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Gender, Militarism, and Resistance: An Analysis of Afghan and Kashmiri Women's Struggles

Abbas Ahmad

Researcher, Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad, Pakistan

abbasahmadpak@gmail.com

Abstract

This comparative study examines the resistance movements of Muslim women in Afghanistan and Jammu and Kashmir, who confront structural injustices rooted in patriarchy and the pervasive impact of decades of militarism and militarization. The research explores why Muslim women in these regions are resisting both the state and societal norms, and how militarism has shaped their lives. The study employs a qualitative methodology, grounded in interpretivism as the ontological position and a feminist standpoint as the epistemological framework. Data were collected from secondary sources and analyzed using feminist content analysis. The findings reveal that militarism has significantly undermined women's agency,

creating barriers to their mobility, education, employment, and economic participation. The research concludes that recognizing the suffering of women in these contexts is crucial for advancing women's rights, with a focus on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Kashmir, Militarism, Feminism, Women Resistance, Women Empowerment

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Introduction

Muslim women in Afghanistan and the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir have been resisting both the state and societal structures due to the profound impacts of militarism on their lives. In militarized societies, women often suffer the most, as they are denied agency in decision-making, with patriarchy being a default feature of such environments.[1] Although feminist perspectives have steadily gained ground in academia across South Asia, state and societal structures still present significant roadblocks to achieving real change.

Consequently, women's voices are marginalized. Even those voices that challenge traditional notions of masculinity remain on the periphery of broader society. In militarized contexts, women engage in significant resistance due to the multifaceted nature of their suffering. First, they are subjected to the injustices of patriarchy and often treated as commodities. Second, militarization profoundly impacts their personal lives, as male family members—husbands, sons, and fathers—are either detained or killed by state forces or militant groups. Third, in the absence of male family members, women are compelled to assume the role of primary breadwinners, thereby facing additional societal pressures that reinforce patriarchal norms.[2]

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[1] Maxwell Adjei, 'Women's Participation in Peace Processes: A Review of Literature,' *Journal of Peace and Education* 16, no. 2 (2019): 1-22, https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2019.1576515; Carol Cohn, *Women and wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

[2] Cohn, *Women and Wars*; Karen Brounéus, 'The Women and Peace Hypothesis in Peacebuilding Settings: Attitudes of Women in the Wake of the Rwandan genocide,' *Signs* 4, no. 1 (2014): 125-151,

The experiences of Afghan and Kashmiri women closely parallel the situations described above. Their resistance is nonviolent and based on the principles of human rights. In both cases, the resistance is against the state and society. The Afghan women resistance is socio-political. These women endure the most extreme forms of masculinity, where their social, political, and economic rights are systematically undermined by patriarchy. Socially, tribalism defines the code of conduct for them, commonly known as Pashtunwali. Under Pashtunwali, they are treated as commodity and have no rights. They are sold, killed for honour, denied public life, and barred from education.[3] After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, barriers for women in education and public life further solidified under the new Taliban regime.

Kashmiri women on the other hand have a long history of resistance. During British Raj in India, they resisted the Dogra rule in 1920s and 1930s, and demanded political freedom from the platform of National Conference of Sheikh Abdullah. After the annexation of Jammu and Kashmir by India in 1947 and friendly relations of National Conference with the Indian state, the early struggle subsided. However, after 1989, women in Jammu and Kashmir gathered to establish circles of influence in the Kashmiri society to mobilise rural women. Thereby, they helped shape the narrative of freedom in Kashmir's liberation movement. Meanwhile, the most recent mobilisation of Kashmiri women was witnessed after the killing of Burhan Wani in 2016, a Kashmiri insurgent fighting the Indian army.[4]

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https://doi.org/10.1086/676918; Kaitlyn Webster, Chong Chen, and Kyle Beardsley, 'Conflict, Peace, and the Evolution of Women's Empowerment,' *International organization, Cambridge Core* 73, no. 2 (2019): 255–289, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818319000055.

[3] Benedicte Grima, 'Suffering as Esthetic and Ethic among Pashtun Women,' *Women Studies International Forum* 9, no. 3 (1986): 235-242. http://afghandata.org:8080/xmlui/handle/azu/3798; Valentine M. Moghadam, 'Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,' *International Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 35-53. https://doi.org/10.1177/026858092007001002; Mary Hope Schwoebel, 'The Intersection of the Public and Private for Pashtun Women in Politics,' In *Women, Political Struggles and Gender Equality in South Asia,* ed. Margaret Alston (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 193-208.

[4] Seema Kazi, *Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2008); Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Nitasha Kaul and Ather Zia, 'Knowing in Our Own Ways: Women and Kashmir,' *Economic and Political* Weekly 53, no. 47 (2018); Shazia Malik, *Women's Development Amid Conflicts in Kashmir: A Socio-Cultural Study* (New Delhi: Partridge, 2014).

