

## Kashmir

# The Struggle for 'Disappeared' People Continue

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Kashmir people have horrifying and heart-breaking stories to tell. In the last two decades period, their husbands, sons, brothers, close relatives or friends had disappeared in thousands. The question for many families now is not whether the disappeared persons can return, but a clear and authoritative statement from the authorities whether the concerned persons are alive or dead and if dead, where their bodies were buried and what was the cause of their death.

The phenomenon of "disappearance" had created a peculiar category of women in Jammu and Kashmir. They are called as "half widows". These helpless women refuse to accept themselves as "widows" unless and until the death of their husbands was confirmed by the authorities. Hence, they are settled down to the status of "half widows".

In the last 20 years, the affected families or the people in general had made several representation to the administration or security forces for information about the fate of their persons who were picked up from their homes or fields or street. They approached the courts, democratic and human rights for a. They resorted to small and massive protest actions. The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons had come up only in the course of this democratic action of the people.

A Sri Nagar based democratic rights forum called, Jammu-Kashmir coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) has done a most difficult and protracted investigation into the fate of disappeared persons. It had estimated that 8000 persons had disappeared in Jammu-Kashmir since 1990s, especially in Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Poonch and Rajouri districts. It had documented the existence of more than 7000 unmarked graves. Astonishingly, the govt. has expressed its inability to show the records of persons buried in these graves. The Jammu-Kashmir Human Rights Commission has then intervened into the situation and directed (Sept 16, 2011) the govt. to identify the persons using all available means and technics including DNA profiling and dental examination. But nothing has moved. Again in 2012, the court too had directed the state to undertake the DNA profiling of those buried in the unmarked graves. But the govt. has expressed its inability to do so.

Yet the deceased people, democratic and human rights for a and people in general had not given up their hope and struggle. The struggle for justice is on.

A grave digger, Raja Atta Mohammad Khan, resident of Bimbyour village in Baramullah district of Jammu-Kashmir had contributed a lot to the struggle of people to identify the dead persons buried in the unmarked graves. He had died on Feb 10, 2016 of chest and kidney ailments. (More details can be had in a separate report published in this issue.)

## A Funeral without A Dead Body

Here is a report based on a write up by PeerzadaAshiqi published in THE HINDU on Jan20, 2016:

Manzoor Ahmad Dar, father of MsBilqees Dar was picked up by the Army's 35 Rashtiya Rifles on Jan 18, 2002. Bilqees was 16 years old at that time. She was in 9<sup>th</sup> class. Her agonising search had failed to locate her father. She said: "we returned disappointed from every jail, every Army camp and every police station where we searched for our father. However, it is a unique case where the government presumed the victim to be dead."

A special investigating team probing Dar's custodial disappearance closed the case on Nov 26, 2015 concluding that Major Kishore Malhotra (now Brigadier) abducted him from his residence and "his body could have been disposed of." An arrest warrant was issued against the officer by a local court.

With this, MsBilqees organised an assembly of mourners around 2 PM in a school ground in Sri Nagar's Rawalpora area on Jan 19, 2016. She told with all pain and agony that she did not want to

see her ageing mother die a “half widow”. ( a term coined for women whose husbands have disappeared mainly in counter-insurgency operations carried out by the security agencies.)

Scores of people gathered at the school ground for the funeral. A spontaneous shut down was observed in the area. Several protesters raised anti-government slogans and waved flags. Hurriyat and JKLF leaders offered prayers. Parveena Ahangar, the Chairperson of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons has declared: “The struggle to search and identify our loved ones will continue.”

This struggle is a part of a larger and basic struggle of Kashmir people for their democratic and national rights. By their crimes, the Indian rulers are only further strengthening the convictions and determination of people in the justness of their struggle.

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