

SOME REPORTS SENT TO US

MAHARASHTRA Camp For Single Women

On June 15 and 16, two of us organized a women's camp at Gaudgaon village, Sholapur district. It was attended by 25 women who are undergoing a two year training organized by Shri Shivaji Shikshan Kendra. Three of these women were single, two widowed, and the rest had been thrown by out their husbands. Many had sought shelter in their parent's houses, but were soon made to feel unwanted, guilty and ashamed, so they came out to get an education and stand on their own feet.

The women were extremely depressed when they came, but after some collective songs and games, they relaxed a bit. At first, they would only say that they were suffering because of their sins in some past life, but after discussions on women's status, they began to talk about how they used to be beaten or how their husbands had second and third wives. After hearing about the similar experiences of other women, they began to feel that they have faced these problems not because they are uneducated or unemployed but because they are women. Throughout, there was a tremendous feeling of solidarity which arose from the fact of being women and living in a male minated society, yet wanting to assert oneself inspite of all opposition. We hope to have more such camps in future to encourage women to

live on their own and work for the cause of women.

—*Ingrid Mendonca, Kusum Karnik*

BIHAR Protest Against Dowry Deals

Some months ago, seven girls and 10 boys from the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini went to Saurath, Mithilanchal, Madhubani district, to protest against the fair held there, in which prospective bridegrooms are displayed, bargained over and secured by the fathers and relatives of marriageable girls.

In the Saurath fair, well dressed and decorated men sit waiting in groups with their relatives, while girl's male relatives move around from one group to another, finding out how much dowry will have to be paid to the different grooms, and striking deals with them. Several marriage brokers also hover around, taking payment from bride's relatives to bargain on their behalf with groom's relatives. The fair is conducted during the days declared to be auspicious by astrologers.

When we reached there, we found the fair in full swing, with food vendors, tea stalls, buyers, sellers, and many men from political parties making speeches against dowry. We also set up a corner meeting but when women tried to speak, we were told that women are not allowed to enter the fair grounds, and cannot speak there! In spite of this opposition, the women raised slogans and sang songs. Some men



began to insult and abuse the women. It seems they were annoyed that we were confronting the Brahmin community. The fair is only for Mithil Brahmin men, while we were men and women of different religions and castes. One of them broke our mike but we continued the programme without a mike. When the tension spread, the matter was referred to a magistrate, who said that we could oppose the fair from outside but could not go inside.

The following day, we organized another corner meeting in which about 15 local women participated. There were songs, speeches and slogans such as: "*Larka larki ek saman, phir dahej ki kaisi mang?*" (Boys and girls are equal so how can dowry be demanded?)

It is ironical that on the one hand, the Bihar government has made the anti-dowry law more stringent, and on the other hand, it shuts its eyes to these openly conducted dowry transactions.

—*Nadira*
(translated from Hindi)

BOMBAY

Reclaiming Women's Compartments

Bombay has a relatively cheap, usually regular and fairly fast local railway system. Since most government and private offices are located in south Bombay, and several mills and industrial estates in central Bombay, and only the rich can afford to live in these areas, it is the poor and middle class people who have to travel daily from the suburbs where they live to their workplaces. Thousands of women workers, employees, students, fisherwomen, vegetable vendors, and housewives use the local trains.

Throughout the day, women have to run the risk of harassment and chain snatching, but around 8 p.m. a fresh problem starts when men start entering women's compartments. This is not due to overcrowding because it does not happen during the peak hours from 5 to 8 p.m. The problem starts after peak hours, when shops and trade establishments down shutters for the day. The men not only enter the compartments but also take them over. They occupy the seats, block the entrances, pass obscene remarks, sing sexist songs, and make travelling a nightmare for women. Women carrying children or heavy loads find it difficult to board the trains. Women commuters on the central railway had taken some action. According to a railway police officer, they even cut off the hair of some men who refused to get out of women's compartments. The situation improved after this, but continued to be pretty bad on the western railway, especially in fast trains to and from Virar which is the northernmost point on the local western railway.

Women did protest individually from time to time, but they were humiliated, even assaulted by the men, who seemed to think it is their right to travel in women's compartments after dark, because women should be home by nightfall, and any who are not home must be "loose" women who deserve no respect.

The forum against oppression of women decided to carry on a sustained



Women demonstrating against harassment in Bombay trains

campaign to tackle the situation. We conducted an initial survey in May, and found out that most women commuters were angry about the situation since they had at one time or other been humiliated, jostled around, pushed aside in the rush of men entering or alighting from women's compartments, and at times had even been beaten up by men. The women realized that it was risky to protest individually, but they were ready and eager to cooperate with us in the campaign.