Ironically, women peaceful resistance movements in Afghanistan and Jammu and Kashmir are either dubbed as foreign funded (in case of Afghanistan) or motivated by terrorism (in case of Jammu and Kashmir). Thus, their agony and pain, which is caused because of militarism is brushed under the carpet.

Within South Asia, significant studies have appeared evaluating women as combatants and part of militarism in non-state armed groups such as, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) in Kashmir, and Naxalite women combatants in Indian Red Corridor. However, women peaceful resistance against the militarism needs further understanding, which this research aims to achieve. Hence, also contributing to the epistemology on women in conflicts, resisting not only militarism but also the state and patriarchy, that deprive them of agency. This study also aims to supports the role of organizations such as UN Women by assessing the implementation and effectiveness of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in Afghanistan and Jammu and Kashmir.

As feminist research is inherently reflexive, it requires the researcher to explicitly disclose their aims and methodology.[5] A significant limitation of this study lies in the absence of my own subjective experience as a woman. Consequently, I have focused solely on analyzing experiences documented and published by women scholars themselves. In this process, I adopt the role of a listener, engaging with their works to interpret metaphors through the lens of Feminist Standpoint Theory. Additionally, I employ the deconstruction techniques of feminist scholarship to examine gender dynamics in the conflicts of Afghanistan and Kashmir, specifically deconstructing the masculine frameworks that dominate both contexts. This approach is influenced by Marriam Attia and Julian Edge, who advocate for prospective reflexivity (examining what the researcher brings to the study) and retrospective reflexivity (reflecting on what the researcher learns from the study).[6]

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[5] Ibid., Part II, Chapter 5, Under, 'Reflexivity and Difference.'

[6] Marriam Attia and Julian Edge, 'Be(com)ing a Reflexive Researcher: A Developmental Approach to Research Methodology,' *Open Review of Educational Research* 4, no. 1 (2017): 35, https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068.

Literature Review

The literature on Afghan and Kashmiri women resistance is widely published. In both cases, the feminist discourses are significantly visible, and women thinkers have picked various themes to speak of. The prominent women thinkers who have worked on Afghan women resistance over the last three decades include, Benedicte Grima, Valentine M. Moghadam, Mary Hope Schwoebel, Elaheh Rostemi-Povey, Nargis Nehan and Sima Samar. Meanwhile, the Kashmiri women resistance is covered by thinkers like, Seema Kazi, Nyla Ali Khan, Shazia Malik, Insha Malik, Hafsa Kanwal, Shaheen Akhtar, Rekha Chowdhary and Vibhuti Ubott,

As far as structural injustices against Afghan women are concerned, Benedicte Grima,[7] and Valentine M. Moghadam,[8] bring to light the aspect of women being treated as commodity in Pashtunwali (a socio-political code of conduct). Moghadam further elaborated how Pashtunwali was institutionalized by the state of Afghanistan and hybridized with the religion by Afghan clergy.[9] Grima, a British anthropologist fluent in Dari and Pashto, has dedicated nearly 20 years to fieldwork in Afghanistan. Similarly, the Canadian sociologist Moghadam was born in Iran and works on feminism and gender in development. Their perspective is primarily rooted in Western feminism, through which they attempt to analyze and interpret the progress of Afghan women.

Militarism in Afghan society has greatly affected women public life. Mary Hope Schwoebel explained this aspect through field work in Afghanistan.[10] Similarly, the impacts of militarism are deliberated upon in depth by Nargis Nehan as well. In fact, her work is a succinct piece of scholarship covering the development of women amid conflict in Afghanistan. She has covered

[7] Grima, 'Suffering as Esthetic and Ethic among Pashtun Women,' 235-242.

[8] Moghadam, 'Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies,' 37-45.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Schwoebel, 'The Intersection of the Public and Private for Pashtun Women in Politics,' 193-208.

Afghan women resistance from multiple angles since 1919 up to 2022.[11] Her scholarship represents the liberal strand of feminism. As a former Minister of Mines and advisor to President Ashraf Ghani, Nehan offers a unique perspective as an Afghan woman in a position of power, making her insights invaluable for understanding the structural barriers to women's emancipation. Schwoebel, on the other hand, is an academic, peacebuilder, and statebuilder, as well as a keen observer of gender in conflict. Similar to Grima and Moghadam, her observations of Afghan women are those of an outsider, often comparing their development to that of women across the broader Asia.

For Afghan women agency and inclusion in conflict transformation, Elaheh Rostami-Povey explains how they are denied agency by the Taliban, the Afghan state, and patriarchy.[12] Nehan also provided a detailed account of women's role in peace councils established after 2011 to engage the Taliban. Sima Samar on the other hand, studied Afghan women's desire for peace in historical perspective and the gradual development of gender in Afghanistan, especially their role in formal conflict transformation.[13]. Samar is a Hazara woman, who herself has experienced the Afghan conflict since 1980s. Her husband was abducted by the Mujahideen, and she had to flee to Quetta, Pakistan. She is a prominent Afghan thinker, who has also served as the Minister for Women Affairs in Afghanistan. Lastly, Rostemi-Povey, a Tajik academic, has also covered the issues of Afghan women resistance.

