

“A murderer destroys the physical body of his victim - a rapist degrades the very soul of the helpless female”. What could women living in the garrisoned Kashmir valley have in common with women coming from any other militarised situation? Indeed, the denial of her rights to exist as a human being.

The worst sufferers in any conflict situation, women are outraged of their modesty and honour, landing them into a state of identity crisis.

Rape against women in any armed conflict is one of the most heinous violations of human rights, in terms of its scale, the nature of the atrocities and the number of persons affected. An instrument of war, rape aims at demoralising and humiliating the opponent. Perhaps a psychological torture is worst than a physical torture in terms of the overall impact it has on the victim. Daily one witnesses many such incidents yet they are hardly recorded or let alone acknowledged of. However this may be for the reason that not many people come forward to file complaints of rape and sexual abuse either for the social norms or the trauma the victim goes through in the trail or it may point to the indifferent attitude of the govt to the plight of women.

Unfortunately a rape victim not only faces a public reprimand but also goes through the family and mental trauma all over during her lifetime. Women are ostracized and discriminated by their families and communities unjustly for what they have gone through.

For last 16 years, the military occupation in Kashmir has had a devastating impact on the lives of the Kashmiri people and women in particular. Women have been repeatedly raped and molested at the hands of the merciless dominant forces existing in the valley. Brutal incidents of the mass rape of Kashmiri women including minors and aged have changed the meaning of existence in Kashmir. One such grave incident is of the Kunan Poshpora on Feb 21, 1991, where the 5th Rajputana Rifles raped over 30 women and children. Again in year 1997 there were mass rapes in Wawoosa, a village nearly 8 Kms, away from Srinagar, where six women were gang raped by the security forces.

The frequency and the magnitude of these incidents of and on vary with the prominence of the area. This has been more of a common phenomenon in far-flung areas close to the border than in urban areas.

Women operate under a certain value system, which has Psychological, legal, social, moral, and financial connotations. It's within these connotations that their lives revolve. Unaware of their legal rights, women have remained suppressed and unreceptive towards the violent and immoral incidents. For the lack of awareness, very few women prefer to take to court and file a case against the perpetrators. More over the lack of supportive system, fear and social stigma inhibits the women to let alone talk about these abuses.

It is high time that the shackles of misconception are conked out. Until and unless we are not able to bring awareness in women folk, women empowerment will only prove rhetoric. It has to be substantiated by the issues like decision making power and political rights of women.

The existing norms of humanitarian law allow for the prosecution of rape as a war crime but those norms are based on violations to the honour and reputation of the woman and thus themselves contain gender specific biases about the rights of women.

For long Kashmiri women have maintained silence over the atrocities committed to them. Although there are some NGO's and women groups working for women empowerment and emancipation, yet nothing has been done to bring to justice the victims of this immoral act.

One of the extreme expressions of the patriarchal drive towards masculine domination over the women, rape aims at degrading a women's dignity and therefore needs to be addressed accordingly.

Life has turned very hard for Shameeli and Saja; both residents of Wadoora in district Handwara, a place lying hardly at one km distance from the border. Wadoora being close to border is prone to shelling and violent incidents in which many civilians have been killed and injured. Further, the area faces threats from renegades who harass people. The worst hits are women who are often subjected to harassment and molestation.

On the fateful day of 20th June 2000, at dawn about 4 am, 21 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) carried out a crack down on the entire village of Wadoora. During the search operation, Army caused a lot of damage to the field crops and material goods. After search the army arrested 500 villagers including nearly 100 women. Usually only men are taken in custody during any search operation. However in Wadoora even women are not spared. This has been a major problem for the residents of Wadoora constantly posing a threat to the life and honour of the residents. During any search operation women are taken to the camps and sometimes even detained and subjected to humiliation.

All the arrested were detained for the day in the Wadoora payeen camp, at half a Kilometre distance from the village. However in the evening all the detainees were allowed to go back to the village except two women namely Musmati Shameeli (18) W/o Mohd Shafi Beigh R/o Wadur Bala and Musmati Saja (25) W/o Gaffar Mir R/o Nichama Wadoora, who were detained in the camp. Both the women were nine months pregnant yet the Army did not release them. The villagers pleaded the concerned officials for their release. Instead all their pleas received deaf ears. Gh Qadir, an Ikhwani R/o Bitchingi Bainpora - neighbouring village of Wadoora, working with the 21 RR posted in the area couldn't bear to see the two helpless pregnant women being physically assaulted by the army. He intervened and requested the army to release the two women. His persistence to free the two women finally culminated into a scuffle with the army. The army publicly threatened him of bearing the brunt of intervening into the incident and as a result he was brutally murdered by the troops of 21 RR.

The search operation continued for the consecutive next nine days. All the villagers would be arrested in the morning following an army cordon and released in the evening. However the two ladies were kept captive for the nine days. It was only when Wali Mohammad Mir their uncle filed the case against the armed persons, that the two ladies were released.

After spending nine days in police custody, the two had a woeful tale to narrate. After being detained, the two were of and on harassed by the RR men till their release. Both the ladies beseeched the Major for mercy to allow them to go back to their homes. It was Major Malik of 21 RR who physically abused both the women, ignoring their worsening condition. The harsh treatment meted out to them, reflected on their health.

Since the first day, the condition of Shameeli and Saja started degrading. "They kept our face covered, so that we might not recognise them. Every day nearly 5-8 persons would physically assault us. They would beat us ruthlessly and shower abuses. For the ten days we were kept captive, we were not provided anything to eat. Our condition started worsening with each day", laments Saja. Both the ladies delivered complicatedly. While the child of the Saja was stillborn, Shameeli's child died few hours after the birth. Since that day, Shameeli's mental condition has aggravated. Since then she is suffering from mental stress disorder, which now shows on her social life.

This depleting condition of Shameeli has brought her nuptial life at the verge of divorce. Both the women now face a social rebuke. Even their families hold them responsible for the defamation and money wastage on case proceedings. It has been since four years that the incident took place. However the memories of the incident and the loss of their babies continue to haunt the two women.

