

SOME REPORTS SENT TO US

NAGALAND

The Terror Continues

Nagaland is one of those areas which, for the last three decades, has been the site of people's movements against state repression and has in consequence, from time to time been declared a "disturbed area." This means that the people are deprived of fundamental rights, and are at the mercy of not just the police but the army personnel who are stationed there supposedly to "maintain law and order."

Ukhrul district, inhabited mostly by Tangkhul Nagas but arbitrarily placed within the administrative boundaries of Manipur by the government of India, is today more like a concentration camp than a civilian area. Anyone and everyone — man, woman, child, church leader, school teacher, are victims of army brutalities. Mass abduction, sexual assault, defiling of churches, torture by administering electric shocks and breaking limbs, have become everyday affairs under the special acts passed by government to give a free hand to the army.

Using as an excuse the February 19 incident wherein 24 Indian army personnel were killed, the armed forces have unleashed a reign of terror on the public. The following are only a few of the incidents which have taken place :

In Ngaimu on January 11, the 4th Assam Rifles forcibly entered the village church and occupied it as a military camp. In Ukhrul on February 20, nine peasant families on their way to the field were rounded up and tortured by the 21 Sikh regiment from 10 am. to 3.30 pm. Medical reports indicate that some of them will be maimed for life. On February 20, buses coming from Imphal to Ukhrul were stopped and passengers indiscriminately beaten up. Many of those whose limbs

had been fractured, were detained on the roadside till the chief minister came and requested the army to release them.

On the same day, the 21 Sikh regiment surrounded Sharkaphong village before dawn, herded the villagers to the spot where the army personnel had been ambushed and killed, and, proceeded to assault them with rifle butts and lathis. Many fell unconscious and were ruthlessly trampled upon. On the 22nd the same regiment began to "search" houses in Nungbi Khullen village. Women were forced to undress and were sexually assaulted. In Paorei on March 5, about 50 villagers including 11 women, were abducted by the armed forces, and their whereabouts are not yet known. There was mass torture of the other villagers and some of them were forced at gun point to sign statements saying that no harassment had occurred.

Despite the assurance of the GOC eastern command, majors-general Venugopal, on April 24, 1981, that all searches of houses and interrogation of women would be conducted in the presence of police *personnel* and women constables respectively, the army has flouted all norms including its own regulations.

All information regarding the situation in this area is systematically covered up as part of the government policy to misrepresent the situation to the people in other parts of the country.

—extracted from the statement issued by Naga People's Movement for Human Rights

ORISSA

Marriage Or Mockery ?

Phulbani is one of the 13 districts in Orissa. It is a hilly, forest area inhabited mainly by adivasis of the Kandha tribe.



-Kathe Kollwitz

The communication system is very poor, there are hardly any schools or colleges, so the tribals remain cut off from the world outside, speaking only their own language and following their own customs.

However, the incursion of outsiders is now proliferating corruption and new forms of exploitation of adivasi girls. Government officers, contractors and businessmen who are posted in the area for some years, get married to tribal women by adivasi ceremony, start living with them and have children. But when these men, many or whom are already married, with families living elsewhere, get transferred out of the area, they disappear and never again contact the adivasi women and children.

Recently, one of these women has filed a suit for maintenance against her husband. She is 18 year old Saibali Pradhan of village Kumbhari Kupa. She was married in 1978 to 35 year old Suresh Kumar Gogarti, ex-excise inspector at Udayagiri. Saibali lived with Gogarti for two years and had a daughter in 1980. According to tribal custom, she

went to her father's house for the delivery. However, Gogarti gradually began to avoid her and did not go to bring her and the child to his house.

The villagers decided to take action against him but in the meantime he got transferred. When the suit for maintenance was filed, the district magistrate, who happened to be a former classmate of Gogarti, got the case transferred to Phulbani court which is far away from Saibali's village. Saibali's father, Sahdev Pradhan, had to sell his property to continue fighting the case.

Two other girls in the same village, Sununa Nayak, married to Mohan Tandhi, supply inspector, and Laila Nayak, married to Gandhi Pradhan, industry extension officer, have been socially ostracized by the community.

