
A brief report on education and militarization in Kashmir

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Overview of education under militarisation:

All children in Kashmir grow as witnesses to the war around us. We go about our daily lives while an active war is raging in our backyards, our gardens, our schools, our hospitals. Despite the turmoil that engulfs us, our parents have prioritised education because they realise that this is a life-saving priority that will help us deal with the horrors that surround us and equip us with the most useful tools for our long-term wellbeing. **Today marks the 40th day that three million Kashmiri children under the age of 18 are facing a repeated onslaught on their education due to the reckless policies being employed in Kashmir.** Over the last 40 days, there has been a suspension of all communication- phones, internet and even letters in Kashmir.

Situation since August 5, 2019

All public life has been suspended since August 5, 2019. As such, there are no opportunities for children to pursue their education. Just like in 2016, tuition centres, schools, universities are all shut and in many cases the educational buildings are taken over by the security forces.¹

On August 22, 2019, we met a fact finding team that visited Kashmir during the blockade after August 5. The information gathered in their visit indicates that in the first two weeks since the clampdown began, Indian security forces have abducted young school-age children in night raids. During these night raids, girls in these homes have allegedly been molested and threatened with sexual abuse. You may access this report for more information.² The report highlights an interaction with an 11-year-old boy in Pampore who had been held in a police station between 5 August and 11 August. He had been beaten up, and he said there were boys even younger than him in custody, from nearby villages. Presently, we have two more fact-finding teams of journalists and activists in Kashmir who will be in India within a week to update us on the situation as it develops on ground.

Reports indicate that loss of life, on the scale seen in 2016, has been prevented. However, as indicated in this report by the Independent,³ it is important to note that Indian officials have not been issuing death certificates and so the verification of any numbers of dead is not possible. Last week, a 16 year old student of class 11, passed away and the Indian security forces recorded that the cause of death was an injury by a stone, however medical reports indicate that he had suffered multiple pellet-gun wounds and a skull injury.⁴

¹ <https://www.firstpost.com/india/schools-in-kashmir-turn-into-armed-fortresses-as-students-watch-in-muted-horror-2980890.html>

² <https://indianculturalforum.in/2019/08/14/kashmir-caged-a-fact-finding-report/>

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/kashmir-india-death-certificates-jammu-protests-violence-modi-a9079371.html>

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/kashmiri-teenager-dies-pellet-tear-gas-shell-wounds-hospital-190904181621345.html>

The boy's family stated that Indian security forces did not allow his body to be buried in their family graveyard.

Loss of education

Presently, since, August 5, 2019, all schools and educational institutions have remained shut off, just like they were shut in 2016⁵. On August 17, 2019, in an attempt to manufacture normalcy, the Indian Government passed orders for reopening of nearly 200 primary schools in Srinagar⁶ but as indicated in this report⁷ by BBC, parents faced tremendous difficulty due to travel restrictions/ curfew in Kashmir and therefore no attendance has been possible. India's PTI news agency reported that in repose to the Order of the Government of India, only government schools have re-opened, with private schools remaining closed, however there has been no report or check on how many students were able to attend these government schools. The government has reported that 30% teaching staff was present in the schools.⁸

The impact of militarisation has been deep and profound on the educational atmosphere in Kashmir. This Economic Survey Report of 2017, released by the Chief Economic Advisor of India, accepted that due to nearly 150 days of forced closure of schools in 2016, students from class 1 to class 9 had to be given a mass promotion without exams. After each incident of disturbance, schools and colleges remain shut for months. This is a repeating pattern since 2008 where almost every year schools are indefinitely shut. In 2016, schooling for the whole year was only conducted for a total of 3-4 months.⁹ Many students had been taught less than 50% of the curriculum for the year. This damage to our education is 'irreparable'. The exposure to armed conflict has reduced the quantity of education attained by children in Kashmir. These students then compete in national exams against Indian students who have no history of dealing with the kind of hurdles that a Kashmiri student has to endure.

Sexual abuse/ harassment of Kashmiri female students studying in Kashmir

This report¹⁰ by Al Jazeera highlights the misogyny and abuse faced by Kashmiri girls since August 5, 2019. During Cordon and Search Operations, many teenaged girls face rape threats and intimidation by Indian security forces.

⁵ <https://scroll.in/article/818275/in-kashmir-students-lost-out-on-school-for-close-to-three-months-but-still-have-exams-coming-up>

⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/normalcy-kashmir-students-stay-schools-190819104606058.html>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49394618>

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/normalcy-kashmir-students-stay-schools-190819104606058.html>

⁹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/kashmir-unrest-education-sector-badly-affected-says-report/>

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/women-biggest-victims-inhumane-siege-190820122327902.html>

This is another shocking report¹¹ which highlights one such incident where a large contingent of Indian forces entered Midur village in Awantipora town in South Kashmir and indulged in physical and verbal abuse of women present there. The alleged actions during these raids include spitting on women, vulgar gestures and physical violence.

