

P R E S S   R E L E A S E

B H A T E R I ' R A P E   C A S E

A number of women's organizations met with the Home Minister, Shri S.B.Chavan, this morning to place before him the following demands:

1. that the case be handed over to the CBI because they had no faith in the local police and the CID enquiry that was in process, as the police and other functionaries at the local level had already proved themselves biased against the victim of the rape, Bhanwri.
2. That the rapists be arrested immediately.
3. That the evidence collected so far be sealed immediately.

The Home Minister was sympathetic and has assured them that he will ask the Chief Minister of Rajasthan to take appropriate action, as it is important in such instances that there be at least some exemplary cases which can act as deterrents in the future. He also agreed that it was important that women such as the victim in this case, who were in fact engaged in implementing government policy at the village level, should be able to work in a secure environment without having to face the threat of violence to their lives and persons.

In this connection women's groups in Rajasthan will be organizing a massive protest march on the 22nd of October in Jaipur. Details can be had from the following groups. Protests will also be held in other parts of the country.

ACTION INDIA   ANKUR   JAGORI   KALI FOR WOMEN   KARMIKA   SABLA  
SANGH   SAHELI   SAAK   VISHAKHA.

15.10.92.



FORUM AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

B 5 HOUSING SOCIETY, NDSE PART 1, NEW DELHI 110 049

The Honourable Home Minister  
Government of India.

14 October 1992

Honourable Home Minister

We, the undersigned women's organizations wish to express our grave concern at the way the rape of a young woman, Bhanwri, is being handled in Rajasthan, at the state level. You are, no doubt, aware of the case: Bhanwri, a worker of the Women's Development Programme (a government sponsored programme in which women at village level work to implement government policy) was raped by two men from her village as reprisal for attempting to stop child marriage, which is illegal according to this country's laws.

Reports from Rajasthan and in the national media have made us fearful that evidence is being tampered with and a woman who has had to face the indignity of gang rape is now being made to feel a liar, and is being isolated at village level. This is proved by the following:

- \* That in spite of several attempts on the part of Bhanwri the police considerably delayed filing of a report of her gang rape;
- \* That the two rapists are still at large;
- \* That police personnel were willing to accept a statement sworn on ganga jal by one of the rapists that he was not guilty, but when Bhanwri offered to swear to the truth of her complaint on ganga jal, the police DySP said that would amount to falsifying the ganga jal.

And these are only a few examples.

We thus fear that the police, doctors, magistrates and others are all pitted against the victim, and they have already decided that she is guilty. In such circumstances we have little faith that a CID enquiry, which is currently in progress, will be either just or unprejudiced.



Secondly, the question is not one that applies to this woman alone. Today, hundreds of women work as part of government programmes ( Women's Development Programme, Mahila Samakhya, ICDS, DWCRA etc) to implement government policy. For them, the threat of sexual assault, and to their lives and persons, is very real. Ensuring protection for these workers against such hazardous working conditions is surely the responsibility of the government who has put them there.

We therefore wish to make the following urgent demands:

1. That a CBI enquiry be instituted immediately, as we have no faith in the fairness of the CID investigation that is in place.
2. That the two rapists be placed under arrest immediately.
3. That all evidence that has been collected be immediately sealed in order to prevent its being tampered with.

We look forward, Sir, to a positive response to these demands.

Yours truly

ACTION INDIA

ANKUR

JAGORI

KALI FOR WOMEN

KARMIKA

SABLA SANGH

SAHELI

VISHAKHA

Gouri Choudhary -

Abhaya

cinashini

Santala

Santala

Gopi

Munna

Tipsu Bhai

Sipra Bhai



THE PIONEER 14/10/92.

# Raped in the line of duty: Women field workers protest

WE WILL not tolerate these sexual assaults anymore. We demand justice. We demand accountability from the government."

Angry and determined. This was the mood of over a 100 Saathins of the Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan who gathered for a two day meeting in Jaipur on October 11-12 to express solidarity with their co-worker Bhanwari Devi, who was violently assaulted and raped on September 22, and to plan further strategy in their campaign for justice. The Saathins came from all over Rajasthan—Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bhilwara, Udaipur, Kota, Sekar, Banswara, Dungarpur.

And they spoke with one voice. For them, as for Bhanwari, there is no turning back. The battlelines are clearly drawn. They are determined to get justice not only for her but for themselves as well, and for women everywhere who live under the constant threat of sexual assault in their workplace.