In Kashmir, the feminist discourses are significantly visible. Sameena Kazi presented women resistance of Jammu and Kashmir from feminist standpoint and documented Indian state's

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[11] Nargis Nehan, 'The Rise and Fall of Women Rights in Afghanistan,' *London School of Economics Public Policy Review* 2, no. 3 (2022): 3, https://ppr.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/lseppr.59/

[12] Elaheh Rostami-Povey, 'Gender, Agency and Identity: The Case of Afghan Women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran,' *The Journal of Development Studies* 43, no. 2(2007): 294-311, https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380601125149; Elaheh Rostami-Povey, 'Afghan Women's Resistance and Struggle: Gender, Agency, and Identity,' in *Women and Fluid Identities*, ed. H. Afshar (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 146-166.

[13] Sima Samar, 'Feminism, Peace and Afghanistan,' *Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 2(2019), https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/feminism-peace-and-afghanistan.

terrorism against Kashmiri women as well as roadblocks by patriarchy.[14] Similarly, Nyla Ali Khan explored various ideological shades of women resistance groups in Kashmir.[15] Shazia Malik gives account of Kashmiri women in historical perspective focusing on their role in different phases of conflict.[16] Meanwhile, Kazi in her yet another work provides a case study on rape as an instrument of terror, which is normalized by the Indian security forces to teach Kashmiri men in armed resistance a lesson.[17]

Nyla Ali Khan is a Kashmiri academic based in the UK. She hails from the political family of Sheikh Abdullah. Her writings are inspired by postmodernism, where she advocates for liberal feminism in Kashmir that can have significant aspect of women inclusion. Meanwhile, Sameena Kazi is a constructivist feminist, whose writings reflect post structuralism. She criticises statist structures in Kashmir that have nothing to offer to women. Shazia Malik has presented the case of Kashmiri women from a constructivist lens revealing the interrelationship of early women struggle and state support.

Insha Malik explains the politicisation and mobilization of Kashmiri women in as a collective unit in nonviolent resistance against the Indian state. She reveals methods of their resistance and explain why it is a feminist movement.[18] Like Sameena Kazi and Shazia Malik, Insha Malik's feminist ideas are also related to constructivist ideas. Similarly, Hafza Kanwal also studies the intersectionality of Kashmiri women,[19] and has interpreted the women resistance in a similar fashion as Kazi, Insha Malik, and Shazia Malik have done.

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[14] Kazi, Between Democracy and Nation.

[15] Khan, Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir.

[16] Malik, Women's Development Amid Conflicts in Kashmir: A Socio-Cultural Study.

[17] Seema Kazi, 'Rape, Impunity and Justice in Kashmir,' *Socio-Legal Review* 10 (2014): 14-46. https://www.sociolegalreview.com/_files/ugd/d56aa6_9ede7195f6f04101b4c223e027cf0bba.pdf?index=true.

[18] Insha Malik, 'Imaginations of Self and Struggle: Women in the Kashmiri Armed Resistance,' *Economic and Political Weekly* L., no. 49 (2015): 60-66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44002930.

[19] Hafsa Kanjwal, 'The New Kashmiri Woman: State-Led Feminism in 'Naya Kashmir,' *Economic and Political Weekly* LIII, no. 47 (2018): 37-40.

Shaheen Akhtar pointed out in her work that Kashmiri women from both sides of the LoC started peacebuilding on their own by arranging women-led dialogue.[20] Akhtar is Professor of International Relations based in Islamabad, who has covered women resistance of Kashmir in terms of their agency. Nyla Ali Khan has also focused on the conflict transformation in Kashmir, where women can have agency at the state level. She states that vested interests on both sides of the border keep prolonging the conflict. She argues that denying Kashmiri women space at peacebuilding is against human rights.[21] Similarly, Rekha Chowdary and Vibhuti Ubbot while focusing on UNSCR 1325 criticized painting women as passive receivers only rather than giving them space at the negotiation table.[22]

The review reveals that a significant number of women thinkers have given their perspectives on resistance of Afghan and Kashmiri women. Therefore, based on the work of authors mentioned in this review—this study compares and differentiates resistance of Afghan and Kashmiri women through Feminist Standpoint. The aim of this literature review was to understand the nature of scholarship on Afghan and Kashmiri women resistance and what it offered.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative paradigm to explore women's individual and collective experiences, guided by an interpretivist ontological stance.[23] Interpretivism views society as a construct of human interactions that generate subjective experiences,[24] which, in

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[20] Shaheen Akhtar, 'AJK Women and 'Strategic Peace Building' in Kashmir,' *Institute of Regional Studies* XXXI, no. 1(2012): 1-37.

[21] Khan, Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir, 20.