Their Uncle Wali Mohammad Mir registered a case against the army in the Handwara police station on 30th June 2000. On their release the area demonstrated protest against the atrocities of the army. Further after their release from the security forces custody the two women were not medically examined. "We were threatened of dire consequences by the army if we filed an FIR or medically examined those ladies. But

inspite of all odds, we registered an FIR within a weeks time from their release in the Handwara police station Even the police came to their residence for recording their statement” says Wali Mohammad..

Early that year Wali Mohammad Mir registered a case in the State Human Rights Commission. Even after many hearings nothing has been done. Earlier RR men tried to bribe the uncle of the two girls by giving him 10,000 rupees in cash and nearly 1500 Kgs of fruit. However on the persistence of Late Gani Lone (Hurriet Leader), Wali Mohammad Mir refused the intentions of the forces and inspite of all hardships pursued the case in SHRC.

Pleading the case for now more than four years has caused a lot of trouble for the whole family of the two women who find it difficult to pursue the case due to the financial constraints and the threat from the forces.

Life does not exist in vacuum. It is an entwined complex thing. Wadoora incident does not end with the plight of Saja and Shameeli. Instead it has many more suffering characters to its credit like Aaisha and her family who lost their only support Ghulam Qadir Hajam - an Ikhwani who got killed by the army on his intervention in Shameeli and Saja’s case.

Aaisha (35), a resident of Bitchingi Bainpora, neighbouring village of Wadoora while talking to the *Voices Unheard* recounted, “Ghulam Qadir was a farmer by profession. In a year of drought we lost all harvest. We had no financial asset to sustain and each day was getting hard to live. Every day new problems would crop up. For lack of school fee, my daughter was not allowed to enter school and debts taken were getting huge to be paid back. Following this growing insecurity Ghulam Qadir turned to a pro government militant (Ikhwani) in 1995 and was finally killed on June 20th 2000 by the 21 RR following a scuffle with them over Shameeli and Saja”.

Aaisha further recalling the whole tragic incident broke down “The day he got killed, I gave birth to a boy. It was all happiness and joy. We both had anxiously waited for the day and I had sent one of my relatives to inform him. Next day, on 21 June at around 1.30 a.m, there was a knock at the door. I held my baby in my arms and opened the door. I couldn’t find anybody. I searched here and there, until my eyes caught hold of the body drenched in blood and tored out in abdomen with chopped limbs. I couldn’t recognise the body. My whole being got numbed and as I slowly went near it, I lost all my senses to find it Ghulam Qadir. I wailed and collapsed down. In the meanwhile all the neighbours had gathered around but none of them voiced against the brutality. They kept silent in fear of army’s repercussion”.

The Army itself labelling Ghulam Qadir as a militant registered an FIR.

Since then Aaisha made all efforts to punish the culprits. In spite of having no family support and financial constraints stretching her hard she filed a case with the State Human Rights Commission three years back. However since then nothing has come out.

After her husband’s death Aaisha’s life was completely shattered. All fingers in the village including her in laws pointed to her chastity. They accused her of having illicit relationship. Since the day Ghulam Qadir had joined as Ikhwani the whole village had got against him. They would of and on harass the family. Now after his death the village had left no stone unturned to dispel Aaisha and her two children from the village. “They would often abuse and beat me. I was afraid to move out of my house but I had no option as I had to earn by begging to sustain my family. For nobody there to take care of the 4 acres of land I had, it became barren”, says Aaisha.

Fearred by the villager’s threatening; Aaisha approached the State Police based at Wadoora camp for protection. The police immediately took action and threatened the villagers not to create problem for Aaisha and her family, which finally led to respite in the situation.

Today Aaisha finds it hard in view of the growing responsibilities to support her family. There are many problems, which the family face. For the lack of male presence in the family, it is very difficult to live alone in such a violence prone area.

Her elder daughter Asiya (8) studies in 3rd standard and her son Suleiman (4) is in nursery. Though the school has offered free education to the children, yet the family has no sufficient finances to let alone satiate the innocent starving children.

Of and on government provides relief to the suffering families in the village. But till date not a single deserving family has been allotted relief. "All the relief goes to the well-off families either for their political influence or support by the army", regrets Aaisha.

A Wadoora incident is not in isolation to the suffering of just three helpless women but to the number of lives attached to those women. Media may have given the space for the incident, Government may have assured for the justice but alas the village filled with numerous tragic incidents continues to live with pain suffering and silence.

IKHWANI TERROR

Tabassum Ishtiaq / Asma Dhar

Yet, another case, yet another story. What we are doing is read it, talk about it and later forget it. The new dimensions in Kashmiri women sufferings started 16 years back like killing, rape, molestation, kidnapping, verbal abuse and torture. Apart from the numerous incidents reported in media, there are many incidents that go unreported.

Special Operations Group (SOG) was formed with the aim of combating militancy in the valley. But with its formation the people of valley and particularly women suffered most as their intervention was more in personal matters than in security matters. Thus making the life of Kashmiri people hell.

The big question is - Is Government really helpless in dealing SOG? Yes, but it seems that Government is even more helpless when it comes to dealing with Government sponsored gunmen, sheltered in SOG and army camps. It is these Ikhwanis that have created havoc through, abduction, molestation, extortion and killing.

Sotharan is an exemplary village when it comes to *Ikhwani* terror. A village 15 kms from Beerwah, has a population of 150 households i.e. nearly 1000 families. The village is a hub of *Ikhwanis* (government gunmen), who harass people in the name of extortion and carry out abduction. Nearly 20 Ikhwanis reside in the 34 RR Drang camp, 2 ½ Kms from Sotharan. The *Ikhwanis* for their alliance and support from the army often visit the Sotharan village and allegedly harass people especially women folk.

