

ZUV

THE SOUL OF RESISTANCE
ISSUE XXVI | FEBRUARY 2026





INDEX

PAGE

I.	TIHAR JAIL: CHAINS ON BODIES, NOT ON THE DREAM OF AZADI	1-5
II.	RISE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST KASHMIRIS ACROSS INDIA	6-8
III.	THE WOMEN OF KASHMIR	9-11
IV.	AUTHORS NOTE	12

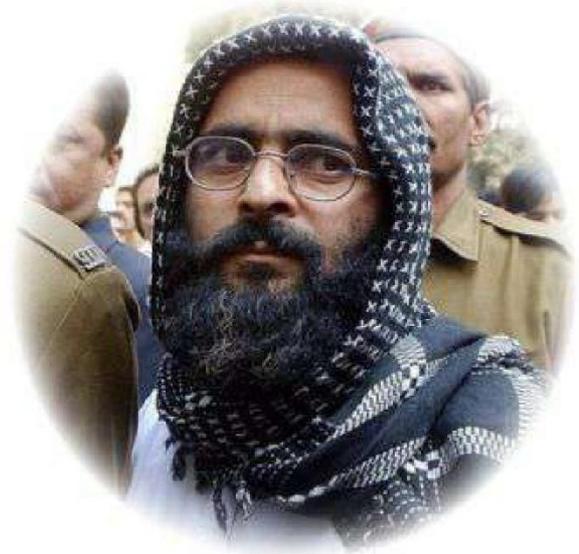
ZUV

THE SOUL OF RESISTANCE
ISSUE XXVI | FEBRUARY 2026

TIHAR JAIL: CHAINS ON BODIES, NOT ON THE DREAM OF AZADI

There are prisons that hold criminals and then there are prisons that hold nations. We are often told that Tihar Jail belongs to the second category, yet the public record suggests a more grounded reality. Tihar does confine individuals, but it does so under the Prisons Act, 1894 and the Delhi Prison Rules, 2018, not to imprison ideas but to hold those charged or convicted under law. It does not detain histories or memories; it houses undertrials and convicts from across India, including organised crime figures, terror accused and economic offenders. For many of us, the discomfort arises not from symbolism alone, but from physical and emotional distance, because Tihar is a correctional facility used when courts determine that trials must be conducted outside Jammu and Kashmir for security and procedural reasons. What is often framed as erasure is, in legal terms, jurisdiction and custodial transfer.

From the very beginning, Tihar's relationship with Kashmir has been described as political, not legal. Yet the earliest cases repeatedly cited were processed entirely through the judicial framework of their time. Maqbool Bhat was convicted for the murder of an Indian intelligence officer and executed on 11 February 1984, after the exhaustion of legal



remedies available under then-prevailing law. His burial inside the prison followed prison protocol applicable at the time. To interpret this moment as the definitive end of dialogue is a political reading, not a judicial conclusion.

Decades later, the same soil would absorb another Kashmiri body, Afzal Guru. His execution on 9 February 2013 followed a conviction upheld through multiple judicial stages, culminating in the judgment of the Supreme Court of India (2005). The Court's reference to "collective conscience" has been widely cited, yet the judgment rested on evidentiary assessment and procedural review, not sentiment alone. Disagreement with the verdict persists, but in constitutional terms, the execution followed due process rather than extra-judicial action.



And when hanging could not resolve the deeper questions confronting Kashmir, the system continued to rely on custody and trial. The death of Altaf Ahmad Shah on 10 June 2022 occurred while he was an undertrial under the UAPA, receiving treatment through jail hospitals and referrals to AIIMS, New Delhi. Bail and medical parole decisions were issued by courts, not prison authorities. His death was undeniably tragic, but no judicial body has ruled it an execution by design or neglect and similar custodial deaths due to illness occur across India, pointing to structural weaknesses in prison healthcare rather than a Kashmir-specific policy.

No rope.

No sudden deaths.

Tihar Jail has thus been described as a factory of Kashmiri suffering. Yet it may be more accurately understood as a site of legal containment, not political erasure, where undertrials are lodged far from home due to security assessments and witness-protection considerations. The distance is real and emotionally heavy, but it is neither unique to Kashmir nor singularly designed to amputate leadership. And despite claims of total failure, the India has not been judicially found to operate prisons as instruments of symbolic extermination.



