

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / Case 253: Aarushi Talwar & Hemraj Banjade

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Bhati Mandal had only worked for the Talwa family for a week, but had already settled into a rhythm.

The 35-year-old housemaid had recently relocated to the Indian capital of Delhi in search of work. She was soon hired to clean the home of Rajesh and Nupur Talwa, a husband and wife who lived in the south of Delhi suburb of Noida.

Rajesh and Nupur were both dentists with busy schedules and needed someone to cover for their usual maid who was on leave. They lived in an enormous 1,886 apartment complex that was home to almost 10,000 people. Bhati would visit their three-bedroom home twice a day to dust, clean the floors, and wash the dishes. The Talwa's also employed a living servant named Hemraj Banjade. Every morning and evening he would let Bhati into the home after she rang the doorbell installed by an exterior mesh security door.

At 6am on Friday, May 16, 2008, Bhati arrived for her first shift of the day.

She rang the doorbell as usual, but Hemraj didn't appear.

Bhati rang the bell a second time, and when she was again met with no response, she figured Hemraj was just taking his time.

She walked up a set of stairs where the family's bucket and mop was kept, and carried them back to the front door. Still, there was no sign of Hemraj.

Bhati rang the doorbell for a third time, and peered down the hallway inside.

There was a second mesh door at the end of the hall. Immediately behind it, in the same frame, was a wooden door that opened to the apartment.

The wooden door finally opened, and Bhati was surprised to see a woman standing there instead of Hemraj. It was Nupur Talwa, one of Bhati's employers. Nupur asked Bhati where Hemraj was, and Bhati said she didn't know. Nupur said he had probably gone out to buy milk, and must have locked the security door behind him.

There were two sets of keys to the Talwa's apartment. Hemraj had one, and the couple had the other.

Bhati asked Nupur if she could throw down her keys from the balcony.

Nupur agreed. Bhati walked downstairs to stand beneath the balcony.

When Nupur appeared, she mentioned that the door might not be locked after all.

Bhati asked her to throw down the keys anyway, and Nupur did so.

Keys in hand, Bhati headed back upstairs to the apartment. This time she pushed the exterior mesh door, and it swung open. Bhati walked down the hall to the second mesh door, which was latched from the outside. She unbolted the latch and entered the apartment through the wooden door, which Nupur had left open. Inside, Bhati was met with chaos.

She could hear Nupur Talwa and her husband Rajesh shouting and crying.

Nupur reappeared and threw her arms around Bhati, still weeping loudly.

When Bhati asked why she was crying, Nupur replied,

Go inside and see what has happened. She led Bhati to the bedroom of the couple's only child, a 13-year-old daughter named Arushi. Standing in the doorway of Arushi's room, Bhati saw the girl lying in bed. Her body was partly covered with a white flannel blanket,

and her throat had been slit.

After Nupur Talwa had answered the doorbell,

she'd picked up the family's Lantalan phone and dialed Hemraj's mobile to see where he was.

Her call was answered, but the person on the other end said nothing. After a few seconds, they hung up. At the same time, Rajesh Talwa was getting out of bed. When he walked into

the family's living room, he immediately noticed a bottle of Valentine's Scotch whiskey sitting on the dining table. It was two-thirds empty. Neither he nor his wife had been drinking the night before, and the bottle hadn't been there when they went to bed at 11.30.

Most troubling of all, there were several bloody fingerprints smeared across it.

Rajesh pointed out the bottle to Nupur. Then the two of them went to check on their daughter.

Arushi always slept with her door closed and locked from the inside. But that morning,

the door was slightly open. When her parents walked in, they immediately noticed the walls were spattered with blood. Arushi lay on her bed, covered with a white flannel blanket.

Her head was partially concealed by a camo tote bag she owned. The pillow under her head was blood soaked, and the blood had dripped onto her mattress and the floor below.

Nupur lifted the blanket, and both parents saw a large card across their daughter's throat.

Arushi's head hung to one side, her skull crushed just above her left eye. Strangely,

there was no blood on the blanket and bag covering Arushi. Nor was there any on her stuffed toys that surrounded her, including a bunny rabbit on the bed's headboard and a large Bart Simpson doll on the mattress. It was as though these items had all been placed there after the attack.

Rajesh tried to straighten his daughter's head, though it was clear she was deceased.

Then he started pacing back and forth to and from Arushi's bedroom.

One moment, he would sit on the bed beside his child. The next, he stood and started hitting his head against a wall. Nupur appeared to be in a state of shock.

When Barty returned to the apartment to start cleaning, a crying Nupur led her to Arushi's room.

Barty stood stunned as she took in the violent scene.

Finally, she managed to ask the talwars if she should tell the building security guards.

They said yes, and Barty hurried off.

Meanwhile, the talwars began calling their closest loved ones,

all of whom lived in the same large complex. These included Nupur's parents, Rajesh's brother and his wife, and their friends the Dharanis, a married couple who were also dentists.

Soon, all were gathered at the talwars' apartment.

Word spread throughout the tight-knit community, and the four couples were eventually joined by neighbors, curious passers-by, and members of the media.

About an hour after Arushi's body was discovered, the first police officers arrived.

They made no attempt to cordon off the crime scene as people wandered through the apartment, examining every room.

A portion of Arushi's mattress was cut out and taken off for forensic testing, along with her blood-stained sheets, pillow, and clothing.

There was no blood in any other part of the home, except for five bloody fingerprints on the bottle of whiskey on the dining room table.

It appeared that nothing had been stolen from the talwars' home.

Then, two friends of Rajesh Talwar,

noticed what looked like blood on a set of stairs that led to the rooftop terrace.

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The door to the terrace was closed and locked.

On close inspection, the lock seemed to have blood on it, too.

The men pointed this out to the police.

Rajesh said he didn't know where the keys to the door were, as their servant Hemraj was responsible for locking it.