[22] Rekha Chowdary and Vibhuti Ubbot, 'Conflict and the Peace Process in Jammu and Kashmir: Locating the Agency of Women,' in *Openings for Peace: UNSCR 1325, Women and Security in India*, ed. Asha Hans and Swarna Rajagopalan (India: Sage Publications, 2016), chapter 9.

[23] Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition (New York: Sage Publications, 2017), part I, under 'An Invitation to Qualitative Research.'

[24] Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 'An Invitation to Feminist Research,' in *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy (Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications, 2007), 20.

turn, form social realities. To focus on women's perspectives, this study employs Feminist Standpoint Theory as its epistemological framework, emphasizing the construction of knowledge from women-specific experiences.[25]

Feminist Standpoint Theory highlights how knowledge production is embedded in power structures dominated by men, often marginalizing or misrepresenting women's experiences. Gendered power relations further exclude women's voices from policymaking, leading to male-dominated decision-making processes.[26] In the contexts of Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan, conflict narratives are similarly shaped by male interests, leaving women's experiences and resistance overlooked.[27]

By centring the voices of women thinkers and their shared experiences, this research seeks to construct alternative knowledge, recognizing women as active contributors to understanding and transforming conflicts. Feminist Standpoint Theory thus provides a lens for highlighting, understanding, and including women as knowledge creators in efforts toward conflict resolution.

Analysis

This research employed feminist content analysis technique motivated by Patricia Lina Leavy.[28] She argues, in this sort of research, content (textual, visual, and audio-visual data) is focused rather than interviews and ethnography. Therefore, following this technique, I only utilized feminist textual analysis in this research. By doing so, I explored the

[25] William Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 7th edition (New York: 2011, Pearson, 2011), 102.

[26] Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Live (New York: Cornell, 1991), 138-164.

[27] Neuman, Social Research Methods, 105.

[28] Patricia L. Leavy, 'The Feminist Practice of Content Analysis,' in *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, ed, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia L. Leavy (New York: Sage Publications, 2007), 227.

available literature about,[29] how non-violent women resistance took shape in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Subsequently, motivated by Hesse-Biber,[30] I divided the collected data into metaphors to determine similarities and differences in both cases. With this technique, I estimated how women scholars from both cases have presented perspectives and experiences of resistance. So, after reviewing and analysing the literature discussed in the section above, various metaphors appeared. For instance, on Kashmiri women resistance, the thematic variations that appeared in almost all writings of the women thinkers were related to struggle for freedom, resistance against enforced disappearances, state terrorism, rape as a strategic tool, and denying women agency in peace negotiations. Similarly, the themes that erupted from the writings of women scholars on Afghan women resistance, following are significant, i.e., structural injustices (in shape of Pashtunwali), militarism, and lack of agency in conflict transformation.

Once these themes were established, the perspectives on each one of them by individual women thinkers were evaluated. In doing so, each author's positionality, situatedness, and bias was discerned. Similarly, it was also analysed how Afghan and Kashmiri women resistance is different from, or similar to the other in each thematic metaphor. Significantly, the sources of the information provided by them were also observed to determine their standpoint as well as construction of their knowledge. The thematic variations are revealed in detail in the next section.

Findings

The findings of this study are divided into two broad sections. The first deals with the case of Afghan women. Meanwhile, the second elaborates the case of Kashmiri women. In the first section, I discuss three major findings about Afghan women resistance, i.e., that of structural injustices, the public life of Afghan women, and their agency in the peacebuilding. Meanwhile, in the second case, I explain my findings organized into three

[29] Ibid., 229.

[30] Hesse-Biber, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, Part I, Chapter 1, Under 'Epistemology.'

subsections, i.e., Kashmiri women and self-determination, rape as a strategic weapon, and Kashmiri women as peacebuilders.

The Case of Afghan Women Resistance

Structural Injustices: Women as Commodity

As Afghans derive their culture from pastoral nomads, thus the women are regulated within 'tightly interrelated lineages.'[31] Since 18th century, the power in Afghanistan mostly rested with ethnic Afghans. Thereby, their political and cultural system of Pashtunwali superseded others—and made inroads into modern Afghan state. In Pashtunwali, women are considered as dependent on men, having no freedom of public life. The Pashtun culture of joint family systems, combined with the transfer of inheritance within the tribe, has further reinforced patriarchal control over society.[32]

According to Pashtunwali, a Pashtun woman's primary responsibility is to protect her family's honour, and failure to do so can result in severe consequences, including femicide. The Afghan patriarchy consider those women brave who are within the framework of Pashtunwali and not those, who resist it. Within Afghanistan, the ancient practices of Pashtunwali that are against women and human rights, and still followed include *Vulwar* (bride money), *Swara* (marrying off women to end conflicts), *Ghag* (forcefully making a claim about an unmarried girl), *Tor and Matizah* (eloped girls).

