

THE RAPE OF PUNJAB

Indian State's Indignities on Sikh Women and Children

I - HUMILIATED, TORTURED AND RAPED

A team appointed by the Punjab Women's Forum has documented evidence of police terrorism directed against women in some villages of districts of Ludhiana and Batala. These cases provide glaring evidence of the continuing terrorism all over Punjab. Our pen cannot adequately convey to you the pain of these women. Their suffering cannot be easily felt or shared. These cases are living testimony to the suffering of the Sikh women.

Background

Since 1984 when Punjab came under the heel of Punjab police and many armed gangs, untold numbers of innocents have languished in jails, countless number of young persons has been killed by police in fake encounters and many others continue to be brutalized in new detention centres.

Because of their political and religious views, some women too were caught in this web of violence but they were few. Instances include the repeated arrest of Bimal Kaur Khalsa (widow of Bhai Beant Singh); the arrest of the women singers (chorale) from Nabha, the arrest and continued detention in Jodhpur of many women arrested at the Golden Temple, Amritsar in June 1984 in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star; raids at the houses of the young people, the abusive interrogation of women; the arrest of the parents of the Panthic Committee member Wassan Singh Zaffarwal; the killing of a pregnant woman by the Border Security Police in district Gurdaspur, etc.

One heart rendering incident occurred as follows: In searching for young men, 50 to 60 police surrounded a barn and without warning started firing. It was just past 7:0 p.m., when bullets started smashing windows. The women inside were petrified. Taking shock of the situation, some older women hid the children in closets. In spite of widespread firing all around her, the oldest woman in the house decided to come out of the house. She said, "I have lived my life and not now see children massacred in front of my eyes!" She came out and from behind a pillar shouted: "Stop firing- you can come in and search the house. There is nothing to hide." The police officers, drunk in liquor, however kept on firing. After 10 to 15 minutes, an officer gave the command to cease firing. During the search, no male was found. The persons in the family were in the city that day; 13 women and children were found. The police were abusive. In the winter's cold, children and women including the mother of a two-week old baby were forced of the house. Not even blankets were allowed to them.

For the first time in December 1986, the armed units molested and raped women in village Brahampura, near Tarn Taran, in district Amritsar. When Avtar Singh Brahampura escaped the cordon of police, the police retaliated by venting their anger on innocent people, by beating them up and by raping and molesting five women. One of those young women spent the night without clothes, hiding behind some bushes. This angered the people so much that the government had to transfer the responsible battalion of Central Reserve Police Force out of that area but the people's demand of justice and trial of those responsible was never accepted.

From mid-1987, atrocities on women by the police and armed gangs have crossed all limits of civilized behaviour. Incidents of violence are not part of any particular search

operation for wanted people, raids or interrogation but occur because the Central government has granted unlimited powers to armed units so that they can suppress the voice of revolution in Punjab. The police and the security have started these atrocities on women for they have been unable to bring to submission the young people of Punjab by resorting to unlawful arrests, torture in special prisons and even killings in so-called encounters. This is a direct challenge to the self-respect and dignity of the people of Punjab.

In order to collect facts, a three- member committee of the Punjab Nari Manch (Women's Forum) consisting of Dr. Jiwan Jot Kaur (Vice President of the IHRO); Miss Kamal Sandhu and Sri Ganpat, Advocate toured some villages of Batala and Ludhiana districts.

Some incidents of Batala District

Batala subdivision lies in Gurdaspur district but has been made a special police district and the police have been granted special powers. This district has been subjected to maximum police brutality. Law of the jungle prevails in this area, the domain of Senior Superintendent Govind Ram. In addition, because of their special powers, the persons of BSF and CRPF terrorise everybody. There is hardly a village among the 40 to 50 villages surrounding the Hargobindpur police precinct where the people have not been suppressed at the hands of the police. This investigation team found the following instances of police brutality of women.

Ajit Singh Shah and his family live on a farm on the outskirts of village Padha, Police post Hargobindpur. One night, some armed young persons came to the farm and at the point of a gun, demanded and received food and shelter for one night.

In the morning, leaving a person behind them took a sick associate into town. The police raided the house at dawn and arrested the one person who had been left behind. For the next one-and-a- half hours he was brutally interrogated and finally shot dead. The whole family was taken out of the house, kicked and beaten with gun butts.

Bibi Sukhwinder Kaur, wife of Balwant Singh (son of Ajit Singh Shah) told us: "We were beaten by the police and the BSF. I was hit with boots and stepped on. They used vulgar abusive language and demanded to know why we had provided food for the young rebels. We replied that we had to provide food for they had guns. The police accused us of sleeping with the rebels. What are we to do? Don't we have any self-respect or dignity? Can they say what they like? When the rebels come with guns what are we to do? Our licensed and registered weapons have already been confiscated by the Government. This happened in December 1988. Those days were very cold. The police forced the men out of the house and made them remove their clothes. We were then forced to sit with them. You know, I normally keep my head averted from my father-in-law. I was feeling very embarrassed but was helpless. After about 2 hours, the men were allowed to put clothes. Then they took my father-in-law, my husband, our guest and myself to the police station. I was kept there for 5 days. There was no woman cop either at the time of the arrest or at the station."

Daljit Kaur, daughter of Shiv Singh of village Nadha was told by the police that she was summoned by her aunt. When the family members refused to send this Sikh girl alone, the police dragged her away. The mother, Piar Kaur went along with her. Both were kept at the police station overnight. Members of this family are still in jail; the remaining women of the family live out on the farm passing their days in fear. She also told us that the police had looted their house.

