The Parent Trap

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When 32-year-old Dr. Humayra Abedin came to Dhaka from London in August, she thought she would be attending to her ailing mother. Instead she was allegedly locked away by her own family, her passport taken away and cut off from the rest of the world. There were claims that her parents thought she was insane because she had fallen in love with a Hindu man and wanted her to marry someone of their choice. This year the UK government's Forced Marriage Unit was contacted by 1,308 concerned callers fearing they or someone close to them might be forced into marriage. It has become such a huge crisis in the UK (among mainly South Asian families) that the government recently passed a Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act to protect victims of forced marriage.

"I wish I could see you once in my lifetime. This is the only wish I have. Most important thing is please try to forgive me if you can. I AM SORRY. Please don't hate me. My life is already ruined. I don't care any more. I just want to end my life as nothing left to live and look forward to. You are one of the best person. I will always remember you. I wanted to grow old with you. It will never happen now" -- these are the words from an email that Humayra managed to send to a close friend in the four months that she has been held captive by her own parents.

Humayra Abedin, the only child of Mohammed Joynal Abedin, a retired businessman, and his wife, a housewife, was trained as a doctor in Bangladesh. She went to England in 2002 to study at Leeds University. She used to live in Leyton, in East London and was working in hospitals across the capital at that time. She was studying to become a GP. When her family found out that she had developed a close friendship with a Hindu Bangladeshi man in London they were furious. According to UK press reports since May of this year they have been desperately trying to force her into a marriage with a Muslim man. According to The UK Independent the Metropolitan Police launched an inquiry at the end of June, after she was held captive in her flat by her mother and uncle, who visited for several days. Her case had also been taken up by Interpol.

When the family realised that they wouldn't be able to force her into a marriage because of the strict laws it was alleged that they thought the best way to get her married to someone of their choice would be to bring her to Bangladesh. In August her mother sent news to her that she was seriously ill and she should immediately come to see her. Once in the family house from August 5 her parents hid her passport and plane ticket, and held her captive. She was allegedly physically and psychologically abused and not allowed to have contact with anyone outside the house. According to The UK Independent her family at one point tried to admit her to a psychiatric hospital saying that her relationship with a Hindu man was a sign of mental illness.

Her only ally was her cousin Dr Shipra Chaudhury who got in touch with lawyers at ASK who had been looking into the matter since August. Her other family members were hostile towards her and had no sympathy for her situation. Although ASK staff and police, alerted to this situation, were able to meet her for a few moments in August 2008, they were obstructed by her parents from speaking to her in private. After that brief meeting none of them were able to get in touch with her. The High Court had on October 27 directed the parents and uncle to appear and to produce Humayra in person, after ASK and Humayra's cousin filed a habeas corpus petition that she was being confined against her will. The parents