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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Where else can they go?': Violence, resistance and the socio-cultural trajectories of Kashmiri women in Freny Manecksha's *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children*

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Abstract

In the armed conflict between Kashmiri militancy and the Indian state forces, Kashmiri women have been relentless victims of abduction, rape, molestation, and cruel objectification by the militaristic patriarchs of both sides. In the context of the state's unaccountability, the rebuttal of justice is horrific in Kashmir. Consequently, due to predominant masculine, state-centric, absolutist, and neo-realist perceptions, the majority of atrocities against Kashmiri women have gone unregistered and unreported, failing to reach the pan-Indian masses through the dominant media and literary narratives. This article explicates Freny Manecksha's book *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children* (2017) as a unique retelling of Kashmiri women's physical violence, fears, trauma, and, most importantly, their fortitude and recuperation. Drawing on feminist views on rape and repression, it exposes how rape in Kashmir incessantly functions as a weapon of suppression, relegating women to the most precarious position. Simultaneously, the discussion demonstrates how rape and oppression render Kashmiri women docile and vulnerable to cultural and collective trauma by employing the

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Foucauldian notion of docility. The article further addresses how Kashmiri women repudiate the traditional divides of private and public, overturn the social expectations of womanhood, contest the patriarchal excesses of militaristic Kashmir vis-à-vis their resilience, and protest against state-sponsored violence. Thus, the article posits Manecksha's writing as a counter-historiographic narrative for the marginalized voices of Kashmiri women, whose ways of redressing their grievances constitute subversive modes of resistance.

KEYWORDS

Kashmiri women, rape, resistance, trauma, violence

1 | INTRODUCTION

The cost of war and violence is substantial and frequently catastrophic, and while all nationalist leaders have used violent rhetoric and articulated ethnically defined national identities and standings during war and conflict, women are often exposed to militarism and violence and are seen fighting against the dehumanization of their agency during this tumultuous period. Women's experiences of violence, especially sexual assault, jeopardize community cohesion and integrity and disrupt the roots of relationship dynamics and traditions that define a society's culture. Violence against women is condemned as one of the most heinous, "systemic and widespread human rights violations" (UN Women, 2013, p. 2). Politically volatile areas intensify crimes against women, as they expose women to masochistic sexual aggression and traumatic everyday experiences. Miranda H. Alison notes that "during times of conflict multiple binary constructions are formed; not only is 'masculine' contrasted to 'feminine' within a group and 'us' contrasted to 'them' between groups, but 'our women' are contrasted to 'their women' and 'our men' to 'their men'" (Alison, 2007, p. 80) While the cognitive and emotional terrains of military combat manifest differently in women's bodies, narratives of wars in Eastern Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa often reveal analogous discourses. In such trying conditions, as Sheila Meintjes argues, "the perversion and inversion of masculinity embedded in these acts profoundly dislocates and erodes men's sense of manhood" and "the social order is at risk, because the assault is directed at the body politic" (Meintjes, 2000, p. 8). Conflict is "another form of armed patriarchy magnifies the existing inequality of peacetimes" (Singh, 2010, p. 655), making women the most vulnerable victims of sexual usurpation and subjugation in any war or armed conflict.

The societal circumstances that facilitate sexual violence encompass but are not constrained to, the following: tolerance for sexual assault and violent pornographic material; the belief that

