

# **OPENING THE PANDORA'S BOX: SEXUAL HARASSMENT, CORRUPTION AND MALPRACTICE IN AN NGO**

**A Report By:**

**Saheli, Delhi**

**Stree Adhikar Sangathan, Delhi and Allahabad**

**People's Union for Human Rights, Mirzapur**

**December 2003**

## **Introduction**

**Context of this report**

**The basis of the complaint**

**Published information about CREDA**

## **Field Visit to Mirzapur**

**Sexual harassment at the workplace**

**Confronting irregularities in CREDA**

**Role of state functionaries**

**Interview with the Secretary, CREDA**

## **Interviews in Delhi**

**Arti Srivastava**

**Runu Chakraborty**

**UNDP**

**NCW and NHRC**

## **Emerging Issues**

**General corroboration of Ranjana's complaint**

**Sexual harassment: How the harasser operates**

**How safe are women workers in the NGO sector?**

**Development: Who labours? Who benefits?**

## **Implications**

**Recommendations**

**ANNEXURE: Summary of Ranjana's Story**

Justice is the bread of the people.  
Sometimes it is plentiful, sometimes it is scarce.  
Sometimes it tastes good, sometimes it tastes bad.  
When the bread is scarce, there is hunger.  
When the bread is bad, there is discontent.

...

As daily bread is necessary  
So is daily justice.  
It is even necessary several times a day.

From morning till night, at work, enjoying oneself.  
At work which is an enjoyment.  
In hard times and in happy times  
The people requires the plentiful, wholesome  
Daily bread of justice.  
Since the bread of justice, then, is so important  
Who, friends, shall bake it?  
Who bakes the other bread?  
Like the other bread  
The bread of justice must be baked  
By the people.  
Plentiful, wholesome, daily.

**Bertolt Brecht**

## **Introduction**

### **Context Of This Report**

---

Ranjana Patel, an employee of the Centre for Rural Education and Development Action (CREDA), an NGO in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, contacted Delhi-based women's organisations Nirantar and Jagori, on 24 June 2003 asking for help in filing a case against Shamshad Khan, the Secretary of CREDA.

After receiving the complaint from Ranjana the women's groups took various steps, which include:

1. Providing support to Ranjana to file an FIR: After meetings with the larger network of women's groups in Delhi and representatives of UP networks and consultations with NGOs working on human rights, legal advice on the case was sought from Lawyers' Collective. An FIR dated 16.8.03 was drafted and sent to Lalganj Thana, with copies to the DM, Superintendent of Police, NHRC and NCW.
2. Helping Ranjana recover all documents from her house in Dubar: A team from Saheli, Jagori, Stree Adhikar Sangathan and PUHR, which visited Dubar village on 24 July 2003, retrieved Ranjana's papers.
3. Organizing a team that would go to Mirzapur. The tasks of the team were:
  - w Collect more detail information by talking to villagers, other employees of CREDA, District Administration, Police personnel and authorities at CREDA.
  - w Ensure that Ranjana's FIR gets filed in the local police station in Mirzapur and inquire into cases filed against her by Mr. Shamshad Khan.
  - w Prepare a report that would detail the injustice done and help generate support for the struggling employees of CREDA.

The team composed of representatives of women's groups and a human rights group from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh visited Mirzapur on 23-25 October 2003. The following constituted the team:

- w Ranjana Padhi and Deepti Sharma, Saheli, Delhi
- w Padma Singh and Renu Singh, Stree Adhikar Sangathan, Allahabad and Delhi
- w Dr. Sadhana Saxena, Delhi University
- w People's Union for Human Rights, Mirzapur

This report is an outcome of the findings of the team after visiting Mirzapur. The purpose of the report is to detail the harassment suffered by Ranjana and other employees of CREDA with a view to generate support for their just struggle.

### **The Basis Of The Complaint**

---

According to Ranjana, for the last two years, she and several other employees of CREDA had been protesting against sexual harassment, exploitation of employees and financial malpractices by the Secretary. In November 2002 the employees had sent formal complaints in this regard to UNDP (which is a major source of funds for CREDA), NHRC and NCW. Being in the forefront of the struggle, Ranjana was continually threatened and humiliated by the Secretary and his cronies (*see Annexure for a detailed account*). While some employees who had complained were intimidated or bribed into withdrawing their complaints, Ranjana and one of her colleagues,

Harishankar, along with a few others stood their ground. The Secretary filed false cases against them accusing them of stealing CREDA property. Their salaries were stopped, but they continued to work in the field and kept up their appeals to various authorities.

On the basis of the complaint filed by CREDA employees, the NHRC ordered an enquiry. The District Magistrate, Mirzapur, was asked to enquire into the allegations against the Secretary. A five-member committee was constituted and took up the enquiry on 17.4.03. However, the members of the committee did not visit the field or interview any of the signatories to the original complaint. A report was submitted to the DM four months later on 13.9.03 exonerating Shamshad Khan of all but one of the 13 charges of corruption.

Events came to a head on 11 June 2003, when Ranjana was kidnapped and confined for three days by Shamshad Khan, who repeatedly tried to force her to sign an apology and withdraw her complaint against him. When she refused, she was handed over to four armed men who blindfolded her and took her to a jungle. She was told by one of the men that Shamshad Bhai had paid for her to be killed. She pleaded with the men and was finally let off by them on condition that she never came back to Mirzapur.

Ranjana was dropped off by the men at Mughalsarai railway station, from where she travelled to Patna and subsequently to Delhi. After trying and failing to find work, she decided to seek help from Nirantar and Jagori, whom she knew because they had been involved as consultants in UNDP-funded CREDA projects.

After Ranjana's disappearance from Mirzapur, Shamshad Khan had Harishankar arrested. He was released on bail only after signing an apology and withdrawing his complaint against Shamshad Khan.

### **Published Information About CREDA**

---

CREDA has been funded both by Government of India and by bilateral and multilateral donors. To begin with, the Ministry of Labour, GOI gave funding to CREDA in 1988-89 for establishing five special schools for child labour. In 1992, ILO sanctioned a grant for CREDA under its International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour. This project was designed to eliminate child labour from the carpet weaving industry. The GOI and ILO projects targeted only the children working in the carpet industry. However, in recent years, CREDA has begun implementing education programmes for all working children in its field area. This work is being supported by UNDP-NORAD under the project 'People's Participation in Getting Children Out of Work and Into School', which covers 106 villages of Mirzapur district. As part of this project, CREDA is also organizing women's self-help groups and implementing micro credit schemes. Studies on these projects were found to be based primarily on secondary information provided by the organisation and paint a very positive picture of positive achievements and 'best practice'. Such studies include: *Mobilising Child Labour for Primary Education* by Aparna Sahay, Paper prepared for DFID and *Getting Children Back to School* edited by Vimla Ramachandran.

### **Field Visit to Mirzapur**

The team visited villages in all three blocks covered by CREDA and interviewed several teachers, para-teachers, organizers of self-help groups and the

*pradhan* of one village, including some employees of CREDA, some of whom were signatories to the original complaint. In-depth interviews were conducted with some senior supervisors, who also submitted written accounts.

The team interviewed both women who have withdrawn their complaints as well as those who have not. The all-pervasive nature of sexual harassment of women employees by the Secretary was a significant outcome of the interviews. Ranjana's account was recorded in Delhi.

The picture emerging from our meetings and interviews is very different from the one painted by researchers and highlights widespread corruption and malpractice in CREDA field programmes.

### **Sexual Harassment at the Workplace**

---

#### **CONFRONTING THE VIOLENCE**

##### **Woman 1:**

An ex-employee of CREDA shared her experience with the team. She started working in 1996 on a salary of Rs. 1300. Initially she was not so keen to work because her son was an infant. But she joined because the Secretary offered many incentives. He had sent her to Jhansi for 21 days training of NGOs from the forest department. He also sent her to Lucknow. There was a programme in which it's decided who will be made supervisor and he said in front of all that she should be made a supervisor but later told her that since she was not a graduate, he cannot give her the job. (But the woman finally chosen as the supervisor was only 8th pass.) Since then, this woman has completed her graduation.

Earlier, he used to pat her back or hold her shoulders. He would say that he could take her forward in life looking her up and down. According to her, everyone, including the wife of the accused, knows about his behaviour with women. She said that anyone who listens to him gets his favours. "The kind of relations he has and wants with women are of an intimate nature. He used to touch women all the time, squeeze their shoulders, pat the back etc. In the office, in front of other people as well, he used to touch women's chests. He has a lot of money and that's why no one confronts him." She corroborated that he has been sending incentives and offers of jobs for those willing to withdraw their complaints. She named some women who have also succumbed to the bribes and are not willing to talk against him anymore.

#### **THE POLITICS OF SILENCING**

Meeting women who had subsequently withdrawn their statement under pressure from the accused was a mixed experience. It was neither easy for the team nor for the woman although there was no intention to "wrest" the truth from anyone. But the women spoke.

##### **Woman 2:**

She was quite nervous talking to us and kept laughing and making light of the matter. The conversation veered from her throwing bits and pieces corroborating the general image of the accused and at times dissociating herself from any such experience.

Although she had submitted an affidavit to NHRC on 30.1.03 along with the other employees, she was later made to compromise with a cash bribe. In the affidavit submitted against the accused, she states that in the name of providing employment to the backward and the adivasis, the Secretary of CREDA is

economically and sexually abusing women. Any complaint or protest against his behaviour is met with the threat of loss of job. He used to boast that he knows very powerful people and no one can harm him. In her words, "I was asked to dance in front of the whole society because of which my husband became very angry with me and wanted to divorce me. Due to the greed for my job, I kept listening to everything he asked me to do. One day he asked me to come to the Sukhda Dak Bungalow for a night stay and said that if I did that, he would make me the supervisor of the organisation. When I refused, I was thrown out of the job without notice or any other formality." When asked about being made to dance, she said it was done for a video film being made on the NGO and its activities. It also happened when visitors from outside came to see the programme. Her husband used to be very disapproving of it. But she quickly added that she was genuinely very fond of dancing.

