

Some Reports Sent To Us

PUNJAB

People Hail Paramjit

Late at night on February 24, in village Mehma Sarja near Bhatinda, 15 year old Paramjit Kaur shot dead her father, 40 year old Balbir Singh, a Nihang Sikh. The cause of this brave action was that Balbir had several times before raped Paramjit and she had already had two abortions. On the night of the incident, Balbir Singh went to the upper room and tried to rape Paramjit. She woke up and ran downstairs to the kitchen. Balbir followed her there. Finding no other way to save herself, she took hold of his licensed gun and fired three shots at him, killing him on the spot. The fire of revenge and constant humiliation was not yet quenched. She drew a sword and hacked him to pieces. Then she summoned the villagers and calmly asked them to throw her father's corpse into a ditch. The whole village hailed the act of the brave 15 year old. Her younger sister also appreciated and approved of her action.

The police have arrested Paramjit under section 204 of the Penal Code Various social and educational organizations including the Punjab State Human Rights Committee have come forward to defend Paramjit in court and also to honour her in public after the trial is over. All round Bhatinda district, people hail the brave action of Paramjit.

— *Ved Parkash Gupia*

Fight For Choice

Sukhjeet is a 29 year old woman working as a clerk in Chandigarh. She is an MA B Ed. She belongs to village Pitho, Bhatinda district. In 1975, when she was about 22, Sukhjeet decided to marry Yashpal, a science teacher in a government school who is an active trade unionist, and also at present president of the government teachers' union. Sukhjeet's

and Yashpal's families were on very good terms. Sukhjeet's brother Darshan was a militant student activist and a good friend of Yashpal. Sukhjeet's father Nachhattar Singh opposed the marriage on the ground that Yashpal is a Hindu while Sukhjeet is a Sikh. Sukhjeet's uncle Babu Singh and brother Darshan promised to try and persuade her father into giving his consent.

However, as time passed, Darshan, who had decided to settle down as a gentlemanly businessman, ditched his sister. From 1981 he began to support his father. Babu Singh also became an opponent of the proposed marriage.

In 1979, as Sukhjeet reports in her leaflet issued in August 1982, life became hell and home a jail for her: "... in December 1979 when I came home for the vacation, my father mercilessly beat me. He even planned to kill me. There was talk of killing me by poisoning. It was only my alertness which saved me...When I came home in 1980 after completing my B Ed, I was beaten again, mistreated like a slave, and filthily abused for days together. I was compelled to resign my job and stay at home. I was prevented from going to dharnas, demonstrations and other trade union activities. Even my girl friends were debarred from visiting me at home. From December 1981, Darshan...began to threaten to murder me and Yash. He prevented me from going to work for a whole month. My father again beat me up and told me to choose between forced arranged marriage and death. For one month I was in a maddening situation."

Even in this terrible situation, Sukhjeet did not hide anything from her family. In the face of all their threats, she openly went for an interview, and finally left for Chandigarh, from where she wrote letters informing her family and some trade unions that she had decided to leave home.



-Kathe Kollwitz

Her brother then issued a press statement accusing Yash of kidnapping Sukhjeet. Sukhjeet and Yash got married in court on June 12 This marriage was like a red rag to a bull. Nachhattar and Darshan with a force of about 25 ruffians armed with rifles, attacked Yashpal's house in Rampuraphul. Since Yash's parents had left the house for fear of reprisal, the ruffians destroyed or looted every article in the house. The family was completely ruined. The ruffians stayed for three days in the house, ate, drank and made merry. Yash's friend who unwittingly visited the house was beaten so badly that he had to be hospitalized. Yash's sister, who is working in a bank, had to flee with her family, since the ruffians had declared their intention of taking revenge on her The ruffians even sold the house in their own name. The police did not show up while all this was going on. Since 'Yash had to attend school in Rampuraphul, more than one attack was made on his life, but he narrowly escaped.

