

MASRAT ZAHRA, PEERZADA ASHIQ, GOWHER GEELANI,  
AASIF SULTAN, AQUIB JAVED, KAMRAN YOUSUF, IRFAN  
AMIN MALIK, MUZAMIL MATTOO, AAZAN JAVID, ANEES  
ZARGAR, HAKEEM IRFAN, BASHARAT MASOOD, SAFWAT  
ZARGAR, NASEER GANIE, HAROON NABI, MUSHTAQ  
AHMAD, AAZAN JAVID, ANEES ZARGAR, HAKEEM IRFAN,  
BASHARAT MASOOD, NASEER GANIE, SAFWAT ZARGAR,  
MUSHTAQ AHMAD, HAROON NABI, ZUHAIB MAQBOOL,  
QAZI SHIBLI, MUSHTAQ GANAIE MASRAT ZAHRA,  
KAMRAN YOUSUF, GOWHER GEELANI, PEERZADA  
ASHIQ, GOWHER GEELANI, AASIF SULTAN, AQUIB

## **JOURNALISM IS NOT A CRIME: PRESS FREEDOM IN KASHMIR**

JAVID, ANEES ZARGAR, HAKEEM IRFAN, BASHARAT  
MASOOD, NASEER GANIE, SAFWAT ZARGAR, MUSHTAQ  
AHMAD, HAROON NABI, ZUHAIB MAQBOOL, QAZI SHIBLI,  
MUSHTAQ GANAIE MASRAT ZAHRA, KAMRAN YOUSUF,  
GOWHER GEELANI, PEERZADA ASHIQ, GOWHER  
GEELANI, AASIF SULTAN, AQUIB JAVED, KAMRAN  
YOUSUF, IRFAN AMIN MALIK, MUZAMIL MATTOO, AAZAN  
JAVID, ANEES ZARGAR, HAKEEM IRFAN, BASHARAT  
MASOOD, SAFWAT ZARGAR, NASEER GANIE, HAROON  
NABI, MUSHTAQ AHMAD, AAZAN JAVID, ANEES  
ZARGAR, HAKEEM IRFAN, BASHARAT MASOOD, NASEER



# PRESS FREEDOM IN KASHMIR



Ever since the intensification of armed Tehreek, the movement for self-determination, in Kashmir in the early 1990s, local journalists and writers consistently risked their lives to bring forth a truthful picture of Indian state's systematic crimes against Kashmiris. In turn, journalists and writers have been gagged, physically assaulted, threatened, detained, and debilitated by the agencies of the occupying Indian state. At the same time, many of India's corporate media houses who spin stories in favor of supposed Indian benevolence are facilitated to broadcast propaganda and smear Kashmiris as either irredeemable terrorists or embracing natives. The attacks on critical journalism include harassing the editors, publishers, and sponsors of local media, particularly the widely read newspaper dailies.

In the past years, as Kashmiris have begun to tell their own stories, bereft of the patronizing mediation of non-Kashmiris, particularly the Indians on both left and right of the political spectrum, Indian state's official 'security' narrative vis-à-vis Kashmir has been increasingly punctured. New Delhi has always attempted to place its occupation and war against the people of Kashmir within the framework of the so-called war against terror or a response to a proxy-war by Pakistan. The on-ground reportage from brave Kashmiri journalists, however, challenges this warped discourse and reveals the enormous violence embedded within the daily functioning of Indian occupation and counterinsurgency in Kashmir.

