

BBC News

Delhi police make arrests after 'honour killing'

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Caste leaders frown upon marriages within the same sub-caste

Police in the Indian capital, Delhi, say a teenage girl and her boyfriend have been murdered in what they suspect is a gruesome case of "honour killing".

Aisha Saini and Yogesh Kumar, both 19, were beaten with metal rods and then electrocuted, police say. The girl's father and uncle have been arrested.

According to police, the girl's family disapproved of the relationship because her boyfriend was from another caste.

Cases of suspected "honour killing" are rare in the Indian capital.

Correspondents say the killings - long a taboo subject in India - are now being reported more often. There have been a number of recent cases in regions near Delhi.

'Bleeding'

The couple's mutilated bodies were recovered early on Monday after neighbours complained of a foul smell emanating from the uncle's house in Swaroop Nagar area in north-west Delhi.

"When we found the bodies - the couple's legs and hands were tied and they were bleeding," Delhi's deputy police commissioner NS Bundela told a news conference.

"The couple had been electrocuted as well, but we will wait for the full post-mortem report."

He said the girl's father and uncle had been arrested "but three suspects still remain at bay".

Police say Ms Saini's family feared she would elope with Yogesh and he was called to her uncle's home on Sunday on the pretext of discussing the relationship.

According to the Hindustan Times, neighbours went to the house on Sunday but were told that a family matter was being discussed.

A police official quoted in the newspaper said the assault went on for hours.

The couple were beaten with "iron rods and other blunt weapons" before being forced to sit on iron trunks to which live wires were attached and they were electrocuted, he said.

"This is a barbaric act of violence and should be condemned. It is my duty to get the perpetrators punished," Delhi's Women and Child Development Minister Kiran Walia said.

So-called "honour killings" are fairly common in parts of northern India, but rarely heard of in the Indian capital.

In April, five men were sentenced to death and one jailed for life over the 2007 murder of a young couple who married against the wishes of village elders in Haryana state, not far from Delhi.

Elders said they had violated local customs by marrying within the same sub-caste.

Social activists say many young men and women die every year in northern states like Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Some commit suicide, others are killed - often with the approval, tacit or otherwise, of village councils that still wield considerable power.

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BBC News

Indian community torn apart by 'honour killings'

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By Geeta Pandey
BBC News, Delhi

Satvati shows the house where the killings took place

Umesh Kumar and his wife Satvati Devi were woken in the middle of the night by loud cries coming from the neighbouring house.

"She was crying loudly. She was pleading, 'Kill me, but please don't hurt him.' She loved him and they wanted to get married," Ms Devi tells me.

Two days after teenage lovers Asha and Yogesh were brutally killed, Swaroop Nagar colony on the north-western outskirts of the Indian capital, Delhi, is still trying to come to terms with the tragedy.

Asha's family was opposed to a marriage because Yogesh belonged to a different, lower caste. Police have described the murders as a case of "honour killing".

They have arrested Asha's father and uncle in connection with the deaths and are looking for others.

In this poor, semi-rural community, tiny homes sit cheek-by-jowl and paper-thin walls offer little sound-proofing.

'Tied up'

When the cries on Sunday night became unbearable, Mr Kumar tried to intervene.

"When I went in, Yogesh was tied up in ropes. He had bruises all over him. And they were beating Asha," Umesh tells me.

"They" were Asha's uncle Omprakash Saini, her father Suraj Saini, their wives and her cousin, he says.

Honour in our community and society is paramount to us

Titoo Saini

"I tried to save the girl, but they pushed me around. They broke my spectacles. They told me not to interfere since it was an internal family matter."

The Sainis also warned Mr Kumar against calling the police.

"I don't have a phone, the pay phone booths are closed at night, and the other neighbours were too scared to get involved," Mr Kumar says.

The cries finally stopped at 4am. Ms Devi was sitting outside her front door when the Sainis came out, locked the house and left.

"We were wondering what happened to Asha and Yogesh," she says. "There were no more sounds from inside."