Even today, inside Tihar itself, Kashmiri leaders and activists remain incarcerated. Their detention reflects unresolved political conflict, but also unresolved legal proceedings, many prolonged by stringent statutes such as the UAPA. They remain visible in public discourse, yet their continued incarceration has not produced measurable relief for ordinary Kashmiris beyond prison walls.



The recent statements issued from Tihar on Kashmir Solidarity Day were circulated widely. For students and civil society voices among us, the more difficult question is not whether words can emerge from jail, but whether those words change conditions outside it. A state's inability to silence speech does not automatically translate into political success, especially when daily life remains restricted and futures remain uncertain.

This is why Tihar has become central to narratives. Not because it records triumph, but because it reflects stagnation. Not because it manufactures submission or martyrdom, but because it exposes the limits of confrontation without outcome. Not because it erases memory, but because it forces a reckoning with strategies that have



not delivered stability, dignity or security.

Kashmiris have not always feared Tihar; some have even internalised it. Yet among younger generations, that meaning is undergoing a shift. Incarceration is no longer automatically read as proof of truth, because truth today is increasingly measured in education preserved, lives protected and futures secured. Romanticised sacrifice without tangible results is steadily losing moral resonance.

To face execution like Maqbool Bhat.

To be buried in prison like Afzal Guru.

To die in custody like Altaf Ahmad Shah.

To age behind bars as long-term undertrials.

These are human tragedies, not milestones of achievement.

India may have wanted Tihar to be feared.

In reality, it remains a custodial institution meant to uphold law, not manufacture symbolism.

India may have used it as a tool of control.

What it has more clearly exposed are the limits of prolonged conflict when legal processes replace political resolution.

And perhaps the enduring lesson drawn from Syed Ali Shah Geelani's words is not prophecy, but a reminder of restraint. History shows that prisons are meant to enforce accountability, not carry the burden of resolving political disputes.

Conscience matters, but justice systems exist to balance conscience with law, evidence, and order.

This is the quieter verdict many of us are arriving at.

Prisons can restrain bodies.

They can enforce sentences.

They can reflect the failures of dialogue.

But freedom, for this generation, must be measured not in incarceration or sacrifice, but in the ability to live, study, speak and grow within a framework of justice, stability and rights.



RISE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST KASHMIRIS ACROSS INDIA

Indian Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims often speak of moments of discrimination, but we also live within a constitutional republic that provides remedies, protections and platforms. We come from snow-covered valleys where snow has covered not only mountains but long histories, livelihoods and layered experiences, not only violations. Our vale is one where snow covers mountains and meadows and where ordinary life continues alongside political complexity, not violence alone. When we move beyond the region, we do so as students, professionals, traders and citizens, seeking opportunity and dignity across the country. Our lives are not confined to a single narrative of suppression.

For us Kashmiris, conversations around prejudice exist alongside visible expansion in education, employment and national participation. Shawl sellers, students, traders, labourers, patients and small business owners travel and work across India under the protection of criminal law and constitutional safeguards.

When harassment occurs, it is recognised as unlawful conduct, not state sanction. In this democracy, accountability may be uneven, but legal remedies, FIRs, courts and public scrutiny do exist. From roadsides to student campuses, we are increasingly present and integrated, contributing to universities, markets, sports and cultural spaces. Incidents reported in Uttarakhand, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh also saw police intervention, arrests and official condemnation, alongside



assurances of safety. Alongside these incidents are thousands of daily interactions marked by coexistence rather than conflict, which rarely make headlines.

Beyond mob violence, we have also seen increased institutional engagement with Kashmiri students. Educational institutions have been directed to appoint nodal officers and grievance mechanisms. Harassment in hostels and intimidation within classrooms are now subject to inquiry, while scholarships, coaching schemes and national-level quotas have expanded access to education for Kashmiri youth. Furthermore, the regulation of mosques and madrasas operates under statutory norms applicable across regions and security monitoring functions within legal parameters, not as a blanket denial of religious freedom.

Moreover, we cannot ignore that civil society and public scrutiny have evolved. If a tourist is targeted in Kashmir, a state-level outcry ensues; similarly, incidents involving Kashmiris outside the region increasingly draw media attention and judicial notice. Raids on homes



and search operations are conducted under legal authorization, while parallel investments in infrastructure, healthcare, connectivity, sports facilities and employment reflect an official shift toward long-term stability.