As most of the Indian media continues its attempt to erase Kashmiri agency from its daily propaganda, masked as news and analysis broadcasts, Kashmiri journalists cut through this incentivized 'newspeak' and bring out the ugly reality of the military occupation. In reporting the unfiltered truth, the journalists in Kashmir occupy the role of true intellectuals in Kashmiri society, for which the Indian state constantly persecutes them. This persecution comes in multiple forms, from the crippling



Masrat Zahra - a Kashmiri Journalist | Photo by: Nusrat

curbs on freedom of movement to the wholesale blockade of the communication channels. The journalists are often stopped, harassed, assaulted, and detained by the police and paramilitaries, manning countless checkpoints and public spaces, that form a pervasive part of Kashmir's occupation infrastructure. Many have been summoned to Kashmir's dreaded torture centers, an act aimed at intimidating them into silence and conformity. One journalist, Aasif Sultan, has been under detention, under 'terrorism' offenses, without fair trial for more than a year. Aasif, reportedly, refused to reveal the sources in one of his stories about a militant commander. Many, such as the photojournalist Kamran Yusuf, have



been hounded by India's 'counter-terrorism' agencies on preposterous charges. Photojournalists, who always remain at the forefront of revealing the crimes of the Indian state in Kashmir- from the Indian forces' war-crimes during gun-battles with armed rebels to violent assaults on protestors- face intensified oppression for the act of simply capturing the truth.



Asif Sultan - a Kashmiri journalist | Kashmir Narrator

Ever since the revocation of nominal autonomy occurred in August last year, which enabled the Indian government to begin settler-colonialism and engineer demographic changes in Kashmir, the sustained assault on Kashmiri journalists has only increased. Kashmiri journalists, putting their physical wellbeing at risk, tirelessly revealed the horrors of this intensified military siege in August. Reporters regularly faced assaults and detention while performing

their duties. Local dailies were intimidated into altering their editorial stance by steering clear of any commentary that challenges the Indian government's sinister moves in Kashmir through the withdrawal of advertising revenue as well as regularly summoning their editors and publishers to the offices of India's 'counterterrorism' agencies. In the midst of an internet ban, many journalists have been forced to look for alternative sources of income including manual labor. A communications ban is nothing less than a deathblow for precariously employed freelancers. For months, journalists could seldom reach an editor with a pitch, let alone send over any work. Over a low-speed 2G network, it still remains impossible for a journalist to send out data-heavy pictures and videos, an indispensable part of modern multimedia journalism. A 'media center' has been set up by the Indian government, ostensibly to facilitate journalists by providing them with an internet connection, but a senior Kashmiri journalist aptly described it as a "media-concentration camp" where journalists have to line up for hours to access the internet on a desktop PC only to be subjected to humiliating surveillance. Because of this relentless assault on journalism, particularly in Kashmir, India recently dropped two places on the latest Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, now ranking at 142nd out of 180 countries. Moreover, the Committee to Protect Journalists has impressed that Kashmir's

media faces an 'existential crisis' due to India's restrictions.



Journalists at a sit-in at Srinagar's press club to protest the internet gag. Photo: Mudasir Ahmad

In the past weeks- in the midst of a pandemic that has also affected Kashmir, at least four journalists have been charged with vague and trumped-up 'terrorism' offenses for, according to the charges,

uploading 'posts and writings on social media platform which are prejudicial to the national integrity, sovereignty and security of India'. All of these journalists, Masrat Zahra, Peerzada Ashiq, Gowher Geelani, and Mushtaq Ganaie are widely published in Kashmiri, Indian, and the international media. These charges reveal a clear intention of India's police and military agencies in Kashmir to bully journalists into permanent silence, the silence that they are banking on while New Delhi intensifies its settler-colonial project with the support of the world's densest military occupation. The writing on the wall seems to be clearer than ever- be a propagandist or face the brunt of India's imperial- and now Hindu fascist- whip.

## REFERENCES:

1. <https://cpj.org/data/people/aasif-sultan/index.php>
2. <https://cpj.org/data/people/kamran-yousuf/index.php>
3. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-two-kashmiri-journalists-abused-thrashed-by-police-while-covering-protests-in-srinagar/344308>
4. <https://cpj.org/2019/08/two-journalists-detained-jammu-kashmir-india.php>
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-51441830>
6. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>
7. <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/09/kashmirs-news-media-faces-existential-crisis-amid-.php>
8. <https://cpj.org/2020/04/jammu-and-kashmir-police-launch-investigation-into.php>