The bodies were brought out in the morning once the police arrived. And details began to emerge of the torture and beatings to which the young couple were subjected.

No remorse

"Their mouths were stuffed with rags, there were signs of beating and small burns on legs suggesting that they were possibly electrocuted," a senior police officer who was the first to reach the crime scene told the BBC.

Asha's uncle and father were arrested but the two men have shown no remorse.

"I'm not sorry," a defiant Omprakash Saini told reporters after his arrest. "I would punish them again if given a chance."

If they wanted to kill their daughter, that's okay. But they shouldn't have killed our boy

Meera Devi

The killings have stunned Delhi. Cases of "honour killings" are regularly reported from the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, but in the capital they are uncommon.

Assistant commissioner of police Pankaj Kumar Singh, who is posted at Swaroop Nagar, says that although the area is part of the capital, the mindset of its people is the same as in the villages.

"A majority of the people here are migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states. People here are deeply rooted in their traditional beliefs," Mr Singh says. "Caste considerations hold much sway."

In traditional Indian societies, women are often regarded as family property. Marriages are carefully arranged by parents and elders and relationships outside of caste are frowned upon.

But proximity to the city and access to education often bring in modern influences, sometimes creating a conflict between traditional beliefs and modern aspirations in the minds of the young.

And these sometimes have fatal consequences, as in the case of Asha and Yogesh. Although her family is no better off than his, it is from a higher caste.

There are no statistics on the number of "honour killings" in India, but Mr Singh says for every case that gets recorded, several others go unreported.

In the Gokulpuri area of north-east Delhi where the lovers lived and met, I visited the homes of both Asha and Yogesh, five minutes apart.

A group of local women sit mourning outside Yogesh's house. His sister, Renu Jatav, weeps inconsolably.

'Justified'

"I had no idea this could happen," she says. "He was having dinner, it was 9.30pm on Sunday when Asha's mother came and called him. Yogesh was a driver. She said someone needed the car, and he went."

"Four or five policemen came to our house the next morning. They said Yogesh had died," Renu's husband Rakesh Kumar says.

Renu Jatav is inconsolable over the murders

"We want strict punishment for them. We want the death penalty. We want them hanged."

The neighbours vouch for Yogesh's character.

"He was a very good boy," says Meera Devi. "We are very angry. We want justice. If they wanted to kill their daughter, that's okay. But they shouldn't have killed our boy."

At Asha's home, her relatives are equally angry.

Cousin Lokesh Kumar Saini says: "We had talked to Yogesh and his family in the past and told them to stay away. We had also found a good match for Asha and she was engaged.

"What will any parent do if they see their daughter in a compromising position with a man? What would you do if you were in the same situation?" he asks me angrily. "That's why my uncles killed them."

Another of Asha's uncles, Titoo Saini, is convinced "the killings were justified".

"We did it for our honour. Honour in our community and society is paramount to us," he says.

I ask them what honour the family has now that they are accused of murdering their own daughter?

"If she had run away with Yogesh, what honour would we have left then?" he asks.

"Moreover, that would have set a bad precedent for the other children in the family. They would have done the same. Then it would have been a slow and painful death for us every living moment. This is better," he says.

"Asha played in my arms as a baby. I carried her for her funeral. Did that not make me unhappy?"

But Titoo Saini is clear that marriage outside of caste is a bigger evil than murder.

"How can we marry outside the caste? This cannot be tolerated. Only an impotent man will accept this. If I was in their place, I would have done the same," he says.

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June 16, 2010

Indian couple electrocuted for daring to marry outside caste

By Andrew Buncombe in Delhi

Bride-to-be's father and uncle held over honour killing that has horrified a nation

In an alleyway in Delhi choked with flies and neighbours in mourning, Devindri Devi held up a photograph of her nephew. "We had agreed to the marriage but her family did not," she said, as she looked at the picture of the soft-faced young man. "It was because he is from a different caste."

