PRESS RELEASE

BHATERI RAPE CASE

A number of women's organizations met with the Home Minister, Shri S.P. 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, Bhanwari.

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, SAA& 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
Raped in the line of duty: Women field workers protest

Bhanwari’s case is fast becoming a symbol worth 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 Jatpur meeting was recalls a case in which a village middle-aged woman was raped. An activist from the Mahila Samakshya Programme is programme similar to WDP, running in UP. Kamalakshi, a member of the programme, talked about the rape of a Shyamnath Jatpur-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 violence was being revealed. These women have to discuss the status quo because they speak about women’s equality, justice, freedom from aggressive social customs, and what better way to shun them up than to violate them sexually? Sexual violence is after all a time tested technique for keeping women back into submission.

Saathis want this ugly truth to be acknowledged publicly as 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 are the Saathis want? Their immediate objective is to arrest and conviction of Gauri Singh and Ranbir Garg who raped Bhanwati. They have already been arrested even 20 days after the incident.

The next immediate step in this anti-rape campaign is on October 22, exactly a month from the day Bhanwati was brutally murdered. On this day WDP and the Saathis have planned a mass demonstration in Jatpur to take Bhanwati’s case to the streets. Groups from all over the country have been invited to join the mass rally on October 22.

She sat through the two-day meeting gritting, firmly. She is scared—Gauri Garg is repeatedly threatening both of her and her husband with violence—but in getting organised she is fighting for self-respect.

The Saathis also discussed the possibility of seeking collective punitive damages, compensation, as symbolic acknowledgment of the risk they face on a daily basis, getting up for government guidelines for their protection, and the setting up of a collective welfare fund for all women workers in government programmes.

Rajasthan’s Saathis 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 Saathis and Prachaks of WDP, but also by activists and lawyers from other regions of Rajasthan as well as Delhi. The growing campaign has been inspired by Bhanwati’s courageous stand and has opened the floodgates for other similar stories to come pouring out.

Saathis are starting to recount other instances of sexual harassment and assault that they have faced. Some of them have faced state officials and even police officials who have tried to dissuade them from continuing their work, which they have done so far. The Saathis have decided to table a memorandum to the government at the state level and demand that victims of assault are not punished.
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 Bhaari 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, Anuradha Shekhawat 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 and struggle till justice was meted out to Bhanwari Bai who was raped on September 22 in the presence of her husband and others to take revenge for stopping the marriage of a seven-year-old child during Akshaya Tritiya this year.

Members of the NCW Padma Seth, Ganga Pooja 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 media-stimulated reports had started trickling down from the police station and village elders in Bhaari 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 calling her the victim. The former has as its supporters many people from Bhaari 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 gang raped.
Rape an occupational hazard for Rajasthan’s Saathins

A rural banking employee was suddenly attacked in a village for spreading the cause of women’s rights. The attacker, who was a local businessman, was known to be a virulent opponent of women’s rights. He had been harassing the woman for weeks and had even threatened her life. The attack was a severe blow to her confidence and she was forced to leave her job.

On the other hand, a group of women in one of the villages in the region had organized a campaign against child marriage. They had been working tirelessly to educate the community about the dangers of child marriage and the benefits of delaying marriage until adulthood. Their efforts had not gone unnoticed and they were beginning to see a change in the attitudes of the villagers.

Meanwhile, a young woman from one of the villages was forced to undergo a horrid ordeal. She had been promised marriage to a young man from the village, but when the wedding day arrived, the groom’s family demanded a huge dowry. When the family refused to pay, the groom’s father threatened to withdraw the marriage offer. The young woman was left with no choice but to agree to the demands.

The saathins’ 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

With little education she is usually selected for her outward and courteous nature and her ability to communicate with people. Her training is very exacting and radical—she must understand all the village, caste and gender prejudices. The NWP’s success with the training has highlighted its role as a path-breaking programme in the country, and so much as the government has very popular with the centres in the village.

Meanwhile, the saathins have been for some time now working against police interference saying that it impedes their work. They want to work through persuasion and have achieved fascinating results on many issues. Their 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 Gujarat police is at stake and Huvardi had to be taught a lesson.

