

RESISTANCE OF WOMEN AGAINST INDIAN ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR: THEIR INVISIBILITY DURING PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

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Abstract

Kashmiri female freedom fighters have remained at the forefront of the resistance movement, rallies, protest marches, and sit-ins. Unfortunately, their activism is invisible, and they have lagged during the dialogue process. The peace negotiations go awry to address the concerns, specific needs, approaches, views, and grievances of women during and after conflict situations. The UN has long been trying to address the concerns of women through varied resolutions, but the implementation of these mandates remains a formidable challenge. This research paper, therefore, aims to analyse the resistance and activism of Kashmiri women for their inalienable right of self-determination against the Indian Illegal Occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. The problem of Kashmiri women's visibility in the resistance movement and their invisibility in the peace process is seen through the theoretical framework of Feminist Security Studies. For the textual interpretation and contextualization of data, Qualitative Content Analysis is employed. A way forward to address women's issues and approaches during conflict situations is to implement the UN landmark Resolution-1325 on 'Women, Peace, and Security' by involving women in all stages of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

Keywords: Women, Resistance, IIOJK, Freedom Fighter, Self-determination.

Introduction

The vale of Kashmir, once famed for its mesmerizing beauty and tranquillity, remains the most longstanding unresolved conflict between Pakistan and India. For a long, due to Indian illegal occupation, Kashmiris have been facing inhuman brutal treatment. India has not only taken illegal control of the vale and its people but also refused to implement the UN resolutions of a free and impartial plebiscite. Demanding their inalienable right of self-determination, Kashmiri women have now shouldered with men and remained at the forefront. They have come forward, raised their voices, and took an active part in demonstrations. They have spearheaded the freedom movement, participated in large-scale mobilizations, and raised anti-India slogans under the banner of Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM) and Muslim Khawateen Markaz that have even outnumbered men at times.

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However, women in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) are the worst hit of the conflict, such as rape and human rights violations, and managing their lives after the disappearance and killing of male members in households. Regrettably, they have been projected as victims of violence, but their activism is undervalued. They are symbolized as grieving wives, half-widows, martyrs' mothers, and raped women.¹ They have been neglected during the dialogue process and peace-making efforts, and their resistance and involvement in demonstrations, agitations, sit-ins, and liberation politics have not changed into their emancipation and empowerment.

Furthermore, the political role of Kashmiri women has been reinstated in the motherhood narrative that is idealized in their slogans. They carry *mujahid* (fighters) in their wombs and lure their male children with the tales of martyrdom. Kashmiri children, soon they open their eyes, are taught the slogans of freedom and fight for the self-determination of their people. Kashmiri women are ever ready to sacrifice their sons, the best and dearest thing in life, and that is enough contribution on their part to serve the freedom struggle.²

After their huge contribution to the freedom movement, Kashmiri women have been lagged during the dialogue process. Their approaches and views are overlooked in conflict-related discourse, and the role of gender in the transformation of conflict remains to be a peripheral issue. The peace negotiations are failed to address the concerns and grievances of Kashmiri women during and after conflict situations. However, the UN has long been trying to address the concerns of women through varied resolutions on 'Women, Peace, and Security' but the implementation of these mandates remains a formidable challenge. Therefore, this paper analyses how have Kashmiri women resisted their right to self-determination and how they remained marginalized, underrepresented, and invisible during peace negotiations in IIOJK.

