

G.B. PANT agricultural university at Pantnagar is a land grant university having about 16,000 acres of farmland worked on by many labourers. There are about 2,500 students out of which about 300 are girls. Most of the girls are doing B Sc in home science and there are a few in other courses such as agriculture and veterinary science.

Discrimination Rife

This is basically a residential university but the girl residents are treated very differently from the boys. The girls are virtually prisoners inside their hostel. Their hostel is connected to the college where they have their classes. There is a wall around this complex and the girls are not allowed to go out on the university campus nor are the male students allowed to visit them in their hostel. The girls are deprived of the use of the university library and instead use a segregated library which is obviously not as well equipped. The situation becomes dangerous at times, when the warden is not available and the girls, if unwell or otherwise in trouble, are not allowed to step out to go to the hospital or the market.

Every now and then, new rules are arbitrarily made and implemented without prior intimation. The girl's mothers and sisters are not allowed to stay overnight with them in the hostel. When the girl's parents come to visit them, the girls are asked to "prove" that they are their parents. All these problems have been outlined in a memorandum drawn up by the girls and entitled "Our Demands."

The students union of Pant university also had some longstanding demands and was agitating for their fulfilment. The demands included an increase in Ph D students students from Rs 300 to Rs 350, supply of cooking gas to effect decrease in the mess bills which are abnormally high, representation of students on university bodies, and provision of facilities such as medical care, canteens, television sets, transport and common rooms. The authorities agreed in principle to most of these demands but implementation was delayed.

University Turned Into A Police Camp

Police And Prisons

On June 1, some men students demonstrated at the vice chancellor's house. The police, who are generally present on the campus, lathi charged the students. They snatched the mike from the union president, knocked him down, and beat him up. The police are alleged to have gone on a rampage after this, indiscriminately beating up any student, who happened to be walking on the campus, even if he had nothing to do with the agitation. One senior student who had gone for a walk after lunch was badly beaten. Another had to jump from the second floor to escape a beating and was injured in the process. The police arrested 50 students, and 15 of them were kept in prison where they were allegedly tortured.

The following day, the union planned to protest against this police brutality. Girl students wanted to join the protest. There are four girl representatives on the union. The warden refused permission to the girls to come out on the campus. So the girls took their books and pretended they were going to class, but slipped out of college and joined the demonstration. The vice chancellor,

called upon for an explanation, denied that a lathi charge had taken place. The students then organised a relay hunger strike in batches of 10 at the district magistrate's office. The girls said they would participate. There would be five girls and five boys in each batch.

However, the next day, girls were again prevented from leaving their hostel. Therefore, they started a hunger strike in their hostel and about 180 of them fasted continuously for three days. During this time, they were not allowed to communicate with the boy students but managed to do so through the parent of one of them.

On June 3, the authorities were alleged to have called in the PAC to intimidate the girls into giving up their hunger strike. At 12.30 in the night, the policemen entered the girl's hostel, with the warden and assistant warden. They turned off the lights and started making animal noises to terrify the girls. They threatened the girls with dire consequences if they continued their agitation. In their letter to the chancellor and other authorities, the girl students have pointed out: "...no male member is allowed after 6 p.m. inside the hostel



premises. The question arises as to how the university authorities allowed the male PAC to enter the hostel premises and stay there to threaten us till 6 a.m. the next morning.”

Thrown Out Arbitrarily

On June 4, the vice chancellor closed the university and ordered the students to leave immediately. The girls were served notice. The students decided to resist eviction. However, they remained completely peaceful so the police had no opportunity to unleash further violence. The mess was closed. Uncertainty and tension prevailed.

At this juncture, the girls courageously resisted attempts to evict them. They drew up a letter to their parents in which they said: “...boys and girls are fighting together to get their rightful demands fulfilled by

administration. Our hostel gates are locked and we are completely isolated. We are not even allowed to talk to our parents properly. The assistant warden will try to contact you first and will misinform you. We request you to please try to contact us first and clarify the position. Please do not try to force us into going home with you...Your loving daughters.” Copies of this letter were pasted up on the campus.

A few days later, most students were forced to leave. Manual tussles with the PAC took place in some boys hostels. Each girl was asked to give in writing that she was leaving voluntarily. The university authorities attitude was that their responsibility ended as soon as the girls were out of the campus. The girls had not booked their tickets or informed their parents. They were afraid of being

stranded.

The postponement of examinations, which were scheduled to begin on June 10, and the closure of the university have caused great loss to the students, particularly to research students who cannot afford to miss a single day since their research is dependent on seasonal fluctuations.

The students have received the support of the teachers association and of the karamcharis and the labourers. They have demanded the immediate unconditional release of the arrested students, opening of the university, removal of the girls hostel warden and assistant warden, and removal of the vice chancellor.

(compiled from the report of a senior student and from students and teachers unions memoranda)

Muslim Women's Inheritance Law

—The Case of Zubeda Bibi

THIS is the story of Zubeda Bibi whose case I helped to fight. Zubeda was married six years ago to Hamid Khan, a mill worker. For some time, she lived with her in-laws. Then she and her husband took up a separate residence. The rent deposit of Rs 5,000 was paid by Zubeda's parents. The marriage was a happy one. Zubeda's first child, a girl, died soon after birth. Her second child, a son, was born in 1982. Zubeda stayed with her mother for a month after the delivery. When the child was 40 days old, she went to her mother-in-law's house. However, since two stitches of the caesarean operation were not properly healed, Hamid Khan advised her to go to her mother's house. Her husband visited her daily there, but he complained of exhaustion and fever. After a few days he was admitted in the civil hospital. When Zubeda visited him, he gave her his purse and the keys of the house, saying: “I am leaving you to

the care of god.” Within half an hour, he died of kidney failure. Since her in-laws immediately turned hostile, Zubeda's mother took her to her house, where she remained in parda for four and a half months, as required by custom.

