



Pratima Singh: A Woman of Rare Courage

Story of a Daughter's Battle against a Rapist and Murderous Father

A MANUSHI Report

Pratima's story is not an ordinary case of family abuse. It tells us a lot about the nature of the Indian state and how it has come to be dominated by criminal elements at all levels. The corrupt and the venal amongst our power wielders regularly use their leverage with the state machinery to benefit their kith and kin and crush with brute force any attempt to challenge their power. However, in Pratima's case, her father let loose a reign of terror against her and her marital family with the active support of every possible arm of the state machinery.

In her years long battle, Pratima knocked on every possible door. Even at the risk of her life, she wrote petitions to senior-most police officers of Uttar Pradesh, to the Chief Minister as well as to the Home Secretary. She also approached the State Women's Commission, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Women's Commission. Each of these institutions failed to come to her rescue. But she never gave up battling.

It was through Zee TV, whose reporter Sanjay Chandra covered her case, that she came into contact with Madhu Kishwar in September 2006. Since then MANUSHI has taken up her case with full force.

MANUSHI's interventions have brought about significant new developments that may give a positive ending to a horror story. However, it is too early to forecast the outcome of the case. That is why we are providing our readers a detailed account of Pratima's life so that you may join us in mobilizing support for her.

We find it very impressive that Pratima does not overstate or exaggerate her predicament. Even when she is close to a point of break down, she speaks in a measured way and retains her dignity. That is one reason why helping her in her fight for justice has been a very inspiring experience. Despite having gone through hell, she has not allowed her own humanity to be damaged.

It has been a matter of great anguish for her that all these years, she is the one who was expected to hide her face from society and feel ashamed, while her father went around brazenly without any sense of shame or remorse. Even newspapers and TV channels, which covered her story, had to hide her identity by changing her name and covering her face. It is an act of great courage on her part that she has chosen to speak to MANUSHI in her own name and allowed us to use her unveiled pictures.

The following account is based on tape-recorded as well as several oral interviews with Pratima and several hours of conversation with her husband, along with a review of their case papers.

Pratima's taped conversations in Hindi were transcribed meticulously by Rakesh. The text of the tape as well as several oral conversations were translated by Madhu Kishwar and condensed for use in MANUSHI by Aliya, Misha, Mariel, Prabha and Lubna also got deeply involved in her case and contributed in presenting this story in MANUSHI. Today, she is like an adopted daughter of MANUSHI.

Twenty-five-year-old Pratima Singh is the daughter of Virendra Kumar Dohare who is currently posted as the Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) in Mahoba District of Uttar Pradesh. She says, “My childhood was very different from that of ordinary children because I did not receive any parental love. My father comes from a very poor Schedule Caste (Chamar) family. He was married off while still in his teens to my mother who is from a still poorer family. Because of her poor background, illiteracy and lack of good looks, he never really accepted her. As he carried on with his studies and then got himself a government job, his disdain for my mother kept increasing. He had affairs with several women and wanted to marry someone else. Therefore, he used all kinds of tactics against my mother, including allegations of sexual infidelity, to get rid of her. For example he disowned me while I was still in my mother’s womb, alleging that this pregnancy was due to my mother’s affair with his own father.

“My paternal grandfather was a Class IV employee with the Indian Railways who did manual work on the railway line as a gangman. He was poor and had received no education at all. My father therefore had very little respect for his own father and spared no opportunity to insult and humiliate him. His allegation that his own father had fathered me was perhaps due to this contempt.

“Though I was the first daughter in three generations in my father’s family, he used my birth to abandon my mother. The main reason for my father’s aversion to having a daughter was because he thought that having a daughter would make him subordinate to whichever family she married into. He was very proud of the fact that for three generations their family has never had to bow before



SDM Virendra Pratap Dohare

any other family. Consequently, she had to spend several years in her own parental home in Satahari village. My maternal grandfather was extremely poor and my mother spent those years in grinding poverty. She had only one sari, a blouse and a petticoat—not even spare garments to change into when she bathed. I grew up on dry *bajra rotis*.

“Even though my mother did not maltreat me, she gave far more importance to my brothers since her position was elevated in the family because of them. While my mother was living in her parental village, my grandfather, uncles, and others made several attempts to take back my elder brother because they wanted a son of the family with them. My mother firmly refused to let go of her son and insisted that either all three of us go

“Once Dohare became a Sub Divisional Magistrate, his arrogance became even more insufferable and his criminal tendencies manifested themselves in more and more gross forms. He would even bring prostitutes home and I would see them sleeping in my mother’s bed.”

back or none. Finally, due to the collective pressure of her community elders, including one of his uncles who later became my father-in-law, my father was persuaded to take back my mother. But he never forgave my father-in-law for having exercised his influence to make him accept his wife nor, for that matter, his own father for having taken my mother’s side.

“My father was one of five brothers and since there was a government school in the village, he managed to get an education. In 1989, he appeared for the exam for Class III officers and was selected as a *Naib Tehsildar*. In no time, he had developed mafia contacts and considerable political influence so that by 1993, within four years of his joining the service, he was promoted to the office of *Tehsildar*. By 1997, he was promoted to Class II service and became a Sub Divisional Magistrate.

“Even though he had not qualified for a Provincial Civil Service exam (PCS), he was promoted to this higher cadre due to the political influence he had garnered. Once he became a Sub Divisional Magistrate, his arrogance became even more insufferable and his criminal tendencies manifested themselves in more and more gross forms.

Even at that age, I could see that due to his corrupt ways, he was beginning to make a lot of extra income and buy big chunks of property around our own village and in Lucknow and Kanpur. He also paid for the upkeep of my mother’s brother’s family and bought a lot of prime agricultural land in the names of members of my mother’s family. I could also see that he used his power to corner women and have extramarital relationships. He would even bring prostitutes home and I would see them sleeping in my mother’s bed. My mother didn’t dare protest openly against his debaucheries because she was afraid of being thrown out of the house again.”