To answer these research questions, qualitative content analysis has been employed. Qualitative methods, by contrast, are best understood as data enhancers; when data are enhanced, it is possible to understand key aspects of cases more clearly.³ In social science research, the qualitative approach collects and analyses non-numerical data that seeks to interpret meaning from data to understand the social context of the targeted population and place. In the qualitative research method, Content Analysis is a widely used technique to analyse the data. The goal of content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study."⁴

The current study unravels women's contribution and active participation in the resistance movement and their marginalization during the peace process as an attempt to contribute to the existing conflict-related discourse on IIOJK and opens new approaches for future research. Also, on the practical ground, this study helps direct the attention towards addressing women's approaches, needs, and participation during policy formulation and its implementation. A feminist approach to

international security has also been adopted that is aptly suitable to the topic and contention of current research work. The inclusion of women in security studies opened new vistas of research and broadened the boundaries of security that were previously understood and analysed as a state-centric approach. The major proponents of Feminist Security Studies (FSS), Laura Sjoberg, Cynthia Enloe, Ann Tickner, and Christine Sylvester sought to draw attention towards women's unique experiences and outlooks other than their perceived private sphere and in their public security domain. In her seminal work, Enloe raised the question: "where are women" in the international political realm. Generally, men are charged with the duty of decision making, formulating military and security policies, and making war and peace, whereas, women have little significance to say.⁵

According to Shekhawat (2014), the traditional International Relations studies exclude women in the domains of war and peace-making. Alternatively, women are an inseparable part of the social frame. Therefore, the discourse on conflict and peacebuilding must include their role and contribution as they are competent in conflict as well as in peace-making.⁶ Sharoni (2001) asserted that in political conflict, gender is widely ignored due to the public-private dichotomy. It is generally perceived that power is a male arena and women are powerless. Women are viewed as victims of a conflict that overlooks their power and agency.⁷ However, there is increased visibility of women during resistance movements in IIOJK. They are protesting and responding to the Indian atrocities with bravery and courage. Manchanda (2001) stated that Kashmiri women would break out into *wan-u-wan*, the traditional Kashmiri song of celebration, intertwining couplets in praise of local *mujahids* (fighters). "Cutting across class, mothers, wives, and daughters, all come to join the swelling processions... due to their activism embedded in their cultural roles. Their voices are now joining those of men in the cry for *Azadi* (freedom)."⁸

Kashmiri women's activism is not confined to public protest. They serve as messengers, supplying shelter and food to freedom fighters, and looking after the injured. When their male counterparts are seized by the Indian army, women protest in front of the security bunkers for their release. In the narrow paths of city areas, women perform the duties of guards and preventing the approaching Indian occupied forces.⁹ Their contribution cannot be denied in developing the nationalist or separatist narrative. Kazi (2018) examined that the Kashmir conflict has assumed gendered overtones and women are subjected to gender-specific forms of violence and discrimination. They are more vulnerable to intractable conflicts. Indian security personnel use sexualized repression to maintain their hegemony in IIOJK with impunity. In the year 2000, this issue got salience in the UNSC Resolution-1325 by affirming the gender implication in militarized regions.¹⁰

Women's Activism in Conflict Situations

Women are the worst recipients of war and they are portrayed as victims of war but they as active participants are ignored and undervalued. Traditionally, it was

considered that women's involvement in violent conflicts required their de-feminization or withdrawal of their feminine attributes as they are naturally endowed with a 'motherist' role emanating emotionality and softness. Men were supposed to play a productive role in war and women were confined to reproductive functions. When women's roles are reduced to mothers and wives, there is a grave threat to obscuring their role in society as political and economic actors. But all women are not always pacifists. Some men can be pacifists and women can be warmongers. "Women are associated with pacifism that is based on a simplified dichotomy (woman-peace, man-war)" that does not allow the conceptualization of non-violent masculinities.¹¹

In war experiences, women are vulnerable to brutality and misconduct. The female fighters are visible in conflict areas around the world. Women actively participate in conflict regions of the world as combatants or military leaders and restructure their traditional gender roles. They are not less militaristic than men during war situations. The empirical instances of women's active involvement in conflict zones are Kashmir, Sri Lanka, and Palestine.¹² FSS scholars emphasized that women's activism in war or conflict was either ignored or not viewed from a gendered perspective.