She said that it is true that women face sexual harassment here but she has not experienced it ever. She spoke highly of the accused's wife and how close they feel to her. When asked about the affidavit she had submitted, she only smiled but did not deny it. She admitted that the accused has made people withdraw their affidavits by promising them jobs and money. She denied having taken any money from him. He always lures people to be on his side and gets them to speak exactly as he wants them to. She admitted that the accused now wants her to re-join the job. She has told him that she can come in only as a supervisor and not as a teacher. When we asked her if she wants to join in, she said that she is indecisive. Throughout her talk with us, it was clear that she is under pressure not to speak more. The presence of a group of people around us also made it difficult. She clearly indicated that she knew what we were asking and seemed unable to speak more.

**Woman 3:**

A woman who had submitted an affidavit along with the other employees on 30.1.03 but later submitted another affidavit on 27.6.03 to the effect that the earlier affidavit against the accused was done under force and threat by Ranjana and Harishankar.

In her affidavit dated 30.1.03 she mentions an incident around 8 to 9pm at the Sukhda training centre on 15.1.2001. The accused insisted on having sex with her. When she refused, he threatened to throw her out of the job. Thereafter, he began harassing her in many ways for having refused him. Even then she did not comply. In 2002, she was dismissed from her job. She states how a young adivasi woman has shared with her about the accused's sexual assault on her. She states how women are scared of him. And how CREDA's image and goodwill is affected among the ordinary people.

In the affidavit withdrawing the complaint against the accused, she says that Ranjana and Harishankar slapped her and threatened to kill her if she did not sign the stamp papers they got for her. And she is seeking protection from both of them. However her behaviour with Harishankar in our presence was quite cordial.

She used to earn Rs 1200 per month. She said of her own accord that she got Rs 5000 from the accused but it was only a settlement of earlier dues. When we asked her about the earlier affidavit she did not deny it as being false or fabricated. She only maintained that she has no problems with him today. She is alone in all this and does not want to aggravate it further. She said at one point that no money was given, we were just threatened to withdraw it otherwise he will kill us. The accused had come to her house and convinced a senior family member that he was not a bad person. He had also made them sign on a blank paper. Asked why did she sign the affidavit in the first place, she said that Ranjana had made them sign a wrong

affidavit. She said that she will work for the accused again if need be because there is no other source of employment. "I just want to work. I want to work again in CREDA. If I am called back, I'll go." In between she quietly added that the accused has behaved badly with about 20-22 women.

She was rather negative about Ranjana and said that the village people were disapproving of the way she would go around with Harishankar. She said that the experience in CREDA was not good. He was removing all the women who said anything against him. She was very nervous all the time and kept saying contradictory things. She wanted to talk openly about what all 'bad' things have been happening but at the same time could not because she had withdrawn the affidavit.

### **HARASSMENT OF RELATIVES**

The family members of almost all women we visited seemed to be in great distress too. While some women have stood their ground despite pressures from the family, others bear the disapproval too.

#### **Woman 4:**

A close relative voiced her grievances about Harishankar and Ranjana because of whom they were facing a lot of pressure. All this commotion has resulted in their being ostracized by the community. "No one came for my daughter's wedding meal. The affidavit has caused us major problems. Shamshad has regarded my daughter in law as a daughter only. If he did touch her, how does it matter?" She holds Ranjana responsible for making it an issue.

### **THE PRICE OF SUCCUMBING**

#### **Woman 5:**

A young adivasi woman finally succumbed to the sexual advances of the accused. In her original affidavit dated 30.1.03 submitted along with other employees, she makes a serious complaint against the accused. She states how the accused asked her for sex. When she refused, he threatened to remove her from the job like he has removed the others. Although she resisted initially, she finally had to yield to him. In the affidavit she states that for the sake of livelihood, she continued being the target of his sexual assaults. When he suggested that she please other friends and acquaintances too, she refused. He removed her arbitrarily from the job in 2002. She states how Ranjana and another woman also shared their experiences about the accused. She finally states how he always quashes any protest against him.

Her affidavit dated 17.6.03 states how Ranjana and Harishankar pressurized her to sign stamped papers. Apparently, when she refused to sign she was badly abused, beaten and mentally and physically tortured for 4-5 hours. They also threatened to kill her family if she complained. According to Ranjana when the word spread that she has reported him to NHRC and the DM, these women came on their own from distant places and volunteered information on their own.

We did not meet her. But according to local people, this adivasi woman has been silenced, and jobs given to her brother and father. The adivasi panchayat too has been influenced by the accused to pressurize the woman to withdraw the complaint against the accused. Interestingly enough, she was the only person the accused wanted to produce before us when we met him. We warned him not to use these women any more and least of all for his defence. It is tragic to see the journey of this woman and the levels of pressures operating on her.

## **RESISTING AGAINST ALL ODDS**

### **Woman 6:**

In the first written account given by this woman the Secretary, CREDA made a sexual advance to her in May 2001. She rejected his demand for sex and submitted an affidavit against the accused in January 2003 while rallying support along with other employees. She told us that her life and that of her family members has become a nightmare as they are facing the repercussions of her standing up to such a powerful man. But she is determined not to yield to his terror tactics.

The woman is a postgraduate who worked in CREDA. She was arbitrarily fired from the job on 14.9.2002. She refuses to withdraw her affidavit against the accused despite his desperate attempts in the form of cash, job offers and physical threats. In an affidavit dated 30.1.03, she narrates the incident in brief when the accused had insisted on having sex with her. The details are substantiated in her written testimony given to the team. "I was a Field Organiser. I always did my work as per the regulations. I did not know that women were being exploited in this organisation.' When Ranjana was recovering in a nursing home in Varanasi, she wanted to look her up on 13.5.01. She was happy to know that the Secretary too was going there the same day along with another woman employee who is known to be close to him. On the way, he did some shopping of items ostensibly for the other woman employee accompanying them. They looked up Ranjana but the accused began delaying the return from Varanasi. They had to put up in a hotel and he ordered some snacks. Then he began behaving funnily (sexual behaviour) with the other woman who did not seem to be resisting right in her presence. Next, "they started pressurizing me for sexual activity. On my refusal, he threatened to fire me from the job. At that time I just kept quiet."

The accused then made life hell for her where the fieldwork was concerned. She was sent to far off places and never provided any transport. "Even during my pregnancy I had to walk 10-12 km each time to arrange meetings and opening up of centres in villages. I was being threatened every day. The more I was threatened the more I worked in the field with all my heart. Deep inside me I was always scared that if I was removed from the job; I had no other way of survival."

This also resulted in his favouring other women when it came to promotions. She was side-stepped deliberately despite her hard and meticulous work in favour of another woman without any experience or qualification needed in that post. Two other graduates too had resigned from their posts in protest. Needless to say, he was sexually involved with the other woman employee to whom the job went.

When she was fired on 14.9.02, she followed his vehicle weeping all the way to Deep Nagar. "With folded hands I begged for the job. On my weeping and begging he and the other woman employee started laughing loud. At that time I felt that it was better to commit suicide. He said that if you agree with me it would be better for you. I kept quiet and returned home weeping".

An affidavit was sent to NHRC in January 2003 along with some other employees who collectively wanted to expose the accused. She told the team how she has been harassed since then. On 18th May, 2003, the accused came to her house at Nevadiya at about 8 - 9 p.m. for a compromise. He took her old father aside and threatened him. They were rough with the father and told him how her complaint is vulgar and in bad taste. How it can affect them when it comes out in the open. They should withdraw it. "My father and other members of my family forced me to sign a blank paper. I spent the whole night crying. I could not understand what to do. I thought

of filing another FIR but since I have never been to a Police Station, I could not muster courage for it. I went searching for Ranjana Didi. And I went with her to the Police Station on 30th or 31st May, 2003, to file an FIR. On 2nd June, I went to my in-laws' house. On 4th July, 2003 in my absence the accused again visited my house in Nevadiya. He met my mother. My mother told him that she does not know anything. He left the place. Then he sent some men to my in-laws' house for a compromise. He offered to give Rs. 30,000/- for the compromise. He said certain things against my dignity to my husband. My husband told me to compromise, but I refused. After this, on 03.10.2003 he sent an employee offering me the job. I refused. But I continue to be scared that he will try to harm me. My house is on the border of a jungle. I am worried that my poor brothers and father may face problems. I am always afraid about them having to face any problem because of me. Please help me."

**Woman 7: ( Ranjana)**

In January 2001, Ranjana was confronted by the accused at the end of the day in a training programme in the Sukhda centre.

This centre is notorious for the sexual activities of the accused. Many villagers refer to it as "bungalow" while some call it the den of pleasure (*ayashi ka adda*). The mention of the name Sukhda was invariably meted with giggles or an all-knowing nod of the head.

That particular night, while all the other women prepared to go to sleep, the accused calls Ranjana into an adjoining room and begins discussing organizational matters. Then he tells her how fond he is of her and that she must make him happy. He holds her and takes her to the bed. She wrests herself free from his clutches and even picks up a chair in self-defence. He persists in cajoling her to yield, to which in a dramatic spur of the moment she tears a piece off her scarf (*duppata*) and ties it on his wrist. She says that she always regarded him as a brother and he will remain a brother. He makes her promise that she will not report this to anyone. The experience of this one-time incident of sexual harassment was traumatic for Ranjana, for whom things were never the same.

