

Tough lesson

Haryana: The police's unprovoked attack on agitating guest teachers creates widespread resentment. BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI IN ROHTAK AND JIND

Raj Rani's death exposes the ruthlessness with which the administration handled an agitation over reasonable demands such as regularisation of jobs.

GLOOM overwhelms house No. 4956 in Sector 11 at Urban Estate in Jind town. A whitish canopy flutters atop. At the porch, the ground is covered with white sheets. Inside the house, women beat their chests and wail. They are mourning the death of 27-year-old Raj Rani, one of the victims of the Haryana Police's high-handed action against agitating guest teachers and lecturers.

Over a thousand teachers from all over the State converged in Rohtak on September 7, a particularly hot and humid day, determined to submit a memorandum to Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who was in town that day, demanding that the government absorb the 14,000 guest teachers in the existing vacancies in government schools.

The protest had been planned well in advance and the Rohtak district administration was aware of this. However, when the agitating teachers insisted on being allowed to meet the Chief Minister or his son, who represents the Rohtak constituency in the Lok Sabha, the administration stood firm on its decision not to let them have their way.

As the crowd swelled, the police started a lathi charge and then opened fire without any provocation. With the police raining bullets and using their canes brutally, mayhem followed. Half the teachers were women, but there were no women police personnel present on the scene.

Initially, the administration tried to maintain that Raj Rani succumbed to bullets fired by anti-social elements who had allegedly infiltrated the protest action. The post-mortem report belied these claims. Raj Rani's death was caused by heavy bleeding following injuries caused by plastic bullets fired

from a very close range. A postgraduate in economics, Raj Rani was a guest lecturer in a secondary school at Samlo Kala village. On the day of the agitation, she told her mother it was important for her to join the agitation demanding the regularisation of her job and promised that she would be back in the evening.

"We never discouraged her. We knew she was going for a legitimate cause," said Raj Rani's mother, who is also a teacher in a government school.

Raj Rani's father, Randhir Singh, a drawing



A DISTRESSED COLLEAGUE watches as Raj Rani, the guest teacher who was fired upon by the police, lies in a pool of blood in Rohtak.

teacher in a government girls' school, recalled the horrors he witnessed when he went to the Post-Graduate Institute hospital in Chandigarh to see his daughter: "In all my teaching life, I have never seen the administration treat teachers this way. I know this has been their attitude towards the poor or the industrial working class, but I witnessed such horrors in the hospital that I forgot all about my own loss. The police beat up even people who had come to donate blood or enquire about their relatives. I lost my cool. I began abusing the police."

The scene of the agitation presented the picture of a war zone, with teachers running helter-skelter to escape the blows and bullets, some even leaving behind their footwear. The police registered cases for various offences against 33 teachers and some of the drivers who had ferried them to Rohtak.

RUTHLESSNESS

The teachers broke down as they spoke of the police's ruthlessness in not even allowing them to help Raj Rani who had fallen down after being hit by bullets. At a press conference organised by the State unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), they said the protesters had at first assembled at a park. The police drove them out of the place and asked them to hold their meeting at a different venue.

"Our leaders tried to convince the police that they were teachers and as such would not damage property or create mayhem. They pleaded to be allowed to meet the Chief Minister," said Suman, an English teacher and Raj Rani's colleague.

The police smashed the vehicles in which the teachers had arrived, thereby ensuring that they had no means of going back. The drivers of these private vehicles were intimidated and autorickshaws were told not to entertain the requests of any of the teachers.

THE POLICE IN action against the agitating teachers in Rohtak on September 7.

The teachers said the policemen physically attacked them and used abusive language when they sought to help their injured colleagues.

Jagmati Sangwan, president of the State AIDWA unit, said the police action was a ploy to demoralise the teachers in every manner. AIDWA has demanded an independent judicial inquiry into the police excesses. "The administration was fully aware that there was going to be a [protest] programme and that women would be present. Why weren't any policewomen present?" she asked. Sangwan said that it was difficult to describe the manner in which the women had been humiliated. She said that even in the hospital, the police used invectives against the injured, adding that the idea was to dissuade women teachers from attending street protests in future. "It is our experience that every time male police personnel are posted on such occasions, the democratic

right of women to protest is attacked," she said.

The appointment of guest teachers is not unique to Haryana but the State police's action on the agitating teachers is without precedent. The teachers, appointed on a contractual basis, are known by fancy names in different States - Shiksha Karmis, Shiksha Sahayaks, Vidya Sahayaks, Andariki Vidya volunteers, Shikshak Sevak and Shiksha Mitra. These contractual teachers, more commonly known as para-teachers, have always hoped that they will be absorbed at some stage as regular teachers.

Regularisation of service and continuation of the contract during the examination period have been some of the major demands of these teachers. Whenever examinations approach, their temporary contract is terminated and regular teachers are put on examination duty. Deprived of an income during the period of examinations and



