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Employed as help, girl alleges abuse by family

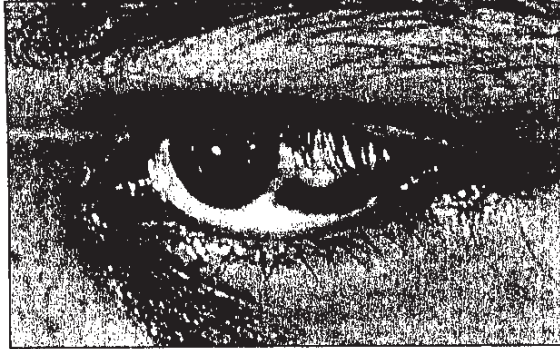
Maria Akram | TNN

Photos: Anindya Chattopadhyay

New Delhi: Swati (name changed) came to Delhi in July for the sake of her impoverished family living in a small village in Ranchi district, Jharkhand. Two months hence, she has landed in a Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) shelter in Burari, sick and battered. The 19-year-old has alleged that she was tortured at the Punjabi Bagh household where she was employed as help and barely escaped death when she was rescued on Saturday night.

When TOI met her on Sunday, Swati had a blood clot in her left eye, and her right hand and left cheek were bruised and swollen; there were deep burn marks on her arms and neck, too. She said she was abused by both the man and woman of the house quite regularly. "If I made a mistake, the woman would burn me with a hot iron press and tongs. I told them that I didn't want to work for them anymore, so last week, the man poked me in the eye with his car keys," she said.

The girl claimed that her cousin brought her to the city and approached a placement agency in Sudarshan Park in July. Within a day, she was placed with the family. "The family took away all my belongings that I had brought from home and would never let me talk to anyone. Even the timings to use the bathroom were fixed—5am and 4.30pm. One slice of bread in the morning and two slices in the



BATTERED: Swati's employer poked her in the eye with car keys when she said she wanted to quit

ed she might die there, so they asked the placement agency to take her back," said Aditya Mishra, project officer with Mukti Ashram in Burari.

The placement agency said that the girl had high fever when she was left at their office. It was then that they called up BBA. "The family alleged that she ate garbage and had stolen some things from their house. They asked for another domestic help," said a worker with the agency.

Swati was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital where she underwent medical tests. But the Punjabi Bagh police station hasn't registered a case yet. "FIR will be registered only after counselling is over. Also, we will know if she was abused only after the MLC report comes," said Devender Singh of the police station. The couple has been detained and are being questioned, police said.

night were given for breakfast and dinner. No lunch. I had only five minutes for taking bath, a minute more and they would thrash me," she alleged.

BBA activists said when they found Swati, she could barely walk. "She has high fever and not fully aware of what is happening around her. The doctors who examined her on Sunday said she has typhoid and possibly malaria. She told us that that she hadn't had food for four days before coming here. The woman would strip her everyday and check if she had stolen anything. But when her condition deteriorated, the family fear-

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