School-going girls are often harassed by security forces, on their way to school. Over the past years, it has been observed that children whose family members have been detained by Indian security forces have also become vulnerable to exploitation. It has been admitted by elected leaders¹² that female students, teenaged girls are engaged by Indian security forces in operations to apprehend militants. Recently, Major Gogoi of the Indian army was caught in a hotel room with a female Kashmiri student last year.¹³ Even high-ranking officials in security agencies are accused of having molested teenaged girls. In 2006, a 15-year-old female student Yasmin revealed that Indian security forces had resorted using honeycombs to trap Kashmiri militants.¹⁴ In 2009 a female student of class 10 from Shopian, and her sister-in-law, was allegedly raped and killed by members of security agencies leading to huge agitation in Kashmir valley.¹⁵ Amidst all this, any sense of justice, from the civil society of India, is elusive in the light of sweeping assumptions of integrity and honour on part of security forces stationed in Kashmir.

Attacks on faculty/teachers

The Indian Constitution does not have any specific provision which explicitly prohibits torture. The Supreme Court of India however, made it clear in its case law that protection against torture is inherent in right to life and personal liberty. However, there are many reported cases of teachers, professors, academics and other members of the educational community being taken prisoner, held in captivity, beaten and tortured and killed in custody¹⁶. This report from TRT world highlights how earlier in 2019, a chemistry teacher was killed in police custody.¹⁷ This report¹⁸ from NDTV, an Indian TV channel, reports how the Indian army admitted to killing of another teacher in 2016 after he was picked up in an overnight raid.

Attacks on school children

Until recently, there was no protection given to juveniles in Kashmir and children were routinely arrested and jailed. Even after the legislation has been passed, there are extra-judicial methods being employed to circumvent the law and detain or arrest, and harm children psychologically and physically. In April 2017,

¹¹ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/in-kashmir-security-searches-lead-to-sexual-abuse/>

¹² PDP leader Muzaffar Hussain Baig went on record saying Kashmiri girls were used as honey traps against militants- Read: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20071022-sex-and-the-valley-734314-2007-10-12>

¹³ <https://www.india.com/news/india/army-using-kashmiri-girls-as-honey-trap-to-catch-militants-hizbul-mujahideen-commander-in-viral-audio-message-3083512/>

Also see <https://www.india.com/news/agencies/court-seeks-status-report-in-major-gogoi-hotel-incident-3076529/>

¹⁴ <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2006/06/484>

¹⁵ <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/06/01/justice-elusive-shopian-case/>

Also see <http://www.kashmirlit.org/infinite-injustice-lies-damned-lies/>

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/southasia/2019/03/clashes-kashmir-teacher-dies-police-custody-190319133729126.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/a-teacher-is-killed-in-kashmir-where-is-the-justice-25152>

¹⁸ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/army-admits-teacher-killed-by-soldiers-says-unacceptable-unjustified-1446197>

50 students were shot with pellet-guns when hundreds of students from Sri Pratap College led a protest against Indian forces.¹⁹

Attacks on schools

Presently, the schools are shut and so there have been no reports of attacks on schools since August 5, 2019 in Kashmir. It is pertinent to mention that schools are regularly within the line of fire by paramilitary even in Srinagar, where often teargas shells are fired into schools and in the schools near the LOC, live ammunition often finds its way in. In 2014, heavy shelling by Indian forces on the Sialkot border villages in Charwar sector caused 120 government schools to shut, and caused heightened levels of fear and distress for local communities.²⁰ The paramilitary forces are routinely accused of directing tear-gas shells into schools and hospitals which there are children inside.²¹ Both schools and universities are damaged. In addition, there have been many attacks of arson on schools and the government is unable to identify who perpetrated the attacks. In 2016 alone, 32 school buildings were burned down by unknown people. Either the Government of India is incompetent or they are complicit. Here are some reports by BBC and Aljazeera that covered this incident.²² In 2016, shelling across the border lead to closure of 25 girls' and 34 boys' schools. On December 16th 2016, a school van was hit by shelling, killling the driver and wounding eight children. On the July 25th 2017, a school building in Poonch was heavily damaged due to shelling. The week before, 25 schools closed due to ceasefire violations.²³

Blockade of internet

Since August 5, 2019 there has been no internet access in Kashmir. Students taking online exams, form submissions for colleges and any internet related activity are deeply affected. Apart from the obvious effect of having no connectivity, the internet blockade and accompanying curfew situation has affected Kashmiri students living around the world as their parents are unable to send any money to them.

