

Lesley University

DigitalCommons@Lesley

Violence Against Women conference

2018 - VAW: Representations, Interpretations,
Explorations/Education

Nov 9th, 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Sexual Violence Against Women in an Armed Conflict

Nowsheen Altaf Dar

National Institute of Technology, Srinagar, nowsheenaltaf8716@gmail.com

Benish Mehraj

University of Kashmir, beanshady94@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/violence_against_women



Part of the [Human Rights Law Commons](#), and the [Military, War, and Peace Commons](#)

Dar, Nowsheen Altaf and Mehraj, Benish, "Sexual Violence Against Women in an Armed Conflict" (2018).
Violence Against Women conference. 9.

https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/violence_against_women/2018/schedule/9

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Symposia and Conferences at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Violence Against Women conference by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.

Sexual Violence against Women in an Armed Conflict.

Svetlana Alexievich, the Russian feminist, throughout her journalistic career has provided an unbiased oral history of the women during World War II through a literary excavation of memory itself. She has proved that war or armed conflict cannot be ungendered, that it demands to be viewed from a gendered lens. Her work brings forth the woman of war whose beauty, empathy, and compassion gives her a special advantage during wartime.

Documentation of life under militarization has mostly been done by “men writing about men”. The need to have a gendered perspective of conflict and war was only recently introduced in the academic discourse after the collective violence against the women of Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s was given the attention it deserved by the international media

In Kashmir, women are subjected to violence through physical, sexual and mental harassments. The very nature of the conflict has pushed Kashmiri women to the wall, putting the burden of violence on their shoulders. Women face physical and sexual assault at checkpoints, during raids, in detention centers and prisons. The forced gender role reversal during conflicts is another gut wrenching reality that a woman has to endure in the face of the adversity.

While many theorists such as Judy El Bushra, J Ann Tickner, et al., argue that such gender role reversals pave way for the emancipation of women in conflict-torn areas, the reality remains that such emancipation is enforced on these women.

Under these severe conditions, women have to assume the role of the breadwinners, while being the care takers of the family. Karima Bannoune argues that violent political conflicts create a free-fire zone, a sort of free for all in which pre-existing ideas about women as inferior, and other discriminatory ideas may be given free expression frequently by all male groups of soldiers and other combatants.

Woman in the context of a conflict is a “double oppressed” category. She is not only at the receiving end of the violence directly but her life goes a complete transformation indirectly as well. The psychological effect of the violence often results in the breaking of familial ties, alienation, and various mental disorders such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolarity, depression, etc.

The research paper that I am proposing aims to uncover the voices of women who have been subjected to extreme and harsh conditions imposed on them by the Indian state in the form of a military occupation and non state actors as well, especially sexual violence; gender-based violence that has been inflicted on the women of Kashmir in the form of sexual violence, rape, abduction both by the state and non-state actors.

I propose to carry a study of gender-based violence in this conflict zone to understand the gendered organization of violence under military occupation. I aim to carry out exploratory research and record testimonies of women (who have witnessed and been at the receiving end of heavy militarization since 1989 in Indian occupied Kashmir), including in my fieldwork accounts of their experiences, their memories, the effect it has left on them, how they have maintained themselves, and managed to survive despite all odds.

Impunity for sexual and gender based violence in conflict zones given to armed forces across the world has made women more vulnerable to abuse and violence. Women in conflict areas suffer from general patriarchal violence and systemized violence from state as well as non-state actors.

Since the Indian invasion of 1947, the territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been plagued by fierce armed conflict, political civilian uprisings. In its efforts to counter this movement, India has employed martial law and has “pursued a policy of repression which has resulted in massive human rights violations.” Systematic sexual violence is one of the most prevalent and potent tactics used to disempower Kashmiri militants and their communities. According to a study by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), nearly 12 percent of Kashmiri women have endured sexual violence, an abnormally high proportion even for conflict zones. Far from random, these attacks are part of an organized strategy to “to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate and degrade” Kashmiri insurgents.

The infamous mass rape of 100 women in Kunanposhpora in 1991 is the only case which has received international attention but there are numerous similar cases; In May 1990, the bride, Mubina Ghani, and her chaperone aunt were separated from others, taken into the fields and gang-raped. In 1989, during the exodus of the Hindus, which was again an outcome of state policy, insurgents of one community selectively raped and tortured women of other community. In March 1990, the wife of a BSF inspector was kidnapped, tortured and gang-raped for many days. In 1992, an army unit entered the village of Chak Saidapora, gang-raped between six and nine women. In 1990, a Kashmiri Pandit nurse was gang-raped and then beaten to death by non state actors, but so far the Indian authorities have not made public any prosecutions or punishments of security personnel in any case because the Indian armed troopers enjoy impunity. As per reports there is likelihood of having more than 10,000 cases of such sexual abuse. Women and girls have suffered disproportionately in this war, Kashmiri women bear the consequences of war and suffer violations of human rights, including terrorism, torture, disappearance of loved ones, rape, family separation, leading to psychological trauma and other health hazards.

Recently a minor girl aged 8 years was gang raped for 8 days in the rubric of ethnic cleansing. From inception of this violence rarely any international documentation has been done on sexual and gender violence, at local level the international Media is not allowed to operate freely, the human rights activists documenting violations are assaulted, tortured or killed.

Jalil Andrabi, a prominent Kashmiri human rights lawyer was allegedly subjected to extrajudicial execution by Indian paramilitary troopers and renegades in March 1996. This research paper tends to bring on surface the unreported cases of sexual violence and the lifelong social and psychological traumas of kashmiri women, so that their voices are heard and presented at a broader and proper forum to prosecute and punish the war criminals.