Ranjana joined CREDA in January 1994 as a teacher in the Lalganj block. Her initial attitude towards the Secretary as she says was one of immense respect. Interaction with the accused intensified from October 2000 when she was promoted as a Supervisor under the UNDP programme implemented by CREDA. However, the benefactor image of the Secretary was short lived. Within 4 months in January 2001, she rebuffed his sexual advance and became more cautious. Significantly, it is during this period after being in the NGO for almost a decade that her role as a Supervisor makes her directly confront the rampant corruption and irregularities of the programme at the behest of the accused who heads it. She begins questioning him at every level and discusses with other co-workers who are also disturbed by all this.

She is not able to discuss the incident of sexual harassment because of her promise to the accused not to talk about it and more importantly the fear of the repercussions of being a single woman. In her own words, "I had no one with me. What if the word spreads? It is not easy to live in a village by exposing such matters... .If I had my parents or a family it would have been different... I managed to keep a distance and he never dared to make any advance after that."

Other women begin sharing their experiences with Ranjana. Although she feels and understands the pain, she is not able to share her own experience. Her anger and

resentment continue to be fuelled not only by her experience and other women's accounts but also by what she herself sees in the field especially in training programmes when women stay together in the training centre for a few days.

### **DISCUSSION WITH A GROUP OF WOMEN**

In a group meeting of a self-help group, we asked some women to share their versions of what they saw was going wrong. According to one of them, "During the training programmes in Sukhda, the Secretary would call for one of us at night. He would come and stand in the doorway of his room that opens out to the hall in which all of us would be sleeping. He would ask for a woman by her name. There was this woman lying in between Ranjana and me. She quietly got up and went to his room. We did not get to see her till the morning. We have seen this happening with our own eyes."

When asked how matters escalated between Ranjana and the Secretary, the women shared their deep appreciation of her as a protector. The same woman continued, 'in further programmes Ranjana would escort all of us. The accused would ask us what she was doing with us. We would tell him that she is our Supervisor and has to be with us. He even once threatened her that 'you are questioning me and my ways. I will see to it that you are no longer here.' When such confrontations increased, he could no longer tolerate her. That is how the problems increased." This is the challenge that Ranjana posed to his ruthless pursuit of women for sex.

A team member queried, "We heard that there was a relationship between him and Ranjana and he was helping her building a house etc. but when things did not go according to her wishes, she got upset and started to say all these things against him. Is there any truth in this?" The woman talking to us earnestly replied, "There is no truth in this. There was nothing between them. In fact Ranjana used to protect us from him. She was a lioness and now that she's gone, we're like kittens... too scared to say or do anything."

When asked how long they can stand up for her when the accused is doing the rounds to force people to remain silent, the women laughed. Unflinching in their loyalty for Ranjana, they said, "She is one of us. Whatever risks may come, we will stand by her. Ranjana took lots of pains for all of us. We really miss her and want her to come back as soon as possible. She never thought about herself, only about our well-being. She was very hard working and worked a lot amongst the people. How can we not support her today? After all she made our children learn to read and write and brought work for us. We were really worried initially when she did not return. We all thought that this man has killed Ranjana. But we got to know the previous time when some you came that she is fine in Delhi now. '

### **Confronting Irregularities in CREDA**

---

#### **ACCOUNT OF HARISHANKAR**

A colleague and fellow-complainant of Ranjana encapsulates many of the issues taken up by some of the employees of CREDA. This is a vivid testimony of the *modus operandi* of Shamshad Khan. Highlights from a verbatim translation of this statement, originally given in Hindi, are summarized below.

*"I have been with CREDA since 1992, when the NCLP schools in Lalganj Block were started. I worked for three years as a teacher in this school, and was aware of corruption in the programme even at that time. For instance, meetings used to be held in the village with the*

children and their parents. The project had a provision for tea and snacks during the meetings but nothing was ever served in any of the villages. Bills and vouchers were forged to complete the records.

“Then I was appointed as a Supervisor under the ILO/IPEC programme. I was given the responsibility for constituting Child Labour Eradication Committees in 100 villages. Under this programme also some funds were given by the District Administration for village-level meetings to inform the people about the Committees, but these funds were never given. I was committed to the work and to this organization, and I cycled or walked long distances to cover all the villages in the Block. But I got neither funds for organising meetings, nor my own allowance and reimbursement of expenditure, for which provision had been made by the District Administration. Shamshad Bhai used to withdraw money in our name and keep it himself instead of giving it to us for meetings. I was the Supervisor for 10 schools. I managed them very well and today the education level for girls in those villages is very good. The girls were to be provided with free school bags and dress material but Shamshad Bhai charged Rs. 55/- each from the poor parents of those girls.

“There was provision for a motorcycle also under the project. It was purchased, but was kept by Shamshad Bhai and was used by his son and for his personal work like shopping for vegetables and groceries. I continued to use a cycle. Shamshad Bhai made all of us work by promising us jobs – we worked without money only because we were unemployed and hoped to one day get a job. I was always told “Harishankar, you will always be working in this organisation, soon I will increase your salary.” I used to motivate myself by thinking that at least I have got work to do. I also got recognition in the village, which inspired me to continue.

“After I had worked for 10 years in the organisation and had become too old to look for anything else that I started being harassed. I am a poor person and a Dalit (Dharkar). I had no choice. I thought that instead of sitting idle as an educated unemployed, it was better to do whatever work he told me to do and it would at least provide me with a source of steady income. I was paid a salary of Rs.1500/-. I had a hard time to meet even a part of expenditure for my family of four. But I continued to put in my hard labour into CREDA.

“The UNDP programme began in 2000-2001 in Lalganj Development Block. Community Cottage schools were started in 20 villages. Many of us, like Dharamraj Bhai, Ranjana and myself, along with 70 activists started working with our full heart and soul. We worked day and night to hold meetings and mass awareness programmes.

“The UNDP project was lavishly funded. After getting a lot of money, Shamshad Khan started establishing himself like a Raja. The villagers and the pradhans of the villages were angry, because they felt that he is getting money in the name of the poor and Dalits, but is actually deceiving people and his intentions and behaviour towards activists had changed. This was when he started throwing out women and men who were against him. Poor activists could not speak out against him, given their fear of unemployment - so he can get the work done on his own terms. Shamshad Bhai exploits women economically, mentally and socially. He sweet talks women and tempts them with the promise of jobs just to get work out of them. Anyone who talks against him is fired from the organisation. When he started exploiting women, many activists protested. As a result, their honorarium was stopped and they were harassed. My own honorarium and caution money was totally stopped – the total unpaid amount was Rs.17,500/-. In addition, the amount for Child Labour Eradication Committees (Rs.37,000/- in total) and the allowance expenditure and money for oil for schools had not been paid. At that time I called for a panchayat at the Block Pramukh's place, where CREDA agreed to give me the money. Even after this, my honorarium was not paid to me.

“When I was a Supervisor, I managed to get people to donate land for construction of three schools for CREDA. One of these sites (in Patar Kalan) is close to the jungle. Bricks

were offloaded there but the school could not be constructed there. Some local people started stealing the bricks from there. With the full knowledge of everybody in CREDA, I kept these bricks in my own custody to keep them safe. This was used against me after Ranjana disappeared - I was accused of theft and CREDA filed a case against me under Section 406.

"I was arrested and sent to jail and was not allowed bail. He bribed people and the activists who had filed an affidavit against him were also bribed heavily and they became divided. But not everyone is of the same mentality – those who did not get tempted by the bribe are ready even today to give their testimony against his corruption. Many activists and women are ready to speak about themselves and the injustice that is going on. Myself, Dharmraj, Ranjana, Kalyani, Girija Shankar, Iliyas, Indravati, and many others have been thrown out. Ambika Bhai, an expert from Varanasi, has told us that he too has been told to leave or be thrown out. We are all prepared to speak out against injustice.

Sd/-

Hari Shankar

Gram & Post : Duvar Kalan,

Thana & Tehsil Lalganj,

Mirzapur - 231211

Phone No. 239116

## **TEACHERS, STUDENTS, PARENTS AND LOCAL RESIDENTS**

In addition to the complaints of sexual harassment, the irregularities and malpractice of the programmes run by CREDA was a significant part of people's accounts too. The entire range of issues came to light only when some employees could no longer tolerate the state of affairs and sought to draw the attention of NHRC and other authorities of the district administration.

The complaints submitted by Ranjana and Harishankar were endorsed by scores of teachers, parents and old and respected members of the community. Our informants shared their own experiences with CREDA to substantiate their perception of Shamshad Khan as an enormously powerful man who can not only buy off people in high places but can go to any extent to silence his opponents. We were told that Shamshad Khan has created a base amongst the corrupt bureaucracy, police, politicians and journalists not only at the local levels but at the national level as well. The real extent of the Secretary's penetration in the local power structure may be a matter of speculation, but as far as the local people are concerned, his image is that he can get away with murder. In the words of one of the women teachers, "He can buy the whole of Lalganj Block any day!"

An elderly woman told us that she was aware that Ranjana had gone to visit the DM and the SP to complain that her life was in danger the day she was abducted. The police cases against Ranjana and Harishankar, and the intimidation and threats that followed did not stop the local people from talking freely to us. One *pradhan* said "We have witnessed Ranjana's hard work and dedication in these villages and we hold her work in such high esteem. What crime had she committed that her belongings had to be confiscated (*kurki*) as if she was a criminal?"