The same day, another incident occurred in Padha village. On hearing gunfire, the village chief, Sohan Singh, a retired army person, asked the guard to summon members of the village council. He stated: "Only four rounds had been fired. We were in the village when the Senior Superintendent of Police came with his Force and started abusing us. He was angry that we had not gone to receive some dignitary who was visiting. He then started beating us and using profane language." Sohan Singh interceded, saying: "Please stop. You have beaten us enough. Do not abuse us further." This further infuriated the SSP. We were all humiliated by having to rub our noses on the ground a hundred times each. We were then taken to the Gurdwara and forced to deliver speeches abusive of the rebels. The village council members are old yet they were dragged to the police station and locked in a cell overnight with about 90 inmates. There was not enough room to sit and they had to stand all night. They were released 24 hours later.

Whether these events occurred in the house of Ajit Singh Shah or with the council members, they occurred in presence of, and under the direct orders of, Senior Superintendent of police Govind Ram.

Village Ballewal

The investigation team met Manjit Kaur (wife) and Prakash Kaur (mother) of Nirvar Singh Ballewal, a minister at a Gurdwara Shaheedan, Amritsar. Nirvar Singh was shot dead by police on the steps of the temple and removed in a jeep. Manjit Kaur ran after the police. They beat her with rifle butts. People rescued her. On 24 September 1987, it was learned that an extremist had been killed. Some people claimed the dead body of Nirvar Singh from the police and returned it to the family. His younger brother, Kulwant Singh had joined the rebels. The police raided his house a number of times looking for Kulwant. His mother Prakash Kaur had been taken to the police station for interrogation about 15 times.

During one of the raids, another younger brother, Dilbagh Singh, a minister at Baba Bakala Gurdwara, hid behind the house. The police shot Dilbagh in the back and killed him. The team saw bullet marks on a wall of the house. Manjit Kaur was badly beaten and dragged by the hair to a wheat field. After about an hour and a half of torture, she fainted and was thrown over the body of Dilbagh Singh with a taunt: "Now get your Khalistan." Her hands and feet were so badly swollen that she could not get out of bed for several days and she was bleeding from her scalp. This occurred on May 2, 1988. Dharam Singh, the village head, lives near Nirvar Singh. He and his family are eyewitnesses to this account. When he arrived at the scene, he was beaten by the police and warned not to pursue this matter.

Pritam Singh is a schoolteacher at Ballewal. He and his spouse Shavinder Kaur have two grown-up sons. Even this family could not escape the clutches of the police. Pritam Singh's only fault was that he was the uncle of Dilbagh, Nirvar and Kulwant. Shavinder Kaur had been taken to the police station three times and was detained there for three nights once and two nights the other times. Their son, Harjit Singh, was in custody for ten days without being charged. He was beaten and was asked to give information about Kulwant Singh. Now Kulwant has been arrested yet this family has not been let alone. Now the demand is to give information about Balvinder Singh, from a neighbouring village. The elderly mother and Shavinder Kaur told us "the police humiliate us during their raids. They use profanity that we are too embarrassed to report to you. We were arrested by male police and there were no female police even at the police station. We are so scared that we are frightened of any unusual sounds."

Swaran Kaur, the unmarried daughter of Assa Singh of village Ballewal, was kept in custody at the Dayanand Anglo Vedic School, Kadian by the BSF. She was arrested allegedly for harbouring extremists but was never charged. Assa Singh is a minister at the Gurdwara at Shahpur. He admitted that some months earlier at a sermon he had recommended that people should abstain from alcohol and should not have marriage parties of more than 10 people. The village council was summoned by the police and offered weapons to defend the village. When they expressed their inability to do so, the council members were arrested and kept in jail overnight. This occurred on January 16-17, 1989.

Village Sarchur

On January 10, Govind Ram accompanied by several police officers and BSF troops raided Sarchur. This village of 4,000 people is about 18 kilometres from Batala. The people of Sarchur and neighbouring villages Kotlik Bhangali Nasirke, Peherowal, etc., were assembled at the focal point of Sarchur. They were abused orally and accused of sheltering extremists and offering their daughters to them. The young persons were forced to lie prone on the ground and were beaten with sticks, belts and gun butt until their skins peeled. This was done for one hour. People were screaming but Govind Ram was not satisfied. He ordered people to repeat slogans after him berating a woman of the village, Surjit Kaur and her two daughters, Manjit Kaur (15 years) and Rajinder Kaur (10 years). Surjit Kaur is an Akali leader of the village and has been imprisoned for 5 months. A retired army officer, Charan Singh, could no longer tolerate this and refused to join in the slogans. He was seized, put in a truck, taken to the police station and kept at Fatehgarh Churian Police Station for three days. Govind Ram taunted that when Surjit Kaur comes out of the jail he would see to it that she is paraded without clothes through the village. Before returning, he threatened the women with dire consequences if they protested against his behaviour. Some families then sent their daughters to relatives far away. Earlier Surjit Kaur was badly beaten by the police. Both her daughters had been taken to the police station as well.

Mari Buchian

When the Sikh Students Federation took control of the Gurdwaras, the management of Gurdwara Damdama Sahib, Hargobindpur became a matter of dispute. Therefore, the village council requested the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to assume the management. The committee pleaded its inability to do so, and unanimously assigned this responsibility to Bhagwant Singh of Damdami Taksal. Everybody vouched for this man's integrity.

Ajit Singh Poola of that area is in league with the police. He maintains 40 to 50 armed guards. On January 18, 1989, at about 6:00 p.m., Ajit and his guards attacked Bhagwant's home. He claimed that he wanted to search the place. Bhagwant was not at home; his spouse was visiting her parents with the children. After the search, they started dragging his brother Harpal Singh, a Science teacher at Ghuman, who lives with them. Harpal Singh resisted and hung into the window grill. Then he was carrying his two-year-old son in his arms. They grabbed the child and threw him away. In this tussle, Harpal's hands were badly injured; signs of the injury were seen by the team. His spouse Maninderjit Kaur and mother Gurbachan Kaur pleaded with them but were also kicked and accused of harbouring extremists. The houses were looted. The team noted that the police had supported groups of raiders like these who commit acts of vandalism. This was confirmed by the lawyers at Batala. Once such people were caught in two scooters stealing incidents and the arms found on them, had been registered with the police. Some knowledgeable people who wish to remain anonymous and some lawyers claim that crimes in this area are being committed by police supported gangs.