Growing up with such a father, it is not surprising that there was no normal father-daughter affection between Pratima and Dohare. From an early age, Pratima resented her father's debauched ways but what humiliated her more was her father's lecherous behaviour towards her female friends. Whenever any of her school or college-going friends came to the house, he would make obscene passes at them.

It was one such incident on October 19, 2001 that led to a major explosion in her life and set her on a dangerous, confrontational path with her father. At the time, Pratima was studying in BSc 1st Year in Kanpur. One of her college friends had come to visit her. They were both discussing some classroom related problems when her father walked in and, as was his habit, passed some lewd comments at Pratima's friend. He was at that time heavily drunk and a bit agitated.

Pratima protested against her father's behaviour saying, "Don't you feel ashamed misbehaving with your own daughter's friend who you ought to treat like a daughter? If you can do this to her, I feel you can misbehave like this with anyone, including your own daughter."

Seeing this father-daughter confrontation on account of her, Pratima's friend left the house in tears. But her father got into such a deadly rage that it seemed blood was pouring from his eyes. He hit her repeatedly, dragged her by her hair, and threw her on his bed. When she tried to resist and get up from the bed, he swooped down on her, untied her *salwar*, paralysing her with brute force, and raped her violently. Her mother was a witness to this scene.

Pratima was so devastated by this experience that for nearly 10 days she did not even come out of her room. During this period, instead of protecting her, all her mother did was to come into her room and advise her,



He hit her repeatedly, dragged her by her hair, and threw her on his bed. When she tried to resist and get up from the bed, he swooped down on her, untied her salwar, paralysing her with brute force, and raped her violently. Her mother was a witness to this scene.

"Please ensure that you take care of the family's honour and protect the interests of your brothers."

Soon after this incident, Dohare was posted at the district headquarters while his family continued to stay in Kanpur. However, he would still come home at frequent intervals. On these visits, Dohare raped Pratima repeatedly especially since he could that see she remained defiant, unlike her mother.

Living under such terror, Pratima found it hard to continue with her education and would miss college for several days. One day her friend came over to meet her and asked:, "Why aren't you attending classes?" She had sensed that Pratima was in trouble. Although Pratima didn't have



He thrashed her with a steel rod, put a gun to her chest, and told her, "You think a DGP can protect you against me? I hold many DGPs in my fist and can make them do my bidding.

the courage to explain her predicament, her friend inferred what had happened from the injuries on her face and body. Pratima also confided in her friend's mother who first advised her to leave home and seek refuge in some *ashram* (shelter home). But after making the suggestion, her friend's mother herself told her that such tales of exploitation are commonplace in women's *ashrams* as well. While presently, Pratima had only one man exploiting her; in an *ashram* there might be many others.

Pratima didn't know where else to go since she was very young and lacked the education to get a job. She says that although she did consider suicide, she decided against it because she thought people would consider her "characterless". Instead, she found another way to handle her predicament. She started making a note of all that she was being subjected to in her diary. She also wrote letters to several of her more influential relatives along with pages from her diary, telling them about her plight. The relatives were well aware of Dohare's corruption and that he commanded immense muscle power, and so Pratima got no real help from them.

A friend advised her to send a letter of complaint to some senior officers in the Uttar Pradesh government. Pratima wrote a petition to the Director General of Police (DGP) and to the Home Secretary in Lucknow and sent her friend to post it for her. This was a very bold and daring step for a woman who was still living under her father's roof and had no alternative means of support. She says that until then she had a lot of faith in the law. But what followed left her totally shattered.

The DGP apparently assigned the job of investigating her complaint to a local junior officer who then handed the case to her own father to write-up the report. On 29 January 2002, Dohare

came to his Kanpur house with Pratima's complaint against himself. He thrashed her with a steel rod, put a gun to her chest and told her, "You think a DGP can protect you against me? I hold many DGPs in my fist and can make them do my bidding. You may try to take recourse to *kanoon* (laws) but *kanoona* (brute force and extra-legal methods) are all on my side." He then forced her to write a statement in a slightly changed handwriting saying that he had never maltreated her and that the complaint was a ploy on the part of some enemies of the family. Thus she was forced to exonerate her own father at the point of a gun.

But merely getting his daughter to retract her statement did not satisfy Dohare. She had to be crushed for this act of defiance. Pratima says, the very next week, around 4 February 2002, Dohare got his servant and his brother-in-law, Dinesh, who depended on Dohare's financial help, to mix poison in her food. That day, Pratima was alone in the house preparing for her exam. She had been forbidden to leave the house unless she was escorted by the household servant and her father's driver. She consumed the poisoned food just before going to bed. In a few hours, she began to vomit and was severely sick. The servant just picked her up and took her to an inner room so that neighbours and casual visitors will not notice that there was something wrong going on in the house. Pratima's uncle then stood guard to make sure she could not call a doctor. Miraculously, Pratima managed to

But merely getting his daughter to retract her statement did not satisfy Dohare. She had to be crushed for this act of defiance.



Pratima with her husband Satya Prakash at MANUSHI office

expel enough poison through her vomiting so that she survived without medical attention.

We asked her why, like her mother, she did not quietly accept her father's ways in exchange for a life of comfort and luxury. She says, "Like most other people, I too like to live comfortably, but I have an inner rage and a sense of revulsion against him because I know he's an evil man. I find it humiliating to enjoy the facilities and comforts he has to offer because he has secured this lifestyle through very corrupt and evil means, and in the process, he has altogether lost his own humanity."

What about Pratima's brothers, did they know what was happening to her? Since her elder brother was studying away from home in a hostel, she got the opportunity to share her predicament with him only a month after the first rape. His first response was one of total disbelief. Pratima says that even when her mother would complain to her son about her husband's womanizing and debauched ways, her brother would respond by saying, "All this is normal when a man reaches a certain status. If we make too much fuss about it, it

will ruin our family's reputation." When he got to know about Pratima's complaint to the DGP, which led to an investigation, his reaction was, "How dare she rebel like this and write letters against her own father to outsiders. What does she think of herself? She should be killed." So she got neither sympathy nor support from her elder brother, while the younger one was too small at that time to be of much help.