Some of the broad issues that came up in the course of these interviews are outlined as follows:

### **Irregularities in Payment of Honorarium**

- q Since the community schools run by CREDA are funded from projects, NFE teachers are employed only for the project period. Apart from this inherent insecurity, we were told that there is no job security because the Secretary is the sole authority, and hires and fires people not on the basis of their competence but on the basis of his personal likes or dislikes.
- q Salaries under the UNDP-NORAD project are comparable with similar projects of other funders. Monthly salary for self-help group organisers is about Rs.750/-, for para-teachers about Rs.1000/-, for full-time NFE teachers Rs.1300/- and for Block supervisors about Rs.3000/-. However, almost all teachers we met complained of the extremely irregular method of payment carried out by CREDA while they were employed – salaries were paid only once every three or four months, and employees were kept in a state of uncertainty about whether they would be paid at all.
- q We were told that CREDA volunteers work without receiving any honorarium in the hope of being paid at some point in the future.
- q On 30th September 2003, the NORAD-UNDP project came to a close and 100 teachers lost their jobs. It was not clear whether the present turn of events which has brought matters to a head for the Secretary has anything to do with these terminations. However, people testified that earlier, when projects came to a close, teachers and staff were immediately re-employed.

### **Corruption**

People referred to irregularities in innumerable ways in their own language - *ghaplabaazi, gadbad, bhrashtachaar*.

- q Ram Dayal Maurya, the *pradhan* of one village, spoke to us in the midst of a sizeable gathering. He said simply “I have not worked in CREDA but I get to sign registers of CREDA when they do some program for children. Then, when you talk to people you realise that the program was not what they claimed it to be and you find out that Shamshad is doing some *ghapla*.” Ram Dayal, along with *pradhans* from some 16 other villages, was a signatory of affidavits attached to the original complaint.
- q Ram Dayal said that the work of CREDA was really good in the initial years, but as the work increased, the irregularities also increased. “We hear enough about corruption from newspapers and TV to be able to discern it when it happens in our own villages with our own people”, he said.
- q Ram Dayal and others told us that school uniforms that are meant to be distributed free are charged at the rate of Rs 55/- each, and this money is recovered from parents. Teachers who could not get the money from the parents had the money deducted from their salaries. In addition, ‘caution money’ is collected from employees (Rs.1000/- from teachers and Rs.3000/- from supervisors).
- q This was confirmed by one of the supervisors, who had called up the Delhi UNDP office to confirm that stationary items and uniforms are meant for free distribution to the NFE children.
- q Ram Dayal said that children and parents constantly came to him with complaints which he would pass on to CREDA supervisors. However, criticisms or suggestions for the improvement of the programme were always discouraged. A small boy from the crowd added that whenever parents try to bring attention

to problems related to the project, Shamshad would give instructions to the supervisors not to bring such people to meetings again.

- q Several teachers and members of the community stated that funds meant for mid-day meals are misappropriated by cutting costs and giving meagre amounts of food, or by asking teachers to stretch one month's ration for two months. One of the villagers asked us "Can children get the recommended nutrition in this way?" A woman testified how the papers sent from CREDA for preparation of bills would include long lists of vegetables and other ingredients, while in fact only plain *khichri* without any vegetables was dished out.
- q Not giving refreshments during workshops and trainings and asking employees to prepare and sign the fake vouchers was another way of misappropriating funds.

### **Silencing Criticism**

- q Employees, who belong to the same community and class as beneficiaries, experience emotional turmoil at what is happening and have tried several times to complain to local authorities and national bodies. Those who try to complain are told not to create trouble and are either bought off or silenced by non-payment of salaries and threats of dismissal. We were told that one person who raised his voice was dismissed ten years ago and has never been called for another assignment.
- q Some of the oldest employees of CREDA who have worked with dedication and commitment to establish the organisation in the field were humiliated by being treated as "mere employees" and not given the recognition due to them. One such person, who has worked in CREDA for 13 years, has had to leave Mirzapur with his family in October 2003 when he was terminated. When one of us met him in July 2003, he had said that he was taking a risk in meeting us because the accused was having him watched to make sure that he did not communicate with Harishankar. He also told us that he has been repeatedly questioned by the Secretary about Ranjana's whereabouts. He broke down several times during our interview, saying that the Secretary is as bad as any Hitler or Mussolini. This employee claimed to have hard evidence of corruption and defalcation of funds in CREDA.
- q Several people also quoted the Secretary as saying that no one could harm him because of his contacts with the police and the district administration, and his international image.

### **Role of State Functionaries**

---

We got a live demonstration of the nexus between the Secretary and the police, which has perhaps been the biggest obstacle for the employees of CREDA in their quest for justice.

Our interaction was mainly with the **SO** of the Lalganj Thana, **RD Kaithal** and the Circle Officer. The minute we mentioned Ranjana's name, it was obvious that they knew what we were talking about. The reaction was extremely hostile. We were sharply questioned as to who we were, and asked to provide proof of our identity. We were then told that the records could not be disclosed to us. At this, we firmly asserted our right to intervene in the case. They began responding reluctantly but finally gave us the records of the case filed against Ranjana.

The details of the FIR lodged by Shamshad Khan against Ranjana and Harishankar are as follows:

FIR No. 134/2003, Section 406 IPC, Date of Incident: 30/09/2002, Date of Report: 25/05/2003. The charge mentioned against Ranjana is that of not returning some mopeds belonging to CREDA and against Harishankar that of stealing bricks.

This complaint of theft was filed well before Ranjana's abduction, but was activated only after she escaped, and utilised to strike terror in those who stood by her. First, on the very next day after Ranjana's disappearance, Harishankar was arrested and jailed for 10 days. Next, Ranjana's landlady and others who spoke to a team from Saheli, Jagori, Stree Adhikar Sangathan and PUHR which visited Dubar village on 24 July 2003 to retrieve Ranjana's papers, were intimidated by the Secretary and his men. The police declared Ranjana to be an absconder, and the Secretary got orders from a magistrate to have her meagre belongings seized (*kurki*) from her rented room on 30 August. The landlady and villagers expressed shock and resentment at Ranjana's being treated like a wanted criminal, when it was clear who the real criminal is. All this could happen because of the active connivance of the local police.

Ranjana's FIR against the Secretary had been sent from Delhi on 16 August 03. The thana claimed to have it sent to the office of the CO on 6 September. The FIR was sent from the CO's office to the record room of the SP on 10 September. The office of the CO informed us that Ranjana's FIR could not be recorded because she herself is an accused. Is this ignorance of the law on the part of the police – or is it that the police can write their own laws?

When we met the **SP Mirzapur, Ramji Lal**, he stated that there was no case – this was simply a case of distribution of stolen property for which there is an FIR against Ranjana. He remembered having met Ranjana. According to him, the problem began only when she refused to return the moped and cycles to CREDA, and it was now a simple matter of her returning the stolen property.

The SP refused to believe that Ranjana had been abducted or that she was in Delhi, and informed us confidently that she had been seen around in Mirzapur. He claimed that her FIR could not be entertained when she was also an accused party. We were forced to inform him that every Indian citizen – even one accused of a crime - had the right to file an FIR. He then changed his stance and told us that the FIR was too long. According to him, an FIR should be only one page. Again, we were forced to tell him that there is no such restriction.

Although the District Magistrate had asked him to help us in lodging the FIR, the SP was plainly uncooperative. He did not seem to have read Ranjana's FIR even two months after it was received by his office on 21 August 2003, and was patently disinclined to act on her behalf. He read the complaint in our presence, and appeared to realise the seriousness of the charges being made. It was perhaps this, and our insistence, that made him ring up the SO of the Lalganj Thana and set up a meeting for us with him the next day.

Both the **District Magistrate Amrit Abhijat** and the **SDM Anjani Kumar Singh** were cooperative. The DM informed us that he had already invalidated the report of the first enquiry that was held in response to the NHRC order to the High Court, since it did not seem thorough or rigorous, and the report seemed superficial. The charges made by the employees in the original complaint were also very general and could not pinpoint the exact irregularities. Also, some people had been transferred in the middle of the enquiry. He told us that he had ordered a fresh inquiry.

The DM stated that in his opinion, the functioning of NGOs is becoming very questionable, as shown when such irregularities come to light. He told us that the general perception about the Secretary of CREDA was very poor. He also said that the findings of our team would be useful to them in their own inquiry.

The SDM told us that he had headed the five-member team for the first enquiry, but had been transferred in the middle of the exercise. Another member of the team met with an accident and they could not obtain sufficient facts or do a thorough job, because of which the report was deemed invalid. He told us that, now that a fresh enquiry has been instituted, they are probing more thoroughly into the complaints of financial irregularities. The team had already made some surprise visits to CREDA field areas when we met the SDM.

Despite the orders from the DM to get the FIR registered without any delay, we met with great resistance - first from the SP and later at the Thana, where our reception was hostile and where the staff were trying our patience by delaying things as much as possible. It was only by sticking adamantly to our objective, as well as by ringing up the DM and the SDM Lalganj to ask for their help, that the FIR could be lodged on 25.10.03. The whole exercise took several hours and was completed only at 10 pm. We also filed a complaint asking for police protection for the people who had spoken to us, who apprehended some retaliation from the Secretary.

Throughout our visit, the extent to which the Secretary of CREDA enjoys the support of the police was made apparent in several ways. We met him on the day before the FIR was registered, but he knew all the details from the copy that was lying neglected in the police station. He had also given photocopies of the complaint to lawyers in Allahabad. While we were in the police station, several phone calls came in supposedly from journalists asking for information about us. Significantly, it took the highest level of intervention from the district administration and the efforts of all of us for an FIR of a woman to be registered.

### **Interview with the Secretary, CREDA**

Although we were planning to go to the office of CREDA at the end of our investigations to hear the other side of the story, the Secretary was looking out for us even before that. He sent Sunil Shrivastava, the CREDA Accountant to meet us at the place where we were staying. We went to the CREDA office the same afternoon.

Sunil told us briefly about the work and origin of CREDA. It was registered in 1988. He informed us that the UNDP programme has come to an end and only the SHGs are operating now. Regarding Ranjana, he said that everything was fine as long as she was with CREDA. He denied knowledge of any problems and said that if Ranjana had any problems, she should have discussed them with the management rather than allowing herself to be manipulated by vested interests and adversely affecting so many other people. He characterised Ranjana and Harishankar as selfish.