Other forms of exploitation of women are linked to the land question. Gaurahari Padhi, now the tahsildar of Udayagiri, has for the last five years, been transferring the adivasis' lands to outsiders, and he demands sexual favours from the women as the price of issuing "caste certificates" to them or their relatives. The adivasis require these caste certificates to avail of government facilities offered to members of scheduled castes and tribes. The Manila Samitis (women's committees) and Jubaksanghs (youth organizations) have written petitions and also met the collector, various ministers and even the chief minister, to protest against such corruption, but no action has been taken.

—Shakuntala Acharya

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Trees The Village Women Want

The firewood crisis is primarily a women's issue. Voluntary agencies involved in afforestation efforts in India are learning that it is women and not men who are interested in fuel and fodder trees. The firewood crisis hardly bothers men.

Ecodevelopment camps organized by these groups this year to involve villagers in local afforestation programmes revealed that when villagers were asked: "What trees should be planted?" the men invariably replied: "Fruit trees." The women complained that the men want fruit

trees because they want to sell the fruit in the marketplace and buy liquor and tobacco with the proceeds. "What will we get?" they asked and then replied themselves: "Nothing. We want fuel and fodder trees because it is we who have to walk miles every day to collect them."

These agencies find that the success of afforestation programmes lies in the extent to which the community can be involved. This depends on how far the rural development workers can appreciate the interests of the community as a whole, and of women in particular.

The Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal which pioneered the famous Chipko (hug the trees) movement against deforestation, has been organizing community forestry programmes since 1976 in the landslide



-Bharti Mirchandani

affected mountain regions of the Garhwal Himalayas. The New Delhi based environment cell of the Gandhi Peace Foundation organised two eco-development camps for the first time in 1981—one in the desert region of Jodhpur and another in the waterlogged areas of Hoshangabad district in central India.

These camps were mainly attended by the local villagers. But interested scientists, environmentalists, local officials, college students and opinion leaders were also invited to attend. It is through these camps that difficulties in providing a green cover on fallow waste land are being understood. The first question that comes up is the choice of species to be planted. Here, repeatedly, all groups find an open clash between the interests of women and men, sometimes expressed mildly and at times boldly, depending on the attitudes of the local women. The men in Chamoli were keen on apple trees. In Jodhpur, they demanded grafted *ber* saplings. The women, however, in both these places have to walk 4-6 kilometres two or three times a week to collect fuel wood and fodder and were interested in fuel and fodder species.

The forest department in Hoshangabad and Chamoli was found to have stocks of saplings useful either for commercial timber or for the men. It was only in Jodhpur that the desert afforestation directorate was able to supply species useful for firewood and fodder purposes. The Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal has had to establish two nurseries for its requirements, which have helped to plant more than a million trees in the last five to six years.

The average survival rate of trees planted by the forest department is about 15-30 per cent in the hills and about 30-50 per cent in the plains. The tree plantation camps organized by the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal have resulted in an astonishing 90 per cent survival rate.

The high survival of trees is because of the sense of involvement amongst the villagers generated by the eco-development camps. While planting and rearing trees, they know these are for their own use and will also conserve the soil which will improve the fertility of their fields.

—Ravi Sharma

(Centre for Science and environment)

ANDHRA PRADESH

Freed From Fetters

Eight year old Savithri of Ootakalu village in Pathikonda taluk, Kurnool district

of Andhra Pradesh, was married to Karuva Rayappa of Peravalli village. Her life became a tale of tears. Rayappa, his father Karuva Chinnamallaiiah and others of the household used to abuse and beat her every day, demanding Rs 3,000 dowry which had been promised to them. Savithri endured this cruelty for seven long years. Now she is 15.