The first ever attempt to modernization in Afghanistan occurred under the former king Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), who encouraged women emancipation. However, the reforms were top down, i.e., they were reflected mostly in the urban spaces, and adopted by Afghan elite women. These reforms were also initiated by the king, so aspect of women resistance was absent. Then Nadir Shah (1929-1933) again succumbed to conservative pressure and women rights were reversed. Zahir Shah (1933-1950) was inspired by Amanullah, who readopted his

[31] Moghadam, 'Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender,' 38.

[32] Ibid., 38-40.

policies, introduced democracy and gave women the right to vote. These progressive days for women were continued under the communists as well, who also made education compulsory and introduced a marriage age.[33]

The Gender development in Afghanistan under the socialist regime of the People Democratic Party Afghanistan (PDPA) was led by Noor Muhammad Tarakai. His government worked toward women liberation in 1978. The areas of empowerment were related to education, mobility, and consent in marriage, employment, and economic issues. More importantly, under the PDPA, the aforementioned anti-women practices of Pashtunwali were outlawed.[34] However, there is no evidence, if these were ever shunned by the rural Afghans, which form the majority of the state.

The Afghan social and political structure remained unfriendly toward women during the Soviet occupation. Post-Soviet Union, Afghanistan underwent a civil war. Though the new Mujahideen government did not ban women education, however, other forms of public life, like employment were banned. Meanwhile, when the Taliban took over in 1996, they banned not only work but also education. These trends kept women under the strict control of Afghan patriarchy.[35] Women were used as political tools by both the communists and the Mujahideen. While communists played politics to enrol large numbers of women in universities, just to make the state of women in a communist society look progressive, the Mujahideen exploited women in the name of religion. Many women were forcefully picked from their homes and married to fighters. Some of these were later left alone, who could not return home because of stigma.[36] The conditions further worsened under the Taliban rule of late 1990s. They restricted women to their homes.

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[33] Nehan, 'The Rise and Fall,' 3.

[34] Moghadam, 'Patriarchy and Politics of Gender,' 45.

[35] Samar, 'Feminism, Peace, and Afghanistan.'

[36] Ibid.

Under the Americans, during the War on Terror, some form of freedom and political agency was awarded to women. For instance, 25 percent of women were inducted to Afghan parliament, meanwhile, a thirty percent quota was also set for civil service. Additionally, the Shia Personal Status Act, passed in 2009 to appease the clergy, sparked resistance from women's rights organizations. Reduction of women quota in parliament from 25 to 20 percent.[37] Nonetheless, after the withdrawal of the US, the vicious cycle of women repression reappeared, as Taliban retook Kabul in August 2021.

The Public Life of Afghan Women: Mobility and Education

Afghan women were resilient in the face of restrictions imposed by the patriarchy. Even though Afghan women were denied public life and education under the first rule of the Taliban (1996-2001), they still managed to resist these directives. Thus, Afghan women initiated underground schools for girls. Rostemi-Povey also had interesting account on women emancipation under the US backed Karzai and Ghani regimes post 2001. According to her, even the US exploited Afghan women for legitimizing the war in Afghanistan. The sufferings of women continued even under the presence of the US led security forces. Because the Taliban would threaten or attack women opting for public life.[38] To counter the Taliban, Afghan women devised their own coping mechanism to achieve some sort of public freedom. And for that matter they started arranging *Mahram* (Shariah compliant male companions) on rent. This became a famous way in circles of urban women to secretly get employment.[39]

Other than condition of *Mahram*, the Afghan women have experienced phases of patriarchal imposed veiling and unveiling in public life. Moghadam believes that 'the veiling and unveiling of women at different points in a country's evolution signifies the political and cultural project of ascending groups.'[40] This reflected a divide between the modern and traditional Afghan. The

[37] Nehan, 'Rise and Fall,' 4-5.

[38] Rostemi-Povey, 'Gender, Agency, and Identity,' 305.

[39] Ibid., 298.

[40] Moghadan, 'Patriarchy and Politics of Gender,' 39.

modern would exploit veiling with the lack of women empowerment, meanwhile, the traditional on the other hand would relate honour with veiling of women. In both instances, it was the women whose bodies were made the subject of men's decision making and their gender politicised.[41]

Mary Hope Schwoebel is of the opinion that it is wrong to assume that the Taliban mistreat women just because of their interpretation of Islam. She is of the view that the Afghan women seclusion is a much older phenomenon than the Taliban. It has more to do with the tribal patriarchal structure of Afghanistan rather than religion. The Mujahideen and the Taliban are only reinforcing the aspects of Pashtunwali. Schwoebel states that this is one of the reasons that women from other ethnicities of Afghanistan are freer than the Pashtuns.[42]

Furthermore, women's right to education was denied in the first phase of the Taliban government. The resistance against these directives were met with force by the Taliban. However, after the US invasion of 2001, the women access to education became easy. The US had exploited women emancipation and education to legitimize their invasion—therefore, education was funded well by the US and Western states. Education of Afghan women improved more under the Ghani regime than that of Karzai's. One of reasons was digitization of Afghanistan. Electronic media along with access to social networking sites empowered Afghan women in real sense as they connected with the outer world.[43]

Nonetheless, the challenge from the orthodoxy continued. They had the agency of not only religious institutions but also conservative Afghan patriarchs—which amplified their propaganda against the Afghan women activists. These groups were also the supporters of the Taliban. That is why Taliban conquered Kabul without a fight on August 15, 2021. Immediately after taking over, the Taliban reversed the progress on gender development to 1990s. They reintroduced regressive policies and banned women education as well as all type

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Schwoebel, 'The Interaction of the Public and Private,' 198-200.