He and his wife Nupur kept begging the police repeatedly to, find Hemraj, find Hemraj.

There was no sign of Hemraj Banjadeh in the adjoining servant's quarters where he lived.

These quarters were accessible from the main apartment, or via a side door in the hallway where the security doors were located.

In the kitchen was an uneaten plate of food that he'd fixed himself for dinner the night before.

His mobile phone was missing, and it looked like his bed hadn't been slept in.

The talwars tried calling his phone again, but it now appeared to be switched off.

Rajesh and Nupur Talwar were convinced that he had killed their daughter.

The fact that he'd vanished without a trace and hung up on the door, the fact that he'd vanished without a trace and hung up on Nupur when she phoned earlier, pointed to his guilt.

45-year-old Hemraj was originally from a village in Nepal and had moved to India to find work.

As a planned suburb of Delhi, Noida had far more job opportunities.

Hemraj sent the money he made to his family back in Nepal.

He'd been employed by the talwars for about eight months,

and it was fairly standard for middle-class professionals in urban parts of India to hire domestic servants.

Hemraj did the talwars' grocery shopping, prepared their meals, and was responsible for receiving visitors and other employees to the home.

The talwars had never had any problems with him at all, until now.

Certain he had fled back to Nepal after murdering Arushi,

the talwars offered the police money to pursue him across the border.

The previous night had been normal.

Nupur and Arushi had arrived home between 6 and 7 pm.

Rajesh had to work late, so was taken home by his driver at about 9.

The driver had gone up to the apartment to drop off the keys after parking the car in the garage.

And saw Nupur, Arushi, and Hemraj getting ready for dinner.

At 9.30 pm, the family sat down to eat the meal that Hemraj had prepared.

Rajesh and Nupur had a surprise for Arushi.

In 9 days' time, on May 24, she would be turning 14.

Her father had ordered a Sony digital camera as a gift for her, and it had arrived that day.

Nupur persuaded Rajesh that they should give Arushi the camera that night as an early birthday surprise.

Arushi's birthday party was being held in three days' time, and to this way she could take photos of the occasion.

Her parents presented her with the camera at about 10 o'clock.

Arushi was so excited that she immediately started taking pictures of herself and her parents.

At around 11, Arushi went to her room.

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Her parents also went to their room, where Rajesh sent some emails. The internet connection was slow, so he asked Nupur to switch the router off and on again. Nupur went next door to Arushi's room, where the router was kept, and saw her daughter sitting up in bed reading a book. Nupur went to bed shortly after this, while Rajesh stayed up using the internet until just after midnight. Neither of them had heard any disturbance during the night. Nupur told investigators that she couldn't remember if she had closed Arushi's bedroom door after going in to reboot the router. Normally, she would, and the door would automatically lock behind her. Arushi could open the door from the inside, or it could be unlocked from the outside with a set of keys Nupur kept on her bedside table. But that morning, the keys were found in the drawing room. Later that day, Arushi's body was autopsied. It was estimated that she had been killed between midnight and 1am. There were no signs of a sexual assault. As well as a 14cm wound to her throat, there were several smaller cuts on her face. These injuries were all sustained after she was struck in the head with some sort of weapon that left a U or V-shaped scar. It was this first injury that killed her. A brutal attack like this in a quiet middle-class neighborhood was shocking, and news of Arushi's murder made headlines across the country. A police spokesperson talked on camera with the media, naming the family's domestic servant as their prime suspect, and adding that he was now on the run, quote, It was believed Hemraj had decided to molest Arushi after consuming some whisky. When she resisted, Hemraj killed her in a violent rage. The police spokesperson asked for the press's help in sharing Hemraj's details so he could be arrested as soon as possible. The police also asked for the press's help in sharing Hemraj's details so he could be arrested as soon as possible. Photographs of both Arushi and Hemraj were given to the media and broadcast on news programs that same day. A reward of 20,000 rupees was offered for information that led to Hemraj's capture. Meanwhile, the Talwas were preparing to farewell their daughter. In Hindu tradition, it is generally believed that a loved one's body must be cremated within 24 hours of their death. Having gained the pathologist's reassurances that Arushi's autopsy was complete and nothing further was needed, her parents made the necessary arrangements. That evening, Arushi's loved ones gathered at the Talwa residence to pay their final respects to her before she was cremated. The apartment was packed with people and still nothing had been cordoned off. Upon seeing his daughter's school friends, Rajesh Talwa burst into tears. He cried out, Look at what they've done to your friend.

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Arushi's loved ones gathered around her small slender body which was wrapped up in a white cloth as part of the pre-cremation ritual. Only her face was exposed. She looked pale but peaceful. Friends remembered Arushi as a fun-loving girl who was often the centre of attention at social events but someone who was very shy at the same time. It always took her a little while to feel comfortable opening up to others, though she had a playful sense of humour and liked to tease her parents. Arushi was a serious student who always ranked in the top three of her class. She also loved attending parties and going on holidays and had particularly enjoyed a trip she'd taken to Singapore and Malaysia the year prior. She had been happiest when surrounded by her family and friends. Just four days before she was murdered, Arushi had given Nupour a card for Mother's Day that read in part, Mum, you are the best. After all, you are the one who will always be there for me. The following morning Rajesh and Nupour Talwar left with Arushi's ashes for the city of Haridwar located about 217 kilometres northeast of Noida. Haridwar is a Hindu pilgrimage site and is where the river Ganges exits the foothills of the Himalayas. The river is seen as a gateway to heaven following death. It is believed that scattering a loved one's ashes in the Ganges will help them rest in peace. Meanwhile, KK Gautam, a retired deputy superintendent of Noida police who was something of a local celebrity, headed over to the couple's apartment to offer his condolences. Relatives of the Talwars had cleaned the residence the previous evening while police milled about. Gautam was met by Rajesh's brother Dinesh, who complained to him that the lock to the terrace still hadn't been opened. The Talwars had given permission for the lock to be broken the day before, but investigators had been unable to find a locksmith. Looking at the staircase that led to the terrace, Gautam saw what looked like spots of blood. He immediately wondered if Arushi's killer had escaped via the rooftop, or hidden the murder weapon up there. Gautam called the superintendent of Noida police and demanded to know how officers had missed seeing the bloodstains the day prior. The superintendent rushed to the apartment with the scene of the murder. The superintendent rushed to the apartment with the senior officer, and the terrace doors lock was broken. Gautam and Dinesh Talwars headed out to the terrace along with the superintendent. They immediately saw that the cement was stained with an enormous pool of blood. Further away were some bloody drag marks that led to a corner of the rooftop. A panel from an air cooler had been torn off and clumsily placed on top of something that was slumped in the corner. It was a human body, clearly deceased and badly decomposed due to India's hot summer sun. The body appeared to belong to a middle-aged man.

