

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > India > Fundamentalism, communalism, extreme right, secularism (India) > **Calcutta Murder for Inter Religious Marriage: Commentary**

Calcutta Murder for Inter Religious Marriage: Commentary

Thursday 18 October 2007, by [DASGUPTA Rajashri](#), [PUNIYANI Ram](#), [The Telegraph \(India\)](#), [The Times of India](#) (Date first published: 16 September 2007).

Contents

- [LOVE AND BE DAMNED](#)
- [HIDE YOUR LOVE AWAY](#)
- [EDITORIAL - BLOOD ON THE \(...\)](#)
- [YOUNG LOVE, OLD RULES](#)
- [CALCUTTA RIZWAN MURDER - \(...\)](#)

LOVE AND BE DAMNED

by **Ram Puniyani**

* **Issues in Secular Politics, October II 2007.**

When Rizwanur Rahman, a graphic designer, was found dead on the railway tracks of Kolkata, the police chief without 'wasting' any time, instantly proclaimed that it is a case of suicide. He had no patience to go through the proper investigation, postmortem report etc. This raised many a questions about the motives behind his immediate reaction. as the circumstances of his death raised a lot of questions at various levels.

The back ground of the incident is very tragic. Rizwan was coming from the slums, got trained as a graphic designer and later married his love Priyanka Todi, daughter of the owner of Lux undergarment enterprise, which specializes in marketing, aandar ki baat, an empire worth over two hundred crores. After their marriage the police intervened, summoned Rizwan, and commented that it is a marriage of unequals and that it is natural for Priyanka's father to be upset. Rizwan and his friend Sadiq, the witness to their marriage, were intimidated repeatedly by the police. Rizwan approached Association for

Protection of Democratic Rights and was to meet them in the evening. But that meeting did not take place as he was found dead on the railway tracks. Just prior to this, police told the couple that Priyanka should go back to her fathers house, she should go back for a week, after which police will ensure that she will come back. The couple refused. When all these intimidatory tactics of police failed they threatened that either Priyanaka goes to her fathers house or they will arrest Rizwan on the charges of abduction and theft. This prompted Priynaka to go to her fathers house after which she became non-contactable for her husband. As per the law police are to provide protection to such couples, thats another side of the story.

To add salt to the injury the women's commission of West Bengal visited Prinaka Todi, at her her fathers place. Priyanka apparently told the commission that she wants to avoid the media glare and wants to get over this past. Also that she has not been pressured into to any statement.

It is not for nothing that they say, truth us stranger than fiction. There can be some obvious other interpretations of the same incident. That the powerful industrialist happens to be close to the police chief adds a minor angle to the story as any way such powerful people can generate their own mechanism to have their way. Whether Rizwan was murdered or committed suicide needs a deeper investigation, that Priyanka might have given this statement under the duress of her father needs to be delved a bit more. Is it something like the case of Zaheera Shiekh, after the Best bakery burning, disowning her statements under allurements and pressure both. One will like to know if Priyanak has given the statement without the blackmail from the family and police or is it what she really feels. All this needs a serious investigation. So far the 'progressive' West Bengal Government's attitude competes with the attitude of the administration of Narendra Modi and many others, as far as giving justice to the victims is concerned.

We are living in strange times. We have a democratic constitution. Incidentally the legal position on such cases of choosing one's life partner against parents wishes, was elaborated in

one Supreme Court judgment. On July 7, 2006, the S C ruled emphatically that there can be no bar on inter-caste or inter-religious marriages. Those who harass, threaten or subject such a couple have to be prosecuted. In the case pertaining to Lata Singh SC observed, "This is a free and democratic country, and once a person becomes a major, he or she can marry whomsoever he/she likes".

Parents despite their disagreement have no right or authority on the decision of the adult children. Maximum they can do is to cut off social relations with the couple. By now the cases of married couples being threatened, and tortured in various ways are too numerous. The society continues to be gripped by the gender hierarchical notion that a girl cannot make her own choice in the matters of marriage. The patriarchal father is the one who calculates the caste, religion, and social hierarchy before 'giving' his daughter. And this position of women is best exemplified in Kanyadaan (gift of daughter) in Hindu marriage ritual. In other religious customs also similar things prevail, 'giving away the bride'. In Pakistan, the society is in the grip of similar hierarchical notion and many a times when the girl makes her choice and marries according to that, she is killed by her own relatives, and the 'nice sounding' but atrocious words is prefixed to that, 'honor killing! 'Honor' for the family, death for the girl!