Women's Absence in Peace-Making Efforts

Women are marginalized during peace negotiations. They are ignored in thinning the conflict. Both men and women have the capability and responsibility to build and keep the peace. "In waging peace, women seem more creative and effective... their tendency to peace provides greater potentials for peace-making."¹³ The existence of disparities between men and women is a worldwide phenomenon. Ignoring women's role in socio-economic and political spheres affects the whole society. Therefore, gender equality and women's involvement in foreign policy and decision-making, result in alter policy outputs. Gender-based violence in conflict zones is an extension of discrimination; women suffer at the time of peace. Building peace requires their active participation. Only, the male population cannot make complete peace while women remained at the margins.

Women, who take an active part in formulating military and security policies, are possessed of rationality as that of men. At the point of a negotiated settlement, women's issues are never considered essential. The developmental strategies neglecting women have failed. As noted by Melanna Veneer, spearheading the State Department's Office for Global Women's Issues, thirty-one of the world's thirty-nine active conflict areas show the recurrence of conflict after the conclusion of peace settlements. Without women's active participation, the needs, interests, and views of half of the population in conflict areas are underrepresented and underrated.¹⁴ The attribute of rationality is found devoid of the distinction of gender. Therefore, women should take part at all decision-making levels (national, regional, and international) for the prevention and management of conflicts. Increasing women's participation

includes the deployment of gender-balanced peacekeeping units and a whole-of-government approach. Gender-based social inequalities should be recognized and then such programs should be initiated that complement UN resolutions on 'Women, Peace, and Security'. Enloe's feminist definition of peace is "women's achievement of control over their lives," which she regards as requiring "not just the absence of armed and gender conflict... but also the absence of poverty and the conditions, which recreate it."¹⁵

Women's Role in Kashmir Conflict

War is considered a male phenomenon. Generally, the decision of war-making is made by men. They initiate conflict and fight a war. Women have not played an active role in warmongering. Women's movements demand peace.¹⁶ Previously, they were either confined to reproductive functions in which there was a grave threat to obscuring their role in society as political and economic actors. Still, they are considered involuntary victims, passive recipients of war, or apolitical that limits their roles.¹⁷ Women support men in war is natural. Men are portrayed as protectors and women as protected. The proponents of FSS averred that the representation of women as mute victims and passive recipients of conflict and not survivors in much of the discourse undervalued their struggle and removed them from the political dimension of militarized conflict. Moreover, their contribution to peace-making has been overlooked. Today, in conflict regions of the world, women are not just simply victims; they also participate in the fight.¹⁸ This has altered a stereotypical representation of women as they are associated with peace that is embedded in their role as mothering and caring.

IIOJK is one of the most heavily militarized zones in the world, and women are in much of the discourse as victims of this militarization. Besides Indian atrocities, they face numerous psychological problems and other health-related issues.¹⁹ They have been victims of a direct hit of violence, molestation, and physical and sexual abuse by Indian occupational forces. They also bear indirect violence due to the absence of their male relatives (fathers, husbands, and sons) as they have either been abducted or killed in the genocide and buried in mass and unidentified graves. Thousands of women have become widows and half-widows, left with a challenging situation of heading their households. Unfortunately, their multiple roles in war are ignored by undervaluing them as victims and not active participants.

Women in IIOJK have assumed multiple roles, from managing their homes singlehandedly to involving in separatist politics. However, their activism in protest movements remained secluded from state politics. They have negotiated conflict situations by becoming citizens, heads of households, workers, war resisters, combatants, and political leaders at local and national levels.²⁰ Their active participation in the resistance movement has altered the traditional view that women are essentially pacifists. Therefore, the presence of women in conflict serves as a shield to protect freedom fighters and restrain Indian occupational forces to fire in the

throng.²¹ They joined women organizations, such as Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of Nation) and Khwateen Markaz (Muslim Women's Organization). Asiya Andrabi, head of the DeM, and Anjum Zamarud Habib, an erstwhile Hurriyat member, were detained and tortured by Indian forces for allegedly supporting freedom fighters leading to the mass protests and marches in the Valley. Asiya Andrabi strongly advocated that women should perform *jihad* at home, whilst men fight against the oppressive Indian state apparatus in IIOJK.²² Parveena Ahanger is the founder of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, an indigenous organization that was formed after the Indian Armed Forces took her son, leaving no clue about his disappearance. She started documenting such cases and conducted peaceful protests on monthly basis.²³ Parashar enunciated that it is the politicization of women's traditional 'motherist' role by taking the private act of mourning into the public space. Women's ways of acting are increasingly challenged by the notion of what a political activity can be.²⁴

