

INDRANI Ghosh is a teacher of mathematics to junior students of Delhi Public School, Mathura Road. Over the last two years, she has been waging a battle against the school authorities who have colluded to shield the principal Dr G.P. Waraich from punishment for having molested Indrani.

On May 31, 1980, at about 9.30 a.m., Indrani went to speak to Waraich about an official matter. After waiting about 15 minutes, she was admitted into his office. In the course of the discussion, Waraich suggested that they move into his private room, as there was too much disturbance in his office, with peons constantly coming and going. He then held open a door for her. Seeing a commode in the next room, Indrani hesitated, realizing that it was a toilet. The principal pointed to another door leading out of the toilet and said: "This way, ladies first." Indrani then stepped through the door into another room.

Before she could sit down, Waraich suddenly wrapped his arms around her from behind. Indrani, who was holding a purse and umbrella, found her arms pinned to her sides. Waraich said: "I have been wanting you for so long." For a moment, Indrani was completely dazed and could only say: "Leave me, leave me." After a brief struggle, she managed to free herself, but since Waraich stood blocking the door leading back to his office, she ran out of another door and reached home in a highly nervous condition.

Indrani and her husband made several attempts to contact managing committee members, who successfully evaded them. On June 28, Indrani sent a written complaint to the school management, in which she briefly narrated the incident and stated her willingness to testify before an enquiry committee. On June 23, another teacher, Gauri Dhiman, also submitted a complaint stating that Waraich had called her to his private room and had made an attempt to kiss her, which she had resisted.

In spite of reminders, Gauri did not receive a reply, but on August 14, Indrani got a letter which stated that "the charges have been very carefully gone into by a responsible committee set up for the purpose. The committee came to

A School Teacher's Fight For Justice And Dignity

the conclusion that the charges could not be established and hence it has been decided to drop further action in the matter." Indrani wrote back, asking what kind of enquiry committee this was, which did not think it necessary to call the aggrieved party to testify before it. She received no reply.

Since the controversy had sparked off an uproar, with the old students' association and the private school teachers' association calling for an enquiry, another committee, consisting of members and exmembers of the

committee constituted under the Delhi Education Act. In January 1981, the high court dismissed the case with a recommendation that "both parties should try to defuse the matter." Indrani and Gauri then filed separate appeals before the supreme court. Gauri's case is still pending, but when Indrani's case was heard, the judges advised her to appear before the committee already constituted by the management. She agreed, on the advice of her lawyer.

The committee consisted of Justices Grover and Sikri, both exmembers of the management, and lieutenant general Bawa. One of the most amazing things about their enquiry was that the accused, Waraich, was allowed to examine the complainant, Indrani, which he did at great length and with many vile insinuations.

Waraich's defence was that on May 31, he left the school at 9.30 a.m., in response to a phone call from his wife, therefore he could not have met Indrani in his office at 10, and secondly, just before he left the school, he had met Indrani outside the office, near the reception, where the entire conversation between them had taken place in the presence of witnesses, so Indrani did not step into his office on that day. Indrani produced a mass of circumstantial evidence, including manifest inconsistencies in the timings stated by Waraich, to prove that she had entered the office, and that Waraich had not left the school at 9.30. None of this evidence was refuted or even mentioned in the committee report. Indrani also tape recorded a conversation with Peshori, one of Waraich's key witnesses, in which he admitted that he had been pressurized into giving false evidence. This tape was also completely ignored in the committee



Indrani Ghosh

management, was constituted. Since Indrani and Gauri refused to appear before this committee and asked that a proper committee be constituted according to the Delhi Education Act, the management issued a press report saying that no prima facie case had been established, so the principal had been "honourably exonerated."

Indrani and Gauri then approached the high court, petitioning that an impartial enquiry be carried out by a

report. On the other hand, the committee rejected the evidence of Indrani's witnesses mainly on the ground that she had not mentioned them in her original, preliminary complaint.

Waraich tried to prove that he was the victim of a conspiracy since it would be "highly irrational for any person to repeat an incident of a similar nature with another person within a few days." He ended one of his statements with the pathetic plea that "I should be allowed to have my wife also working on the campus so that I may feel more secure."