For this *Ikhwani* terror, one may find many withered faces of destitution and suffering. The youth that should have blossomed with happiness suffocates to strive. The same is what happened to Shameema (13) d/o Abdul Rehman Hajam r/o Sotharan Beerwah. Eldest of her five sisters, Shameema was abducted by a notorious Ikhwani Mohammad Amin Khan along with five of his accomplices on the intervening night of 15 and 16 June 2004 at around 1 O' clock. Amidst firing, Mohammad Amin Khan forced his entry into the residence of Shameema and abducted her while she was fast asleep. Hearing gunshots the family woke up and tried hard to resist the abduction bid. During the resistance, Shameema got badly injured on face and arms. The family pleaded the Ikhwani for mercy, which however went to deaf ears. The whole incident took place in absence of Shameema's father, who had gone to a neighbouring village for some work. Following the incident, the villagers protesting against the alleged abduction, went to the neighbouring village and informed Shameema's father of the abduction. An FIR was lodged in the Choki Khar police station (FIR26/2004). The police came to the residence of Shameema and recorded the family statement. Next day, Amin's accomplices again raided Shameema's residence and threatened them of dire consequences for giving their names or making any statement before the police. The family informed the concerned minister of the threatening, who ordered the police to provide protection to the family.

Meanwhile, unable to get the girls whereabouts, the family went to the concerned minister, who pressurised the police posted in the area for immediate action. Finally after severe search and inputs from some informed sources, Shameema was recovered along with the arrest of 2 Amin's accomplices and 10 other locals involved in the crime. However, owing close alliance with the security force personnel, all the arrestees were bailed out after 20-25 days while, the main accused Mohammad Amin Khan is still at large.

Talking to the *Voices Unheard*, Shameema's uncle Ghulam Mohammad Hajam said, "Shameema was abducted and consequently physically assaulted for five days. Amin and his partners in crime would shift Shameema from one place to another. Although family witness to the incident and the girl herself recorded her statement before the police, yet nothing has been done by the police so far to take into custody the main

culprit Amin. The uncle of the girl further alleged that Army had pressurised the state police not to arrest Amin for his close liaison with them”.

Revealing Amin’s background, Ghulam Mohammad Hajam said, “Till the beginning of turmoil, Mohammad Amin Khan was a farmer. Then he crossed over the line of control and turned militant. A year later, he left the organisation and became a government gunman (Ikhwani). Since then there has been no alleviation in his brutal activities. Amin was married to lady from neighbouring village in Drang whom he left some years back. He later abducted another girl from the neighbouring village and forcedly married her. On June 1, 2004 militants ambushed his residence. In the encounter, Amin’s father, wife and son died. It was fourteen days after in order to take revenge that Amin abducted Shameema and raped her”.

After Shameema’s release, she was sent for medical examination. The reports of which are yet to be received. Following her release and woeful tale, villagers came out and held massive protest against the accused and demanded his immediate arrest. However Amin still at let loose warned the villagers of similar repercussion if they continued with the protest.

Fearing worst consequences, the villager including close relatives feel hesitant to come forward or raise their voice against the daily harassment they face at the hands of these government sponsored gunmen.

The family of Shameema for lack of support and fear moves from one place to another. Since the day of incident, the village wears a gloomy look. Amin’s freedom and fear both haunt the villagers who now find it appropriate to move out of the village to safer areas.

CRUEL OF FATE

Tabasum Ishtiaq

Life has been a struggle for Sara (40), resident of Handwara. Belonging to a very poor family, her parents got her married to an already married person having four children at a very tender age. Few years later, tragedy befell her.

In a road accident her husband got killed. It came as a major set back for the family of Sara, who now had eight children (four from her husbands first wife and four her own) to feed, besides her mother in law. Each day was getting harder and harder for Sara and her family to make both ends meet.

When their attempts to somehow sustain the family turned futile, Sara remarried her brother-in-law Gul Mohammad Mir. A businessman by profession, Gul Mohammad was already married having three children. It was Gul Mohammad who took the responsibility of the whole household. With a large family of 11 children (9 daughters and 3 sons) and four women to support including his mother, Gul struggled hard to suffice the needs of the family.

On 7-09-2001, during an army crackdown by 21 RR of the Zachildar camp, Handwara which began at 6 a.m in the morning till 12 Noon, army took Gul Mohammad with them on pretext of purchasing fruit from him. On resistance by the family members, the army threatened the family to go back and assured that Gul Mohammad would be returned back in the evening. When Gul Mohammad did not return back, his family again went to the camp. This time the army got furious and claimed that they had released Gul Mohammad. On the hue and cry of the family, the army personnel resorted to cane charge, turning the members back. Next day the family again went to the camp, pleading the army for Gul Mohammad’s release. This time the army went haywire, beating the whole family ruthlessly and showering abuses. Following the accesses by the army the family turned to the elders of the village for support. Fearing similar treatment to them by the army, the villagers refused to protest against the atrocity. One reliable source having liaison with the army told Sara that her husband was beaten and tortured to death by the army. He also showed her the spot, which bore blood marks and a pair of teeth. Sara could not believe her eyes, in just a fraction all her hope died. She was left dumb stricken. Soon the word spread and all family members reached the spot. Even all the villagers gathered. When the family went to register an FIR, they were shocked to know that army had already registered an FIR accusing Gul Mohammad of harbouring militants and providing them all basic amenities. However the family refuted the allegations as baseless. They further alleged that Gul Mohammad was not involved in any illegal activity. After twenty days, FIR was registered bearing number 342/ 364 RPC. Four person witnesses to the incident gave their verdict. Nearly three years

have passed but till date the haunted memories of the past are still alive. Sara's eyes glistened with tears as she narrates the whole incident. Since that day it has been hard for her. The whole incident took place on the backdrop of a family feud as narrated by Sara. Earlier in view of the growing responsibilities, Sara had her elder daughter Shaheen's Nikah at a very tender age of 8 with a boy Samad Mir (10) from the neighbouring village. Sara particular for having no male member except Gul Mohammad in the family adopted the boy. As Samad reached adolescence, he forced the family to get him married formally. The family however refused to marry their daughter at that very tender age as she was studying at that time and was not even of marriageable age. This irritated the Samad Mir who forced the family to marry him otherwise he would involve militants for the decision. The family completely refused to marry Shaheena (14) at that time. A day after, Samad along with a group of militants entered the residence of Sara. After knowing the reasons, the militants decided in favour of the Sara. This infuriated Samad, who straightway went to the Zachildar army camp and alleged Gul Mohammad of hiring militants. The next day army issued a list of persons involved in illegal activity. The list also had Gul Mohammad's name. The cordon of the area and subsequent arrest of Gul Mohammad followed it. Since then nothing is known of him except that what Sara had been told and witnessed off by the reliable source.