Bhanwari's case is fast becoming a symbolic battle larger than the WDP alone. It is becoming a fight for all women working in similar government programmes at the grassroots level—women who work in villages as change agents against oppressive social practices at great risk to themselves. Women who could be "raped in the line of duty" like Bhanwari was.

The Jaipur meeting was

recalled a case in which a village midwife was raped. An activist from the Mahila Samakhyas Programme (a programme similar to WDP, running in UP, Karnataka, Gujarat) talked about the rape of a Sahayogini (cluster-level worker) in Karnataka.

Suddenly it seems that the horror of Bhanwari's experience is just the tip of the iceberg, as if a whole silent history of vio-

lence faced by these women workers is now finding its voice. WDP workers are carefully documenting this history as part of their campaign for Bhanwari. The Saathins and other activists are clear in their minds about one thing—it is high time that governments, both state and central, sat up and recognised that women workers at the field level are extremely vulnerable to sexual violence.

These women dare to disturb the status quo—because they speak about women's equality, justice, freedom from aggressive social customs—and what better way to shut them up than to violate them sexually? Sexual violence is after all a time tested technique for beating women back into submission.

Saathins want this ugly truth acknowledged publicly at a

rape; and other Deputy Superintendents of Police will think twice before asking a woman who has been raped, "Do you even know what the word rape means?"—which also happened to Bhanwari.

What form of justice and redress do the Saathins want? Their immediate objectives are:

- Arrest and conviction of Gyarasa Gujar and Badri Gujar who raped Bhanwari. They have

band and cried rape! Surely they should be testing the rapists not the husband!

- Strict action against police officials; the Bassi Primary Health Centre doctor, and the Jaipur magistrate who have been negligent to the point of being conspiratorial.

Their larger goals are:

- Policy level recognition of the occurrence of sexual violence against women working in

government programmes.

The next immediate stop in this landmark campaign is on October 22, exactly a month from the day Bhanwari was brutalised. On this day WDP and the Saathins have planned a mammoth demonstration in Jaipur to take Bhanwari's case to the streets. Groups from all over the country have been called to descend upon Jaipur in solidarity with the issue. And how does Bhanwari feel about all this?

She sat throughout the two-day meeting grimly, firmly. She is scared—the Gujaras are repeatedly threatening both her and her husband with violence—but is getting tremendous strength and support from her fellow Saathins. She wants justice.

When the Saathins were talking about collecting bags of grain for Bhanwari's family who have been completely ostracised by the village, she quietly spoke up, "Don't worry about my stomach, just please protect my body. I am entrusting you with it."

## Rajasthan's Saathins are in a combative mood and demand that the government and society at large acknowledge the dangers of sexual violence that they face, says Farah Naqvi

attended not only by Saathins and Prachetas of WDP, but also by activists and lawyers from other regions of Rajasthan as well as Delhi. The growing campaign has been inspired by Bhanwari's courageous stand has also opened the floodgates for other similar stories to come pouring out.

Saathins are starting to recount other instances of sexual harassment and assault that they have faced. Some

lence faced by these women workers is now finding its voice.

WDP workers are carefully documenting this history as part of their campaign for Bhanwari. The Saathins and other activists are clear in their minds about one thing—it is high time that governments, both state and central, sat up and recognised that women workers at the field level are extremely vulnerable to sexual violence.

policy level. They have already broken their silence about sexual assault and now want the government and society at large to break this conspiracy of silence too.

No more "Yes, yes, we all know it happens but lets not talk about it". Admit it. Acknowledge that sexual violence is a stark reality so that no other local policeman will dare to argue for over three hours before lodging a FIR about

not been arrested even 20 days after the incident.

- An immediate CBI probe into the rape because the police investigation currently underway has no credibility left with either Bhanwari or WDP. Why, for example, did the police take Bhanwari's husband Mohan to the hospital at 10 pm on October 3 and take his semen sample for testing? What are they hoping to prove—that she just had intercourse with her hus-

band and cried rape! Surely they should be testing the rapists not the husband!

- Setting of special cells at the state and district level to deal with all cases of sexual violence.

- The Saathins also discussed the possibility of seeking collective punitive damages/compensation as symbolic acknowledgement of the risks they face on a daily basis, setting up of government guidelines for their protection, and the setting up of a collective welfare fund for all women workers in



PIONEER: OCTOBER 12, 1992.

