

## Co-ordination of Democratic Rights Organisations (CDRO)

### ***Stand in Solidarity with the People's Struggle in Kashmir!***

Since 8<sup>th</sup> July 2016 when Burhan Muzzafar Wani was killed there have been widespread protests against his killing in Kashmir Valley. Since then the Government of India has launched a crackdown and the cycle of curfew and bandh has persisted for more than ninety days now and brute force has been used to smother the agitation. The number of casualties has risen to 90 killings of civilians, 7000 injured by pellets, more than 1000 blindings, number of those injured is close to 17,000 civilians and 10,000 security force personnel, arrest of 6000 persons either detained under draconian Public Security Act (PSA) or arrested under various charges. The dreaded night raids have been going on and Indian Army has launched "Operation Calm Down".

Kashmir is the only place where Pellet Guns have been used. Nowhere else in the world or in India are they used. The very fact that even in Haryana where in February 2016 for five days hooligans indulged in physical attacks, loot, rape, molestation and arson and the BJP led state government did nothing, pellet guns were not used. Because, no civilized country either uses these, or supports their use. Yet, in Indian held Kashmir pellet guns have been justified just as Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) too is, by enemies of Democracy.

#### **Is not Pakistan involved in a proxy war against India over Kashmir?**

The Co-ordination of Democratic Rights Organisations (CDRO) blames Government of India for enabling Pakistan to interfere. Since October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1947 India and Pakistan have divided Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) and India has been in complete control of the territory where people have been agitating for a political resolution to their longstanding demand for bringing the dispute over J&K to a closure.

It is true that Pakistan is involved and has carried out attacks with the help of Lashkar i Tayabba and Jaish i Mohammed in India. However, the area under Indian control has been in turmoil for very long, and people have fought for their demand for right of self-determination by using all the peaceful means available to them including participating in elections. In all these 68 years, Indian Governments have not succeeded in ending the struggle of Kashmiris despite use of brutal force.

Recall that since past 27 years the struggle, J&K is a declared as a "Disturbed Area" and AFSPA is in force. The forces brutally put down the struggle and we are told by Government that everything is alright now, but there is no "normalcy" because every few years the struggle commences and then once again brutal suppression follows. This cycle has been on for 27 years. Meanwhile nothing has been done to restore the autonomy of J&K promised, and constitutionally guaranteed. With no forward movement in reaching a political solution the demand for Azaadi from India gains legitimacy.

#### **By closing all doors for democratic solution it is, we insist, the Indian government which provided an opportunity to Pakistan to interfere.**

Consider this. From the time Sheikh Abdullah was arrested in 1953, people have faced repression in the area under Indian control. Despite the settlement of 1975 when Sheikh Abdullah returned to power following the Parthasarthy-Afzal Baig agreement in 1975, the promise to restore the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir was never kept. Central Government continues to exercise complete control and the elected State Government cannot even prevent use of pellet guns, withdraw security forces, remove AFSPA, or release arrested persons without Central Government's approval.

#### **But that does not mean that we should support those who want to break-away from India?**

CDRO believes that India's unity means the unity of the peoples of India. Territorial unity without the unity of people of India has no meaning. And unity of people means that we Indians have to stand by people who face repression and support demand for a democratic solution. In Nagaland, Government of India has been holding talks for more than 18 years with National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) without any pre-condition. So why cannot they do the same in Kashmir?

CDRO believes that we cannot fight for unity of the country if we are not outraged by the suffering of our own people, whom we claim to be our "integral part"- the Kashmiri people who have faced Military rule for more than 27 years. The entire J&K remains a "disturbed" area and Armed Forces of the Union enjoy legal immunity from prosecution for any harm done to a civilian; killing, torture, rape, disappearance etc.

Since 1989-90 more than 70,000 persons have been killed, hundreds of women faced sexual violence, 8-10,000 people remain disappeared after they were taken into custody, and no less than 60,000 were victims of torture. During this entire period of 27 years Indian people rarely protested against AFSPA, atrocities by security forces or extended support and succor to the Kashmiri people. All this compels Kashmiris to demand Azaadi, which is a cry for Freedom from oppression.

### **All this is fine, but why support the Kashmiris who are acting on behalf of Pakistan?**

Let us look back. In 1947 it was Sheikh Abdullah led National Conference (NC) which pushed for accession with India. In 1947 when entire India and Pakistan was engulfed in blood-letting and Hindus and Sikhs were being killed in Pakistan and Muslims in India, it was remarkable that Kashmir remained peaceful. In fact in September 1947, in Jammu city Muslims on their way to Pakistan were given assurance of safe passage, but a massacre of Muslims took place. Even this did not provoke Kashmiris.

Indeed it is remarkable that in J&K once National Conference came to power in October 1947 they introduced the first ever radical land reform by ending Jagirdari system and distributing land to the tiller. Every tiller, Muslim or Hindu benefitted from this. Because under Dogra Maharajas all the land was owned by the King and people had no rights over land they cultivated.