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Dinesh Talwars

Dinesh Talwars called his brother to tell him another body had been found at his residence.

Rajesh and Nupur hurried home, still carrying Arushi's ashes.

Rajesh was asked if he could identify the body, but the man's face was too swollen and disfigured to recognize.

However, Rajesh thought the shirt he was wearing looked familiar, as did his hair.

After checking with his wife, Rajesh said he was fairly sure the body was that of their servant, Hemraj Banjade.

The number one suspect in the case had turned out to be a second victim.

Like Arushi, Hemraj had been killed with a weapon that left a U or V-shaped scar.

His wound was to the back of the head, then his throat had been slashed.

It was estimated that both victims had been killed between 12 and 1 a.m.

It turned out that the blood on the bottle of whiskey belonged to both Hemraj and Arushi, indicating the killer touched the bottle after the murders.

However, no identifiable prints could be collected from the marks left.

On the terrace was a bloody footprint made by a size 8 or 9 shoe.

This hadn't belonged to Hemraj as he was found wearing his slippers.

Also on a terrace wall was a large bloody handprint made with Hemraj's blood.

Multiple reporters and others who were permitted to wonder about the crime scene touched it before it could be forensically examined.

Therefore, the police subsequently decided that checking it for DNA or prints was useless.

For unknown reasons, the air cooler panel that had been placed on Hemraj's body was never examined either.

With their prime suspect ruled out of the case, investigators had to start from scratch.

Technology used by the family seemed to confirm the timeline the Talwaas had provided.

The photos on Arushi's new digital camera showed a happy family enjoying their evening together at around 10 p.m.

The last photo was a shot of Arushi smiling shyly.

It appeared to be a selfie she had taken in her bedroom.

Based on the numbering of the photographs, however,

police realized that some shots prior to the last one had been deleted.

They thought this was suspicious, but the Talwaas said it was due to Arushi deleting pictures she didn't like.

Computer and internet records confirmed Rajesh Talwaa had been active online until around 12 a.m.

Hemraj Benjati's phone was missing, but records showed the last call he'd received that night had been just before 8.30 p.m.

Whoever called rang from a payphone about one kilometer away and had chatted with Hemraj for around six minutes.

The next calls the phone received were the ones from Nupur the following morning.

The phone pinged off a cell tower and the phone was not connected to the phone.

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The phone pinged off a cell tower in the vicinity, indicating that whoever had the phone was still in the large apartment complex. When Arushi's body was discovered by her parents, her black Nokia N72 mobile phone was noticeably absent from its usual spot on her bedside table. Investigators had been unable to find the missing device, but they could access its records. Usually Arushi stayed up until after midnight texting her friends, but on Thursday, May 15, her phone had been switched off at 9.10 p.m. This was highly unusual. Her parents said that she had complained about the phone not working properly and they'd discussed getting her a new one. Pouring over the records, police saw that from the start of April until her death, in mid-May, there had been 688 text messages and calls between Arushi's phone and another number. That number belonged to a 15-year-old school friend of Arushi's named Anmol. He was known to have a crush on Arushi and was said to be her boyfriend. Amongst Arushi and her friends, having a boyfriend was a term to describe a special friendship with a boy. There would be a mutual attraction between them and they'd talk a lot on the phone and at school, but it didn't imply any physical intimacy. Anmol was the last person who tried to contact Arushi on the night she was killed. At about midnight, he tried calling her mobile, then the family's landline. Neither call was answered. Roughly half an hour later, he sent Arushi a text. Because her phone was switched off, this message didn't go through. Police decided to question Anmol to see what he knew. A week after the murders, police picked up Anmol and took him to the station for questioning. His parents weren't present for this and nor were they asked for their permission. Investigators grilled Anmol about his relationship with Arushi. Anmol said that he and Arushi had a disagreement on the night in question, which was why she'd turned off her phone so early. It wasn't because she was having issues with the device as she'd told her parents. According to Anmol, Arushi had also complained about her father, who she said had become stricter over the past two weeks. Under intense interrogation, Anmol added that he wasn't the only boy Arushi was in contact with. She'd been a pretty and popular girl who'd had lots of boyfriends. When the police asked if Arushi had been, quote, easy with who she liked, Anmol agreed that she was. That same day, police called the Talwars and asked them to come down to the station, supposedly to identify a suspect. The couple got into their car and tailed a police vehicle to the destination. They, in turn, were followed by multiple television news crews. All of a sudden, the Talwars turned around and abruptly headed back home, without ever making it to the police station. The following day was Friday, May 23, exactly one week after Arushi Talwar and Hemraj Banjadi were murdered. Investigators went to the Talwars' home and again asked Rajesh and Nupur to accompany them to the station. The couple agreed. Once at the station, they were taken into separate rooms. New evidence had come to light that had taken the case in a new direction.

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Investigators said it was related to a woman named Dr Anita Durrani.