Women's Mobilization in Mass Protests in IIOJK

Following the first phase of militarization in 1989, thousands of women in IIOJK came to the forefront, poured into the streets, showed unparalleled courage, spearheaded agitation movements, and raised anti-India slogans. The protest movements have the support of Kashmiri men and women alike. Kashmiri women protestors contributing to mobilizations of *Azadi* campaigns legitimizes the freedom struggle and reveals the aspirations of Kashmiri society. Women activists of DeM came to the streets, provided support to their menfolk, and arranged women-led mass protests. They organize protests against Indian occupational forces in front of human rights bodies, often taking up the issue of their missing male relatives. Moreover, 23 February is marked as Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day in commemoration of the struggle for the survivors of a massive hoax orchestrated against women of Kunan-Poshpora, twin villages of Kupwara District, on the night of February 23, 1991.

Coming out from the peripheries of their homes, Kashmiri women during protest marches and demonstrations faced the national and international media to help disseminate their message to the world and requested international human rights bodies to help resolve the issue. In women-led protests and marches, they are in a way empowered to make their own decisions.

Women's Role as Facilitators

The freedom movement in IIOJK could not have been sustained without the participation of women. Their involvement is not restricted to demonstrations and protest marches. They shoulder the burden with their male counterparts. From sheltering to nursing to nurturing to feeding to shielding men, women acted as protectors, messengers, and combatants. They raise funds, facilitate medical treatment, help the release of men from Indian forces' illegal custody, and arrange venues for the meetings.

Female freedom activists in IIOJK play an active and supportive role to popularize their *Azadi* movement. Their involvement (mostly college and school students) in political activities has increased the credibility of the Kashmiri freedom struggle.²⁵ They devised innovative strategies to alert their male counterparts about the nefarious actions of Indian occupation forces against them. They block the path of Indian occupational forces in narrow alleyways by pelting stones at them and letting freedom fighters move away.²⁶ However, they are not directly involved in hostilities. They arrange food during long and unprecedented curfews, provide shelters and take care of the injured. They even resist before the Indian occupational forces and march to courts to secure the release of their male relatives.

Women's Role in Formation of Narrative

Besides giving material support, women in IIOJK provide moral support to their male counterparts. They are no less militaristic than men. The male fighters are glamourized and projected as heroes. The females are seen to be interested in making nuptial ties with freedom fighters and give birth to as many children (sons) as they can. As it is idealized in their motherhood narrative, their sons will become fighters. They are complicit in the reproduction of militarized masculinity. As biological regenerators, they produce the future generation of fighters. Creating male warriors, the credit goes to women.²⁷

Moreover, they mobilize and indoctrinate the Kashmiri youth by transmitting their ideology to fight for freedom. By playing a direct role in war processes, women lure and mobilize men to go on war by chanting pro-freedom slogans, "*Shaheed ke jo mauth hai, woh qaum ki hyat hai* (He who dies a martyr, gives life to the nation)"²⁸ and "*Hum kya Chahte... Azadi* (What do we want? Freedom)."²⁹ Mothers transmit militarist values to their sons. They deliver speeches at the funerals of their sons, glorifying martyrdom and mobilizing the youth.³⁰ Motherhood narrative as a mobilization strategy by discussing sacrifices of mothers in conventions and rallies provide the cause and justification of *jihad*. These narratives are now their political voice and part of the freedom struggle.³¹

