



'My baby was stolen and sold'

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LOOKING INTO HER NEWBORN

baby daughter's brown eyes, Kanon Sarkar was overjoyed. But within minutes, doctors had swept her away, claiming she had heart problems and needed urgent surgery.

That was the last time Kanon saw her baby alive. A few hours later a doctor announced she hadn't survived.

Two years on, that same doctor, Dr Tapan Biswas, has been arrested for his alleged involvement in a baby trafficking ring in Kolkata, eastern India, and Kanon now suspects her baby was one of his victims.

'I had her inside me for nine months and all five ultrasound reports were normal,' Kanon, 26, says. 'I delivered her,

she was healthy. I even breastfed her. Then she died? It doesn't make sense. I'm convinced my baby was stolen and sold.'

Last month, Kolkata's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) learned of a baby trafficking ring. They raided a nursing home in Baduria, 80km from Kolkata, and rescued three newborn babies from a cardboard biscuit box. The babies were intended to be sold to childless couples.

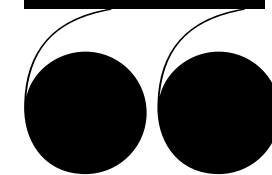
Since then, another 13 babies – 10 girls and three boys – have been rescued, three clinics have been shut down and so far 20 people have been arrested, including doctors, nurses, midwives and clerks who allegedly faked adoption certificates.

When Kanon heard the news on TV, she felt all her suspicions had finally been explained. Her husband Ashish Sarkar, 37, a labourer, went straight to the local police station to report their story.

'I always knew something was wrong but I had nothing, no proof, no



Left: police images of babies found in a nursing home in Kolkata. Below: a clinic allegedly involved in the trafficking ring



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explanation,' she says. 'Now, I can't stop thinking about the possibility my daughter is still alive.'

Kanon went into labour on 13 July, 2014, at her home in a village 60km from Kolkata. Ashish called Dr Biswas, who had been recommended to them by relatives. Although he had no formal qualifications, he had been carrying out deliveries for as little as 3,500 rupees (£40) – allowing him to become successful in a country where healthcare is expensive.

Dr Biswas suggested Kanon be admitted to Matri Mangal Hospital in Kolkata. At 5am on 14 July, 2014, she gave birth naturally to her daughter.

Kanon remembers, 'Everything was wonderful. My mother had made clothes and the family were starting to celebrate. 'Suddenly a nurse came and said a specialist wanted to give my baby a check-up. But after just a few minutes the doctor entered and said our daughter had heart problems and needed surgery. We were devastated.'

Kanon and her baby were transferred to another hospital for surgery. But the following day Kanon was told her baby had died. 'I couldn't believe it,' she says.



'We were in complete shock. I cried. I screamed. I couldn't accept it.'

The couple were given a baby's body to take home for a traditional Hindu ceremony. Ashish says: 'My cousin picked up the body. He said it was like a different baby, a lot smaller and very frail.'

A CID official tells *Grazia*: 'These babies have been used as commodities and sold on the basis of complexion, weight and looks. A boy was sold for over 200,000 rupees while girls were cheaper.'

It is believed the babies have been sold abroad. Chairperson of West Bengal Child Welfare Commission, Ananya Chatterjee, says, 'This has possibly been going on for over 20 years. If we assume 100 babies a year, 2,000 babies have been trafficked so far.'

Kanon says, 'I'm living for the day I see my daughter again. To know she could still be alive somewhere will make me fight every battle to get her back.'



Kanon (above left, and above with her husband)

Words: Helen Roberts and Charmamrit Sachdeva. Photos: Cover Asia Press/Tanzeel Ur-Rehman