In village Cheema, police post Hargobindpur, a young person named Jugraj Singh had joined the rebels several years earlier and is now known as Tufaan Singh. He is the only brother of five sisters. Two or three times, police had brought his sisters to the police station and the village council had gotten them released. Now the police badly mistreated the sisters and their mother. Finally tiring of this, the family left the village. All this happened after Govind Ram took charge of the police in this area.

In Sundwa village (police post Hargobindpur), the spouse and daughter-in-law of Dalip Singh have been accused of sheltering extremists.

In village Tapiala, Hargobindpur police post, Gurmej Kaur, spouse of Bhagwan Singh was badly beaten. Their house was destroyed and set on fire. Their son was killed. They were accused of harbouring extremists.

Nirmal Kaur of village Sundwa, police post Hargobindpur, was accused of sheltering extremists.

Women and children were assembled at the focal point of Nassarpura and badly beaten.

Women were beaten at Kadian village. Some had their wrists broken. When the village council went to the police station to demonstrate, they were treated very badly.

The village council of Buttar went also to complain about police harassment and misuse of power. In turn, they were badly treated and beaten up. Many more cases from the neighbouring areas had come to the attention of the team but could not be pursued because of lack of time.

The team felt that women hesitated to tell them about their mistreatment because of social and familial considerations. The team also noted the mistreatment by the police of the village councillors. Whereas, according to law, every time that the police go into a village, it should consult with the council. Such consultation never occurred and when the council members went to the police station to protest against the mistreatment of women they were themselves beaten, abused and treated as traitors. For this reason, 21 councils submitted their resignations to the Deputy Commissioner of district Gurdaspur.

At Talwandi Lal Singh village, Gian Singh was arrested. His spouse Prakash Kaur was forced to lie on the ground and police officers stood on wooden planks on her thighs. She was screaming and another police officer stood on the chest of her ten-year-old son. Afterwards the police took her away and at 10:00 p.m., in the midwinter she was dropped off on a bridge leading to the village. This was stated by Gurdial Singh of that village, in the presence of Deputy Commissioner, Dalsair Singh Kalia and Sub Divisional Magistrate, Kulwant Singh and was reported in the Tribune on January 3, 1989.

The village head of Harbhajan told a gathering at Harcharanpur village that a child returning from school was taken away by the BSF and released only after 14 days of torture. Gurdev Singh, 44 years old, also of this village was killed in fake encounter by the police. This was reported by the Tribune on January 3, 1989.

A conference on people's power was organised at village Sunderpura in Batala police district that was addressed by the Punjab Governor S. S. Ray who asked for the people's co-

operation. The people related their stories of police excesses to the Governor. Ray appeared shocked and ordered an inquiry into the incidents at Mari Buchian. The Governor admitted that the cases of two women had been handled by police officers and not police officers. The truth is that there are many more incidents like this. From every village the women have been taken to police stations where there are no women constables.

Ambo, the mother of Jagdish, village Shankarpur; Prakash Kaur spouse of Gian Singh village Rakhia; Kulwant Kaur mother of Balvinder Singh, village of Shankarpur related many incidents of police atrocities at the conference on people's power. After the incident at village Padha, a police force of 11 jeeps under the command of Govind Ram raided the house of Sital Singh, which is on the outskirts of village Mattewal and brutalised his wife and sister-in-law. Two years earlier also a police officer had pushed the spouse against a wall so that her skull was fractured.

In December 1988, about 200 police and BSF troops raided the house of the head of village Ghogey. His servant and spouse were badly beaten. When the head of the village Kotla went to protest police atrocities, his spouse was beaten.

An elderly woman of village Kastival told us that her son is so scared of the police that he has not returned home in 4 years. The police have arrested him several times and have looted the house.

Events of Ludhiana Districts

Arvinder Kaur Khalsa, unmarried daughter of Ranjit Singh of village Kila Raipur was arrested on July 9, 1987. She was released and re-arrested on September 7, 1987, under the National Security Act. The courts ordered her release but she was arrested for the third time when somebody shot a person named Jagvinder Singh. For there to four days, she was tortured at the police station Dehlon. On July 10, a case was registered against her of harbouring extremists. The case has now been dismissed by the special court.

Kuldip Kaur, widow of Darshan Singh, village Chomon, was arrested by the police and tortured for 15 days. She was paraded around naked for 5 days in Ahmedgarh Police Station. On October 21, 1988, she was charged with harbouring extremists and possessing stolen property. At present, her case is in the court of Magistrate Mr. Katari in which the widow has complained of being dishonoured by the police.

Nachhattar Kaur, spouse of Charan Singh, village Chak Sarawa Nath, was arrested from her home and detained at the police station for 3 to 4 days. She was subjected to abusive language and mistreated. Case no: 159 were registered against her on December 15, 1988, for his activities under the Anti Terrorist Act.

Gurmel Kaur, spouse of Ajit Singh and Jarnail Kaur, spouse of Harbans Singh, both of village Chhandran, police post Sahnewal, were arrested along with Nachhattar Kaur.

Jaswant Kaur spouse of Avtar Singh, village Kila Ajnaud police post Khanna had gone to attend a funeral ceremony. The police took her to the police station, tortured her for one day and booked her under the Anti Terrorist Act and for speaking against the Government. After she was bailed out, she told the people about atrocities against her and others. She was then re-arrested on February 14, 1989, and badly tortured on February 19 and remanded to prison on February 21.

