

Sick Fantasies

RAZIASULTAN

“Sultan Razia was a great monarch. She was wise, just and generous, a benefactor to her kingdom, a dispenser of justice, the protector of her subjects, and the leader of her armies. She was endowed with all the qualities befitting a king, but she was not born of the right sex, and so in the estimation of men, all these virtues were worthless.” (Minhaj-us-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*).

Minhaj was a perceptive historian, to have captured so sharply the essence of Razia’s career as Sultan of the infant kingdom of Hindustan established in the thirteenth century. Razia was the only woman in India to have ascended a throne in her own right, as lawful successor. All other queens, like Lakshmbai, for instance, were acting as regents for minor males. But the Razia of the contemporary historian, or even of the better textbooks available today, will be obliterated and cast aside by that monster of modern India, the popular cinema, which has turned her into a beautiful passive object to be wooed and fought over by men, rather than an achiever who created history.

Kamal Amrohi’s *Razia Sultan* has serious implications for the historian. A historical film is a potent means of interpreting events and personalities to people who will never be exposed to history in the course of their lives. Although a historical film may not be oral history in the technical sense, it could have the effect of contributing to oral history since it will become part of popular consciousness. While India has never produced a really good historical film, neither have we before produced such a monstrous distortion of historical reality as *Razia Sultan*. The fact that this film chooses to focus on a woman is not an accident. It is central to the blatant distortions indulged in by the film maker. Who cares about history, who cares about women, who cares about the truth? Not Kamal Amrohi, not the Bombay film world, not the fat financiers who poured millions into the film, not even the government, which gave it tax exemption, though the grounds on which it was given completely escapes one.

Let me here summarise the historical facts about Razia.



Razia Sultan : A joke in the name of history

This summary is based on the contemporary historian Minhaj’s account.

In the time of her father, Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash, Razia had exercised authority with great dignity. The Sultan had discerned in her countenance the signs of power and bravery, and although she was a girl and lived in retirement, the Sultan ordered that her name be put down as heir of the kingdom, his successor to the throne. Before the *farman* could be executed, however, some members of the king’s inner group asked him what wisdom there was in making a woman heir to the throne, when he had sons? The king replied that his sons were devoted to the pleasures of youth and that none of them was fit to rule. He said that after his death, the courtiers would find that there was no one more competent to guide the state than his daughter. It was later commonly agreed that the king had judged wisely.

Yet Razia did not succeed to the throne immediately after her father died. According to Minhaj, the princes and nobles placed Altamash’s son Ruknuddin on the throne. The new king squandered the public wealth on his debaucheries. His mother Shah Turkan took over the reins of government and perpetrated some cruelties. She had Altamash’s younger son Kutbuddin blinded and killed. While Ruknuddin was away from Delhi, Shah Turkan also tried to capture and kill Razia. But at this the people rose, and Razia seized upon the royal palace, and made Shah Turkan a prisoner. When Ruknuddin returned to the capital, he found that the guards and the Turkish

nobles had gone over to Razia's side. Ruknuddin was made prisoner and kept in confinement where he later died.

We are told that when Razia succeeded to the throne, "all things reverted to their old order." However, some prominent nobles refused to give her their allegiance, and instead they surrounded the gates of Delhi. Hostilities continued for a one long time. Sultan Razia pitched her tents on the banks of the Jumna. Several skirmishes took place between her army and the insurgent army. Finally, peace was made with "great adroitness and judicious management." Some of the insurgent nobles secretly crossed over to her side, and the rebellion subsided. After thus securing her position Razia conferred the office of Wazir on "an upright officer." The kingdom then began to enjoy peace, and, in the words of Minhaj, the power of the state became manifest so that all the princes and nobles made their submission. Subsequently, Razia ordered and her officers successfully executed, the capture of the Ranthambhor fort.

Razia then made two appointments, that of Malik Iktiyaruddin Itigin as lord chamberlain and Amir Jamaluddin Yaqut, the superintendent of the stables, as her personal attendant. According to Minhaj, these appointments created jealousy among the Turkish generals and nobles. She also cast off the veil of women and showed herself among her people. She ordered a march to Gwalior and ensured its submission. There was year of peace, but the following year, 1239, required her to put down the revolt of the governor of Lahore. In 1240, Malik Altunia, the governor of Tabarhind in the Punjab, revolted and some officers of the frontier supported him. Razia marched to Tabarhind to put down the revolt but she was attacked by the Turks. The Turks killed Yaqut, captured Razia and imprisoned her in Delhi. Razia now found an unexpected supporter in Altunia. The two contracted a political marriage, and joined forces to attempt to regain the kingdom, but they were defeated by the army of the new king Muizuddin, Altamash's third son. As Razia and Altunia were fleeing, their remaining forces abandoned them, they fell into the hands of the Hindus, and were killed. Razia had ruled for three and a half years.