## Gangrape of Bhanwari Bai Caste lobby trying to suppress facts, say women's groups

UNI

Jaipur

MEMBERS OF the National Commission for Women (NCW) and the Social Welfare Board said on Sunday a powerful caste lobby was making all-out efforts to suppress facts of the gangrape of Bhanwari Bai, a woman activist and a vocal crusader against child marriage, in Bhateri village in Jaipur district.

The team, which visited the village and met the Chief Minister on Sunday, told newsmen that Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat had assured them that strict action would be taken after completion of the CID inquiry.

Chairman of the Social Welfare Board Amarjit Kaur said the attitude of the police was highly condemnable as they were making the rape victim go from pillar-to-post in order to protect the accused. She said they would not give up their struggle till justice was meted out to Bhanwari Bai who was raped on September 22 in the presence of her husband ostensibly to take revenge for stopping the marriage of a one-year-old child during *Akha Teej*

this year.

Members of the NCW Padma Seth, Ganga Potoi and Anne Mathews also met senior police and district administration officials and representatives of various women's organisations. Ms Seth said the NCW would await completion of the CID inquiry before initiating any action on the issue. Ms Seth said many strongly-worded reports had started trickling down from the police station and village elders in Bhateri that Bhanwari Bai had concocted baseless allegations of rape.

Two parallel positions have since gained ground — one, basically questioning the authenticity of Bhanwari Bai's story and the other, of outrage at the violence meted out to her. The former has as its supporters many people from Bhateri village, caste leaders, one MLA and a few police functionaries.

The rapists were also propagating that they have the protection of a Union Minister, Ms Seth said.

She said all evidence proved beyond any doubt that the victim, women's development programme volunteer, was gangraped.



## Rape an occupational hazard for Rajasthan Saathins

IF A RURAL banking employee was suddenly assaulted in a village for spreading the cause of usury against local tradition, what would the general reaction be? A nationwide strike by banking employees demanding legal action and compensation, trade unions screaming for protection against occupational hazards and a media showering kudos on the employee and derision on the cantankerous villagers.

But when a woman employee in similar circumstances gets gang-raped for working against child marriage in a Rajasthan village, she has to spend most of her time in front of hostile audiences swearing the truth of her attack on her young son's head.

Bhanwari Bai, a *saathin* in a state run programme for spreading awareness on women's issues in the villages has been taking on the risk of belligerent villagers without being either a permanent government employee or knowing that her official work exposes her to a high risk of

attack and that someone must be held responsible for it. She is too busy proving her honesty to know that she can hold the state responsible for her rape. She is also confused as to why her husband Mohan Lal who was first beaten up by the gang of four Gujars and the local priest is more easily believed for his attack than she is for her gang-rape.

Meanwhile, news reports

will decide how secure *saathin's* feel, but no one is talking about it. Nearly a decade old, the programme has created an unprecedented cadre of women workers called *saathins* and *prachetas* who have been organising women around critical awareness and development issues.

The *saathin* is the village-level worker and is always a recruit from her own village.

Up until a few years ago the *saathin's* received a smallittance in the way of an honorarium. For this small amount these women are obviously working for love and not money. They have developed into highly independent women which doesn't make them

young Rajasthanis take marriage vows that they cannot even pronounce. Bhanwari counselled Ram Karan Gujar against marrying his one-year-old daughter. But the police on that day, unknown to Bhanwari, went on an official drive to tot up some success rates on the Chief Minister's orders. The police action incensed Ram Karan and the Gujars predictably held Bhan-

wari responsible. Meanwhile, the *saathins* have been for some time now arguing against police intervention saying that it impedes their work by instantly creating hostility. They want to work through persuasion and have achieved fascinating results on many issues.

Her work has never been popular. A few years ago when she took up the case of a

woman raped by a farmer she was threatened. But now the Gujar pride was at stake and Bhanwari had to be taught a lesson. Interestingly, no one in the village refutes the tension caused by Bhanwari's work against child marriage. They don't accuse her of being a thug or a mafioso but a reformer.

Yet are they refusing to believe her gang-rape especial-

ly when one of the accused is Ram Karan himself. The police of the area are also aware that Bhanwari Bai was facing acrimony in the village because of their actions but rather than extending extra protection for a fellow state employee they have been the most negligent.

Their delays and prevarications destroyed critical rape evidence because Bhanwari was forced to go for an examination

to Jaipur all of which took over two days.