Prof. Rajinderpal Singh Gill of the Punjab Agricultural University was killed by the police in a fake encounter. His spouse Rajinder Kaur Gill MA was arrested by the focal point police of Ludhiana on December 12, 1988, and tortured under the instructions of the inspector. A case for harbouring terrorist was registered against her on December 13, 1988.

Krishna spouse of Hardev Singh of village Ghabbadi is mother of five daughters and a son. A head constable has repeatedly threatened to kill her son. Two of her daughters were arrested (one of BA student) and dishonoured at the Sadar police station by the head constable Darshan Singh and others. Case no: 370 were registered against them on December 15, 1988. Krishna's spouse was also arrested but is now on bail.

Charanjit Singh Channi, son of Master Devraj Singh Talwandi Ex-MLA, has joined the rebels and the police have been looking for him. His spouse Harbans Kaur and sister-in-law Jasvir Kaur were arrested and warned that Harbans Kaur's two young children 2.5 and 4.5 years old would be tortured.

The unmarried sister of Channi was also taken to Raikot police station, insulted and warned that her family would be eliminated. However, some influential people were able to get her released. (Channi was killed in a fake encounter by the Ropar Police in June 1989)

Jaswant Kaur's daughter Manjit Kaur, of Jagroan village, was arrested along with her children. The police took her to a secret hiding place and her parents had no idea where she was for many days. Manjit's mother has also been arrested several times.

This chronicle of police atrocities is hardly complete. It is impossible to survey all the villages of Punjab. People are afraid even to speak.

When an old person was asked why he does not report this behaviour of the police, he answered that lives have been lost and if he reports on them, they will kill us and blame the extremists for the deaths.

Now another phenomenon has come to our attention, that is, the work of armed gangs under the direction of the police. Many incidents of this nature have come to our attention but are beyond the scope of this report. The excesses of the police are commonplace; these practices can be traced back to the top brass of the police and Central government in Delhi. The judgement of who is an extremist is in the hands of the police and not the courts.

We feel the extent of repression has crossed all limits of civilized behaviour in Punjab. Although we have covered only two areas, of which Batala area is the worst affected, it forms only the tip of the ice-berg of what is happening all over Punjab.

0II - SSP GOVIND RAM: THE TERROR IN BATALA

On February 2, 1989, two members of the Committee, Tapan Bose and I, were visiting a primary school- Guru Nanak Dev Academy- in Batala, a sub-divisional town in Gurdaspur district. The school, we had been told, was concerned mainly with upbringing and education of the children whose parents had suffered State atrocities. Fifteen children studying at the Academy had lost their fathers in so-called encounters. At this school, we taught about the campaign of terror which Govind Ram, the Senior Superintendent of Police of Batala police had been carrying out in the villages within his domain, ostensibly to demoralise the Sikh militants.

A teacher at the Academy, whose name we shall withhold, narrated to us an incident that epitomized the police campaigns under Govind Ram. In the forenoon of January 10, 1989, contingents of the Punjab Police and the Border Security Force in hundreds swooped down on the village, Sarchur, which has a population of 4000. The forces were being led by the SSP, Govind Ram. He ordered them to round up the Sikh inhabitants of the village and a number of small villages in its vicinity like Kotli, Parowal, Nasirke, Kalowal, Tripaye and Pangale and to muster them at the focal point in the outskirts of Sarchur (the ground for cattle fairs and village markets). Mixed batches of the BSF and the Punjab police went round the villages, pulled out the persons working in their fields, walking in the bazaars and lurking in their houses and shepherded them to the specified location.

There, Govind Ram, as a surely masters pouting over his slaves, harangued them, accusing them of harbouring terrorists and charged their women of cohabiting with them. He then ordered all the young persons in the assembly to fall on their bellies to the ground, which they did. The personnel of the Punjab police and the BSF lashed them with their leather belts, batons and bamboo poles. The public flagellation lasted for more than one hour. Govind Ram then asked the assembly to rant after him the outrageous pronouncements he execrated for Mrs. Surjit Kaur, an Akali Dal leader from Sarchur, in jail for the last five months and her young daughters living with their father in the village. At this point a retired army officer, Charan Singh of the village Pharowal protested. He refused to abuse them.

Govind Ram ordered that he be taken into custody. Charan Singh was caught and pushed into a police truck. Govind Ram then forced the villagers to repeat those abuses and went on to pronounce that if ever Surjit Kaur came out of jail he would make her and her daughters dance naked before a similar audience in the village. Govind Ram went away with his forces at dusk after announcing that the next time it will be the turn of the women to be assembled and treated in a similar way.

The narrator of his incident also told us that many women of the village Sarchur had left their homes in panic to live with their relatives elsewhere. He also gave us many specific instances of police atrocities, which in their magnitude and relentlessness seemed to surpass what we had so far learnt of the State terror in Punjab. We decided to carry out an investigation by personally going to the affected villages and speaking to the victims.

Two members of the Committee, Ashok Agarwal and I, went back to Batala in the morning of February 10. We did not intimate anyone there of our arrival in advance. We first went to the Guru Nanak Dev Academy. We learnt there that the police have meanwhile forced those children whose fathers had been killed in "encounter" to withdraw from the school.

We asked the teacher whether he would accompany us to some of the villages involved in the incident of January 10. He agreed.

We drove to Sarchur, 18 kilometres from Batala. On the way, we passed many check posts operated by the BSF. We were stopped at one. The BSF personnel equipped with metal detectors and their rifles closing on to our faces unusually asked us the usual questions: Where are you coming from; where are you going; what do you have in your luggage, etc. We told them. They stood still without flinching their guns and coldly eyed our baggage for nearly one minute. They waved our car to move on. We wondered whether they had also been equipped with X-ray vision.

Approaching the village Sarchur, we noticed two young persons in close-cropped hair and moustache walking down the road. Our companion asked the car to stop and called them out. Although they seemed to recognise him, a well-known and respected elder of the village as we found out, they became nervous on seeing us. We requested them to tell us what had happened on January 10. They remained fidgety and pale in their faces. They would not speak and seemed eager to go away. We let them go away.