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women who consume alcohol are available for sex; constrictive concepts about manliness (e.g., men do not cry); the belief that women should be concerned about security (e.g., blaming the victim); and belief that certain communities are superior to others (Conley & Griffith, 2016, p. 279). In post-colonial South Asia, armed conflict in India (Kashmir and Northeast), Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka (Jaffna), Afghanistan, and Nepal exposes a history of female subordination and abuse. Not only are they vulnerable to murder, but they also face racial and sexual assaults. Singh notes that women in South Asia have been subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by insurgents, armed soldiers, and extremists seeking to demean and subjugate their adversaries (Singh, 2010, p. 656). In her extensive studies on South Asian wars, Rita Manchanda points out that "the violence against women in conditions of conflict stands on a continuum alongside the violence experienced by women in 'normal' conditions" (Manchanda, 2005, p. 4739). In the context of South Asian armed conflicts, Kashmiri women have been suffering atrocious violence under state regimentation and continual military occupation for the past few decades. However, most crimes against Kashmiri women have gone unrecorded and undocumented, failing to reach the pan-Indian masses through the dominant media and literary narratives. As monopolized by masculine, state-centric, objectivist, and neorealist interpretations, "the spaces for alternative ways of thinking remain narrow, and the path to challenge the dominant analysis of state, conflict and security still remains long and arduous in the region" (Singh, 2017, pp. 149–150). Hence, the need to re-examine the multifaceted relationship between women, conflict, and security in Kashmir is a crucially important discussion within the context of South Asia. The immanent necessity to reprimand "the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators" and to take a relook at "our collective inability and unwillingness to address the profound impact of such violence" (Butalia et al., 2016, p. xii) in the context of Kashmir has earnestly been reiterated by many feminist writers and thinkers. Recurrently, it has been critiqued as to why "did caste rape, or rape by the army, not result in the same kind of outrage, the same explosion of anger as the incident of 16 December 2012 had done?" (Butalia et al., 2016, p. xiv). While the enduring topics of public discourse in India revolve around the undeniable prevalence of violence against women and the hesitancy of public authority to address this issue (Karp et al., 2015, p. 2), the state's callousness and rebuttal of justice are horrific in Kashmir. Despite the extensive documentation available during the period of 1980–2004 regarding the severe "rapes and sexual violations of women by the armed forces" in conflict zones of India (Kannabirān & Menon, 2007, p. 28), the lack of accountability remains a significant concern in relation to physical violence against women in marginalized communities and border zones like Kashmir.

Hence, women in conflict-stricken Kashmir are in double jeopardy—undergoing rampant sexual violations and then being denied justice. Systemic impunity has been normalizing sexual violence in Kashmir as if "the violation of women's bodies is an accepted way of establishing male superiority" (Butalia et al., 2016, p. xiii). Against such a backdrop of masculine-militaristic invasions on the female bodies and psyche, Freny Manecksha's *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children* (2017) [henceforth, *Behold I Shine*] stands out as a testimony to the torture and torment that mar Kashmiri women's lives. It is worth noting that Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*, Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field*, Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*, Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*, and Mirza Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves* are notable literary narratives that provide a realistic portrayal of the current predicament of Kashmir and its citizens. These works emphasize the challenges faced by the common people of Kashmir and highlight how the region has become a center of challenging circumstances. Manecksha's text depicts Kashmiri women's intricate experiences by highlighting a vivid

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commentary on the horrendous violations of their bodies while more penetratingly depicting the shame, stigma, and trauma that entail such violence. Hence, the article studies this primary text as a unique retelling of Kashmiri women's bodily violence, fears, trauma, and resilience.

Drawing on feminist views on rape and repression, the discussion exposes how rape and patriarchal violence constrict the subjectivities of Kashmiri women, often pushing them into disturbed psycho-sociality and traumatic encounters. The article further addresses how Manecksha's writing situates the gendered violence in Kashmir as a fallout of the unabashed antagonism of the Indian army, the rigidities of a conservative Kashmiri patriarchy, and a piteous disregard of the dominant state toward appropriate legal action and justice. A parallel discussion is presented on how rape and military oppression render Kashmiri women docile and vulnerable to cultural and collective trauma by employing the Foucauldian notion of "docility" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). Most significantly, the article argues that Kashmiri women are not merely passive victims; many of them repudiate the traditional divides of private and public, overturn the social expectations of womanhood, and contest the patriarchal excesses of militaristic Kashmir vis-à-vis their resilience and protest against state-sponsored violence. Accordingly, the article posits Manecksha's writing as a counter-historiographic narrative of the marginalized voices of Kashmiri women, whose ways of addressing their grievances provide subversive modes of resistance.

