

Travelling and collecting personal testimonies from Kashmiri civilians, a team of economists and activists offer a glimpse into the silenced streets of Srinagar and neighbouring villages. The report was made public on August 13, 2019.

We spent five days (August 9-13, 2019) traveling extensively in Kashmir. Our visit began on August 9, 2019—four days after the Indian government abrogated Articles 370 and 35A, dissolved the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated it into two Union Territories.

When we arrived in Srinagar on August 9, we found the city silenced and desolated by curfew, and bristling

We spent five days moving around and talking to hundreds of ordinary people in Srinagar city, as well as villages and small towns of Kashmir. We spoke to women, school and college students, shopkeepers, journalists, people who run small businesses, daily wage labourers, workers and migrants from UP, West Bengal and other states. We spoke to Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs who live in the Valley, as well as Kashmiri Muslims.

Everywhere, we were cordially received, even by people who were very angry about the situation or sceptical of our purpose. Even as people expressed their pain, anger, and sense of betrayal against

return to normalcy in Kashmir are grossly misleading. They are based on selective reports from a small enclave in the centre of Srinagar. As things stand, there is no space in Kashmir for any sort of protest, however peaceful.

Reactions to the Government's Treatment of J&K:

When our flight landed, and the airlines staff announced that passengers could switch on our mobiles, the entire flight (with mostly Kashmiris in it) burst into mocking laughter. "What a joke," we could hear people say—since mobile and landline phones and internet have all been blocked since August 5!

The words we heard over and over from people about the Government decisions on J&K were 'zulm' (oppression), 'zyadti' (excess/cruelty), and 'dhokha' (betrayal). As one man in Safakadal (downtown Srinagar) put it, "The Government has treated us Kashmiris like slaves, taking decisions

Kashmir Caged!

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Kashmiri residents leave their house during restrictions in Srinagar, August 14.

PHOTO: REUTERS/DANISH SIDDIQUI



A pellet victim in Srinagar's SMHS hospital.

PHOTO: FACT-FINDING TEAM

with Indian military and paramilitary presence. The curfew was total, as it had been since August 5. The streets of Srinagar were empty and all institutions and establishments were closed (shops, schools, libraries, petrol pumps, government offices, banks). Only some ATMs and chemists' shops—and all police stations—were open. People were moving about in ones and twos here and there, but not in groups.

We travelled widely, inside and outside Srinagar—far beyond the small enclave (in the centre of Srinagar) where the Indian media operates. In that small enclave, a semblance of normalcy returns from time to time, and this has enabled the Indian media to claim that life in Kashmir is back to normal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

the Government of India, they extended warmth and unstinting hospitality to us. We are deeply moved by this.

Except for the BJP spokesperson on Kashmir Affairs, we did not meet a single person who supported the Indian government's decision to abrogate Article 370. On the contrary, most people were extremely angry, both at the abrogation of Article 370 (and 35A) and at the manner in which it had been done.

Anger and fear were the dominant emotions we encountered everywhere. People expressed their anger freely in informal conversation, but no one was willing to speak on camera. Anyone who speaks up is at risk of persecution from the government.

The Indian media's claims of a rapid

about our lives and our future while we are captive. It's like forcing something down our throats while keeping us bound and gagged, with a gun to our heads."

In every lane of Srinagar city, every town, every village, that we visited, we received an extensive schooling from ordinary people, including school kids, on the history of the Kashmir dispute. They were angry and appalled at the manner in which the Indian media was whitewashing this history. Many said: "Article 370 was the contract between Kashmir's leadership and India's. Had that contract not been signed, Kashmir would never have acceded to India. With Article 370 gone, India no longer has any basis for its claim over Kashmir."

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