Then we noticed a middle aged Sikh driving down a tractor our way. Our companion waved him to stop and conferred with him for five minutes, telling him that we had come to investigate the incident of January 10; that we were not police detectives and that he should tell us what have been happening. He began to talk excitedly and somewhat incoherently. We asked him for his name. He would not tell. We asked him whether we could tape-record the conversation. He said no. When we took out a notebook to write, he said do not write. The fear in this village began to confound us. We tried to explain to him that it was important for us to record the facts and that the identity of the persons we speak to would not be revealed if they desired to remain anonymous. He looked doubtful and went away with the excuse that the he had some work in Batala to attend to.

We drove into the village and stopped near a cluster of houses where some persons were moving about, cutting fodder and attending to other chores. Our companion again talked to them about the purpose of our visit. We assured them at the very outset that their identities would not be revealed, and we did not ask for their names. Soon twenty to twenty-five persons of the village gathered round us. They told us about the incident of January 10 in vivid detail that we had already learnt from our companion. There were some persons in the crowd who had been intently following the discussion without so far taking part. When we asked our interlocutors to tell us more closely why Govind Ram had singled out Jasbir Kaur and her daughters for the insults he heaped on them, and to tell us their assessment of what exactly he wanted, some of these persons who had so far remained silent interjected. "We are ashamed to talk about this episode. We may be punished if we tell you," they said.

"Why are you so afraid? No one can punish you for talking to us," we tried to calm him or her.

"You want to know why and who are we afraid of? Then come with us". They got into the car and directed us to the village Nasirke, some kilometres away. We stopped outside the house of one Pal Singh. They went into Pal Singh's house and brought him out. He looked about sixty and had only one arm. We did not know what to ask the persons who brought us to him explained that Pal Singh was just then returning from the jail to Batala after committing his three sons to judicial custody. What did they do?

What did they do?

Nothing, Pal Singh said?

What do you mean by nothing? You must know if you went to make them over to jail.

I have sent them to jail so that Govind Ram may not kill them, Pal Singh said. We did not understand.

You see, my sons, Dhanraj Singh, Ranjit Singh and Dilbag Singh, had been implicated in a case of murder sometime in 1986. The case was false and flimsy and my sons got bailed out. But since their release, the police have been trying to recruit them as informers. When Govind Ram became the SSP, Batala, Harassment against us became suddenly intense and unbearable. The police come and pick us all up- my sons, me and even my father. My father, Mota Singh, is ninety, a decrepit old person. Even he is not spared. On January 9, when the police came to pick us up, they beat up my old father with shoes.

Can we see your father?

Mota Singh, wobbling on reedy legs and supported by two persons, comes out. Lal Singh continues with the story: Govind Ram told us that he would kill my sons if they did not join his ranks. We know that his tongue is unerring in evil as are his hands in killing innocents. So I cancelled my sons' bail and sent them back to jail.

Who will look after you and your father?

"Wahe Guru" will.

We went back to Sarchur. Our teacher companion took us to one house. An old person with a silver beard, small bulgy eyes and a gloomy frown, his forehead puckered in umpteen furrows was sitting on a bed. He spoke to us clearly and tranquilly, words rising to the surface as if from a deep stillness within.

We asked him: Why is Govind Ram doing this? Does he suspect that terrorists are hiding in here? Does he suspect any one in particular? What does he want you people to do?

The old person explained: There have been many police raids on this village. Every house has been searched for weapons and terrorists on a number of occasions. Never was anything recovered. No militant has been arrested from here. We do not know why he is terrorising us. In this village, most of us here are Amritdharis- baptised Sikhs. May be he thinks that we are the enemies. May be he wants us to become the enemies. For how long can young persons, with their tradition of valour and honour, suffer these atrocities and dignities? Take the case of the Granthi, Avtar Singh, of the village Gurdwara. You would not perhaps believe if I tell you how the police have tortured his spouse and him for no crime of their own.

We would like to talk to them ourselves, we told him. He sent for a person to accompany us to the house of Avtar Singh.

After some preliminaries, he narrated to us his story. One night in May or June of the last year, some people who were armed came to my house. They wanted to be fed and took me away to the Gurdwara by force. I did not know who they were. They were clearly fugitives. In the past, the police and the BSF personnel had been forcing me to give them food, tea and beds to sleep. One of these persons who had eaten at the Gurdwara was later nabbed. Under interrogation, he told the police that he had eaten at the Gurdwara. The police came to arrest me.

When was this?

On fourth or fifth of October 1988, I was not at home. I had gone with food to the flood affected area. When the police came, my spouse, Amarjit Kaur, and my mother, Gurmeet Kaur, who is 85, were alone at home. The police ransacked the house, pulled down two walls in the courtyard, dug up the hearth and took away all our belongings including two bicycles. And they took my spouse into custody. Amarjit Kaur, his spouse, was sitting next to him. We requested her to tell us herself what happened to her after her custody. We asked, "Were there women's police at the time of your arrest?"

No, they were all men. At the police station, I saw Amarjit, my brother who had been picked up from my parental house in Peduwal village near Kalanaur in Gurdaspur district. The police compelled my brother to beat me and ...," she stammered. Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"I was tortured terribly for eighteen days. My hands were tied to the back. A wooden roller was placed on my thighs. Some men stood on it and others rotated it on my legs.

Avtar Singh asked me to touch her thighs and to feel the wounds. I felt them; nodular rings of ruptured flesh.

Which police station were you in?

"At the Sadar police station in Batala, my husband came there to rescue me. He was taken into custody."

We turned back to Avtar Singh. He started speaking.