Since Dohare was easily able to deflect Pratima's official complaint, he



When Pratima's elder brother got to know about her complaint to the DGP, which led to an investigation, his reaction was, "How dare she rebel like this and write letters against her own father to outsiders. What does she think of herself? She should be killed."

became further emboldened in assaulting her. So, on 13 February 2002, he unexpectedly came home midweek on the pretext of picking up voting machines for his constituency. As soon as Pratima saw him, she walked out of her room to the verandah, fearing yet another assault. Her calculation was that if she stayed out in full public view, she might be able to protect herself. But Dohare forced Pratima's mother to fetch her in. And once again, she was raped while her mother was in the house.

Despite increasing violence and threats, Pratima could not be subdued. She wrote many more letters to various high officials, including the Home Secretary and the Chief Minister of the State describing her predicament but to no avail.

She took a couple of her friends into confidence who supported her decision to leave the house. Since she had no where to go and no money to organize a safe shelter for herself, she went to Varanasi, and sought refuge with a young relative named Satya Prakash who was at that time studying for a medical (BMS) degree while staying in a hostel. She chose him for seeking help because he was educated and of good repute. Moreover, his father had helped her mother get back into her matrimonial home and also expressed a measure of disapproval of Dohare's acts against Pratima.

Satya Prakash says he was himself unwilling to get involved in this matter because he knew that Pratima's father would turn vindictive. However, when Satya Prakash's close circle of friends heard Pratima's story, they were very moved and pleaded with Satya Prakash to come to her rescue. After hours and hours of his friends pleading and arguing on Pratima's behalf, Satya Prakash consented to marry her because that alone gave him the right to offer her shelter without falling foul of the law. Had he given her shelter without marriage, Dohare



Pratima's mother-in-law, Bhagwati

could have implicated him in charges of abduction and rape of his daughter.

Satya Prakash did not even get the opportunity to consult with his father or elder brother before the marriage. In any case, he knew they would never support his decision. On 21 February 2002, they registered their marriage in Uttar Kashi. They dared not get married in UP, their home state, because they feared Pratima's father would try to stop it. Soon after the marriage ceremony, Pratima made the mistake of telephoning her father to inform him of her marriage to Satya Prakash and told him that she wanted to break all ties with him. After that, Pratima and Satya Prakash went into hiding at the house of one of Satya Prakash's friends in Uttar Kashi. Dohare was so outraged at the news that he lost no time in retaliating.



Despite increasing violence and threats, Pratima could not be subdued. She wrote many more letters to various high officials and power wielders, including the Home Secretary and the Chief Minister of UP describing her predicament but to no avail.

On 23 or 24 February 2002, Dohare went with some local goons in his official car to Satya Prakash's village and forcibly abducted Satya Prakash's father Sita Ram, and brought him to his official residence in Kanpur. At gunpoint, Dohare demanded the expeditious return of his daughter. Dohare was convinced that Sita Ram had instigated Satya Prakash to "elope" with his daughter. Dohare also phoned Satya Prakash's elder brother, Babu Ram Pratap, who was an advocate practicing in the Allahabad High Court, and demanded that he immediately come to his house in Kanpur, or else he would shoot Satya Prakash. As soon as Babu Ram reached Kanpur, Dohare forced him and his father into a vehicle and carried them to Satya Prakash's hostel in the medical college in Varanasi. Dohare was accompanied by two carloads of goons. There, Dohare and his goons ransacked Satya Prakash's room and tried to burn all his books and papers. Luckily, his roommate ran and called the hostel warden who stood up to Dohare and ordered him and his goons to leave the hostel premises at once. Satya Prakash's friends somehow managed to rescue Babu Ram and his father by smuggling them out of the hostel through the back gate.

After this incident, Babu Ram and his father Sita Ram were too terrified to stay in their village home. Therefore, Babu Ram took shelter in his wife's parental home. Sita Ram and his younger son Ramasre also went into hiding and moved from one relative's house to another. The only person left in their village home was Pratima's old mother-in-law who had to face Dohare's goons all alone on several occasions. They would come looking for the male members of the family, break things, vandalise the whole house and shower threats and abuses on the old woman.

Following the February 2002 kidnapping and Dohare's subsequent

terrorising acts against Satya Prakash's family, Babu Ram Pratap endeavored to file complaints against Dohare. Even though Babu Ram was a High Court advocate, he was unable to get even an FIR registered against Dohare and his goons. Satya Prakash says, "The Circle Officer of the police station of the area, Rajesh Kumar, happened to be a buddy from Dohare's college days and belonged to the same SC community. He made no secret of the fact that he was acting at Dohare's behest. When Satya Prakash's family tried to register complaints and seek protection for themselves, policemen would tell them, 'He's only threatening you, he hasn't yet killed you, so what are you making this big fuss about? After all, your brother has run away with his daughter. Do you expect him to take this humiliation lying down?'" Satya Prakash adds, "On March 25, 2002, Dohare fired a shot at my brother, saying, 'you know where the girl is but you are hiding it from us. If you don't help me reach her soon, I'll kill you all.'

In desperation, Babu Ram sent registered letter to the Home Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, the Chairman Bar Council of Allahabad High Court, and several other high officials complaining that his life was in danger. But no one took any note."

Pratima says, "My father remained convinced that Babu Ram Pratap was giving me strength to revolt no matter how much I tried to explain to him that Babu Ram did not approve of Satya Prakash's marriage with me. Therefore, my father was determined to knock Babu Ram out from our lives."

At this point, in desperation, Pratima sought the help of another supposedly influential relative who lives in Jaipur, to prevail upon her father to leave her alone. She told him that she was willing to come and face her father provided he stopped hounding her husband and in-laws. This relative assured her that he would

Even though Babu Ram was a High Court advocate, he was unable to get even an FIR registered against Dohare and his goons.

help her arrive at a compromise and asked her to come to Jaipur for the purpose.