The Secretary introduced himself as an old associate of Vinoba Bhave, Baba Amte and Jaya Prakash Narayan, and told us he was someone very well known in his field for the last 35 years. He wondered how he could be called corrupt just because two people have been removed. He stated that he had been framed by one A.D.Giri, a wealthy lawyer, who was hitting back at him because of a land dispute about which the Secretary had earlier challenged him. He also named

vested interests including the land mafia and the carpet mafia, and said in addition that this was the outcome of some international lobbying against him and his work.

The Secretary accused Ranjana of joining a political party and working for them actively when CREDA was a non-political organization. When we asked him which party Ranjana had joined, he said that he was unaware of it.

The Secretary began discussing the content of Ranjana's FIR, which had not yet been registered by the police! He pointed out some contradictions in the FIR. He said that she refers to the bullet incident in the FIR as having occurred while she was returning from work whereas actually it had to do with her brother. He also said that she had mentioned the presence of a woman who he referred to as 'bua' (aunt) in the house where she was confined, but his aunt had died several years ago. He also asked us why we had given a complaint to the police that we apprehended threats to the people we had interviewed. The smooth flow of information between him and the police was evident all along.

The Secretary told us that Harishankar had given a written statement stating that he had been framed by Ranjana. He gave us a copy of this letter, which was the one Harishankar had written while in jail. He alleged that Ranjana and Harishankar forced people to give affidavits against him. He offered to take us to meet the adivasi girl who had charged him with sexual assault and told us that she would tell us how she had been forced to falsely accuse him.

The Secretary also mentioned that he is getting a separate investigation of CREDA carried out by Bindu Singh and Lenin.

Several times in the course of our meeting, the Secretary suggested that we "settle the case" as he did not have the time to be involved in litigation. "We need to find a way out – my records are straight" he said.

## **Interviews in Delhi**

Arti Srivastava

---

**Arti Srivastava of Nirantar worked with CREDA for some time in 2000, when Nirantar was contracted by UNDP to provide inputs to their programme for adolescent girls education. Arti is also the person first contacted by Ranjana when she came to Delhi. She spoke to us about her impressions of Shamshad Khan, which also provide a snapshot into the way of functioning of the organisation and his relationship with his employees.**

Arti said that when Nirantar team members made their first visit to the villages where the programme was supposed to be implemented, it was obvious to them that women were not genuinely mobilised but had been herded together for their visit. Another strange thing was that children who were already going to the regular government school were the same children who were shown as attending the CREDA non-formal schools.

Nirantar had initially planned to work with teachers by observing classroom sessions, giving feedback to teachers, and designing training programmes and training materials as is usually the case. However, Arti found that there was no programme on the ground and even teachers were not in place – she had to do everything from scratch.

In working with the community, she found that many people had not even heard the name of Shamshad Khan. On the other hand, people were very familiar with Ranjana, Harishankar and Bhola.

Arti got no help from Shamshad Khan in organising a *jatha* to launch the Adolescent Girls' Education Programme. Gradually, she felt that he was becoming uneasy at her way of working and the success of the *jatha*. He began talking sarcastically to her and taunting her in public, implying that she was trying to build a political image for herself (“*Yahan apna jhanda gadhne aaye ho kya?*”). On one occasion, when she went alone to a village at night for some work, he expressed great shock at her behaviour. He began referring to her as “Netaji”.

Within two months, he began to clash with Arti. Another consultant, Arun Srivastava, was a witness to many of these clashes. In Arti's opinion, the trouble happened because Shamshad was threatened by her competence and the fact that she was coordinating with people directly instead of going through him. In her words, “Perhaps he thought I was showing him how to work with people”.

During this period, Arti also developed good relationships and friendships with some employees who also told her about the problems they had with Shamshad. Shamshad showed his insecurity by not allowing CREDA employees to meet ‘outsiders’ and visitors to the project on their own. In fact, he warned Ranjana and Harishankar not to receive any direct call from Arti. Every decision in the project had to be validated by him.

Matters came to a head at one particular workshop where an external resource person was also present but no arrangements had been made despite prior notice. Employees were afraid to help Arti in handling the situation, because they said they could do nothing without orders from him. The Secretary shouted and humiliated the employees. Arti confronted him and charged him with having no interest in the work. Later, when the resource person had left, Shamshad Khan tried to apologise by

touching Arti's feet. It was clear that he was scared and was desperately trying to make up.

Nirantar had a meeting with Neera Burra of UNDP to apprise her of the above situation. She did not seem surprised at the events, but did not take any action to rectify the situation. After this, Nirantar decided to withdraw from the project. In Arti's words, "He has always controlled all decisions in CREDA. He thwarts any initiative because he is very insecure. I was not at all surprised when Ranjana told us what had happened to her."

---

### **Runu Chakraborty**

---

Runu Chakraborty of Jagori gave us the following statement.

"I worked with CREDA as a gender consultant for their UNDP-funded project and made several visits during 2000-2001. My mandate from UNDP was to give consistent inputs to mainstream gender in the CREDA programme by strengthening their existing women's groups and building the capacity of field workers recruited under the UNDP-supported project. My experience with this project was not at all positive - although I could build a very cordial relationship with the field workers, I felt that Shamshad Khan was always suspicious of me and was not very comfortable with the gender issues I was raising.

"I began my inputs with a gender workshop for the entire staff of CREDA. The intention was to reach a consensus about gender-related issues in the programme and in the organisational functioning. Shamshad did not attend this workshop. Since he was the person who took all the decisions, his disinterest in the process resulted in delays at every stage.

"The second activity I was involved in was selection of women workers for the UNDP project. Here again, there were problems. I felt there was potential within the existing staff to take over the role of coordinator for this component but somehow the decision was not taken. Instead, an interview was held in which I was not present and Aradhana from Allahabad was appointed as the coordinator for the women's component. Later, Aradhana left CREDA. She came to meet me at the hotel where I was staying and told me that she was forced to leave. She wanted to keep this meeting a secret as she was scared of the Secretary.

"Shamshad's wife became very friendly to me. She was lonely and used to complain against the women who according to her came close to her husband to take favours. Though she used to keep a distance with the field workers, she once came to one of my trainings and shared her pain with others. There was a lot of empathy from the other women, who sympathized with her.

At this time, Ranjana Patel, who was very loyal to CREDA, confided in me and told me that the Secretary used to warn them before each of my visits, that they should not share internal things with me, since I was an "outsider" and may misuse these information. I realized at that point why I was never left alone during my visits and why Sunil Srivastava always accompanied me to the field and was present during all my interactions with the staff.

"After one of my gender workshops, Shamshad raised some objections to my discussing gender issues and discriminatory practices with the women in the group. We had an argument and I decided to stop my interactions with CREDA. After this, Shamshad came to Delhi and contacted me and apologized profusely and asked me

to continue. I made a few visits after this but continued to face delays and disinterest at every step.

“Each of my attempts to move the project forward faced a lot of resistance from Shamshad –I felt he was reluctant to do anything on the project and he had his own feudal ways of marginalising and ignoring suggestions that did not suit his own interests. I therefore broke my connection with the project and had no contact with anyone from CREDA until Arti Srivastava of Nirantar contacted me on 24 June 2003 to say that Ranjana Patel wanted to meet me.”

## **UNDP**

---

The employees of CREDA had engaged in dialogue with UNDP. Harishankar had told us that when the situation became unbearable, he and Ranjana spoke to Neera Burra of UNDP, whom they had met earlier during her visits to the field. She asked them to send a written complaint, which they did soon after. This complaint was sent on behalf of several employees, along with affidavits from several *gram pradhans* alleging corruption in CREDA. However, Neera Burra sent the complaint to Shamshad Khan who confronted Ranjana and Harishankar with the document. The harassment from the accused intensified after this and dismissals of workers picked up pace. When Ranjana and Harishankar contacted Neera Burra once again, she expressed her inability to act and asked them to leave the organisation if they were not satisfied.

w On 27 October 2003, we met Maurice Dewulf, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP, and Shashi Sudhir, Program Officer, immediately upon our return from the field. They seemed unaware of the fact that CREDA employees had appealed to UNDP. We conveyed to them that people in the field were demanding reform and not closure of the programme. However, they took the stand that since a judicial investigation was underway UNDP could not play any role in the case. However, they expressed keen interest in our report and said they would wait for its publication.

w With some effort, we were able to draw their attention to the accountability that UNDP should demonstrate in this situation irrespective of the judicial investigation and our intervention. Mr. Dewulf conceded that irregularities do not come to light when donors and partners meet, because the focus of discussion is only on successes and achievements. Audit reports also state that the objectives of a project were not met, but without ever specifying any reasons. In his words, “While a project will promise paradise, the evaluation will say simply it did not work out.”

w Mr. Dewulf said that urgent action would be taken on our report. He assured us that some alarm bells have already been rung with our intervention in the matter.

## **NCW and NHRC**

---

The complaint sent to the National Commission for Women (NCW) was very difficult to trace. Because it was signed by several panchayat members and mentioned that the police were supporting Shamshad and refusing to register an FIR, the complaint was wrongly filed as “panchayat complaint against police inaction”. It was not taken up by the National Commission directly, but was forwarded as a matter of routine to the State Commission for Women, which has to date not contacted any of the complainants or taken any action in the matter.

After returning from Mirzapur, the team met the chairperson of the NCW, Dr. Poornima Advani. At this meeting, we discovered that the copy of Ranjana's FIR sent to the NCW on 16 August 2003 had come up on that day – 10 November - for the attention of the commission – a delay of three months!! Nevertheless, Poornima Advani promised to look into the matter. She suggested we call a press meet and hand over the case to the NCW, which could exercise pressure for the case to be speedily dealt with.

