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Kashmir

End the repression - for self determination

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Radical Socialist condemns the continued violence against people in the Kashmir valley, where the death toll is continuously rising, making people remember 2010 all over again. Even by Government figures, in the last two decades around 40,000 people have been killed, including over 21000 real or spurious terrorists. Civil rights groups put the figure at around 100,000.

The violence this time was sparked off by state response to the public protests at the killing of Burhan Wani, described by Indian state and media as poster boy of the Hizbul Mujahideen. Wani was the latest in a series of "terrorist killed in encounter". In many of these cases, the killings have been extremely dubious. Some reports (e.g., by the PUCL) about Wani's killing suggest he was shot dead from a distance of four feet in a case of cold blooded murder. Two other persons accompanying Wani were also killed by a special team of the security forces. Such cold blooded killings camouflaged as "encounter" in an alleged gun-fight is unacceptable in a democracy. This followed previous such cases and sparked widespread outrage.

The response of the state has been to intensify shootings, killings, and other violence. Over forty people have been killed so far, and over 300 injured till date. The unprovoked indiscriminate firing, teargas shelling and lathi-charge on a mob gathered for Wani's last rites, is a gross violation of the law and a human rights excess, or would be in any democratic country.

Indiscriminate repression by the Indian state is experienced by Kashmiris in their day-to-day lives. Secular and democratic forms of protest have been brutally silenced over the years. Certainly, terrorism exists in Kashmir. But unless the conversation is shifted from terrorism to the causes of terrorism, India can only go on increasing the size of the armed forces and the numbers killed, maimed, raped, without any just peace. The 22 year-old Wani, belonging to one such group became, in his death, a symbol of the Kashmiri aspiration for freedom and resistance against state oppression. Thousands of mourners gathered on the fateful weekend could relate to his death, as death of their own kin who took up arms for the cause of freedom. The eruption witnessed in the last week in the valley, unlike the portrayal in the media is not a make of any foreign power. This represents popular anger, and a refusal to put up with the military dominated national integration practiced by India.

It is important to point out that under the present regime, while the actual behavior of the military and the police has not changed the degree of ideological pressure in India to accept this has grown. Thus, television channels have been used to silence all dissent on Kashmir. The social media has been widely used to propagate not merely hatred, but slogans of annihilating the Kashmiri people, forcible population transfers to turn them into minorities in their own land, etc. Rapes and sexual violence of all sorts have become commonplaces in Kashmir. The quarter century old Kunan Poshpora rape case drags on in a far away court. It is not even allowed to be brought to the Srinagar High Court. Sexual violence in a war like context is not about sexual desire. When 125 soldiers enter a village, separate the men from the women, and sexually assault 50 women aged between 13 and 60, clearly we are seeing a military practice. But while huge numbers of rapes are claimed by women, there is not a single conviction. Justices B.S. Chauhan and Swatanter Kumar, during the hearing of the Pathribal fake encounter at the Supreme Court in 2012, had said to armed personnel: "You go to a place in exercise of AFSPA, you commit rape, you commit murder, then where is the question of sanction? It is a normal crime which needs to be prosecuted, and that is our stand."

But the executive and legislative wings of the state have flatly ignored this occasional intervention by the judicial wing. India asserts that Kashmir is an integral part of India, something proved by the fact that elections are periodically held. Residents of the Valley have lost all faith in these claims, at least since the late 1980s. Kashmir's right to self-determination, conceded verbally in 1948, has been systematically ignored. By holding elections, India has

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falsely claimed that high voter turn-out during such elections is an indicator of the ebb in the demand for Kashmir's freedom. However, the political demand for self-determination has remained deeply etched in the popular consciousness of the people. Imposing draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Power's Act that give the impunity to state forces to kill, exposes the role of the Indian state that uses brute force to subjugate people in the valley.

Under the garb of protecting territorial integrity and national security, excesses and abuse of state power in Kashmir by the Indian state continue unabated. While, the Indian state cries foul over Pakistan's sponsoring terror in Kashmir, it conveniently ignores the state terror that the people in the valley are subjected to.

The rise of Hindutva ideology has added another dimension. Every Kashmiri Muslim is seen as a de facto terrorist. While crocodile tears are shed about Kashmiri Pandits, they are retained in the same position, even by the BJP, because their prime value lies in responding to all criticism about AFSPA, fake encounters, etc with a one line query: "What about the Pandits?" Given that in Pakistan occupied Kashmir too, opposition to spurious governments imposed from Islamabad are met with violence, it is clear that Kashmiris see themselves as a distinct nation.

We do not find it necessary to endorse this or that particular party or leadership. Nor are the people of Kashmir waiting for endorsement, and still less guidance or direction from India. As Indians, our responsibility is to mobilize people, to demand from the Government of India:

â€¢ Repeal the Armed Forces Special Power's Act.

â€¢ Stop all forms of violence including sexual violence.

â€¢ De-militarise Kashmir.

â€¢ Restore freedom of the press inside Kashmir.

â€¢ Conduct a thorough investigation into the excesses carried out by military, para-military and police forces.

â€¢ Exemplary punishment to those found guilty.

â€¢ Affirm the right to self determination.

â€¢ Immediate relief measures for the survivors of state violence.

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