On 27 April 2002, Pratima, her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law arrived at the house of Dohare's cousin in Jaipur. However, contrary to the assurances made to Pratima, this man had entered into a different kind of pact with Dohare. Pratima's husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law were taken and locked up in a separate room. Dohare came in his official vehicle with his brother and several armed men and abducted Pratima, dragging her by force and dumping her into the car. As soon as Dohare left with Pratima on 28 April 2002, the Jaipur relative released Satya Prakash, Sita Ram, and Babu Ram. As he threw them out of the house, he told them, "If you dare come anywhere near that girl again, we will dynamite your house so that as high as it stands today, there will be as deep a crater in its place."

"At this point, I was pregnant with my father's child... Out of sheer anger and revulsion, I told my father, 'You have been trying to prove me a liar... Finally, I will have an incontrovertible proof to show to the world in the form of this child.'"



After Pratima was kidnapped by her father at gun point on 28 April 2002, her father-in-law called the local police to register a complaint because he was afraid that her father might get her killed on the way. But the Jaipur police refused to register a case on the specious plea that the case was under UP jurisdiction because the SDM was from UP.

After returning to UP, her husband tried to file an FIR in Kanpur but no one would accept his complaint thanks to Dohare's influence. Satya Prakash says Dohare called his father the next day and told him: "Now that I have taken the girl back, I will teach your whole family a lesson you will never forget."

Her father apparently brought her to Kanpur because by then her letters of complaints to various high officials of UP had resulted in enquiries against him, and he needed her to get his name cleared in those enquiries. She says, "At this point, I was pregnant with my father's child and my mother got to know about it. Out of sheer anger and revulsion, I told my father, 'You have been trying to prove me a liar for pointing a finger at you. People in the outside world also doubt my word because they want proof. Finally, I will have an incontrovertible proof to show to the world in the form of this child.' Within no time, my parents forced an abortion on me on 21 May 2002. They took me to Sumita Nigam who runs a clinic in Shishamau market in Kanpur. I cried and told her I did not want an abortion but the doctor said, 'you have no choice. You better go through it.'"

We asked her how she was so sure that it's her father's child and not her husband's since she had been married in the meantime. Pratima says, she knew it for sure for the following reasons: "First, I had already missed my period before I got married. Secondly, after my marriage, my husband and I were living under so much stress and terror that neither of

us were in a psychological frame of mind to establish conjugal relations. Moreover, we were living in other people's homes where we had no private space. We couldn't live like husband and wife. That's why my parents were dead-set on getting me aborted after I had let it be known that I wanted the child as an act of defiance."

Where did she get so much courage and spirit of defiance? She says, "Today, I have to go on fighting because the lives of so many members of my husband's family have been endangered because of me. But at that time, when I was barely nineteen, like many young people I had the spirit and desire to stand up for my rights. I had no direct experience of such battles, I had only read about them in books and seen them in films and TV serials, so I expected the legal machinery to come to my aid".

Pratima's father did not hide the fact that after he was cleared in the enquiries, he wanted to eliminate her. She says: "He let it be known that he would get me murdered and implicate my in-laws, alleging that they had killed me for dowry. Therefore, I was really afraid for Satya Prakash and his family but I had no way of contacting him because I was held captive in my own house and was not even allowed to use the family phone. Finally, in desperation, I begged our domestic servant to help me reach my husband by phone. I told Satya Prakash that my father had declared it openly that after murdering me he was going to implicate them all. Therefore, it was important that he approach the court to get me released from my father's custody.

"My brother-in-law was at that time so disgusted with the whole affair that he wanted nothing to do with us. Therefore, he refused to help. So my husband went through some friends and colleagues of his brother who helped him file a *habeas corpus* petition on 26 May 2002 in the



"He let it be known that he would get me murdered and implicate my in-laws, alleging that they had killed me for dowry."

Allahabad High Court to seek my release from my father's illegal captivity. This was listed for hearing on 5 August 2002.

"This further outraged my father. He had not expected the matter to reach the High Court. He tried to pressure me to give a statement in his favour in the Court, once again repeating his favorite threat, 'Even if you manage to get a verdict in your favour with the help of *kanoon*, remember *kanoona* is in my hands.' I was really in a terrible state. If I gave a statement in my father's favour, life for me would be worse than hell or death in his house. On the other hand, if I went against him, I knew he was capable of destroying my life and that of anyone else connected with me."

As a result of Satya Prakash's petition, the High Court issued a subpoena to Virendra Kumar Dohare. He had failed to appear in Court on two earlier occasions. Therefore, he

"Since my father knew that I was likely to testify against him, he was determined to prevent me from reaching the Court ... he arranged for yet another kidnapping.... Three armed men dragged me by the hair, threw me into a car, tied my hands and feet, blindfolded me, and drove away."

was held guilty of 'contempt of court.' On 5 August 2002, the case was postponed to 7 August 2002 for a hearing.

Pratima says, "Since my father knew that I was likely to testify against him, he was determined to prevent me from reaching the Court on August 7. So he arranged for yet another kidnapping. At the time I was made to stay in some relative's house in Allahabad. Early on the morning of 7 August 2002, there was a knock on my door and my elder brother Anil asked me to open the door. As soon as I did so, three armed men dragged me by the hair, threw me into a car, tied my hands and feet, blindfolded me, and drove away. I think they had chloroformed me because as soon as they threw me in the car I passed out.

"They seized me so abruptly that I didn't even have slippers on my feet. When I regained consciousness, we were somewhere on the highway. I was disoriented and had no idea where we were going. The three men were armed and had apparently been instructed to eliminate me. This was later confirmed when I discovered that on the very day I was abducted by my father's goons, he had registered an FIR with the Dhumanganj police station in Allahabad alleging I had been kidnapped by someone else. He was trying to stage my abduction as if he had no involvement.

"Some hours after being driven blindfolded, I regained consciousness and requested water from my abductors. They agreed to this request." When they gave her water, they agreed to remove the blindfold for a while though her hands were still tied behind her.

As luck would have it, precisely then Pratima's abductors discovered that they had a flat tyre. So two of them got down to change the tyre while the third left the vehicle to urinate. Per chance all three abductors left their guns in the car. Pratima used this opportunity to seek help.