In many parts of the country especially north India the caste panchayats have been deciding the fate of such couples, they are forced to separate, the girl being asked to tie rakhi on her husbands wrist. The boy or couple being killed at times and in the worst of the cases the girl being raped on the dictates of the panchayat have also been reported. This trend cuts across different religious communities and has most to do with the prevalence of gender hierarchy. Other hierarchical notions, that of economic class, caste angles also get thrown in. With the rise in religion based politics and the retrograde social values, rise in such cases abound. No wonder that worst such case is seen in Gujarat, the Hindu rashtra, being ruled by RSS combine from last decade or so. Here there is one Babu Bajrangi,

whose major 'religious task' is to beat up the couples sitting in parks. Further the couples who have married despite their caste differences, are bashed up by this ardent associate of RSS combine. He does wield lot of patronage from the powers that be, and has tried to break many a marriages. In the same Gujarat many an attacks on Muslim minority were engineered, on the ground that Muslim boys are marrying Hindu girls.

In tune with this are many fatwas, where some elements decide the fate of couples in love, or those who have married. Cases of same Gotra (clan) marriage being subjected to the wrath of the community also abound.

The prevalence of these feudal hierarchical notions and values are far and wide. Here the women is regarded as the embodiment of family and community honor. She is not only regarded as the property of men, her life is controlled by the men in different degrees. Women being the carrier of community honor is also painfully seen during the communal violence, when the women from the 'other community' are subjected to ignominies and violation of the worst type. With coming of democratic norms the equality of women is accepted at formal level. The process of secularization and womens own struggle ensures the transition from formal to substantive equality. It is a process of struggle. The sectarian politics, in the name of religion or race puts the brakes on this process. The ascendancy of these trends retards the process of transformation towards relations of equality. Fascism, Hitler, also assigned a particular role to women, that of a life revolving around Kitchen Church and Children. The Muslim fundamentalists, Talibans, Maulana Maududi and the Hindutva streams also give the secondary subordinate position to women.

In India this process of secularization, transformation in caste and gender relations towards the one of equality, was fairly well on its way till the decades of 80s, when the rise of communalism has put severe brakes on this process. What is surprising is that even in West Bengal, which is ruled by the Left front Govt., the matters don't seem to be much different. In Rizwans case while the human tragedy is of

mammoth scale, the intolerance of high and mighty is very intimidating. The collusion of state machinery with the mighty gives dangerous signal for democratic polity. Here the mighty, a Hindu trader/industrialist, presumably upper caste, exercises his worst possible trait, in the pursuit of patriarchal controls over his daughter. Rizwan coming from the background of average to low economic status and coming from the 'other religion' has been his nemesis. It is reflections of our times that the retrograde social values are on the upswing and WB is no exception to this down hill journey. The left front rule does deserve the credit for operation Barga, but the cultural scene seems to be no different from the other places. Communalization of social psyche is similar to the other places in the country. On the front of communalism, the only credit which can be given to LF government is absence of communal violence. But absence of violence does not mean that communalism is not there or that the social common sense and the social norms are any better.

How many more Rizwans will be sacrificed on the alter of the family honor?

HIDE YOUR LOVE AWAY

by Rajashri Dasgupta

** The Times of India, 4 Oct 2007.*

Rizwanur Rehman's charming smile refuses to fade from people's memory. After his body was found on September 21 on train tracks in the heart of Kolkata, there have been numerous candlelight vigils, angry protests and demonstrations demanding the truth about his death.

While his family suspects that Rizwanur was murdered, the police commissioner shrugged away his death as a "simple case of suicide" even before the post-mortem was complete.

Whatever the truth, Rizwanur's tragic death, the trauma of his wife Priyanka and brutal interference by the police reflects the daily

struggle of lovers who defy tradition and resist authority to marry persons of their choice.

Theirs was a romance that defied all socially appropriate norms.

