



Hathras is far away. I didn't even know there was a place by that name until the recent headlines. Then I wanted to know about the place and its people. And so much from the Hathras incident resonated with Goa.

The reader of this is likely to say, 'what? It resonated for you in Goa? But Goa is better'. But resonate it did. I thought of the decapitated child abandoned on the Siridao beach in the second fortnight of September, where the police initially made no efforts to search for the parents of the child, perhaps simply on the presumption that the child was a migrant child, and by extension, that a migrant's life does not matter. If it were a well off upper caste parent whose child had gone missing or had been kidnapped, the news would be out there. But one can safely infer that this was the child of vulnerable parents, either migrant or poor or socially disadvantaged or unwed, who were, therefore, unable to raise their voice for the child.

I thought to myself: All women are vulnerable to sexual crime. But some women are much more vulnerable because of a combination of caste, class and gender vulnerabilities. I also thought to myself: Crimes are inflicted on people of all castes. But there is a certain kind of vulnerability that is omnipresent for certain sections of society. Hearing from residents of Hathras and its neighbouring villages, they say that sexual assaults on Dalit (Valmiki) girls is not uncommon, that is, it has been occurring for a long time. They also say that only recently have Dalits been allowed to build pucca houses, but they still cannot plaster their houses.

Again, my mind transports itself from Hathras to Goa. Dalits at Ibrampur at Pernem do not have a chance to legally repair their ancestral houses (of generations), because the property on which the houses are located is not in their name, despite having served the temple for ages in the past. I am also reminded of a now dead landlord in Saleli, Satari, Goa, by name of Prithviraj Rane, whose acts of transgression into people's, including women's lives, reached such proportions, that they finally became his nemesis. And now, in Melauli, people are resisting a different kind of invasion of their land in the name of IIT. The issue is far from that of education, or access to exclusive education. The question is one of development for whom, at the cost of robbing, ill-treating and discriminating against whom.

Institutional discrimination is ongoing. I ask myself what are the systems in place that allow it? First these 'inconvenient' atrocities or atrocities against those who are seen as dispensable by the State as well as by society, are swept under the carpet and the evidence erased. You are mistaken if you thought this happens only at Hathras. It happens elsewhere also, under governments of different political persuasions. It happens in Goa too.

But the collapsing of systems is much more apparent now. Reporters say there is no longer a regular dissemination of the daily station reports from the police headquarters, or access to information based on daily station reports, as used to be the case earlier, which enabled the public to become aware of crimes. The Superintendent of Police (Crime) who it now appears has been designated as the Public Relations Officer, only disseminates cases that are related to the Crime Branch, they say. Therefore dissemination of information is selective and now depends on how the press person builds links with the police, which then compromises the media's position. This is particularly detrimental when it comes to marginalised sections of society that do not have the power to leverage the dissemination of information. It is high time the system of disseminating *all* information is restored. Since police tend to or are compelled to yield to the bidding of dominant forces or of powers that be, it is necessary that police reforms be implemented as directed by the Supreme Court in the case of Prakash Singh v/s Union of India as far back as 2006.

There is a Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, under which a case must be registered when advantaged caste men commit a rape against Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe women. But this law is also only invoked when repeated pleas are made. So far it has not been invoked in the Hathras case. It was also not invoked in Goa in the case of the 7 year old tribal school girl who was raped in the school toilet. Further, can it be believed that the police were unable to zero in on the culprits when the crime happened admittedly in the school toilet?

Also, the Goa State Commission for Women seems to have gone into a slumber with the new Chairperson only recently appointed. Its autonomy is also severely compromised from the way the funding is managed. These monitoring bodies are often left unconstituted, or without Chairpersons for extended periods of time, when an appropriate software programme is all it takes for the Government to be reminded that a new Chairperson has to be appointed, or the Commission or monitoring authority has to be reconstituted. Yet, the Goa State Human Rights Commission, the Goa State Police Complaints Authority, and the Lokayukta have remained or continue to remain headless or the bodies unconstituted for extended periods of time.

Most think that they are not like UP, but if we look close enough, we will see that there is a little bit of UP in all of us! And that must change, at individual level, at societal level, at the level of governance.

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