

# LONG ROAD TO JUSTICE

**Delays in police investigations and court procedures mean women victims of crimes are often deprived of compensation**

Vidya Venkat

The Supreme Court-mandated Victim Compensation Fund is an excellent scheme for rehabilitating the victims of such heinous crimes as acid attacks, rape, sexual abuse, human trafficking and molestation. But herein lies the catch:

No claim made by the victims under sub-section (4) of the Section 357-A of the CrPC shall be entertained six months after the date of commission of crime as per the government notification on the scheme.

Though provisions for appeal to condone delay in seeking compensation are in place, senior advocate Sudha Ramalingam told *The Hindu* that such a short cut-off period might unnecessarily jeopardise the prospect of victims getting assistance.

The Tamil Nadu government has been operating a victim assistance scheme even before the Supreme Court ordered the setting up of the fund.

The State scheme covers dowry deaths, attempt to burn or murder owing to dowry problem and eve-teasing, too. Ms. Ramalingam suggested that the government use the fine paid by the accused in court to pay the compensation.

Delays occur at various stages of addressing crimes, be it the filing of the First Information Reports and charge sheets or court proceedings. During the course of interviews *The Hindu* conducted with lawyers, acid attack survivors, activists, and the families of the victims of sexual offences, concerns at delays came up

again and again.

P.T. Rajan, a BSNL employee and father of a dowry death victim from Thirumullaivoyal, said that even over two years after the death of his daughter at her in-laws' house, the police had not filed the charge sheet yet. She was set ablaze by her in-laws for not meeting her sister-in-law's demand for gold bangles. "My son-in-law had forced her to drink acid a month before her death. I spent Rs. 10,000 on her treatment. But, at the end of the day, it is not the lack of compensation that hurts me so much as the lack of justice."

D. Geetha, a Madurai-based lawyer fighting for women's rights, recounted the story of Kavitha of North Chennai who underwent four surgeries after an acid attack six years ago. "She did not receive any financial assistance from the government. Though the government is often prompt in awarding compensation for the death of acid attack victims, it should prioritise funding for survivors of such attacks as they have to spend a lot on reconstructive surgeries."

The most disturbing story was the one narrated by Rani, 48.

Her husband had poured acid over her 20 years ago. To date, he is at large. "I make ends meet by tailoring. But the wounds of the past have not healed yet. I still suffer from fatigue and head aches and cannot work long hours like a normal, healthy person."

Rani has lost hope that justice will ever be done. She echoes Mr. Rajan's sentiment. "I don't care for the money, but I want the culprit brought to book."

## DID YOU KNOW?

**1** The State Legal Services Authority/District Legal Services Authority can arrange for compensation if court makes a recommendation.

**2** The victim or her dependents shall report the crime to the officer-in-charge of the police station or any senior police officer or Executive Magistrate or Judicial Magistrate of the area within 48 hours of commission of crime.

**3** Acid attack victims are entitled to interim compensation of Rs. one lakh within 15 days of commission of crime.

### COMPENSATION AMOUNT

LOSS OF LIFE DUE TO ACID ATTACK

up to Rs. 3.5 lakh

ATTEMPT TO BURN DUE TO DOWRY PROBLEM

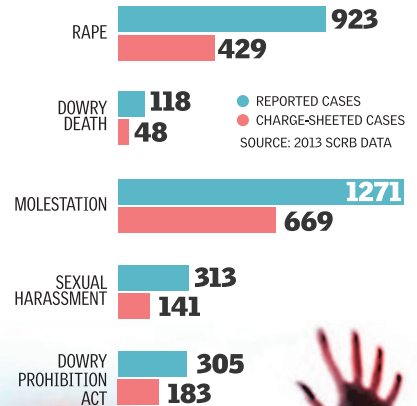
up to Rs. 10,000

DOWRY DEATH

Rs. 20,000

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HOME, PROHIBITION AND EXCISE

### CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN



**It is over twenty years since my husband poured acid over me. I have not received any financial assistance till now. I had to pawn my jewels from marriage to meet medical expenses**

- RANI, 48, ACID ATTACK SURVIVOR

