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Life at LOC (Line of Control)

TARIF SOHAIL*

Hundreds of miles away I still remember
The dark nights illumined by search lights in the sky
Probing for militants crossing border on the sly
Huddled with families in underground bunkers
In the backdrop rhythm of deadly machine guns and tankers
Sounds of our pounding hearts competing with shattering windowpanes
Running to see the razed houses by the first rays of the sun
Counting the number of injured and neighbors who had been

Not by horror but by routine

I still remember

The news of children exploded in minefields
Of grazing-cum-playgrounds now turned graveyards
Of school grounds bearing tombs of students
Remainders of young lives nipped away in impudence
A punishment for playing during unprovoked crossfire
A punishment for having born near cross border wire

I still remember

The news of missing fathers and sons
Either killed by militants or taken for torturous enquiries by armed combatants
Entire villages herded intermittently to migration camps

Days passed in despair and hopes of returning home
Homes, fields & schools occupied or destroyed in ceaseless shelling
I still remember
The quinquennial rituals guided by party loyalties of family elders
But everyday lives dependent on Army – the destroyer and the savior
For lack of alternative in employment, security and infrastructure
Ours are the lives lived in continual neglect
Of indifferent bureaucracy and power-hungry politicians
Lives away from modernity caught in time warp
Caught in a vicious cycle of marginalization and abandonment
Ours are the voices silenced from mainstream media
From the debates and discussions of national intelligentsia
I still remember and will always remember
The silenced life of LOC.

***Tarif Sohail** is an M.Phil Research Scholar at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. This short poem is a depiction on the everyday life of ordinary citizens at the Line of Control village Jhulaas, in Poonch District, Jammu Division of Jammu & Kashmir (of which this author is a permanent resident) at the height of militancy in the decade of 1990s. In the past one year, the international cross-border conflict has increased and the poet feels that the everyday life portrayed in this poem is ominously returning.