"I was tortured for thirty days. My interrogation used to take place mostly at nights. They used to tie my legs and my hands to the back with an iron rod inserted under the arms and with a rope fastened to the rod and with its other end going through a hook on the ceiling while they beat me with sticks from below. I was given electric shocks with one wire attached to my genitals. A roller was rotated on my legs in the same way as my wife's, and my legs were stretched out until my pelvis ripped. "Do you want to see my injuries?" Avtar Singh asked.

No. But tell us what they wanted to know from you.

They asked me about the terrorists. Where I had kept weapons for them, etc. They asked me why I did not catch them by the scruff of their necks and do them over to the police. They asked me why I did not put poison in their food.

What were your answers?

I do not know how I could have nabbed them while they were armed to their teeth. I do not keep poison at the Gurdwara to mix in the food we cook at the Langar- the Guru's kitchen.

But why did you not inform the police later that the terrorists had come to eat at Gurdwara?

I did not, because I know that if the terrorists came to wipe out my family there would not be any police to stop them. Police are only to torture the innocent and the hapless, not to stop the terrorists. After torturing me for thirty days, they released me because I had done nothing wrong. But they came to arrest me again. They kept coming just to pick me up.

Many police officers know me by now. Some of them tell me that they too are helpless. The SSP wants them to keep the lock ups full. He wants to see them full during inspections of the police stations. But it was becoming unbearable for me. On January 9, I came back to my village after spending one night in the lock up at the Fatehgarh Churian police station. Not even one hour had lapsed after my return that the SP Head Quarters, I think his name was Anil Kumar Sharma, turned up with his cops to take me away again. He took me to the BSF interrogation centre at Aliyal, near the canal bridge. I was again tortured in routine. They released me after twelve days. Now I do not sleep at my house. The police had come the last night too. My mother was at home. They went away after kicking a bucket of milk. Even in the daytime, I leave a boy on the roof to keep watch if the police are coming. I cannot bear these tortures any more. I will run away," he started sobbing. We went back to the house of the old person who had directed us to the Granthi. His grand son who had also been rounded up and beaten at the focal point on January 10 had brought over to his house a number of young persons of the village who had all been subjected to the same treatment. Many of them showed us blue patches on soles of their feet and ankles that remained from the beatings on that day. While we were talking to these boys in the courtyard of the house, a person in late forties drove in on a scooter. He is the old man's son. He joined the conversation and said:

The elders of the village have told the SSP that they are willing to help the Government to fight the terrorists but the police must stop inflicting atrocities on innocent people. We shall co-operate in any manner they desire us to do. If the police have evidence that anyone in particular is a terrorist or keeps illegal weapons, they can take him away. If they want to interrogate someone, they only have to inform the Panchayat - the council of five elders- and we shall bring that person to the police station any time specified. I have even told Govind Ram that if he wanted it, we shall send our boys away to our relatives outside the State. We would furnish him with the particulars of where they stay and what they do, and he could keep a tag on them. Govind Ram said, that will not be necessary. But within a short time after I came back to my house, the police were again there to pick up my son. For how long can we tolerate this? For how long can the Sikhs take these indignities? No one is spared. To be a Sikh in itself has become an offence. Take the case of Nirmal Singh, a soldier in the army. He had come on some days of leave to be with his family in the village. On January 10, Govind Ram had him rounded up and marched to the focal point along with other persons. He showed his identity card. But he was still beaten up like the rest. Do you think this soldier will defend the country that treats him and his brethren like slaves with great enthusiasm? If you do not believe me, then write to him or his Commanding Officer and find out. Shall I give you his address?

Yes, please.

Here it is Sep. Nirmal Singh No 2479898 HQ COY PL.MOR.C/O 56 A.P.O. 19 Punjab.

We asked him about Surjit Kaur and her background. She is an Akali Dal leader of the district level and is languishing in Batala jail for the last five months. Her son, Prabhjot Singh, who lives abroad, came to attend one of his sisters' marriages in September 1988. He too was arrested and implicated in a case under the Arms Act. He is now in Srinagar jail, in solitary confinement. Her spouse, Surinder Singh, is a farmer who is picked up off and on and tortured without any reason. Their two young daughters, Manjot Kaur, 15 and Rajinder Kaur 10, had also been picked up and tortured.

We go on to their house accompanied by our teacher companion.

Surinder Singh was in his fields. We met his daughters. Rajinder Kaur had her hair tied into a bun and wore a black turban, a sign of protest. It was difficult for us to talk to them about plight, considering their age and their apparent haplessness. But they were forthright, though not very well informed.

Who looks after you two sisters? We asked them.

Our father. He is at the farm. He is very much a harassed person. The police had taken him away at least ten times so far. The police are also bothering my sister and me very much.

How are they bothering you?

They had taken us away to the police station.

When was this? Do you remember the date?

No, Sir may be a month ago.

Which police station were you taken to?

To Sadar police station, Batala.

Why did they want to take you away? Did they explain?

No Sir. They just told our father that they were taking away his daughters.

What did they do to you at the police station?

They did the most humiliating things sir.

Tears rolled through the heavy lashes hazing over the hazel eyes of Manjit Kaur like a veil against the un-alleviative reality they beheld.

To change the topic, we asked: How is your mother? Have you been to see her at the jail?

No sir. How can we go there alone? Our father has to look after the fields. But we have seen her in the court. She is very ill. The police had beaten her very much.

How do you know?

Our mother told us this in the court.

Have you heard of Govind Ram?

Yes sir. He had forced the people of the village to abuse our mother. Also us. When the police come to our house, they use the same abuses on us. We are afraid of them, sir. We do not dare to even leave the house, sir.

Charan Singh, a retired army officer who had been taken into custody for objecting to Govind Ram's execrations against Surjit Kaur and her daughters on January 10, lives in Pharowal village, four kilometres from Sarchur. We went to see him.

Why were you taken into custody on January 10, we asked him.

