

*Sarojini Nagar Police Station*

## **Death on the Move**

**People's Union for Democratic Rights  
Delhi  
September 1996**

Nineteen year old Sonu was picked up by police personnel of Sarojini Nagar Police Station from his house at Chanakya Place near Janakpuri on 29 August 1996. He was ostensibly taken for questioning regarding the whereabouts of his younger brother who had escaped from police custody a day earlier. Sonu was taken in a police vehicle to various places till finally his dead body was brought to Safdarjung Hospital and recorded as unidentified. This was in the early hours of 30 August. A day later the news of his death was reported in the newspapers.

Interviews with family members revealed the following sequence of events. Sonu's brother, Deepak (14) was picked up by policemen on 20 August from a place close to his residence. Their mother Kamlesh was informed of it by other residents. Three days later at 9.30 a.m. three policemen again came to the house and asked Kamlesh to accompany them. She was first detained at Dabri P.S. for an hour before being brought to the Sarojini Nagar P.S. where her son Deepak too was being detained. Deepak had been stripped of his clothes and his hands and feet were tied. Kamlesh was questioned about Sonu's whereabouts. On 25 August around 9.30 p.m. at the P.S., Deepak was stripped in front of her and mercilessly beaten. Some hours later Kamlesh was asked to put her signature on a paper. When she enquired what was written on the paper, she was slapped and forced to sign. Around noon on 26 August before being taken to a magistrate, she was threatened that Sonu would be killed.

Both Kamlesh and Deepak were remanded to judicial custody at Tihar. The magistrate ordered an X-ray examination of Deepak to ascertain his age. According to the police Deepak was brought to Safdarjung Hospital on 29 August from where he managed to escape.

Around 3 p.m. the same day a police party came to Sonu's house. Sonu and his wife Geeta were present there. According to Geeta, Sonu was dragged out of the house and beaten with lathis and handcuffs before being taken away in the police vehicle.

According to Raju, Geeta's brother-in-law, around 15 persons, two in police uniform, came to Tilak Vihar in two vehicles, a private car and a police gypsy. Geeta's sister, her brother Mangal, her parents, and Raju were present in the house. Policemen enquired about Deepak's whereabouts. Getting no information they pounced upon Mangal and started beating him. Raju and Mangal were put in the police gypsy. Sonu was also in the vehicle. In the vehicle the policemen were intermittently hitting Sonu. After travelling a small distance, one of the tyres of the police gypsy blew a puncture near the Harijan colony close to Vikaspuri. Sonu was beaten on the street with a wrench, handcuffs and fetter chains for the half hour it took to repair the tyre. They were then brought to Sonu's house but nobody was present there. Sonu was taken to a road crossing some distance away and beaten with lathis.

When they were again put into the vehicle, the police party received a wireless message following which a policeman said that he would make a phone call. After the phone call at a nearby lottery shop, Raju and Mangal were shifted to the private car and brought to the Sarojini Nagar P.S. and detained in a room. Around half an hour later they heard three shouts from Sonu, pleading with the policemen to spare him. They however did not hear any sounds of beating.

Around 2 a.m. on 30 August, policemen in three vehicles came to Sonu's maternal grandfather's house, also at Chanakya Place. Sonu's uncle Sushil Kumar (*maama*) was dragged into the police gypsy. Both the uncle and the grandfather saw Sonu motionless, bundled up in front of the driver's seat, his mouth, feet and ankles tied.

At 2.40 a.m. policemen, most of them in plain clothes, reached Sonu's aunt's (*maasi*) house at Burari in three vehicles. There are allegations that many of the men in plain clothes were lumpens. The aunt, her husband and two of Sonu's brothers were sleeping on the terrace of the house. They were woken and asked about Deepak's whereabouts. On getting no information, one of Sonu's brothers, Joginder Lal, was beaten and all of them were taken out of the house. Joginder Lal was asked to pay Rs. one lakh to be spared. A policeman took him to an autoricksha parked nearby and threatened to shoot him. The driver of the police gypsy was asked to bring the vehicle closer to the house. A policeman then pulled Joginder towards the police gypsy. The driver came out of the vehicle and took the policeman aside. All the family saw Sonu tied in the same position as at Chanakya Place. Policemen then decided against picking up Joginder. Sushil Kumar, picked up earlier, was also made to unboard the vehicle.