Six months ago, her in-laws sent her to her parents' house, ordering her to come back with the money, but Savithri decided not to return to her in-laws, because she could not suffer any more. Infuriated, Savithri's husband Rayappa and his sister's husband Krishnappa went to her village and with the help of some toughs, dragged her out of the house, overcoming her resistance and protests. They put iron rings on her feet, tied her up, put her in a bullock cart and took her back to Peravalli. Savithri says she was then locked up without food or water and not even allowed to visit the toilet. On April 8, she was forced to do the housework, with her legs still chained. On the same day, Savithri's mother Ramakka met a local lawyer who filed a petition with the first class magistrate of Pathikonda, Mr. C. Narasimhachaliyalu. He appointed an enquiry commission and issued a search warrant. When Savithri was finally released, she was found to be still wearing the iron rings. She was then entrusted to her mother, and is now undergoing treatment in Pathikonda hospital.

—V.A. Mary, *Visakhapatnam*

BIHAR

Property Right Made A Death

Trap

In 1956 the Hindu Succession Act was passed, giving Hindu women the right to inherit parental property. Today, after 26 years, property is still divided among sons only, and a woman who demands her share can even be killed. This was what happened to Manju, a science student in Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur Bihar.

Manju's parents had died when she was a child, and she was brought up by her father's brother Kamdev Mandal and father's sister's husband Sahdev Mandal. Manju's father Ramdev Mandal had

bought a piece of land, and built a house with his earnings. He had also put Rs 20,000 in Manju's name. Recently, Manju had been engaged to be married and Rs 18,000 were taken out from her account and given as *tilak*.

One day, in the course of family conversation, Manju said to her uncle : "You have given money from my account as *tilak*, then you will also give me the land and house, won't you ?" It is said that she mentioned this more as a joke than as a serious demand but her uncle was angered, and relations between them deteriorated.



Manju

Kamdev Mandal's domestic servants report that on March 1, Manju was badly beaten up. At night, her uncle and his relatives took her in a tempo to Sabaur. She was afraid to go, and told her aunt: "If you let me go with these people you will see only my dead body," but even her aunt could not save her. Manju was taken away by force. She was tortured and poisoned in Sabaur and the corpse was disposed of there.

When the neighbours enquired about Manju, Kamdev Mandal said she had died and gave various unconvincing and contradictory accounts of her death. This gave rise to suspicion among the people of Kahalgaon, particularly the student community. There is a great deal of anger

and desire to expose the criminals, but Kamdev Mandal has bribed the police into silence and obtained a false medical certificate from a doctor. Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini has written to the prime minister demanding a CID investigation into the case and speedy arrest of the guilty.

—Ranjiv

(translated from Hindi)

She Fought And Won

On April 11, Zahida Khatun came to Bihariganj, where she was soon to marry Noor Mohammed. She and her widowed mother were staying with a relative, Doman Miya. Before the marriage could take place, on the night of April 14, a local police constable Akhilesh Prasad Varma and a local doctor D.N. Misra came to the house with some policemen, and ordered the whole family to go to the police station. There, Noor Mohammed, Islam, Idris and Ali Baksh were put in the lock-up while Zahida and her mother were taken to a thatched hut. The mother was tied up and gagged while Zahida was raped throughout the night by Varma, Misra and two other policemen.

The next day, Zahida managed to escape and told the local people what had happened. The police refused to register a first information report. News of the incident swept through Bihariganj. Several people went to see government officials but no action was taken. An angry crowd collected and gheraoed Misra's clinic. The police fired three rounds but the crowd refused to disperse. Then there was a lathi charge in which many people were injured. The market closed down due to police terror.

In the evening the district magistrate came to Bihariganj, a police case was registered, and Zahida's statement recorded. An identification parade took place as a result of which Misra and Varma were arrested. Zahida and her mother were medically examined the same evening but the police did not release them till the following night. During those 36 hours, they kept pressurizing Zahida to change her statement, but she withstood their threats and remained steadfast. Finally, they had to release her for fear of public anger.

The police are now busy trying to intimidate the witnesses by registering false cases against them, and also pressurizing local shopkeepers to give false statements. No action has been taken against the other two rapist policemen.

In the meantime, Zahida has got married to Noor Mohammed and is now living with him. But how many such miracles take place ?