While the committee rejected Waraich's conspiracy theory, and was therefore unable to assign any possible reason for Indrani's having filed a false complaint, it chose to conclude that her case was not established. When the committee report was submitted to the managing committee on November 18, 1982, Indrani submitted a protest letter, which the management decided not to accept. The managing committee asked all teacher representatives to withdraw, which they did under protest, and the managing committee then decided "that no further action in the matter is necessary". As Indrani indignantly asks, if she had filed a false complaint, why was no action taken against her? Obviously, the authorities were interested only in hushing up the matter, because they knew that Waraich's case was flimsy.

While those school employees who testified in support of Waraich have been rewarded with special favours, Indrani and her witnesses are being



DPS principal G. P. Waraich

systematically harassed. For instance, at a meeting of the joint council of teachers of Delhi, some men teachers of Delhi Public School distributed vulgarly slanderous pamphlets addressed to Gauri and Indrani, in which exactly the same arguments that Waraich had used were repeated and emphasized.

Sexual harassment by employ often acts as a powerful disincentive for

women seeking employment and economic independence. Once at the mercy of an employer, teachers, underpaid as they are, are frequently pressurized into tolerating sexual exploitation. For instance, another colleague had told Indrani that she had been similarly molested by Waraich, but later, this lady, who needed the job badly, was pressurized into testifying that Indrani had tried to bribe her to make a fall complaint! It is also alleged that Waraich has similarly harassed many women seeking employment or admission for their children into the school, and some complaints to this effect have been made to the authorities, but no action has been taken by them. The institution of "private rooms" for principals seems to have come into being to facilitate the harassment of women teachers.

Indrani and Gauri have shown great courage in raising this issue which is too often buried by women teachers for fear of losing their jobs and their reputations, and in fighting for justice in the face of daily insult and humiliation. Though disillusioned today with the "justice" provided by the judicial process, Indrani has not lost heart and is determined to continue her struggle with the support of her family and of many colleagues and friends.

—Ruth Vanita

AT 11 a.m. on December 28, two men walked into Saheli, a women's resource centre. They asked for the whereabouts of their sister, Asha Kapoor. Since Asha, who is an adult, had left home of her own free will, Gita and Savita, the Saheli volunteers present at the centre, said they could arrange a meeting with her, but were not in a position to give her address. At this, the two men abused and manhandled the two women volunteers, and stole a Confidential document.

At 1.30, these two men returned with a constable, and sub-inspector Chetan Das who accused the volunteers of kidnapping the woman, and of running a brothel. These policemen entered the premises without any official order and began to interrogate the women in the presence of the two men who had earlier

manhandled them. No written complaint had been filed by these two men, so this was a gross abuse of power by the policemen. Despite written evidence that the girl had left home of her own free will, the policemen made false charges of abduction, and made defamatory remarks about the organization. They attempted to seize confidential documents, saying there was no need for a warrant, since the police have the right to take anything they want at any time.

When the volunteers went into the

Nizamuddin police station to register a complaint of manhandling, trespass and theft, the sub-inspector, and the SHO Q.P. Yadav refused to let them file a first information report, and instead threatened to arrest them. They were refused paper to write the report, and only after three hours of harassment were they finally permitted to write it. The policemen threatened to call policewomen to strip the volunteers, beat them and get information. Yadav told the volunteers: "In the course of investigation, if I wish to; I can take the

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clothes off your backs.” The volunteers were also threatened : “I’ll lock you up and you can see your lawyer only when you are produced in court.”

An Indian Express reporter who was present was beaten, dragged by his hair, threatened, and locked up for 45 minutes in a room in the police station. When Prabeen, a Saheli volunteer, protested against this, Yadav threatened to arrest all of them, shouting : “I do not need any proof to arrest you, I will show you what the powers of the police are.” A policeman was placed outside Saheli centre, and threatening phone calls were made to intimidate the volunteers.