[43] Nehan, 'Rise and Fall,' 6.

of public life. The Taliban's hate for women public life stems from the fact that after assuming power, they disbanded the Women Affairs Ministry, and in that same building founded the ministry of *Amar Bil Maruf Wa Nahi Anil Munkar* (Promotion of Virtue and Negation of Vice).[44]

Afghan Women in Peace Processes

Women continue to struggle for gender parity, equal access to opportunity and upward mobility.[45] The Afghan Peace Process started in 2010, when Hamid Karzai's led *Loya Jirga* (Consultative Council) asked for political settlement with the Taliban. Thus, women support was sought by the government to form a High Peace Council (HPC). The Jirga advised only 10 percent of the female participation in HPC—however, upon criticism by the women and pressure from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the number was increased to 28 percent. The *Loya Jirga* and the US believed that bringing women to the table would persuade the Taliban to shun violence—because they were neutral.[46]

Nonetheless, the philosophy could not be implemented during the negotiations stage. Out of 68 members of the HPC, only four were women—that too representing political factions, rather than human rights, peace, and civil society activists. The agenda of the HPC was seldom shared with the women, thereby, the ones who were inducted in HPC remained only in paper, and women were kept mostly in dark about the peace processes. Nargis Nehan is of the view that even with the US spending money on women emancipation, the inclusion of Afghan women in political affairs was based on tokenism. It is further interesting to note that the Afghan state was a signatory of the UNSCR 1325, but still the traditional gender relations, patriarchy and machoism of the Afghans excelled—and the international community gave in on this crucial affair.[47]

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[44]Ibid., 7.

[45] Samar, 'Feminism, Peace and Afghanistan'"

[46] Nehan, 'Rise and Fall,' 5.

[47] Ibid.

The techniques employed by Afghan women to make their voices heard were largely within the existing system, reflecting what could be described as a liberal feminist approach that emphasizes the importance of inclusion. Afghan women activists leveraged platforms provided by donor agencies to pressure the government for greater women's participation in decision-making. However, these efforts were met with criticism from conservative groups, who labelled them as 'embassy women.'[48]

Sima Samar argues that feminism within Afghanistan must strive for inclusion, where women are represented equally alongside men, without any prejudice of ethnic, economic or sectarian background. When it comes to peace, philosophy of inclusion becomes more significant because women bring totally different experiences than men to the table. Women in Afghanistan must be on table regardless of their historical role.[49] Samar has criticized quick fixes to Afghan problem. She wants long term solutions.

The Case of Kashmiri Women Resistance

Kashmiri Women's Resistance for Self Determination

After the movement of self-determination in Kashmir post 1989, Kashmiri society was undergoing an ideological transition. The Kashmiriyat of Sheikh Abdullah was interpreted as a lost cause because India was gradually eliminating the independent status of Jammu And Kashmir State by constitutional manoeuvrings. Thus, two major ideological shifts happened. One was influenced to join Pakistan under the banner of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) established in 1993. Meanwhile, the other wanted to see Kashmir as an independent state, under the platform of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).[50] Given this context, the politicisation of Kashmiri women was the reflection of Kashmiri society as a whole. Therefore, various forms of resistance emerged among Kashmiri Muslim women, some

[48] Ibid.

[49] Samar, 'Feminism, Peace, and Afghanistan.'

[50] Tahir Amin, *Mass Resistance in Kashmir: Origins, Evolution, Options* (Islamabad: Institute for Policy Studies, 1995), 81.

independent, while others were affiliated with political parties such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC).

The prominent non-violent women resistance platforms that are independent in their operations in Kashmir are Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM) founded by Asiya Andrabi, Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) of Yasmeen Raja, and Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons—founded by Pervena Ahangar. These women movements mobilised rural women for the cause of freedom as well as resistance against the highhandedness of Indian armed forces against their men. DeM and MKM draws their ideological influences from different sources. While DeM is inspired by religious ideology of Islam, MKM on the other hand is rooted in the political philosophy of self-determination. The women of MKM had the first-hand experiences of Indian atrocities [51]

Nyla Ali Khan blames DeM of introducing extremism to the women of Kashmir, who were traditionally liberal. For instances, Khan criticizes Andrabi's religious sermons and forcing veil on the women of Kashmir. In this connection, Nyla present Andrabi as an agent of patriarchy. However, Seema Kazi disagrees with Khan. She argues that it is an independent women resistance group, which draws its inspiration from religion.

