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"It was my birthday just the day before — the day before my husband was killed," said young Iris Malhotra. "He had bought me a new sari and we had a big party. The next day, that was Sunday the second, I was dying to wear the sari so I thought we could go to my office together — the Junior Artistes' Union office at Mahim. I kept telling him, 'come on, let's go', but he was feeling very lazy. It was Sunday, after all. Then it started raining so he said, 'Forget it'. But I was dying to wear it so I said, 'Let's go to the picture at the cinema next door,' but he had already seen it so I decided to go with my neighbour's daughter, Geeta. I told him to get milk for the baby and went off."

Iris stops for a while. She is very young and, perhaps, looks even younger than she is. She has a heart-shaped face with eyes set wide apart. She looks much too young, much too innocent and much too pretty to have had anything to do with a brutal, cold-blooded murder; to be a widow.

She is very collected, though, and soon carries on.

"We didn't have anything to do with the people around here. These Hare Krishna people. We were their tenants and paid them their rent but but we had nothing to do with them. In the two-and-a-half years we lived here, we never spoke to them once. My husband, Dilip, he had a motorcycle so we would just get onto it and go right out. We never even met them on the way. They used to send us notes, though, all of us

tenants here, saying, 'Don't eat meat', 'Don't eat fish', 'Don't have sex'. Can you imagine? Why, they were married and had children and they're telling us . . ."

The Malhotras occupied a small cottage behind the Hare Krishna temple. The entire compound was known as Nair Wadi until the I.S.K.O.N. (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) bought it over a few years ago. Apart from the newly built temple and hotel premises, the compound includes several blocks of flats, a few cottages and a garden that until a few months ago housed a statue of Gandhiji installed by the tenants. In April, it disappeared, having apparently been severed from its pedestal. During the investigations connected with the recent murder of Dilip Malhotra, the statue was unearthed in one of the temple bathrooms. The general animosity between the tenants and the American devotees has been a well established fact and it is no secret that the devotees have been trying their best to evict them. There are stories that the tenants are not allowed to stand around speaking to each other or to use the common garden. They have also been regular recipients of the aforementioned admonitions.

Iris' mother, Ms. Campos, had come to stay with her daughter. She interrupted her, saying "These Hare Krishnas! They behave as if they have never seen a woman before. The way they stare and stare . . . it doesn't make any difference whether she's a young girl or an old woman."

Iris continued, "When we were coming back from the movie and had just entered the

temple compound, there were quite a few people there and the security guard suddenly gave me a sharp nudge. I stopped and asked him what he thought he was doing. In the distance, I saw my husband. He couldn't hear what was going on or anything. He must have just taken one step towards us when I saw that Mahabudhi (one of the chief foreign devotees) rush to the security guard with an iron rod, give it to him

Death In Hare Krishna Land

SUBHASHINI ALI
talks to the widow
of the cine dancer
allegedly murdered
by I.S.K.O.N. members

and gesture towards Dilip. The guard started hitting him with it. Dilip just caught his head and sat down. He never regained consciousness after that. I remember that I started screaming. People started running around. These Hare Krishna people just behaved like animals and hit people with sticks and things but I could only see Dilip in front of me, holding his head, bleeding. They even hit my neighbour's son with a stick. Why didn't they use a stick on Dilip? Why did they use an iron rod when we had never had anything to do with them? We were even thinking of leaving this place. That very day, Dilip had seen a flat in Versova, on Tuesday he was going to pay the money and today (Sunday) we would have left."

After Dilip was taken to the hospital a huge crowd gathered in front of the temple and threatened to burn it down. The next day, a large number of people accompanied Dilip's body which was placed in the temple. The mourners refused to remove it until the temple management agreed to pay Iris compensation. They finally gave her a written undertaking promising to do so.

"But I think they only did it to get rid of the body," says Iris. "The very next day, they went back on their word and said that the temple had suffered so much damage. Now they are only trying to save their image. They are trying to stop my husband's colleagues (he was a cine dancer) in the film line from doing something, from joining the Juhu people's agitation. But I don't want their money. I'm not a beggar. I want their name to be mud. I want them to be punished for what they have done."