While Rizwanur was a Muslim who had struggled from the slums of Tiljala to become a graphic designer and teacher, his 23-year-old wife, Priyanka Todi is a Hindu and belongs to the Rs 200-crore-plus Lux hosiery andar-ki-baat-hai business family.

The couple's crime was the assertion of their choice, which was seen as a direct attack on parental authority, community, social norms and religious beliefs.

The story of Priyanka-Rizwanur is the eternal tale of young couples trapped between their desire, the rights guaranteed by the law and their socio-cultural reality. It is about how the family, community and state agencies like the police treat love as a criminal activity and young lovers as criminals.

In the last few years there has been a growing concern about the violence — popularly called “honour killings” — which couples face when they marry of their own choice or have a relationship.

Since marriage is the only socially sanctioned sexual relationship, the display of romantic love and desire by couples like Priyanka-Rizwan's is seen to bring “shame” on “family honour” since it does not follow the norms of class, religion and caste. Those who breach the social arrangement face disapproval, stiff resistance, violence — and even death.

Rural north India is replete with cases of crimes committed against “love marriage” couples, ranging from their being hounded out of the village, the wife being forced to tie a rakhi on her husband or the couple being hanged to death. Urban India is not very different.

As Dinanath Bhaskar, chairperson of the scheduled caste/scheduled tribes commission, Uttar Pradesh, puts it: "For inter-caste and religious love affairs to crystallise into marriage and then for the couple to survive, they require three Ms, money, muscle power and manpower".

The comment reflects the yawning gap between the written law and social reality.

On July 7, 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that there can be no bar on inter-caste or inter-religious marriages. Anyone who harasses, threatens or subjects such a couple to acts of violence will be prosecuted. SC observed in Lata Singh's case, "This is a free and democratic country, and once a person becomes a major he or she can marry whomsoever he/she likes".

If the parents of the boy or girl did not approve of the marriage, the court stated, the most they can do is to cut off social relations.

Ironically, criminal law, intended to protect women from forced marriages, is used against consenting couples. The natal family in consultation with the police and lawyers invoke laws on rape, abduction and kidnapping to criminalise love and frame the boy.

According to the chief counsellor, National Commission for Women, almost half of the "kidnapping and abduction" charges filed by parents in "love cases" are false.

The assumption of the police and parents is that an adult woman is incapable of choosing her own partner — even though she can vote and decide the future of the country — and must therefore be coaxed, coerced or emotionally blackmailed to do her father's bidding.

The police actively participates in maintaining orthodox beliefs in the name of upholding culture. Senior officers are unmindful of the fact that their attitude violates state law and human rights.

Following Rizwanur's death, the police commissioner justified Todis' opposition to Priyanka's marriage as "natural" and questioned the desirability of relationships in which "financial and social status" do not match. He ended the press conference by asserting that the police would handle similar cases "professionally" — in the same fashion — in the future.

The 'professionalism' with which the Kolkata

police handled the Rizwanur-Priyanka case smacks of its class, social and communal bias. It ends up making marriages from personal choice look like an illegal activity.

The couple had married under the Special Marriage Act and on August 30, fearing harassment by the Todis, sought police protection in writing.

Instead of helping the couple, senior officers summoned them thrice to the police headquarters within a week of their marriage to “persuade” Priyanka to return to her parents and harassed Rizwanur. She finally agreed to go to her family for a week after the police threatened to arrest Rizwanur for abduction and theft. A few days later, Rizwanur was found dead on the tracks.

Perhaps the three Ms have become essential for love to survive even in a Left, progressive state like West Bengal.

(The writer is a Kolkata-based freelance journalist.)

EDITORIAL - BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

The Times of India

16 Oct 2007

West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Saturday met Rizwanur Rahman’s family. This is a welcome, though belated, move. Rizwanur, 23, was found dead next to train tracks on September 21. His untimely death might have become a footnote if it were not for his marriage to Priyanka Todi, daughter of a Kolkata-based hosiery magnate, three weeks earlier. We don’t know whether Rizwanur was murdered, but there is enough evidence that the Kolkata police had been harassing him ever since he dared to cross the religious divide to marry a Hindu girl, that too from a wealthy family.

