

Press Release

The Human Rights Forum (HRF) is of the view that the police response is insufficient in the case of the killing of Yadavalli Hemavathi (23) by her family for having married a Scheduled Caste person. We demand inclusion of the names of all those who abetted Hemavathi's family in committing this ghastly crime as well as those police personnel who ignored various pleas by Hemavathi's husband Mogilapuvuri Kesavulu (27) over the last two years. Had the police initiated timely response to these complaints, as they are supposed to do under Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, this murder would perhaps not have taken place.

HRF also demands that the names of Babu Naidu and Kupendra Naidu, of village Mandipeta-Kotamuru, should be included in the FIR filed by the Palamaner police station. Those police personnel of Gangavaram police station and the Palamaner PS who willfully neglected their duties when Kesavulu and Hemavathi sought to file FIRs with them regarding the harassment they were facing at the hands of the accused in the present case, must also be booked under Section 4 of the SC and ST (POA) Act.

Following media reports about the killing of Y Hemavathi, a three-member HRF team on Sunday visited Mandipeta-Kotamuru and Palamaner in Chittoor district to ascertain facts of the case. We met and spoke with M Kesavulu and his family members at Mandipeta-Kotamuru. We also met the Palamaner DSP, Yugandhar Babu and spoke to him about the case.

On the evening of June 28, 2019, Kesavulu and Hemavathi alighted the bus at Kaalavapalli check post near Oosarapenta with their 7-day old child. They were returning to their village Mandipeta-Kotamaru (in Palamaner mandal) after getting their infant son checked at a private hospital in Palamaner. Waiting for them at the check post were Hemavathi's parents Yadavalli Bhaskar Naidu and Y. Varalakshmi, her younger sister Y. Nikhila, elder brother Y. Bhanu Prakash and younger brother Y. Charan. As soon as the couple alighted the bus with their son, Hemavathi was abused by her parents and relatives for returning to the village. Pushing aside Kesavulu, they forced Hemavathi on to a bike and took her to their

residence by a route where the presence of people is minimal. They locked her up in their house, threatened Kesavulu who in the meantime had reached the house, and then took Hemavathi to their field adjacent to the house and hacked her to death. The body was then buried in a dried up well in the field. The police have since arrested Varalakshmi and Nikhila and we have learnt that the other three accused are also in police custody. They are expected to be produced before a magistrate soon.

Kesavulu belongs to the Arava Mala caste, a Scheduled Caste, and ekes out a living as an electrician. He was working as an electrician with Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) before his marriage to Hemavathi. Both he and Hemavathi, who was a kamma by caste, are from the same village Mandipeta-Kotumuru. They fell in love in 2012 and got married in 2017. From the beginning, Hemavathi's parents were opposed to the relationship which was why the couple got married in secrecy. Hemavathi, who was pursuing B.Tech at the time of the marriage, discontinued studies. Her parents lodged a complaint with the Palamaner police who, instead of counselling them about the couples legal right to choose the partner of their liking, 'settled' the issue and sent Hemavathi back to her home along with her parents. Hemavathi was beaten up at home for marrying Kesavulu.

A few days later, however, Hemavathi escaped from the house after which she and Kesavulu moved out of their village. Fearing for their safety, they stayed for varying periods of time in Bengaluru, Mogili, Chittoor, Tangalla Agrharam and Bangarupalyam. Hemavathi's parents continued their efforts to track them down and also enquired about their whereabouts with Kesavulu's friends including P. Niranjan who also works as an electrician at the TTD.

Last year when Hemavathi, who had resumed studies, completed the 1st semester of B.Tech, her sister Nikhila called to inform her that various certificates of Hemavathi were lying at home and she would like to hand them over to her. Believing her words, Hemavathi went to meet her and other family members near the college where she was then studying. However, when Kesavulu wanted to accompany her for the meeting, Y. Bhaskar Naidu refused saying that it was their family matter and he better stay back. The family on that occasion too took

Hemavathi away forcefully on a vehicle and locked her up in the house. Kesavulu along with his friends went to Gangavaram police station to complain about the kidnapping. The police, however, refused to file an FIR saying that he should first obtain permission from a village elder belonging to the Kamma caste. Apart from demanding money, they also said he must go to the Palamaner police station to file the complaint. No FIR was therefore lodged. Hemavathi, meanwhile, managed to escape once again from her parent's captivity and returned to Keshavulu.

In the first week of January, 2019, Kesavulu's father Govindaiah, who was working on a road construction project in the village close to Bhaskar Naidu's house, was attacked by the latter who also hurled casteist abuses. When Kesavulu, Hemavathi, and Govindaiah then went to the Palamaner PS to file a complaint, the police personnel there too refused to do so. They asked the three to obtain a recommendation from Aetukuri Jagadeesh Naidu, the contractor of the CC road project and a relative of Bhaskar Naidu, for a complaint to be filed. No FIR was lodged on this occasion also.

We have also learnt that one Kupendra Naidu of the same village encouraged Hemavathi's parents and the other accused to commit the crime assuring them that he would 'manage things' later. Kupendra Naidu, was convicted in his wife's murder case and had served sentence for a few years at the Rajahmundry Central Prison. There are also allegations that one Babu Naidu had provided Hemavathi's family details of the couple's movements from the time they were in a private hospital in Palamaner getting their child treated.

HRF believes that Hemavathi's killing was not a murder committed in a fit of anger or the spur of the moment. Her family was nurturing hate because she had married a Dalit and intended to teach the couple a lesson. The police, who could have prevented this killing if they had acted upon the complaints they received earlier, refused to do so. The SC/ST (POA) Act empowers the police to initiate preventive action if they perceived any danger from a non-SC/ST person to a SC/ST person. In this case, the police of the Gangavaram and Palamaner stations, willfully neglected their duties and are therefore culpable.

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