2 | RAPE AND THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

In Kashmir, women endure a culture of violence that not only defines their bodies and identities based on their gender but also more harshly due to deeply rooted ethnic nationalist animosity. To understand the heinous nature of bodily violence, one must discover the root causes of this culturalization of violence in Kashmir since the days of Indian independence. While religion was a prime factor in segregating two nations—India and Pakistan—in 1947, Kashmir, despite being a Muslim-dominated region, chose to remain a princely state under Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu ruler. Kashmir denied being part of either India or Pakistan. However, under certain adverse political situations, Hari Singh sought military aid from the then-Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, eventually signing the Instrument of Accession on October 26, 1947 (Khan, 2014, p. 9). Kashmir has attributed a special status through Article 370, which permitted India only to control defense, telecommunications, and foreign affairs. Kashmir retained political power through its constitution and political leadership. Article 370 was considered a temporary settlement, as the Indian government promised a plebiscite soon. However, political actions and events happened contrary to the Indian state's assurances and the Kashmiris' expectations. The hope for an autonomous Kashmir happened to be a delusive one, and the narrative of nationhood that emerged in India "proceeded along the lines of carving out ethnicity built around cultural artefacts of Hinduism, however defined or understood" (Navlakha, 1991, p. 2951). This ideological inclination of the modern Indian state has led to the emergence of broader expectations for a more cohesive manifestation of Indian identity. This entails the potential compromise of the nation's plurality while enabling the nation-state to flourish based on universal tenets of governance and influencing, mobilizing, or compelling society to conform to the state's ideology (Nandy, 1989, p. 4). No wonder the ethnic minorities, with their cultural particularities, gradually became the 'others' in this grand scheme of nationhood, with Kashmiris being the most dangerous ones for their aspirations of political self-determination.

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In their demand for autonomy, Kashmiris waged armed struggles against the Indian government in different phases, though "in the national narratives of Pakistan and India, Kashmir exist[ed] as an undivided space claimed by each side" (Bhan et al., 2018, p. 6). For several decades, the Kashmiri population has consistently expressed their dissatisfaction with the claim that India incorporated Kashmir, irrespective of the population's presence or absence. The Indian government implemented a rigorous counterinsurgency strategy in order to suppress the armed rebellion of Kashmiris, thereby leading to a complete militarization of Kashmiri society for an extended duration (Malik, 2019, pp. 87–88). Repressive laws such as the PSA (Public Safety Act) and the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) were imposed, leading to the abetment of ethnic hostilities between the majority of Kashmiri Muslims and Indian military forces. Subsequently, the valley of Kashmir became rife with militarization and exorbitant violence, entangling women in horrendous ways. During warfare and armed conflicts, military institutions have historically used rape and sexual assault as a means of punishing both individuals and communities. The political and societal motivation behind the use of rape became evident, especially following the recognition of war rape as a crime against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) (Bergoffen, 2009). These seminal legal decisions acknowledged that war rape, instead of being a mere byproduct of the broader violence associated with warfare, carries distinct intentions and objectives, such as harming communal relationships and thus impacting communities across several generations (Westman, 2024, p. 1). In the context of Kashmir, the perpetration of sexual assault against women emerged as a strategy to instigate fear among the populace and to establish a precedent of penalizing individuals who may advocate for resistance against the governing authority (Batool, 2018, p. 61). Manecksha's empathetic investigation takes her to many such women who are being assaulted and mercilessly raped by state forces to scare their male counterparts and thereby affirm the power of the dominant state.

Women symbolize the community's integrity, which is why rape becomes a significant component of communal violence in war-ridden topologies. Sexual violence seems to have been deployed as a strategic tool in the context of conflict in Kashmir, where the subservient status of women is perpetuated and upheld through the covert acts of violence perpetrated by men. As Herman argues, "There is a war between the sexes. Rape victims, battered women, and sexually abused children are its casualties" (Herman, 1992, pp. 28–32). In Manecksha's narrative, Hameeda's story obtains a pathetic portrayal of martial brutality that pinpoints how rape in Kashmir incessantly functions as a weapon of suppression. Hameeda, a sixteen-year-old girl, was called for interrogation by the police. After being beaten, Hameeda was provoked to comply with the sexual advances of the male police authority. On denying acquiescing, she was harassed so barbarously that when hospitalized, "her ruptured innards suggested that she may have been violated even with a baton" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 67). Hameeda, even years later, struggled with the trauma of her violation: "She was often in denial and asked a young woman-journalist whether the act was technically a rape" (2017, p. 67). To make matters worse, Hameeda could neither file an FIR nor corroborate her innocence in society, and she was viewed as "spoiled goods", and therefore as "fair game" (2017, p. 68), even by the men of her community. This reinforces patriarchal control not only of women's bodies but also of their agency, subjectivity, and physical articulations. Undeniably, the rape of Hameeda "is a cross-cultural language of male domination" (Card, 1996, p. 7), but in militarized conditions, it operates as a draconian machinery of ethnic masculine prowess on the politically weak "others" like Hameeda. Card (1996, pp. 9-10) elaborates on this as follows:

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> Like civilian rape, martial rape has become a political institution.. . martial rape is a practice defined by unwritten rules (for example, the rules that only females are "fair game," that age does not matter, that soldiers who rape "enemy women" are not to be reported for it, that anonymous publicity of it may be desirable).

