

Not Paradise but Prison

Stand against the Continuing Siege of Kashmir

PINJRA TOD

ABSTRACT In the fall of 2019, Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage), an autonomous collective of women students working to ensure secure, affordable, and non-discriminatory accommodation for women students throughout Delhi, joined forces with other student organizations to coordinate a joint protest and public meeting against the continuing siege of Kashmir. The action took place at the Arts Faculty of Delhi University. In this pamphlet, Pinjra Tod interrogates Narendra Modi's corporate plans for a "paradise" in Kashmir under the capitalist guise of "freedom," and its intersection with far-right racialized nationalism. Further, they report on the horrific stories emerging from Kashmir: stories of the detention and torture of minors and young men, arbitrary midnight raids, and constant threats and danger of sexual violence against women by the armed forces. They articulate the present state of emergency as an intensification of the long and brutal history of oppression by the Indian state impacting the lives and democratic aspirations of the people of Kashmir. Raising their voices against the continuing lockdown and in support of and solidarity with the people of Kashmir, Pinjra Tod presents a set of demands which include that Articles 370 and 35A of India's constitution be reinstated; that the popular participation of Kashmiri people in any further policy decision be ensured; that all political leaders, social activists, youth, and children be released; and that special provisions be made for all Kashmiri students across all universities whose studies were disrupted.

KEYWORDS Kashmir, students, protest, Pinjra Tod, Delhi University

"We have once again to build a paradise in Kashmir," said Narendra Modi at a recent rally. The paradise Modi seeks to build is nothing but a prison. The sinister clampdown on communication, fresh corporate plans to invest in Kashmir, the celebration of the "freedom" of non-Kashmiris to buy land in Kashmir and the joyful declarations of being able to marry "fair-skinned Kashmiri girls" — all this is part of the RSS and Modi-Shah government's ruthless nation-state building project.¹

Three long and painful months have passed since the Indian state abrogated Section 370 of the constitution and divided Jammu and Kashmir into two union

territories. The mainland barely strains its ears to hear horrific stories of detained children, tales of curfews, and whispers of desolation and anger in Kashmir.

The Indian state loudly proclaims that “all is normal” and that “violence has been reduced” in Kashmir. Almost the entire media apparatus in India is under the control of the Modi-Shah regime; all information about the ongoing state repression and siege of Kashmir is blacked out by the propaganda machine. The government has conveniently characterized as false all facts and reports in the international media highlighting the tremendous human-rights violations in Kashmir, which have only intensified since the revocation of Section 370.

They are masters at selling lies and forcing consent to their rule. The ever-increasing deployment of brute military force against the democratic aspirations of people in the Valley has led to a mass resistance movement that threatens the imperial dreams and desires of the Hindu Rashtra and its brutal integrationist fantasies of *Akhand Bharat*. It is this mass resistance that the Indian state seeks to crush.

The Indian judiciary (which cannot find the time to hear petitions regarding Kashmir) and parliament (which supports the abrogation with a two-thirds majority) have all succumbed to the political pressures of the ruling party and stand exposed and complicit in their support for this heinous oppression.

Fact-finding reports on Kashmir reveal horror after horror. Minors and young men snatched from their homes by the army, pregnant women unable to access medical resources while going into labor, the constant fear of rape and sexual violence by the Indian army—stories of death and detention fill the air we breathe.

Mental health crises, educational crises, medical crises, job crises, economic crises—the violent acts of the Indian state have thrown Kashmiri society and people into a multi-layered state of continued, prolonged emergency. With students worrying about taking their exams, laborers leaving the valley en masse, farm produce rotting on trees and crucial medicines being denied to the sick, the Indian state has systematically snatched away from the people of Kashmir every right to existence and dignity.

Those of us from Kashmir studying in Delhi and other universities in the country are experiencing rage and trauma. We are unable to communicate with family and friends, unable to receive any news from home. We encounter numerous difficulties in paying fees and covering living costs, police frequenting university housing, colleges demanding lists of Kashmiri students, daily taunts and threats from fellow classmates and faculty.

We have a clear message to the Indian state and all its supporters: we do not share your violent dreams. We stand with the people of Kashmir for their right to self-determination and their right to a dignified life and livelihood. We will continue raising our voices against the state of civil war unleashed by the Indian state.