Three years have passed, but the family is in miserable condition. With no one to support apart from the constant threats by Samad each day is getting harder for Sara. For the lack of manpower the land has been left barren. This has resorted the family to begging. All the widows in the family accept their mother who is quite aged leave their houses in the morning for begging. It is through begging that family sustains. "Sometimes we starve for day's altogether. At times we think of killing ourselves but then we look at our children, they haven't seen anything yet. They have a long way to go" sobs Sara. Tired of the threats by Samad the family gave a written statement to the state police against the alleged psychological harassment by Samad.

Sara's life is a chain of worries and unsurpassed problems. It has been now three years that the family have filed a case in SHRC. But till date nothing has come out from the inquiries. The family continues to struggle without any respite. Till date they have received no relief or compensation from any government or private organisation.

Left to the mercy of destiny, with poverty and agony pulling at each other hard the family is left to strive.

A WOMAN'S ELUSIVE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Asma Dhar

Disappeared brother, deserted wife and life full of miseries, defines Zooni. Disappointed and disillusioned from every quarter, Zooni (36) from Handwara faces the worst, which she ever thought of. The disappearance of her brother not only ruined her parental house but even her husband deserted her.

After the arrest of his brother, her husband deserted her as she was pursuing his brother's case in the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and used to visit different jails of the state, which he never approved off. Deserting her, he forcefully married off one of her daughter Hafeeza who is only 13 years of age for the sake of Rs 15000.

Narrating her woeful tale Zooni said, "My husband is a drug addict for that he needs money. First he sold our three and a half acre of farm and cattle. Now he has sold his daughter for Rs 15000. Although his parents are well aware of his habit, yet they support him in all his misdeeds. Now he sold his own daughter. Earlier Zooni took the help of the village elders and his family members for his husband's misbehaviour. But all their advices took to deaf ears. Fearful, Zooni's daughter ran away from her father's house. She is now staying with her mother. "We both live in a constant fear. As my husband is constantly harassing me to return Hafeeza back. We were hiding for 2 months because of his fear. He has even registered a case of abduction in police station".

Zooni has nowhere to go. With each passing day, her hopes with the tedious judicial system are feigning. Surviving for her daughters and to fight for her disappeared brother, Zooni laments, "I know he was innocent. I will fight for my brother till end of my life".

“My younger sister is only 22 years of age. She turned almost blind due to ceaseless weeping and to save her eyes, she was operated two years back. All our savings went into her operation”, narrated Zooni. To sustain her mother, sister and a daughter Zooni is doing infinitesimal jobs.

On November 2003, yet another blow struck her when her father died. “My brother’s disappearance was too much for his heart to take and he finally died of heart attack. My mother Fazi is already in extreme shock”, says Zooni. The sorrow of Zooni does not end here “The only source of sustenance is my brother, an auto driver. Life has been really difficult for him to somehow make two ends meet. In spite of his wife’s constant taunts, we still stay there, as we have nowhere to go. In this hour of need and support, she has made our life miserable. Many times my daughter thought of attempting suicide.”

The tedious judiciary system, unawareness, poverty and indifferent attitude of Government have made not only Zooni’s life miserable but impossible.

WIFE SEEKS HUSBAND’S WHEREABOUTS

Tabasum Ishtiaq

Saleema (35) W/o Mohammad Abbas Mir R/o Wadoora is living a life of hardships. Four years back, life took a fast turn for her, shattering all her dreams into despair.

It was in early autumn in 2000 that Army led by a Major of the Dragmulla camp raided their residence in Wadoora payeen. It was on the strong information that a militant Saleema’s husband was hiding in the house. The army searched the whole area till 11:30 pm in the late evening. Unable to find anything they searched the whole house a number of times. Just as they began to move out, one of the armed personnel by chance turned down the rice sack and found a gun kept hidden inside it. This further assured their claims. They returned back and devastated the whole house, scattering things here and there. They looked for all possible areas using searchlights. In the attic just under the roof, they sighted two feet. The whole force rushed up and dragged down Saleema’s husband. Before taking him with them the major asked him if he had any wish. On receiving no reply from the Saleema’s husband, the army took him to the Dragmulla police station. Initially his brother was allowed to meet him three to four times in the camp. During this period Saleema never went to see her husband. “I never went to see my husband in the camp for here we face another problem. Often women visiting in connection of the arrested persons are often detained and subjected to inhuman treatment. In fear of this I preferred to stay at home” says Saleema.

Two years after Saleema’s marriage her husband Mohammad Abbas Mir crossed over the line of control for getting arms training. It was only eight months later, that he returned and worked as an active militant for next six years till his arrest from Dragmulla by the security forces.

It has been now four years that his husband was arrested by the forces. But till date nothing has been known of him. As earlier his brothers were allowed to meet him. However after three visits, none of his family members were allowed to meet him.

Since then life has turned hell for her. With a large family to support consisting of two daughters and two sons it has been a nightmare for her to sustain her family.

Though they have some land but for the lack of manpower it has become barren. The only source of financial support is from the neighbours who pool money collectively and pay it to the family for sustenance.

Being in a nuclear family, Saleema now left alone after her husband’s arrest faces constant threat. “I have a grown up daughter. For the lack of a man’s presence in the house, I feel insecure”, says Saleema. Saleema’s story is not something new for the Kashmiris who are a witness to the brutalities inflicted on them by the security forces.

Everyday life is getting hard for Saleema. With each passing day new responsibilities are coming up. In these changing circumstances the need of the family are difficult to fulfil in such a meagre amount. The family is going through a crisis situation. “For how long will the supports from the neighbours’ continue. All have their responsibilities, what will happen to my children if there is no support. I have already sold out a part of my land. But I won’t be able to continue it for long”, laments Saleema.

The financial constraints have been the main reason for the family who till date have not pursued Abbas’s case. But now only after selling her land in view of the growing insecurity for future, Saleema

wants to pursue the case. In this connection a case has been registered with the State Human Rights Commission.

Life is not a bed of roses for Saleema and her family who struggle hard each second to survive.

SHAKEELA FIGHTING WITH DEATH

Asma Dhar

Bedridden in a dingy ward in SMHS hospital, Shakeela in critical condition, counts breathe to live. Failing to get adequate dowry, life turned virtual hell for her, landing her in this critical condition.