In a case that has stunned India's capital, Mrs Devi's nephew and his teenage girlfriend were tortured and murdered in a so-called honour killing, allegedly by the young woman's family, who objected to the relationship.

Over a period of several hours, the young couple were bound, beaten and given electric shocks before they died. All that time, the woman screamed and begged with her assailants - apparently her uncle and father - to spare the life of the young man whom she so wanted to marry.

"When we found the bodies, the couple's legs and hands were tied and they were bleeding," the deputy commissioner of Delhi police, NS Bundela, told a press conference yesterday. "The couple were electrocuted as well, but we will wait for the full post-mortem report."

The killing of young couples who challenge the wishes of their families is not uncommon in rural India where the centuries-old traditions of caste and tribe remain little diluted. But this incident has triggered an unusual degree of outrage, both for its brutality and for its location in a city that is gearing up for October's Commonwealth Games and a chance to showcase itself to the world.

The couple, Yogesh Kumar Jatav, 21, and 19-year-old Asha Saini, lived just streets from each other in the crowded, claustrophobic Gokulpuri neighbourhood on the edge of the city and had started their relationship two years ago. Yet despite such geographic proximity, in the eyes of Ms Saini's family, the pair were from worlds apart; her father owned and operated a successful vegetable wholesale business, while Mr Jatav, whose parents are dead, worked as a taxi driver. More importantly, it seems, Mr Jatav was from a lower caste.

The young man, who just two months ago had bought his own, second-hand van, had been warned off several times by Ms Saini's family. They had even tried to arrange an engagement for her with a man from outside Delhi, of whom they approved.

Yet Ms Saini would not desist from seeing "her poor cabbie friend", who she would meet at the local market, their illicit encounters unavoidably known to the entire community.

Perhaps because of this, two weeks ago her family sent her to live with an uncle in another neighbourhood, about 15 miles away.

Mr Jatav's family and friends said that on Sunday, Ms Saini's mother contacted the young man, either by phone or in person, and asked him to come to that uncle's house that evening. When he arrived, he was allegedly seized, tied up and tortured.

Neighbours claimed they heard shouting coming from the house and tried to intervene, but were sent away by the uncle who said they were taking care of "family business". One neighbour told reporters that several times during the night they heard a young woman screaming: "Do whatever you want to me, please just let him go." At around 3.30am the noises stopped.

The following morning, with Mr Jatav's red Maruti van still parked outside the uncle's house but with no one apparently inside, the neighbours called the police. When they broke down the door, they found the bodies of the young couple, still bound. Some reports said electrical wires were coming from the wall. Others said metal bars had been used to beat the pair.

Delhi police have arrested Ms Saini's father and her uncle, Om Prakash, and they say they are still looking for other members of the family.

When he was brought before court yesterday, Ms Saini's uncle apparently confessed to the crime and told reporters: "We killed them using an electric shock. Yogesh had come to our house. We don't feel any remorse."

Kiran Walia, Delhi's minister for health, women and child development, told the Mail Today newspaper: "This is a barbaric act of violence and should be condemned. It is my duty to get the perpetrators punished."

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June 16, 2010

Dr Subir Sinha: Rise in brutality is traditional society's revenge on modern life

Honour killing has gone on since time immemorial. Parents objecting to their child's choice of partner is quite common, but killing is an extreme step. This is a really big issue but it's difficult to say how many there are. It was much more localised but with rapid economic changes in India, young people no longer live with their parents and they're meeting and falling in love in large cities, many are from different castes which is creating conflict with elders in their families and villages. Increased reports of honour killings seems to be some kind of revenge of tradition.

There's a feeling, given the pace of change in modern India, that parents cannot now dictate who their children will marry. If you look at the village councils in Haryana, which adjoins Delhi, they have ruled that couples cannot marry within their gotra or lineage, or sometimes within their village or a group of villages and they have come up with death sentences parents have to implement.

But the desire to police the sexuality of children and the ability to do so are no longer compatible. Love marriages can lose parents the chance of getting a dowry since the decision to marry is just down to the couples - not an agreement between families. There are not lots of these types of cases coming to court, but when they do people haven't got away lightly. But the exemplary punishments don't seem to have been a deterrent.

