

The Politics of Rape



"They hurled me from one man to another." -- Khursheed Begum



"They were like animals." -- Veena Hayat

The year 1991 in Pakistan has seen an absolutely horrendous increase in rape and violence against women at the hands of the state, particularly the police agencies and specially in Sindh where violence against women is being used as a tool of political repression. The instances are too many to list, but the latest has been the rape and torture of two women in Karachi, Sindh: Khursheed Begum and Veena Hayat. While the government finally has set up a tribunal to investigate the Veena Hayat case which had received considerable international attention, the agony of Khursheed Begum continues.

Khursheed Begum is an unassuming woman who lived a life of quiet struggle in Karachi's Sahabdar goth. Her crime: her husband Essa Baloch was a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) worker activist, paying a price for his political beliefs in jail. Essa was arrested during General Zia-ul-Haq's martial law and kept in jail for 8-1/2 years before finally being released through the amnesty granted to political prisoners by Benazir Bhutto on assuming power. He was rearrested on October 4, 1991. Khursheed's eldest son, 16 year old Zulfikhar who is not involved in politics was also arrested on November 1, 1991 and was not being produced in court. On November 13, Khursheed was returning from her husband's court hearing when she was seized, blindfolded and taken away to a dark room where she was raped and brutalized by men in uniform.

Veena Hayat is a dress designer by profession. Her crime: a long standing friendship with the co-chairperson of the PPP.

The two women were made to pay for these crimes. One in a police station, the other in the hitherto unviolated privacy of her own home. Khursheed Begum alleges rape and torture at the hands of the police, while Veena Hayat was molested and raped by a gang of five armed men who broke into her house. The men were more interested in her links with Bilawal House than they were in her valuables. The story might have come to the usual end at this point but the two women had one more thing in common: the courage to speak about the unspeakable, the will to fight for justice. They refuse to suffer in silence while their assailants go about their business unhindered in the land of the chadar and chardiwari.

Most recently Khursheed Begum was in Lahore to mobilize support and to plead for justice. She indicated that the officials seem to want to make a deal: for her to retract her case against the police in exchange for her son. She wants no compromise and only wants justice, but does not know where to turn and where to go. ☐

Action Alert

We urgently request you to immediately send telegrams/letters of appeal to:

Prime Minister M. Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister's Secretariat, Islamabad; President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, President's Secretariat, Islamabad; Chief Minister Sindh, Jam Sadiq Ali, Chief Minister's Secretariat, Karachi and copies of the same to the Pakistan ambassador in your country; demanding:

- 1) the immediate arrest of the rapists who Khursheed recognizes and are police officials;*
- 2) the immediate transfer of her son to a hospital;*
- 3) the withdrawal of her son's case from the Special Court, and*
- 4) the disbanding of all parallel courts like the Special Courts, Terrorist Courts, etc.*

Please send copies of your letters to:

Shirkat Gah, 18-A Mian Mir Road, P.O. Mughalpora, Lahore, Pakistan-15. ☐