

COMMENT

Nilofer, Asiya, Manorama

May 29, 2009. It was one more agonising night for the people of Shopian in Kashmir, better known as the valley of death. Two girls Nilofer and Asiya were allegedly raped and murdered by security personnel. Be it the case of Manorama in the North East or the present case of Nilofer and Asiya, the tale is tragic. The administration, however, tried to prove that the death of Nilofer and Asiya was due to drowning. But millions of Kashmiris across the valley didn't buy it and they took to streets to voice their anger. Kashmir has been in flames since the Shopian incident took place last month.

What is unfolding in Kashmir is no simple confrontation between injured pride and dignity. The mass protests, wave upon wave of them, have been continuing for the last few weeks defying curfews and police high-handedness. How long they can rule the troubled state by perennially imposing curfew is open to question. Like all previous peaceful agitations by the people of Kashmir, this one seems to be a complicated contest of desires and visions, ambitions and grudges, with marchers and martyrs on the streets.

The authorities always try to project army as the holy cow which it is not. From times immemorial army has been plundering and raping. The very attitude of persons in uniform, to women has not been anything good to write about.

There has been one soldier for 6-7 Kashmiris. North East too will soon resemble Kashmir in terms of troops-people ratio. Life under such circumstances doesn't need much to elaborate.

Right now paramilitary forces along with some crack state police units are conducting operations against the maoists in Lalgarh of West Bengal. A recent press release by the central committee of CPI (Maoist) states frequent cases of strip searching of women, rape threat and actual rape by security men.

In war—or in insurgency women are the worst sufferers. The women of Kashmir know it. The women of North East know it. And now the tribal women of jungalmahal of Bengal experience the same trauma.

Surprisingly, no political party, even on the left, not to speak of the right, takes the issue of rape by security personnel seriously, albeit it has been virtually institutionalised over the years. Human Rights Bodies just produce reports on sexual abuses on women by security forces and army without making any concrete steps to stop it. And most women's organisations, barring one or two owing allegiance to different political outfits are more interested in women's quota in parliament and legislatures. They have no time to think over the ever rising incidents of rape by security men.

India doesn't have any institution like the 'School of Americas' where security personnel are being specially trained to get brutalised themselves before indulging in brutalities on the innocent people. In India all police, para-military and military units are given free hand and tacit approval to do what they would like to do in the field. The culture of sadism in the security establishment is so pervasive that nothing will change unless progressives, democrats and liberals continually raise their voice against rape by security forces. And Nilofars, Asiya and Manoramas, otherwise caught in the cross-fire between army and militants,

will perennially suffer and die in silence. To them women's liberation movement is at worst a mockery! □□□