Bhanwari is an astonishingly brave woman because she has still chosen to stay on in a village where her family has now been socially and economically boycotted. Meanwhile, the Gujars are still on the prowl as no arrests have been made and they are openly flaunting their political connections.

Bhanwari is still taking risks

**A *saathin's* gang-rape for counselling against child marriage evokes little protest even though it might throw the whole Women's Development Programme in jeopardy, writes Jasjit Purewal**

VIEWPOINT

like those in *The Hindustan Times* are more concerned about the suspect character of a woman who can recount her rape "in minute detail". Which in the case of an assault against a man would have simply strengthened his case.

More importantly, the future of an exemplary programme like the Women's Development Programme (WDP) is at stake and the outcome of this case

With little education she is usually selected for her outspoken and courageous nature and her ability to communicate with people.

Her training is very exacting and radical—she must unlearn all the village, caste and gender prejudices. The WDP's success with the training has highlighted it as a pathbreaking programme in the country, in so much as the government has

very popular with the power centres in the villages.

Bhanwari Bai is also a kumhar by caste which worsens her odds in a Gujar-dominated village. Undeterred, she took on the fight against child marriage in her village after the state government asked WDP to help them curb this unlawful but flourishing practice.

This year at Akha Teej, which is the time of year when

wari responsible.

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no male employee would dream of simply because she has been trained effectively to stand her ground. And even now there is no talk of the risk *saathin's* take nor the glaring circumstantial evidence of her attack.

Instead, her courage and professionalism has been eclipsed by the 'semen' stains which will decide whether she is even credible.



Tol. Oct. 7, 1992.

## No arrests yet in Rajasthan rape case

By GURMUKH SINGH

BHATERI (JAIPUR), OCT 6

FROM Bhateri to Kumbher, the pattern is same: atrocities on lower castes, police indifference and the hushing up of the most heinous of crimes.

Bhavri Bai, a *saathin* (worker or partner) with the government-run Women's Development Programme (WDP), was raped on September 22 for opposing child marriage and atrocities on the poor in Bhateri. The police delayed in registering an FIR and getting her medically-examined on one pretext or the other.

They are mum on the medical examination report. None of the five accused—Shravan Maharaj, Badri, Ram Karan, Ram Sukh and Gayarsi — has been arrested.

"We have 'rounded up' four except Badri and are interrogating them 'to establish whether they were in the village at the time of the incident,'" says Mr Rajendar Joshi, DSP.

The accused are said to have absconded on September 22. Gayarsi, Ram Karan and Shravan Maharaj say they were either not in the village or away on the day of the incident.

**DIFFERENT VERSIONS:** Interestingly, while the police say

that "two were 'rounded up' on Friday, one each was 'picked up' on Saturday and Sunday", Shravan says he gave himself up on Wednesday and Ram Karan says he 'came-back' on Tuesday. Their versions don't tally with the police version.

But thanks to conscience-raising efforts by women social activists, the state government has woken up to the incident. It was raised in the state assembly. The chief minister, Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, who is initially said to have described the criminal act as "only one such incident" has ordered a CID inquiry.

**INCIDENT:** Narrating the incident, Bhavri says: "I had gone with my husband Mohan to collect fodder. When he went to relieve himself in the nearby field, Mohan had a tiff with Shravan Maharaj, Badri, Ram Sukh, Gayarsi and Ram Karan sprang to Shravan's help (because he is the village priest and people hold him in high respect) and beat up my husband. On hearing his shrieks, I rushed to his help. While Shravan and Ram Karan grappled with him, Ram Sukh pinned me down. Then Gayarsi and Badri raped me in turns."

Incidentally, it was the marriage of Ram Karan's one-year-old

daughter on Akha Teej (May 5) which Bhavri had tried to stop. A few days before the marriage she, along with other *saathis*, had met Ram Karan and persuaded him not marry the infant. Later, when the police intervened, Ram Karan suspected that Bhavri had informed the police.

"Ram Karan threatened that even if it meant waiting for 24 years, he will take his revenge," says Bhavri. Women social activists allege that the police even refused to register the FIR on various pretexts.

**FIR:** Mrs Rasila Sharma, a *saathin* whose help Bhavri sought

to register the case at the Bassi police station, says: "The DSP asked why we did not file the FIR on the day of incident? He also asked 'madam, do you know what is rape'. I told him emphatically 'yes'. Only then did he register the FIR."

Denying this, Mr Joshi, DSP, says: "There was no dilly-dallying. I just asked them why they were late. They could have gone to Jatwara which is only 5 km from Bhuteri."