Dr Durrani and her husband were close with the Talwars. Like the Talwars, they were both dentists and the two couples worked in the same clinic. Their daughter had also been one of Arushi's best friends. The police said they had intel that Rajesh Talwar had been having an affair with Anita Durrani. During Anmol's interrogation the previous day, he had supposedly said that Arushi knew about

the affair and was unhappy about it. A social worker who had known Hemraj had also told the police that five days before he was murdered, Hemraj said he was in danger and so were his loved ones. Based on these claims, Gurdarshan Singh, the Inspector General of Noida Police, had a theory. He believed that 13-year-old Arushi had been so devastated by her father's affair that she decided to embark on an illicit relationship of her own with Hemraj, her family's 45-year-old servant. Late on the night of Thursday, May 15, Rajesh went to Arushi's room and found Hemraj in there with her. Inspector General Singh would later say the pair had been in, quote, an objectionable but not compromising position. Enraged, Rajesh Talwar took Hemraj up to the terrace and brutally slaughtered him. Then he went back downstairs and drank some whiskey before making his way to Arushi's room. While his daughter lay in bed, Rajesh murdered her in an honor killing, a crime in which a family member is killed to supposedly protect their family's honor. Such killings have been reported from the northern parts of India, which was where Rajesh was originally from. Rajesh was confronted with video footage that seemingly bolstered the police theory. It showed Hem and Nupur the previous day, suddenly turning around when they were supposed to be going to the police station.

Investigators said this was evidence they had tried to flee.

Rajesh explained that the reason they had turned around was because the police had called and told them not to come down after all. He denied having an affair or ever doing anything to harm his child. After getting married, the Talwar's had tried to have children for five years without success and had finally used IVF to conceive Arushi. She was their only child and a much loved daughter. Nevertheless, Rajesh was informed that he was suspected of committing the double homicide and placed under arrest.

A press conference was held to update the media and the public on this twist in the investigation. The case was receiving an exceptional amount of media attention. This was partly due to the fact that high-profile middle-class professionals such as the Talwar's weren't usually seen as victims of crime. Inspector General Gurdarshan Singh told the assembled press how they believed the murders had played out. According to him, the weapons used were a hammer and a surgical scalpel, though neither of these items had been recovered. Singh seemingly forgot Arushi's name during the press conference and repeatedly referred to her as Shruti. He also detailed her supposed affair with Hemraj and said that the 13-year-old had been, quote, characterless, a slur indicating that she was promiscuous. After this briefing, news coverage of the murders went into overdrive. Salacious stories about the Talwar's were splashed across tabloids all over the country.

TV programs aired reconstructions of how the murders were thought to have gone down.

To many, Rajesh being the culprit made sense. Arushi's bedroom was right next to her parents' room,

with their beds between seven and eight feet apart. If an intruder had killed Arushi, then why hadn't her parents heard anything? Some reporters believed Rajesh hadn't seemed emotional enough in the wake of his daughter's murder and organized her cremation too quickly.

Rajesh's initial insistence that Hemraj was the culprit was deemed suspicious, as was his claim that he didn't have a key to his own terrace where Hemraj was later found. Perhaps he had planned to dump Hemraj's body somewhere but never had an opportunity because of the constant police and media presence. Rajesh insisted that he was being framed, while some who were close to him offered their support, others turned against him. Although he and Nupour retained the dental clinic they owned, Rajesh was fired from a position he held at a hospital. A few days later, police seized Rajesh's laptop and the hard drive from Arushi's computer. They wasted no time in leaking Arushi's emails, social media interactions, and WhatsApp messages to journalists. Select portions of Arushi's messages were printed and shared by India's media. Emails she'd sent to France were said to confirm her promiscuous tendencies as they referred to boys and contained objectionable words. There was also one email to her father in which she apologised for having gone out with friends without a parent shaper owning them. This was seen as evidence of the father and daughter's fraught relationship, even though the email had a light-hearted tone. Nupour Talwar felt the need to speak up in her family's defence despite police recommending she avoid the media. On Sunday May 25, Nupour gave a one-on-one television interview with the English news station and DTV. Looking exhausted but composed, Nupour said the Talwars were like any other household and there was no way her husband could be responsible for the murders. She told the interviewer, I was living in that house. I was sleeping next to Rajesh that night. It's not even possible. When asked what she believed had really happened, Nupour said she had no idea. When she had discovered her daughter's body that morning, she immediately thought Hemraj had done it. After realising he was murdered too, she suspected the culprit was someone who had some kind of hostility with Hemraj. Nupour's composed demeanour had the opposite effect that she had hoped for. Instead of seeing a devastated mother, many in law enforcement, the media and the community, saw a cold and calculated woman. But others were siding with the Talwars. Arushi's classmates organised a protest march in defence of their friend's reputation. India's Minister for Women and Child Development expressed her concern that the Noida police had slandered a murdered girl. She also accused them of blatantly ignoring the nation's press council regulations. The police's inflammatory statements prompted the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the state where Noida was located, to suggest the case be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation or CBI. The CBI is India's national investigative agency and was originally created to investigate government corruption. Eventually, its jurisdiction was expanded to include murders, kidnappings and terrorist activities. In 1987, a special crimes branch was launched which led to the agency investigating many high-profile offences. Two weeks after the murder of Arushi Talwar and Hemraj Banjati, Noida police inspector's general was demoted and the CBI took over the investigation. Although Rajesh Talwar remained in police custody, the new investigative team began looking at the case through fresh eyes. It seemed to them that Noida police had overlooked some potentially crucial clues. Three glasses were recovered from Hemraj's quarters the morning after the murders. Two had remnants of alcohol in them. Also in the room were three bottles which respectively contained wine, beer and sprite. It appeared as though Hemraj had some guests over the night before. Impressions in his made-up bed indicated up to three people might have

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sat on it. It also looked like the servant's toilet had been used by more than one person. For some reason, all of this had been ignored or overlooked by the Noida police. Scouring the case file, the CBI's lead investigator noticed something else. A 22-year-old man named Krishna Tattari had been held by the Noida police for 10 days during the course of their investigation.

