garden which said: "May be she wouldn't have died if you had given her a TV set." Other anonymous letters from neighbours of the Hardys said that Kanchan had been screaming for ten minutes before her mother-in-law allowed them to go in and rescue her. Neighbours banging at the door, saw through the window her mother-in-law changing her clothes and Sunil Hardy drinking a glass

of milk, white Kanchan was burning to death. The letters also said Kanchan's mother-in-law was always screaming at her for having come "empty handed". When I talked to women of the locality they corroborated these facts, even though they are not prepared to give evidence in court because they do not want to develop enmity with the Hardays.

I went to the Hardys' house. The mother-in-law said: "We are decent people. Nobody in our family even drinks or smokes. We would never do a thing like this." But she and Sunil Hardy maintain that though they were in the house, Sunil sleeping in a room only five feet away from the bathroom, they did not know Kanchan was killing herself and arrived too late to save her.

— *Tavleen Singh*

The Evil is Spreading

So far, Kerala has been one of the few states in India relatively untouched by the evil of dowry – chiefly because



.... and after

the matrilineal social system there guaranteed property rights to women. But of late, this system has been breaking down and the custom of dowry is taking root in Kerala too. Another reason for the increase of the giving and taking of dowry is the money pouring in from oil-rich Gulf countries, leading to the growth of a neo-rich class. A common demand is that the bride's family should arrange for the groom to go to the Gulf countries. This costs about Rs. 10,000. Cash is also taken by the groom's family as "marriage expenses". Here is the case of a girl killed because the dowry was not up to expectations.

P. Valsala was married to M. Chandra in June 1976. Her father gave the usual clothes and jewels; also Rs. 1,000 as "marriage expenses". The couple stayed



Valsala

in Ranchi when Chandra was employed as a compressor operator in the Dakara Collieries. After marriage, he started demanding money from Ralsala's father, who gave him Rs. 1,000 more, but could not afford to meet his further demands as he is a Class III Government servant and has five daughters and a son to bring up. From November 1977, Chandra began to maltreat Valsala. He beat her up severely and she came home to her parents. He then filed a suit against her for adultery, and she petitioned for maintenance. In September 1978, the Court granted her maintenance of Rs. 80 per month. After this, Valsala stayed with

her father, Mr. Nair in Delhi.

Chandra came to Delhi at the end of April 1979. He arranged a compromise with Valsala and took her to Ranchi on May 13. On May 17, Valsala was hanged in her husband's house in Ranchi. Her father got a telegram on the 18th. "Valsala expired come soon". He wired that the body should be kept, but when he reached there, she had already been cremated. Chandra said Valsala had committed suicide and he found her hanging from a rope when he returned from work.

None of the neighbours were willing to talk to Mr. Nair. He also found that Valsala's clothes, jewels and suitcase had vanished from the house. There was nobody in the Police Station, Khalari, when he went there to lodge a complaint.



Her husband M. Chandra

He waited for about 15 minutes and then was forced to leave because some people tried surrounding him in a suspicious manner.

The doctor who conducted the post mortem said that Valsala's death could be "homicide, suicide or murder" and that she may have been hanged while she was unconscious.

Since Mr. Nair is pursuing the case, Chandra visited Kerala and threatened to murder his wife and children. Mr. Nair has submitted complaints to 12 different authorities in Bihar, Kerala and Delhi, but has received no reply, except from the DSP, Trichur. The post mortem report has

also not reached him.

We appeal to all concerned citizens and women's organizations, especially those in Bihar, to take up this case, to see that it is handed over to the crime branch and that the authorities and the police are shaken out of their crass apathy, their indifference to the deaths of women.

A Mother's Crusade

For Satyarani Chadha the world has not been the same since March 17, for it was on that night she witnessed the gruesome sight of her 24-year-old daughter Sashi Bala, big with child, lying burnt out like a pile of garbage inside the courtyard of the residence of Sashi Bala's mother-in-law.