—Ranjiv
(translated from Hindi)

PUNJAB

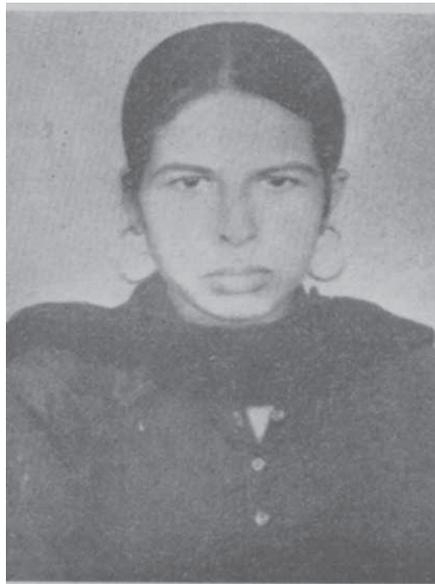
Gang Rape And Murder

On May 13, Harpreet Kaur, a 20 year old girl, was gang raped and murdered at Bhatinda, Harpreet had passed BA and Giani, and was undergoing training as a stenotypist. She was the daughter of a widow Kailash Kaur who is a crafts teacher in a government school in a village near Bhatinda.

Harpreet was lured into a trap by Param Pal Singh, an air force employee. He promised to get her a government job, and on May 11, took her to his village Ghurnman Kalan. There she was raped repeatedly by Param Pal and two other men. They brought her to Bhatinda, where a policeman and an employee of the Punjab road transport corporation joined the gang of rapists. Harpreet started bleeding and became unconscious. Fearing dire consequences, they throttled her to death and threw her dead body into the Bhatinda thermal plant lake on the night of May 13.

On May 15 morning, the police found the corpse. As a routine practice, the police officer took the corpse to the civil hospital for post mortem. Though the girl was wearing a wristwatch and good clothes, and could not be passed off as a vagrant, her body was cremated in a hurry without making any attempt to identify her. The government doctor too connived at this attempt to hush up the case, and did not bother to conduct a thorough post mortem.

Meanwhile Harpreet's mother become apprehensive and began to search for Param Pal Singh. She waited outside the air force station and was informed that he belonged to Ghumman Kalan village. She went to the village and traced him. At first



Harpreet Kaur

he tried to put her off but finally told her that Harpreet was dead and had been cremated by the police at Bhatinda,

Kailash Kaur went from one police station to another, and met many senior police officers but all of them purposely turned a deaf ear to her. Finally, when she went to the district court, she happened to meet some workers of the district association for democratic rights and Punjab human rights committee. Both these organizations took up the case with higher authorities.

On receiving orders from the director general of police, the police swung into action and within a day or so, Param Pal Singh was arrested. About a dozen others were also taken into custody. On May 20, the senior superintendent of police, Bhatinda, called a press conference and dismissed reports about the rape of Harpreet. But the next day, investigations revealed the facts. It appears that some influential people may have been involved in the crime since they have been trying to get it hushed up.

The Association For Democratic Rights has constituted a seven-member committee to deal with the case.

—Ved Prakash Gupta,
Punjab Human Rights
Committee, Bhatinda

GUJARAT

Protesting Contractual Exploitation

The Women Equal Rights Group organized a seminar in Ahmedabad to protest against the "friendship contracts" now rampant in Gujarat, Ms Kusumben Shah, an advocate, said that these contracts are used to float the monogamous sanctions of the Hindu-Marriage Act. Dr. Taraben Patel, sociologist, pointed out that the contracts are prejudicial and discriminatory because while men have little to lose, women carry a permanent stigma after the contract period is over.

This system of so-called "friendship" is conducted by means of a Rs 10 stamped affidavit in which the man declares his willingness to live in companionship with the woman for a certain period, and to provide for the maintenance of any child born during that period. Ironically, since the contract is "against public policy" it cannot be enforced in a court of law, which means that the woman can be deserted at any time, and she has no means of enforcing the contract.

Speakers pointed out that in almost all cases of such "contract friendships", the men are previously married while the women are un-married. In the contract, the man declares that he is married but does not have a good relationship with his wife.

—Suraksha Maharaja

MADHYA PRADESH

Women Workers Meet

A training institute for women workers was held at Mahasamund from May 5 to 15, 1982. There were 14 participants. Four of them are women who have been involved in work in their own areas for a couple of years.