It turned out that Krishna was another employee of the Tawars. He worked at their dental clinic while also completing his studies. Krishna also lived in the same complex with just a few apartments between his residence and the Tawars. He knew Hemraj well and like Hemraj he was originally from Nepal. The case file documented what Krishna had told police during his time in custody. To the CBI's surprise, it seemed that he was the one who had informed them of Rajesh Tawar's alleged affair with Anita Durrani. Krishna said that when Nepal was working at another clinic every Tuesday and Saturday, Rajesh and Anita would close up early and give Krishna the afternoon off. Although he had never actually seen them together, he said that Hemraj had told him about it. It was also Krishna who claimed Arushi had been devastated after discovering the affair and sought comfort from Hemraj. According to Rajesh Tawar, he had reprimanded Krishna two days before the murders after Krishna made an incorrect dental cast. This dressing down had taken place in front of other employees, including Anita Durrani. Rajesh's driver had supposedly later heard Krishna say to Hemraj that he was going to deal with Rajesh. Realizing that the police's original theory had originated from this lone witness, the CBI knew they would need to interview him again. On Thursday, June 12, Krishna Tatarai was taken into custody. While being interrogated by the CBI, he confessed that he had been in the Tawar's apartment on the night of the murders. Krishna was hanging out with Hemraj and two other domestic workers from Nepal, Rajkumar and Vijay Mandel.

Rajkumar was a little younger than Krishna and worked for the Tawar's good friends, the Durrani's. People who knew him said he was likeable and easy going. Vijay Mandel was also in his early 20s and lived in the garage below the Tawar's residence. As a child, he had been physically abused by his parents and had anger issues as a result. Consequently, he struggled to find work, but had been a driver in the Noida area. Late on the night of Thursday, May 16, the four men were drinking beer together in Hemraj's quarters. Krishna told the other three how he had been humiliated at work by Rajesh Tawar and wanted revenge. Hurting Arushi would be the most obvious way to hurt Rajesh. Krishna and Rajkumar headed to Arushi's room. The door was unlocked that night. They entered and Rajkumar began trying to sexually assault the 13-year-old. She fought back, prompting Krishna to pull out a curved Nepalese knife known as a kukri and kill her. They knew Hemraj would now be a danger to them. He had been very fond of Arushi and hadn't wanted anything to happen to her. The two men took Hemraj up to the terrace, where they killed him to cover up their crime. Krishna would go on to amend his story, but the essential facts remained the same. In his second version, he said it had actually been Rajkumar and Vijay Mundal who had gone into Arushi's room and both intended to rape her. She had resisted, so Vijay had hit her in the head before Rajkumar cut her throat with the kukri.

They wiped off the kukri with a tissue which was then flushed down the toilet in Arushi's ensuite. The two men and Krishna had then taken Hemraj up to the terrace, locking its door behind them, and murdered Hemraj to ensure his silence. Krishna later reverted to his original admission, that he had gone to Arushi's room and cut her throat. Hemraj was murdered after threatening to tell the Tawars. The three culprits had wanted to kill the Tawars as well, but gave up after finding their bedroom door locked. On Wednesday, June 18, Krishna's apartment was searched. It turned out that his rooftop terrace could be reached from the Tawars. All of the terraces in the block were connected and it was possible to walk across one to the other. While searching Krishna's apartment, CBI agents found a kukri that had small spots of blood on it. They also recovered a pair of trousers and a pillowcase stained with blood. Over the following weeks, Rajkumar and Vijay Mundal were interrogated as well. Both had admitted that they had been with Hemraj on the night of the murders and told variations of the same story Krishna had shared. There were some key differences, though. Vijay said a fight had broken out between Hemraj and a drunken Krishna right before Arushi was killed. Rajkumar was more resistant to confessing and said he hadn't committed the murders. He pointed the finger at Krishna instead. The men said they had destroyed Arushi and Hemraj's mobile phones. All three were arrested for the double homicide and Rajesh Tawar was released from jail. By this time, he had spent 50 days behind bars. Despite having obtained three confessions to the crime, the CBI was left with a major problem. All of the confessions had been made under what is known in India as the Nako Analysis Test. This test involves the subject being injected with sodium pentothal, which some refer to as truth serum. This drug renders the suspect sedated in a trance-like state. It's believed that in such a state, their imagination is neutralised and therefore they are only capable of telling the truth. They also exhibit no resistance to being questioned. Law enforcement agencies in India have been permitted to use Nako Analysis as an investigative tool, similar to a polygraph test. But like a polygraph, results of Nako Analysis are not permitted as evidence in a court of law. This is because the altered state of consciousness experienced by the suspect renders them more susceptible to influence and incapable of judging the consequences of what they're saying. The science behind Nako Analysis is dubious and the results from such tests are often inconsistent. Investigators had filmed the suspects being interrogated while under Nako Analysis and these videos were later leaked to the press. They showed the men barely conscious and mumbling answers to questions that were often leading. Krishna's supposed motive of wanting revenge against his employer after being told off at work also seemed weak compared to the brutality of the crimes. His family said that Krishna had been forced to undergo Nako Analysis against his will and was also beaten by investigators. They believed he was the victim of anti-Nepalese prejudice. All three men also claimed to have alibis for the night of the murders. Krishna's family and landlord said he'd been at home. Vijay Mandal's employer said the same for him. Anita Durrani, who was Raj Kumar's employer and the target of the original Noida police investigation, could vouch for Raj Kumar also being at home until at least 12 30 a.m. He might have snuck out after everyone went to bed but it would take him at least 20 minutes to reach the Tawar's residence and that didn't fit with the investigation's timeline.