We then went on to stick posters and collect signatures from women commuters. On June 19, we held a demonstration at the office of the general manager of the railways. There were about 30 of us, and a delegation of five met the assistant general manager, who said that his hands were tied since the question of law and order was not under his jurisdiction. He did however promise to advertise on television and in the press that men travelling in women's compartments would be prosecuted.

Guarding the compartments was a tiresome and dangerous task but was also the most rewarding part of the campaign. Initially, we faced a lot of hostility from men. There were instances of physical assault, stone throwing and indecent

exposure. The drivers and guards refused to stop the train when we pulled the chain, because they thought that men entering women's compartments was too "trivial" a matter for them to take action.

We used to undertake the guarding action twice a week, boarding the Virar fast train at Dadar and changing the train at Andheri so as to make our presence felt in two different trains each time. We kept varying the timings between 8 and 10 p.m. because we found that men began to avoid the train we guarded, instead boarding a later train. We had decided not to go on the campaign unless there were at least 12 of us, otherwise it was too risky. However, as days passed, many women commuters began to join us. They told us that each time they had protested in the past, they had been humiliated and at times, even followed and beaten up on their way home.

We carried on this action for a month. On two occasions, forum women who were travelling individually on days when the campaign was not on, were beaten up by men who recognized their faces. So we felt that we had better proceed to the next stage of holding a joint meeting with railway and police authorities.

After a great deal of effort, we were

finally able to coordinate the joint meeting of five high ranking railway officials, three from the railway police and five forum members. We narrated our experience of the past month and firmly stated that we would not take any more risks, since it was their duty to protect us and ensure safety of the commuters. We pointed out that we were only asking them to enforce their own rules regarding non-entry of men into women's compartments. It is significant that the railway authorities are able to adequately enforce the rule against people with second class tickets travelling in first class compartments even if they are empty, but profess helplessness when it comes to women's rights being violated.

When we asked for police protection, we were told that the railway police is understaffed, and in any case their duty is to protect railway property, not commuters. We also realized that women police are there only to prevent women from committing crimes, not to ensure that crimes are not committed against us! Three trucks full of women police always accompany every protest demonstration by women, but policewomen are not posted to safeguard women from harassment. After a two hour discussion, the deputy inspector general of police promised to post 50 men to guard the trains the following week. We were informed later that these policemen had managed to fine 250 men in the course of one night!

We feel the situation has improved in so far as the authorities are more alert, railway police carry out raids from time to time, and though men do get into women's compartments, they now know that they are trespassing, and most of them hurriedly leave when they are told that if they stay, they are likely to be fined.

—*Sonal, Flavia*

MADRAS SIET—Harassment Continues

In June this year, the SIET women's college management suddenly announced that no students would be admitted to undergraduate and postgraduate classes. The reason given was "gross indiscipline

and misconduct" of the staff. This announcement brought to a climax all the harassment that the college management has been inflicting on staff and students (see **Manushi** No. 4). The association of university teachers began an agitation, has been picketing the college, and some members went on fast demanding government takeover of the college. The management reacted by suspending all teachers who belonged to the association.

Many people suspected that the management was planning to close down the college altogether, and use the site to build a five star hotel. An examination of the admission policy of the college over the last few years lends strength to this suspicion. In 1978-79, there were 3,800 students in the college. This number was gradually reduced until in 1981-82, only 400 students were enrolled, and none at all this year. This has resulted in 35 teachers last year and more than 100 teachers this year being declared surplus. Of these teachers 80 per cent are Muslims, for whose supposed benefit the college was started.

This confrontation has had the desirable effect of raising once again all the old issues which had not been resolved. These issues include the astronomical capitation fees extracted from students, the arbitrary restrictions on dress and behaviour imposed on students, the keeping of teaching and non-teaching staff in "temporary" posts for periods ranging from seven to 22 years, the inordinate delays in paying their salaries, the ban on their joining unions. The 11 member trust headed by Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, wields a despotic rule over the institution. The question raised by this struggle is how far can an institution, in the name of minority rights, flout university rules and government regulations?

Soon after the management suspended admissions, the deputy director of collegiate education filed a criminal complaint against the SIET management under section 25 of the Tamil Nadu private colleges regulation act. SIET responded by pleading that as it is a minority

institution, section 25 is not applicable to it. The court stayed proceedings while admitting two applications from four individuals for removal of the management council and for a direction to SIET to resume admissions. Meanwhile the state government, which took a serious view of the misuse of minority status, introduced the Tamil Nadu recognized private colleges regulation amendment bill, 1982, which, was passed by both houses. Replying to criticism and protests from Muslim members that the bill was an infringement of the fundamental rights of minorities the education minister pointed out that the SIET college had not encouraged girls from the minority community. While 70 per cent of the staff are Muslims, hardly 15 per cent of the students are Muslims.

