

The Human Toll of the Kashmir Conflict: Grief and Courage in a South Asian Borderland, Shubh Mathur (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

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For someone who has never come across unending mourning and pain of missing dear ones in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), Shubh Mathur's *The Human Toll of the Kashmir Conflict* is a must pick. This book is a collection of stories on lives of the affected people, which recognises the phenomenon of enforced disappearances in IOK. In this book, Mathur documents the horrific and unexplainable massacre of Kashmiri people and the pain of their families, who still long for the return of their missing dear ones. The conflict in Kashmir is one of the most critical and terrible conflicts in international politics in which the people of IOK have been subjected to all forms of torture and human sufferings, be it physical, mental, emotional or social.

The book has 10 chapters and includes the testimonies of the victims of state-sponsored terrorism, including the relatives of the people who have disappeared in IOK. In nearly all the documented cases, the concerned authorities have failed to promptly investigate the cases. Based on extensive field work, this book questions laws and justice for the detained and disappeared persons, and other human rights violations including the right to kill, rape and torture by the Indian Occupation Forces (IOF) .

The author narrates the dilemma that revolves around the question that often rises in the narration and selection of the stories and cases of disappearances. Selection of the cases as a case study for study or a book had been a critical question, the author mentions in her book. Mathur also says that she has struggled with justifying choices sometimes in terms of representativeness of the selected cases that illustrate some of the particular aspect of the issue, while emphasising that, as in so many other conflict situations, the roster of military crimes will never be

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completed. According to the author, there are still stories of a long struggle against impossible odds that demand to be told.

The tales of sorrow started two decades ago in IOK and brought pain to everyone living there. Despite the repression by the IOF, the people of IOK never spoke of revenge and never wanted to torture the torturer, kill the killer and rape the rapist and; book proves this fact. They are not looking for revenge rather they are victims of enforced disappearances as defined by the international human rights law.

For more than 25 years now, relatives of the disappeared people are demanding peace and justice. Individual narratives, as told in this book, by fathers, mothers, sons, daughters and wives during the process of arrest, search, and struggle reveal the outlines of a system of military control and fear. The search for the missing is a desperate, all-consuming endeavour. It forces the families — housewives, elderly parents, young children, brothers and sisters with families of their own — to confront the IOF. The physical and psychological violence on people in IOK is written on bodies and space. The frequently used term ‘human rights violations’ carries in itself a deeper truth. Rape and torture are both individual and collective wounds.

What an irony is that the international justice system has failed to end well-documented and widespread impunity of committed torture and disappearances by the IOF. This book is a passionate call for the end of occupation and calls for the right of self-determination of people of IOK.

The Human Toll of the Kashmir Conflict: Grief and Courage in a South Asian Borderland is a heart-rending book. Mathur accomplished her research working in a conflict zone, earning the trust of the people, who are constantly being surveilled and often punished for speaking out. Given the paucity of research available on the human impact of the conflict, her research is an invaluable resource for future researchers, human rights activist, policy makers and academic circles, interested in pursuing other aspects of this very important work, which is eloquent, thorough and heartfelt.