The circumstances surrounding Rizwanur’s death are a stark reminder that marriages across religion and caste are still unacceptable in

India, even in supposedly progressive cities like Kolkata. Honour killings of couples who transgress social boundaries still happen, particularly in north India. Harassment of couples who marry against their family's wishes is depressingly frequent. A worrying feature is the role of the police who often slap charges of rape, abduction and kidnapping against the groom in such cases.

In Rizwanur's case, the Kolkata police have not acted any differently. Before his death, Rizwanur handed over a statement to human rights organisations with details of how the police, including two IPS officers of deputy commissioner rank, had threatened him and his newly-wed wife. Kolkata police commissioner Prasun Mukherjee, too, has come off poorly. Soon after Rizwanur's death, he dismissed it as a "simple case of suicide". He even suggested that the police were bound to intervene in a marriage where the families were against it, conveniently ignoring the fact that both the persons involved here were adults. Rizwanur's death provides yet another example of the police's unhealthy proximity with social elites. It is the job of the police to maintain a detached character for the good of the people. But all over India, policemen are seen as being close to the political and social power centres, so much so that senior appointments are almost never made without the assent of the ruling party.

The only bright spot in the Rizwanur episode is the sustained pressure put by civil society on the West Bengal government to identify the guilty. At present, there is a judicial as well as a CID probe being conducted into

Rizwanur's death. The only way some credibility can be recovered by law-enforcing agencies would be to punish those responsible - however well connected they might be - for snuffing out a young life.

YOUNG LOVE, OLD RULES

Marriages based on caste, class and creed are still the norm. The society is fundamentalist at a basic level.

The Telegraph

October 07, 2007

Muslim boy meets Marwari girl. They fall in love. The girl's family is vehemently opposed to the match. Boy and girl get married and the couple move into the boy's house. When pleas and threats fail to bring the girl back home, her father calls the cops and ensures that she is sent back to her parents for seven days. Ten days later, the boy is found dead near the railway tracks.

The tragic end to the Rizwanur Rahman-Priyanka Todi affair has once again highlighted the insurmountable barriers that often come to the surface in the case of mixed marriages. Even in these "progressive" times, when matrimonial sites use the word extensively, and in a "progressive" city like Calcutta. Study what you want to, but marry whom we want you to - remains the parental diktat. Or at least someone whom we will approve of. And most children obey their parents. Few defy norms, like Rizwanur and Priyanka, and if they do, they pay a price.

In the Marwari community, the rules are strict. "There is an unwritten law that the marriage of a Marwari boy or girl outside the community is sacrilege. If a girl marries outside the community it sometimes becomes a matter of honour for the parents," says Ravi Santhalia, a Marwari businessman from Lake Town. Priyanka studying computer graphics was fine; but she could not fall in love and marry her teacher. The community largely feels that the way the Todis dealt with the marriage is unacceptable, but it does not mean that it is ready to accept marrying a Muslim.

It is wrong, however, to think that Marwaris alone resist the idea - it's the same for all communities, including "liberal", educated Bengali Hindus. "The Rizwanur incident is the result of a clash between progressive and conservative values, which is present in every

society. In this case the approach has been arrogant and inhumane," says Prabha Khaitan, social worker and author. "But this attitude is not peculiar to one community."

The limit

While Paroma Bhattacharya (name changed), an IT professional, and Rahil Mirza (name changed), an engineer, both 27 years old, were just friends, the two families would visit each other on social occasions and celebrate festivals together. But everything changed when word was out that they were in love and wanted to get married. Each family accused the other of trying to lure their child. Paroma and Rahil now meet in secret without the knowledge of their parents.

"Romantic marriages are still not the norm in our society. One can find hordes of advertisements for negotiated marriages based on caste and class and at some basic level the society is still fundamentalist. This is why such marriages become an issue," says sociologist Bula Bhadra.

The money factor

Rizwanur had committed a double crime - he not only belonged to a different community but also to a poorer class (as a computer graphics teacher, he earned Rs 10,000 per month; Ashok, Priyanka's father, is the owner of Lux Cozi, a Rs 200-crore company). Though even Bollywood has to admit that inter-community marriages, such as the Hindu-Muslim marriage in Bombay or the Gujarati-Tamil marriage in Ek Duj Ke Liye, are problematic, mainstream Indian films are often based on the poor-boy-meets-rich-girl theme and they usually live happily ever after. Real life seems to be different.

