

COMMENT

## Suo Motu Cognizance and...

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS Commission (NHRC) seems to be one more talking shop this democracy has ever produced, without any biting power. Not that it has not intervened in areas of gross human rights violators but the government does hardly bother about its recommendations which in most cases remain unimplemented because NHRC has no mandatory authority. And they organise seminars and workshops, rather frequently, on so many rights issues that the main problem of human rights abuses by the police and security establishment remains unaddressed even in regions where it deserves serious and urgent attention. How to make the police behave and accountable is not a concern of this voluntary body of justice that criticises the government authorities and security forces just for the sake of criticism.

Brutality coupled with sadistic practice is part of the game called policing. There is no school like the School of Americas and yet the policemen have been learning the art of torture and repression without an officially sponsored 'torture manual' since the days of Raj. The British themselves never introduced third degree methods in their country but they resorted to third degree in their colonies, particularly in India to silence any voice of dissent.

Not that policemen in India are invariably peasants in uniform. They are mostly middleclass people in uniform. Despite their middleclass background and minimum formal education, they soon become inhuman in their approach to ordinary people. Very recently NHRC took a suo motu cognizance of a media report carrying the photograph of a father taking his daughter's body for post-mortem on his bicycle. It happened in Madhya Pradesh. The ordeal of Gokul Gond, a poor farmer from Dudhmunia village of Annupur district, had to trek 14 km with his daughter's dead body on a makeshift bier, tied to his bicycle to get autopsy done because the police refused to carry the body showing non-availability of vehicle as an excuse. The incident amounted to violation of the human rights of the deceased. Thus observed the NHRC. It is too much to think of human rights of the dead in a country where custodial death in almost every state is on the rise.

Mere awarding some monetary compensation to the victims of police brutalities and that too after the completion of a prolonged hearing process, is simply not enough. Nor can it reform the policing system without which violations of human rights will continue unabated. The centre and state governments mainly depend on age-old acts and manuals prepared by the British with a view to terrorising the 'natives'. And the brown sahibs in post-independence India maintains the British legacy of terrorising ordinary people whenever they protest against injustice and inequality that plagues the society at every level. The Gokul Gond story reveals how sick the policing system is and how sick is the dominant culture it produces and promotes year after year.

Irom Sharmila's fast unto death in protest against the provisions of Armed Forces Special Powers Act is now an international issue. Sharmila Chanu, a poet, writer, human rights activist of Manipur is a living legend. Recently relatives and friends of Ms Chanu, imprisoned in Imphal, were not allowed to meet her in Jail. When the matter was brought to notice of the Commission by one Henry Tiphagne, a representative of an NGO, NHRC issued a notice to the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur, calling for a report in the matter. That was all!

Official campaign for human rights by NHRC and state level rights bodies could hardly transform this repressive policing system into something humane unless civic society reacts in a massive way against the immunity and non-accountability that the policemen enjoy under the present system.  
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