

WILL THE COURT PUNISH THE RAPIST S.P?

This is the story of a brave tribal woman who is fighting for justice. Her name is Ledha. Perhaps she is the first tribal woman who stood courageously against a cruel, perverted Superintendent of police who raped her. She is fighting the case in Chattisgarh court.

She is from a small village in Sarguja district of Chattisgarh . She was married to Ramesh Nageshia, a tribal who was a member of the Maoist party. Just because she was married to him she was also branded as a Naxalite and was sent to jail on the charges that she was a squad member and participated in a land mine blast killing three CRPF personnel. She was arrested in the name Seema. She was in jail for one and half years. She had conceived by the time she was arrested. She languished in the jail during pregnancy and due to malnutrition, she gave birth to a weak child. Due to the efforts of her lawyer Mr.Amarnath Pandey she got bail for one month to deliver the child. She was again sent to jail. Finally she was acquitted from the case.

Ledha's advocate advised her to show the acquittal order at the police station so that the police would not harass her in future. Ledha went and showed the order of acquittal to the police. They pressurized her to make her husband surrender. They even lured her with an offer of money and a job for her husband. As Ledha had a child to look after, she was tempted by the offer. She innocently believed the cops and convinced her husband. She told him that even if something goes wrong, at the most he may have to serve imprisonment, but nothing worse than that would happen. She dreamt of having a nice future with her husband and the child.

The S.P of Sarguja District, S.R.P.Kalluri arranged for the surrender on May 28th 2006. As per his plans, the police force from Shankergarh, led by Mr. Kalluri himself, started off on the task. An additional force joined them in Kusmi. Ledha accompanied them. They got down from the vehicles in Kasmaar and went up to Civildagh village on foot. Ramesh Nageshia, Ledha's husband was already waiting there. The police beat him up black and blue immediately on reaching near him. Then S.P. Kalluri asked both of them to sit in the Gram Panchayat secretary's house. They both sat there talking. Assistant Platoon Commander Brijesh

Tiwari of the Special Armed Forces came into the house. Suddenly he shot Ramesh at point blank range. A shocked Ledha screamed in terror. But Ramesh died on the spot. She was brought to S.P Kalluri. He ordered them to kill her also. But somebody said that after all she was a woman, so why kill her? Everybody laughed at this. She was taken to Shankergarh Police station and let off from there after thoroughly terrorizing her of dire consequences if she revealed what had happened in front of her eyes. A very usual story appeared in the daily news papers that there was an encounter in Shankergarh Police Station limits and a Naxalite had been killed.

She went back to her relatives' place and did not dare to come out for some days. On 30th September 2006, when she went back to her village she came to know that the police were searching for her. She was picked up by them on Dusserah. After taking her to the police station they asked her to remove her clothes. When she refused to do so her parents were also brought there and they beat her father severely until she obeyed them. S.P Kalluri came and slapped her on her face. Ledha fell on the ground along with her child. When the child was uncontrollably crying, and the old parents begging him to leave her alone, S.P. Kalluri raped her. He went to the extent of such cruelty that he inserted green chillies into to her vagina. She was kept in the lock up and the next day Dheeraj Jaiswal, a notorious S.P.O came to her along with four other constables in a drunken state. They all gang raped her. This went on for ten days. All the time the child who cannot yet walk and talk, due to the trauma, used to fervently cry. Finally she was let off. A torn and shattered Ledha met the lawyer with great difficulty in January 2007. She filed a case against S.P. Kalluri and others in the Chhattisgarh High Court. The case was admitted recently.

A joint fact finding team initiated by CAVOW and PUCL Chattisgarh went on a 3day tour to Sarguja district. When the team met Ledha, who was in hiding (obviously for security reasons) she narrated her story to them. She is a brave woman who is determined to fight. She was feeling very guilty for believing the police and making her husband a victim. The pain was so intense in her eyes when she said "Dhoka Khaliye hum". (we were betrayed.) She is a tiny lean figure. Her child Ranjita is very weak and traumatized. Whenever somebody touches her mother she becomes shaken and terrorized. She cries uncontrollably. The trauma is clearly

visible on her tiny face. Ledha cannot work for her living as she has been fighting against the state and is in constant threat. But she does not want to give up. She says “Agar marna hai tho ladke marenge.” (If death is for sure, let me fight and die.) When one of us asked what punishment should the culprits get? She said with out hesitating “mauth ki sajaa, aur kya?” (Ofcourse, death punishment. What else?)

It is not for the first time that the state is using rape as a weapon on women to “control” or suppress movements. But it is not every time that the victims can fight the state. It is not only because Ledha is brave. Such braveness is definitely required but it is due to the peoples’ movements and the support which Ledha is getting in her struggle that prompted her to fight. Ledha in any case is fighting. It is now the duty of all democratic minded people and the organizations to extend their strong support to Ledha. Let us realize that it is a fight Ledha can not do alone.