Married three years back to Ashraf Ahangar, Shakeela since day first suffered brutal treatment from her in-laws. Ashraf a blacksmith was already married before he tied the nuptial knot with Shakeela. Struggling between life and death, Shakeela Mir conferred that her husband beat her ruthlessly for having failed to get adequate dowry from her parents.

She said that her husband would often thrash her. But on that day it had been worse. Her husband Ashraf beat her up until she became unconscious. She was rushed to the hospital in critical condition, where doctors removed her uterus. Her kidneys were also damaged.

According to Shakeela's mother, Ashraf wanted to marry another girl for the same purpose; therefore he attempted to kill Shakeela. To get her out of the way. Meanwhile, relatives and the neighbours of Shakeela staged massive protest outside the Deputy Commissioners office demanding the arrest of the accused.

The protesters alleged that Harwan police station didn't register any complaint, so they approached women's police station at Ram Munshi Bagh. Expressing concern, protestors further alleged the authorities for not taking any action against the accused, which they claim was still at large. **"Domestic violence against the women should be prevented by all people it is a slur on our society"**, said Abdul Salam, one of the protestors.

The in-laws who persecuted Shakeela and were demanding the dowry from her should be brought to justice", said her mother who felt dowry deaths go unreported in the rural areas. People said the dowry deaths continue to be a problem due to the non-enforcement of criminal laws by police and prosecutors. **"Police rarely follows the guidelines and frequently fails to investigate the complaints properly. Police often dismiss such crimes as family disputes and report them as small accidents"**, said one of the protestors.

Dowry death, which did not exist earlier in the valley, has now seen everywhere. It is a high time for Government, NGOs and other social workers to take this issue seriously.

EMOTIONAL REUNION

Asma Dhar

The Line of Control divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan. This partition separated many people from their kith and kin. But it could not separate the emotional bond shared by the people on the both sides of the bloody border. A little move from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has brought a breeze of hope for the separated families. Which made a big difference in their lives.

It was in this context that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) brought together the divided families – through web camera. It was first initiative of its kind since the controversial partition of Indian sub-continent in 1947. The BBC set up a web cam allowing families to communicate with their loved ones on both sides of the LoC. The idea, according to reports, was the brainchild of BBC Urdu Online's Waheed Mirza, a Kashmiri, who says he came up with video - conferencing after he had seen large numbers of people gathering on both sides of the LoC waving at each other, after the Indo-Pak ceasefire in November last year.

The hour-long video and satellite-phone link between Srinagar and Muzzafarabad in the Pakistan - administered Kashmir witnessed many emotional moments. Their conversation brought tears into the eyes of audiences including the media persons present on the occasion.

Rehana Masudi broke down when she was able to see and speak to her sister, Abida Masudi, on the Pakistan side. Her mother who was equally emotional on seeing her long lost daughter accompanied

Rehana. The family have not met for the past 20 years. "It was a mixture of joy, excitement and plenty of pain to see my sister after such a long time. It was all the more so for my mother and father, who is around 80-years-old", said Rehana. Rehana said the web cam fulfilled a dream that began amid reports of re-opening of a Srinagar - Muzaffarabad road. "But I think this road will never open," she said.

Hafeeza Begum couldn't control her tears of joy. She saw her 80-year-old mother for the first time in 20 years. She said it was like a real meeting. Hafeeza felt short of words to express her happiness. Begum was in her teens when she came to Pakistan along with her brother and got married to a cousin in 1980. She came back to Indian Kashmir twice, in 1982 and 1983, to see her mother, but since then she has only spoken by telephone or exchanged occasional letters because of travel curbs due to tensions between both countries. "I could not believe my eyes when I saw my mother, sister, and other loved ones", said Begum. "My home is just four hours drive from here but I cannot go there, so we pray that the road between Muzaffarabad and Kashmir road should soon reopen. "If Indian and Pakistani rulers have a human heart they should resolve Kashmir issue and end the suffering of the people on both sides", the divided families said choking with sobs.

The divided families prayed for the collapse of "wall" between India and Pakistan and the opening up of Muzaffarabad road. They said the rulers of both the countries are not sensitive to their pain. It is worth mentioning here that the Indian government withdrew the facility of direct dialling to Pakistan and Pakistan administered Kashmir (PAK) from Srinagar on the outbreak of an armed uprising 16 years ago.

The videoconference was organised to give vent to the human sufferings and bring relief to the pain and agony and separation of the divided families. The wounds of separation are so deep. This conference has given some relief to the families to see their near and dear ones.

SAGA OF WOMEN TO MEET HER HUSBAND

Tabasum Ishtiaq

Haneefa begum (32), R/o Sheeri Baramulla has been suffering for the last 14 years. This suffering is however different from the way women suffer in Kashmir.

Nearly 14 years back, in early 1990's when turmoil began in the real sense in the state of J&K, an incident took place, which changed her whole life. Her brother in law Nazir Ahmed working - as *Arze Nawees* (Petition writer) was killed by unidentified gunmen. He was working earlier as a militant for JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front). Though he never crossed LoC, yet he actively participated in all their activities.

On his way to the office unidentified gunmen abducted and killed him. His body was thrown on the roadside. When the news spread around, people gathered and started protesting. An FIR was lodged in the Baramulla police station. Fearful of the Nazir's killing, Haneefa's husband Farid Ahmed without acknowledging anybody, during midnight escaped from his residence.

Finding him missing in the morning, Haneefa searched here and there but in vain. All her efforts to locate him turned futile. "I had no one but him. My son was three years old at that time. I was quite depressed. I neither knew where to find him nor what to do. I was helpless", says Haneefa. Further adding Haneefa stressed that Farid was not affiliated with any organisation nor he was remotely connected with any person or group.

In view of the increasing uncertainties and fear of living in militancy and security prone area, Haneefa applied for passport. It has been now 14 years that Haneefa is struggling from one post to another to get passport. Life has been a nightmare for Haneefa. Living alone with her son, Haneefa's only source of income is by selling wood. Everyday Haneefa would transgress miles to forest and collect wood, which she would sell off. "I get only meagre amount and sustaining in that amount is not possible. Going to far-flung areas, has always been a threat. The forest is full of militants and army and hence going alone in the forest is always fearful", says Haneefa.