Pratima describes, “At that moment, I saw a state transport bus coming in our direction. I somehow managed to get out of the car and run into the middle of the road. I motioned at the bus to stop and gesticulated to show the bus driver that my hands were tied behind my back. Luckily for me, the driver came to my rescue. The other passengers noticed the guns in the car and decided not to confront my abductors. The passengers quickly pulled me inside and the bus driver sped away. Since the bus had a full load of passengers, my abductors did not continue to pursue me.

“At this point we were somewhere between Kannauj and Unnao. I was hungry and penniless. When the bus reached Unnao, some fellow passengers helped me to make a phone call to my mother’s uncle in Lucknow. I told him of my plight. He already knew about my father’s violence and feared him terribly. He told me I would endanger him by coming to his house or any other relative’s for that matter. His advice was that I should go back to my husband and no one else. But he offered to meet me at Lucknow bus stop and help me locate my husband. Finding Satya Prakash was difficult for him because my husband was in hiding.”

When Pratima reached Lucknow, her relative gave her some money and the contact address of her husband. He also helped her contact a member of the State Women’s Commission named Anita who is the wife of a BSP worker and was known to Pratima’s brother-in-law. Anita helped Pratima get a lawyer, Rajeev Upadhyaya, who agreed to take up Pratima’s case at the High Court in Allahabad.

Pratima appeared in High Court on 19 August 2002. She says, “My husband had no idea how I would testify because we had lost contact for a while. He feared my father might have coerced me to come to his defense. The High Court judge,



Babu Ram’s widow, Archana

Justice R.C. Deepak, who was hearing the *habeas corpus* petition filed by my husband, called me for my testimony in his private chamber rather than hearing the case in open court. My husband was not allowed to come in. This judge also happened to be from the SC community. Apart from seeking release from my father’s illegal custody, I was determined to put all of the facts of the case against my father, including charges of rape, violence, abduction, attempt to murder and forced abortion before the judge. But he refused to take note of those facts. He told me point blank, ‘*Ek to us bechare ki ladki ja rahi hai doosra tum uski rozi roti bhi chhinana chahati ho!*’ (On the one



“Apart from seeking release from my father’s illegal custody, I was determined to put all of the facts of the case against my father, including charges of rape, violence, abduction, attempt to murder and forced abortion before the judge. But he refused to take note of those facts.”

hand he has lost his daughter, on top of it, you’re trying to snatch away his livelihood from him!) It should suffice for you that I’m letting you go with your husband. I promise you your father will not bother you anymore. As for the rest of the charges, it is best that you forget about them.’ Thus, despite my best efforts, I could not get a case registered against my father even though I had risked my life to do so. I wanted to put the past behind me and start a new life, but I knew that my father would not leave us in peace.”

Apart from repeated attacks on Sita Ram’s house, Dohare got his cousin, Mahender Kumar to institute a fraudulent case of criminal trespass and takeover of property against Sita Ram. This was preposterous since Sita Ram and his family had been living in their home for years. Dohare was simply trying to encumber Sita Ram with legal entanglements. However, with great effort Babu Ram successfully proved in Court that this was a bogus case meant as an act of vindictiveness against their family.

Babu Ram was aware that he was being followed by criminals and that his life was in danger. Therefore, he became very careful about his movements. However, on 23 February 2003, Pratima’s father finally succeeded in silencing Babu Ram Pratap forever.

Satya Prakash describes the events of that day: “He laid an elaborate trap by sending a man called Udayvir Singh who knocked at my brother’s door at about 11 a.m. and begged him to accompany him to Bidhuna by claiming that there was an emergency since someone close to him needed urgent legal help with bail. My brother resisted since it was a Sunday but the man fell at his feet and pleaded with him till Babu Ram relented.

“In Bidhuna, Udayvir Singh took Babu Ram to meet one Kamlesh Kumar Yadav who asked Babu Ram

to help him secure bail. Babu Ram became nervous when he saw Kumar's long criminal history, but the two men kept him engaged for hours. In the meantime, Babu Ram's wife got very anxious because he had not reached his sister's house in Bidhuna as he was supposed to. So she sent his younger brother, Ramasre, to locate him. Upon reaching Bidhuna, Ramasre stopped at a petrol pump to refuel his tank. At that moment, he saw Udayvir Singh. Ramasre asked about Babu Ram, but Udayvir Singh was evasive. Ramasre was suspicious of Singh but didn't let on. He secretly started following Singh until he reached where his brother was.

"Ramasre insisted that Babu Ram return home at once. Udayvir Singh and Kamlesh Kumar allowed the two brothers to go but apparently continued to follow them. After a brief stopover at their sister's house, Babu Ram and Ramasre got on the scooter and left for their village. This was around 4 p.m. They had barely gone a kilometer or two when their scooter broke down. So they had to stop and get it repaired. Shortly thereafter, Udayvir Singh, Kamlesh Kumar and Brij Bihari reached the scene on a motorcycle. The three men pretended as if they wanted to know why Babu Ram was stuck on the road. Kamlesh Kumar then accosted Babu Ram, saying, 'The SDM has given me 50,000 rupees to murder you. How much are you willing to give me to murder him?' Babu Ram replied, 'He may be involved in such acts. I am not the kind who hires assassins.' Kamlesh Kumar then shot and killed Babu Ram. Ramasre was forced to witness the murder of our elder brother but somehow managed to save his own life by running into a nearby field. With great difficulty he managed to reach home to bring the tragic news."

Pratima says, "Babu Ram's murder devastated the entire family because, as the eldest and best-educated son



Pratima and Madhu in the three hour phone-in programme *India Bole*, put together by India TV at MANUSHI's request.

of the family, Babu Ram was the pride of our family. He was in his early thirties and left behind a 26-year-old widow, a 7-year-old son, and an infant daughter. My father's personal car, URG 123, was seen that day near the spot of the murder. Dohare's brothers, Ravinder and Arvinder Kumar, were reportedly inside the vehicle."

Dohare was implicated in the murder under section 120B of the IPC and as a result, he was suspended from his job on 10 April 2003. This case is being tried in the District Court at Auraiya. Among the witnesses listed in this case are Pratima, Satya

Prakash, Ramasre, and Nilesh who is Babu Ram's brother-in-law.