On December 29, two policemen came and demanded that Savita, Gita and Prabeen come to the police station since the deputy commissioner was conducting an enquiry. In spite of their informing them that they would come at 7 p.m., the police kept coming to the office all day long, looking for these three volunteers. When Saheli rang up the police station to confirm the

appointment, they were told that they need not go to the police station.

This harassment created an atmosphere of terror for the volunteers and obstructed their work. They demanded the immediate suspension of the SHO and sub-inspector, a written public apology for the defamatory remarks made against the organization, withdrawal of the case of abduction in view of the police investigation having nullified it, and a public enquiry into the incident in view of the grave implications of such harassment for the work of women’s social service organizations. The enquiry committee should include representatives of women’s organizations and the joint secretary of the ministry of social welfare, who is in charge of the women’s bureau.

On December 20, about 30 people staged a protest demonstration outside the Nizamuddin police station. Several women’s organizations issued a statement condemning then police high-handedness.

Asha’s mother then filed a habeas writ petition in the supreme court and Saheli was ordered to produce Asha in court. Asha then filed an affidavit asserting that she had left home of her own free will. She is determined to live and work independently and not to be intimidated into returning to her family.

On February 15 the court, after questioning Asha, dismissed the petition, holding that as an adult, Asha has the right to live independently. As soon as Asha emerged from the court, her mother and brother Jamuna Prasad pounced on her and pulled her hair. She was rescued by lawyers. Hearing her screams, the chief justice ordered the arrest of Jamuna Prasad, convicted him for contempt of court, and sentenced him to three months’ simple imprisonment. The next day Jamuna Prasad was again produced in court, and the chief justice confirmed the sentence, saying it might be revoked only if he was repentant and if he gave an undertaking of good behaviour. □

A Question of Character

One morning in November 1982, Usha Rani, a young married woman of village Dokh., Himachal Pradesh went to milk her buffaloes as usual. When she opened the door of the cattle shed, her neighbour Ramesh, who was hiding in the straw, grabbed her from behind, shut the door, and tried to tear off her clothes and rape her. She bravely resisted his attempts, and raised an alarm. Ramesh ran off, shouting that he would kill her if she took any action against him.

It is to her credit that she and her mother-in-law Vidya had the courage to go to the police, and file a complaint. Ramesh is a violent man, and is known to have raped nine women in the village already, yet he was given bail. No one in the village had dared confront him, because he, and his brothers, and his father Dev Raj Suniara, are known to possess many weapons and to have hired ruffians at their command.

At present, Usha, her family and the witnesses in the case are facing considerable danger and intimidation. When we told some politicians in Simla about the case, their first question was about the character of the woman. Let

us hope some questions about the character of Ramesh are asked in court.

—Ursula Sharma

DTC’s New Brainwave

Of the five seats reserved for women in every bus (about a quartet of the total number of seats), DTC has now converted two seats into reserved seats for disabled persons. From this reservation within a reservation, is one to conclude that the DTC authorities consider disabled persons a subspecies of womankind, or that they consider being a woman a kind of disability

Seminar In Jaipur

On December 11 and 12, 1982, Lokayan and Mahila Lok Jagran Samiti jointly organized a seminar on the theme: “Status of women in Rajasthani society” at Kanodia Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Jaipur. Women from about 20 organizations from Rajasthan, Delhi and Kanpur, attended.

Since discussion was not restricted to the theme announced, but ranged from dowry to violence to health and hygiene, it tended to remain at the level of expression of individual opinion. Speakers also described the work of their organizations. Since both urban and rural

organizations were represented, this was an enlightening exchange of experience and views.

It was heartening to hear about the number of new groups that have sprung up in Rajasthan over the last few years, and to observe their determination to act unitedly.

Change

*One morning she awoke
and the sky had changed colour
Tentatively, she viewed it
through the window,
then turned back
to her everyday doings,
attempting to forget—
washing and mending,
clearing and cleaning,
turning and bending —
it persisted,
spreading across the trees
and buildings.
Was its hue becoming
the atmosphere of her mind ?
Much she would have preferred
to pretend it was still blue,
had it not encircled the universe.*

—Ruth Vanita