

Rebuilding Her Life



Devendra and Kunda

THIS morning, 19 year old Kunda came to me, looking depressed and weary. While she was studying for the B Com degree at the MS university, Baroda, Kunda was married to Devendra Dhulekar on May 9, 1983. Her widowed mother spent Rs 25,000 on the wedding, including Rs 6,000 given in cash and gold ornaments.

When Kunda went to her in-laws' place at Ratlam, she was kept confined to the house and forbidden to talk to any of the neighbours. If anyone from her natal home came to visit her, she would be badly beaten. Her husband used to burn her with cigarette butts. None of her in-laws came to her rescue.

Devendra was a drunkard, gambler and

womaniser. When he failed to get satisfaction from outside, he would force himself on Kunda and, immediately afterwards, would kick her off the bed. She had to spend most of her nights on the kitchen floor. Kunda kept fasts and performed rituals for the reformation of her husband, all to no avail. He now began to demand that she get Rs 25,000 cash and that she supply her girl friends to him. When she resisted, he beat her severely and she still has marks of the injuries on her chin and her hand. Finally, she wrote a secret letter to her relatives, and on July 19, 1984, her uncle came to fetch her. However, she was not allowed to go with him until August 2.

At Baroda, she was just trying to recover from the trauma 15 months of married life, Devendra turned up at her house and began to beat her. She screamed and he ran away but came again the next day. He was captured with the neighbours and was taken to the police station. After much hesitation, the police registered a noncognisable offence and let him go scot free. He has threatened to kill everyone in Kunda's family.

Kunda is now getting her injuries treated in the hospital but she wonders how to rebuild her life.

—Nispruha Desai
(translated from Hindi)

What Can Be Done ?

ON May 31, 1984, 24 year old Rekha died in her in laws' house at Malakpet, Hyderabad. The in-laws say that Rekha hanged her-self. However, Rekha's brother alleges that there were marks of injury on her body, and the photo-graphs of the dead body also testify to this fact. Moreover, Rekha was only five feet tall and the ceiling of the room was 10 feet high. A member of the *panchnama*, a re-tired judge, insisted that even with the table and stool that Rekha supposedly used to reach the ceiling, there would have been a two foot gap that she could not have covered.

Rekha was an MA in political science from Osmania university. She was married to Visweswara Rao, a junior engineer at

water pollution board, in November 1983. Her parents gave a dowry worth a lakh. Though Visweswara was offered a dowry of three lakhs by another party, he wanted an educated girl to be his wife so he married Rekha in the face of much opposition from his parents. Rekha's mother-in-law used to abuse her for having caused them a loss of three lakhs. Rekha told her parents that she would adjust in her in-laws' place because her husband was good to her.

On the sixth day after Rekha's death, her father-in-law, Laksh-man Rao, younger brother-in-law, Parameswaran, with a police circle inspector, Bodhan of Nizamabad, visited the political science department of Osmania university and

enquired about her conduct when she had studied there. they told department members that Rekha was missing from the house and they suspected that she had run away with some boy so they wanted to know whether she had been friendly with any boy in her class.

The Dowry Deaths Investigation Committee informed the police that after Rekha's cremation, the in-laws had made such enquiries at the university, but the police ignored this highly suspicious fact. The investigative officer made a philosophical speech, saying that no one can do anything as long as society is in its present condition. So far, no arrests have been made. Since Rekha's father-in-law are police officers, everyone doubts whether an impartial investigation will be conducted.

—Y. Nirmala