"I had never seen anything like it... there were no eyes, no mouth... one could not tell whether the body was that of a man or a woman; it was just a twisted black bundle lying in a corner." Satyarani said in broken sentences amid stifled sobs, "and the mother-in-law refused to give me even a 'kafan' (white sheet) to cover the body she told me to pick up my rubbish and clear her courtyard."

Since then, Satyarani has given up her life as an ordinary housewife who had hardly ever stepped outside the confines of her house and had devoted her life to bringing up her five children. "Now I am not afraid of anyone... I have met everyone, the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, the Home Minister and the Prime Minister... I want justice... I do not want publicity for myself or my dead daughter but I want you to proclaim loudly the names of the culprits, for I know my former son-in-law is planning to marry again".

Satyarani has taken up her daughter's case as a crusade. Her insistence has made the authorities take a little more interest and now the case has been transferred from the Gandhi Nagar Police Station in Shahdara to the crime branch. "The law makers of this country are perhaps waiting for a Prime Minister's daughter to be burnt in a similar manner before they wake up", she

says.

The trouble began just a few days before the wedding on May 4 last year. On May 1 at the *sagan* (engagement) ceremony the would be groom, Subhash Bhasin's mother was dissatisfied that money had not been given to her relatives who had attended the function. Satyarani apologized and a day later gave Rs. 400 to be distributed among the boy's relatives. Then came specific demands that a refrigerator, a television and a scooter should be given as dowry. The mother pointed out that she had limited means and agreed to give a refrigerator.

After the marriage the girl remained behind with her mother-in-law in Delhi while the boy went to Mathura where he

give it to you'... how did I know that two days later she would be killed?"

On March 17, two strangers came to the house of Satyarani in Old Gupta Colony to tell her that her daughter had been burnt. She rushed to Sashi Bala's mother-in-law's residence in Dharampura, Mahavir Chowk, Guru Nanak Gali in Gandhi Nagar.

Krishna, the mother-in-law, Naresh, younger brother of husband Subhash and Chanchal and Aruna, Subhash's two sisters, were at home. They apparently did not know when Sashi Bala poured kerosene or petrol and set herself on fire. The police were not too concerned. A girl had apparently killed herself or had been killed as her parents could not give

daughter in her convocation gown – she was a student of Lakshmbai College, Delhi University – her appeals to various VIPs and short, terse newspaper clippings announcing the death of a girl by fire, makes the rounds of various offices, knocking on doors for justice.

Will Satyarani now refuse to give dowry for her younger daughter ? Will she have the courage to refuse to marry her daughter to anyone making even the smallest demand ? Satyarani hesitates. For dowry is a thing given at marriages and the boy's family is expected to make some demands.

It is accepted that man and woman are unequal and that something must be thrown in with a bride to make up the difference.

— Neena Vyas

In Her Mother's Words

My daughter Premkumari was married to Premkumar, son of Meghraj Bhatia, at *Kanpur Bannubiradri Dharamsala* on May 31, 1978. On May 9, 1979, he and his family broke my daughter's hands and feet, poured kerosene oil on her and burnt her to death in their house, 118/516B Kogalpuri, Sunder Nagar, Kanpur.

My daughter was taken to the cremation ground.

We were shown the corpse only for a minute. The teeth had been broken and the whole body was so badly burnt from



Sashi Bala



Her husband Subhash Bhasin

works as a manager for Bata. Satyarani then tried to find out why he did not want his wife to stay with him and was told that he was heavily in debt as he had borrowed for his sister's marriage. "I then gave Rs. 1,000 to the boy and pleaded with him to take her with him... some months afterwards she became pregnant and then there were ugly scenes as he wanted her to get the child aborted while she refused", Satyarani says.

Just a few days before the terrible event of March 17, Subhash has asked his mother-in-law for a scooter. "I told him, 'Make my daughter happy first; let her have her child and then I will try and

her husband a scooter. She was just another among a string of similar suicide-murders.