Mental health of students

Kashmiri students face a direct and on-going threat to their lives every day. Living in the backdrop of a perpetual threat of violence has led to problems with mental health, as well as stunted intellectual development. A 2014 study compared the mental health of school-children in Srinagar to those in Kolkata. The students in Kashmir were found to be more than twice as likely to suffer from poor mental and emotional health.²⁴ Since 2014, the incidents of turmoil and bloodshed have increased. 2018 is on record

¹⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1422920/dangerous-new-phase-kashmir-conflict/>

²⁰ <http://www.pakistankakhudahafiz.com/india-resumes-shelling-ajk-sialkot-villages/>

²¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/kashmir-teen-shot-dead-54-students-wounded-clashes-170415190505282.html>

May also see- <https://time.com/4743988/kashmir-jammu-india-pakistan-unrest/>

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/11/burning-kashmir-schools-161102102009566.html>

Also see- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37819842>

²³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/impact-explosive-violence-students-and-education-kashmir>

²⁴ Monidipa Banerjee et al. (2014). 'A comparative study of mental health problems among 11-17 year old Indian school children living in areas with persistent political violence and children of the same age group living under standard conditions using self-rated Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire', Sri Lanka Journal of Child Health, 2015; 44(2): 88-91.

as the bloodiest year in the last decade.²⁵ The effects of this unabated ghastly violence on the mental health of students in Kashmir are drastic.

Female students dropping out

Proximity of schools to military camps leading to an increased chance of sexual abuse and harassment have lead to fears causing an increase in female dropout rates in rural areas over the last few years.

Situation of Kashmiri students in Indian cities

It is essential to highlight the dangerous conditions of Kashmiri students living in Indian cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi etc. Indian leaders are on record²⁶ making sexist and misogynistic remarks about Kashmiri girls, alluding to human trafficking. This creates an atmosphere of fear and general hostility towards the Kashmiri students living in Indian cities. These incidents are a humiliation of Kashmiri people merely because they are from Kashmir and the videos of such attacks are widely circulated on the internet and social media but no action has been taken against the perpetrators till now. Since August 5, 2019, there are many incidents of Indian shopkeepers refusing to sell supplies to Kashmiri students, mobile phone dealers are refusing sim-cards, and hotel owners are refusing accommodation to Kashmiris. It doesn't help that Kashmiris look visibly different with our fair skin colour and facial features, making it easy to identify and harass. Here are some links that highlight the immense lack of safety and conditions Kashmiris are currently experiencing, all over India-

- Kashmiris students facing eviction in the aftermath of Pulwama attacks, as reported by Reuters.²⁷
- Kashmiri students fleeing Chandigarh were attacked and beaten as reported by Scroll.²⁸
- Kashmiris living in Maharashtra were also attacked, as reported by Economic Times.²⁹
- Kashmiri student living in Bangalore was beaten up by a mob, as reported by India Today.³⁰
- Kashmiris in Dehradun beaten up by a mob, as reported by Rising Kashmir; also see report by The Week indicating that 300 Kashmiri students had to flee Dehradun, following harassment and threats of physical violence.³¹

²⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/2018-is-the-deadliest-year-in-a-decade-in-kashmir-next-year-could-be-worse/2018/12/22/493ff2e4-03bb-11e9-958c-0a601226ff6b_story.html

May also see <https://www.newsclick.in/civilian-killings-2018-was-deadliest-year-kashmir-says-report>

²⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/khattars-rape-remark-congress-aap-hit-out-at-bjp/article25530845.ece>

²⁷ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-india-kashmir-backlash/kashmiris-complain-of-evictions-after-deadly-attack-on-indian-forces-authorities-promise-safety-idUKKCN1Q609J>

²⁸ <https://scroll.in/article/913585/in-makeshift-chandigarh-shelter-kashmiri-students-fleeing-dehradun-mobs-share-agonising-stories>

²⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/kashmiri-students-attacked-in-maharashtra/articleshow/68106084.cms>

³⁰ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/kashmiri-student-thrashed-bengaluru-1486136-2019-03-25>

³¹ <http://risingkashmir.com/news/kashmiri-students-studying-in-dehradun-beaten-threatened-344011.html>

Latest on the ground reality in Kashmir under siege.

Besides various media reports, the only two fact finding reports on the situation in Kashmir were conducted by two Indian civil society groups. The first one visited the Valley between August 9-13³² and the second group from Sept. 17-21³³. As per both reports there is clear evidence of the suffering of young children and youth and their parents.

On September 14, 2019, child rights expert, Enakshi Ganguly and Professor Shanta Sinha filed a PIL in the Indian Supreme Court against illegal detention of children in Jammu and Kashmir.³⁴

³² Kavita Krishnan et. al. Kashmir Caged: <https://www.nchro.org/index.php/2019/08/14/kashmir-caged-a-fact-finding-report-by-jean-dreze-kavita-krishnan-maimoona-mollah-and-vimal-bhai/>

³³ Women's Voice Fact finding report on Kashmir: <http://en.maktoobmedia.com/india/2019/09/24/full-text-womens-voice-fact-finding-report-on-kashmir/>

³⁴ PIL in Supreme Court against illegal detention of children in Kashmir: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/supreme-court-pil-against-illegal-detention-of-kashmiri-children-1599131-2019-09-14>