In the case of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the complaint was taken seriously and forwarded to the District Magistrate and the Allahabad High Court with a direction to conduct an enquiry. The report of the enquiry – which did not even interview the complainants, and dismissed all but one charge with the remark “proved to be false” - was submitted to the NHRC but did not attract any comment. In fact, it was the District Magistrate himself who questioned the validity of the report and reopened the enquiry.

The team met Justice Sujata Vasant Manohar, member of the NHRC on 17 November. Justice Manohar called for the file on Ranjana's case and was shocked to discover that the FIR sent to the NHRC on 16 August was not in the file. We showed her the acknowledgement card that Ranjana had received at the Saheli address, but the letter could not be traced. The next shock for Justice Manohar came when we informed her that the DM Mirzapur had ordered a fresh enquiry into the case. She wondered how it was that the NHRC did not get a copy of this report. We promptly gave her a copy of the report. Justice Manohar assured us that she could look into the inaction on the FIR by the Thana and SP. We had come prepared with an application to the NHRC to this effect, and handed it over to her. She assured us that they would act upon it in 3-4 days time.

However, Justice Manohar stated that the Commission could only probe into human rights violations of the government or state bodies, and not of private organizations. Justice Manohar suggested that we challenge this aspect of the NCHR Act and informed us that an amendment was already underway. The basic human rights of NGO employees obviously do not seem to fall in the purview of the commission.

---

### ***Emerging Issues***

In addition to sharing an overwhelming corroboration of Ranjana's account at the field level, this report raises pertinent questions for all of us.

Firstly, patriarchal domination continues to make women prone to systemic violence at the workplace. Any resistance to it is met with severe repercussions because of the grossly imbalanced power equations between employer and employees.

Secondly, the hard labour of NGO employees has no protective legislation or mechanisms of scrutiny. In the event of reporting irregularities, everyone from the administration to funders to the NHRC have done precious little to stand by the employees. The abduction of Ranjana and the trauma and displacement incurred is a direct outcome of this negligence. This colossal neglect has also led to a severe backlash on the jobs, safety and security of many employees of CREDA.

This report is a modest attempt to place their struggle in a shared perspective. And draw attention to other additional concerns that we face in the course of looking

into the CREDA case. It concerns all NGOs who have paid employees and all women's organizations struggling against sexual harassment at the workplace.

### **General Corroboration of Ranjana's Complaint**

---

The team found overwhelming corroboration of the allegations made in Ranjana's complaint.

- n Interviews with CREDA beneficiaries and with members of the local community revealed that, far from being a respected social worker as he claimed, Shamshad is widely perceived as a corrupt womaniser, who uses his links with the police, press and local *goondas* to silence any opposition.
- n Women who had worked in CREDA recounted several incidents of sexual harassment and painted a picture of pervasive exploitation, with continuance in the organisation and career advancement being dependent on willingness to comply with sexual demands made by the Secretary.
- n Depositions and interviews with women who were signatories to the original complaint confirmed that the Secretary had used money, threats and coercion of family members to get them to withdraw their complaints and speak against Ranjana.
- n *Panchayat* members and members of the community expressed anger at Shamshad Khan's treatment of Ranjana and stated that they were prepared to give evidence of corruption and mismanagement in CREDA programmes. They also expressed resentment at being used by Shamshad in his efforts to create an international image for himself.
- n Local members of the Samajwadi Party stated that Ranjana was not a member or office-bearer of the party as claimed by Shamshad and cited by him as the reason for terminating her employment.
- n Women and men in the community expressed respect for Ranjana's work and admiration for the way in which she has continued her struggle, for which they affirmed support.

### **Sexual Harassment**

#### **How the harasser operates**

---

The perception of the accused as a sexual harasser is not only affirmed by women's testimonies but also shared by the old and the young (even children!) who have witnessed it over the years in villages where CREDA runs its activities. When Ranjana initially shared with us how in January 2001 he made advances to her in the CREDA sub-centre in Sukhda, the incident seemed to be isolated and not connected with the entire gamut of issues ranging from corruption and exploitation of labour to the abduction of Ranjana. However, subsequent meetings with women in July and October and going through the affidavits submitted revealed the striking pattern of a person misusing his authority as the head of the NGO.

The pattern is well established from the stage of making the initial advance to the manner in which he is today silencing some women. The pattern of approaching women with incentives etc has been uncannily consistent. We have been able to discern a broad pattern of how he operates:

#### **When the accused begins picking on his targets, he:**

- o Proposes for sexual activity ("Yaun Kriya" or "Galat Kaam" as the women describe).

- ð Says she has to please or satisfy him.
- ð Offers incentives in the form of raise or job security.
- ð Seeks out a particular woman of his choice in training centres at night.
- ð Physically touches or caresses women in the office in the presence of others.

**When the woman remains silent or does not comply, the accused:**

- ð Rebukes her with dire consequences.
- ð Treats her harshly on the job.
- ð Sends her hither and thither to test her patience.
- ð Holds back her promotion.
- ð Replaces the employee at times with a woman who has yielded to him.
- ð Mocks and humiliates her invariably accompanied by another employee who is going around with him.
- ð Fires any woman who continues to keep distance.

**When the employees began to make complaints to state and national bodies and submitted affidavits, the accused:**

- ð Offered small amounts of money (Rs 5000/-) to make some of them submit counter affidavits to the effect that they were compelled and tortured by some elements acting against him.
- ð Raised the amount to Rs 30,000 to persuade those still holding out.
- ð Offered fresh employment to those who were removed earlier.
- ð Offered raise in salary and position as an incentive to compromise.
- ð Appealed to the woman's father and/or brother that the family's dignity was at stake if she did not compromise.
- ð Appealed even to in-laws that he regarded her as a sister and nothing else.
- ð Threatened the members of the family to compel the woman to compromise.
- ð Used physical force to coerce the old father of a woman who is resisting, to sign a written statement.

**How safe are women workers  
in the NGO sector?**

---

The interviews with women no doubt unfolded the saga of large-scale sexual harassment by the head of CREDA - the boss and the godfather. Besides extracting cheap labour of employees and siphoning off "development aid" meant for the poor, the Secretary of CREDA was accused of sexual harassment by several people we spoke to. Women employees were caught in a fix of holding on to a job or giving in to him. Women who resisted were harassed in the job, and some resisted only to be fired sooner or later.

The entire experience of interviewing women some of whom are being harassed and bribed into silence raised many questions in our minds. Even while making small of their problems or denying it through smiles, women were making statements against him. The tentativeness of sharing and the alternating blurred and sharp memory of women pointed to a fear of the consequences. We cannot help but document such invisible costs of psychological damage wrought on women by the predominantly patriarchal power of the victimizer.

In remote villages such as the ones we visited, the entire act of talking up against such sexual harassment or even running into contradictions in it seems an act of defiance. Confidentiality and anonymity is zero. The need to cling on to jobs or even be lured by cash bribes in such an economically deprived environment can be well imagined. Despite these pressures, the women talked. We met none who categorically refused or were hostile.

The accused has played upon their insecurity of the adverse consequences of the affidavit for the family. An assault on women's dignity and using the same argument to dissuade them from going public has been one of the oldest tactics of harassment. A woman's efforts at brushing aside her experience and her mother-in-law's defence of the accused makes it clear that both women were at pains to come to terms with what has happened.

Accounts of the assaults carried out by the accused were rife in the language of "good" and "bad". Some villagers and other women employees constantly judged three women helping the accused as being inherently bad. Even a woman who has subsequently withdrawn her complaint said that the accused does not do anything wrong. Only his "women" do these things in the field. "I had actually not left my job, one of the women with him had asked him to remove me as according to her I was not doing a good job. She used to tell him that we talk a lot and that's why I was removed."

Are these women employees helping in luring other women to consent to suppressing evidence against the accused to be seen as "bad" women? Or are they victims too? Reality is more complex when issues of consent, choice, and the perceived power of the male employer as economic benefactor and care provider consolidate in such deeply entrenched patriarchal and class contexts. We see this as the essentialising or normalizing of sexual favours as a routine mode where the conflict of poverty versus employment is exploited to the hilt.

Victims often subordinate their interests and rights to become victimizers. And development gets a disreputable image in the eyes of the workers and the beneficiaries. On one hand, sexual choice or desire is distorted by a seemingly empowered economically liberated female subject. On the other, patriarchal interests only serve to reign in women to the restricted roles of wife, mother and unpaid homemaker. All the women we met lamented the loss of job and considered re-employment if given a chance. Is this women's empowerment? Can we envision the conditions under which they can exercise the choice of resuming work?

We need to understand the complex array of factors that operate in strengthening patriarchal and corrupt forces as represented by the accused in this case. The use of women employees, the tools employed, the methods of self-preservation undertaken by the accused, and the relentless carrying out of dubious strategies to vilify the victim and her experiences have all been employed to establish a reign of terror so far. In effect, the terror to take him on and the connivance of police and local *goondas* points out the way these structures operate to silence women and other poor people. The power of the NGO head today in such rural areas well substitutes the feudal rule of old. But it has to come to an end.

In CREDA, what could have ideally been an effective check on the power and rapacity of the victimizer? Organizational structures such as CREDA need to be examined closely for arrogating a convenient and easy use of absolute power. What is the role of the Board of Directors in such a case? What is the role of funding agencies such as UNDP in this case? What is the role of the state and national bodies

and the district administration to whom the employees have repeatedly appealed for help? Will they speak up and act? Or is the NGO head the sovereign power? The absence of accountability measures for NGO patriarchs is a formidable challenge for the women's movement today.

### **Development:**

#### **Who labours? Who benefits?**

---

The CREDA case also raises several issues with a bearing on the larger development scenario, which are flagged below.

