

Woman in Kashmir: A Silent Victim

Kashmir is one of the most neglected, long standing and unresolved issue. It is one of those conflict zones which have faced the worst human rights violations and crimes against humanity from the last many decades like torture, extra judicial killings, mass murders, rape, torture, and abuse, exposition of unmarked graves, detentions and enforced disappearance. India has committed both; crime against peace and crime against humanity.

The world's largest democracy has never held its Army accountable for abusing the rights of thousands of individual in Jammu and Kashmir. UN has miserably failed in resolving this issue and has not given due voice to holding accountable India for her atrocities in Kashmir.

The fact is that in any conflict the first and worst victims are women and children and same is the case in Kashmir. Women primarily have been the most terribly injured party, in this decade's long conflict. Anywhere in the world, women suffer the most in any sort of conflict. Either she is war booty in the hands of belligerents or she is a widow back at home. She suffers as a daughter, mother, wife and sister, because most of the times she has to survive alone, with the loss of any support from her male counterpart.

~~The people of Kashmir are continuing their long struggle against Indian oppression and~~ tyranny. Violence is widely used to subjugate the masses and especially the women. Indian army and paramilitary forces have used violence and abuse against women in Kashmir as a tool to subdue them. Women actually have become a medium through which Indian forces claim their authority and impose a number of abuses in this manner. Few of the international organizations do acknowledge the facts that Indian forces have gone for the worst human rights violations and crimes against humanity, but Indian media and international media always turns a blind eye to what is happening in Kashmir.

Women in Kashmir are suffering from a number of physical and psychological problems because of the stressful environment. In the war-trodden region, Kashmiri women are now experiencing more stress as an aftermath of war and infertility. According to a report many women are becoming infertile because of conflicting environment and stressful conditions. According to psychiatric research, 800,000 people in Kashmir including women are affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A gynecologist has said that "Conflict has resulted in many psychiatric problems in women, including depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and anxiety, which directly affect child birth."

A research was carried out in 2002 which revealed that around 90% of the estimated 10,000 Kashmiri war widows didn't remarry despite provision of remarriage in Islam. According to Kashmir Watch suicide rates among Kashmiri women have shown increase over the years. As compared to men, more women are suffering from various psychological disorders. This has also been proven by several surveys carried out in Indian held Kashmir which states that more Kashmiri women commit suicide than men.

The tales of agony of Kashmiri women do not end here. The unending conflict in Kashmir besides leaving behind widows have also left number of 'half-widows'. The missing persons in Kashmir have left over thousands of half-widows whose husbands are missing or are in enforced disappearance. The valley is full of the plight of such women who have been left at the mercy of no one. Wives, mothers and sisters of those men who are in custody of Indian forces for years or missing go for regular sit-ins and protests in Indian held Kashmir. There were over 30,000 widows in Kashmir.

There are countless tales of rapes in Indian held Kashmir. Indian soldiers no doubt use rape as an instrument to force the Kashmiri people to show compliance. Through this, they try to break the moral and mental strength of Kashmiri people, to humiliate and degrade them in any way possible. Late in 2012, a very prominent Indian human rights activist Arundhati Roy said in a media interview in Delhi that Indian army and police are using rape as a weapon against the people Kashmir. She also said that rape is legitimately used and Indian law gives the perpetrators full protection.

Below are the statistics that show the Indian brutality in Kashmir, according to Kashmir Media Service.

Total Killing	93,836
Custodial Killings	6,997
Civilians Arrested	120,724
Structures Arson/Destroyed	105,977
Women Widowed	22,765
Children Orphaned	107,444
Women gang-raped / Molested	10,048

Rape is one the most underreported crimes in Kashmir, and the criminal has almost never been punished. As a raped woman is "stigmatized" in our society, so it's a tool to punish her entire family. Indian forces have used this gender related violence against the women of Kashmir in order to punish and humiliate the entire community. In one of the interviews conducted by Asia Rights Watch, the raped Kashmiri women narrated that "One soldier kept guard on the door and two of them raped me. They said, "We have orders from our officers to rape you." She said, "You can shoot me but don't rape me."

According to a report published by Asia Watch & Physicians for Human Rights the security forces have used rape as a tool to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate and degrade. It was also reported that there can be no doubt that the use of rape is common and routinely goes unpunished. Although strong evidences were available that army and paramilitary forces were engaging in widespread rape, but hardly ever a case was investigated by the authorities. Those cases who were reported never end in criminal prosecutions of the security forces involved. This all shows that Indian government has badly failed to ensure human rights in Kashmir and to hold accountable the members of security forces for their crimes. Many human rights groups have reported the use of rape by Indian forces in Kashmir, but international condemnation has hardly ever come. This shows the seriousness of the international community towards the atrocities done to the Kashmiri people.

The gender based crimes and violence in Kashmir by Indian security forces shows the reality of India in true sense. The 'world's largest democracy' has poorly failed in containing its armed forces against crimes against humanity and particularly crime against women in Kashmir. The irony is that the crimes are seldom reported and almost never punished. In last sixty years, thousands of Kashmiri women have suffered at the hands of cruel Indian forces both physically and psychologically. This is the high time that international community, United Nations and especially women rights organizations should come forward and rescue the constantly suffering women in Kashmir and hold accountable all the involved members of the Indian security forces.