Susan Brownmiller coined the phrase "rape as a weapon of war" in her book *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), referring to men's genitalia "as a weapon to generate fear" and rape, as an exhibition of systemic phallocentric domination, "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (Brownmiller, 1975, pp. 14–15). In Manecksha's narrative, Hameeda's story obtains a pathetic portrayal of martial brutality that pinpoints how rape in Kashmir incessantly functions as a weapon of suppression. The massive trauma of rape, the state's covering of the perpetrators, and then the malignant social stigma cumulatively impinges on Hameeda's normative selfhood. She becomes a victim of intersectional oppression that is attendant on the state's political objectification of her body, her own community's stringent notions of purity, and the contemptible judicial negligence of such viciousness. Hameeda and women like her have experienced the devastating consequences of this political tragedy. As Manisha Sobhrajani (2014, p. 2) points out, they have not only suffered from the conflict itself but have also been used and treated as objects of both utility and entertainment by militants and Indian security forces. This also emphasizes the gradual disintegration of the Kashmiri identity of ordinary individuals due to recurring terrorist attacks, atrocities, and armed conflicts with the Indian army, resulting in a state of profound distress and fragmentation (Karmakar, 2022a, p. 430). Eventually, Hameeda buries herself in humiliation and shame, preferring silence and withdrawal from the public—which sadly demonstrates how the dehumanizing experiences of rape coupled with the repulsive social climate devastate Kashmiri women. Hameeda's failure to narrate her wounded testimony and her decision to remain silent due to coercion exemplify the epistemic violence inflicted upon women in Kashmir, which seeks to diminish their ability to express themselves and have their voices heard (Dotson, 2011; Spivak, 1988). In some cases, this occurs when individuals in positions of power and authority (in-group) cause physical harm to survivors and marginalized communities (out-group). Reporting crimes becomes challenging for individuals belonging to the out-group when structures are exclusively controlled by the in-group (Bunch, 2015). Sexual assault and epistemic violence in this case exemplifies Kashmir's rape culture, which is evident whenever society begins to condone or conceal rape and are frequently coupled with victim-blaming and humiliation. Hameeda's plight demonstrates how the rape culture perpetuates, silences victims, and thus belittles male sexualized violence by categorizing and classifying 'different kinds' of rape based on their presumed intensity and rareness.

The psychic mindset exaggerates the traumatized rape survivor's alleged clinical manifestations (Healicon, 2016, p. 3). Another unabashed case of rape and disparaging trauma is that of Pakeeza. Manecksha meets Pakeeza, a Gujjar woman of the "semi-nomadic pastoral" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 56) community in South Kashmir. Pakeeza, a tragic survivor of sexual violence, represents one of those anguished Kashmiri women whose life and identity have been irrevocably warped by rape. While Pakeeza was preparing tea for her husband's friends (suspected to be militants), the army barged in and raped her in front of her family so coldheartedly that Pakeeza lost her consciousness and said that "she had no recollection of what ensued" (2017, p. 57). Senior army officers approached Pakeeza and her family after a few days. They offered handsome compensation in "exchange for silence" (2017, p. 57) to Pakeeza. But what followed in the aftermath reveals a poignant story of female commodification and

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helplessness at the hands of repressive patriarchy. Pakeeza's husband was offered employment in exchange for his divorce, resulting in his eventual abandonment of her. Consequently, Pakeeza was unable to prosecute her rape case due to the requirement of presenting witnesses, all of whom were affiliated with her former husband's family. More than being an individual act of sexual coercion, rape here functions as an abominable instrument of "enforcing gender roles in society and maintaining the hierarchy in which men retained control" (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992, p. 14). Pakeeza's narrative reinforces patriarchal control not only of women's bodies but also of their agency, subjectivity, and physical articulations. After some time, Pakeeza gets married to another person from her community and sadly accepts that her rape was a consequence of her community's faulty association with the militants. Pakeeza's violation piteously exemplifies what Mackinnon (2006) defines as the "humiliation rite" by men in any political conflict. Mackinnon further argues that perpetrators vis-à-vis women's bodies assert their power over their opponents by triggering their failure to protect their women. It is as if to ridicule the opposing men as weak and incapable of being robust guardians or rescuers of their women. Mackinnon (1993, pp. 65–66) explains this as follows:

> Ethnic rape [is] an official policy of war: not only a policy of the pleasure of male power unleashed; not only a policy to defile, torture, humiliate, degrade, and demoralize the other side; not only a policy of men posturing to gain advantage and ground over other men. It is rape under orders: not out of control, under control. .. It is rape to be seen and heard by others, rape as a spectacle. It is rape to shatter a people, to drive a wedge through a community. It is the rape of misogyny liberated by xenophobia and unleashed by official command.