To this account of the contemporary historian Minhaj, other medieval chroniclers added a few more details which have been used by the medieval historian A.B.M. Habibullah in his account of Razia's reign. One important detail is that when Ruknuddin ascended the throne, the people of Delhi did not take the customary oath of allegiance. Razia successfully exploited the popular discontent. Clad in a red garment which is customarily worn by the aggrieved, she showed herself to the people assembled for the Friday prayers. In the name of Altamash, she appealed for help against Shah Turkan. This gesture produced an intense upsurge of loyalty to the memory of Altamash, and the people raised her to the throne. Isami, a later chronicler, tells us that Razia entered into an agreement, the terms of which were that she be given a chance to prove her abilities, and if she did not prove better than men, her head be struck off.

In effect, this ascension negated the precedent established by the case of Ruknuddin, whereby the provincial governor had acquired a predominant voice in the king's nomination. The episode as well as Razia's entire career have to be placed in the historical context of the struggle between the crown and the nobles. Razia was the strong monarch who would not allow herself to be manipulated like a puppet. Habibullah writes : "She was herself aware of the dangerous power of her father's Turkish officers and slaves who monopolised all power in the state. The crown was vindicated when she overthrew the dangerous constitutional precedent. It was necessary now to follow it up by restoring the monarchy to its rightful position. For a dynastic leadership could yield the best results, in the circumstances in which the Turks were placed, only when it commanded absolute power. In thirteenth century India the monarch's firmness was the only justification for his/her existence. Courage and unflinching determination was to be her motto ; in strength of character she was to prove herself 'better than man'."

According to Habibullah, Razia's appointment of Yaqut was part of her plan to break the Turkish nobles' monopoly of all important offices. Razia is described as having bestowed a favour on Yaqut. The same language is used when describing the favour bestowed on Altamash by his predecessor. The conspiracy hatched by the nobles was not only intended to depose Razia but also to render future sovereigns permanently and constitutionally ineffective. The execution of their plan proved unexpectedly difficult because Razia commanded strong support in the city. Also, her vigilance left no scope for a palace revolution, and a military siege of the capital had already proved unsuccessful at the beginning of her reign. It was therefore necessary for the rebels to decoy her to a distant province, and to occupy the capital in her absence. Razia's deposition was in effect a victory for the military aristocracy. For the next 25 years, the oligarchy held actual power and succeeded in reducing all the male monarchs to nominal rulers, something they were not able to do to Razia.

There is no doubt that Razia's story could have made a magnificent film. Instead, Kamal Amrohi presents us with a calculated misrepresentation of facts. He has reduced the fiery and courageous Razia to a combination of a sleeping beauty and a Laila.

A review of the film is an unpleasant task but I must demonstrate the extent of vulgarity and dishonesty displayed. The only thing that seems to matter in the film is Razia's undying love for Yaqut. Repeatedly, we are shown a still of Razia being helped to dismount from her horse by Yaqut, and falling languorously into his arms in the process. Her normal posture in the film is recumbent. Sometimes we see her clad in diaphanous nightwear, spread across a couch, sometimes being put to sleep by obliging maidens who row her up and down in a sleeping boat. Her companion or a disembodied voice sings in the background to tell us Razia's thoughts which centre round such choice sentiments as "*Jalta hai*

badan-.Bhatak rahihun.-Koi honton se sulaye to soyegi" (My body is burning ..I wander around, lost...She will sleep only if someone puts her to sleep with his lips). The diaphanous wear is particularly offensive since history tells us that Razia cast off her veil and openly went out in male attire even at the risk of public disapproval.

Kamal Amrohi makes Razia into a schizophrenic in whom the sovereign and the woman are not only divided but are at loggerheads with one another. Thus we have a shot where Razia, the queen, rides on an elephant while her split self, the woman, trudges along in the desert sands, yearning for Yaqut. There is also a long drawn out sequence, supposed to be her fantasy, in which Yaqut comes along with *barat* in true filmi style and marries Razia, a coy bride, clad in red. The film's distortions continue along the same track of neutralising the force that Razia represented.

