

The Grammar of Rape Money

WSN Network

After a few shameful incidents of rape and murder of Dalit girls in UP, a jolted CM Mayawati asked her top police officer to visit the victim families. The DGP allegedly went by a helicopter and paid the government-ordered compensation of a few thousand rupees to the victim girls. Seeing a readymade issue in the development, the Congress, ever eager to get a better grip in the state that has spoiled its electoral arithmetic for years now, blasted the Bahujan Samaj Party's governance. But the Congress' UP chief, Rita Bahuguna, a woman, shunned all restraint in her tone, choice of words and delivery.

Exhorting the people to rise against Mayawati, she said the poor people should throw the compensation money into Mayawati's face and say to her that were she to be raped, they will give Rs 1 crore as compensation. "Yeh paise us ke moonh pe maro aur bolo ke ja Mayawati, tera balaatkaar ho jaye, main ek crore doongi," she said in a speech telecast live and repeated on prime time. Soon UP was on the boil as angry BSP workers went about burning Rita Bahuguna's house, and other property. Mayawati blasted Sonia Gandhi for not immediately condemning the slur. Rahul Gandhi said Rita's words may be wrong, her point was correct. Rita spent a couple of days in jail before getting bail but Mayawati seems intent on teaching her a lesson.

But even as this spat continues, just focus on the issue of financial compensation for rape victims. The 2007 National Crime Records Bureau states that Uttar Pradesh recorded 21,215 cases of violence against women, including 2,066 cases of dowry death, 1,532 cases of rape and 3,819 cases of kidnapping. Nearly half of the rape case complaints

that the National Commission for Women gets are from UP. While Mayawati has said that compensation for rape is humiliating and erodes the self-esteem of Dalits, in government circles there have been moves to widen the compensation net. In 2008, the NCW recommended Rs 2 lakh compensation for rape victims, starting from the time an FIR is filed. Under the 11th Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission, too, has allocated funds for a similar scheme.

But is such compensation a solution? Poor victims most definitely could do with all the monetary support they can get after suffering a traumatic crime like rape. But how does one quantify this trauma in financial terms? The Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, mentions Rs 25,000 to each victim of 'insult, humiliation and intimidation' and Rs 50,000 to victims whose 'modesty has been outraged' and have been sexually exploit-

ed. Then there is the tricky issue of quantifying workdays lost in the case of working victims. Many are of the view that the compensation money helps victims to fund the legal process. True. But this is a damning indictment of the State whose duty it is to represent victims and fight their cases in courts.

In India, the conviction rate for rape is a dismal 27 per cent. Instead of theological calculations about how much the cost of rape is in compensatory terms, the appropriate compensation would be to have speedy trials and a far better conviction rate. Instead of using the issue to wage a political war that will benefit no one beyond those hoping to score some quick 'identity politics' brownie points, let the Bahujan Samaj Party government provide real justice by ensuring that rapists are brought to dock and rape is not treated as any old ailment that needs a quick-fix treatment, but a preventive as well as a more nuanced, long-term one.

Ruling BSP activists burn furniture after setting on fire the Lucknow house of Rita Bahuguna, the UP president of Congress party on July 15, 2009. Rita was arrested after she suggested that Mayawati would get Rs 1 crore if she is raped so that she can understand the plight of rape victims in her state.



Rita Bahuguna

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