The Pennurimai Iyakkam held a meeting on September 11 to highlight the problem. The teachers suspended by the management during the agitation have announced that they will start pavement classes outside the college for students whose studies are being interrupted.

While this report was being written, the SIET management decided to resume admissions from September 15. Admission forms were issued and there was a big rush for them. It is noteworthy that the management decision to resume admissions, like the earlier decision to suspend them, was taken without consulting the staff or the students.

—*Bharati Sadasivam*

UTTAR PRADESH Death Of A Nurse

On July 7, we read in the newspapers that Kavita Chatterjee, a 22 year old nurse in the Diesel and Locomotive Works hospital, which is a few miles away from Banaras Hindu University, had committed suicide by swallowing poison. On June 30, Kavita had conducted a sensitivity test on a little boy, and found that the place where she had injected him was slightly swollen. On noticing this, the boy's father P. S. Choubay, an employee of Diesel and Locomotive Works, raised a hue and cry, abused Kavita and threatened to beat her

up after her duty hours. The other nurse and doctor on duty tried to explain to Choubay that nothing had gone wrong and the child was perfectly all right. In spite of this, Choubay caught hold of Kavita after her duty hours and beat her up with sandals. Kavita managed to escape and go home, but Choubay continued his outcry. He rang up the general manager and other higher officials and demanded action against Kavita, threatening that he would bum down the hospital if no action was taken.

The next day, Kavita and the doctor-in-charge sent a written report of the incident to the officials, demanding that an enquiry be conducted. However, on July 3, without answering Kavita's letter, and without holding any enquiry, the administration handed her a notice terminating her services! Shocked and humiliated, Kavita returned home with the notice, and wept bitterly. Her parents tried to console her but the same evening, she was found lying unconscious. She was rushed to the hospital where she expired three days later. She left behind a pathetic note, blaming the authorities. Ironically, the little boy patient is in perfect health!

When we read about Kavita's death, we were deeply disturbed, and decided to investigate. Kavita's father, Mr Chatterjee, is a DLW employee so the family lives in the DLW colony.

According to Mr Chatterjee, Kavita joined the DLW railway hospital as staff nurse, grade B, on May 1, 1982. Mr Chatterjee alleges that within a month, some politically powerful men — R.C. Lal, Srivastava, P. S. Choubay, S.N. Singh and Jang Bahadur, who also work in the DLW, began to harass Kavita. On June 9, they tried to act familiar with her, and since she did not succumb, they went to her house on June 13 and threatened her family members. On June 13, a police complaint was lodged against this harassment.

On June 25, Kavita was returning home from hospital. These five men waylaid her and attempted to sexually assault her. She raised an alarm and managed to get away. Another police report was lodged, but the nature of the assault was not mentioned, for fear of social stigma. The drama of June

30 was thus the culmination of a process of harassment and resistance. The dismissal letter was signed by M. G Verma, the general manger and M. M. Gupta, divisional medical officer. However, the assistant medical officer, Mr Sengupta, who was on duty when the incident occurred, has given a written report which clearly states that Kavita was not at fault.

The residents of the colony are afraid to talk about the case. It is learnt from other sources that sexual harassment, rape and other atrocities on women employees have been prevalent in the colony for years but nobody does anything about it. Mr Chatterjee has now filed a case in court.

—Ujjwala, Madhu, Rita

PUNJAB

Struggle Against Police Rapists

Muni Devi is a 20 year old girl from Garhwal in Uttar Pradesh. Her husband Manohar Singh is an employee of the electricity department in Bhatinda. In June, he was arrested in connection with the murder of a small child, and was sent to jail. Muni Devi was also taken to the police station several times for interrogation.

On June 12, sub-inspector Bhagat Ram, the SHO of Kotwali police station, and Mithu Singh, a constable, went to Muni Devi's house at about 10.30 p.m. Both were in plain clothes. They ordered her to go with them to the police station. When her teenaged brother-in-law, Ram Lal objected, he was slapped and silenced. Muni Devi was forced to sit on the pillion of a scooter, between the two policemen. Instead of taking her to the police station, they took her to a room provided by a hotel owner who is known to be a police tout.

Ram Lal went to the police station and since Muni Devi was not there, he lodged a complaint in writing. Meanwhile, Muni Devi was gagged and repeatedly raped by the two policemen all night long. Her clothes got torn in the struggle. At about 6 a.m. she was left near her house, and ordered to leave Bhatinda immediately. She was also threatened with dire consequences should she breathe a word about the atrocity perpetrated on her. Muni Devi and Ram Lal left for UP the same day.

The following day, some workers of the Punjab Human Rights Committee came to know about this crime. The committee immediately made written representations to the Punjab governor, the director general of police and the chief secretary, demanding arrest of the rapists. Under public pressure, a case was registered but since Bhagat Ram enjoyed the favour of a senior police officer, he was not arrested. The police officer made hectic efforts to find Muni Devi with the intention of extracting a favourable statement from her. Attempts were also made to bribe the human rights activists into dropping the case.