These four women shared with the others their experience in organizing women and working class people. They felt that the women's struggle needs to be linked to the working class struggle, and that a permanent change in the condition of women and of the working class is possible only when the social structure is changed to a socialistic pattern.

Participants read their poems and sang

songs together. It was a real eye-opener for some participants to see and accept other women, not through the telescope of values laid down by men, but as individuals in their own right.

—*Chhattisgarh Mahila Jagriti Sangathan,*

DELHI Action Against Dowry

The newspapers have been reporting at least one death by burning of a woman every day for the last month. Protest demonstrations were organized against the murderers in some parts of the city. In Gulmohar Park, residents have been demonstrating every Sunday for a month, outside the residence of P.K. Narula, a Press Trust of India employee, whose daughter-in-law Bharati, married to Rakesh Narula, died of burn injuries on June 2. The demonstrations were organized by Karmika and Gulmohar Park Ladies' Club. The demonstrators also protested outside the adjoining house of Satpal Bansal whose daughter-in-law died by hanging some months ago. Demonstrators demanded social ostracism of the culprits. They also said newspapers carrying matrimonial advertisements should carry a statutory warning against dowry.

On June 20, hundreds of people held an angry demonstration outside the Lajpat Nagar residence of Mr Saluja whose wife Chandermohini, a supreme court stenographer, died mysteriously while on holiday in Simla with him. As relatives and friends described the harassment Chandermohini had faced from husband and in-laws, anger mounted so high that the crowd rained stones at the house, smashing all the windows to smithereens. The demonstrators marched to the local police station and demanded the registration of a case. When the police hesitated, the crowd sat down at the gate and refused to let anyone in or out till the case was registered. Finally, the reluctant police agreed to register a first information report.

Another recent case shows clearly how increasing loss of faith in the police and judiciary is driving people to self-destructive and desperate actions. Meera Gupta of Naya Bans was burnt to death in



**“Stree par na ho atyachar, ham padosi zimmewar”
Women from different organizations protesting in Safdarjang Enclave**

her house on June 20. Her brother Shyam who knew that Meera was being harassed for many years (she was a mother of four) came from Mathura and walked into the house, fuming with anger. A violent quarrel ensued. Enraged, Shyam picked up an ice pick and attacked Meera's husband and in-laws. Her mother-in-law Raj Rani died on the spot. Three others escaped with minor injuries.

The National Archives, New Delhi, arranged an exhibition on dowry from June 23-29, 1982. Several documents and records, mainly from late 19th and early 20th centuries, and newspaper clippings from the last few years, were on display. Unfortunately, the exhibition seemed to have been hastily and sketchily put together. Connections were not properly built and the selections were most unrepresentative. The exhibition served to show the direction in which much more work needs to be done to uncover the origins of dowry in various regions and communities.

On July 4, about 60 women, including representatives of Stri Bal, National Federation of Indian Women, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, Karmika, All India Women's Conference and Manushi held an angry protest demonstration outside B5/75 Safdarjung Enclave, the residence of Bhupinder Gupta whose 19 year old wife

Usha Rani was found burnt to death on the terrace of the house some days ago.

Usha Rani had been married only six months and was pregnant at the time of her death. Her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law were arrested but were subsequently released on bail.

The demonstrators shouted slogans such as: “*Stri par na ho atyachar, Hum padosi zimmewar*” (We neighbours are responsible to see that women are not tortured); “*Nek gharon ki yeh pehchan, Bahu beti ek saman*” (A decent house is one in which daughter and daughter-in-law are treated as equals); “*Tilak nahin, dahej nahin, Shadi koi vyapar nahin, Kharida hua jivan sathi Ab humko sweekar nahin*” (No tilak and no dowry, marriage is not a commercial deal. We are no longer willing to accept a purchased life partner). Neighbours were called upon to come out and join the protest. A few of them did come out, and also spoke about Usha. Her immediate neighbour testified that Usha was a quiet girl who never emerged from the confines of the house. The demonstrators went around the colony, calling upon people to boycott the Gupta family. The participation of neighbours is a positive phenomenon which indicates a growing social awareness around the issue of dowry deaths. □