Once again, Satya Prakash and his family found it difficult to get even an FIR registered, let alone a proper investigation into the murder. This, despite the fact that Ramasre was witness to Babu Ram's murder and could recognize and identify the three men involved — Kamlesh Kumar, Brij Bihari, and Udayvir Singh. Satya Prakash says, "We had to move heaven and earth to get a murder case registered because the Circle Officer of the area, Rajesh Kumar, was not just a close friend of Dohare, but he was also particularly close with Kamlesh Kumar, the man who had actually fired the shots that killed Babu Ram. The courts had issued an externment order against Kamlesh Kumar from Auraiya district on account of his criminal record that included nearly 50 cases against him".

Of her father's hand in the murder Pratima says, "My father thinks there is no one more powerful than him in the world. He has police support, he manages to get political patronage of whichever party comes in power, and he can manipulate anyone from the bureaucracy to mafia gangs.



My father thinks there is no one more powerful than him in the world. He has police support, he manages to get political patronage of whichever party comes in power, and he can manipulate anyone from the bureaucracy to mafia gangs.

He can find a way to defy any law. In fact, he tries to get people's sympathy and turn them against me by saying that I am making false allegations of rape against him at the behest of Sita Ram and Babu Ram. He claims that Satya Prakash and I were having a romance before our marriage, which he objected to since Satya Prakash is supposed to be my cousin *chacha*. This is patently false because there was no such relationship between us. He is my cousin *chacha* and not my father's brother. I only went to him out of sheer desperation. I could not have gone to total strangers and the police and government officials had failed to offer me protection. I choose someone I had some claim on account of his being related to our family. But he has spread the rumour that I and my in-laws are being vindictive towards him because he objected to my marrying Satya Prakash who has seduced me out of greed because he wants to marry a rich man's daughter and get a fat dowry. In fact, Satya Prakash married me reluctantly." This false charge of romance has so angered them both that Satya Prakash says he has come to hate the word "love affair" since it has come to be used as a weapon against him.

In fact Dohare's younger brother has actually married his real niece, after breaking her first marriage! Dohare finds that perfectly acceptable yet he went on a murderous spree when his daughter married a cousin uncle.

Satya Prakash adds: "Even though there was clear-cut evidence of Dohare's involvement in this murder, and even his car was seen at the murder site, no action was taken by the state government against Dohare. Through some senior colleagues of my dead brother, we approached one of the members of the State Women's Commission. She was moved by Pratima's plight and



Pratima with the Home Secretary of Uttar Pradesh

introduced her to another influential member of the Commission, Indira Punia, the wife of the former Chief Secretary of UP, Mr. P.L. Punia. Without these contacts, we would never have gained access to members of the State Women's Commission. They hardly ever consent to meet ordinary citizens. Indira Punia was able to get her husband to suspend SDM Dohare and also help us get police protection for a while.

"After this initial help, however, Mr. Punia, who was also a Scheduled Caste IAS officer, refused to extend further help. Dohare managed to get the then Transport Minister in Mayawati's government to persuade

Punia that as SCs they should protect each other rather than go against an officer of their own community."

Both Pratima and Satya Prakash say that through these years they got much better response from non-SC officials than from people of their community. Therefore, both of them are very bitter against their own community. The one officer who was especially helpful and sympathetic to Pratima's plight was Daljit Singh Chaudhry who was then the Senior Superintendent of Police of that district. He provided them police protection for as long as he was posted in the area. But after he was transferred, even that was withdrawn.

Dohare's vengeance kept augmenting as he found her fighting back. Pratima says, "Soon after my brother-in-law's murder, Dohare instituted yet another fabricated criminal case against my old father-in-law, my husband, and my younger brother-in-law. He staged the drama of getting his cousin Pradeep Kumar's 8-year-old daughter 'abducted' and named my very ill, bed-ridden father-in-law, my husband, and my younger

He staged the drama of getting his cousin Pradeep Kumar's 8-year-old daughter 'abducted' and named my very ill, bed-ridden father-in-law, my husband, and my younger brother-in-law, Ramasre as the abductors

brother-in-law, Ramasre as the abductors under Section 364A of the Indian Penal Code.

“We got to know that this girl was actually sent to her uncle’s house in Jaipur, but the staged drama was meant to implicate my family in yet another criminal case. This was at a time when my father-in-law, already traumatised by his eldest son’s death, was in a very poor state of health. In that condition he had damaged his femur and had to undergo a bone transplant at the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. After that, he was confined to his bed and could not even walk to the toilet. And yet he was implicated in the abduction case.

“It’s very easy for my father to prop up false witnesses because of his official influence. At the same time he was also able to get reinstated in his job by paying off senior officers. He apparently spent 5 lakh rupees getting reinstated even though the case is still going on in the court.

“My father-in-law was so devastated by being implicated in the abduction case, especially after the murder of Babu Ram, that he never recovered and passed away on 19 October 2005.”

Due to a lack of police security, Pratima and her in-laws found it difficult to attend court hearings. Pratima, Satya Prakash, and Ramasre left the state altogether and looked for a job outside Uttar Pradesh. They felt they could not reside safely in any part of the state as Dohare’s corrupt influence had infiltrated seemingly every level of the administration. Since the family had lost their main bread-earner, Satya Prakash had to look for a job to support Pratima and Babu Ram’s wife and children. He had cleared his B.M.S. exam in 2005 and was therefore qualified for a medical job. Securing employment was difficult since they had to stay in hiding. It is noteworthy that Pratima defied her



Dohare on election duty as SDM during the October, 2006 municipal elections in UP.

traumatic circumstances and completed her B.Sc degree with the support of Satya Prakash.