In urban societies, after the religious divide, it's possibly the money factor that matters most. It is not known what the Todis found more objectionable about Rizwanur - his religion or his class. "Religion is not the only problem. We are also extremely class conscious, which adds to the whole issue," feels Bhadra. "Most parents want their daughter to marry into a household more affluent than theirs. Especially because the social status and nature of the household endorses their social status," says Mudar Patherya, a communication consultant.

He should know. Mudar did not have to suffer Rizwanur's fate, but had acted similarly. A devout Muslim, he married Shalini, a Hindu girl, and faced huge opposition from the girl's family. It was not just on the basis of religion, but also because of the difference in economic background. "When I got married in 1993, we faced opposition, especially because of the repercussions of the communal riots on the Babri Masjid issue. But the difference in our economic background was also a reason," he says.

With religion and socio-economic status, caste and region play an important role for an overwhelming majority.

What keeps it going

The Indian sense of tradition. Matrimonial columns in newspapers, even those which come with the tag of "caste no bar", mention the candidate's caste. The "cosmopolitan" ads hardly come with the declaration "religion no bar". It is either Naidu parents looking for a bride or a Baidya girl looking for a groom.

A matrimonial column will have categories on the basis of language, religion, age, caste, community and profession. The search engines of portals like shaadi.com and bharatmatrimony ask the user to enter whether it is a bride or a groom one is searching for, the age of the candidate and the community, with options such as - Hindu: Assamese, Hindu: Bengali, Muslim: Shia, Muslim: Sunni, Christian: Protestant, Christian: Born again. There are even categories like "spiritual".

Online message boards on marriage as an institution have various responses from young Indians, and most of them are conservative.

"We spoil our tradition if we marry outside our community," is one of the responses on a message board on rediff.com that deals with the issue of marrying outside the community.

Another post on the board reads: "Inter-religion marriage - not good between certain communities; inter-caste marriage - up to the individual. religion is a dicey thing.... You will lose everything, your roots, and your anchor in the

form of your family and your identity. Don't do it.... Some communities have never come to accept individual choices, it is better to stay away from them. Inter-caste marriage is fine as long as both the boy and girl are okay with it."

Differences in tastes, customs, value system, are raised as reasons why inter-community marriages should still be considered taboo.

Social repercussions

Parental opposition alone does not make life difficult for the younger generation trying to break out of conservative norms. "It becomes difficult for other brothers and sisters of that girl to get a match in the community," feels Santhalia. Both the communities also consider children of the couple outsiders.

There are very few support systems in place for such couples. Apart from problems such as not getting places to rent, they also lack a platform where they can be heard.

"There is definitely a lack of dedicated forums for such cases, though many of them go to women's organisations and other local organisations," feels Nilanjana Gupta, a coordinator of an NGO called Saman that has dealt with cases of inter-caste and inter-religion marriages.

It is not just marriage that is underlined by communal and caste-based differences - these are deep-rooted beliefs that are part and parcel of the Indian society, feels Gupta. "Platforms for interactions between different communities are still not readily available. As a result biases regarding different communities exist," she says.

There is a ray of hope, feel some. Response to inter-caste or inter-community marriages is not all negative, feels Gupta. "There is a problem regarding social acceptance by family and neighbours, but it is not always the case," says Gupta. Initial resistance often gives way to acceptance, once parents see that their children are happy and Mudar and Shalini are an example.

"We have been accepted not only by the immediate family but by the extended family as well," says Mudar. He and Shalini started the candlelight

vigil outside St Xavier's College for Rizwanur, as a symbol of protest on behalf of the residents of the city.

But it is difficult to feel hopeful while the banality of Rizwanur's death stalks the city every moment.

(Those wanting to volunteer for the candle-light vigil can call 9874304494 or email justizforriz gmail.com)

CALCUTTA RIZWAN MURDER - RUN, RABBIT RUN...