Haneefa for the past fourteen years has been suffering alone. The application filed for passport has been rejected on part of the CID verification. Of and on army comes to her residence for knowing Farid's whereabouts and asking him to surrender. Haneefa, who often communicates with Farid on phone and

even through letters, has not only restricted her communication with Farid and also burnt down the letters in view of the forces action.

Haneefa again filed an application for the passport three years back but till date nothing has come out of the inquiries.

Each day is getting hard and new responsibilities are cropping up. In this circumstance, Haneefa has been left with no option but to beg. The money earned from the selling the wood is not sufficient to mitigate her suffering, let alone satiate the growing needs of her family. Sometimes Haneefa's sister would provide some thing but even it won't fulfil their needs.

Haneefa has moved from pillar to post, even the small amount of money she earns has been spent on getting the passport. Almost once in a week she would come to the passport office from Baramulla, North Kashmir. "It not only means time and money as I won't be able to go to the forest and collect wood but also I have to leave her son back at home. Over the years, I have this growing insecurity regarding my son, as he is my lone support. Sometimes I am afraid that something might have happened to him. Therefore, I never try to leave my son at home", said Haneefa.

Haneefa's problem is not in isolation to the suffering eves. Haneefa has been suffering over the past 14 years to get passport so that she would go to her husband and bring respite to the suffering family.

Unheard Voices, Unheard Suffering

Tabasum Ishtiaq

Life is not an entity existing in vacuum. It is a complicated intertwined system, where one life depends on the other for existence. In Kashmir, the situation is such that you never know what is going to happen in the next moment.

This was what happened to 19-year-old Gulnaaz D/o Nazir Ahmed Lone R/o Bemina. Student of Polytechnic College at Gogji Bagh, on the fateful day of 21st May 2002, just after leaving the examination hall at Kite Polytechnic Rangreth, she got killed in an unwarranted firing by the security forces. The whole incident took place when two scooter borne Sikh boys were asked to stop by the military. Unable to listen to their alarm, may be due to noise on roads. They moved ahead. This infuriated the security force personnel who started firing. At the same moment Gulnaaz was leaving the examination hall. She fell victim to the firing and died on the spot.

Shattered by the incident, her whole family finds it hard to accept this harsh reality. While talking to the *Voices Unheard* Gulnaaz's mother expressed helplessness over the whole incident. Narrating the woeful tragedy she said, "We are very poor. It was only after long hardships and sacrifices that we were able to educate Gulnaaz with a hope that she would be our support. Now all our sacrifices and hardships have turned sour". "The dream that we had nurtured all the years has broken down to pieces", grieves her grandmother. In the whole incident the most affected is Gulnaaz's sister who cannot accept a fact that her sister is no more. It was this incident and its subsequent insecurity that compelled her to leave her studies

Kashmiri women over the years have shown tremendous courage in putting themselves strongly before conflict situation prevailing in Kashmir. Being the worst victims of the war in Kashmir, their modesty outraged, their souls ravaged, they still continue to endure all their miseries and misfortunes. This is not the case with one or two women; rather, innumerable women suffer inhuman treatment daily. Gulnaaz's sister is no exception to all those families who have been left to struggle for existence by the loss of their dear ones in the Valley during the past decade.

The uncertain death of Gulnaaz has put her sister in a trauma. She has abandoned her school, due to the fear of being killed like her sister. Gulnaaz's sister is on medical treatment for neurosis. Her grand mother's health has also deteriorated since Gulnaaz's death. For Nazir Lone Gulnaaz's father - a single source of income for the family each day is extremely inadequate in bearing all the expenses. Being a fourth class employee it was only after long hardships and struggle that he had been able to educate Gulnaaz for a professional course.

Within few months of the death of Gulnaaz, the government provided *ex- gratia* relief to the family. Yet this is not sufficient for the family to meet all expenses. The family now hopes for relief from SRO 43 in order to ameliorate their appalling economic condition.

Asma Dhar

After losing her two sons to violence, a mother feels duped at the hands of Government. Reshma Jan, a widow living in the remote village of South Kashmir in Brari Aangan, Islamabad lost one of her four sons, Khursheed khan (22), in 1999 in a cross fire between militants and troops. On 11 May 2004, her another son Rashid Khan (40) was killed by policemen masquerading as militants, who forced their entry into their house and shot Rashid dead.

"I am yet to receive compensation in the shape of compassionate appointment for the killing of my younger son Khursheed. Now after the brutal killing of my other son no compensation has been given to our family", snobs Reshma adding that the authorities had promised a job within seven days after Rashid's murder.

The death of two male members has brought poverty to this family. "Rashid's murder continues to haunt me as I see her innocent children and young wife. I feel helpless when his children ask for food and there is not enough to feed them", says Reshma with tears rolling from her eyes coupled with a loud wail in typical Gujjar accent.

Rashid Khan's death has orphaned his five daughters and three sons. Razia (20) is eldest and two-year-old Shahida is the youngest. Police forced entry into Reshma's house. They broke down windowpanes, when the family denied them entry through the door. Which is still lying untended.

Rashid's wife, Roshan visited the Deputy Commissioner's office at Islamabad several times in this connection, which she believes is the only way she can raise her children. However for her, the reply is always, 'come tomorrow'. "Although I talk to everyone hoping somebody may listen to me and help me to put an end to this misery, but nothing seems to happen", says dejected Roshan.

Jammu & Kashmir police personnel masquerading as militants forcibly barged into the residence of Abdul Rashid Khan on May 11, 2004 and demanded 2 lakh rupees from the inmates, which they denied. The policemen opened fire killing Rashid on the spot and injuring five others. "Violating all norms of human rights. Law advocators have themselves become lawbreakers. If the behaviour of men in uniform is like this, where common man will go to seek his protection?" says Reshma.

Police confirmed the involvement of its men in the incident. The Chief Minister ordered immediate action against the culprits.

Despite the confirmation from police about the incident and Chief Minister's order to take action against culprits, no compensation has been given to the family. No compensation can replace the loss of human lives but at least it can minimize the miseries of the family that they are facing due to the loss of two male members.