The first act Razia performs when she ascends the throne is to witness a vulgar display of maidens dancing in *gopi* fashion round a Krishna figure. In the rest of the film, the action is all looked after by Yaqut who reports to Razia from time to time. Thus we have a long scene of Razia swinging nonchalantly to and fro, and feasting her eyes hungrily on Yaqut, while he gives her an account of all the disturbances which have been quelled. In reality, every important action was led by Razia in person. The film also shows Yaqut acting as surrogate son or son-in-law to Altamash, who not only appoints him to high office but charges him to act as protector of Razia. He dutifully does this by tattooing Altamash's will, making Razia the heir, on his chest. In fact, it seems a tragedy in the film that Yaqut could not be the heir, as he, in fact, takes all the crucial initiative to secure the throne for Razia and to safeguard her both before and after ascension. He appears from nowhere at every critical moment, to rescue this damsel in distress from evil men such as Altunia. Never mind the fact that in history, Razia had contracted a marriage, for political reasons, with Altunia.

Kamal Amrohi's Razia could not care less for politics or sovereignty. Unlike the queen Razia who lived with the one ambition of wielding power, this filmi version proclaims that she finds the royal power an obstacle in her love (which is equivalent to her life) and that she will throw it away: "*Yeh shahanshahi libas kafan nai. Mai ise utarke phenk dungii*" She also declares: "In future, whenever people take my name, they will couple it with that of Yaqut." People did not do so because of the faint pull of historical facts, but they may well do so now, thanks to Kamal Amrohi's investment of crores.

The film ends with Razia and Yaqut ascending to the milky way, on their horse. They are pierced through with one spear, that thrown by Altunia. Earlier, he and Yaqut were also pitted against each other in a duel for Razia's hand, in a scene straight out of King Arthur and his knights. In medieval India, there was no question of a lady watching a tournament where knights battled for her love. This is a direct import from the west. There are too many outrageous and repulsive details in

this film to be recounted here. I must mention that the film makes out that the only kind of oppression and injustice perpetrated by bad kings was a sadistic exhibition of sexual perversion. Otherwise, medieval kings were basically good guys. The grotesque postures struck by girls on all possible and impossible occasions, under the pretext of palace interior decor, are, of course, not treated as evidence of exploitation. Thus, Razia is shown throwing pearls into the water, which are brought up by near nude women, and she is never seen in court or at a banquet, without women in undress posing all around her. Yet the people are shown protesting only at the sexual debaucheries of Razia's brother. In actual fact, it was the acts of cruelty of Ruknuddin and his mother which led the people to espouse the cause of Razia.

It is not only pornographic films which affect the perception of women in society. Such perversions of history have equally dangerous implications for women, and should be resisted. Besides, one wonders whether some of the money wasted on this distortion of history could not have been more profitably spent on the renovation of Sultan Razia's tomb, which lies in a state of shameful neglect, at Bulbulikhana, Delhi.

—Uma Chakravarti



KAYAMAT

A woman walks alone, barefoot, down the back alleys of Bombay. Within minutes she is attacked by men in a car. They chase, she runs. Then she is raped. This is the opening scene of the film. All this is supposed to be the outcome of local warfare between gangs of hoodlums. The girl's father tries to seek redress by appealing to the wealthy but goldenhearted smuggler hero Rameshwar alias Shyam. This male saviour specialises in taking revenge on the enemies of the poor, by unleashing his gang of ruffians. Of course, he offers his protection and revenge service to deserving women, too.

The scene shifts quickly to ruffian number two, Dayal. He is stroking his favourite pet, a near lifeless doll whom he calls "darling." When he wishes to conduct business, he orders her out to the car. Business entails extracting information from a rival thug. Meanwhile, the darling is still standing there, terrorstricken. Dayal calls her lovingly, strokes her again and then strikes her hard across the face. She falls, bleeding. He laughs and warns his enemy that this is what he does to his

darling when she disobeys him. Soon after this, Dayal forces himself on to Gita, the girlfriend of Rajeshwar who promptly rescues her. Dayal takes revenge by murdering Gita, just after her marriage to Rajeshwar.

Given this fine start of male terrorisation, we know what to expect. Rajeshwar, lonely, wronged, spends years accumulating wealth and power, but remains single, lost in memories of his beloved. Oh, he only has recourse to prostitutes. He happens to encounter Dayal once more, and, having high technology at his command, gets him kidnapped in a helicopter and whisked off to his residence, where he shoots him in a duel.