So what made people who chose to be with India to change their minds later? It is this question we should ask. From 1953 onwards all elections in J&K were rigged and the Central government allowed this to happen because they chose the Chief Minister and not the State Assembly. Plus the memory of partition has been kept alive by India's communal organizations particularly the right wing parties who publicly cast suspicion on Muslims in India and always question their loyalty.

Like elsewhere in India, especially among the Adivasis and people in North East, land grab is also an issue in Kashmir. As in the North East so in J&K local people and their land and resources are supposed to be protected, and just as elsewhere in India, in J&K too, Government encroaches on people's land to benefit the rich and the privileged. As elsewhere in India, people in J&K are resisting land acquisition and have been resisting land takeover.

Besides, unemployment is very high and up to 40% of educated are unemployed. Horticulture and orchards remain the mainstay of the J&K economy and land is scarce, and a lot of cultivable land is occupied by Security Forces. Most of the jobs being generated in the government sector is in the Armed Police, that too on contract where total wages are Rs 6000. For instance, in August 2016 Narendra Modi Government announced that 10,000 persons would be employed in J&K Police.

Just as a comparison. Delhi has a population of 1.6 crore people and a police force of 85,000 or 1 policeman for 1600 people in Delhi. None of us who live in Delhi feel safe with them because they mostly work for the Party in power at the Centre and ordinary people face tremendous obstruction from them if they go to file their complaints. Now imagine a place where the population is 1.3 crore with presence of more than 650,000 soldiers and police persons facing people, a ratio of 1 soldier for 20 civilians. Imagine also that the police and soldier enjoy legal immunity that protects them from any threat of prosecution for

any crime they commit, such as rape, murder, torture. They are all armed and under AFSPA the forces enjoy the power even to kill on mere suspicion. Imagine also that such conditions have been present for 27 years. Would anyone of us here in India prefer that? If we were forced to live in such conditions where even the Right to Life is jeopardized for 27 years, how would we feel? What would be our sentiments? And if people are angry in Kashmir because of such repressive conditions why should we be surprised.

National Security Advisor in UPA government MK Narayanan recently said that the Kashmiri movement is indigenous and not a Pakistan sponsored movement. Surely, if even top security expert of India says that, then it is time for us to shed abusing the Kashmiris for being puppets of Pakistan, and treat them as our own people who are demanding a democratic solution for once and for all.

### **That's alright but what about Kashmiri Pandits?**

CDRO is clear that the migration of more than three lakh Kashmiri Pandits was a horrible thing to have happened. They have suffered being driven from their home and hearth and remain migrants who have not been able to return. While Kashmiri society bears blame for not making them feel secure and safe, the greater blame is that of Governor Jagmohan and VP Singh Government in New Delhi which pushed the Kashmiri Pandits to migrate and by transporting them to Jammu and beyond, rather than protecting them where they lived and worked. For 27 years in the name of 'national security' J&K has been reeling under dictatorship of the central government. And despite the enormous force at their command they have failed to enable return of the Kashmiri Pandits.

Also long before the migration of Kashmiri Pandits the local Muslims have been suffering at the hands of the Indian Government. It was Government of India which violated the constitutional autonomy provided to J&K after 1953 and began to rule J&K from New Delhi. Besides, just consider, that 27 years have passed and yet there is no "normalcy" in J&K. Every few years people protest. Because, there is no serious effort towards political solution. Even Indian Army has said that Kashmir or North East cannot be solved militarily but only politically. The military can only restore order. So why is it that after 27 years there is no "normalcy"? India's Supreme Court asked the same question from Government of India recently when hearing arguments in a case related to 1528 fake encounters in Manipur. The Court said that if normalcy has not been restored (46 years in Manipur, 68 years in Nagaland and 27 years in J&K) then there is something wrong with the policy. And wrong there is because to have military rule under AFSPA for so many years is a cruel joke on our own people whose democratic rights given by our Constitution are being denied for so many decades.

So when Kashmiris ask for Azaadi, they want Azaadi from oppression and for what is being denied to them. Because this Azaadi is not possible in India, then why blame them for asking for Azaadi from India?

### **But the Kashmiri militants are Muslim fanatics?**

What is happening in J&K is related and linked to what is happening in India. All the sufferings of the past have been aggravated by coming to power of RSS-BJP in India as the ruling party. In the last 30 months the Saffron Brigade has unleashed its vicious campaign and targeted Dalits and Muslims and everyone else who challenges their politics. We have seen, "ghar wapsi", "love jihad", charges of being "anti-national"- anyone who questions the fanatic Hindutva campaign has been attacked, trolled, abused and maligned. In a sensitive area like J&K they have also unleashed a divisive campaign, cow vigilantes have lynched Kashmiri Muslim truck drivers, BJP MLA's have attacked fellow Muslim MLAs, they have used religious yatras to preach hatred of Muslims. This has created a sense of fear and insecurity among Muslims of J&K, especially when Indian military is controlled by the RSS-BJP Central Government. If people are made to feel insecure and live under fear of pellet guns, night raids, arrests, torture etc and no one in India speaks out against them, then people feel even more vulnerable and are alienated from India and Indians. Our silence also sends the message that Indians do not care for them and only covet their beautiful land.