Failure of Institutions

It speaks volumes about the functioning of the highest institutions in India that Pratima got no help whatsoever when she approached various institutions of the state. She wrote to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as early as April 2002. At first they did not even respond to her complaint. She sent them several reminders, with no effect. She and her husband made yet another petition to the Human Rights Commission after the murder of Babu Ram Pratap on June 8, 2002. This particular complaint was taken note of. But what happened made a mockery of the whole exercise. The NHRC wrote to the State Human Rights Commission, which assigned the job of investigating the complaint to the Circle Officer of Auraiya District, Rajesh Khanna. Pratima says, “This

Dohare organized the murder of the sister-in-law (bhabhi) of Brij Bihari, one of his mafia gangsters, who was involved in the murder of Babu Ram.

man neither took my testimony nor that of my husband’s and in-laws’. And yet he sent a report to the NHRC stating that I have been instigated by my husband and in-laws to lodge false cases against my father because of past enmity.”

Likewise the UP State Women’s Commission closed the case in 2003 on the ground of “insufficient evidence” against her father — all because when the State Women’s Commission summoned him for his testimony, he refused to show up. That should have been ground for taking more determined action against him rather than closing the case.

Her application to the National Commission for Women (NCW) in 2004 also received no response. However, when Madhu Kishwar personally took her to the NCW in September 2006, they took note of the case though their intervention did not produce any results.

Madhu Kishwar met Pratima and Satya Prakash on September 9, 2006 in the ZeeTV studio, where she had been invited to comment on their story which had been put together by reporter Sanjay Chandra. They both looked like hounded animals so Madhu gave them her phone number, assuring them on Manushi’s behalf of extending all possible help to them.

Pratima, Satya Prakash, and Ramasre had to appear in the Auraiya District Court on 19 September 2006 as witnesses in Babu Ram’s murder case. They were terrified of returning to Dohare’s territory in UP. We were under the impression that her father would be subdued by Zee TV’s public she, but she had not counted on his genius for finding more and more devilish ways for giving vent to his vindictiveness.

On September 19 Pratima, Satya Prakash, and Ramasre appeared in court along with constable Suryapal Singh and constable Suraj Singh, their

assigned security guards. (The three had been granted round the clock police protection between the dates of 10 September and 25 September 2006 in order for them to appear in court.) The two constables were staying at their house. As per Pratima's account, on the very day of the hearing, Dohare organized the murder of the sister-in-law (*bhabhi*) of Brij Bihari and implicated Satya Prakash, Ramasre, and their brother-in-law, Nilesh Kumar, in the murder. Brij Bihari is one of Dohare's mafia gangsters, who was involved in the murder of Babu Ram. It is quite likely that Brij Bihari's sister-in-law had become an inconvenience and they decided to kill two birds with one stone—get rid of her and destroy all of the men in Pratima's marital family.

In order to evade arrest, Satya Prakash and Ramasre had to go into hiding while Pratima began phoning Manushi from Auraiya in total panic. If Satya Prakash and Ramasre were arrested she would not even have the money to hire a lawyer to secure their bail.

MANUSHI could do very little to help her in Auraiya. Therefore, we advised her to rush back to Delhi at the earliest while we fixed an appointment for her with the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women. On September 22, 2006, Pratima reached Delhi and Madhu accompanied her to meet Girija Vyas who at once called a press conference and announced that the NCW would take up this case.

On September 25, 2006, the Deputy Secretary of NCW wrote to the Director General of Police and the Chief Secretary of UP requesting that the NCW be provided with a detailed report about the inaction on cases lodged against Virendra Kumar Dohare.



The man who set the wheels of justice moving: Home Secretary of UP, Satish Kumar Agarwal

Neither the Chief Secretary nor the DGP bothered to respond to the NCW letter. Another reminder was sent on October 5, 2006. This too met with the same fate. In the mean time, Pratima became even more desperate because her father's goons had once again descended on the village home where her mother-in-law and widowed sister-in-law were living with the two children. Pratima believes they had come with the intention of killing or

abducting the children, but since her sister-in-law screamed for help and several villagers rushed to her aid, the gangsters fled the scene. Because of the way Dohare had managed to entangle Pratima's husband and her younger brother-in-law in a false case of murder, she was afraid they would be arrested and she would be left without any support to fight her father.

Finally Some Relief

Therefore we approached Maneka Gandhi, who represents the Pilibhit constituency of Uttar Pradesh in the Parliament. She phoned the Principal Home Secretary of the UP Government, Satish Kumar Agarwal, and told him that MANUSHI would be approaching him with full details of the case. Within hours of that phone call, Mr. Agarwal had assigned Mr R.K. S. Rathore, one of his best police officers, to personally get the facts of the case from MANUSHI.

On October 16, 2006, Mr. Rathore, Senior Superintendent of Police along with two other officers visited the MANUSHI office to meet Pratima. He spent nearly four hours listening to Pratima and helping her write a detailed complaint. Within a day, the Home Secretary invited Pratima and Madhu Kishwar to come and meet him in Lucknow. They left for Lucknow on October 19, 2005, escorted by two police officers.

The meeting with Mr. Agarwal turned out to be momentous. He told Pratima he would take personal responsibility in helping her get justice and help her rebuild her life. This despite the fact that taking action against Dohare involves high political risks because Dohare has a volatile and well organized caste lobby working in his support.



Pratima taking the blessings of Devi Swachhnarayani in Manushi office before leaving for Lughnow.

Because of the Home Secretary's personal interest in her case, the Director General of Police (DGP), Mr Bua Singh promptly ordered police protection to Pratima's family in the village. The investigation for the murder case in which Pratima's husband and brother-in law were falsely implicated has been handed over to DIG Daljit Singh, an officer widely respected for his integrity and efficiency. But the DGP, Bua Singh did not think it was feasible for Pratima to register rape, abduction and attempts -to- murder charges against her father since those incidents were very old. This despite the fact that Pratima had knocked on every government door and risked her very life in trying to register criminal cases against her father when those incidents actually happened. It was the fault and failure of the government machinery that she was not heard and the cases were not registered against her father. Therefore, we argued that it was for the Government to make up for the lapse and the time lost.

Mr. Aggarwal saw merit in this and instructed that an FIR be lodged on the basis of Pratima's complaint and

assigned the job to SSP Daljit Singh. Within an hour of listening to her account, he also offered to secure her a job in a reputed firm. Pratima was reluctant to accept the offer though she desperately needs the money. Firstly, she is mortally scared of living in UP which in her view seemed like inviting death and worse.