After a number of demonstrations and agitations by the teachers' union, the police registered a case of forgery and trespassing against Nachhattar and Darshan. Unfortunately, Yash's brother and sister dropped the case, when the attackers promised to return the stolen property. The promise has not yet been fulfilled. Yash and Sukhjeet still have to live in fear. It seems that films like *Prem Rog* are not so far off the mark when they show fathers and brothers ready to kill daughters who want to decide their own lives, while police and administrative authorities protect the ruffians !

—Chaman Lal

Women Workers' Camp

On November 29, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha organized a three day camp at Chandigarh for labouring women. Many women reported that women are paid lower wages than men, for doing the same work, in many sectors and areas in Punjab and Haryana.

Padma from Delhi said that even in the capital city, the Minimum Wage Act is not effectively implemented. She expressed deep dissatisfaction at the fact that women workers have far fewer facilities than men workers. She pointed out that women workers in many industries in Faridabad do not get the benefits guaranteed to them by labour legislation.

Rajwanti Kaur from Amritsar said that women workers, particularly agricultural labourers, are not even aware of their legal rights.

—Banmali

MAHARASHTRA Rural Women Meet

Marathwada is one of the most backward areas in Maharashtra. In recent months, a growing number of atrocities against women have been reported in this area. In October 1982, in village Bholegaon, district Latur, it was rumoured that a woman was having relations with a teacher. The woman's husband, who worked in Hyderabad, was summoned by his brother. One night the husband and his brother cut off the noses and ears of the woman and her supposed lover. In November 1982, a man, suspecting his 16



Women's demonstration in Marathwada

year old daughter of having relations with a boy, beat her up severely and then killed her by throwing her into the well. In January 1983, a married man raped a dumb woman. When the villagers came to know of this, they paraded the rapist on a donkey and also beat him up.

In view of many such reports, a women's meeting, sponsored by Terre des hommes, was held by Gramin Shramik Pratishthan at Nilanga on January 18, 19 and 20, 1983. Various women's issues were discussed, and much stress was laid on the need for a women's organization. It was suggested that each village should have a Mahila Mandal, which would also form Stree Atyachar Virodhi Mandals. The women sat in small groups and discussed in detail the problems they would face in forming such organizations when they went back to their villages. It was decided that when any atrocity took place in their area, they would get detailed information from the family and send a report either to Latur or Nilanga, where pamphlets would be issued and the news would be spread.

The authorities would be informed and if finance was available, medical and legal assistance would be given to the victim.

On the last day of the *shivir*, a demonstration was taken to the tehsildar's office. About 150 women participated,

shouting slogans like : "*Le le, le, le, Ie atyachar, are, are, are, are, bhrastachar*" and "*Tila nahin, hunda nahin, lagin kahi, bazar nahin*" A memorandum was submitted, the main demands being that women should not be called to a police station after 6 p.m., cases of violence on women should be dealt with immediately, laws relating to dowry, child marriage, bigamy and divorce should be implemented, land rights must be given to women, and a women's hostel must be built in every taluk.

The women went back to their villages with much enthusiasm, vowing to start women's organizations. I cannot end this without telling the story of Janak Nandini, a 22 year old Village girl, who, one night, took off her *mangalsutra*, and gave it to her husband, saying: "I don't want this. If you want to live with me as my friend and companion, you may. Otherwise, I am not going to stay with you. I'd much rather work for the cause of women."

—Ingrid Mendonca

BANGALORE Anti-Dowry Actions

On January 5, 1983, the body of 18 year old Pushpavathi was found hanging from the ceiling in her house at Vidyanagar cross, district Bangalore. Pushpavathi had been married, just eight months before her

death, to Chennaveerappa. Her in-laws had demanded a sum of Rs 3,000 in dowry, of which her parents had paid 1,500. After marriage, the in-laws had continued to threaten her parents, saying that her life would not be safe unless the remaining amount was paid, or a job was found for the groom.

Pushpavathi had often sent messages through the postman to her parents, saying that she was being harassed.

