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Dowry death relief for husband won't absolve in-laws: SC

New Delhi: A husband's acquittal in a dowry death case cannot be grounds for absolving the victim's in-laws, the Supreme Court has ruled.

The apex court said this while sentencing a dowry victim's father-in-law to seven years' imprisonment, setting aside his acquittal by the Rajasthan high court.

The high court had said that as the trial court had acquitted the victim's husband, the other accused, including her in-laws, cannot be convicted.

The Supreme Court termed the premise as erroneous and affirmed the trial court's verdict holding the victim's in-laws guilty of dowry death. "The high court committed a serious illegality by acquitting the father-in-law on the premise that the husband had been acquitted," a bench said.

The SC said the high court ignored the most important factor that the deceased suffered injuries in a dwelling unit belonging to her in-laws and she died in their presence due to those injuries.

While setting free the victim's father-in-law, the high court had said, "In view of the acquittal of the husband of the deceased, the other accused cannot be convicted for offence of dowry death."

Giving the benefit of doubt to the victim's husband, who was out of station on the day of the incident, the trial court had acquitted him.

The Supreme Court has set aside a Rajasthan high court verdict, which refused to convict a dowry victim's in-laws after her husband was acquitted. The apex court has sentenced the victim's father-in-law to seven years' rigorous imprisonment

The Supreme Court also questioned the haste with which the victim's body was cremated by her in-laws, without informing her parents. "The disposal of dead body in a hush-hush manner clearly established that the accused had done so with the sole object of concealing the real cause of her death," the bench said.

The victim was attacked on her head by a lethal weapon. She was then taken to a nearby hospital but her in-laws took her away at 4 am on the pretext of taking her to Jaipur for further treatment. Within an hour, she was cremated under mysterious circumstances.

She was continuously tortured by her in-laws during her 18 months of marriage and villagers, who had noticed it, had advised her in-laws to refrain from doing so. **AGENCIES**