Muni Devi returned to Bhatinda with her father and met the governor, Chenna Reddy at Chandigarh. She filed a report with the police on June 25. On July 9 a deputation from the Human Rights Committee met the governor, who promised that justice would be done. However, he is reported to have advised Muni Devi not to meet the press or politicians.

It appears that the district administration is bent upon giving full support and help to Bhagat Ram. Though his bail plea was rejected by the Punjab high court, his arrest was delayed, giving him time to appeal to the supreme court for bail. Finally, he was arrested and bailed out. The case is in the judicial courts, and now begins the unending judicial process which in most cases wears out the poor victims to the benefit of better-placed accused persons.

—Ved Prakash Gupta

ANDHRA PRADESH

Women's Studies — A Beginning

A society for women's studies and development has been formed in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. On August 7 and 8, the society convened a conference attended by participants from Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Pune, Hoshangabad, Dalli-Rajhara, Vishakhapatnam, Guntur. The local participants were mainly male students of the Warangal engineering college, where the conference was held, as well as teachers from various colleges.

The conference covered a range of issues from politics, employment and

organization to culture and media. Some speakers pointed out that there is a need to trace the various concepts of "development and women" which have provided the basis of government policies. It is also necessary to identify and analyse the entire development strategy of the Indian government since all non-owning sections of the population are the victims of "planned underdevelopment." When we were discussing movements for change, it was suggested that the nature and extent to which a social or political movement attacks the concepts and institutions of patriarchy should be taken into account when analysing it. This could provide a base to explain the continuing inequality of women even after such movements have been successful. According to one speaker, the need at present is to form a "united front of women", which involves both "a necessary sisterhood" and "class war." It is to be hoped that the society will follow up the conference with smaller meetings and discussions in Warangal and its neighbourhood.

—Sudesh Vaid, Uma Chakravarti

UTTAR PRADESH

On August 21, the department of sociology, Banaras Hindu University, organized a seminar on "Basic issues in women's studies." The seminar was attended by women lecturers of other departments and colleges. The speaker Dr Surinder Jetley emphasized in her lecture the need for studies to focus on the invisible section of women, the poor, rural women, who have so far been neglected by social scientists in third world countries. This section is fast expanding as increasing numbers of small peasants are rapidly being proletarianized. While at the macro level, there is a need to study government policies, sex bias in current methodology and in statistical analyses, which neglect to compute the value of women's work and women's role in social change, at the micro level there should be collectively conducted studies of women's condition and struggle under specific geographical and economic circumstances.

—Radheyshyam Tripathi
(translated from Hindi)

RAJASTHAN

The Rajasthan university women's association was formed on international women's day, 1981. A big meeting was held on the campus at Jaipur. Women from different walks of life addressed the meeting, and a poster exhibition was also held. The objectives of the association are to create greater awareness about women's socio-economic, political, educational and employment rights, and to share our knowledge and experience with less privileged women inside and outside the university, with the aim of improving their situation. Membership of the association includes students and all women employees of the university—professors, lecturers, officers, office workers, peons and sweepers.

Since March 1981, we have not looked back. We have lobbied for women representatives on university executive committees and in the various employees and student associations.

We conducted a survey of the bathroom and common room facilities available on the campus for women students and employees, and are now working for changes in the deplorable condition of these facilities. We raised funds for a knitting machine for one of our peon members who is a widow with five children, two of whom are physically handicapped.

We held a protest meeting when a foreign girl student was molested on the campus. We have also organized several lectures and seminars on problems of women and submitted a detailed memorandum to the parliamentary commission set up to revise the dowry prohibition act. We have taken up various cases of discrimination against women in appointments, admissions and promotions. Lately, in collaboration with the university department of adult education, we have set up a centre for women's studies with a special focus on Rajasthan. We plan to open a creche in the near future and to work for the construction of a working women's residence on the campus.

—G.J. Unnithan

A Beautiful Torso

*You have a beautiful torso, he said.
But don't you see my forehead
that promises intelligence?
No, you have a beautiful torso.
Don't you see my eyebrows
that speak of power?
No, you have a beautiful torso.
Don't you see my eyes
gleaming with humour?
No, you have a beautiful torso.
Don't you see my nose,
the guide to character?
No, you have a beautiful torso.
Don't you see my lips
—the silent determination?
No, you have a beautiful torso.
Oh, my torso, my torso!
Given a chance,
would you not rape my corpse?*

—Prabha Rani

DO YOU KNOW THAT

Employment of women in coal mines has gone down from 50,000 to 30,000 in the last three years, that is, 20,000 women have been thrown out of jobs
