



Sonia Akhter allegedly killed for dowry in Shirajdikhan Upazilla of Munshiganj district

Fact finding Report

Odhikar

In the evening of 6 August 2011, Rakib (24), the husband of Sonia Akhter (20) killed his wife by suffocating her. Sheikh Halem, Sonia's father filed a case as a plaintiff in the Shirajdikhan Police Station of Munshiganj. Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam of Shirajdikhan Police Station is the investigating officer of the case.

. At 12.30 in the night of 11 September 2011, Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam arrested Rakib. The investigating officer Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam framed charge sheet of this case and submitted to the court on 30/09/11.

Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission into this incident. Odhikar interviewed-

- Relatives of the deceased Sonia Akhter
- Elder brother of the accused, Rakib
- Chairman of the victim's area and the female UP member
- Police officers
- Doctor who performed post-mortem

Sheikh Halem (48), Sonia's father

Sheikh Halem told Odhikar that Sonia used to work in a garment-manufacturing factory. She met Rakib there. On 21 January 2011, Rakib and Sonia Akhter got married with 2 lac taka dower money. After their marriage, the couple lived with Rakib's elder brother, Din Islam (25) in Rakib's village Bhura of Shirajdikhan Upazilla. Rakib started demanding dowry and asked his wife to tell her parents to give money for a new house, a television, bed and furniture. Sonia informed her parents about this matter. Sheikh Halem refused to give any money. For this reason, Rakib started abusing Sonia physically and mentally. Shahadat, a neighbour of Rakib, informed Sonia's mother that Rakib was beating Sonia. Sonia's mother asked Sonia, who

admitted to the fact and gave her mother in details. After that, Sonia's parents went to Rakib's home to bring Sonia back; but Rakib refused to let his wife leave.

Sheikh Halem said that he then mortgaged his house and gave 36,000 taka to Rakib for building a house. After a few days, Rakib demanded 15,000 taka to build a bed and Sonia's mother gave him 10,000 taka. On 30 July 2011, Rakib again demanded 5000 taka and Sonia's mother gave him 2000 taka, without informing her husband.

On 6 August 2011 at around 7:00 pm, Rakib's elder brother Din Islam informed Sonia's mother Minu Begum that Sonia had collapsed and asked them to come to the house. Sonia's parents and cousin Arif left for Rakib's home and reached the house at around 9:30 pm. They learnt from Din Islam and his wife Mahima Akhter that Sonia closed the bedroom door and hung herself with a scarf. Din Islam said he bought the body down.

At around 11:00 in the night, he along with Sonia's cousin Arif and Shohag went to Shirajdikhan Police Station where police were told them to wait till the next morning. The police said that a case would be filed after seeing the body in the morning. On 7 August 2011 at around 10 in the morning he (Halem), Mahbubur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shirajdikhan Police Station, Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam and Upazilla Porishod member Meherunnessa went to Rakib's house. They saw Sonia on the bed covered by a quilt. Her face was normal but there were two bruises on both sides of her throat. Sheikh Halem said that he believed Sonia did not hang herself. Moreover, Sonia did not look like died by hanging. He said that Rakib with his family members killed her by strangling her with a scarf for dowry money.

Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam and Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mahbubur Rahman prepared the inquesting report of the body of Sonia in the presence of everybody. Sub inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam took the body to the Police Station at around 11:00 am. On 7 August 2011 at around 1.15 pm, he filed a suit against Rakib in the Shirajdikhan Police Station as a plaintiff. The case number is: 9, date: 7.8.2011, under section 11(ka) of the Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain/2000 (Amendment) 2003 on the crime of killing a wife on the demand of dowry. However, the police and Shohag, Chairman of Rakib's area, recorded the case in a different way in favor of Rakib. He also said that Rakib's elder brother Din Islam was involved in the matter. However, police and Chairman Shohag avoided mentioning this.

Then police took the body of Sonia to Munshiganj Sadar Hospital for post-mortem. After post-mortem, the body was brought to the Abirpara village and buried there.

Minu Begum (37), Sonia's mother

Minu Begum told Odhikar that she found out from neighbours and from Sonia that Rakib started abusing his wife physically and mentally from the third day of their marriage. She gave 36,000 taka to Rakib for building a home. After a few days, Rakib again demanded 15,000 taka to make a bed but she could only give him 10,000 taka. Then Rakib demanded 5000 taka more and on 30 June 2011, she gave 2000 taka. On 6 August 2011, she talked to Sonia in the late afternoon.

After iftar (the sunset meal that breaks the fast during Ramadan) she got a call from Rakib's elder brother, Din Islam and went to Rakib's home at around 9.30 pm with Sonia's father and her cousin. There they came to know that Sonia hanged herself. They asked Din Islam how he knew she had been hanged and Din Islam said that the door was open and he saw Sonia hanging and got the body down. She then asked him how Sonia could have hung herself with the door open and people in the house. In reply, Din Islam began verbally abusing Sonia's mother. Minu Begum also said that Sonia lay looking like she had just gone to sleep and her arms and legs were not cold. On both sides of Sonia's neck, just below her jaw, there were two bruises. She believes that the family members of Rakib's family killed Sonia and tried to make it look like a suicide.

Dr. Abul Khayer (52), Janapriyo Medical Hall, Shirajdikhan Market, Munshiganj

Dr. Abul Khayer told Odhikar that Sheikh Halem is his next-door neighbor. Hearing the news of Sonia's death, he went to the Police Station on 7 August 2011 and saw two marks on the neck. He did not see any evidence of hanging.

Din Islam (25), elder brother of the accused

Din Islam informed Odhikar that when he returned home after fishing, he saw Sonia and Rakib talking. Later on, he went to their room and found Sonia dead on the bed and Rakib absent. After that, he called Sonia's mother and asked her to come. He also called the neighbors and the former UP member Billal Hossain.

Meherunnesa, female UP member, Abirpara village

Meherunnesa told Odhikar that she went to the Police Station to report the news of the death of Sonia, the daughter of Seikh Halem to the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shirajdikhan Police Station. Hearing details the Officer-in-Charge (OC) said that he would investigate the matter the next morning. On 7 August 2011 around 10:00 am she along with Sonia's parents, neighbors, relatives, Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam and Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mahbubur Rahman went to Rakib's home. They saw Sonia laid on the bed and learnt that Rakib had absconded. Police took the body to Shirajdikhan Police Station after preparing the inquesting report. After filing the case, the body was sent to Munshiganj Sadar Hospital for post-mortem.

Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam, Investigating officer of the case, Shirajdikhan Police Station, Munshiganj

Sub Inspector (SI) Shofikul Islam told Odhikar that at around 10 in the morning of 7 August 2011 he went to Rakib's home for inquesting after hearing the news of Sonia's death. He saw that the body was laid on the bed and covered by quilt. He brought the body and the investigation report to Shirajdikhan Police Station. On 7 August 2011, Sonia's father filed a case in Shirajdikhan Police Station as a plaintiff. Case number is 9, dated: 7.8.11 under section 11(ka) of the Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain/2000 (Amendment) 2003. He did not get the post-mortem report yet.

Dr. Ehsanul Karim, Resident Medical Officer (R.M.O) Sadar Hospital, Munshiganj

Dr. Ehsanul Karim told Odhikar that by the post-mortem examination, he found that Sonia was killed by strangulation. He also found an injury on the right side of her head. He did not find any sign of hanging.

Odhikar's statement

Odhikar demands that the Government to take initiatives to ensure that the Dowry Prohibition Act is properly implemented and that acts of violence against women be properly investigated and taken into serious consideration by the law enforcement agencies and the courts of law.