#### **'EMPOWERMENT' OR ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY?**

Empowerment of deprived communities through education has emerged as an important agenda for the government and funding agencies since the late eighties. The development objectives of earlier decades have been shelved in favour of 'teach anyhow' measures. Instead of addressing the disempowerment process and clearly identifying the exploiters, the onus for change has been shifted onto the victims of exploitation. The twin agendas of 'empowerment through education' and 'community participation' have eased the way for the state to gradually abdicate its responsibility for poverty alleviation, including effective systems of public health and education, land distribution, food distribution and relief schemes during famines, floods or droughts. The Malthusian thesis of 'population explosion' as one of the primary causes of poverty is gaining legitimacy again through such programmes. Along with 'empowerment' and awareness building rhetoric, most of the teaching-learning materials used in such programmes overtly or covertly present increasing population as one of the main causes (some times the only cause) of deprivation.

We need to address and organize around why people are poor and look at the structural issues underlying poverty and illiteracy. Such programmes have often seemed most disempowering for those whose labour it rests on.

#### **DISTORTED YARDSTICKS FOR MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS**

A convenient system for measuring the effectiveness of 'empowerment through education' programmes is also in place. Donor agencies and NGOs running these programmes hire other NGOs, management institutions, 'free lance educationists' or 'education consultants' to evaluate them, usually as a preliminary to further funding. These 'researchers' in turn hire 'field workers' to gather 'field level data'. Such exercises are termed as 'research', but boundary conditions are laid down in a way that generally prevents any kind of critical appraisal of the work. 'Documenting good practices' has also emerged as an alternative to overall critical appraisal. As the nomenclature suggests, the emphasis is purely on documentation of success stories. Moreover, the yardsticks for measuring the impact of education programmes are often contested. Unlike other programmes, where failure is tangible and visible - bad roads, broken hand-pumps, dysfunctional PHCs and so on - education/empowerment programmes are entangled in less visible and easily manipulated indices such as access, enrolment, quality and achievement levels that are not universal and are widely contested. Corruption is thus less visible and difficult to prove.

#### **DOES EMPLOYMENT IN NGO ADDRESS POVERTY?**

The immediate context of 'empowerment' programmes is the reality of pervasive unemployment situation amongst the 'educated' youth especially in the rural areas, which is kept under control by offering them insecure, low paid, contractual jobs and encouraging them to hope that they will get absorbed in the system some day. This policy has created divisions among young people by selectively providing new 'employment avenues' for this otherwise neglected and restive group. People so employed are called volunteers, para-teachers, *sahayaks*, *sevikas* and other such euphemisms. 'Good practice documentation' rarely highlights the social distortions – including vulnerability to sexual harassment – created by this strategy.

Blindly identifying with the objectives of funders, we run the risk of creating a consensus that poverty and illiteracy can be addressed through developmental activity. Employment in NGOs fills in the gap between good work and the needs of a deprived society. The yawning gap created by conditions of chronic economic insecurity is made use of by such activities.

It is high time we fight for mechanisms addressing secure labour conditions and labour practices for those employed in the development field. NGO employees too need to organise in defence of their rights. We certainly need to transcend from the notion of NGO work as social work to regarding it as wage labour too.

#### **A 'NOBLE CAUSE' AS A COVER FOR CORRUPTION**

Education programmes, and those who implement them, are protected from criticism by investing them with an aura of nobility and 'selfless service'. Urban intellectuals who can easily identify and condemn the failure and corruption of other development programmes, appear overwhelmed by the presumed 'sacrifices' of those who work for emotive causes such as children's education or child labour, particularly in remote areas. CREDA has cashed in on this sentiment. The backwardness of the district and the dire situation of children appear to be sufficient excuse to overlook the malpractices in the organisers. With the increasing role of such programmes in the larger development scenario, the tendency of donors and development-watchers to overlook 'minor instances of corruption that are in any case difficult to establish' is gaining social acceptance. An additional argument is also often presented – that, despite massive increases in funding for NGOs working in the education sector, education is still under-funded and the scale of corruption is negligible compared to the corruption in the industrial sector and in defence deals. The enormous social costs of this corruption are easily ignored by donors and others who come to the defense of these 'noble souls'.

---

#### **Implications**

This case raises several important issues with implications that go far beyond CREDA and one complainant, and raise questions on the perspectives and functioning of a range of institutions and organisations.

#### **For the NGO sector**

---

n The case underlines the insecure and vulnerable situation of women workers in NGOs. Many NGOs employ workers on short-term contracts and pay their salaries from the funds sanctioned for a particular project. In practice, these workers are all treated as full-time staff. However, the contractual nature of employment, or the fact that funding for the project has come to an end, can be invoked at any time to terminate employment without notice or benefits. Often, obstacles are placed in the way of anyone who dares to ask for better conditions

or questions unfair practices,. As in Ranjana's case, this can happen when the worker is seen as a 'troublemaker' of some kind, who has to be removed. For many employees, the insecurity created by the knowledge that their employment depends entirely on the judgement or decision of the management is a powerful weapon of control. In the case of women employees, it can ensure complete submission and silence in the face of exploitation.

- n Although the Supreme Court Guidelines on sexual harassment are binding on NGOs, NGO apex bodies have not monitored compliance or taken a clear stand against sexual harassment. This case makes clear that the lack of an institutional mechanism for lodging, investigating and taking action on complaints of sexual harassment is also a serious issue that constrains women in NGOs from breaking the silence around their own exploitation.

---

#### **For NHRC and NCW**

- n The overwhelming respect and faith in the NHRC and the NCW shown by ordinary citizens is an impressive endorsement of the credibility and public image of these institutions. Ranjana and her colleagues had an unwavering confidence that the several complaints and submissions they have made to the NHRC and the NCW will be taken seriously and acted upon. In fact, however, the responsiveness of these bodies is hampered by inefficient systems and insensitive procedures.
- n According to NHRC, there seems to be no protection of the human rights of NGO employees. In the absence of any protective labour legislation too for this sector, can we attempt to make bodies like NHRC accountable for at least the safety and security of thousands of NGO workers in this country?

---

#### **For Donor Agencies**

- n This case brings a fresh perspective to the issue of accountability of donors for the actions of their project partners. UNDP, which is the major source of funding for CREDA was informed verbally and in writing by Ranjana and her colleagues of malpractices and corruption in the project, but responded by breaching confidentiality and communicating the content of the complaint and the names of the complainants to Shamshad. While UNDP cannot be held accountable for Shamshad's activities, it is difficult to justify this action, which exposed the complainants to retaliation leading to the abduction of a woman employee who had knocked more than once on its doors. Despite the reluctance to intervene or interfere in the internal affairs of NGO partners, bureaucratic and insensitive responses to serious complaints such as Ranjana's actively undermine the credibility of donors and place a question mark against their professed commitment to gender equality and women's rights.
- n Even as women's groups are demanding that women contract workers and those in the informal sector be covered by laws relating to sexual harassment at the workplace, the role of donor agencies, analogous to "primary employers" comes into question: what are the responsibilities of donor agencies to women employed by NGOs they fund. With increasing withdrawal of State agencies from functions like health and education, and boom in NGO involvement in these sectors, this issue is of growing relevance.

---

#### **For the Women's Movement**

- n This case highlights the fact that the issue of sexual harassment still falls in a “grey zone” even for women’s groups and organisations working on gender issues. A host of misconceptions and prejudices characterise “malestream” attitudes to sexual harassment - that the victim is in some way responsible for her own exploitation, that her silence in the face of harassment signifies consent, or that she gives in because she derives benefit from the situation. Or worse still, that there must be someone behind her with vested interests.
- n However, in workplaces, power imbalances tend to impinge on sexual relations, especially those across hierarchies, and even a ‘seeming consent’ of a woman lower down in the hierarchy in reality can amount to sexual harassment.
- n The case also underlines the difficulties involved in making effective interventions on such issues in NGOs, given their flexibility, the creation of a ‘family-like’ atmosphere with the same patriarchal patterns of authority and privilege, the lack of formal mechanisms of redress and the lack of accountability of the decision-makers.
- n Questions of survival, of rebuilding lives of individual women complainants after such upheavals, continue to be a challenge for women’s groups. How do we ensure the safety of those who dare to speak up? Needless to say, there is no short cut or easy path to building up women’s resistance against patriarchy.

#### Recommendations

- Ä The NHRC and NCW should ensure immediate action on the FIR lodged by Ranjana, and seek the arrest of Shamshad Khan.
- Ä The false cases lodged against Ranjana and her colleague Harishankar by CREDA should be quashed.
- Ä Protection should be provided to the women who have spoken of their experiences earlier and during this fact-finding exercise, to ensure that they and their families are not harassed.
- Ä An official enquiry should be instituted into the functioning of CREDA, preferably by a committee that is constituted by the Allahabad High Court and includes women activists, human rights groups, elected representatives and members of the local community.
- Ä Employees of CREDA should be protected against retaliation and dismissal by the Secretary and/or his accomplices in the organisation.
- Ä The district authorities should enquire into the role of the local police in providing protection, information and encouragement to Shamshad, and should take appropriate action against the concerned individuals.

## ANNEXURE

### **SUMMARY OF RANJANA'S STORY**

Ranjana Kumari Patel joined CREDA in January 1994, as a teacher in a community school in Lalganj Block. In October 2000, she was promoted to the post of Supervisor in the UNDP-funded child labour elimination programme being implemented by CREDA. The Secretary of CREDA Shamshad Khan and her colleagues appreciated her work and she was highly respected by the community.

In January 2001, the Secretary made sexual advances to Ranjana at the CREDA training sub-centre in Sukhda. She pleaded with him to consider her his sister and tied a *rakhi* on his wrist with a scrap of cloth torn from her dupatta. The Secretary released her and apologised but warned her not to talk about the incident to anyone. She initially kept quiet, but soon found that several of her women colleagues had also faced sexual harassment by him. She began to notice and protest against financial irregularities in the UNDP programme. She also raised the issue of sexual harassment with the Secretary who responded with anger and asked her not to interfere.