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CBI agents hoped they would find something tangible that tied the trio to the double homicide such as fingerprints or DNA from the crime scene but nothing emerged. Testing of the blood on the kukri found in Krishna's home revealed that it wasn't human though it couldn't be determined what kind of animal it came from either. The blade also seemed too blunt to have resulted in the cuts to the victim's throats. In any case, it no longer seemed that the CBI had found one of the murder weapons. During early September, all three suspects were released from custody due to a

lack of evidence. Case file will be back shortly. Thank you for supporting us by listening to this episode's sponsors. Thank you for listening to this episode's ads. By supporting our sponsors, you support case file to continue to deliver quality content.

After the release of the three Nepalese suspects, the case faltered.

Sensationalist stories still ran in the media but from an investigative point of view, it had reached a standstill. Then, one year later, in September 2009, there was a breakthrough. Arushi Talwar's Black Nokia N72 phone was traced to a house in the city of Bulencha hair, located 60 kilometers east of Delhi. A man by the name of Ram Bull was using the device with a new SIM card. When police spoke to Ram, he said his sister had found the phone in May of the previous

year. She worked as a maid close to where the Talwar's had lived. A few days after the Noida murders, she spotted the phone on a dirt track a few kilometers away. She pocketed the device and gifted it to her brother but he hadn't started using it until the following year after purchasing a new SIM card. Neither of them had any idea that it had belonged to the murdered teenager.

Police were able to verify the sibling stories and ruled them out as suspects.

An examination of Arushi's phone found no photos, text messages or data.

But the discovery of the Nokia alone seemed to disprove the CBI's theory that Hemraj's three acquaintances committed the murders. All three men had said both phones were destroyed. Now there was evidence indicating their admissions were unreliable.

This development seemed to result in a shake-up at the CBI. That same month in September 2009, the case's lead investigator was removed, with the agency citing that his tenure had simply ended. Then, the investigation into the murders of Arushi Talwar and Hemraj Benjati was handed over to a new team.

Right away, the second CBI team took a very different approach to their predecessors.

The new investigators focused first on Arushi's autopsy report. Dr Sunil Doheray had completed the post-mortem and found no evidence of a sexual assault or injury, stating that there was nothing abnormal about Arushi's genitalia. Swabs taken from her vagina had no trace of semen.

In October 2008, Dr Doheray had given a second statement to the original CBI team.

This time, he added a line that read,

During post-mortem examination, I observed that the vaginal cavity of the deceased was dilated.

This sentence caught the attention of the second CBI team.

Dr Doheray was asked to provide them with another statement, which would be his third.

This time, he went into greater detail, writing,

The doctor's observations seemed to imply that Arushi had likely been engaged in sexual intercourse around the time of her murder.

Later, he would more explicitly say that he thought her vagina had been washed to remove any evidence of such activity.

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His reference to her hymen was an allusion to her having lost her virginity well before the attack, despite the fact that a hymen can be ruptured in other ways and is no indication of sexual experience.

Dr Doheray said he hadn't bothered to mention these details in his original report because the findings were, quote, non-specific and very strange.

He had also never completed an autopsy on a female body before, so he didn't realise such things should have been recorded.

The doctor who completed Hemraj's autopsy was also caught upon again.

Speaking to the new lead investigator, he noted that the cut to Hemraj's throat was consistent with a very sharp-edged, light instrument.

When asked about the significance of Hemraj and Arushi's matching neck wounds, the doctor added, The identical position of the injury and the skill with which the cut was made clearly point towards a surgically trained person.

Investigators concluded that a scalpel had most likely been used to slash the victim's throat and noted that as dentists, the talwars had surgical experience.

Examining the crime scene photos, investigators also came to the conclusion that the weapon used to hit both victims in the head was a golf club.

This was why they had U or V-shaped injuries.

As it happened, Arushi's father Rajesh was an amateur golfer and owned a set of clubs which were kept in Hemraj's quarters.

A forensics expert was asked to analyse the crime scene based on photographs and a visit to the apartment, which the talwars had long since vacated.

After studying pictures of Arushi's blood-stained bedroom, he pointed out that there appeared to be two distinct impact splatters on the wall behind the bed head.

He believed this meant they had come from two different victims, meaning that the two victims had been killed.

Arushi and Hemraj were attacked in the same room at the same time.

This supported the theory that the pair were together in bed when they were murdered.

Then the killer dragged Hemraj's body up to the terrace to conceal it.

Blood found on the staircase leading to the terrace was seen to confirm this.

The fact that the stuffed toys on Arushi's bed had no blood on them pointed to the killer dressing the crime scene after the murders.

The way they had covered Arushi's body with a blanket and her favourite bag also suggested a personal connection to the victim.

To the new team of investigators, all the evidence was pointing back to a theory the Noida police had cited from the start.

Arushi Talwar had been having an intimate relationship with Hemraj Benjati and the two were victims of an honour killing.

On Monday, May 24, 2010, which would have been Arushi's 16th birthday, an article about the new investigation was published in English-language newspaper The Pioneer.

Quoting several unnamed CBI sources, the story hinted that Rajesh Talwar was again being considered as a suspect.

Rajesh objected to the article, prompting the CBI to deny ever speaking with the publication.

Seven months later in December, the agency concluded their investigation and released a final

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report on the case.

In it, they officially cleared Krishna Tadara, Raj Kumar and Vijay Mandal of any involvement. As well as pointing to the trio's alibis, investigators said the servants wouldn't have dared drink alcohol late at night in the home of one of their employers.

The CBI also ruled out the possibility that an intruder committed the crimes, citing the lack of forced entry or motive.

It was pointed out that an intruder would have no reason to hide Hemraj's body or stage Arushi's room.

Ultimately, the CBI concluded that circumstantial evidence pointed to Rajesh Talwar committing the murders in a fit of rage after finding Hemraj in bed with his daughter.

His wife Nupur was accused of helping to cover up the crime.

Only those who lived in the apartment would have the time and access required to clean Arushi, remove any trace of Hemraj from her room and stage the scene.

However, there was a total lack of physical evidence due in part to the original investigators failing to secure the crime scene.