If violence, trickery, valour, wealth and power are the heroic qualities of Rajeshwar, they are also found in abundance in the other hero, policeman Kamal. The only difference is that the latter has the sanction of the law and the former does not. The cop also uses helicopters, cars and other pieces of high technology to chase the baddies. He has too a younger sister who adores him and a wife who worships him with *arti*, a precaution to maintain her *suhag* during his medal winning encounters. The good man thus has the good women at his disposal while the bad man has recourse to the bad woman, Shama, a dancing girl. True to the formula, cop and robber hero are childhood friends. They discover each other in a five star hotel and fall into each other's arms. But the storyline insists that the cop be set to catch the smuggler.

Shama is made the object of sale and purchase between Rajeshwar and a rival. Soon, she and her madam are lured into accepting seven lakhs as the price to falsely implicate Rajeshwar in a rape case. Unlike our real life courts that shift the onus of proof onto the woman victim, this court, even though the woman is a prostitute, promptly sentences the man to seven years' rigorous imprisonment. Rajeshwar feels let down that Kamal was unable to prove his innocence. So he hurls insults at him, and looks menacingly at Kamal's sister and wife.

The film then takes us scene by scene into the hunt, chase and systematic terrorisation of the sister by the hero. Worst of all is the self degradation that Kamal's wife is made to enact. She offers herself to Rajeshwar, in order to prevent him from raping her husband's virgin sister. She says: "Today I have got the chance to fulfil my true religion." Later, the sister tries to kill Rajeshwar with a spike but only succeeds in splashing herself with blood. This sight softens him into remorse, and he swiftly reverts to the role of protector, saving her from attempted rape by a rival gangster. Kamal, however, arrives, sees Rajeshwar, and fires. His sister cries out: "Brother, what have you done? This man is a *devta*, not a criminal. He saved my honour." Kamal embraces his dying friend, and we see in flashback, the two as adolescents embracing each other in slow motion. Need this friendship have been fought out over the bodies and beings of women?

—Nina Kapoor

BEABROO

This film is supposed to be an outcry against the forcible induction of women into the call girl racket. However the

presentation is such that it ends up exposing the female body and dwelling visually on violence in every scene. The real purpose of the film seems to be to offer sex and violence of the most perverted kind. The audience is encouraged to enjoy the torture women suffer at the hands of their clients. When a woman was being undressed by ten men, there were whistles from the audience, and when she was burnt with a cigarette but, there was laughter.

The film maker condemns the pimps as the main culprits in the flesh trade but nowhere indicts the clients or holds them responsible for its perpetuation. One of the victimised women decides to take revenge by killing a number of pimps, one after another. She does not direct her indignation against the "ordinary" men who are their customers. Instead, she preaches to a cabaret dancer that death is better than the kind of life she is leading. Though convinced that marriage is the only proper thing for a girl, she refuses to marry because she considers herself impure. Finally, she kills herself when the police arrive, because she does not want to surrender to a law which would condemn her for killing pimps which she does not consider a crime.

The title song tells the audience that women who are Sita and Kali, and who mothered Krishna and saints, ought to be better treated. However the only message that men who exploit prostitutes are likely to get from this film is that at best the women will kill themselves and at worst the pimps will be killed. In any case, they will be free to satisfy their hunger for perverted sex and sadistic violence at cinema halls.

—Prabha Rani

The film opens with a quote from an article in *Young India* by Mahatma Gandhi: "The problem of prostitutes will not be solved until women with extraordinary purity and strength of character take the responsibility of uplifting this fallen part of the human race."

In the garb of shocking the audience into realising the plight of prostitutes, producer Anand Girdhari and director Shiv Kumar in effect only exult in the violation of these women. Why else is the "good" woman who kills pimps shown dressed so scantily? The natural impact of such presentation is that the audience can only laugh at her antics.

The camera focuses only on women's, not on men's, nudity. Also, the pain of the women is not allowed to come through. For instance, after being gang raped, the heroine kills her abductor and then calmly walks out, most seductively clad. She reaches her friend's apartment and acts perfectly normal. There is no trauma, no breakdown. Instead, she indulges in reveries of her former song filled days with her boyfriend.