Sonu's dead body was brought to Safdarjung Hospital in the early hours of the morning, as *laawaris* (unclaimed and unidentified). At 6.00 a.m. Raju and Mangal were allowed to leave the police station.

At 4.00 p.m. Sonu's maternal grandfather was asked to accompany policemen to the office of the SDM at Mehrauli. There he was informed of Sonu's death. Enquiry by the SDM and another by the South West District Crime Cell

of the Delhi Police was started. Eight policemen were suspended. A case of culpable homicide (S. 304, IPC) was registered regarding Sonu's death, but no accused were named. Post mortem examination was conducted on 31 August. It confirmed 51 marks of injury all over the body including six burn injuries. It concluded that Sonu's death resulted due to shock. The dead body was cremated on the night of 31 August amid tight police security.

Between 5 and 8 September, policemen and others made visits to the grandfather's house, and offered Rs. 1.5 lakh to ensure that family members do not testify in court. On refusing to accept this 'settlement', family members were threatened that Deepak, who is still missing, would be killed. On 8 September two suspended policemen also came to the house and threatened that they would not be allowed to reach the court.

### **Police Version**

News reports quoted the version of the happenings that led to Sonu's death as related by senior police officers including the District Commissioner of Police, South West and the Additional Commissioner of Police, Southern Range. The account presented by the police officers was as follows: Sonu was "an accused" in a case of theft in which his younger brother Deepak was arrested. Following Deepak's escape from custody, Sonu "willingly joined" the police investigation to trace Deepak. Sonu "was unwell" and when the police had taken him to Burari, Sonu "had suffered some minor injuries" while "trying to escape from the police jeep he was travelling in". The injuries sustained were "not grievous enough to cause death". He was never taken to the police station. After Sonu "complained that he was feeling unwell", he was taken to Safdarjung Hospital. Sonu "died in the hospital". Following the death a case under section 304 was "registered against the police officers" accompanying Sonu.

Police officials, including the SHO and Additional SHO of Sarojini Nagar P.S. and the DCP South West refused to give any account of the happenings to the PUDR investigation team. While the Addl. SHO refused to talk about the death, the SHO took shield behind the specious and oft repeated argument that he was on leave at the time of death and therefore was not aware of the facts; an ignorance he can least afford as head of the police station. The DCP, however, was more forthcoming. He dwelled at length on the difficulties of police investigation, the expertise shown by the policemen accompanying Sonu in other cases, and Sonu's misdemeanours in the past. According to him, Sonu was involved in 37 cases of serious crime. However the records at the Janakpuri P.S. confirm that he was an accused in 25 cases of petty house theft (without weapons). But he did not divulge any information about Sonu's death. He even denied having given any account to the press.

### **Findings**

The findings of the PUDR investigation team have revealed all of the above statements to be false. Sonu was neither an accused in the theft nor had he willingly joined the police investigation, nor was he even unwell. By the time

the police party reached Burari village, Sonu was in no shape to complain of illness let alone attempt escape. The injuries suffered by him were grievous enough to cause death. He was brought to the police station. He died before reaching hospital. No policemen have been held responsible for his death. This death illustrates an unprecedented brutality and sophistication on the part of the police.

Following are the conclusions emerging out of the PUDR investigation.

1. That Sonu died as a result of beating by policemen.
2. That the identity of many persons accompanying the uniformed policemen is being withheld.
3. That no policeman has as yet been accused of the death of Sonu.
4. That the Delhi Police authorities, including senior police officials, gave a false and misleading account of the happenings.
5. That Sonu's brother, Deepak, and mother, Kamlesh, were kept in illegal detention at Sarojini Nagar P.S. for periods of 6 days and 3 days respectively.
6. That Raju, Mangal, Sushil and Joginder Lal were beaten by policemen and that the first three were also illegally detained.

In view of the fact that the family is being threatened repeatedly either by policemen or at their behest, PUDR apprehends serious danger to Deepak and other family members.

#### **PUDR demands**

- ☐ That the family be provided with protection.
- ☐ That identities of all the persons (at least 15) involved in the police raids be disclosed.
- ☐ That charges of murder (S. 302, IPC) be filed against all those involved including the incharge of the Sarojini Nagar P.S.
- ☐ That the SHO, Sarojini Nagar P.S. and other policemen be charged for illegal detention of Kamlesh and Deepak.
- ☐ That further investigations and filing of chargesheets be handed over to the CBI.
- ☐ That compensation be paid for the death of Sonu, the beating of four persons, and illegal detention of five persons.

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