

Sexual Harassment at Delhi University

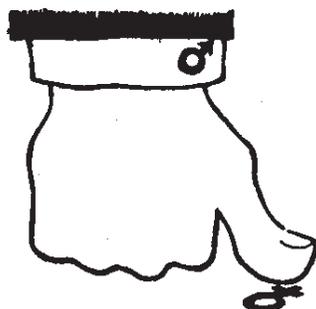
In response to the report in Manushi No. 69, in which women working under him had made serious allegations of sexual harassment against him, Dr S. C. Bhatia sent us the following letter dated May 11, 1992, giving his version of what happened in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension (DACEE).

This has reference to your write up "Need for a Thorough Probe" in Manushi Number 68, pages 5,7,9 and 11.

I hold your journal in high esteem. I have always admired the boldness of its style and the efforts put in by your staffers. I do, however, disagree with the judgement which you seem to pronounce on me by choosing to include the above write up in your recent issue.

I welcome the need for a thorough probe myself. I wrote to the Vice-Chancellor to this effect myself. However, your desire for a probe would have been objective if you had chosen to hold the write up from publication and had initially submitted the same to the University authorities. You could then choose to publish, if you so felt, the piece after the enquiry was completed. I am deeply pained at the realisation that much before the enquiry gets underway, you have chosen to condemn me in print in a ratio of three-and-a-half pages to half-a-page. The condemnation is based on mere hearsay of a few disgruntled individuals whose performance in work is a matter of record. I wonder if the right to print includes the right to advise and malign on the basis of a statistical count and recourse to vulgarity by individuals whose motives are liable to question.

I had myself asked for an enquiry



in 1987 when the lady under reference made some allegations. This time again I have asked for the same. It would be only fair if the enquiry is undertaken on the basis of written (on an affidavit) statement by the lady and the scope of enquiry includes not only the conduct of the Head but the conduct of the lady within the framework of service conditions governing employees in the University of Delhi.

The entire write up is based on wild lies and self-righteousness of individual views. I am dealing below with a few of these just as an example

of the extent of fabrication on their part.

(i) Project employees, whether women or men, are appointed for specific durations. The women employees left under one or more of the following situations:

- (a) project duration got over;
- (b) employee got a better job;
- (c) employee got a foreign scholarship;
- (d) employee got married and went abroad; and,

(e) employee got married. The project duration ranged from four months to a few years.

(ii) The project staff is appointed on temporary and ad hoc basis largely on account of the uncertain duration of the projects and rules and regulations in force in the University.

(iii) The appointments are made by Selection Committees as per rules and regulations in force in the University. The Head is just one member of this Committee. My experience as Director of the Projects has in fact taught me that there is practically no authority with the Director; in fact, the Director is frequently subject to abuse and threats.

(iv) Initially, staffers are happy at being selected. However, their desire for a permanent job forces them to take recourse to all means — fair and foul. Unfortunately, jobs do not seem to grow so rapidly. The entire anger is against the Director. When staffers are

told that they are not putting in adequate efforts in their work, they threaten with the charge that such statements cause "mental torture."

I am attaching herewith a note on the Department with the hope that you would consider publishing the hand-written letter and the note as my rejoinder.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed)
S.C. Bhatia

Unfortunately, Dr. Bhatia's letter arrived at Manushi too late to be included in issue No. 69. That issue was already in press. Though we are publishing Dr Bhatia's letter, we felt that also publishing the five pages of closely printed notes on his Department that accompanied his letter that he asked us to include would not contribute sufficiently to answering the questions in dispute to justify taking up so much space. Copies are no doubt available from Dr. Bhatia for those wishing to read them; we will send a copy to anyone writing to us for them. While they contain much inter-esting material on Dr. Bhatia's views concerning the functioning of his Department, we could find nothing in them directly relating to the charges of sexual harassment made against him. This is also true of his letter to Manushi.

We can only hope that a thorough public inquiry by a group of honest and hardworking committee members will determine and make available the facts of the case. It is always difficult for us to decide when, if ever, to publish charges such as were made against Dr. Bhatia, and when to give time for a full, prompt and fair investigation to be completed first. However, in this case, these same charges of sexual harassment had been made numerous times in the last few years, with little evidence that they had been impartially assessed. For example, only the conclusions of



the Bhavasker Committee of 1987 have been made public. Nothing about the directions to the Committee, the proceedings nor the evidence upon which they came to their conclusions have ever been released.

When we received a written statement from the staff of DACEE we scrutinised it carefully. As we continued investigating, staff members made a large number of additional allegations against Dr. Bhatia. We published only those portions of the charges which the complainants were ready to swear occurred to them personally, or in their presence. Hearsay about what they were told happened by some third party was kept out of the article.

It still seems to us that the University has not yet undertaken a full and fair investigation of these charges of sexual harassment. Unless this investigation gets underway and reports back promptly, fully and openly, we can unfortunately have no assurance that the charges have been refuted.

-Editor □

Some Useful Tips

Terry Karl, a Stanford political science professor who battled against sexual harassment on her first teaching job at Harvard University - a job she was made to quit instead of the don who harassed her sexually - gives some specific pointers to women who are subjected to "abuses of power" in the workplace:

1) Keep a detailed written record of the incidents. (She kept a two-year journal of incidents that she said escalated over time to threats of rape and finally assault.)

2) Tell several friends, family...[or colleagues] about the incidents when they occur. "Say", 'I'm not ready to file a grievance, but I want you to know this is happening'."

3) If possible, create an "ear witness" Karl had her roommate listen

4) Consider sending a letter to the harasser letting him know you will file a complaint if the harassment does not stop. In Karl's case, the harasser wrote back admitting some behaviour, which later helped her prove her case.

5) Seek corroborating evidence. "Look for people who are in the same position as you ...If somebody's harassing you, there's a good chance he's harassing somebody else." Other women in her academic department were eventually added into Karl's case.

6) If you happen to be in an institutional setting that has no sexual harassment grievance procedure or policies and no advocate for you as a victim, go into a forum that does by filing legal claims based on... anti-discrimination laws.

From an Interview in Stanford Observer. Sent by R.T. Krishnan, Madras