

Minor girl fights wedlock

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Ranchi, Feb. 2: A 14-year-old girl from a remote village in Gumla, around 200km from capital Ranchi, has openly defied her parents' diktat to marry her off on February 4, by proactively contacting the police, district legal services authority and child welfare committee to say that she wanted to study.

Mamta Kumari (14), a Class IX girl belonging to a poor OBC family in Hapamuni village, Ghaghra block, who was supposed to deck up as a bride on Thursday, is now spending hours shuttling between the nearest police station, Ghaghra, which is 10km from her home, and district legal services and child welfare officials in Gumla town, asking them to save her from this illegal minor wedding. Gumla police sources have told **The Telegraph**.

Yesterday, when the spunky girl realised her constant pleas to her father Ratan Sahu to stop the wedding



Ninth grader Mamta Kumari at Ghaghra thana in Gumla with a lady constable on Tuesday. Telegraph picture

would have no effect, she told her parents she was going to SS High School in Ghaghra where she studies, but went straight to the police station instead with her plea that her marriage be stopped and she be allowed to study.

The local police directed Mamta to district legal services authority in Gumla town, where she submitted a written complaint to the clerk for the district and sessions judge A.R. Sinha, who heads the district legal services authority whose members include Gumla deputy commissioner Shraavan Say and superintendent of police Bheemsen Tuti.

A sub-judge ranked judicial officer, who happens to be its secretary, forwarded her complaint to SP Tuti.

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Minor girl

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Then, the girl went back home and behaved normally.

This morning, a police team reached Mamta's Hapamuni home and asked her and her parents to come to the *thana*. Though the girl complied, her parents dithered. As the police did not have a warrant, they could not press the parents to come along.

In Ghaghra and Gumla, the girl again repeated her story before the police and child welfare committee members, respectively. SP Tuti told **The Telegraph** that he personally directed Ghaghra police station OC to register a complaint and begin investigations, which have started.

Mamta, who reportedly told the police that her father, a poor farmer who could not afford to educate her further and felt 14 was a marriageable age for a girl in their community, may have been inspired by Birasmuni Kumari (13), yet another Gumla schoolgirl from Palkot block who had last year refused to get married.

Mamta's parents did not turn up before the district child welfare committee to clarify their stand and take her home.

Some of Mamta's relatives did reach the district child welfare office and promise officials they would help her study further, but the child welfare officials did not allow them to take the girl home. Mamta was sent to Gyanashray Bal Grih, a children's home run by NGO Vikas Bharti.

Praising the girl's courage, Gumla district child welfare committee chief Tagren Tanna also rued the fact that her parents apparently had fled.