I went to visit her during this period and advised her not to sign any papers without consulting me. Then I phoned the provident fund commissioner who told me that the Prasad mill where Hamid had worked, was in the exempted category so the fund was with the mill owners. When contacted, the mill manager said that the provident fund nominee was Husena Bibi, Hamid's mother. As Zubeda's uncle was clerk to a lawyer, we sent a stay order to the mill manager. Zubeda had to sign the affidavit in her house since she could not step out for four and a half months. With this affidavit we went to the Textile Labour Organisation, whose president, after



seeing the ration Card which was in the names of husband and wife, and the rent receipts, wrote to the mill manager, saying that the wife should be given all the benefits that accrued to her husband. Then the in-laws also contacted the TLO and got a similar letter from the president. Thus a deadlock was reached. In the meanwhile, the mother-in-law went to the TLO office and collected Rs 300 from the Shri Khandubhai Desai Widow Fund.

After four and a half months I sent Zubeda to the TLO with a written appeal.

Zubeda was also given Rs 300 but the union leaders were on the side of the in-laws and delayed signing the salary and bonus vouchers. At last, after six months, they signed these and Zubeda collected the money. The mother-in-law sent a notice to Zubeda, accusing her of having stolen jewellery worth Rs 10,000.

Finally, we decided to go to court. Zubeda had to spend nearly Rs 1,600 to

admit her case. The first thing we did was to get all the money due to Hamid Khan transferred to the court because we knew from hearsay that the mill was due to be closed down soon.

Rs 30,000 were in the custody of the court. After nearly 14 months, the judgment was given according to Muslim law. The money will be put in a bank in the name of the minor son. Zubeda will

get the interest in six monthly instalments.

Can you imagine what would have happened to Zubeda if she had had no parents? What would have happened to the house if her husband had not handed over the keys to her? How will a Muslim widow survive for the four and a half month period of customary mourning if she has no money?

—**Shailbala Motiwala**

News of Protests

Bihar

On March 30, 1984, the people of village Bariyarpur, Munger Sadar, Bihar, blocked the roads for four hours in protest against the increase in cases of rape and sexual harassment by ruffians in collaboration with the local police.

On March 21, the 16 year old daughter of an agricultural labourer was working in her neighbour's field when half a dozen miscreants forcibly abducted her, in the presence of others. One man, Narayan Yadav, who tried to protest, was murdered on the spot. The girl was raped, and released only after 12 hours. It was this case which sparked off the road blocking agitation.

Of late, many such cases have been reported. In September 1983, eight year old Rinku Jaiswal was grazing goats in a neighbour's field when two railway employees took her to the railway yard and raped her. Residents of Munger district say that in the last two months, there have been four reported cases of people being murdered when they tried to resist abduction and rape.

On March 20, 1984, in Bhabhua, Rohtasthana, Hazaribagh district, a 16 year old harijan woman, Sampati Devi, went to the police station to report her husband's maltreatment of her. The policemen mocked and molested her, and chased her away. She then appealed to

the court of the district magistrate, Rohtas. The magistrate ordered that she be kept in remand, but the police colluded with her husband to spirit her away, and she did not appear in court at the next hearing on April 4.

Within a fortnight of this case, two tribal girls Shivratiya and Ramkaliya of village Dudha situated in the Kemur hills, 40 kilometres from Bhabhua, were raped by local policemen in the course of interrogation of the villagers with regard to the whereabouts of a wanted criminal. The girls shouted for help. The villagers who tried to intervene were beaten with rifle butts. The people of Rohtas are much angered by this case...

—**C.A. Kumar, Dhanbad**
(translated from Hindi)

Gujarat

A demonstration was organised recently by Ahmedabad Women's Action Group and Chingari to protest against police indifference and callousness while investigating cases of death of young, married women under suspicious circumstances. The demonstration was sparked off by the death of Varsha Dixit, mother of two children. (See Manushi No. 22)

The demonstrating women went to the Ellisbridge police station and submitted a memorandum to the superintendent of police, Mr Khan who,

with police inspector Yadav had investigated Varsha's case. Holding placards and shouting slogans, the women demanded a thorough probe.

In the memorandum, the women alleged that because of the lethargic and incomplete investigations done by the police, evidence of the burning of the victim by husband and in-laws could rarely be established. The police usually closed the file & by labelling such deaths suicides. It was also alleged that the police refuse to record evidence of the parents of the victim on the ground that they were not present when she died. The police prepared their report merely on the basis of the dying declaration or the postmortem report. Moreover, the police took bribes from the husband and in-laws of the victim. The police were also guilty of passing derogatory remarks about women social workers, and witnesses, for which the demonstrators demanded an apology.

Chingari performed a street play and sang feminist songs that sought to draw the attention of passers by to Varsha's case. The women also marched to Varsha's in-laws' residence, where they again shouted slogans and performed the play. The event left a strong impact on the neighbourhood.

—**Amina Amin**