NEWS BRIEFS

PROTEST AGAINST RAPE BID BY RR MAN

May 15: Thousands of people demonstrated against the alleged attempt of rape by a 30 RR personnel at Harmat village in Handwara. The residents also observed a general strike.

The residents alleged that security personnel of 30 Rashtriya Rifles forcibly entered into the house of Abdul Rashid Malik and finding his 18 years old daughter alone in the house attempted to Rape her. Strongly resisting the attempt, the girl jumped out of the window and raised an alarm. Hearing her cries, the villagers assembled in the village and raised slogans against the troops.

According to a local news agency CNS, Police has arrested the guilty and registered a case against him.

TEENAGER KIDNAPPED FROM DODA VILLAGE

May 16: Two persons allegedly abducted a teenage girl from her residence at Pattle Paddar in Doda. Reports said that finding the girl all alone in her house at Pattle Paddar, two persons allegedly kidnapped her to some unknown place. As the family came to know of the incident, a complaint was lodged by the father of the abducted girl in the Doda police station. Police taking cognisance of the complaint, has identified both the kidnappers as Mohan Lal and Kunja Lal, both sons of Ishar Dass of Liggeri in Doda.

PROLONGED DETENTION LANDS AGED PAK WOMAN IN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

May 16: A scroll from her home situated close to international border on Pakistan side, landed 60-year-old Bhagi in psychiatric hospital Jammu. Undergoing treatment for trauma, she suffered during her 8 years of detention for stepping across the unfenced border area; Bhagi awaits the day of her release. She has passed eight years in detention but without any trail.

Bhagi Begum, w/o Sultan Muhammad, r/o Shakergarh area of district Sialkote in Punjab, Pakistan, stepped into this unfenced side of border in 1996, while walking in the fields. Shakergarh is a border village of Pakistan and neighbours Ramgarh and samba area of Jammu.

Recalling the incident she said "I was there to attend the call of nature, when some Indian army personnel caught hold of me". Tearful she added further "My husband died a year before I crossed the border. I have my sister Laajoo Begum, two sons Muhammad Ramzan and Bashir Ahmed in my home at Shakergarh. They don't know, my sons do not know whether I am alive or dead".

Worried about her family in Pakistan, the lady only wishes to know their plight "just ask them to inform me about the health of my wards," she pleaded.

Speaking in her mother tongue chasti, emotions and agony was all visible on her face. She said, "I want to go back to my village to meet my young wards and sister. I miss my sons. Kindly make some arrangements for sending me back to Pakistan. I am innocent, I have not committed any crime," she lamented.

Bhagi had been detained in district jail Amphalla. On the recommendation of Akhnoor Judicial Magistrate, she is now undergoing medical treatment in psychiatric hospital Jammu for the last two weeks. She was admitted in the hospital for her degrading mental status. The doctors in the hospital say, Bhagi is mentally depressed. "She is not permanently disabled but depressed due to the imprisonment. Its behavioural depression but her memory is unharmed," said the doctor

Though the punishment for crossing the line of control or boarder by mistake is only 6 months imprisonment according to the criminal law but a number of people like Bhagi are languishing in jails for years without any trial.

MOLESTATION ATTEMPT BY BSF MAN

May 30: A timely alarm last evening saved a housewife at Shankerpora hamlet in Nowgam from a Border Security Force (BSF) man who barged into her house and reportedly tried to molest her.

According to a local news agency UNS, a BSF man, identified as Foji Singh of 92 battalion, entered into the house of Muhammad Maqbool and tried to molest his wife Saja. The woman raised an alarm, which invited attention of family members and neighbours, forcing the BSF jawan to run from the scene leaving behind his service rifle. The jawan was not even properly dressed.

The incident evoked strong protest from the residents of the area who demanded strict action against the BSF personnel. Later On Sunday, police seized the rifle of the BSF jawan and registered a case against him under FIR bearing number 34/2003 and started investigation.

MINOR ALLEGEDLY RAPED BY BROTHER

June 6: In a bizarre incident, police this morning arrested a youth for allegedly raping his own sister in a tented accommodation in Thandi Chaan of Dooligam Banihal. The accused, who reportedly confessed his crime, has been identified as Mohammad Shafi (20) s/o Ismail Gujjar of Thandi Chaan in Dooligam Banihal.

According to reports Mohammad Shafi, a labourer by profession, finding her 14 years old sister Salima all alone in the house allegedly raped her.

Suspecting foul play, the landlord of the house Akbar, working with crime investigation department (CID) of police, informed the police, which took the accused into custody. Police have recorded the confessing statement of accused during interrogation, while the victim has been sent to a hospital for medical examination. A case has been registered against the accused and proceedings have been initiated.

IKHWANI KIDNAP BABY

June 8: An 18 month old baby was allegedly abducted by an Ikhwani on pretext of granting marriage permission by the family to marry the abducted baby's aunt. Identified as Rais Ahmed Khan s/o Ghulam Muhammad Khan alias Bita of Gopalpora working with 7 RR, kidnapped 18 months old baby girl, Abroo d/o. Bashir Ahmed Ganie r/o Mattan, Anantnag. The gunman demanded consent from the family of kidnapped baby to marry her aunt. A FIR was lodged against the gunman.

PROTEST AGAINST MOLESTATION BID ON SCHOOL GIRL

June 11: Police resorted to baton charge and fired tear smoke shells to disperse hundreds of people protesting against an attempted rape of a 14-year-old girl by her teacher on June 10.

Reports said a high school teacher Tirlok Singh allegedly attempted to rape one of his students whom he had invited at his residence for guidance to solve the question paper. Police arrested Singh and registered a case under section 277/204 342/ 376511 RPC against him.

BEMINA DUO HELD FOR RAPE

June 21: Police today took two persons into custody for kidnapping and molesting a girl.

An official of Parimpora Police station told Greater Kashmir - local English daily that two persons, Zulfkhar Ali Bhat and Ghulam Hassan Mala of Khumani Chowk, Kidnapped a girl (22), on June 15 when she was returning to her house. The girl's parents were not aware about the incident and were looking for their daughter everywhere. The duo took the girl to Gulmarg and molested her for four days. On June 19, the kidnappers without caring for consequences released the girl at Khumani Chowk. On hearing about the incident, the relatives and neighbours were enraged and lodged a complaint at police Chowki Bemina. Police promptly arrested the duo and registered a FIR, booking the duo under 366/376 RPC. Zulfkhar is a driver, while Ghulam Hassan Mala is butcher by profession. Zulfkhar had used his Sumo vehicle for kidnapping the girl.