While it was suspected that Rajesh had used one of his golf clubs and a scalpel to carry out the attack, there was nothing to prove this.

They had no blood-stained clothing, fingerprints or DNA confirming Rajesh was the killer.

Consequently, the CBI recommended that the case be closed without charging the Talwar's.

Rajesh and Nupur Talwar were devastated by this turn of events.

Although they were not being charged, the report made shocking allegations against them.

The couple decided to file a petition asserting their innocence and demanding that the case remain open.

On Tuesday, January 25, 2011, as the pair made their way to a magistrates court that exclusively looked at CBI cases, they were followed by crowds of police and TV news crews.

Public interest in the Noida double murder was as strong as ever.

Suddenly, a young man rushed from the crowd towards Rajesh Talwar.

He was carrying a meat cleaver.

He swung the cleaver at Rajesh's face, slashing his right cheek.

Rajesh raised his hands to protect himself and the man swung again.

This time, he broke one of Rajesh's fingers and badly wounded his hands.

The perpetrator was quickly overpowered and Rajesh was rescued but suffered a sliced artery, cut tendons and a severed facial nerve.

His right cheek was permanently scarred.

The perpetrator was a 29-year-old vigilante named Utsav Sharma who had previously attacked a former police chief.

Sharma said he was angry about the slow progress in the Noida case.

While Rajesh was recovering from the violent attack, the court case proceeded.

After considering the Talwar's petition, the magistrate dismissed it and went a step further.

She turned the CBI's closure report into a charge sheet,

declaring that there was enough evidence to charge the couple for Arushi and Hemraj's murders.

Rajesh and Nupur Talwar were ordered to stand trial.

The Talwar's appealed the order, first at the state's High Court and then at the Supreme Court.

They lost both appeals and their trial began in May 2013, five years after their daughter's murder.

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As well as having to answer two counts of murder, they were charged with destroying evidence. The prosecutor presented the court with the CBI's theory of how the murders had unfolded. While Rajesh was still up and using the internet in the early hours of May 16, 2008, he heard a noise and went to investigate. First he went to Hemraj's quarters and was surprised to find them empty. While there, he heard another noise and realized it was coming from Arushi's room. Rajesh grabbed a golf club from the bag where they were stored and ran to his daughter's bedroom. Finding Arushi and Hemraj in bed together, Rajesh lashed out. He hit Hemraj in the head with the golf club. As he went to deal a second blow, Hemraj moved to avoid it, leading the club to hit Arushi instead. Meanwhile, Nupur was woken by all the commotion that was going on just seven feet away. The CBI believed it was impossible for her to miss when her bed was one room away and less than eight feet from Arushi's. She went to her daughter's room and saw the two victims lying near death with severe head injuries. Nupur and Rajesh agreed to cover up the crime. They wrapped Hemraj in a bedsheet and dragged him to the terrace where they cut his throat before concealing him with the cooler panel. The plan was to dispose of him properly later. To ensure the crimes looked identical, they then cut their daughter's throat before cleaning her body to hide any sign of sexual activity. They also cleaned Hemraj's blood from the floor and disposed of any bloody clothing as well as the scalpel or similar weapon used to cut the victim's throat. Afterwards, Rajesh sat in the living room and drank some whiskey to calm down. A key witness for the prosecution was Bhati Mandel, the maid who had just started working for the Tawars at the time of the murders. She was the first person to arrive at the scene and said that when she tried to open the first of three doors to the apartment, it hadn't budged. The CBI argued that the Tawars must have latched the door from the inside. This proved that they were the killers because an intruder wouldn't have been able to do such a thing and still flee the apartment. Bhati had asked Nupur to throw down the keys to her so she could let herself in. The CBI suspected that while Bhati waited below the balcony, Nupur entered the hallway and unlatched the first door so Bhati could open it. After she threw down the keys, Bhati returned to the first door. This time it opened when she pressed her hand against it. Other evidence the CBI caught on was the large palm print made with Hemraj's blood on a terrace wall and the smeared bloody fingerprints on the whiskey bottle. They said that Rajesh Talwar had been wearing surgical gloves while carrying out the crime, which left a larger than usual handprint and made collecting fingerprints impossible. The defence said about trying to refute all of these points. While cross-examining Bhati Mandal about attempting to open the door to the Talwar's apartment, she told them, I'm stating whatever has been explained to me. They took this to mean that she had been coached by the CBI.

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In a subsequent interview with the documentary film crew, Bhati said she hadn't pushed the outer door until after she had the keys, which was contrary to her statement in court. The Talwar's driver also testified that the outer door had a habit of sticking. If someone just pressed it lightly, it might appear to be latched, but you had to push hard to open it. After being charged, the Talwar's had requested that more evidence from the crime scene be submitted for DNA touch testing, including the bloody palm print left on the terrace, the golf club believed to be the murder weapon, and the whiskey bottle found in the living room. These requests were denied. The defence still tried to argue against the whiskey bottle evidence, pointing out that it didn't make sense for Rajesh to leave it out if he was the killer. He could have simply stashed it in the bar, which was concealed inside a cabinet. A killer outside the family was more likely to leave it out, as they wouldn't know where the secret bar was. As for the CBI's claim that the Talwar's must have hurt the crime taking place, it had been the middle of summer, and noisy air conditioners were running in both bedrooms. A sound simulation test ordered by the CBI had even found that it was possible the Talwar's might not have heard what was happening one room over. Experts also refuted the assertion that the victim's neck wounds had been made using a light scalpel-like weapon with surgical precision. Due to the large size of the injuries, it seemed that a bigger blunter weapon was used. A gynecologist gave evidence that disputed that of the doctor who had performed Arashi's autopsy. His amended report claimed that Arashi's vagina had been so dilated that he could see her cervix. The gynecologist testified that this was not possible unless force had been used after rigor mortis set in. Such force would result in noticeable injuries, which were absent from Arashi's body. None of Hemraj's blood or DNA had been found in Arashi's room. The notion that the Talwar's had somehow identified which blood was his, and then succeeded in cleaning it all up while leaving Arashi's untouched, was labelled absurd. The defence argued that Hemraj had been killed on the terrace, as originally agreed. The blood on the staircase leading up there hadn't come from the Talwar's dragging his body, but from Arashi's mattress. Some acquaintances of the Talwar's who had been given police permission to clean the apartment initially took it up there to dispose of it. When they found the terrace door locked, they left the mattress on a neighbour's terrace instead. The defence had an alternative suspect in mind. When they had gained access to the prosecution's evidence during preparation for the trial, they discovered a forensics report dated November 6, 2008. It related to items belonging to the Talwar's former employee, Krishna Tadurai. The original CBI team had collected the items while investigating Krishna and two of his acquaintances for the crime. One of the items was the kukri knife with blood from an unidentified animal on it. Another was a purple pillowcase stained with several spots of blood. According to the report, DNA testing revealed the blood belonged to Hemraj Benjati.

