



## Public Mandate In Defense of Plurality: An Experiment in Nonviolence



### Raising Trained Community Based Nonviolent Peace-Keepers, Defenders of Social Harmony and Plural Culture in J&K: Gandhi Shanti Mitra:

After four years of efforts at understanding human suffering, cultural-spiritual history and mindset of the people, interactions with people of diverse persuasion and socio-political position; consistent dialogues with radicalized youth, youth of both the regions, Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims on nonviolence, trust-and-team-building Swaraj Peeth entered into the next phase of building community based peace-keeping-peace-building cadres- Gandhi Shanti Mitra, starting with three districts of Chenab Valley, Jammu region out of 22 districts of J&K; while in Kashmir SP chapter is engaged in dialogue on nonviolence with radicalized youth, and constructive action.

#### Jammu Region: Experiment in building Communal Harmony:: Public



meetings during July-August 2014 in more than a dozen places in District Ramban, Doda and Kisshtwar in the Chenab Valley of J&K were reassuring because of the keenness with which people are receiving the idea of organizing community based nonviolent volunteers for

Peace-monitoring, peace-building and peace-keeping --Gandhi Shanti Mitra. Meetings were conducted by SP Jammu Coordinator **Azhar Hashmi**.

**Why Gandhi Shanti Mitra?:** Communal divide between Muslims and Hindus is feared more than militancy. It is seen as a common threat. Social distancing among communities creates space for infiltration by mischief makers and feeds militancy. Most painful is the blow it casts on the unique religious-social and cultural symbiosis developed and nurtured over the long history of J&K, about which Gandhi had said "I see a ray of hope in Kashmir" when the nation was divided on communal line. The treasure must not be lost.

Swaraj Peeth organized public



talked the most about communal divide as being their gravest concern and asked SP, because of its Gandhian, nonpartisan credentials and consistency in building relationship of trust across various sections in J&K, particularly with the youth, to provide a nonpartisan platform; help bridge relationships; involve the

consultations or public mandate for such an idea. Pictures are testimony to a very enthusiastic support across all sections. Many a youth enlisted, but we have initially selected 25 from both the communities including women for the training to be held at Bhaderwah in September 2014.

**Back-Ground:** In the course of interactions, interventions and dialogues, about fifteen over past four years senior public figures, intellectuals, Journalists, youth, activists and leaders of various shades and ordinary people have



youth in nonviolent peace-building and peace-keeping; and speed up these activities. Following June 2014 visit of Rajiv Vora to Jammu and Srinagar and his meetings with many seniors and SP youth groups, SP decided that it was now right time to go to people with a plan, start selecting, enlisting and training nonviolent peace-keepers and builders at the community level, where it matters the most.

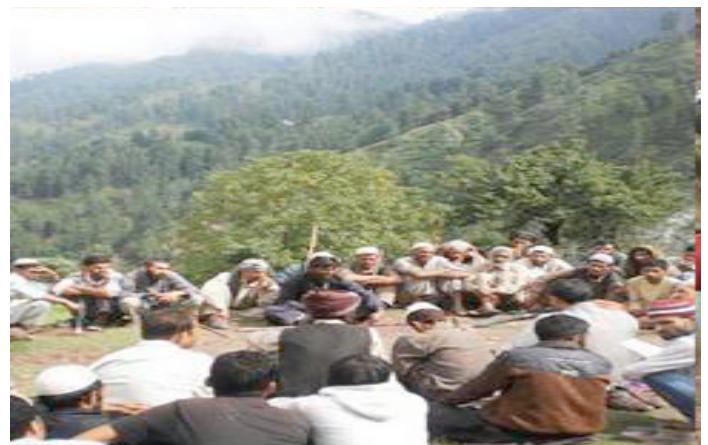
### **The Task:**

*Swaraj Peeth Report on  
communal riot in Kishtwar, Sept  
2013, concluded with  
deliberation on and drawing  
up an outline of building a  
trained community based  
nonviolent peace-keepers and  
peace-builders as defenders of  
social harmony and plural  
culture on the following lines:*



- Deployment of 10 nonviolent peace-keepers/builders in each of the 10 Districts of Jammu division and two each in 10 districts of Kashmir and two of Laddakh division, phase wise;
- Volunteers would come from their respective districts, towns, villages;
- They will be located according to communal demography, existing divide, and apprehension of communal tension and fear;
- Peace-keepers/builders would
  - Acquaint themselves with each and every house hold and locality of their region/village/town; leaders, journalists and officials;
  - Keep a tab on any possibility, apprehension and fear of violence; provide early warning;
  - Contain rumours and verify rumours, bring facts to the notice of their seniors, concerned authorities and use them to contain mistrust, doubt and fear;
  - Bring out constructive energies and positive stories;
  - Organize civil society for constructive thinking and collective action;
  - Organize such action when circumstances so demand;
  - Identify prospective peace-keepers/builders and enlist them for training in nonviolence and social-communal harmony;
  - Will work as peace-keeper/builder in the time of violence and fulfill those duties as stipulated in the Gandhi Shanti Sena Training Manual of Swaraj Peeth; before, during and in post-violence situation;
  - Peace-keepers/builders will involve themselves in activities that enhance confidence-building among local population, all the religious and ethnic communities;

- Gandhi Shanti Mitras from Jammu, Kashmir and Laddakh will meet regularly in order to learn from each other and enhance their understanding of the other;
- On the basis of their experience, their training-needs and cultural education-needs will be identified and training/study/exposure will be so designed and arranged by SwarajPeeth;
- The ‘Dos’ and ‘Don’ts’ will be worked out in joint sessions of Gandhi Shanti Mitra , he defenders of plural culture and social harmony.
- Last but not the least, these cadres will also work, if need be, as relief workers at the time of humanitarian crisis.



*File Raising  
Gandhi Shanti Mitra  
Cadres\_J&K  
\_1<sup>st</sup> Phase\_i*