Huvardi, like many of the women in the police, was a victim of child marriage. She had to go through the same ordeal as the saathin. She was forced to marry a man who was twice her age and had already had children. She was left with no choice but to accept her fate.

In the end, the saathins and their allies succeeded in changing the attitudes of the villagers and delaying marriage. The case of Huvardi was instrumental in raising awareness about the dangers of child marriage and the importance of education. As a result, the village saw a decrease in the number of child marriages and an increase in the number of educated women.

The saathins’ work is not easy, but they are determined to continue their fight. They believe that with education and awareness, women can overcome the social barriers that prevent them from living a fulfilling life.
No arrests yet in Rajasthan rape case

By GURMUKH SINGH

BHATERI [JAIPUR], OCT 6 From Bhateri to Kumbhalgarh, the pattern is same: atrocities on women, police indifference and the rising up of the most gruesome of crimes. Bharat Bhai, a saathi [worker or partner] with the government-run Women's Development Programme (WDP), was raped on Sept 25 for opposing child marriage and assaults on the poor in Bhateri. The police delayed in registering an FIR and getting him medically-examined on one pretext or the other. They are ramming on the medical examination report. None of the five accused—Sharwan Mahara, Ram Karan, Ram Sahai and Gaurav—has been arrested.

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

The accused are said to have abandoned on Sept 25, Gaurav, Ram Karan and Sharwan Mahara when they were ejected from 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 was "picked up' on Saturday and Sunday," Sharwan 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 conscientious 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 Bhanwar Lokesh 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, Bharat Bhai says, "I had gone with my husband Mohan to collect fodder. When he went to fetch fodder in the field, a girl from the nearby dhaba matched him. Sharwan Mahara came and started shouting at him. I told him to go. He shouted that I was interfering. Then Ram Karan and Ram Sahai came and threw me in the dame."

"Then they tied me up and dragged me to the well. Sharwan and Ram Karan jumped into the well and pulled me up. Then they took me to another spot."

The DSP says, "We are investigating the case."

MEDICAL CHECK-UP: After the FIR, Bharat was sent to the Bhateri police station where he was examined. Since he was in a critical condition, the police took him to NSIC Hospital, Bhateri. But he was later shifted to the state-run Saurashtra Medical College and Hospital. The police also sent him to the police station in the morning.

Amusingly, on Oct 5, the police had informed the court that the accused were under investigation and that the FIR had been registered. But the police failed to produce the accused in court. The police have also failed to produce the FIR in court.

Despite the police's efforts, the accused have managed to evade justice. The police have failed to produce the FIR in court.

As Bharat was waiting for justice, his wife, Jyoti, decided to take matters into her own hands. She went to the police station and demanded to see the FIR. The police failed to produce the FIR. The police have also failed to produce the FIR in court.

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Bhanwari, the social worker

Raped by villagers, harassed by Govt

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI

SATIENS, the prominent women for women's development in Rajasthan, have been shocked not just by the rape of Bhanwari, their colleague who was actively campaigning against child marriage, but by the manner in which a woman of proven integrity is being treated as a "traitor" by some people in the administration.

A comprehensive study, "Bhatari 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 Bhanwari require sustained 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 pathos incident and the subsequent developments have cast a shadow not only on the satiins, but on the women's development programme but also on all those doing peace work in ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) and DEWORA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas).

"The plight of Bhanwari provides..."counter major effects that the department of health is making to promote village-level workers and mobile medical units in the area of family planning, prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases."

The rape case has, however, brought to light the role of officials in the local administration in failing to prevent the violation of Bhanwari's rights.

The report points out that strong-willed individuals have been taking it on themselves to fight against the stigma of child marriage and to ensure that the right to education is not denied to girls. The report calls for a rethink on the part of the government to ensure that such cases are handled with sensitivity and dignity.

The report is graphic and frightening on the dehumanising and degrading methods used against women. It highlights the need for a change in the mindset of the authorities and the importance of providing support and protection to women who are fighting against wrongdoings.