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The defence couldn't believe that this evidence had somehow been overlooked for five years. When they presented it during the Talwar's attempt to appeal the charges, the CBI said it was simply a typographical error.

The pillowcase with blood on it had actually been recovered from Hemraj's room, but it had been mislabeled as belonging to Krishna.

With no further evidence to support one claim or the other, the defence could not use the pillowcase evidence at trial.

In late November 2013, six months after the trial began, the judge was ready to deliver a verdict. He ruled that it had been proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Rajesh and Nupur Talwar had murdered Arushi and Hemraj.

He also found them guilty of destroying evidence to cover up the crime.

Rajesh and Nupur burst into tears upon hearing the verdict.

The CBI had asked that they received the death penalty. The judge sentenced them to life in prison.

The Talwar's continued to maintain their innocence, as did their supporters.

Defenders of the couple pointed out that the murder weapon was never established and there was no forensic evidence tying the couple to the crime.

So how could they have been convicted beyond a reasonable doubt?

Journalist Avi Rook Sen, who wrote a book about the case titled Arushi, accused the judge of deciding on the verdict before the defence had finished presenting their case.

The Talwar's found purpose in prison by setting up a dental clinic there with permission of the authorities.

They treated their fellow inmates while waiting for their first appeal to be heard by the Allahabad High Court, the highest court in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Almost four years after they were incarcerated, the High Court found that the evidence presented by the CBI was not sufficient to find them guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

In a scathing 273 page report, they said the CBI had miserably failed to find evidence to support their theory of the crime.

Rajesh and Nupur Talwar were both acquitted of all charges and allowed to return home.

Some were angered by this decision. The CBI announced their intention to challenge the ruling at the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the appeal, but there have been no further updates and the case remains unsolved as of mid-2023.

In the Nepalese village where Hemraj Banjadi was from, many of his family and friends are certain that the Talwar's were guilty.

Hemraj's wife, Kumkula Banjadi, has spoken publicly of her conviction that Rajesh Talwar killed her husband.

Who else would do this, she asked in a 2017 documentary series titled Arushi Beyond a Reasonable Doubt.

Kumkula believed at the initial theory of the case that Rajesh had been having an affair and killed Arushi after she found out.

Hemraj had witnessed the murder, so Rajesh killed him too.

According to Kumkula, Hemraj had cared for Arushi like she was his own daughter.

Others who had known Hemraj also vouched for his kind and loyal character.

A woman who'd employed Hemraj for 15 years prior to him joining the Talwar household said he had

always been protective of her children, to the point of intervening if she or her husband were angry with them. Kumkula told the filmmakers how difficult her life was without Hemraj. He had moved to India to find work and provide for his family, but he made sure to return once or twice a year. He would stay for about a month before going back to India. Almost a decade after his death, Kumkula still missed him constantly and found it hard to believe he was gone. To make matters worse, it felt like her husband was the forgotten victim of his own murder.

Quote,
There's an emptiness in everything. How do I put it in words?
Dr Talwar has money, so everyone only talks about his daughter's murder.
We are poor, so who will stand up for us?
Others see the Talwars as victims of corrupt policing agencies, a flawed justice system, and a media circus.

Journalist and cousin of Nupur Shri Paradkar wrote an article about the case for Toronto Star. She'd explained that they'd assumed the CBI was independent of the state police who botched the first investigation. But it turned out the CBI officers who charged the Talwars were colleagues of the Noida police. Issues of class and social mores may have contributed to the Talwars' prosecution. The couple were urban middle class professionals who spoke English and were university educated. They had fairly liberal values and a relationship with their daughter that was more open and easy going than many Indians were accustomed to. Arushi was permitted to talk to boys, go out with friends, and could be cheeky with her parents. Most of the police officers and CBI investigators responsible for the case came from more conservative backgrounds. Elements of the Talwars' lives which were quite normal for middle class Indian families appeared foreign and troubling to them. Their cosmopolitan lifestyle led to allegations that the couple had affairs and engaged in swinging. The fact that Rajesh and Nupur didn't cry in public after their daughter's murder also seemed suspicious. When confronted by this, they argued that no one saw how much they cried every day in the privacy of their home. When journalist Avi Rukh San visited the Talwars at their home, they showed him keepsakes they had of their daughter. These included a letter Arushi had written to Santa Claus for what would turn out to be her final Christmas.

It read,
Dear Santa, Merry Christmas to you.
I know you will be tired from running here and there giving children what they wanted, but I want something totally different.
I want the well-being of my family. I want no harm to reach them. Please fulfill my wish.
My second wish is that I want my parents to always be with me and my friends too.
My third wish is a bit silly. I want a dog, not from you, but from my parents. I wish they'd agree.

Reflecting on the letter, Rajesh said in a sad voice,
He didn't fulfill even one of her wishes. Did he?
Thank you for watching.