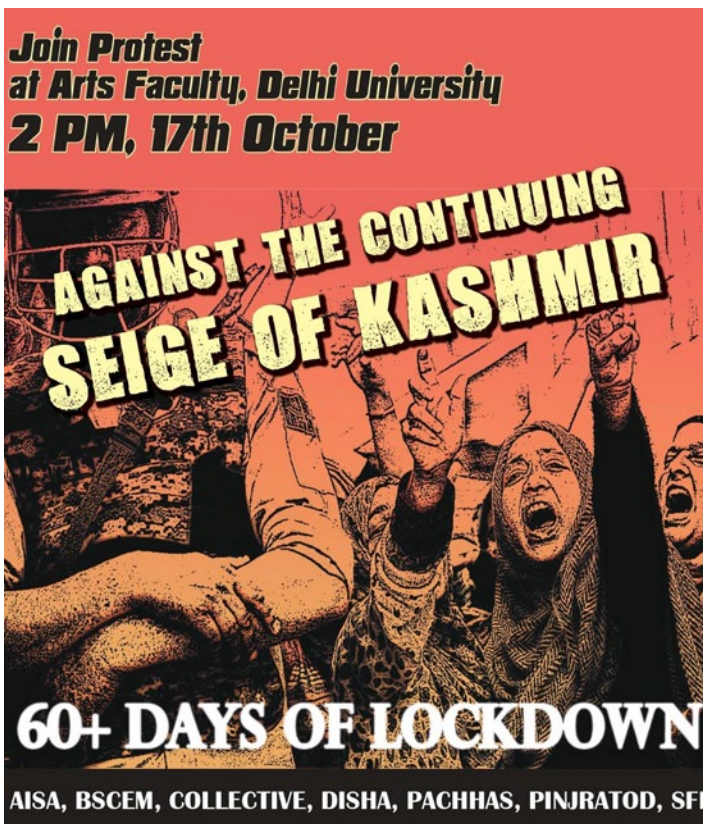


FIGURE 1. In the fall of 2019, the autonomous women student's collective Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage) coordinated with other student groups to organize a joint protest against the continuing siege of Kashmir. The protest action and public meeting took place at the Arts Faculty of Delhi University.

Pinjra Tod urges all students and teachers to join the Joint Protest and Public Meeting (fig. 1) on October 17 at Arts Faculty from 2p.m. onwards in huge numbers (www.facebook.com/events/515851075662911/) #pinjratod

DEMANDS:

- 1) Reinstate Articles 370 and 35(A)
- 2) Revoke bifurcation of the State of J&K
- 3) Ensure popular participation of Kashmiri people in any further policy decisions
- 4) Immediately restore all channels of communication in Kashmir
- 5) Immediately release all political leaders, social activists, youth, and children
- 6) Action against army and paramilitary forces responsible for the repression and continued killings of Kashmiri people

- 7) Repeal AFSPA
- 8) Demilitarize the region
- 9) Special provision to be given to all Kashmiri students across all universities, who couldn't take admission this academic year.

PINJRA TOD (BREAK THE CAGE) is an autonomous collective of women students working to ensure secure, affordable, and non-discriminatory education and accommodation for women students throughout Delhi. Pinjra Tod has also fought against social discrimination and violence based on gender, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, ability, and social background; challenged sexual violence within the university and beyond, demanding accountable mechanisms of redressal; defended the democratic and participatory character of university spaces; and contested aggressive masculine cultures on campuses. Pinjra Tod was formed in 2015 in New Delhi. The collective is mostly based in the various colleges and universities across Delhi. The movement has drawn its legacy from the long history of democratic women's and students' movements in the country and draws inspiration from the lives and work of Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh, the founders of women's education in India.

Note

1. *Editor's note:* The RSS, or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, founded in 1925, is described by Arundhati Roy as "the mothership of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]. Its founding fathers were greatly influenced by German and Italian fascism." The abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 "effectively demoted Kashmir from being a state to being a union territory"; Article 35A, also dissolved, had "made Kashmiris the stewards of their own land." Arundhati Roy, "India: Intimations of an Ending. The Rise of Modi and the Hindu Far Right," *Nation*, November 22, 2019, www.thenation.com/article/archive/arundhati-roy-assam-modi; "Arundhati Roy: It's Hard to Communicate the Scale and the Shape of This Shadow Taking India Over," *Democracy Now*, November 28, 2019, www.democracynow.org/2019/11/28/arundhati_roy_it_s_hard_to.