Says Mr Ajit Singh, SP, Jaipur rural: "It did not seem to be a clear-cut case of rape. Injuries were not suggestive of it. And we were looking for corroboration."

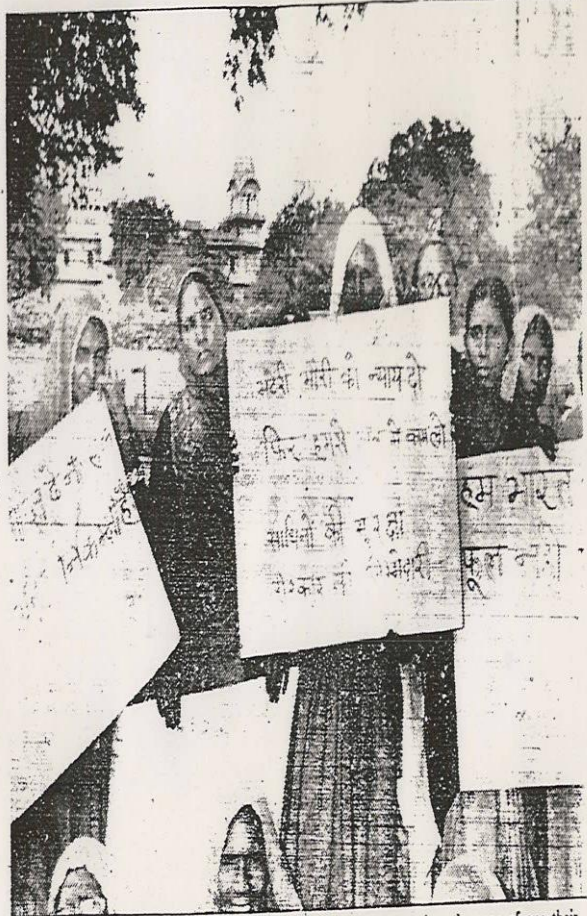
According to Mr Chhitar Singh, SHO, they could not believe that it could be rape case as four out of the five accused were above 55. Women activists dispute this saying that the accused are much younger, with Badri being only 25 to 30 years old.

**MEDICAL CHECK-UP:** After the FIR, Bhavri was sent to the Bassi public health centre for medical check-up. Since there was no lady doctor she was sent to SMS hospital, Jaipur. But the doctors refused to examine her without the magistrate's orders. Bhavri went to the magistrate at 8 p.m. He shouted at her for coming to his house. She spent that night in the Mahila police station. Next day, after the magistrate's orders, Bhavri was examined at 8 p.m.

"This delay was meant to destroy the evidence," alleges a *saathin*. After 12 days, the report of her medical examination is yet to come.

Even as Bhavri's agony continues, everyone in Bhuteri is pouring scorn on her. She has been ostracised. No one buys her earthen wares.

Cooped up in her adobe house, Bhavri says: "My humiliation is complete. I am like a corpse waiting to be cremated." But no one believes her.



Women social activists at a meeting to plan demonstrations against the rape of one their colleague at Bhateri village near Jaipur.—TOI photo by Gurmukh Singh



INDIAN EXPRESS, Wed. Oct. 7, 1992. P.1 bottom spread.

Bhanwari, the social worker

## Raped by villagers, harassed by Govt

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI

**S**ATHINS, the grassroot workers for women's development in Rajasthan, have been shocked not just by the rape of Bhanwari, their colleague who was actively campaigning against child marriages, but by the manner in which a woman of proven integrity is being treated as a "liar" by some people in the administration.

A comprehensive study, "Bhateri case: backlash and protest", by the women's studies unit of the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur, presented to the National Commission for Women on Tuesday, points

out that agents of change like sathins require personal confidence, high energy levels and a nurturing support structure. All three have been seriously undermined in the rape case of Bhanwari.

Kanchan Mathur, who has done the report with contributions of many researchers, says the ghastly incident and the subsequent developments have cast a shadow not only on the sathins or the women's development programme but also on all those doing grassroot work in ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) and DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas).

The plight of Bhanwari strongly counters major efforts that the department of health is making to



involve village-level workers and mahila mandals to fight resistance to

fertility control, population protection against AIDS etc. In effect, it sets the clock back for women by indicating what "lessons" could be given to them if they dare go against the accepted "traditional" norms dictated by established interests," the report says.

