

Mumbai: Mother-daughter duo welcome rats into their home to beat loneliness

By Anurag Kamble | Mumbai | Posted on 1st September, 2017

Saraswati Building residents at their wits' end after filthy Acharya home turns host to pests; police won't intervene, all BMC does is place traps



Sharvari Acharya, with daughter Shubhana (in the background) at their flat in Saraswati building. Pic/Sameer Markande

A 75-year-old woman and her daughter, 42, have found a strange way to overcome loneliness. They have opened the doors of their third-floor home in a Vile Parle society, to rats, hundreds of them.

"They are our friends, they give us company," Sharvari Acharya, the mother, tells neighbours who are sick of fighting the menace for the last 10 years.



Rats roam the kitchen of their home

The neighbours are so fed up that they have complained to the police and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), but the adamant women refuse to budge. When mid-day visited the Acharya residence, the neighbours were quick to inform that BMC officials had taken away two traps only last week, filled with 60 rats.

The ground-plus-three-storey Saraswati Society, at Irla Lane, is located in a serene neighbourhood and was built in 1969 for State Bank of India employees. With three wings, the 42 flats housed residents who had lived a quiet life, till 2007.



The drawing room

"Ten years ago when Jayant Acharya, Sharvari's husband, died of a heart attack, his wife and daughter Shubhana seemed unable to cope with the loss. After some time, we noticed rats entering our homes. This was strange, since it had never happened before," said Tushar Samant, a committee member of Saraswati society, who lives above Acharya's flat.

"Another resident on the second floor then casually mentioned that he, too, had noticed them in his house. We then spotted rats around Acharya's flat. The problem started getting worse. Now, there must be at least 200 of them in there," he added.



The filthy kitchen with leftover food

Police refuse to intervene

A police complaint was lodged at Juhu police station after BMC officials told residents that they would take action only under police presence since the home belonged to female residents. The cops, however, refused to intervene in the matter. Ever since, it has become routine for residents to call a society meeting, raise the issue of dirt and rats and get vague answers from Sharvari. When mid-day spoke to Vivek Kinikar, Sharvari's next-door neighbour on Monday, he said, "We want to help them, but they won't entertain us. We knew her husband, who retired as a senior official from SBI, but since his demise, both the women seem to be struggling with depression."

Smell of something rotting

When mid-day visited the flat, Shubhana opened the door, and left it ajar. A pungent odour hit this reporter, as if something was rotting inside. The floor of the house was sticky and blackened, as were the tiles in the kitchen. Sharvari was sitting on a sofa in the drawing room littered with clothes and leftover food.

"I know our house is a little dirty, but it is cleaner than any other house in the society," Sharvari said in defence. She added, "There are a few rats, but they come and go at night."

Meanwhile, Shubhana, a graduate from a reputable Vile Parle college, demanded that we leave. When Sharvari was asked why she didn't take the society's help to clean her house, she said, "I have the right to do anything in my house. And, I have allowed the BMC to place traps."

Another neighbour said, "The rodents are now eating wires and burrowing into the walls of the flats. They can damage the pillars of the building, which is almost 50 years old."

60

No. of rats the BMC trapped from their residence in two days

42

No. of flats in the society

BMC says

A BMC official, who did not wish to be named said, "After receiving complaints from the residents in 2014, we met the Acharyas. Initially, officials thought they must surely be exaggerating. But, when one of our men went to the flat, he vomited within seconds of the door being opened. Many of our men have tried to convince the women to let us help them, but they just don't listen to us, saying 'We don't think this is a problem at all'." Prafulla Kamble, Pest Control Officer, K-West Ward, said, "We eventually got them to understand how the rodent menace was affecting others and they allowed us to set up traps. Last week, we took out 60-odd rats from their house. On Monday, we again placed two traps. If they keep allowing us to set up traps, we can help the building get rid of the rat problem."