During early 1990s, the women of Kashmir resisted the Indian armed forces for arresting their male family members. They would come out of the homes and stage protests. The phenomenon of women combatants was generally not experienced in Kashmir. Inshah Malik opined, even If Kashmiri women were nonviolent—yet their resistance had the mark of collective thought processes of the Kashmiri society, which was self-determination. This idea is refuted by Nyla Ali Khan, who rather believed that women of Kashmir were being used by the patriarchy for their own cause—i.e., mobilization of youth toward armed resistance.

Nonetheless, Insha Malik and Hafsa Kanwal disagrees with Khan. For Malik, alleging Kashmiri women of aiding patriarchy is ignoring the intersectionality of Kashmiri women.[52]

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[51] Insha Malik, 'Imagination of Self and Struggle,' 60.

[52] Ibid., 61.

Hafsa Kanwal criticizes Khan for romanticizing Indian state led women emancipation from the platform of National Conference, which only supported those women who were committed to socialism. Kanwal believes that local Kashmiri women movements are only termed extremists and foreign funded because they challenge the ideology of Kashmiriyat.[53]

Women in Kashmir has a collective experience of grief as well. These are women who have lost their male family members in the conflict. Most of Kashmiri youth who were picked up by Indian armed forces under the suspicion were killed. For searching such youth, Kashmiri women gathered under the leadership of Pervena Ahangar, and formed an organization called Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons.[54] Seema Kazi states that Kashmiri women are socially policed. Most of them are those, whose male family members are disappeared. They have to struggle against the Kashmiri patriarchy, who see them as an easy prey.[55]

Rape as a Strategic Weapon

Kashmiri women were made soft targets by the Indian army. To defeat Kashmir's insurgency, the Indian army employed the policy of mass rapes of Kashmiri women. This was done in order to shatter the resolve of Kashmiri men who picked up guns against the Indian state. Such incidents mostly occurred in the dark of night, when Indian security forces used to cordon off the entire villages on the pre-text of searching militants. They would force the men out of houses and rape their women inside. Kashmiri women have suffered this humiliation since the beginning of freedom struggle in 1989. The first such incident was reported in 1990 and continued to appear till 2011.[56]

The Kashmiri women chalked out a strategy for this and started staying in groups whether inside or outside the home. These responses developed after their shared traumatic experiences. Another response mechanism was reducing the age of marriage that came down to 14, which

[53] Kanjwal, 'The New Kashmiri Woman,' 37-40.

[54] Khan, Islam, Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir, 116-118.

[55] Kazi, Between Democracy and Nation, 133.

[56] Kazi, 'Rape, Impunity and Justice in Kashmir,' 22.

before 1989 was 20 or above.[57] Kazi laments the Kashmir legal structure and allege that, women bodies are violated in front of this structure, but they cannot protect them. She shared her experience of conversation with an Indian military officer, Lieutenant Colonel, V. K Batra, who took rape very lightly and told Kazi that, 'since Kashmiri men have become psychotic after cordon-and-search operations and cannot perform, women have to seek satisfaction elsewhere.'[58]

Kazi believes that women of Kashmir generally do not report the incidents of rape because of the social stigma it brings. Therefore, the number of actual incidents could be beyond expectations in the valley.[59] The registered rape cases within the UN are only 143.[60] However, the Kashmir Media Service believes that it could be as high as 11,000.[61] Meanwhile, the Amnesty International suggests that this number could be from 2500 to 5000.[62] Because there is an element of stigma associated with rape—therefore, it becomes manageable for the government to hush up the incidents.[63]

Kashmiri Women in Peace Processes

After 1989, the major talks on Kashmir were only held between the states of India and Pakistan. Thus, agency in Kashmir was never given to women to present their

[57] Ibid.

[58] Kazi, Between Democracy and Nation, 134.

[59] Ibid., 139.

[60] Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, June 14, 2018, *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 35, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf

[61] Kashmir Media Service, n.d., https://kmsnews.org/news/

[62] Kazi, 'Rape, Immunity, Justice in Kashmir,' 26.

[63] Ibid.

perspectives,[64] they were excluded in peace processes at the state level.[65] Interestingly, in Kashmir the gender roles played a roadblock for women in peace talks. Because women were perceived as victims of the conflict therefore, their role was relegated to that of a mourner.[66] Chowdhary and Ubbot argued that if women were victimized in the valley, it was because of the politics played by men—and if women have to be rescued, then it must be made part of the political process.[67]

Shaheen Akhtar is of the opinion that Kashmir lacked strategic peace building because elements of change, reduction in violence, transformation of relationship, and capacity building were absent. There were either state to state talks motivated by third parties like the US, UK and Russia or Track II dialogues. Women were denied agency in this process at the state level.[68] However, at the societal level, Kashmiri women from both sides of the Line of Control came forward for peace. From Muzaffarabad, a women group known as AJK Women for Peace, Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation. These both organizations were joined by international women organizations like Conciliation Resources (London) and Gender Concerns International (The Hague). Along with it was Women in Conflict, Security Management, and Peace from New Delhi. Together they initiated peace processes since 2007. Rounds of talks were held in Sringar (2007), Gulmerg (2011), and Muzaffarabad (2012) with the agenda being demilitarisation.[69]

Discussion

Militarism is a key driver behind the resistance of Afghan and Kashmiri women. Militarism refers to the belief that conflicts should be resolved through the use of force

[64] Khan, Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir, 140.