The neighbours suspect that Pushpavathi was killed by her in-laws and her body later hung up to make it appear a case of suicide. They say that the ceiling of the room is only six feet high, and the feet of the corpse were touching the floor.

hush up the case.

About 60 young people from Manini, Vimochana and the Centre for Social Studies held a protest demonstration in the village. The group shouted slogans and sang songs against the dowry death.

Some college students enacted a skit depicting the death of a bride due to harassment by in-laws. The group met the superintendent of police, Bangalore district, and the deputy inspector general of police. Investigation has now been taken over by a police officer of the rank of deputy superintendent. The police are likely to charge Pushpavathi's mother-in-law with abetment of suicide.

—*B.K.Renuka*



Protesting Pushpavathi's Death

Also, the mother-in-law insisted that on the night of her death, Pushpavathi slept alone in the house while all the other family members slept in a small wooden shed nearby. This does not sound plausible since the shed is too small to have accommodated them.

On seeing the newspaper report on January 14, a team of volunteers from Manini, a progressive women's organization, went to the locality to investigate the matter. The team found that the local police had refused to register Pushpavathi's parents' complaint on January 5, and had finally registered it three days later. The parents also allege that the local police, the doctor and a powerful person of the village are in collusion to

ANDHRA PRADESH Raped In Hospital

On January 9, 1983, the news spread that a patient in Hanamkonda maternity hospital had been raped by a watchman. The following day, *Inaadu*, a Telugu daily, reported the incident, stating that the watchman had been suspended pending a departmental enquiry, but no criminal case had been filed nor had the police been informed. Society for Women's Studies and Development and the Civil Liberties Committee sent a fact finding team to investigate the incident.

The team met the victim who, after much hesitation, finally told them some details. Her name is Rajamma. She is about 30 years old and lives on her own in

village Peesara, since she has been deserted by her husband. She earns a living by labour. She came to the hospital for a pregnancy test. She was not pregnant, but the doctor said that she needed an operation for vaginal fistula. She was somewhat confused so she asked Kishan, the watchman, whether the prescription given to her was a correct one. He offered to take her to a big doctor for better treatment, whereupon he took her to a room in the hospital which is not in use. There he caught hold of her. After narrating this, she burst into tear and was not able to give any more details. She said that she had asked the superintendent not to make a police complaint, since she was afraid that she would not get treatment in the hospital if she complained.

Many people told us that Kishan is notorious for such misbehaviour. He had once been suspended for assaulting a lady patient, but no action was taken against him, and he was reinstated. The hospital superintendent refused to give any details. She insisted that there had been no rape, but a departmental enquiry had been instituted. She absolutely refused to register a police complaint. On its second meeting with Rajamma, the team felt that she had been intimidated, and was afraid to speak the truth.

The team therefore demands that the police should file a case and take Kishan into custody. Proper arrangements should be made to protect the women patients in the hospital. Women should be appointed to guard the hospital gates since it is a maternity hospital.

How Suguna Died

On January 2, 1983, Suguna, a mother of four children, was done to death in Kothur street of Hanamkonda town. Her husband dubs it suicide but the neighbours call it a murder. Wall posters appeared in the street, condemning Venkataswamy for having murdered his wife Suguna. A fact finding team of the Society for Women's Studies and Development spoke to Suguna's mother and neighbours, with a view to bringing the facts to light.

Suguna was married about 10 years ago

to Venkataswamy, a bus conductor. Soon after their marriage, he began to drink heavily, beat Suguna, and flirt with women in her presence. When Suguna's sister came to stay with them for some days, he began to make eyes at her, and demanded that Suguna ask her parents to give her sister in marriage to him.

He continued to torture Suguna who, in the course of some years, had three children. Her parents refused to marry her younger sister to him, and there was an altercation wherein he attacked his mother-in-law. After the panchayat ordered him to publicly apologize, he grew more enraged, and his atrocities on Suguna continued unabated. He also took away the jewels her parents had given to her at the time of marriage.