This kind of blatantly unrealistic portrayal makes it clear that the real purpose of the film makers is to sell the cult of male violence on women, and to profit from such merchandise. It is no accident that this four lakh budget film, which, by Bombay commercial standards, is a low budget, is reaping a rich harvest of Rs43 lakhs per territory. After the industry's big investment *Razia Sultan* flopped miserably, producers

directors, and distributors seem to be gravitating towards such greener pastures as *Be Abroo*. We are informed that five more such films are in the pipeline.

—Nina Kapoor

UNMAIGAL (Tamil)

Unmaigal is the story of people who are thrown into cliched situations, try to rise above them, but get bogged down by what the director seeks to show are the inescapable truths of society. Primarily, it is the story of Janaki, a woman of great intelligence and integrity, who finds that her husband has gone to bed with the maid servant and made her pregnant. When confronted, he shouts : “You are the one to blame for this. If you had been more of a wife to me, and had borne me a son, do you think I would have gone to her ?” Brushing aside his protests, she takes the courageous and dramatic decision to leave him and installs the maid in her place.

From the start, the director takes Janaki as an unusual and difficult strength of character, contempt for sense of fairness make her a misfit among colleagues and unpopular among students. Her husband finally suggests that she can “also” stay with him. To which Janaki retorts, in a memorable line : “Who do you think you are ? Lord Murugan ?” This is a reference to Subramania, son of Shiva, who has two wives.

The director then paves the way for her fall. Jeeva, an illegitimate child who grew up in an *ashram*, becomes a friend

of Janaki. Soon, he starts to have romantic ideas about her, though she sees him only as a lost soul needing companionship. Re enter the still proprietary husband to find Jeeva sitting in his wife’s house, and to overhear his declaration of love and Janaki’s shocked “Get out.” The husband then delivers an ultimatum : “Return to me, or marry this boy whom you have used to keep me at bay.”

But she does neither, and the film hurtles along to end with the timetested tearjerker of suicide by a helpless woman. An uncharacteristically subservient Janaki, bedecked in wedding finery, symbolic of her return to the married state, drinks poison and dies coughing blood in her husband’s lap.

Unmaigal makes you sit up, pleasantly surprised, but later, you find yourself wondering why the director, who tried to give an unconventional slant to an old story line, had to come up with the cliched suicide, brought about in a perfectly preposterous manner. Would a woman who took the considered decision of leaving an unfaithful husband, be so upset by his baseless charges as to hastily commit suicide ? Surely a woman who defied her husband once can defy him or his flimsy accusations again, and continue to live ? But no, the director says, not even an independent, intelligent woman can live without the support and status provided by her husband. Logic and aesthetics are sacrificed to bring home the “truth” that a courageous woman must be brought to heel. At any cost.

—Bharati Sadasivam

End Of A Life

Police and post mortem records available at Tiruppur, a bigish town in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, suggest that Nagammal Muniappan, a 29 year old college lecturer, died of hanging on July 1, 1983. The officials concerned have been going out of their way to assert that the death was a suicide. But investigations by various organisations have revealed that it was anything but suicide.

Nagammal’s troubles began before her marriage. Her brother contracted an intercaste marriage with the result that a larger dowry was demanded by all those who offered to marry Nagammal. Muniappan, an assistant professor in mathematics, demanded Rs 20,000 in cash and gold jewellery worth 40 sovereigns. He almost cancelled the alliance when her parents offered slightly less. For months, the bargaining went on. The price ultimately agreed on was Rs 12,000 in cash and gold ornaments worth Rs 45,000. The vows

of matrimony were taken on March 12, 1976.

In several letters to her friends, Nagammal said that Muniappan never touched her, and they had no conjugal relations at all. When she got a job as a lecturer, her in-laws used to snatch away her entire salary and only give her exact bus fare every day. When she protested, she was beaten. Her jewels were forcibly taken away from her. Then she was told to bring furniture worth Rs 5,000 from her parents. When she refused, she was tortured and driven out of the house.

She then started living in a hostel. After four months she got a job in a government college, and had to go to Muniappan’s house to collect her original certificates. She was beaten up badly and was given the certificates only after she signed some blank sheets of paper. She then began to share a flat with some women colleagues. In December 1978, Muniappan filed a

divorce petition and the the case dragged on for 10 months. It is said that he had already arranged another marriage alliance for himself. During this period, he several times accosted Nagammal on the road and beat her up in public, to force her to agree to a divorce.

