

Missing Baby Killed by Family Friend for \$50K Ransom * 'She Left This World Too Soon': Dad Venkata Konda

Photo: Venkata Konda, Oct. 26, 2012



By Sunika Sohrabji, Staff Reporter

Latha Punnuru Venna (left) and Venkata Konda (right) with their 10-month-old daughter Saanvi. Venkata Konda is the father of Saanvi. Photo by Sunika Sohrabji.

The search for 10-month-old Saanvi Venna, who had been missing since the afternoon of Oct. 22 when her grandmother was killed, ended early Oct. 26, as police found the little baby dead in the sauna of the apartment complex they lived in the Upper Merion township of King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Police arrested Raghunandan Yandamuri, a family acquaintance who lives in the same apartment complex where the Venna family lives. According to police reports, Yandamuri kidnapped little Saanvi for \$50,000 in ransom and fatally stabbed her grandmother, Satyavathi Venna, 61, as she put up a fight to save the baby from being abducted.

Saanvi was the daughter of Venkata Konda Siva Venna and Latha Punnuru Venna. Satyavathi Venna was Venkata Venna's mother; she had been visiting the family since July and planned to return home in January.

Contacted at his home, Venkata Konda told India-West that he and his wife Latha were heartbroken at the loss of their baby and mother. "Please don't ask, the Indian American father said, responding to a question as to how he would remember his little daughter. "She left this world too soon. Maybe she will come back sometime," he said softly.

Yandamuri was taken into custody and faces charges of murder, kidnapping, robbery, burglary, theft and abuse of a corpse. He was arraigned Oct. 26 and is being held without bail.

Venkata Konda's mother, Satyavathi, was a very kind and generous person, Konda recalled to India-West. "Whoever comes to our house in our village, she would cook food for them and welcome them," he said. Her body was flown home last week to Kudumulakunta in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh for proper burial rights.

Various media have characterized the relationship between the Kondas and Yandamuri as a long-standing friendship. But Konda said the acquaintance began shortly after Yandamuri moved with his pregnant wife Komila to the apartment building where the Kondas live.

The Kondas would frequently invite the newlyweds over for a meal, as did other families in the apartment complex. "I told his wife, any time you need help, you can come to my house, and talk to my mother." "He was like a friend to us," said Konda, expressing his concern for Komila, now that her husband faces double murder charges.

As for Yandamuri, Konda said he had no words to express his feelings about the killer of his mother and only child. Latha Punnuru was too emotional to speak to India-West.

A search by India-West on the legal Web site Pacer revealed that Yandamuri was about \$27,000 in debt, and had filed for bankruptcy in April 2012. In July, a Northern California bankruptcy court ordered him to pay off his debts to several credit card companies and the California Employment Development Department. Online conversations on several Andhra Pradesh-related discussion groups speculated that Yandamuri was addicted to online gambling and had accrued severe debt as a result.

Speaking at a press conference Oct. 26, Montgomery County District Attorney Risa Ferman said it was unclear how long ago Saanvi had died, but she was found at 4:30 a.m. the morning of Oct. 26.

Yandamuri left 10 copies of a ransom note around the Vennas' apartment, demanding \$50,000. The note reads: "Shiva, your daughter has been kidnapped. If you report this to cops, your daughter will be cut into pieces and found dead."

"If you inform this to anyone, you will find your daughter's body parts thrown into your apartments. Our people are monitoring all your moves all the time. Your e-mails and phone are being traced."

The note went on to specify that Latha alone should meet the kidnapper at a nearby Baja Fresh restaurant at 8 p.m., with \$50,000 in cash, and re-stated that she alone should come there with the cash; if anyone else was spotted, Saanvi would be killed.

"Remember, your baby has been starving since the morning. It is up to you to decide, do you want your one-year-old daughter or five months of your income," read the ransom note.

"The first word in the ransom note is 'Shiva'. During an interview with investigators, Venkata Venna said that his full name is Venkata Konda Siva Prasad Venna, and some of his close friends and family members call him 'Siva,'" stated a police affidavit. The Kondas were asked to provide a list of people who had knowledge of the 'Siva' and 'Lata' nicknames. Among the names provided by the couple was Raghun, according to the affidavit.

Chillingly, Yandamuri offered help to the Vennas during the massive search for their little baby girl. "He placed himself here to support the family during the search for their child; someone who actually printed fliers and handed them out; someone who offered support, came to this police station during the course of the search and actually attended the vigil in memory of Mrs. Venna and looking for Saanvi," said Ferman at the press conference.

The district attorney stated that Yandamuri acted alone, even though his ransom note seems to suggest an accomplice. She also stated that the motive was purely ransom, adding that Yandamuri must have believed the Vennas were wealthy, as they were both computer programmers. €

Yandamuri told police he killed Satyavathi as she resisted the kidnapping of Saanvi. When the little baby began to cry, Yandamuri told police that he stuffed a handkerchief in her mouth to make her stop crying and then placed a bath towel around her head to hold the handkerchief in place.

Yandamuri told police he then stuffed Saanvi into a blue suitcase he found at the Kondas™ apartment, then fled the apartment and hid Saanvi™s body in the sauna of the apartment™s basement gymnasium. He later disposed of the knife, his blood-stained clothes and some jewelry he had stolen in a nearby river.

According to police, Yandamuri told detectives during his interrogation to tell the media that his wife Komal had turned him in, so that she could claim a \$50,000 reward for information, put up by the police, the Telugu Association of North America, and a neighbor.

Prasad Thotakura, national president of the TANA, told India-West that the organization had worked with the Indian embassy to expedite the return of Satyavathi™s body to her native place.

