

Chandini alias Nazir, a 22 year old *hijra* (transgender) woman died in mysterious circumstances on the night of December 1, 2002, a Sunday, in Bangalore, India.

On December 4, all English and Kannada newspapers sensationalised the death of Chandini. Her death was reported as a suicide. Her husband Gnanaprakash claimed that she set herself afire because he had discovered her *hijra* identity and threatened to reveal it to his parents. They also reported that Chandini deceived Gnanaprakash by hiding her *hijra* identity at the time of marriage. It is not at all surprising that the police also accepted in totality this version of what had happened.

The following is a brief account of the events as ascertained by a fact-finding team comprised of representatives from the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Karnataka, Alternative Law Forum, Sangama (a sexual minorities rights group), and Vividha (an autonomous group of sexual minorities).

Chandini hails from Arsikere, Hasan and has been living in Bangalore for the past 5-6 years. Gnanaprakash initially met her in a *hamam* (bath house) in a colony of *hijras*. After a six-month relationship and after much persuasion Chandini agreed to marry him. They married 16 months ago. There is photographic and videographic evidence of the marriage, and of it having been attended by many friends of Chandini from the *hijra* community.

A week after the marriage, Gnanaprakash accompanied Chandini when she decided to go for *nirvan* (castration) in a hospital in Cuddapah, Andhra Pradesh. After the operation Chandini and her newly wed husband lived at Chandini's Guru (*hijra* mother) Prema's house, for about a month. Later they rented a house in Amrutha Halli, on the outskirts of Bangalore and lived together as husband and wife for five

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Justice for Chandini

months. He was often violent towards her and began to harass, beat her and took away all the money that she was earning through sex-work. After six months of living together, unable to bear his constant demands for money and to escape his torture, she left for Pune.

Chandini returned to Bangalore on November 7, 2002 and began living with her Guru in Amrutha Halli. Gnanaprakash learnt of her return to Bangalore and came to her Guru's house. In the absence of her Guru, he forced her to return with him. She had on her person 60 grams of gold jewellery and Rs. 50,000 in cash when she left. Gnanaprakash took her to a rented house in Ramaswami Palya (Banaswadi Police Station limit) in Bangalore. He deliberately isolated Chandini from her only support, the *hijra* community. She was found dead on the night of December 1, 2002.

Local police in Banaswadi Police Station initially refused to register the complaint of Prema, Chandini's Guru. They in fact said that they do not recognise the *hijra* community or its relationships. They said they would act only if Chandini's biological parents issued a complaint. They also claimed that they only recovered Rs. 5000 in cash while investigating Chandini's death.

There are several issues that suggest suspicion of foul play in Chandini's death. First, it is obvious from the foregoing that the statement of Chandini's husband of being tricked into marriage by her is a lie. There is evidence of his having frequented *hamams*, and the photographic evidence of the marriage clearly shows that he knew Chandini was a *hijra* at the time of marriage. Second, there are witnesses to the fact that Chandini was brutally treated by her husband, and

ran away from him to Pune. Third, when Chandini left her Guru's house (under pressure) she had with her Rs.50,000 and 60 grams of gold, while the police claimed to have recovered only Rs.5000.

We do not have much faith in the local police of Banaswadi Police Station undertaking an impartial investigation. Their bias against the *hijra* community is obvious. There is also the possibility they were offered cash inducement in order not to undertake the investigation seriously.

The fact finding committee has spoken to Chandini's parents who dispute local police claims that the Rs. 5,000, found with Chandini was returned to them. They also mentioned that when they first saw the dead body of Chandini, she had gold ornaments on her which were disappeared later.

We are campaigning to pressure the police to investigate this incident seriously, and to ensure that the people responsible for Chandini's death do not go unpunished

Famila, Revathi, Roshan and others for Sangama □

Remembering Kalpana Chawla

You smiled so much
Like Carl Sagan
He must have been an idol

The smile was your reaction
To "the asperities and inequities of society"
(Re: Marie Curie *In Memoriam*
by Albert Einstein)
Did you think of her and her severity
When you faced injustice?

"A poet imagined worlds beyond stars -
I saw them!"
Had you imagined
You would become a star to the world?

You inspired millions
With your life.
With your death,
You will inspire more.

Syed Anwar Owais, Srinagar