

Shattered Dreams: The Reality of Enforced Disappearances in India occupied Kashmir:

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In the picturesque yet tumultuous region of Indian-occupied Kashmir, the recent discovery of the body of Showkat Ahmad Bajad and Riyaz Ahmed Bajard has once again highlighted the grim reality of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Showkat, along with his brother Riyaz and another youth named Mukhtar Ahmad, went missing last month from Qazigund. The bodies of both Showkat and Riyaz have since been recovered, igniting protests and demands for accountability from their families and local communities.

The recovery of body's of Bajard Bothers from Vishnu Nala in Kulgam district serves as a haunting reminder of the ongoing violence and human rights abuses that have plagued Kashmir for decades. The families of the missing youths staged protests on the National Highway at Qazigund, calling for an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding their disappearances. Members of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly from various political parties, including the National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Peoples Conference (PC), joined the call for accountability, emphasizing that the issue of enforced disappearances is not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of state violence in the region.

The history of enforced disappearances in Kashmir dates back to the early 1990s, coinciding with the onset of current phase of uprising against Indian occupation and for the quest of right to selfdetermination . During this period, Indian occupation forces remained engaged in arbitrarily arresting youths from their homes during siege and search operations, only to later deny their detention. The Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) have documented over 10,000 enforced disappearances and nearly 8,000 custodial killings attributed to torture in custody. These numbers reflect a staggering reality that has left countless families in anguish, searching for answers and justice.

The case of Abdul Rashid Dar, who was arrested from his home in Kunan Poshpora in March 2023, and later found dead in Zurhama forests with visible signs of torture, exemplifies the brutal nature of state violence in Kashmir. Local police and the Border Security Force (BSF) claimed that he had escaped from custody, a narrative that has been widely disputed by his family and human rights advocates. Such incidents underscore the urgent need for accountability and justice for victims of state-sponsored violence.

The impunity enjoyed by Indian security forces is enshrined in laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which grants them sweeping powers to operate without fear of prosecution. This draconian law has been criticized by human rights organizations and international bodies for undermining the right to life and perpetuating a culture of violence and abuse. The Indian government has consistently refused to repeal AFSPA, despite widespread calls for its abolition, insisting that it is essential for maintaining order in the region. This stance reflects a troubling disregard for human rights and the rule of law.

The discovery of unmarked mass graves in various parts of Kashmir has further compounded the sense of despair among the local population. Reports from human rights organizations have revealed the existence of these graves, believed to contain the remains of individuals who were forcibly disappeared. The lack of

transparency and accountability surrounding these graves raises serious questions about the extent of state violence in Kashmir and the fate of those who have gone missing.

The recent events surrounding the deaths of Showkat and Riyaz Ahmad Bajad are not isolated incidents but rather part of a broader narrative of suffering and injustice in Kashmir. The families of these youths, like many others, are left grappling with the loss of their loved ones while demanding answers from a system that has repeatedly failed them. The call for accountability is not merely a demand for justice for the deceased but a broader assertion of the people's right to life, dignity, and justice.

The international community has a crucial role to play in addressing the human rights violations in Kashmir. The principles of international law, including the right to life and the prohibition of torture, must be upheld and enforced. The United Nations and other international bodies should take a stronger stance against the impunity enjoyed by security forces in Kashmir and advocate for an independent investigation into cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

The people of Kashmir have long endured the consequences of state violence, but their will for justice and their demand for their rights cannot be extinguished by the killing of innocent individuals under mysterious circumstances. The spirit of resistance among the Kashmiri people remains unbroken, as they continue to seek truth, justice, and accountability for the atrocities committed against them.

In conclusion, the tragic fate of Showkat and Riyaz Ahmad Bajad serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for accountability and justice in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The ongoing cycle of violence and impunity must be addressed to ensure that such tragedies do not continue to unfold. The world must not turn a blind eye to the suffering of the Kashmiri people; their voices must be heard, and their rights must be upheld. Only then can there be a path toward healing and reconciliation in this beleaguered region.

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