The status of the departments of women and children within the larger administrative system has also suffered a blow.

The report points out that strongly-worded reports have been trickling down from the thana (police post) and village elders in Bhateri that Bhanwari had concocted a baseless allegation. Two parallel positions have since gained ground—one questioning the authenticity of Bhanwari's story and the other of

outrage at the violence meted out to her.

The report is graphic and frightening on the dimensions of the case on development per se. Tracing the events that led to the rape of Bhanwari, it points out that for the last seven years she had taken up issues related to land, water, public distribution system, literacy, health and payment of minimum wages at famine relief work. On all these issues she had the support of men and women of her village.

Bhanwari's alienation in Bhateri began specifically on the issue of child marriage just before Akha Teej. This year the state government had decided to observe the fortnight preceding Akha Teej as an

► p 10 col 4



# Raped by villagers, harassed by Govt

Continued from p 1 col 5

anti-child marriage fortnight. The Chief Secretary had written to the district collectors to conduct campaigns.

As against the soft line approach of discussion and persuasion which the WDP (Women's Development Programme) functionaries had been taking earlier, stoppage of child marriage became serious business. Bhanwari along with the pracheta (block-level worker) and project director of the district women's development agency tried to persuade people against child marriages.

Along with others, some influential Gujar families were planning child marriages and were insistent on performing them. But when Bhanwari visited Ram Karan Gujar of Bhateri and tried to convince him not to get his one-year old daughter married, she met with a hostile and aggressive response. The Vidhaya of the area also opposed Bhanwari. He felt that since 40 out of the 100 households in the village belonged to the Gujars, his supporting the issue would have serious implications for him. The IDS report says some of the families are financially well off and claim to have political connections.

In response to the appeal of the district collector, a list of the proposed child marriages was prepared by all the sarhins in the district. The list included the name of Ram Karan Gujar and some Kumbhar

families of the neighbouring village. The SDO and deputy superintendent of police started taking hectic rounds of the villages in their efforts to prevent the child marriages. This added to the tension.

On May 5 the two officers even came to Bhateri village to stop the marriage of the year-old girl. The father is a ward panch. As with all other marriages in the area, the state machinery only succeeded in preventing the marriage on Akha Teej. The marriage took place at 2 a.m. the next morning and no police action was taken against the family. People in the village, however, connected Bhanwari's efforts to convince them against child marriage with police action.

After the marriage, the Gujar community said Bhanwari must be taught a lesson. They harassed Bhanwari by cutting a tree and taking fodder from her field. She was socially boycotted and the Gujar community was asked not to sell milk to her family and not to buy the earthen pots made by Bhanwari and her husband. Mohan, a rickshaw-puller in Jaipur, had to stop work and be with Bhanwari. Badri Gujar, the IDS report says, even came to Bhanwari's house and beat up Mohan. When Bhanwari tried to intervene and point out that Mohan had nothing to do with the sathin's work, there was a scuffle in which Bhanwari's bangles were broken. A few days later, the project director

of DWDA was also threatened by Badri Gujar.

A local MLA even admonished the pracheta for trying to prevent child marriages on Akha Teej when he visited Bhateri on June 2 for the Rajasva Abhiyan (revenue campaign) in which a piece of land was given to Bhanwari. The woman pointed out she was trying to enforce the law of the land in letter and spirit and if the MLA had no faith in the law, he as legislator should try to change it. The exchange clearly revealed the ambivalence of the political leadership and the consequent casualty at the most vulnerable level," the report says.

Because of the hostile environment, the sathins, prachetas and others connected with the WDP visited Bhanwari at intervals. On June 22 a jajam or a public dialogue on the issue was held at Bhateri. However, the Gujar community continued to be aggressive. The village postmaster who had employed Bhanwari to manage a water kiosk at a shop that he owned had to ask her to quit after he was roughed up five persons.

But in the last two months Bhanwari was lulled into a false sense of security because of assurances given by the Gujar community. The villagers began interacting with her and the WDP supporters reduced the frequency of their visits to her.

On September 22 evening when she and her husband were working

on their field, Mohan went to relieve himself in the neighbouring field. Five men - Ram Sukh Gujar, Ram Karan Gujar, Badri Gujar (an uncle of Ram Karan), Gyarsa Gujar and Shrawan Sharma - attacked him with lathis, the report says. Bhanwari, thinking he had been bitten by a snake, called back on hearing his cry. Receiving no reply she rushed to the spot. Mohan was unconscious and held down by Shrawan and Ram Karan Gujar. Ram Sukh Gujar caught hold of Bhanwari and Badri and Gyarsa took turns to rape her. The IDS report states. To stop her from screaming, her odhni was stuffed into her mouth. Her locket and earring were stripped and taken away and she was threatened of dire consequences if she spoke.

