

Cover-up of woman's accidental death in mill shocks commission

Her family denied due compensation under the Employees State Insurance

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R KAMATCHI, 35, died in a fateful industrial accident in a spinning mill in Rajapalayam taluk of Virudhunagar district in 2012. Her death has been covered up and turned into a natural death by her employer. Her family was denied due compensation under the Employees State Insurance (ESI) to which Kamatchi was subscribing. Her death was not even reported to the Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH).

This was a clear case of exploitation of women at workplace and one of the 41 cases that came up before the Tamil Nadu State Commission Women that convened a state-level public hearing on protection of women workers in textile and garment industries held at the office of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) here on Tuesday.

The Kamatchi case has shocked the commission members, who couldn't digest the apathy at all levels. Kamatchi's daughter Rajalakshmi, who petitioned the commission, told *Express* that her mother suffered grievous injuries on September 17, 2012 at Chunaichandran spinning mill when her saree accidentally got caught in the machinery, sucking her in.

"To avoid police complaint, the employer took my mother to a private hospital. Due to excessive bleeding, she succumbed to injuries on September



Kamatchi's daughter Rajalakshmi at the TNPCB office for a State level public hearing convened by the Tamil Nadu State Commission Women in city on Tuesday | EXPRESS

20, 2012. The hospital was asked not to report the death to the police. The mill management did not report the accidental death to the DISH, which is a must. Our village (Kothankulam) heads held a meeting and persuaded the mill management to pay ₹5 lakh as compensation. They did give a cheque for ₹5 lakh, which bounced, and later paid us ₹2.5 lakh and the remaining half is still due. My father is unwell

and does odd jobs. I have finished BA in English and my brother is studying Plus 2. We need money to pursue our studies and to meet daily needs," Rajalakshmi said, explaining her family woes.

At the hearing, one of the mill directors Jayakumar initially claimed before the commission that Kamatchi was on 15-day leave and her death was not due to accident in the factory and the company was not liable to pay any compensation. However, when the commission grilled him presenting the proof of cheques being issued, he admitted to the fact that the accident did happen and gave an undertaking to the commission that the factory would pay the remaining ₹2.5 lakh to the family in a couple of days.

The saddest part is Kamatchi's family was eligible to receive claim under ESI. Officials of the DISH, who were present at the hearing, told the commission that the accident was never reported to the department and on scrutinising the records it was found that Kamatchi was a subscriber of ESI. "Because FIR and postmortem reports were not filed, Kamatchi's family was denied their rightful claim under ESI," the official said.

When asked, Amutha, former labour secretary and member of the commission, said the commission would recommend legal prosecution against the mill for suppressing the facts.

