

Dr. Humayra Abedin Source: www.theage.com.au

This particular case of Humayra Abedin portrays why forced marriages have increased so much in recent years. South Asian parents seem to be paranoid about their children choosing partners outside their religion and nationality.

and uncle failed to comply and after the Court ordered the top police official to ensure Humayra's recovery, lawyers for the parents finally appeared before the Court. But the parents continued to fail to comply with the Court's orders failing to produce Humayra before the court. The parents claimed through their lawyers that Humayra, though an adult, should be in her parents' custody first on the ground that she was 'unmarried' and later, because she was 'mentally ill'.

The parents continued not to comply with the order to produce Humayra before the Court throughout November. The Court issued a suo motu contempt notice on the parents and uncle and directed them to appear in person on December 3. The parents and uncle did come to court but without Humayra. At one point Humayra was able to send an email to a close friend in the UK where she expressed deep depression under the circumstances and there were underlying indications that she was either contemplating suicide or that she would be killed. A British court, at this point, directed the parents and uncle to disclose Humayra's whereabouts, not to harass her and force her into a marriage and hand her over to ASK or the British High Commission (HC) in Bangladesh.

On December 14 Humayra was finally produced before the court. She expressed that her movement was severely restricted since August. She voiced her desire to pursue her education in England. The High Court ordered the Police Commissioner and Court officers to escort Humayra to the British High Commission to arrange Humayra's safe travel to London.

Humayra is just one of many Bangladeshis who are forced into marriages against their will every year. Not just in Bangladesh, but throughout the South Asian and some African disapora community in the UK and USA. According to the UK Independent in the first nine months of 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. The unit directly helped 388 of these victims -- nearly twice as many as in 2007.

The new Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 which came into force in November 2008 because of the high number of reported cases, offers protection to all residents of the UK. This Act allowed the UK government to intervene in Humayra's case which otherwise would have been treated as a domestic matter for Bangladesh.

Forced marriages are different from arranged marriages. In an arranged marriage, the family will take the lead in arranging the match but couples have the choice as to whether or not to proceed with the marriage. With forced marriages there is no choice. It is a form of domestic violence and an abuse of human rights. There is usually much emotional and physical violence and manipulation involved, where a person is sometimes forced to agree to the marriage in fear of his/her life. According to an article by Sara Hossain and Suzanne Turner every year at least 1000 women are abducted from the UK by their families and taken to a foreign country in order to be forced into marriage. The majority appear to be Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women from the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi diasporic communities in Britain. According to the UK government's Forced Marriage Unit 85 percent of victims of forced marriages are women and girls and 44 percent of the overseas cases dealt with by the government's Forced Marriage Unit involved minors.

In 2007 the UK government's Forced Marriage Unit rescued an 11-year-old British girl of Bangladeshi origin whose parents married her to a Bangladeshi man in Dhaka. She was the youngest helped by the unit. The girl