I could not bear the filthy abuses for Surjit Kaur that Govind Ram was compelling the villagers to rant after him. I protested. Govind Ram took offence and proclaimed that I was the Guru of the terrorists. I told him that I was not a Guru of the terrorists but a soldier who had retired after fighting for the nation in two ways. But he ordered my custody. I was pushed into a police truck and driven away. I was locked up in a cell in Fatehgarh Churian police station. One inspector Mander Singh was the in-charge. For three days, I remained there without clothes in this winter, without a glass of water and not so much as a morsel of food. I am 62. They knew that I am a retired soldier, not a thief. But I am a Sikh that is perhaps a bigger crime than to be a thief.

Sadness cast a shadow over his face. Words came out of his mouth soft and muffled from a grieving heart.

In 1984, I had saved a police officer of my village from being killed by the army. I thought then that I was doing my duty.

Will you please tell us about it?

After the Blue Star, the army had been combing the villages of Punjab for terrorists. There was a ban on pillion riding on motorcycles. One day, a police of our village was taking his ailing father on his motorcycle to the hospital. Actually, his father was ailing from addiction to opium. At Nasirke, an army patrol stopped him. The police officer on the motorcycle was in plain clothes. He became nervous when stopped and sped passed the patrol. He came back to the village and tried to hide. But the army patrol traced him down. They tied him up to a tree and started interrogating him. In panic, he lost his speech. When I reached the spot, one soldier was poking his rifle into this stomach. I reflected for a second weighing my thoughts for and against the reckless courage that would be required of me to intervene to save this person. I shouted at the soldiers to stop. It took me some effort and I nearly risked my life to save him.

But now when I try to save an honest and religious woman who is already in jail for her courage of conviction, and her hapless young daughters from being publicly outraged by the Senior Superintendent of Police, though only by words more injurious than the actual deed, I am labelled to be a Guru of the terrorists. I am detained and starved. Not even Duryodhanas and Dushashans, the evil incarnations of the Hindu mythological yore, had shown such malevolence as Govind Rams of today are inflicting on our people. May be it will all end in another Mahabharata. But I am not happy at this internecine protest.

Can you tell us whom this police person was you had saved in 1984?

Constable Mohan Singh. He is now attached to the police station in Batala near the Bus stand where Surjit Kaur's daughters had been detained and harassed.

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February 14, 1989

0III MEDIA REPORTS

1- Constable Rapes, Kills Two Minors By Ramesh Vinayak

SRIHARGOBINDPUR, Punjab- A gruesome incident of rape and murder of 2 minor girls, allegedly by a Punjab Armed Police constable who was deployed at the special police officers (SPO) picket in Bham village, 9km from here, has left the people of this sensitive area of Batala police district shocked and agitated.

The decomposed bodies of Sarbjit Kaur (14) and Salwinder Kaur (13), a class VIII student, who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances from the village on June 11, were recovered by the police from a water-filled drain near here on June 16. The parents of the victims and a section of the villagers whom this correspondent met yesterday alleged that the two were kidnapped by the said police constable who strangled them to death after brutally raping them. Later he disposed of their bodies.

The persistent refusal of the police to register an FIR (First Information Report) against the police officer, whose name figures in the preliminary complaint lodged by the parents, and attempts to "hush up" the case, have led to strong resentment among the villagers. When repeated requests and representations failed to bring the culprit to book, a delegation of panchayat members tried to meet the Punjab Governor, Mr. S. S Ray, who was in the nearby town of Kalansur on June 19. However, the police did not allow them to meet the Governor.

Agitated, the villagers went to the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. S. S. Sudharao, demanding a probe into the incident and also action against those policemen who added insult to injury by severely beating up the father of one of the girls when he refused to give in writing that it was suicide case. Taking serious note of the incident, the Deputy Commissioner wrote to the SSP Mr. Govind Ram, to conduct an inquiry into the circumstances leading to the death of the two girls who belonged to poor families. He also asked the police chief to register an FIR.

Although the police have rounded up two persons- Purshotam Dev, a PAP constable and Roshan Lal, an SPO - no case has yet been registered against them. Mr. Govind Ram has debuted Mr. Anil Kumar Sharma, SP (Headquarters), to probe into the incident.

Narrating the sequence of events, Mr. Joginder Singh, a retired Army man and father of Salwinder, said his daughter, along with her friend Sarbjit had gone to the outskirts of village to take clay from the dry canal bed on June 11. The two, however, did not turn up by the evening. When frantic search by the worried parents led to nowhere, they lodged a complaint in the police station here. They expressed suspicion against a police constable who was in charge of the SPO picket in the village before it was removed by the police officials on persistent complaints by the villagers. The said constable was seen roaming under mysterious circumstances near the village hours before the girls disappeared by Mr. Makhan Singh, father of Sarbjit.

Later, Mr. Govind Ram admitted that he had received complaints of drinking and eve teasing by the SPOs during a surprise visit to the village in the first week of June.

Holding back his tears Joginder Singh said that despite a number of visits to the Police station by him and panchayat members, no FIR was registered against the suspect on the plea that the case would be registered after the girls were recovered- dead or alive. On June 16, a police party took the parents of the missing girls for identification of the two bodies that were recovered in the evening.

True to the fears of the parents, the bodies were of their daughters. The police did not even bother to cover the bodies, which were without clothes and decomposed. "I took off my turban to cover the naked girls," said Joginder Singh, sobbing uncontrollably.

In order to complete the post-mortem formalities, the bodies were taken to the Civil Hospital, Batala, on June 17, where the accompanying police party tried to force the parents not to lay claim to the bodies and declare them unidentified in front of the hospital doctor. However, the parents refused to do so and approached the SDM for handing over the bodies.

All this while the police party contacted the Municipal Committee (Council) of the town and asked for the cremation of the "unidentified and unclaimed" bodies of the two girls. When Makhan Singh, father of Sarbjit and Gurdial Singh, brother of Salwinder, resisted the lifting of the bodies from the mortuary, the police party beat them up in the hospital premises. It was only after their furore and intervention by the people around that the police relented and left the place. Later, the SDM intervened and the bodies were handed over to the parents.