The neighbours say that Suguna had told them how her husband often threatened to burn her, or to drown her in the canal. On the day of her death, she had been working till 11 a.m., and looked quite cheerful. At 1 p.m., some boys saw smoke pouring out of a window and collected people who managed to enter the house by removing the roof tiles. They found the half-burnt dead body of Suguna. While they were looking on Venkataswamy's brother hurriedly brought a kerosene stove from the neighbours' house and put it beside the corpse. When someone in the crowd questioned this act, he, with guilty looks, said he was wrong to have brought the stove, and immediately returned it to the owner.

Visible marks on the dead body show that Suguna's legs were tied. The neighbours had not heard any shouts, nor were there signs in the room of her having struggled in pain. Only the upper half of the body was found burnt. A piece of cloth is said to have been found in her mouth during post mortem. All these details indicate that Venkataswamy, alone, or with the help of his family, may have first killed Suguna and later burnt her body by pouring petrol over it. Even if she did commit suicide, however, she was clearly driven to it. Therefore we demand a judicial enquiry into the case so that the culprits are brought to book.

—*SOWSTUD fact finding team*

BOMBAY Muslim Women Protest

On February 8, 1983, Forum Against Oppression Of Women, and Amroha Jamayate Qureshi organized a protest demonstration at Bandra against the family of Mohammed Ayub Qureshi who had brutally maltreated their three daughters-in-law.

Ayub's first wife had been tortured, burnt with acid and nearly killed for dowry. She managed to return to her parents at Amroha. Ayub then married Saira. After about six months, Ayub, his brothers Matlub and Bakshish and their mother Jamila Rani began to torture Saira. She was beaten with cycle chains and nylon ropes. She was made to sleep in a dog kennel, and fed on raw flour and water. Her fingers were broken. Matlub's wife

home, and later with the family of a respected leader of their community. Their plight evoked an uproar in the Qureshi community. Ayub Qureshi is an influential man, and managed to silence the police as well as the local Urdu press. Finally, under public pressure, the police lodged a first information report and a medical report which showed that the girls had sustained fractures and injuries.

At the demonstration, many Qureshi women spoke, shouted slogans and joined in singing militant songs. Some of them, in a wave of enthusiasm, pulled off their burqas. The Forum demands that Shama and Saira be given divorce, and maintenance, and that Saira be given custody of her child. The Amroha Jamayate Qureshi demands that dowry be eradicated in the Qureshi community, that



Protest demonstration by Muslim women in Bombay

Shama was also a victim of these brutalities. Her teeth were broken. Though the family is a wealthy landowning family, these two women were clad in filthy rags and forced to work day and night. They were constantly slapped, kicked, burnt with cigarettes and poked with sharp objects. They were fed with bad food and when they vomited, were forced to lick the vomit. They were not allowed to contact their parents. Though dowry hunger was one reason for the maltreatment, the sadism is not fully explained by this greed.

One night, the two women managed to run away and take shelter first in a rescue

no one commit the mistake of marrying a daughter to Ayub Qureshi, that an enquiry be held and that the Ayub Qureshi family be punished.

— *Forum Against Oppression Of Women*
(translated from Hindi)

International Women's Day BIHAR

On March 8, many women, including the activists of Mahila Mukti Manch, took out a procession through the main thoroughfares of Patna. The procession ended in a public meeting and poster exhibition at the Dakbangla Road square. The women carried big banners with

slogans denouncing the various forms of exploitation of women.

On March 6 and 7, discussions were held on "The situation of women in present day society" and on "Women and the law." The women present, including students, teachers, housewives and labouring women, were unanimous on the need to develop an autonomous women's movement. A coordination committee of five women was formed, which will call women's meetings from time to time. It was resolved that women would collectively come out of their homes on Holi and would move around in their colonies, to combat the increasingly violent atmosphere that builds up at the time of this festival each year.