When Bhanwari and Mohan reached home they appealed to two families who they considered their sympathisers to help them. A woman rebuffed her saying she had brought enough trouble to the village and should seek the help of the programme officials. Since the last bus left the village at 4.45 p.m., Bhanwari had to wait till the following morning to reach Patan. Accompanied by Krishna, the sathin there, she went to Bassi. Krishna went on to Jaipur to mobilise help.

The pracheta and Krishna returned to Bassi at 1 p.m. and went to the police station to lodge a report. For one hour they had to argue with the police who expressed scepticism about the incident. Ulti-

mately, the FIR was lodged and Bhanwari was sent to the PHC at Bassi for medical examination. The male doctor at the PHC refused to conduct the examination. The two lady doctors attached to the PHC were not available. Bhanwari was therefore referred to SMS hospital at Jaipur.

The IDS report says significantly, it was later revealed that the reference chit by the PHC doctor requested medical examination for confirming age of the victim rather than rape. The medical jurist, SMS hospital, refused to conduct the medical examination without orders from the magistrate. The medical examination was done 48 hours after the incident. The report indicates injuries on Bhanwari's hands and legs.

On September 29 a meeting was held at Bhateri by the NGOs and women activists. Some 200 people attended it. Bhanwari was isolated. The attitude of the men and the community leaders underscored the fact that they planned to put up a united front and prove that Bhanwari had fabricated the whole story," IDS says.

The Chief Minister has assured that the CID would conduct the enquiry with sensitivity and efficiency. The IDS report says "the CID report would either restore or destroy the confidence of the people in the government department to clearly demarcate the honest from the criminal."



## Gujjars gang up to boycott raped woman's family

KC Soodhl

Bhateri

BANWARI BAI, the 35-year-old social worker who was gangraped on September 22 by upper caste Gujar farmers of this sleepy village in Bassi tehsil of Jaipur district, is now facing a social boycott.

She was raped and her husband, Mohan Lal (40), was severely beaten up by the farmers for leading a crusade against child marriage and protesting against atrocities on women. Bhanwari Bai, who belongs to the kumhar caste (potters), is a *saathin* working for the social welfare department of the State Government. Bhanwari Bai has two sons and a daughter.

The villagers have stopped buying anything from the family

which used to sell earthen pitchers and milk. This reporter saw a pile of unsold pitchers outside her house.

Neither is the family allowed to buy their daily requirements from the village shops. Thankfully, they produce enough foodgrain to stay alive. There are four kumhar households in the village. All the kumhars are related to Madan Lal.

Bhateri has a population of 2,000 but there is hardly anybody to be seen. A complete silence descends upon a visitor as he enters this village which is located 55 km from Jaipur.

The village has a middle school with a strength of 337 students, an Ayurved dispensary and a panchayat ghar, apart from a big pond.

This is the setting of the shocking incident that occurred last month. What has heightened the



VICTIM OF SOCIETY: Banwari Bai

tragedy is the fact that none of the villagers regrets the incident. Nor does anyone have any sympathy for the victim of upper caste oppression.

Most of the villagers this reporter spoke to admit that Mohan Lal was beaten up, but they do not believe that Bhanwari Bai was raped. To the contrary, they accuse hold Bhanwari Bai responsible for "tarnishing the reputation" of the entire village. "She is responsible for chopping off our noses," says one of them.

Bhanwari Bai attributes this hostility to the fact that the culprits belong to the powerful Gujjars who are now being supported by other upper castes.

Bhanwari Bai, who is yet to recover from the humiliation to which she was subjected, narrated how she earned the wrath of the villagers.

"I met Ram Karan Gujar (one of the men accused of raping her) a fortnight before Akha Tej and pleaded with him not to marry off his one-year-old daughter... On the day of the child's marriage, the police intervened. He held me responsible for this, although I told him that I had not informed the police... they came because the Chief Minister had issued an appeal against child marriage. The administration was organising a fortnight-long campaign to educate the villagers and mobilise public opinion against this evil practice. Because the administration was vigilant, the district authorities sent in the police on learning that a child marriage was going to take place..."