A farm labourer, Makhan Singh was picked up from the village on the same night and was again beaten up in the police station at Srihargobindpur. Showing his legs to show the torture marks, the dazed Makhan Singh said police officers were forcing him to give in writing that the girls had committed suicide. When the police failed to have its way, he was released the next day. The parents again approached the SSP, demanding action against the culprits, but to no avail. "Our hopes for justice were dashed to the ground when the police did not allow us to meet the Punjab Governor at Kalanaur," said Makhan Singh.

Mr. Govind Ram, however, feigned ignorance about the beating up of the parents of the deceased girls by the police but assured to look into this. He persisted that no attempt was made to hush up the case. The sustained interrogation of the PAP constable, he said, had not revealed anything except that he had an affair with one of the girls.

- The Tribune

2 - Women Face Police Wrath **By Ramesh Vinayak**

AMRITSAR, Punjab- An aged widow, Surjit Kaur and her two daughters, Shavinder Kaur (21) and Narinder Kaur (18) - were beaten up and tortured by a police party headed by the SHO of the Beas police station at Butala village.

Although more than a week has elapsed since the incident, the family is in a state of shock.

When this correspondent went to the village, none of the victims would come forward to narrate the event. After much cajoling by a group of villagers, Shavinder Kaur and Narinder Kaur mustered courage to speak.

The two sisters, who still found it difficult to stand, broke down occasionally. The father, Sohan Singh died of cancer three months ago leaving behind four daughters and two sons aged six and nine.

Shavinder Kaur, who is a matriculate, said on the evening of April 20, a number of police officers and CRPF jawans surrounded their house. Six police officers entered the house and dragged out the women in the courtyard. While they spared the boys and the eldest daughter, Paramjit Kaur, who has been bed-ridden ever since she donated blood to save her father. They beat up the mother and Shavinder Kaur and Navinder Kaur charging them with harbouring terrorists. The mother was spared after a sound bashing.

"We were partly unconscious when we were made to lie prostrate on the ground. A heavy log was placed on our legs with two police officers pressing heavily on it before we fainted," recalled Shavinder Kaur with tears in her eyes.

"After we regained consciousness the police officers sprinkled salt in our eyes. All pleadings by our elder sister in bed to have mercy were greeted with filthiest abuses from the cops," said Narinder Kaur.

After two hours of torture, the two sisters were put into a police vehicle and taken to the Beas police station. There they were again questioned by the police that kept accusing them of sheltering terrorists Balwinder Singh Shapuri, Harbhajan Singh, Satnam Singh and Khajan Singh.

As news about their arrest reached the village sarpanch, Mr. Gurdeep Singh, accompanied by the panchs (council members) and village elders, he reached the police station and pleaded for release. The constables on duty not only refused to listen to them but also accused them of defending the girls who they said, had "illicit" relationship with terrorists.

The girls release could not be secured as the police officials were away to the Jandiala police station to celebrate the promotion of their colleague. The following day, the village leaders approached the officials concerned who agreed to release the girls on the condition that the family immediately abandoned the farmhouse on the outskirts and shifted to the village.

The Majitha police district chief, Mr. G. S. Mann, when contacted, feigned ignorance about the incident.

In another incident, Kuljit Kaur spouse of Khajan Singh of Sattowal village was arrested some time back. She was rounded up on April 19 and tortured at the Mehta police station throughout the night. On intervention by villagers, she was let off and has since been staying with her parents.

A woman of Dharde village was meted out a similar treatment last week on the suspicion of harbouring terrorists.

Many villagers allege that the youths are often arrested and tortured and then let go after payment of bribe.

- The Tribune: May 1, 1989

3 - Harassed Women Seek Justice

By Ramesh Vinayak

AMRITSAR, Punjab- 2 women, Dhan Kaur and her daughter Surjit Kaur have been running from pillar to post for over four years, demanding action against certain police officers who allegedly tortured them and detained them. Undeterred by the prolonged litigation and threats from police officers to withdraw the case, the two hapless women have now filed a petition under public interest litigation in the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Hailing from a border village Rattoke in Tarn Taran subdivision, the peasant women have sold off their ornaments and a chunk of land to fight the case and are determined to "teach a lesson to the guilty police officers."

With tears in her eyes, Dhan Kaur told this reporter that she and her daughter were picked up by the police from Sarhali bus stand where they had gone to get medicine on September 23, 1984. The police that suspected them to be thieves allegedly tortured them while in custody till October 12 when the Punjab and Haryana High Court ordered their release.

The Warrant Officer, who was deputed by the High Court to go into the case had noted in his report that the two were illegally detained in the police station and were tortured. After a medical examination, the victims filed a complaint on October 10, 1984, in a court at Tarn Taran. The case had since been shuttling between the special courts at Amritsar and Jalandhar with every time the courts summoning the 11 police officers named in the complaint. But none of them has appeared in the court even once. After 70 fruitless summons the accused were ordered to appear throughailable warrants. Even non-ailable warrants and warrants of attachment of their salaries had no effect.

Then the warrants were sent through Sessions Judge, Amritsar, to the SSP to procure the presence of the accused. But these were returned on the excuse that the accused had been transferred and their destinations could not be disclosed for security reasons. Letters were also sent to the DIG and DGP by the court, but to no avail.

In her petition, a copy of which has also been forwarded to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Dhan Kaur has demanded directions to the State Government to compel the accused persons to appear in a competent court to law within a stipulated period and that the personal appearance of the petitioner should be exempted in view of her inability to bear the expenses on litigation any longer. The petitioner has also urged that she should be paid Rs 1 lakh as compensation for mental torture.

- The Tribune: May 14, 1989