

Mumbai Dalit teen killed over inter-caste relationship

Seven people, including the girl's relatives and their friends, were arrested in connection with the murder by Nerul police.

The Indian Express

Written by [Rohit Alok](#) , [Sadaf Modak](#) | Mumbai | Updated: July 21, 2016



Police said the victim, 15-year-old Swapnil Sonawane, was killed because the girl's family did not approve of him as he belonged to a different caste.

A DALIT boy was allegedly beaten to death on Tuesday night by the family of a 15-year-old girl he was in a relationship with. Police said the victim, 15-year-old Swapnil Sonawane, was killed because the girl's family did not approve of him as he belonged to a different caste.

The girl belongs to the OBC Agri community.

Seven people, including the girl's relatives and their friends, were arrested in connection with the murder by Nerul police on Wednesday. The girl, who has also been listed as an accused, has been sent to a children's home in Bhiwandi.

"The boy's parents claim the girl is responsible for his death. The girl's parents, her two brothers, the brothers' friends and a rickshaw driver who ferried the Sonawane family to the girl's residence have been arrested," Navi Mumbai Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale said.

The names of the accused have been withheld to protect the girl's identity.

According to Swapnil's father Shahaji, on Monday evening, the boy received a call from the girl's brother. "He called him to the building gate with his phone and pen-drive. When Swapnil went downstairs, some boys put him in an autorickshaw and beat him up. He was taken to Nerul police station, where the girl's father was also present," Shahaji said.

Shahaji alleged Swapnil was warned by the police and the girl's father not to get in touch with her again. The two studied in the same school.

When Swapnil's mother and other relatives arrived at the police station Monday night, they were allegedly told by the police to ensure Swapnil ends the relationship. "My wife was told by a lady police officer, 'Why are you behaving like characters in the film Sairat. Your story will also become like the film's.

There will be bloodshed in your home'," Shahaji alleged.

Sairat, a Marathi film, tells the story of an inter-caste couple who are killed in the name of honour by the girl's family.

Shahaji claimed the girl's family took Swapnil's phone and pendrive to destroy any evidence of their relationship.

Nagrale has suspended two police officers on charges of dereliction of duty, including woman sub-inspector Sonali Rajguru, who allegedly made the reference to the film on Monday night, and assistant police inspector Yogesh Mane. Mane allegedly refused to register a complaint when Shahaji approached the police station on Tuesday — hours before Swapnil's murder — because he feared for his son's life.

"It was Swapnil's first day at college on Tuesday. I took him to the police station but one of the police officers did not allow us to meet the senior inspector. My complaint against the girl's brother was not registered. Had they taken action, my son would have been alive today," Shahaji alleged.

While they were at the police station, Shahaji received a call from his daughter, who told him there were some men were at their home, banging on the front door.

"I rushed back and saw 15-20 men, including the girl's brother, waiting for me. I took them to the terrace and he told me that my son and his sister had been in a relationship since they were in Class VII. At first, he threatened me. But later he said we should settle the matter and called me to their home," Shahaji said, adding that he was reluctant to go but the boys assured him an amicable solution could be reached.

"When I reached their home, the girl's father started saying casteist things about me and my son. Both my son and I were slapped. The father called the girl and asked my son to

apologise to her and call her his sister. My son was humiliated and was asked to fall at her feet. He even did that. But the girl's father kicked him. He was so scared that he ran out of the house. Four-five people ran behind him and beat him at the chowk," Shahaji alleged, adding that bystanders did not intervene.

Shahaji alleged he and his wife Gauri were also assaulted.

Originally from Ahmednagar, the Sonawane family has been living in Navi Mumbai for over two decades. Shahaji works in a public sector bank and has two children. He said he was unaware of his son's relationship till Monday evening, when he was told about the incident at the police station.

Police said a friend of the girl's brother spotted her with Swapnil last week and informed her family.

Police said that apart from the girl's family, they are probing the role of the two officers at Nerul police station. "When Swapnil's mother approached the police with some relatives, PSI Rajguru did not pay heed to their requests," said a police officer.

Rajguru, who allegedly also told the two families to "settle" the matter, has been suspended for "gross misconduct".

"Swapnil was injured in his private parts and his chest. Prima facie, it appears that he and his parents tried to flee from the house but the family chased them and beat them up. His skull was cracked and he was left bleeding on a street behind Nerul police station. He was taken to D Y Patil hospital but was declared dead on arrival," said an officer.

The Nerul police have filed a case of murder, kidnapping and criminal intimidation under the IPC. Sections under the Atrocities Act have also been invoked.

Shahaji said he would always rue the moment he decided to take Swapnil to the girl's home.

"I saw my son fall to the ground. I saw him die before my eyes," he said.