MINOR MOLESTED

June 22: Police today arrested a waiter of Hotel Paradise for allegedly attempting rape on a minor tourist from Kanpur.

According to reports, in the morning the waiter, Hilal Ahmed Baigh entered the room no.117 where a minor tourist from Kanpur was putting up along with her family. Finding her alone, the waiter dragged her to room no.111 and allegedly attempted to rape the girl. The age of the girl in police records has been registered as 7. A FIR NO83/2004 has been registered under Sec 376, 511RPC against the accused in the Ram Munshi Bagh police station. Later police arrested the accused from the hotel.

GIRL ESCAPES FROM IKHWANI'S CAPTIVITY

June 22: A girl of Suthaharan - Beerwah escaped from the captivity of an Ikhwani, who allegedly kidnapped, her seven days back. Reports said on June 15, an Ikhwani, Mohammad Amin han of Saka Chal bras, along with his accomplice kidnapped a 13-year-old girl.

Following the incident, the father of the girl registered a case in police station Khag. Till her release, the residents of the area continuously held protest demonstration. These demonstrations prompted the police officials to issue immediate orders for the arrest of the criminal.

Though the police made several raids at different places, but they were unable to trace the *Ikhwani* Mohammed Amin. However the girl escaped from his captivity. The police handed over the girl to his parents; however, they have so far failed to nab the criminal and his accomplices.

WOMEN – CHILDREN KILLED

April 2: A woman lost her life when she was allegedly trapped in an encounter between militants and troops at Gagran, Shopian in south Kashmir. Her identity was established as Zarina of Mundi Rajouri who was a beggar.

April 7: A woman was allegedly killed by an unknown posse of gunmen inside her home at Pargam Bala area of Kulgam.

Reports said, gunmen not identified forced their entry inside the residential house of one Mohammad Ramzan Shah and fired at his daughter who died on the spot. The motive behind the killing was not known. The deceased has been identified as Sweetie.

April 8: An 18 years old girl Arfan, d/o Dawood r/o Daboli tehsil Sunderbani committed suicide by consuming poisonous substances on April 7.

April 16: A woman SPO Surja Devi, w/o Kirpal Singh of Bijrani district Doda, posted at welfare Centre Doda was allegedly kidnapped by constable Choudhary Hussain posted at police station Kishtwar from Munshi Mohalla Doda on April 10, 2004. An FIR has been lodged in this connection.

April 20: A woman journalist was killed in an IED blast in Sogam area of Kupwara district in north Kashmir while monitoring the Parliamentary Elections. The deceased has been identified as Aasia Jeelani d/o Bashir Ahmad of Nageen, Hazratbal, Srinagar.

April 23: A minor lost his life and another injured when they allegedly fiddled with a lying hand grenade in village Bhargin at Doda district. The deceased was identified as Papi Kumar son of Ranjit Singh resident of Bhargin.

April 24: Wife and a minor daughter of a Special Police Officer were killed allegedly by the suspected militants in Ajas Bandipora in north Kashmir Baramulla.

The deceased were identified as Shaha Begum, 30, wife of Ghulam Hassan Qureshi and her daughter Misra, 8.

May 1: A women was killed while, another injured critically in an IED blast at their residence at Dayalgam Anantnag. The incident took place when an IED concealed near the wall of the house of a retired teacher Ghulam Mohammad Wagay went off suddenly injuring both the ladies. The family was having a bask at the time of the incident.

The injured were identified as Naza and Yasmeena – Daughter and daughter-in-law of Gh. Mohammad Wagay. Both the ladies were rushed to hospital, where Naza succumbed to her injuries.

May 4: Fifteen-year-old girl Shabnum d/o Muhammad Sultan Lone r/o Kralgund, Handwara committed suicide after consuming poison.

May 25: A 20-year-old girl Shagufta d/o Ghulam Hassan Dar ended her life by consuming poison at Yaripora, Kulgam. However the reason behind the suicide is not known.

June 4: Unidentified gunmen shot dead two women at their residence in Prungroo Marwar in Handwara of district Kupwara. The deceased were identified as Sarva Begum (55) W/o Lassa Dar and her daughter Fareeda (27) W/o Ghulam Hassan Rather.

Fareeda's father Lassa Dar accused his son-in-law of the double murder alleging that the government gunman had threatened to kill them thrice in the past in view of his fractured relationship with Fareeda. Fareeda along with her three children had been staying with her father following the fraction. Dar blamed the police officials for the incident, as he had already informed police about the threats. Handwara police when contacted said the matter was being investigated.

June 18: A lady suffered bullet wounds, when his husband a Jammu and Kashmir Armed Police (JKAP) cop shot her at her parental house in Thannamandi area of district Rajouri. She was shifted to the District Hospital (DH) Rajouri. The incident took place after the couple exchanged heated arguments. Police arrested the accused Mehmood Ahmed of Shahatra Sharief and registered a case against him.

June 21: Following a heated argument, two women committed suicide at Khoribatpora hamlet in Kulgam. A local news agency said Ghulam Ahmed Bala's daughter Shazada, 22, and daughter-in-law Shakeela, 29, consumed poisonous substance after having a heated argument with one another. Both the ladies were rushed to hospital, where their condition was stated to be critical.

June 29: Three members of Mohammad Amin Khan a family including a woman were killed when some unknown armed men forced their entry inside their residential house at Brtas, Beerwah in Budgam district.

The identification of woman was ascertained as Hafeeza wife of Mohammad Amin of Beerwah. Official sources suspected militants behind these killings.

Date	Women killed	Children killed
April 02	1	-
April 07	1	-
April 08	1	-
April 16	1	-
April 20	1	-
April 23	-	1
April 24	1	1
May 01	1	-
May 04	2	1
May 25	1	-
May 29	1	-
June 18	1	-
June 21	2	-
Total	14	3

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