— *Kiran Shaheen*
(translated from Hindi)

On March 8, the Mahila Kalyan Samiti organized a corner meeting in front of the Vishtupur post office, Jamshedpur. The meeting began at 5 p.m. with slogans, songs and speeches. Leaflets were distributed. Many women and men participated with enthusiasm. The meeting focused on the spreading evil of dowry.

— *Renu Dewan*
(translated from Hindi)

MADHYA PRADESH

In Raipur 60 women from different slum areas came together to talk about their work lives. Housewives, domestic servants, *agarbatti* workers, *bidi* workers, *balwadi* teacher all participated.

The domestic servants of Gorkhapara and New Shanti Nagar demanded half a day off once a week and a place for the creche run by them in their area. The slum dwellers demanded streetlights, drinking water, toilets, and a place for their creche. The *bidi* and *agarbatti* workers demanded a minimum wage from their employers. In addition, all the women felt the need to demand job opportunities for all women, opening of small scale industries by government to give women employment, bank loans to women for self employment schemes. The next meeting was fixed for the second day after Raksha Bandhan, in August 1983.

— *Shashi Sail*

BOMBAY

On March 5, Chembur Mahila Samiti celebrated international women's day by holding a public meeting at Tilak Nagar. About 100 men and women actively participated. Representatives from Purogami Mahila Sangathana, Nari Mukti Sangathana, and Sramik Mukti Sangathana also participated. There were speeches and songs, and a skit showing the condition prevailing in the nearby working women's hostel. It was a good programme. I felt very happy because many slum women, both Marathi and Tamilian, came. Some of them sang with us. There were only a few middle class women from the working women's hostel, Passersby watched and many workers also came. A couple of policemen watched suspiciously from the road.

On March 6, Purogami Mahila Sangathana held a public meeting at Vanamali Hall, Dadar. On March 7, the Forum Against Oppression of Women held a public meeting at Chabildas Boys' School, Dadar. The main two demands were for the right to work and for legal rights for all working women. The pamphlet issued also demanded extension of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, to agricultural labourers; reservation of 25 percent jobs for women; provision of transport and creches to working women; hostels for working women with children; formation of vigilance groups to see that legal rights of women in police custody are not violated. On March 8, a rally was taken out from Azad Maidan to Sachivalaya.

Everyone says that the whole programme was a success. However, I feel it is necessary now to mobilize more lower class women. When none of the vegetable sellers or construction workers or poorer women know about March 8, what is the use of my feminism? We are discussing this and we hope to hold programmes in all the slums in Tilak Nagar.

— *Alfie*

PUNJAB

A small group of women and men who have been celebrating March 8 every year

since 1981, under the banner of an ad hoc committee to celebrate international women's day, got together again this year. There was a poster exhibition, an exhibition of paintings about women by professional painters of the city, panel discussions in the university, and a street play on dowry, *Om Swaha*, enacted by girl students, once on the campus, and again at the main shopping centre of the city, which was the terminating point of a 40 strong procession. Since there have been several dowry deaths in the city recently, anti dowry slogans dominated the rally. Two leaflets were distributed.

A public meeting was attended by about 300, mostly women, and I was addressed by women activists, and by the chief commissioner of Chandigarh. The programme received sympathetic coverage in the press.

— *Pritam*

DELHI

About 20 women marched through some main streets in the city on March 3, blackening hoardings which depicted women in an obscene and degrading manner.

Since prohibitory orders were in force on the city on March 8 due to the non aligned meet, a rally could not be taken out. Several women's organizations including the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, the National Federation of Indian Women, the All India Democratic Women's Association, and the Young Women's Christian Association, held a meeting, which issued a statement calling upon the non aligned nations to redeem their pledges for the uplift of women, made at the last meet.

AND ELSEWHERE

Rallies and meetings were organized in many parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat, including Latur, Bhor, Kasegaon, Kolhapur, Sangli, Ahmadnagar, Pune. The main demands were for more employment opportunities, vocational training facilities for women, extension of the equal pay for equal work law to cover women agricultural labourers, provision of drinking water and toilets.