While many more girls continue to die every day the law is busy splitting hairs to find out whether there were any eye-witnesses to the alleged murders. Sometimes the suspects are not even arrested unless the girls' parents make enough noise. The work of the police very often finishes with a terse post mortem report, and it suits them to register a suicide as no follow-up is needed.

Meanwhile Satyarani, with her briefcase containing pictures of her



Prem Kumari

the neck to the feet that the flesh was falling off the bones. We were absolutely helpless as her in-laws, who are influential people in Kanpur, had silenced the doctors and the police.

On May 13, we wrote letters to the following : H.M. Patel; Charan Singh; Chandra Shekhar; Banarsi Das Gupta; the Deputy Commissioner of Lucknow and Kanpur; Police Station, Gumti No. 5, Kanpur; the SSP, Lucknow. We have written three registered letters to each of these people and received signed acknowledgement slips. But there the matter ended. We have not got a single reply.

The Kanpur police have not taken any action at all, nor was Premkumari's death even mentioned in a single newspaper.

— Mrs. K.C. Bhatia

When Police Shelter Criminals

Rakesh Kumari's case is a typical example of how the guardians of law and order actively collaborate with murderers and take bribes from them. Her brother Vinod Kumar, who is a school clerk in Kothkapura, is a broken man today, not only shocked by the gruesome death of his sister barely 14 days after her marriage, but even more because all his efforts in the last one year to get the case transferred to the CBI have failed. The local police have been bought with a few hundred rupees and the bigwigs have no time for such petty matters.

Here is the story in Vinod Kumar's words :

My sister Rakesh Kumari 21, of Kothkapura, Faridkot, Punjab, was married to Madan Lal Puri of House No. 3911, Gali No. 28, Regharpura, Karol Bagh, New Delhi. On August 14, 1978. About Rs. 25,000 was spent on the marriage and dowry, though my father is a milk vendor. After marriage, she was not sent home to us, even though this is the custom among Hindus. The excuse given was that her husband did not have leave, though this has been proved false from his office record.

When Rakesh on different occasions,



Rakesh Kumari and her husband Madan Lal Puri

briefly met her aunt and cousin, and me on Raksha Bandhan day, she complained that she was being taunted and ill-treated because her dowry was not considered sufficient. She could not say much because her in-laws were always keeping an eye on her.

On August 29, Rakesh was burnt to death in the kitchen of her husband's house. The neighbours did not hear any sound, but they raised a hue and cry when they saw smoke pouring out of a window. They suspect that Rakesh was first killed and then burnt to death. Her in-laws did not call for help, get her to a doctor or make any attempt to save her life. Our own relatives, not Rakesh's in-laws, informed us by telegram and we rushed to Delhi. We found that the body had been sent for post mortem. Neither her husband nor her in-laws came to the hospital or the funeral.

At the Police Station, Karol Bagh, I got a strange reception. I was told, "Go back to Punjab. Why are you wasting time and money here? Nothing ever gets done in such cases." I had to insist, approach the local councilor, and spend

two whole days at the police station before they would consent to write an FIR and give me a copy.

30 residents of Gali No. 28, Regharpura, signed a resolution demanding an immediate police enquiry into the matter. They were planning to agitate for the transfer of the local SHO but the police intimidated them into silence.

The police are clearly in league with my sister's murderers. They have not bothered to question the witnesses to whom Rakesh had complained or to read the letter written by her. After dragging out the case for nearly a year, they have finally, on July 10, 1979, informed me in a scribbled note that the "case has been closed as untraced because despite best efforts, it could not be worked out." We have filed a suit against the police in the court of J.D. Dhanuka, Karol Bagh, for not producing Rakesh's case in court within six months – but no matter how much we try, nothing much can come out of it because the police has helped destroy all evidence and wasted precious time.

— Vinod Kumar