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Raped by villagers, harassed by Govt

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anti-child marriage front. The Chief Secretary had written to the district collector to conduct campaign. 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. Bharwan arrived the prachetas (block-level workers) and project director of the district women's development agency tried to persuade people against child marriage.

Alongside, officials, some influential Gujar families were planning child marriages and were insisting on performing them. But when Bharwan visited Ram Karan Gujar of Bharwan and tried to convince him not to get his one-year-old daughter married, the met with a hostile and aggressive response. The Vidyavikas of the area also opposed Bharwan. He felt that since 40 out of the 100 households in the village belonged to the Gujar, his supporting the issue would have serious implications for him. The IDS report says that 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 sarvaks in the district. The list included the name of Ram Karan Gujar and some families of the neighbouring village. The SDM and deputy superintendent of police started taking同心 sounds of the villagers on their efforts to prevent the child marriage. This added to the tension.

On May 5, the two officers came to District village to stop the marriage of the year-old girl. The father is a watchman. For all other marriages in the area, the marriage was taken care of by the pracheta. In Bharwan, 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 Bharwan's efforts to convince them against child marriage with police action.

After the marriage, the Gujarat community said Bharwan must be taught a lesson.
Gujjars gang up to boycott raped woman’s family

K C Sondhi
Bharian

BANWARI BAI, the 25-year-old social worker who was gang-raped on September 22 by upper caste Gujjar farmers of this Siwaiy village in Bansi tehsil of Jalore 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. Bharian is a prosperity village and Belwadi is a prosperous village. Both are located in the Bikaner district.

The villagers have stopped buying anything from the family which used to sell earthen pitchers and milk. This reporter saw a pile of earthen pitchers outside her house.

Neither is the family allowed to buy their daily requirements from the village shop. Thankfulness, they produce enough foodgrain to stay alive. There are four kumbhar households in the village. All the kumbhars are related to Mahadev Bhai.

Bharian 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 Jalore.

The village has a middle school with a strength of 37 students, an Ayurved dispensary and a pan-chayat, apart from a panchayat. This is the setting of the shocking incident that occurred last month. What has heightened the tragedy is the fact that none of the villagers regrets the incident. Not 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 Bharian Bhai was raped. To the contrary, they accuse him of "harassing the reputation" of the entire village.

"She is responsible for chopping off our noses," says one of them.

Bharian Bhai attributes this hostility to the fact that the culprits belong to the powerful Gujjars who are now being supported by other upper castes. Bharian Bhai, 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 Gajjar (one of the men accused of raping her) a fortnight before Akshay Tend 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 told 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 organizing a fortnight-long campaign to educate the villagers and mobilize 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 Gujjar 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.

Nawal Singh Rangwala, a farmer from Bhanwari Bai’s village, narrates 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 buffaloes around 8 pm.

After a while, my husband, who had gone to relieve himself, was suddenly attacked by five men—Ram Karan Gujar, Badar Gujar, Ram Sukh Gujar, Shrawan Brahmin and Gyanji—and raped.

On hearing her husband’s screams, she rushed to the spot where she found the men beating Mohan Lai. On seeing Bhanwari Bai, Badar Gujar, Ram Sukh Gujar and Gyanji posted upon her as Ram Karan Gujar and Shrawan held her husband. Ram Sukh Gujar removed her gold necklace and silver earrings and then pulled her down as Badar Gujar and Gyanji raped her.

She could not go to Basti 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 Basti police, she says, sent her for a medical examination to the primary health centre. But there was no lady doctor to examine her. She was, therefore, sent to SHO Bhaleri in Bajpur where the medical nurse refused to perform the examination in the absence of a court order.

The police then took her to the mantri’s camp in Bhaleri. But he refused to pass any order that night. The mantri 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 5 pm. The medical examination finally took place at 9 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.

“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—Mr Anupa Shrestha, director of the Child and Women Development Programmes, and Mrs Veena 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 I Meena, MLA, and an ex-serviceman. 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 Bhaleri gangrape case in which Bhanwari Bai, a Santin working under the Women Development Programme for the Rajasthan Government, was assaulted on September 22 and her husband Mohan Lai was beaten up.

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

The “blackness” can be seen from the fact that Mohan Lai 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