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If you love Patel women, stay away

By: Anand Holla and Ketan Ranga
December 26, 2005

Four men, Ajay Nikam, Abhijit Sonavane, Raju Medige and Prashant Samudre, have been waiting for months for their wives to return. The three Maharashtrians and a South Indian, all married to Patel women (Gujarati), have paid a heavy price for choosing inter-caste marriages.

"The four of us became friends due to our common fate. We call each other every day to share our feelings," said Prashant Samudre, husband of Geeta, who was allegedly kidnapped by the notorious Babu Bajrangi on February 12 this year.

Madhavji Patel, Geeta's uncle, state president of Navchetan group, "I don't want to comment. We will reply to the notices. Bajrangi and myself are from the same community".

Teesta Setalvad, secretary of Citizens For Justice and Peace, "This was not just an isolated incident, but a part of an organised crime. I am just providing a helping hand to the victims, this being a very genuine case."

What happened

Babu Bajrangi allegedly kidnapped wives of Nikam, Sonavane, Medige, and Samudre on behalf of the girls' parents, as they married men outside their community without their consent.

On Thursday, the Bombay High Court served notices to the parents of the kidnapped girls, and the police forces of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The recipients have been told to file their response by January 23.



Who's Babu Bajrangi?

The National President of Navchetan Sangathan, a group that allegedly kidnaps Gujarati girls who marry outside the community and forces them to remarry Patel boys. He is the prime accused of the infamous Naroda-Patia massacre after the Godhra riots, in which at least 83 people were killed.

The four men who lost their wives



Abhijit Sonavane (24)

Abhijit and Bhavna knew each other for four years before they got married. Even as Bhavna's parents repeatedly threatened Sonavane, they got secretly married. However, Bhavna's parents and relatives came to Sonavane's house and demanded their daughter come back.

In May 2005, when the Sonavane family had gone for a holiday to Panchgani, a group of 15 kidnapped the pregnant Bhavna. Two days later, the police told the Sonavanes that Bhavna was with Baba Bajrangi by her own will.

A mob of 400 people of Navchetan group accompanied Bhavna to Khandala court on June 13, where she said she did not wish to stay with Abhijit. Later Abhijit learnt Bhavna had filed for divorce under pressure.

Raju Medige (23)

Married Naval against the wishes of both families and her

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parents placed her under house arrest. In January, Naval's relatives began threatening Raju to sign divorce papers or his mother and sister's lives would be in danger. Raju finally gave as he was scared for the well being of his family.

In August, Naval called Raju to tell him that one Atul Patel who had come to Raju's house had plans of taking Naval to Babu Bajrangi. She said Bajrangi would ask questions like, "How many times have you slept with Raju?"

On August 28, the couple decided to meet at a spot and then run away. But Naval didn't turn up. Raju got a call at night and Naval told him she was in Naroda, Ahmedabad. She cried the whole time. Till date does not know where she is. He said, "I want my wife back from the clutches of Bajrangi."



Ajay Nikam (29)

Married Geeta on May 23, 2003 without their parents' consent after five years of dating. They informed their families in October 2004. Geeta's parents, uncle Madhav Patel and aunt Kamla got gangster Babu Bajrangi to abduct her. Geeta disappeared on November 30, 2004, a month after her parents were informed of the marriage.

After the abduction, Ajay received threatening calls from Ahmedabad asking him to forget Geeta. But a determined Ajay went to Ahmedabad, where Bajrangi's men met him. There, he was forced to sign divorce papers at gunpoint.

Nikam said, "In whatever conditions and circumstances, I want my wife back"



Prashant Samudre (26)

Runs a hotel in Miraj, Sangli district, and on May 5 he married Geeta, who went back to stay with her parents, as both intended to complete their studies. She went missing in February after she went to a restaurant after receiving a call. Later, she called Prashant from Ahmedabad and told him she could not break free from those who held her.

But when Prashant reached Naroda he was chased away by eight people. On reaching Miraj, he got a divorce petition. But later in April he came to know his wife was illegally forced to marry Shival Patel in Mumbai.

Another girl, Bharati Patole who had run away from Bajrangi's clutches, she complained to the Karnataka police of the sinister racket.

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