Her brother, however, continued to press for a compromise. Finally, after an insecure agreement, Nagammal, loaded with jewellery, was sent back to her husband. Muniappan immediately took temple vows which prohibited him from having any physical relations with her. However, he transferred her fixed deposits to his own name, and also continued abusing, beating and starving her. She was kept confined to the house, and was not allowed to write to her parents or to meet neighbours.

On June 27, Muniappan decided that he and his wife should live separately from his parents so they moved into a separate flat. The next day, Nagammal went to work, looking quite normal. Muniappan, however, was busy spreading the rumour in his college that his wife was suffering from acute stomach ache. Nagammal’s colleagues not mention having been in

pain, though she always shared her feelings with them.

On the night of July 1, the lights were put off unusually early. Late at night, the landlord saw Muniappan spreading his bed on the verandah. "She is having the monthly curse", he explained. The next morning, when the milkman came, Nagamma did not open the door. The landlord was surprised because she was a very early riser. He told Muniappan to wake

her up. Muniappan knocked on the window. Suspecting something, the landlord made his grand-son climb onto the roof and peep in. The child saw Nagamma, hanging, dead. Muniappan immediately started saying that she had committed suicide due to stomach ache. This he said even before he entered the house.

The post mortem showed burn injuries on her face and abrasions on her

legs. A paper was found on which a sentence in Tamil was written: "I and my stomach ache are the sole reasons for my death", signed by her in English. The policemen refused to photograph the body and insisted on registering a case of suicide, in spite of Nagamma's brother's protests.

T.S.V. Hari, Madras

SHE HAS LEARNT TO FIGHT BACK

On November 27, 1983, the Forum Against Oppression Of Women took out a dignified march towards Vakola where Mr Zakariah, the husband of a Women's Centre member, lives.

The pamphlet distributed during the march gave information about the circumstances under which Mr Zakariah, who is a supervisor in a multinational company, has been ill treating his wife, Achamma, ever since they married in 1967. We reproduce extracts from the pamphlet.

"Just three days after the wedding, Achamma, to her utter dismay, discovered that her husband was already living with his maternal cousin and wanted to continue a sexual relationship with her. In other words, here was a man who wanted to sexually exploit other women while at the same time enjoying the status in society which his wife and her dowry brought him. Achamma was a working woman. Besides a sizeable dowry, she began to bring her pay packet home and thus contribute to the household expenses. Despite the terrible truth of having to tolerate the presence of the other woman, Achamma tried her best to make her marriage work. Early in her married life, she became pregnant. Despite this, her husband forced her to leave for the Gulf, in order to fatten the family income. While she slogged abroad, he continued living with his cousin sister. Achamma came back to India in time for her delivery. After the birth of her daughter she conceived again.

Life had degenerated into a nightmare for her. Bitter arguments about the other woman resulted in frequent quarrels which ended with physical and verbal abuse. Achamma was often hit in the stomach.

The result was miscarriage, septicemia and hospitalisation. Zakariah remained callous and indifferent to her. The brutality continued even after this until, finally, the physical cruelty and humiliation drove her out of the house. She lived alone, hoping that reconciliation might take place and she might some time lead a normal family life. All appeals to Zakariah to mend his ways fell on deaf ears. He continued to live an immoral life, had numerous affairs, even married a second time. His illegal second wife is a poor woman, equally ill treated.

Zakariah brainwashed their teenaged

daughter who used to live with Achamma. Now she has gone to live with her father and stepmother, leaving Achamma lonely. Today, Achamma continues to struggle alone, being denied the means to a comfortable existence and the love of her only child. Life as a single woman without the means to buy the necessities of life is bad enough, but Achamma had to face the malicious personal slander that follows cases such as hers. All these hardships have helped her become a strong woman who no longer submits to humiliation, who refuses to be smashed, who has the strength to fight back.

We, as women's organisations, feel that both Achamma and the second wife are victims of Zakariah's scheming and that it is high time he is brought to book."

As the *morcha* wound on its way, a curious crowd of onlookers gathered. Some members made short speeches to acquaint the neighbours with the situation. They sang songs and distributed pamphlets. Unlike the *morcha* taken out after the strange death of Varsha Venkatraman of Chembur, this *morcha* was not militant, nor was it a show of womanpower in numbers. It was womanpower in support of an oppressed woman who has been victimised for 16 years.

It is significant to note that there were many men amongst the supporters. It is high time we realised that a fight for justice is a fight for human dignity and freedom, affecting men and women.

—**Rinki Bhattacharya**