Accepting hardship is not surrender, but we also recognize that endless confrontation alone has not delivered security or dignity. The dignity of our religion, our identity, our land and our people is strengthened when lives are protected and futures secured. Survival lies not only in resistance, but also in education, participation, reform and resilience. India cannot conceal realities through coercion, nor can our future be reduced to a single narrative of perpetual victimhood.

We do not need destruction to assert truth.

We do not need erasure to demand justice.

Our strength lies in living, learning and moving forward with dignity.



THE WOMEN OF KASHMIR

Since the beginning of political turmoil in Kashmir, women have stood shoulder to shoulder with men not only in endurance, but in sustaining families, institutions and social continuity. They have absorbed uncertainty with resilience, adapted bravely and guided communities through periods of disruption and transition.

Our women were impacted by conflict, displacement and instability during counter-insurgency years. Yet our mothers and sisters stood resilient and forward-looking, choosing education, caregiving and rebuilding over despair. Our sisters and mothers have raised and nurtured entire families after their spouses and fathers were lost to violence, detention, or prolonged conflict, while simultaneously entering schools, colleges, healthcare and public service in growing numbers. Our women have preserved cultural, social and religious values, while also embracing modern education and professional growth for younger generations.

Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day
23rd February



From the violence against women during the upheavals of 1947, to Kunan Poshpora in 1991, to the long-term impact on families thereafter, to widely discussed cases such as Asiya and Neelofar and to the detention of women during periods of unrest, it would not be wrong to say Kashmiri women have borne deep social consequences. Yet it is equally true that these experiences did not halt their progress, but strengthened their resolve to claim space in education, employment and public life.

For political gains, divisive rhetoric has often deepened social fractures. Within our own society, we are increasingly recognising that the dignity of women is protected not by conflict, but by opportunity, safety and voice. The real motivation drawn from women's sacrifices today lies not in prolonging confrontation, but in ensuring their security, participation and equal footing in shaping Kashmir's future.

Despite facing prolonged instability, Kashmiri women have achieved measurable success across multiple fields. Our women have emerged as writers, journalists, doctors, educators, researchers, athletes, entrepreneurs and civil society leaders. Kashmiri women have been telling their own stories, documenting lived realities and shaping narratives through scholarship, media and literature. The book "Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?" remains part of a broader academic and social discourse led increasingly by Kashmiri women themselves.



The day of 23rd February is remembered annually as Kashmir Women's Resistance Day, marking the trauma associated with 1991. While remembering women affected by violence and injustice, many of us now also reflect on the responsibility to convert memory into reform, access to justice, education and institutional accountability. Remembrance today increasingly walks alongside rehabilitation, policy engagement and empowerment.

Today, many women who endured years of uncertainty are re-entering education, skill programmes, employment schemes and public institutions. They are no longer only defined by loss, but by agency and contribution. Psychological resilience, once forged in hardship, is now fueling leadership in classrooms, hospitals, courts, startups and community organisations.

When we look at the present, it becomes clear that Kashmiri women are no longer silent subjects of history, but active authors of change. The real transformation lies not in perpetual confrontation, but in enabling women to live, learn, work and lead without fear or interruption. This is the direction many of us, from within society, are now choosing to strengthen.



ZUV: AUTHORS NOTE

February is a time of reflection for us in Kashmir, reminding us of the value of dignity, balance and responsibility. While memory has its place, our strength today lies in how we move forward through education, awareness and constructive engagement with the world around us.

Over the years, Kashmiri women and youth have made visible progress. Women from our society are excelling in education, healthcare, research, journalism, entrepreneurship and public service, shaping families and institutions alike. Our students are accessing universities, scholarships, skill programmes, sports platforms and employment opportunities across the country, building confidence and competence.

For our generation, progress matters more than provocation. Stability protects opportunity and opportunity safeguards dignity. The future of Kashmir rests in empowered women, educated youth and communities committed to growth, contribution and peaceful advancement.

February, for us, is not only about reflection, it is about progress, responsibility and hope.





خوشیوں کے گل کلائی
آو کہ مسکرائیں
سب رنج و غم بلائیں



وڻڌ ڙهه، شين گلي، بي پيه بهار
Wande tzahe, sheen gali, beyi yi bahaar...
...Winter will pass, snow will melt, and spring will come again