

Mr. Ram Chander Chhatrapati (52), editor of "Poora Sach" (full truth), Hindi evening daily of Sirsa in Haryana, died on November 23, 2002 at Appolo Hospital, New Delhi, after a month long struggle for life following he was shot on October 24. Chhatrapati was shot by followers of the controversial local Hindu religious cult, "Dera Sacha Sauda", as a vengeance against his bold reportage exposing several irregularities and unholy activities within the "holy premises", including sexual scandal" involving the cult "Guru" (master). The shooting incident took place following constant threats he received for his exposures on the secret cult.

Four persons, including a senior cult member, were arrested in connection with the shooting last month. The deceased editor leaves behind a son and two daughters.

When the police and local people apprehended the man who pumped four bullets into Chhatrapati's body near his residence at Sirsa town, the culprit said that manager of the "dera" had provided him the revolver and a walkie-talkie to commit the crime. Three senior followers of the cult, including the manager, Krishan, were arrested later.

After the shooting incident, Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, assured the protesting journalists on October 26 that the government would hold an inquiry into the affairs of the sect. The journalists' protest followed wider apprehension of lack of governmental action as leading politicians were regularly visiting the "dera" to pay obeisance to its "Guru". The Chief Minister assured a "comprehensive inquiry" into the "dera" affairs by clubbing all complaints against it, including the one in which the High Court ordered a CBI probe.

One of Chhatrapati's grieving daughters said : "My father had been writing against the "dera" for long and he was threatened many times. Only a few days before the attack, he published stories exposing the alleged sex scandal within the cult premises."

A total strike was observed in Sirsa district today as a mark of respect to the deceased journalist by various commercial, social and educational institutions. Leaders of various social and political organizations and professional bodies of lawyers and doctors condemned Chhatrapati's murder, terming it as an attack on press freedom. Condolence meetings were also organized at different places. Demands were raised for a thorough investigation into the cult activities, apart from providing Rupees one million and a government job for Chhatrapati's dependents.

The body of the departed editor was consigned to flames at the Shivpuri cremation ground in Sirsa town this evening.

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