

# Was there not even a single human among you?



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Right from the Epic Era down to the contemporary times, it has been only on woman's body that the so-called 'heroic history' has been written. All epics that dished out panegyrics on kings' valor and war victories celebrated destruction of women in the defeated countries. The kings', that is, men's, adventures were recorded without qualms, as exhibited in cutting the tresses of women in the captured countries and using them as ropes to pull down trees (Nattrinai 270). It is this age-old male chauvinistic mindset handed down from generation to generation, which has ruined the two daughters of Manipur.

This is a country of contrasts and ironies. On the one hand, we hold aloft the values of womanhood in preserving family system, culture, and heritage and on the other, we are good at letting loose a reign of terror against women.

Deftly hiding whom woman should be safeguarded from, we have been using women as dice and sacrificing them from the Kurukshetra battle to Manipur riots. That the women immolated themselves when they found their country beating a hasty retreat was a testament to the murderous male chauvinism.

It has been an age-old procedure that if a country, a race, or an individual must be defeated, disgraced, or humiliated, the dignity and modesty of women of the country or

the race or the family should first be ruined. The violence on the Manipur women is a just tip of the misogynistic iceberg having a long tradition.

### **Historic humiliation**

At the point when power and male domination converge, both men and women are hunted down. In the mad rush, the herd mentality too joins, making the battlefield even more macabre. For men, the body is in torment and for women life is in torment. All the violence perpetrated on woman's body is just an extension of the perspective of woman, not as a fellow human being, but as a body-commodity.

Women are only thus approached at all levels of the society. It is just to camouflage this evil and cruel outlook on women that our culture trumpets pompous words such as mother country, mother tongue, womanhood, motherhood, and womanly forbearance. A mob of men has tortured and tormented the Manipur daughters. It is not a one-off. We have long resigned ourselves to this trend, living in this century.

Countless were the bodies of women slaughtered by men during the India - Pakistan Partition. Saadat Hasan Manto, who presented disturbing portraits of cruelties and atrocities perpetrated on women during the Partition, said, "If what I have written seems to you a stain, it means that the country we live in is more stained. My stories reflect the bitter truth of the society."

This hits home how fact is sadder than fiction.

The list of historical episodes that showed how women were butchered is inexhaustive: The anti-

Sikh pogrom during the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Gujarat riots, Veerappan hunting mission, Ariyalur, Villupuram, the Mothers of Manipur's struggle, Una, Hathras, Delhi, Badaun, Kathua.... In the same Manipur way back in 2004 when the paramilitary forces branded a young woman as a terrorist and sexually harassed her, was justice established?

### **Mob violence**

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the number of anti-woman crimes was 4,28,278 in 2021. As for the sexual harassment cases, it has been recorded that on an average, 87 women are raped every day. The cases have recorded 87 per cent rise between 2011 and 2021.

The connection between the mob mentality deeply rooted in the last decade and the anti-woman violence merits a deep study. When an individual, who hesitates to commit a crime as a single man, joins a mob, he goes about exhibiting his dormant violent tendencies.

The fact that it took a video of two women being stripped naked and paraded for the government to focus its attention on the Manipur violence speaks volumes about the 'dignity' of our democracy.

This is the 'most spectacular' political scenario that it took the government 70 days to react aggressively to the Manipur violence which it had all along tried to show just as a one-off.

If you talk about this most cruel issue, it will be twisted as an anti-government malice. "You talk about this issue. What about other issues?" say some people, indulging in whataboutism. They are also participants in the crime.

It is a general trend that when incidents of violence happen in any part of the country beyond a day, they are branded as 'uncontrollable' and allowed to continue. Manipur riots are no exception. When government and power join the ruling forces, it is women who have to bear the brunt of violence.

### **Who're criminals?**

There is no dearth of laws in the country. There are several pro-women laws on subjects ranging from sati to safety at workplaces. But they remain only on paper. Had they been scrupulously implemented in letter and spirit, there would not have been a need at all for the laws themselves.

The powers-that-be knew well that the outrage sparked by the video on day one would over the days wear off. An issue is prevented from escalating into a major problem and the rallying of people is thus stalled. When a problem inches towards solution, it gets distracted and another steps in, demanding our attention.

It works only in favour of the rulers that public memory is short and the people, caught as they are in the travails of their day-to-day life, become nonchalant and insensitive. They will forget today's problems and cruelties within five years; it is this trend that sustains several politicians' way of life.

The government has not yet announced measures for the two victimized women's physical and mental wellbeing and for their future. So far, six persons have been arrested in connection with the incident. But are they alone criminals?

The government must follow in letter and spirit liberty, equality and fraternity enshrined in the Constitution. Only when the government is for all, it is a democratic government. But when it fails to administer justice without religious, linguistic, gender and racial prejudices and partialities, it's what will happen as it does now.

When Panchali was disrobed in the Gauravas' court, was there none who wanted to stop the crime? It is the same question that seems to be itching to be hurled at the Manipur government and at the mob of men who stripped naked the Manipur daughters: Was there not even a single human among you?

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**