On the other hand, the hallmark of a fanatic is hatred of the 'other'. Now it is remarkable that the much maligned Kashmiri militants have repeatedly welcomed Amarnath Yatris and even welcomed Kashmiri Pandits. It is "foreign militants" who have threatened and attacked the *yatris* in the past. But if in India presence of Hindutva in power at Centre has not turned all of India into supporters of RSS-BJP, then to dismiss entire Kashmiri people's struggle as of fanatic Muslims is even more wrong because they are not even in power, unlike Hindutva groups in India.

The formation of the current coalition government of BJP-PDP in J & K, has contributed to the present situation. PDP campaigned on the plank of keeping RSS-BJP out. But once they formed the government, in defiance of the mandate, the RSS-BJP only stepped up its rabidly communal agenda by appointing as a Minister a BJP person who is accused of lynching two persons in Kishtwar, by raking up issues such as abrogation of Article 370 and unleashing anti-Muslim campaigns. There have been killings of Kashmiri truck drivers, and even attacks on Kashmiri MLAs by BJP men inside the state Assembly for disagreeing with them. And since July 8<sup>th</sup>, continuing into the present, the same state and central governments have let loose the most vicious brutal campaign against unarmed civilians, by encouraging security forces to use pellet guns for blinding and injuring, and to arrest old and young – men, women, boys and girls.

Day in and day out Indian Government propaganda says everything is due to Pakistan. But no one explains that if this part of J&K has been under Indian control since 1947, and people have again and again come out to vote, then how come Pakistan finds it so easy to stir up trouble? IF after 68 years of Indian control, and 27 years of military suppression, the Government has still not brought "normalcy" in J&K, then it also means that Indian government is responsible for vitiating the conditions in J&K and this incompetence of theirs has allowed Pakistan to fish in "troubled waters". It also means that Government of India does not believe in any political solution.

CDRO also believes that in forcing Indian Army to bring "normalcy" the Indian Government is harming the Indian Army. Because any Army which is deployed against its own people, that too for over 27 years, means that the Government has failed.

Friends, who are reading this 'parcha', CDRO urges you to understand that truth has another side which must also be brought before the public. It is, therefore, Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisations stands in solidarity with the peoples of J&K in their struggle to be Free and condemns the use of Pellet Guns, killing civilians including children, blinding young girls and boys, and causing injuries to tens of thousands of people. WE insist that only restoration of civil liberties and de-militarisation followed by search for a democratic solution can prevent the slide into revival of armed militancy and end the cycle of violence which is weakening us from inside. CDRO believes that we cannot win over people when they are being killed, blinded, arrested & detained, or justice is denied to them and political solution ignored. CDRO appeals to you to realize the gravity of the situation and join us in extending a message of solidarity with our own people in J&K who need to know that we care.

*Constituent Organisations: Association for Democratic Rights (AFDR, Punjab), Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR, West Bengal); Asansol Civil Rights Association, West Bengal; Bandi Mukti Committee (West Bengal); Civil Liberties Committee (CLC, Andhra Pradesh); Civil Liberties Committee (CLC, Telangana); Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR, Maharashtra); Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR, Tamil Nadu); Coordination for Human Rights (COHR, Manipur); Human Rights Forum (HRF, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana); Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS, Assam); Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR); Peoples' Committee for Human Rights (PCHR, Jammu and Kashmir); Peoples Democratic Forum (PDF, Karnataka); Jharkhand Council for Democratic Rights (JCDR, Jharkhand); Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR, Delhi); Peoples Union for Civil Rights (PUCR, Haryana), Campaign for Peace & Democracy in Manipur (CPDM), Delhi. Other Organisations in Delhi endorse this: Aahwan; Ek Janwadi Sanskritik Muhim, All India Students Association (AISA), Ambedkar Bhgat Singh Students Front (ABSF), Bigul, Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Students Organization (BASO), Bhagat Singh Chatra Ekta Manch, Campaign Against Fascist Attack on University (CAFOU), Dalit Queer, Democratic Students Union (DSU), Inqalabi Mazdoor Kendra (IMK), Jamia Students Forum, Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association (JTSA), Janhastakshep, Morcha, Mehnatkarsh Mahila Sangathan (MMS), Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS), Saheli, Stree Mukti Sangathan, North-East Forum*

for International Solidarity (NEFIS) , Women Against Sexual Repression and State Violence (WSS), Disha ,Morcha,Manipur Students Association,Delhi (MSAD)