[65] Ibid., 20-45.

[66] Chowdhary and Ubbot, 'Conflict and the Peace Process,' in *Openings for Peace*, Chapter 9.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Akhtar, 'AJK Women and 'Strategic Peacebuilding' in Kashmir,' 4-8.

[69] Ibid., 23-27.

by the parties involved. This, in turn, leads to militarization, which is the societal shift towards framing conflict as a means to achieve objectives. As a result, militarism and militarization create insecurities for women, making them vulnerable to the dominance of masculinity in conflicts.[70] The use of force has been witnessed in cases of Afghanistan (since the Soviet invasion in 1979), as well as in Kashmir (since armed struggle for self-determination post 1989). As a result of which both societies have become militarized.

While militarism is a similar metaphor in both cases of Afghanistan and Kashmir. However, the women resistance is varied from each other. For instance, in Kashmir, the women resistance was initiated against the Indian occupation. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the resistance was directed against the patriarchy and their philosophy of militarism and gender roles. The Kashmiri women bodies are controlled by the others—while Afghan women bodies are controlled by their own. Both manifestations are forms of sufferings. In both instances, the international organizations ignored their own commitments to UNSCR 1325 and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Kashmiri women had enjoyed the freedom of public and private life traditionally. This led them to play a role of influencers, mobilisers, protesters, and active participants in the struggle. Meanwhile, Afghan women on the contrary were denied public life historically. Even under the progressive regimes post 1919, the Afghan women lacked the aspect of stability. There remained a continuous challenge of the orthodox religious segment and conservative tribes of the society. Another key difference was the "otherness." In case of Kashmir, the enemy was an outsider and an occupier, who threatened women's freedom, bodies, and peace, whereas in Afghanistan women faced an internal enemy, their own men.

While there have been instances of grassroot level women resistance movements in Kashmir, on the contrary, in Afghanistan, such movements were state led and poorly funded. Thereby, resulting in lack of mobilisation of rural women. The education played a key denominator in this regard. In Kashmir, the universal formal education proved to be a significant element of women raising their perspectives. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, such a benefit was not available

[70] Showkat and Zakaria, 'Looking the world from Kashmir,' 284.

to women. The women resistance on educational ban in Afghanistan though appears sporadically but are mostly limited to framing purposes and consumption of a few media outlets. Nonviolent women resistance against a group like Taliban, which do not hesitate to use brute force even against women is tough task.

The women agency in peace processes is dismal in both cases of Afghanistan and Kashmir. Swati Parashar has righty observed that, post conflict, the entire acknowledgement is claimed by men. The gendered experiences of the conflict are ignored, and women are relegated to the position of only receivers.[71] From the Feminist Standpoint, peace is when women are able to take decisions about themselves.[72] Feminist Standpoint theory asks states to readjust their structures on security and include female perceptions of reality in the new ones.[73] Even the UNSCR 1325 adopted in October 2000, stresses on the need to inclusion of women as agents of change. And granting them access to decision making, part of policies on Gender Based Violence, disarmament and reintegration regimes, and peace making.[74]

There are various terminologies associated with peacebuilding in literature, like that of conflict resolution, conflict mitigation, and conflict transformation. I chose to adopt the conceptual framework of conflict transformation, because it addresses the causes of conflict in historical and cultural scenarios and strive to transform it once and for all rather than quick fixes by so-called third-party peace experts.[75]

Conclusion

[71] Swati Parashar, *Women and Militant Wars: The Politics of Injury* (London: Routledge, 2014), 101.

[72] Jill Steans, Gender and International Relations: Issues, Debates and Future Directions, second edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 60.

[73] Ibid., 116-124.

[74] Malathi de Alwis et al., 'Women and Peace Processes,' In *Women and Wars,* ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 169, 183-84.

[75] Ibid., 170-178.

The Afghan and Kashmiri women are resisting militarism and militarization in their spaces, which has impacted their lives drastically. In Kashmir, militarism has multiplied the traditional patriarchal barriers, as well as introduced the new ones—such as masculine others—who violate them to conquer their men. In Afghanistan, militarism has halted gender development, thus taking women back to cycles of patriarchal structural control. Gendered power relations in Afghan women's structural problems are unequal. Their treatment as a commodity is still a big challenge. Similarly, both Afghan and Kashmiri women also resist for gaining agency in conflict transformation. However, both are denied role at the table, which is against the principles of UNSCR 1325—that provide for equal representation of women in decision making.