She ran into trouble once earlier when, four years ago she complained to the sarpanch

See Gujjars Page 4



# Gujjars boycott raped woman's family

From Page 1

about a woman being raped and how some farmers had tried to rape another woman.

Narrating the sequence of events on September 22, Bhanwari Bai says: "I had gone to the field along with my husband to collect fodder for our buffalo around six pm.

After a while, my husband, who had gone to relieve himself, was suddenly attacked by five men—Ram Karan Gujar, Badri Gujar, Ram Sukh Gujar, Shrawan Brahmin and Gyarsi—armed with lathis."

On hearing her husband's screams, she rushed to the spot where she found the men beating Mohan Lal. On seeing Bhanwari Bai, Badri Gujar, Ram Sukh Gujar and Gyarsi pounced upon her as Ram Karan Gujar and Shrawan held her husband. Ram Sukh Gujar removed her gold necklace and silver earrings and then pinned her down as Badri Gujar and Gyarsi raped her in turns.

She could not go to Bassi police station the same night to report the incident because it was at distance of 20 km and there was no transport available at that time. According to her, she boarded the seven am bus on September 23 along with her husband. That is why the report with the police was lodged at 2.30 pm on that day.

The Bassi police, she says, sent her for a medical examination to



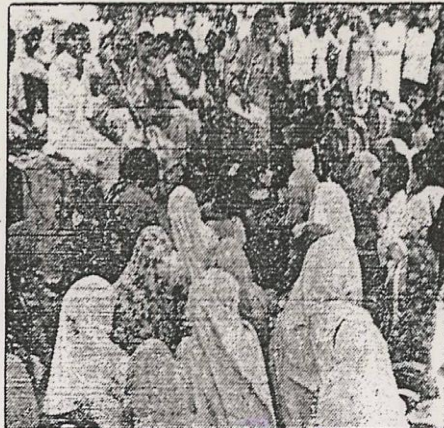
Mohan Lal

the primary health centre. But there was no lady doctor to examine her.

She was, therefore, sent to SMS Hospital in Jaipur where the medical jurist refused to perform the examination in the absence of a court order.

The police then took her to the munsif magistrate, Bassi, at his base camp in Jaipur. But he refused to pass any order that night. The magistrate had even objected to her being brought to his house at night. Later, she was lodged at the Mahila Police Station for the night.

On the morning of September 24, the police produced Bhanwari Bai before the magistrate at 10 am, but he passed his order around five pm. The medical exa-



Women activists storm Bhaleri on Tuesday Gopal Sanger

mination finally took place at nine pm in the hospital.

Seven days after she was examined, the police is yet to receive the medical report on whether or not she was raped.

But although the report has not yet been submitted, the police is inclined towards disbelieving Bhanwari Bai and has charged her with not reporting the incident in time.

"There is the Jatwara police post at a distance of five km from Bhaleri village. She could have easily reported the matter there. Why did she wait till the next morning to lodge the FIR?" says a police officer.

The police has not arrested anybody so far, but has taken into custody two of the

accused—Shrawan Brahmin, priest of the village temple, and Ram Karan Gujar—for interrogation.

Bhanwari Bai, however, is not entirely alone. She may not have any sympathiser in the village, but the incident has triggered a storm of protest in the State capital.

Two officials—Mrs Anjna Bhushan, director of the Child and Women Department of the State Government, and Mrs Venu Gupta, additional director of the Women Development Programme—visited the village to console her. They also met senior officials of the administration and police officers. On Tuesday, women activists stormed the village to express their solidarity with Bhanwari Bai.

They organised a public meeting which was also addressed by Mr K L Meena, MLA, and an ex-sarpanch. Both of them said that they would see to it that the culprits are punished if rape had indeed been committed.

## CID probe into gangrape

THE CID Crime Branch will look into the Bhatari gangrape case in which Bhanwari Bai, a Saathin working under the Woman Development Programme for the Rajasthan Government, was assaulted on September 22 and her husband Mohan Lal was beaten up.

The case has been referred to the CID after a complaint was made by the Woman Development Programme for slackness on the part of the administration in its investigation. Another factor is the attempt by villagers to save the culprits who belong to the dominant Gujar caste.

The "slackness" can be seen from the fact that Mohanlal was sent for an X-ray examination only on Wednesday and that there was considerable delay in the medical examination of Bhanwari Bai.

PIONEER.  
Oct. 2.