

Gone and not forgotten The story of the disappeared people in Kashmir

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"Two decades of conflict between militants and the Indian army and police have cost more than 40,000 lives to date. Violent protests of Kashmiri Muslims against the Indian security forces take place in the streets of Srinagar on a weekly basis. Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Kashmir, as many as 10,000 people have disappeared after being arrested by the Indian security forces. The majority of them are non-combatant Kashmir's. Thousands of women and children are seeking answers regarding the fate of their missing beloved ones. Indian government seems to be indifferent to the distress of the families.

Founded in 1994, The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) has been struggling to find out the whereabouts of the Kashmiri men subjected to enforced custodial disappearance in the past 20 years. In the early 90's a large number of parents and relatives of disappeared people used to visit the High Court of India to pursue the Habeas Corpus petitions. This led to the establishment of APDP when the organization's Patron, a practicing lawyer and a Human Rights activist, together with APDP's Chairperson, Parveena Ahangar, decided to combine all individual efforts into a strong collective effort to ascertain the fate of the missing persons. Parveena Ahangar is herself a victim of the enforced disappearance in the state. She has lost her 16 years old son, Javed Ahangar, who was taken away by the Indian forces during a raid in their neighborhood. Javed was picked up for interrogation and that was the last that his family ever set eyes on him. Parveena's personal story is one of so many others in Kashmir. Since the foundation of APDP, the association has been organizing protests across the valley and providing families with legal advice as well as support in their efforts to find out the fate of their beloved ones.

20 years ago there was one small orphanage in Srinagar while today the city has 6 large institutions filled to the brim. As of today approximately 100,000 children in Jammu and Kashmir, a 5.5 million people state, are considered orphans - a term referring to children who have lost their fathers and whose mothers are too poor to look after them. Many of the girls at "Banat Institute of Education", an orphan girls institute in Srinagar, are daughters of disappeared men. The institution is funded by donations only. The government does not take part in the financing of the institution.

Enforced or involuntary disappearance has become a public issue in the Jammu and Kashmir state. Disappearance is a crime against humanity. According to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is governed by the Rome Statute, the persons found responsible for disappearances shall be personally responsible for violation of International Humanitarian Law. The struggle of the relatives of disappeared people is continuing with the international human rights community."

"Hindu fundamentalists in India are now petrified that international players may want to participate in their hyped up Kashmir imbroglio. This will put paid to a "cross border" imported terrorism bogey and focus attention on renewed Zionist type oppression in Kashmir.