Women's Absence in Political Process

Women in IIOJK are not passive recipients of the conflict. They are projected as victims rather than survivors. The conventional patriarchal ideology of struggle in Kashmir is enhanced in which women are symbolized as grieving mothers.³² They act courageously in the conflict and deserve praise but are neglected even by their people. In much of the existing literature on Kashmir, women remain invisible.³³

Women in Kashmir are confined to perform secondary roles. They are not much active on the political front and have less political representation. Women's concerns and representation of their issues remain at the helm of male political leadership. They are only involved in the mobilization of the freedom movement but

remained politically marginalized.³⁴ They are underrepresented in politics and the decision-making process. Only two visible faces in Kashmiri politics are Begum Sheikh Abdullah (wife of Sheikh Abdullah), who remained a member of parliament twice, and Mehbooba Mufti (daughter of Mufti Sayeed), who has derived position from her father and became Chief Minister and President of Peoples Democratic Party. These women have been able to carve some political space only due to their political family background.³⁵

Kashmiri male political leadership does not encourage women to participate in state and national politics and assumes deafening silence on their political rights due to Indian government pressure. Women's grief and mourning serve as a political project.³⁶ They have only been directed to organize protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins besides supporting men in the resistance movement. Enloe's feminist definition of peace is "women's achievement of control over their lives,"³⁷ whereas, in IIOJK, negotiations and peace-making efforts have not involved women due to the leadership absence. When asked what they want if they are present during the negotiation and dialogue process, their demand is peace. "We want peace and a just peace," is the chant heard in the entire Valley. Overwhelmed by immediate challenges, many women who became widows in the prolonged conflict say that they need jobs and education for their children or a house to reside in. The reason an average Kashmiri woman does not participate in political matters is also that they have immediate issues to resolve.³⁸

As per the traditional stance, women are essentially peaceful, and their equal participation can play a role in conflict mitigation, peace processes, and reconstruction efforts. Schofield asserts that non-recognition of women's contribution in the Kashmir conflict adversely impacted the peace process besides women's victimization and marginalization.³⁹ The discrimination of women in IIOJK leads to their marginalization in politics.

UN Response towards Invisibility of Women during Peace Process

The role and contribution of women in the conflict cannot be ignored any longer in all stages of resolution of conflict. Peace cannot be sustainable without full and equal participation of women.⁴⁰ Women's marginalization at negotiating table, their experiences, their needs, and protection during conflict and post-conflict situations, such as repatriation and rehabilitation have already received international accreditation. The UN landmark Resolution-1325 on 'Women, Peace, and Security' is binding on all its member states.⁴¹ It endorses the equal participation of women in the decision-making process and their contribution to peace negotiation and peacebuilding. It also addresses their specific needs, issues, and approaches during the management and resolution of a conflict, but there is no enforcement and accountability mechanism.

UN Resolution-1325 should be put into practice to protect women against violations of human rights. A complete mechanism for its implementation regarding women's security in conflict times must be developed. Women are rendered destitute in IIOJK. Demilitarization and repealing of immunity laws that provide Indian Armed Forces with extraordinary powers in IIOJK are mandatory steps for the peace process. Women do not merely want to end the conflict but to take control of their lives. They aspire to attain peace and empowerment along with sovereignty. They want to make their own decisions and chase their destiny.

Conclusion

Women in IIOJK are directed as well as represented by the male political leadership. Earlier, they were supposed to remain in their private sphere; however, they have come out of their traditional roles as mothers and daughters to facilitate and support their men and sustain the freedom movement. Unfortunately, during negotiations and peace-making efforts, they are marginalized, underrepresented, and invisible, whereas, they play a vibrant and active role in the conflict. They are the worst sufferers of conflict and portrayed as victims of violence, but their role remains undervalued. Due to the women's leadership crisis, women in IIOJK are not seen or heard during the conflict resolution process. They should be given their due political space on negotiating table.

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