

# Paying heavy price for love marriage

By Nadeem Saeed

MULTAN, Sept 18: Ongoing miseries of Farhat Asif who married a man of her choice against the will of her influential family some three years ago took a bloody turn on Thursday evening when allegedly her brother and his accomplice shot and injured her in a busy Cantonment market.

Farhat, 23, met her friend's brother, Asif Shaikh, in 1996 and decided to marry him. However, their families disapproved the match for 'status' reasons as the girl belonged to a well-off family.

The love birds then opted for civil marriage on Dec 16, 1996, but kept it secret. Three months later the girl disclosed her marriage with Asif. The disclosure infuriated her family who confined her to their residence in Nadirabad locality of the city.

Besides torturing her, they also pressed Asif to divorce her. However the couple refused to succumb to their pressure. Farhat's father, Malik Bashir, a property dealer and the owner of a shopping plaza in Sadar area, shifted her to Rawalpindi to some relatives' house.

During her 'captivity' there, Farhat managed to contact Asif who reached Rawalpindi and took her to Karachi. There they sought Ansaar Burni Welfare Trust's help and started living in a rented house. They stayed there for one and a half year. Asif who ran a general store in Sadar Bazaar in Multan, got job in a factory as a daily-wager. Farhat gave birth to a son who, however, died within three days.

On the other hand, Malik Bashir got registered several criminal cases, including fornication, kidnapping, theft and dacoity, against Asif and his family in various police stations to shatter their routine life. However, reportedly all the cases proved baseless and fabricated dur-

ing investigation.

Farhat's family got a clue and approached the Burni Trust in Karachi in October, 1998. Trust's functionary Sarim Burni arranged a meeting of the couple with the girl's parents in his office. Malik Bashir said that he would accept the marriage if formal matrimonial rites were performed.

"Sarim Burni also convinced us to accept the offer," Asif told this correspondent in a corridor of the Nishtar Hospital's emergency ward on Friday morning when his wife was being operated upon after her brother and an accomplice shot her.

After an assurance by the Burni Trust and Malik Bashir that formal rukhsati of Farhat would be done within 12 days, she accompanied her father to Multan.

Instead of honouring the promise, Malik Bashir reportedly filed a suit in a civil court of Duniyapur to prove the 'Nikah' deed as false. The addresses submitted before the court of both Asif and Farhat were fake and allegedly a hired woman impersonated as Farhat before the court. The court, consequently, announced an ex-parte verdict against the marriage.

In the meantime, her family allegedly kept torturing her to force her accept their will. But Farhat, a graduate, never yielded. Instead, she managed to write a letter to a senior judge of the Multan bench of the Lahore High Court.

The court admitted her 'SOS' letter as habeas corpus petition and a bailiff recovered her on Aug 16. As the matter had become controversial due to the Duniyapur civil court's verdict against the wedlock, Farhat was shifted to Darul Aman.

On Aug 31, she recorded her statement before the court of Justice Fakhru Nisa Khokhar and showed her willingness to go

with her husband. She also expressed her ignorance about having filed any law suit in Duniyapur for the falsification of her marriage. The court permitted her to go with her husband.

Her father and brothers, at this move, reportedly started threatening the couple with dire consequences.

On Thursday night, at about 10pm, when Asif and Farhat were passing by a busy road of Cantonment area, two motorcyclists opened fire on them. Two bullets hit Farhat in her chest, while Asif luckily escaped unhurt. She was rushed to the Nishtar Hospital where her condition was stated to be critical.

Farhat identified the assailants as her brother, Malik Shafiq, and a relative, Malik Qasim. The latter is said to be a constable in the Cantonment police station.

Till Saturday evening no one from the police visited the hospital to record the statement of the critically injured Farhat. However, a man in civvies presenting him as a policeman was seen convincing Asif not to talk to journalists before any formal registration of the FIR.

Asif alleged that he was still being harassed by his in-laws, while his wife was struggling for her life in the operation theatre. He said his business had been ruined and now he was compelled to borrow money to purchase medicines.

He feared for the life of his wife as some suspected people were roaming around the emergency ward. He also alleged that his in-laws were even pressing his lawyer who did not appear before the LHC on Saturday.

He said that even the Ansaar Burni Trust functionary were showing their helplessness in the situation. He alleged that the Trust's people had been bribed by his in-laws