



Gulabi gang

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The **Gulabi Gang** (from Hindi *gulabi*, "pink") is a female vigilante group in India. Sampat Pal Devi started the group in 2006 in Banda District, Uttar Pradesh. The group is dedicated to empowering women of all castes and protecting them from domestic violence, sexual violence, and oppression. They also combat political corruption and the oppression of lower caste people, specifically Dalits.

In 2014, the group estimated over 270,000 members consisting of women between 18 and 60 years old the group uses both non-violent and violent tactics and reports many successful interventions. They aim to support women in attaining financial autonomy, education, and political empowerment. Despite facing difficulties with local government bodies, many members of the Gulabi Gang have been elected into office. The group has also garnered substantial recognition and media attention.

Backgrounds

Regional context

The Gulabi Gang is officially headquartered in Badausap in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh. As of 2003, the district was ranked 154th on the Planning Commission's list of 447 districts based on an index of backwardness. Uttar Pradesh has one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence against women. It reports high rates of child marriage, dowry demands, mortality during childbirth, and a low





female literacy rate. Additionally, over 20% of the Banda district population is lower caste people, with a high Dalit population, who face severe oppression and discrimination. Many of the members of the Gulabi Gang and the women they protect are lower caste women, meaning they are especially vulnerable in this rural setting. The region is also ridden with government corruption specifically in the unfair distribution of resources and a widespread lack of education.

Membership

The gang has reported to have grown since 2010 and has been active in regions of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.¹ In 2014, the group estimated around 270,000 members. To become a member of the Gulabi Gang, women are expected to pay a registration fee of 100 rupees. Members wear bright pink saris and carry lathis, or wooden sticks, for protection. When a woman is assisted by the gang, she is expected to join the gang and contribute to the mission of assisting other women. While men are not permitted to be members of the gang, many male villagers play an active supporting role. One such examples is Jai Prakash Shivhari, who joined to stand in solidarity against issues like government corruption, child marriages, and dowry deaths. Often, a few male supporters will accompany the gang to gatherings and protests for the safety purposes. Because many villages predominantly only educate men, male supporters also assist with administrative tasks that require reading, writing, and math skills.

Leadership. The Gang has several regional stations and each station has a head of a section called the 'commander', who handles daily activities and smaller problems of people in that area. The commander sends regularly updates and reports any substantial problems to the leader of the Gang. On March 2, 2014, Pal was relieved of her role as the head of the Gulabi Gang amid allegations of financial impropriety and putting her personal interests before those of the group. Pal denied these allegations and still has some involvement in the gang. The members elected Suman Singh Chauhan, formerly the assistant commander of the group to run the group.

Non-violent demonstration

The Gulabi Gang has participated in countless protests and demonstrations, often relying on media coverage and mass mobilization to make a substantial impact. When police officers at



the Atarra police station refused to lodge a Dalit's complaint, the group organized a demonstration of over 200 members. They stormed the police station with pink dogs, who they claimed were more loyal and effective than the police, as a "replacement" for the police. The group had invited the media to publicly shame the police officers into doing their jobs. In 2011, the gang helped Sheelu Nishad, a 17-year-old girl who had been gang raped. Nishad was arrested after arriving at the police station to file a report. The rapists, which also included a member of the legislature, arrived at the police station first and requested her arrest. The victim's father approached the Gulabi Gang organised two mass demonstrations in front of the police station and legislator's house.

Violent intervention

All members of the Gulabi Gang carry and are trained to use a lathi. Lathis are common weapons in rural areas as they can be created from trees. While the media tends to focus on their violent interventions, the Gulabi Gang tends to use violence as a last resort or in self-defense.

When intervening in a domestic violence case, the gang begins by approaching the police. They only pursue the case if the police does not respond or acts unjustly. In their intervention, the gang first reasons with the abuser and demands he stop the abuse. If he doesn't comply, the wife joins the gang in thrashing the husband. According to Sampat, the Gulabi Gang has had a 100% success rate in bringing justice to domestic violence complaints and has thrashed hundreds of abusive husbands.

Pal Devi has said that "Yes, we fight rapists with lathis [large bamboo sticks]. If we find the culprit, we thrash him black and blue so he dare not attempt to do wrong to any girl or a woman again." Suman Singh, a later commander of the gang, mentioned that when "a woman seeks the membership of Gulabi Gang, it is because she has suffered injustice, has been oppressed and does not see any other recourse. All our women can stand up to the men and if need be seek retribution through lathis."



Government relationship

Due to the Gulabi Gang's efforts to counter corruption, they are often in direct opposition to local government institutions and the police. This strained relationship has led the Gulabi Gang to become a target of local police officers and political leaders. Many members have received threats of violence and been called "militant Maoists" by local police officers. Police officials have also frequently accused the Gulabi Gang of defamation and assault.

Corporate partnerships

Corporate partnerships of the Gulabi Gang include Vitalect, a technology and services company that works with non-profit organisations to assist them with their technological needs, and Social Solution India (SSI), a non-profit company that promotes NGO stability.

Awards

The Gulabi Gang earned the Kelvinator 11th GR8! Women Award, an award offered by the Indian Television Academy. They also earned the Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award for social bravery, offered in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Delhi.