

'Remains of 3-yr-old hint at child sacrifice'

High-profile forensic and crime scene expert submits report in HC petition filed by victim's father four months after child's remains were found at construction site

PICS: RAJU SHINDE, DEEPAK TURBHEKAR

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More than four months after three-year-old Shreya Rai's skeletal remains were found at a construction site in Borivali, high-profile forensic and crime scene investigation expert Roma Khan last week submitted a report attached to a petition in the Bombay High Court suggesting the girl was a victim of child sacrifice.

Khan told *Mumbai Mirror*, "The way the remains were found indicates a forceful act by which the head was severed and left beside the body. Several such factors hint that this could be a case of child sacrifice." Khan is India's only expert in 'Forensic Archaeology Crime Scene and International Investigations' and recently helped the government in a case involving 'missing children' whose bodies were later found buried. She offered to help Rai's family after reading a *Mumbai Mirror* report.

Rai's remains were found 50 days after she went missing in October. Her father Upendra Rai, 33, said in his petition in which he seeks a CBI inquiry into the case, "Shreya went missing during Diwali and hence the possibility of child sacrifice for religious offering cannot be ruled out." Rai told *Mumbai Mirror*, "I believe that Shreya was sacrificed for some ritual. The police have given up investigations in the case. Moving the high court is my final attempt to seek justice for my daughter." The electrician from Bori-



(Above) The victim, Shreya Rai, whose skeletal remains were found at a construction site. (above right) Her father Upendra Rai filed a petition seeking a CBI inquiry in the case (Below) Police after exhuming the body



vali had reported his daughter missing to the Kasturba police on October 14. In December, he identified his daughter's skeletal remains, which were found only 300 feet away from his chawl.

The petition, which will come up for hearing before the HC on April 27, states, "The head was found severed from the body. Almost all the hair was missing from the head and fingers from hands. Medical reports show that bones were broken and blood was detected on all articles except hair. Yet the police didn't investigate the possibility of sacrifice."

The petition also states that a 10-year-old boy told Rai's wife that he had last seen Shreya with their neighbour Pawan Pandey near a temple in the vicinity. The police arrested Pandey for kidnapping but released him within days after his lawyer argued that he was a minor. Pandey's relative, the petition said, is the temple's head priest.

Khan, who is the CEO of Investigative Scientific and Anthropological Facility or INSAAF, said, "Strangely, the autopsy report doesn't even specify the manner or the cause of death." She added that her report was based mostly on secondary sources like police documents, anecdotes and forensic reports. She told the court she would be able to help more if she could examine the remains.

Rai's lawyer Anand Jondhale said, "If this is indeed an instance of child sacrifice, it is a very serious issue as it has occurred in Mumbai."