

## Swaraj Peeth Kashmir Up-date: 7-to-11 Sept 2014



**A Midnight Call:** “We are drowning, Sir...” frantic voice of Rammez Makhdoomy, an independent journalist , friend and Coordinator of Srinagar Chapter of Swaraj Peeth on the phone post mid-night of 6-7<sup>th</sup> . He was gasping “Srinagar and South Kashmir are destroyed ..” He told us everything that TY channels showed later the next day...”Sir, Pray for us, only God can save...” That evening we had called more than 20 people in Kashmir to inquire about their welfare, whom we reach... despair and nightmares...Nature’s fury and human’s helplessness were at peak....Indian Army came as saviors.

Swaraj Peeth Jammu-Chapter coordinator Azahr Hashmi had only a day earlier returned from organizing a series of public meetings in several places in Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar district to get public mandate and identified and enlisted youth for community based nonviolent peace-keeping to harmonize communally tensed relationships. We were planning training for 30 volunteers later this month. I wrote a short report with photos so that we can ask friends and well-wishers to contribute for this programme.

Within two days, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7th everything had drastically changed.

**Youth and Relief:** By the evening of 8th Swaraj Peeth Jammu coordinator Azhar Hashmi, who returned from Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar on 6<sup>th</sup>, had **enlisted a team of more than 350 youth**. Every day about 40 to 60 of them go house-to-house to collect public help – woolens, blankets,



house-hold immediate etc. By 10<sup>th</sup> they collected more than 40 bags of clothes etc. Rs 45000/-purchased baby food, biscuits, ration –atta, rice, oil water bottles; sent to Kashmir, and distributed 20 bags of atta, 20 bags of rice, 40 bottles of oil in FlaiMandal and Beli Charana colonies of Jammu. The SPT group has adopted a totally devastated village Pancheri in Dist. Udhampur. They took on 11Sept to Pancheri clothes, and 20 cartons of milk, ration, water plus some tarpouline, 50 blankets in a car.

**Distributing ration, Azhar on the right**

Today, on 12<sup>th</sup> ,the group had 61 youth, some collected money, some other things. They bought 400 blankets,

biscuits, water, milk powder etc out of Rs 35000 collected today, sent to Kashmir; and distributed ration, water, milk in Jammu. Azhar asked an industrialist acquaintance of him to help. He asked how much. Azhar, who expected him to donate Rs 50,000 to 100,000/-, told him not give money but buy medicines to be sent to Kashmir. The business man friend asked him to give a list of medicines people needed, which he handed him over promptly. He bought, got them packed and sent them out to Srinagar by the evening – he spent Rs 400,000/ plus, asked Azhar not to publicize his name, Azhar told us all who donated money asked not to publicize their names. I asked him, why. “They said it is a sin! This help has to be silent.” I had same experience with a professional intellectual friend from Mumbai this morning.

**The Team and its Maintenance:** Our team in Jammu is swelling every day. Many more are to join, who have enrolled themselves from various parts of Jammu division. Many want to go and work in the devastated areas of Kashmir and Jammu region. Many from among them wish to be long term nonviolent volunteers, Gandhi Shani Mitra and be trained as nonviolent peace-makers, as they see this as a vital need as soon as water settles. We are fortunate to have a highly dedicated group of experienced youth at the core who have contacts, good moral and social standing and credibility, both in Jammu region and in the Valley. SP coordinator has established a Control-room where all re-assemble after collection; take stock of collections of things and cash, do the planning for the next day. What is collected is sent away, distributed and the money is spent on buying medicines, food, water etc on the same day. Their day is over by late night.

Once the water recedes, the real work will require volunteers who know the local conditions, people and their problems. By then our Jammu team would be in full strength. Our team in Srinagar, we pray their safety, has the capacity to mobilise many, as many of them are editors of online papers with large readership, writers, activists and some leaders in their own capacity having groups of youth with them, including women.



**Funds:** Raising funds has become so urgent in order to fulfill the duty, every hour demand/request for food, water, medicine; and to sustain the dedicated voluntary youth forces that is getting collected, active and who are looking forward to prepare them for meeting during-and-post-relief needs of a society in conflict and accumulated internal tensions. Funds are urgently required for keeping the group at work - for transport, communication, travel, food while travelling, for emergency etc. What they collect is spent only for the people in distress, and the same day..

**Broken Links:** No communication with any one in Srinagar, Anantnag etc. In response to my last night's post on FB, a Kashmiri friend in USA told us our friend Irtiza Ashraf is stuck on the second story of his house, while two stories are under water. He is safe at least. The friend in USA has her old parents stuck in their submerged house in Rajbagh, having no drinking water...No news of the rest. I should be in Jammu and want to find out how are our friends in Srinagar, Anantnag and other places, but friends there are asking me to wait for some more time and be in Delhi itself for coordination among all, due to connectivity.

**PS. 3.05 am./ 13/09/14.** Connected with Mushtaq Sikandar at 1.40 in the night, his internet worked, got necessary info on FB msg. He is running a relief camp and community kitchen.

**PS 2, 7.40 am/13/09:** Messaged us on FB in the morning they ran out of ration... Assured him we will arrange from Jammu, will reach by afternoon.

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