Some of the publicity surrounding honour killings is because the middle classes feel this makes India look bad in other countries. It's part of the "India shining" picture - of rapid growth, urbanisation and growing wealth - that makes people want these things to end. It's also part of the way Indian society has grown. The area in this case is now part of Delhi. The city in the early 1990s used to be manageable; now it has morphed into something eating up countryside around it. There has been a culture clash between those that sold off land and those who inhabit huge new developments. It's less a story of Delhi but of rural villages incorporated into cities.

I think the murderous intensity is in itself an indicator of a feeling of losing control in some rural parts of India. The mere word of an elder is no longer enough to deter a couple from taking certain actions.

Dr Subir Sinha is a senior lecturer in development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London

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Jatin Anand, Hindustan Times
Email Author
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We've no regrets, say Delhi honour killers

A day after their misplaced sense of honour drove them to kill their teenage daughter and her fiancé, Asha Saini's father, Suraj Kumar Saini, and uncle Om Prakash have no regrets.

"On being asked why they took the drastic step, Saini and Om Prakash said Asha had left them no alternative," said a senior police officer requesting anonymity. "They said Asha's deed frustrated them and the family didn't regret killing them."

Asha Saini and Yogesh Kumar — both 19-year-olds from Gokulpuri — were tortured for four hours and electrocuted to death on Monday at Prakash's Swarup Nagar residence.

Asha had been warned by her family to stay away from Yogesh because he was a cab driver and belonged to a different caste.

On Tuesday, as Yogesh's sister Renu stood outside the Sanjay Gandhi Memorial hospital the mortuary for her brother's body, Asha's relatives — who claimed they were not involved in the murders — stood close by, looking away from Renu's direction. They had come to claim Asha's body.

"They just stood outside the mortuary as we waited for the hospital authorities to hand over Yogesh and Asha's bodies," Renu said. "I didn't talk to them and they didn't talk to me. We waited in silence for three hours."

The Sainis' neighbours in Gokulpuri expressed shock at the horrific murder committed by the "good people".

"God knows what came over them on Sunday. They were such good people," said Vishnu Sharma (36), who runs a provision store near the Sainis' home residence. "I've known the Sainis for two years. They never got into fights. I couldn't believe the story about Asha's brutal murder till I saw them on television this morning."

Jainarayan Singh (40), another neighbour said, "Asha's mother, Maya is a very hardworking woman. She used to spend most of her day hard at work at the vegetable market to make enough money for her daughters' weddings. It's very hard to believe the same woman murdered one of them just because the boy's caste was a factor."

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Honour killing: Father, uncle arrested

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NEW DELHI: The father and uncle of 19-year-old Asha who was tortured to death along with her 20-year-old boyfriend Yogesh Kumar have been arrested after they confessed to the crime, police said on Tuesday, describing the gruesome murders as a case of honour killing.

The couple was found dead on Monday at her uncle's house in Swaroop Nagar in northwest Delhi with multiple stab wounds.

"We arrested the father, Suresh Kumar Saini, and uncle, Om Prakash, late on Monday. During the interrogation, they confessed to the double murder," Pankaj Sharma, the investigating officer, said.

"The two are in police custody now and will be produced in the sessions court in Rohini on Tuesday," he added.

Officials have described it as a case of honour killing as the couple belonged to different castes and Asha's family was vehemently opposed to the match.

"It looks like a case of honour killing. The girl's marriage was fixed with somebody else because she and Yogesh were from different castes," a police official said.

"On Sunday, the girl came to stay at her uncle's house and was assaulted along with her boyfriend and killed by her family," the official added.

Renu, Yogesh's elder sister, said: "Asha wanted to marry my brother but her family forcibly fixed her marriage to somebody else. On an earlier occasion, her mother had come to our place and threatened dire consequences if Yogesh did not stop meeting her."

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