Rizwan was hounded to death for daring to marry for love. Calcutta weeps for him.

by Jaideep Mazumdar

** Outlook Magazine | Oct 22, 2007.*

Fifteen summers ago, a 15-year-old student of St Lawrence School in Calcutta earned kudos for his superb direction of a short play on inter-faith love. After facing the usual trials and tribulations, the play's protagonists 'lived happily ever after'. Fifteen years later, having fallen in love and married a girl from another faith, Rizwanur Rehman realised that real life can be cruelly different. A police force acting at the behest of his rich father-in-law ensured that Rizwan and his new bride Priyanka's love story ended in tragedy.

Rizwan's mysterious death, followed by highly offensive statements by Calcutta's police chief, have sparked unprecedented outrage, galvanised the citizenry to stage daily protest rallies and candle-light vigils, triggered SMS and web campaigns and an outpouring of condemnation and anger against the police and Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and judicial probes ordered by an embattled Buddhadeb have failed to placate protesters, who are demanding a CBI investigation and stern punishment to the police officers instrumental in separating the couple.

There was no reason for this poor-boy-meets-rich-girl story to play out the way it did. Rizwan, from a poor Muslim family, was educated, intelligent, hardworking and decent. A topper in school, he did his undergraduate course in English at St Xavier's College. His father, a Grade IV employee with a small private firm, had passed away by then and Rizwan used to give private tuitions to fund his education. After graduation, he completed a course in graphic designing and became a graphic design teacher at a popular software education centre.

Friends, teachers, colleagues, students and neighbours all remember Rizwan as an outstanding human being-his wit and charm made him utterly lovable, they say. They refuse to believe, as the police claim, that he committed suicide. Rizwan and Priyanka fell in love, but kept their affair secret till they got married on August 18 this year under the Special Marriage Act. Priyanka was aware of Rizwan's humble background, having visited his home thrice before the marriage. She left home on August 31 and shifted to Rizwan's place before informing her father, Ashok Todi, owner of the Rs 200-crore Lux Cozi hosiery brand, about her marriage and her decision to live with her husband and in-laws.

That was when all hell broke loose. Todi, along with relatives, and some employees of his company rushed to the Rehman's small Tiljala Lane flat in the Muslim-dominated Park Circus area. "He stayed here the whole night trying to convince his daughter to end the marriage," Rizwan's elder brother Rukban told Outlook. "He threatened and pleaded with Priyanka to return home, but she refused. He was here for nearly 12 hours and went away angry the next morning, before threatening Rizwan with dire consequences," recalled Rukban. Before going to the Rehman house, Todi had approached the local Karaya police station to intervene. But the cops, having learnt that Rizwan (30) and Priyanka (23) were adults and had married of their own free will, refused to step in, especially at the orders of their boss-the Calcutta police deputy commissioner (south) Jawed Shamim-reputed to be an honest, upright officer.

Having been rebuffed by the local police, Todi

decided to approach Police Commissioner Prasun Mukherjee. He asked his business associate Snehasish Ganguly (elder brother of cricketer Sourav Ganguly) to get him an appointment with Mukherjee. Snehashish, an office-bearer of the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) of which Mukherjee is the president, took Todi along to meet the police chief. Mukherjee directed Todi to deputy commissioner (headquarters) Gyanwant Singh who, in turn, referred him to deputy commissioner (detective department) Ajoy Kumar. Todi filed two false complaints, the first saying his daughter was missing and the second accusing Rizwan of abduction and wrongful confinement. The police officers got into the act, summoning the couple to Lalbazar Police Headquarters thrice, 'counselling' Priyanka to go back to her parents while threatening and abusing Rizwan. Ultimately, on September 8, Kumar told Rizwan that he would be arrested on the basis of Todi's complaint if Priyanka didn't return to her parents' plush, three-storied Salt Lake residence.

Faced with this, Priyanka agreed, but not before getting two written assurances from her uncle Anil Saraogi (who was present in the police officer's chamber)-that she would be allowed to return after a week and that Rizwan wouldn't be threatened or harmed during this period. Kumar stood guarantee to these assurances. That was the last the two saw of each other. They kept in touch over the phone, but only till September 11. After that, all calls Rizwan made to his wife and father-in-law went unanswered. Meanwhile, the city police continued to threaten Rizwan's friend Sadique Hossain, a witness to the marriage, telling him he would be framed in a murder charge if he didn't state that Rizwanur forced Priyanka into marriage. Hossain went to inspector general of police (enforcement branch) Nazrul Islam to complain. While he was in Islam's chamber, a sub-inspector named Krishnendu Das called Hossain on his cellphone to threaten him. Islam heard the threats, and on identifying himself, was told by Das that he was acting on orders. That was exactly what Das and his immediate boss, assistant commissioner Sukanti Chakraborty, told their CID interrogators later.