She fears that no matter which party is in power, corrupt officers like Dohare in general, and Schedule Caste lobby in particular carries enough political clout to influence government decisions. It is not as if before MANUSHI took up her case, people in the Mulayam Singh government were unaware of Dohare's track record. But he kept getting protection at all levels.

Pratima's other major concern is that, with UP elections due early next year, there is a chance that the Samajwadi Party might be voted out of power and Mayawati might assume the reigns of power in Uttar Pradesh. In such a situation, there could be a 180-degree turn in the attitude of the administration since Mayawati would appoint her own favourites in key positions of power.

Under her regime, Pratima believes that it would be virtually impossible to get a Schedule Caste officer punished.

Also she is now in her seventh month of pregnancy. Her husband has, with great difficulty, found a reasonable job with a private hospital outside UP.

But we persuaded her to accept the offer, not just for financial reasons but also because it would be far easier for her to follow up the legal cases while being based in Lukhnow. Her presence there would ensure that her case receives a measure of attention from the highest authorities in the UP Government, atleast as long as Mr. Agarwal remains Home Secretary. We assured her that if things do not work out well, MANUSHI would help her relocate to Delhi and also fight her legal battle in court.

Mr Agarwal ensured that within an hour of her saying 'yes' to the job, Pratima had an appointment letter in her hand along with one month salary in advance, plus secure and free accommodation till such time as she feels safe enough to organise her own.

Mr Agarwal has so far delivered whatever he promised. Chief Minister

Pratima Singh Legal Aid Fund

We will need to engage the best of lawyers to fight the legal battle on behalf of Pratima Singh and Satya Prakash in the relevant courts of Utttar Pradesh, including the Allahabad High Court. We cannot leave her at the mercy of government lawyers who tend to do a careless job and easily fall under the influence of bribes and string pulling.

Right from its inception, MANUSHI has been involved in providing legal and social support to individual women in need and also taking up Public Interest Litigation on behalf of vulnerable groups such as street vendors and rickshaw pullers as well as for challenging discriminatory inheritance and other rights of rights. However, this has been undertaken on an ad-hoc and need-based manner without any special funds to support this activity.

We now intend to establish a full fledged **Legal Aid Centre** which will provide in a more systematic and sustained manner legal aid as well as social and political support to individuals and vulnerable groups, who are facing life threatening situations and have no means of fighting their battles on their own strength alone. This project may take some time to materialise since it requires substantial fund raising.

In the meantime, we seek your help in getting justice for Pratima by contributing to Pratima Singh Legal Aid Fund. If perchance we get more contributions than are needed for Pratima Singh's case, the money will be used towards the corpus fund for Manushi Legal Aid Centre. The entire account of Pratima Singh Legal Aid Fund will be made available on our website.

Donations to Manushi Sangathan are tax exempt.

Please send your contributions payable to Manushi Sangathan, C1/3 Sangam Estate, 1 Underhill Road, Civil Lines, Delhi 110054. You may also pay through our website portal at www.manushi-india.org

Mulayam Singh has not only suspended Dohare from his job but also ordered his arrest. Unfortunately, while the investigations were on, the District Magistrate of Auraiya allowed Dohare to proceed on leave, providing yet another example of Dohare's ability to ensure the complicity of the local administration. Knowing well that the local police and administration of Auraiya would be influenced by Dohare, the Home Secretary did not leave it to the discretion of the local police to either investigate the case

Given the volatile caste based politics of UP, it is hard to predict what the final outcome of this case will be.

or issue arrest orders. Mr. Agarwal ensured that the Government issued arrest orders of Dohare. But Dohare has gone underground and managed to evade arrest so far.

While Mr. Agarwal has gone beyond the call of duty to help Pratima get justice, his interventions only highlight the fact that while individual officers may

respond to the call of duty, the state machinery as a whole is held hostage by criminal elements.

Given the volatile, caste based politics of UP, it is hard to predict what the final outcome of this case will be. Dohare may succeed in getting bail and escape punishment to wreak further vengeance on Pratima or she may finally get justice.

We will keep you informed about further developments in this case and hope MANUSHI readers and friends will help in taking Pratima's fight for justice to its logical conclusion. □

We Urge our readers to send the following message in support of Pratima to the Chief Minister of U.P

Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav,
Chief Minister U.P.
Government of Uttar Pradesh
Lucknow, UP

Dear Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav,

We appreciate the stand taken by the UP Government in getting an F.I.R. registered against Virendra Kumar Dohare on the basis of Pratima Singh's charges of rape, forced abortion, abduction and attempts to murder her as well as his involvement in the murder of Pratima's brother-in law and falsely implicating her husband and in-laws in murder and abduction cases. It is very heartening to know that Dohare has been suspended and arrest orders issued against him. However, it is a matter of serious alarm that an outright criminal like Dohare should carry so much influence with the state machinery that he could get away with rape, murder, abduction and a long track record of corruption for such long years. **We support Pratima Singh in the following demands she has listed in her petition to you.**

- Pratima's in-laws, her husband, and she be provided with appropriate police security.
- There be an impartial and expeditious enquiry into all of the false cases filed against Pratima's husband and other members of his family so that they are freed from the burden of torturous litigation and fear of being arrested.
- Appropriate punishment be given to her father after an impartial enquiry for instituting false cases against Pratima's in-laws by misusing his official position.
- Her father expeditiously dismissed booked and tried for charges of rape and murderous attacks on Pratima.
- Her father be immediately suspended from his present job, because if he continues to hold his present post, he will be able to misuse his office to prevent impartial enquiries into his misdeeds.
- Babu Ram's murder case trial should be conducted with speed so that Dohare can be punished for his role in that murder.
- Since Pratima has been rendered homeless and the peace and economic security of her family has been totally shattered, she should be provided adequate financial support from the State Government to help her reestablish her life.

We hope the UP Government will take this case to its logical conclusion and ensure that Pratima Singh gets justice and her father, uncle and other associates get their due punishment.

NAME

ADDRESS

SIGNATURE

Please email this statement to Manushi and we will forward it to the UP Government