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Opinion

Wake up

Even as the *Peer waer* (land of saints) of yesteryears has been witness to unprecedented bloodletting over more than a decade past, certain traits continue to be alien to Kashmir's glorious culture. Howsoever compelling the provocation, the people here would never countenance a response as sadistic as a couple of recent incidents would suggest. That a woman would be mercilessly set afire, that too, in as sacred a place as a mosque or a young handsome boy with dreamy eyes would be deprived of his eyesight for ever in the most inhuman way is something the valley has hardly ever heard of.

On Friday, some masked men allegedly barged into the house of a Kralapora resident, dragged his divorced daughter, Neelofar Akhtar, a mother of two, out into a mosque, sprinkled kerosene on her, set her ablaze and made good their escape. The woman with 95 per cent burns, is battling for her life. On Saturday, the people of Ratnipora in Pulwama took to streets to protest alleged police inaction in arresting the youth who allegedly splash acid on a local youth, Gulzar Ahmad, for the sin of a girl indicating her preference for him over one of the accused.

The paradise on earth that Kashmir is known as the world over was for times immemorial almost synonymous with love and peace. Rape, murder or other heinous crimes were almost unknown here. It is common knowledge that even for the innocuous slaughter of a chicken, half a century ago, one had first to arrange a knife from some neighbour and then go about the lanes and bylanes of the locality to get, indeed persuade, someone to slit the poor creature's throat.

Violence of a heinous nature never enjoyed any acceptability in the Kashmiri society. People still cherish the fond memories of those peaceful times when vengeance of a violent kind would be the last resort even for a scoundrel. By nature, people would generally avoid a bloody response to an incident, howsoever unacceptable. Patience and tolerance would be the hallmark of their individual as well as the collective behaviour.

Lately, however, violence has gained a kind of social recognition and acceptability in the valley. The disturbances over the recent years might have contributed a great deal in removing the inherent abhorrence for killings. Over-exposure to violence has left most people largely traumatized. However, the sadistic touch visible in violent acts leaves one aghast. Could such a nasty behaviour ever be tolerated in this society? In spite of the entire value system having collapsed, one shudders at the phenomena becoming a common sight now. The widespread revulsion the recent incidents caused is on the expected lines.

Down the ages, the moral values inspired by the valley's religious moorings had a sobering effect on the people's precepts and practices. Unfortunately, over the decades, these have been losing their grip over the upcoming generation. Most youth look at the old values with some kind of

contempt. The turmoil and turbulence of the past decade or so has worsened the situation further. Its psychological fallout has been so widespread and devastating that some social activists recently claimed around 80 per cent of the valley people suffered from some kind of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The heinous crimes the like of which are becoming common could be traced to these developments.

Before the situation spins out of control, the saner elements of the society need to do some soul searching to identify the root causes of the emerging trend and to devise an appropriate and effective response to call an immediate halt to it. Apart from police, which has a pivotal role and which, unfortunately, its members have neither the desire nor the will to play, the entire society has to rise to the occasion and create a mass revolt against such crimes.

Courtesy: Daily Greater Kashmir, Srinagr, Kashmir, 17th June, 2002)