Fearing for his life and suspecting that his wife was being held prisoner, Rizwan approached a

human rights body, the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) with a written complaint detailing police harassment against him and his friends. "I had detailed discussions with Rizwan and he was prepared to fight the police and his in-laws to get his wife back. He was cool and determined," APDR secretary Sujato Bhadra told Outlook. Bhadra scheduled a meeting with officers at Lalbazar for September 21 afternoon and Rizwan promised to accompany him. "At about 7 am that day (Sep 21)," recalls Rizwan's brother Rukban, "my brother received a phone call that was traced to a PCO booth at Lake Town. He went out immediately, saying he'd be back in two hours." At 10.11 am, Rizwan called up Bhadra to confirm that he would meet him in front of Lalbazar that afternoon.

Around 10.30 am, Rizwan's body was discovered on the railway tracks about 15 minutes' walking distance from the Lake Town PCO. The nature of his injuries and the way the body was lying on the tracks have strengthened the conviction of many that he was murdered.

Park Circus erupted in riots the next day, and the day after, Mukherjee's intemperate comments fuelled people's anger further. Asserting that Rizwan had committed suicide, Mukherjee defended the Todis: "After taking care of their daughter for 23 years, if the family finds she has left them to start a new life with an unknown youth, parents cannot accept it. The reaction of the Todi family was natural.... They reacted because Rizwan's social and financial status didn't match theirs." Mukherjee added the police have dealt with such cases in a "similar manner" and would continue to do so. His comments have evoked widespread condemnation-from former CMs Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Jyoti Basu, senior cabinet ministers, former police chiefs and intellectuals to thousands of ordinary people-and strengthened the suspicion that the police acted at Todi's behest.

Todi, a small-time trader from the Marwari hub of Barabazar till a decade ago, was hugely successful over the past few years after he set up his hosiery unit. He was arrested as the kingpin of a cricket betting racket in the mid-'90s, but released without charges. Many

people, including state transport minister Subhas Chakraborty, have demanded a probe into the Todis' rise. Public works minister Kshiti Goswami has alleged that Todi financed police commissioner Prasun Mukherjee's campaign for the CAB president's post. Todi did in fact sponsor a musical soiree at Lalbazar Police HQ earlier this year, and donated 800 T-shirts to the city cops during an anti-drug rally a few months ago.

Some of the public anger against the police chief has found its way to the CM as well, since he backed Mukherjee against Jagmohan Dalmiya in the CAB elections. Suspicions have also grown about a 'cover-up job' being ordered from the top. "Our government's actions till now inspire little confidence. Injustice has been done to Rizwan, and we're not appearing to do justice now. The judicial probe will only put this case in cold storage," Chakraborty told Outlook.

Meanwhile, the 18-hour candle-light vigil on the pavement outside St Xavier's College on Park Street gathered momentum, with swelling crowds writing messages and poems, vowing to fight for justice. "It's as if Calcutta is reaffirming its identity as a cosmopolitan, tolerant, inclusive city," comments sociologist Bratati Gupta. "Rizwan is like our boy-next-door who has worked hard to rise in life, is the sort of young man who is an ideal for every middle-class family. That he has been so grossly wronged by the moneyed and the powerful is something Calcuttans can't digest, and they feel personally responsible for ensuring justice." Every day, scores of people cutting across religious, age and class barriers visit the Rehman's. Rizwan's mother Kishwar Jahan tells them to ensure that no other mother suffers the tragedy of her son being killed for falling in love. And that she won't be cooking his favourite biriyani every Sunday. Outside, neighbours say they won't be celebrating Eid or Durga Puja this year. Nor, for that matter, will many others in Calcutta.

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P.S.

* Circulated by South Asia Citizens Wire | October 16-18, 2007 |
Dispatch No. 2461 - Year 10 running.