In May 2001, Ranjana was shot at and injured by unknown persons while she was in the field performing her official duties. Although the assailant has not been identified, she feels that the attack was connected with an ongoing property dispute between her and her brothers. (Ranjana subsequently reached a mutual agreement with her brothers in the property dispute, and received an amount of Rs.2,50,000/- in final settlement of her claims.)

Ranjana was taken to Dr. Narendra's nursing home in Mirzapur where she was treated for the injury. She was later shifted to the Singh Medical Centre in Varanasi, and was under treatment for over a month. Shamshad paid all the bills for the hospitalisation and treatment, but did not show the bills to her or inform her of the exact amount spent.

When she returned to work in June 2001 and resumed her duties in Lalganj Block, she does not receive any salary for four months although she was made to sign her salary receipt. On enquiry, she was told by the Secretary that her salary was being credited towards repayment of the expenses of her treatment. He showed her two separate bills for Rs.25,000/- and 12,000/-, but did not give her copies of the bills or any receipts against loan repayment. In October 2001, she was given her salary for September, but was told that there is still some money outstanding against the amount spent by him for her treatment. She promised to pay it back and again asked for the bills, but he refused. Again in December 2001, she signed her salary receipt but was not paid any salary.

Ranjana was paid her salary in July 2002 only after her colleagues intervened on her behalf and asked the Secretary to spare her. She gave him an amount of Rs.40,000/- in cash, but he once again refused to give her a receipt. She was repeatedly threatened by the Secretary who told her that he would humiliate her publicly if she did not return the Rs.10,000/- that she still owed him ("*Samaj mein nanga kar denge*"). She was finally able to pay this amount in September 2002, again without a receipt.

Ranjana continued to work in Lalganj, but harassment by the Secretary now became open with interference in her work and unfair criticisms of her performance. She was given a receipt book of the Samajwadi Party by him and asked her to collect donations. She managed to collect Rs.500/- from women in the field and gave it to

him along with the receipt book. Some days later, Ranjana found her name mentioned as an office-bearer of the Samajwadi Party in some local newspaper reports.

Events came to a head in October 2002 when he and his goons tried to get her to stop working and leave the organisation by confiscating the moped she used for her field work, threatening her, accusing her of theft and filing false cases against her. When Ranjana tried to file a case in the local thana, the Secretary apologised to her. She continued to work, but her salary was stopped and she was told by him that there was no money left in the project.

It was at this stage that Ranjana and Harishankar, her friend and colleague, prepared a detailed complaint and sent it to the NHRC, NCW, Allahabad High Court, DM, SP, Supreme Court, Chief Minister and several other authorities (13 letters in all). The complaint was supported by affidavits from several gram pradhans alleging corruption, and affidavits from eleven women employees of CREDA alleging harassment including sexual harassment and non-payment of salary. They also phoned Neera Burra of UNDP and informed her of the situation. She initially suggested that they leave CREDA if they were not happy, but then asked them to submit a written complaint, which they did. A few days later, Ranjana and Harishankar were called to the CREDA office. The Secretary showed them their complaint and said that it had been sent back to him by UNDP. He also told them that UNDP would not believe their words against his.

Ranjana continued to work without a salary and despite being abused and threatened by the Secretary and his goons, one of whom (Gopal) threatened her with a country-made revolver (*katta*) and told her to withdraw her complaints. She was undaunted and complained yet again to the NHRC and the District Magistrate. Meanwhile, the local papers came out with reports that that she had been dismissed for creating trouble in CREDA, and because she had been found to have link with the Samajwadi Party. (At no time Ranjana was any termination letter.)

In March 2003, Ranjana received a copy of a letter from the NHRC to the DM, ordering an enquiry into her complaint. She was told by her friends that the enquiry team was meeting in the CREDA office, and had not met any of the complainants. A few days later, local newspapers reported that the Secretary has been cleared by the enquiry committee. At this, Ranjana and Harishankar complained to the DM that they had not been called by the enquiry committee. She was then asked to appear before the ADM, and went to his office on the appointed date to find that he had been transferred and the new ADM had not been instructed by the DM to take up the case.

In April 2003, Ranjana was threatened several times by the Secretary's goons and told that she would be killed if she did not stop making trouble for him. The Secretary also told her that all the women who gave her affidavits had withdrawn their complaints, and warned her not to try to harm him further. Ranjana contacted each of the women and was told by them that he threatened them and gave them money, and took their signatures on blank stamp papers.

In the next couple of months, Ranjana went to the CREDA office a number of times with women organisers, teachers and self-help group members from her field area who had also not been paid their dues for several months. On each occasion, the Secretary warned the other women that they would face the consequences if they continued to support Ranjana. At the same time, when confronted by Ranjana, he

denied that he had dismissed her and gave her money in cash( how much?) and told her that she would get the rest of her pay later.

Ranjana continued to face threats from him and submitted three separate complaints to the SP, stating that she apprehended a threat to her life. On three separate occasions in May, police from Lalganj thana came to her house and harassed her. She was also called to the thana several times by the SHO, threatened and asked to withdraw her complaint. After hearing her side of the story, the SHO told Ranjana that he was under pressure from his superiors who favoured Shamshad Khan. He also warned her that the Secretary was trying to file a case against her for stealing a motorcycle from CREDA. The police finally stopped harassing Ranjana after she and Harishankar met the SP, who heard them out and gave orders to the Lalganj thana to stop the harassment.

On 11 June 2003, Ranjana and Harishankar went to Mirzapur to meet the DM and SP, and to give press notes to various local newspapers describing the harassment being inflicted by the Secretary on the staff of CREDA. As Ranjana came out of the newspaper office, she was accosted by Rajkumar, an associate of the Secretary, who asked her to come with him to meet the Secretary. She refused, upon which Rajkumar said that she should at least come to pay condolence to him for the recent death of his mother.

Ranjana insisted that she would not go alone. Rajkumar told her that he had already spoken to Harishankar who had also agreed to meet the Secretary. Rajkumar asked Ranjana to get onto his motorcycle, and when she did so, sped away, taking a roundabout route to a house which he says is Shamshad Khan's old house.

The Secretary was waiting at the door of the house, and took Ranjana to a room and tried to persuade her to withdraw her complaints, saying that since all the other women have apologized, she should also do so. She was asked to sign an apology letter and some blank stamp papers. Ranjana tried to run out of the room, at which the men locked the doors and windows of the room and threatened and slapped her. Her hands and feet were tied together and she was gagged with a piece of cloth. She was confined in this way for several hours, during which Shamshad Khan, Rajkumar and a third man several times tried to get her to sign the papers. The third man threatened her with an iron rod which he tried to thrust into her mouth. When Ranjana continued to refuse, Shamshad Khan told the other men that she would have to be eliminated ("*Ab iska kaam tamam karna hi padega*").

Ranjana was again gagged and blindfolded and dumped into a vehicle. After several hours of driving, she was taken out and the blindfold was removed. Her captors were four men whom she did not recognise, who told her that they had been paid to kill her and leave her in the jungle. He told her to give up her fight since Shamshad Khan was too powerful for her to oppose. Ranjana wept and pleaded with him for mercy. Finally, the men agreed to free her provided she leaves the area and never comes back. They untied Ranjana's hands and feet and took her to Mughalsarai town, where they dropped her off a few yards from the station.

Ranjana boarded an east-bound train and got off at Patna, and then again boarded a Delhi-bound train from Patna, travelling without a ticket. In Delhi, she stayed with the husband of one of her former colleagues, who works in a dairy. On 18 June 2003, after several days of looking unsuccessfully for a job, she contacted Arti Srivastava of Nirantar and Runu Chakraborty of Jagori, whom she knew because they had earlier done training programmes in CREDA on consultancy assignments from UNDP.

Ranjana was given shelter in a women's refuge. Delhi-based women's organisations decided to take up her case. In July 2003, a team of women activists from Jagori, Saheli and Stree Adhikar Sangathan (Allahabad) went to Mirzapur to recover Ranjana's belongings and papers. They also meet some key informants and come back with strong corroboration of Ranjana's story.

With the assistance of Lawyer's Collective, an FIR was sent to the Lalganj thana dated 16.8.03. This team was constituted to probe and get more information of the entire situation. The team visited Mirzapur from 23-25 October 2003. The team found that the FIR had not been registered. It was only after severe insistence of the team and the intervention of the DM that the Lalganj thana finally registered it.

FIR # 134A/203 dated 25.10.03 lodged against the Secretary of CREDA and some of his men include IPC sections 147, 354, 307, 504, 379, 506, 523, 342 and 363. With the help of lawyers from PUCL, Ranjana's petition for stay of arrest was also filed in the Allahabad High Court, which has now granted the stay.

--END--

*In  
Extending Solidarity to the Employees of CREDA  
Providing Legal Advice  
Helping in Field Trips  
Supporting the Issues Raised  
Improving the Draft  
and  
Endorsing this Report*

***We Acknowledge***

People's Union for Civil Liberties, Uttar Pradesh  
Jagori, Delhi  
Lawyers' Collective, Delhi  
Shakti Shalini, Delhi  
Popular Education and Action Centre, Delhi  
Trust For Secular And Democratic Values, Delhi  
Nirantar, Delhi  
PRISM, Delhi  
Forum Against Oppression of Women, Mumbai  
Initiatives Women In Development (IWID, Western Region),  
Bhopal  
Organised Lesbian Alliance for Visibility and Action (OLAVA) , Pune

**Published by:** Saheli Women's Resource Centre, Defence Colony Flyover Market,  
New Delhi 110024

**Printed at:** Vikas Offset Press, Navin Shahdara, Delhi - 110032

**Suggested Contribution:** Rs 10/-