



—Bula

## After The Protest...

TODAY, innumerable social, political and voluntary groups are working with oppressed classes. These groups organise protests with the aim of exposing exploitation. It is essential now to analyse how far these protests are really helping the oppressed people to achieve social equality and justice.

Our study team recently collected data on the famous rape case of Rameezabee. We then held a big meeting of activists from various organisations..

In the course of the discussion, the active group core workers said that protests are often used as capital to improve the status of political leaders. Usually, these leaders benefit while the tortures of harijans and other oppressed people continue to increase. They also felt that many of the protests are a temporary action programme rather than a continuous plan of action. They further said that a group or an individual or a party first decides to organise a

protest and then presses the decision on the people. Soon after the protest, the tempo that was built up dies down.

The political leaders who were present disagreed with this view. The grassroots workers said that protests are partially successful. If they are organised by external persons they lose their direction. They said that leaders take advantage of poverty and mobilise people by offering them cash. But they quoted examples from their experience

of how they had achieved some justice through organising their own local protest demonstrations.

The Rameezabee case was discussed as an example of widespread protests and their effect. Rameezabee was raped by policemen on the night of March 29, 1978. She is a resident of Nandikotkur in Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh. Her father had ill treated and deserted her mother. At the age of 16, Rameeza was married off to Mahboob Pasha. He deserted her after two months. Rameeza's brother then insisted on remarrying her to his friend Noor Ahmed, an already married man. He was very suspicious of Rameeza's character, and insisted that she stop going out to work. Rameezabee then came to Hyderabad with an acquaintance known as Ahmed Husain. She planned to return to her native village in a few days. On March 29, she and Ahmed Husain went to a movie. After the show was over at 10 p.m., when they were returning home, Ahmed Husain stopped the cycle rickshaw near a urinal. Rameezabee was sitting in the rickshaw when two constables in uniform enquired her identity. They ignored her explanation and said she was a woman of questionable character. They took her to Nallakunta police station where the subinspector forced her to strip, beat her and burnt her with a cigarette. Subsequently, she was raped by the subinspector and by three uniformed policemen, one after the other. The next morning, she was taken home, and then she and Ahmed Husain were again brought back to the police station. When Ahmed Husain heard what had happened he rebuked the subinspector. The subinspector and two policemen assaulted him violently with sticks. The police then demanded Rs 300 from them. A constable broke open Rameeza's suitcase and took Rs 200 from it. Then they were released.

The same afternoon, Ahmed Husain developed chest pain and became unconscious. He died a short while

later. About 150 people gathered, and took the corpse back to the police station, where they shouted anti police slogans. Soon, about 1,500 people gathered and started pelting the police station with stones. They also broke open the rear door and set fire to the motor cycle and cycles kept there. A large police force was summoned to control the situation.

The government of Andhra Pradesh appointed an enquiry commission headed by high court Justice Muktdhar, on the basis of whose findings a CID investigation took place and found the policemen prima facie guilty of the offences. Accordingly, a case was registered against them but they appealed to the supreme court, and managed to get the case transferred to the sessions court, at Raichur, where public opinion was not as strongly mobilised as it was at Hyderabad.

It is evident from the proceedings of the sessions court that unnecessary witnesses were introduced by the defence to prove that Rameezabee was a woman of "loose" character. However, her character was of no real relevance to the case of rape and murder by policemen.

Further, due to the delay of three years in filing the case, Rameezabee was not able to identify the policemen with certainty. Their dresses and hairstyles were changed so as to confuse her. Similarly, eyewitnesses of the beating of Rameezabee were confused and not able to identify her with certainty, due to the lapse of time.

The sessions judge convicted three constables of minor offences, but acquitted the accused of the main charges—rape and murder. Due to the pressure built up by women's organisations, the state government filed an appeal in the high court. The sessions judge granted leave to appeal in August 1981 but further proceedings are yet to be known.

We went to meet Rameezabee and found that she is living with one Aziz in

her village Nandikotkur. But she was very much disturbed by the mental torture inflicted on her, and felt that she had no future at all. Because of the newspaper publicity her case received, she was socially ostracised by the other villagers. She felt that the organisation who loudly proclaimed they were taking up her cause had failed to help her. She said: "This is all a *tamasha*. They receive public importance while it is I who am looked down upon in society." She did not even know that the accused had been acquitted by the sessions court, nor did she know that an appeal had been filed in the high court.

Meanwhile, many attempts had been made to harass her. The police had got a case filed against her at Kurnool, accusing her of having brought two girls to Hyderabad for the purpose of introducing them into prostitution. Aziz managed to meet one of the girls who confessed that they were being pressurised by the constable to make statements against Rameeza. Subsequently, the girl boldly stated this in court, so the case had to be withdrawn.

Rameeza also told us that a man had written a letter to her, asking her to live as his mistress. He had come to her house twice, to persuade her to accept this proposal. We then held discussions with neighbouring women so as to build up some protection for Rameezabee. We also brought some of the local college students and Mahila Mandal members together, and requested them to form a social defence team to give her social protection. In the beginning, Rameeza was not receptive to our efforts. When the man came again, the women surrounded him, abused him and beat him. Finally, he apologised to Rameeza and went away.

This action created some confidence in Rameeza's mind. Aziz, with whom she lives as his second wife, was not capable of supporting her fully. So we helped her to buy a sewing machine and arranged for her training. Today, she earns about Rs 4 a day. □