Pakeeza's narrative is quite intimidating for not only depicting how Kashmiri women's bodies are converted into battlegrounds in the armed conflict but also for the state and society's insidious role in it. Women such as Hameeda and Pakeeza "are unable to report or engage with institutions that would otherwise provide respite to them" (Batool, 2018, p. 62); that in turn boosts the one-upmanship of the violators. Both of these women are sexually abused and humiliated because their female bodies provide a "space over which the competitive games of men [are] played out" (Das, 1991, p. 6). Hameeda's and Pakeeza's stories grimly testify to how the trauma inflicted by rape in the face of the dominant state's tremendous indifference and the patriarchal conservatism of the Kashmiri community beleaguer the victim's sense of dignity and hope for basic human rights. The lack of concern exhibited by the state might be attributed to the military ideologies of aggressiveness, wherein Kashmiri women are perceived as the guardians of honor within the Kashmiri community engaged in conflict with the Indian state. Kashmiri women are subjected to oppression not alone because of their gender, but also due to their perception as the "other," specifically as women belonging to the "other" who pose a potential threat to "our national security" (Mushtaq, 2018, p. 56). Hence, their rape "in presence of their own families, their own husbands, and their own children" (Kazi, 2014, p. 14) is deemed to stand out as cautionary spectacles/warnings for the dissenters.

This leads to the fact that "in Kashmir, continued military occupation allows for use of rape as a tool of humiliation [...] and this shows that sexual violence is a tactic of war which is deployed to strip honour or emasculate the subject population" (Malik, 2019, p. 97). Both Hameeda and Pakeeza contend with their traumas and are forced to endure familial and social bitterness in silence. Simultaneously, their voices against rape and gendered crimes remain seldom heard and addressed in the politically belligerent space of Kashmir. Moreover, the

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prevalent culture of victim-blaming, which has a propensity to attribute blame, shame, or disbelief to victims, also serves to suppress their voices. The institutional construction and material patterns of distribution, including the weight of proof, as well as the cognitive and financial expenditures involved in appealing lawsuits (Lin, 2024, p. 7), pose challenges for Hameeda and Pakeeza in reporting their experiences and expecting recognition and justice. This demonstrates how the inherent conviction in specific ideologies in Kashmir has been substituted by what Henry Giroux refers to as the "biopolitics of disposability" (Giroux, 2015), highlighting the significance of societal personal responsibility in safeguarding women in Kashmir. When the authorities fail to establish a secure environment for women, they frequently find themselves in precarious circumstances. Consequently, obnoxious violence, a socially regressive mindset, and a lack of strong disciplinary actions intermingle to demoralize the rape survivors in Kashmir, in turn perpetuating an atmosphere of collective fear and trauma for all women living there.

3 | BRUTALITY, DOCILITY, AND TRAUMA

Alarmingly, in many of her interactions, Manecksha realizes that the rapes in Kashmir have unleashed a cultural and collective trauma for women over the decades. Cultural trauma in the context of Kashmir "refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 2). Collective trauma is frequently caused by individual encounters with suffering and misery, thereby endangering the collective identity that determines the nature of the suffering involved (Alexander & Breese, 2013, p. xii). This is indisputably apparent in the pervasive fear that prevails in Kashmir about public disclosure or reporting of sexual crimes committed by the security forces. Given the state's shielding of the culpable, many rape victims have deliberately adopted forgetfulness or refrained from talking about their experiences. Manecksha intriguingly finds that "some of the interviewees felt more comfortable when [the sound recorder] was switched off" (2017, p. 60). Within the constraints of a government-controlled military regimentation, registering a complaint against law enforcement is accompanied by inherent difficulties. Manecksha acknowledges the significant challenges associated with reporting and determining instances of rape in Kashmir, highlighting the exhaustion experienced by individuals who engage in such cases for a duration of fifteen to twenty years (2017, pp. 73–75).

Rape, as Manecksha argues, is a systemic process, and so is its continuous denial in Kashmir. No surprise, the ghastly experiences of rape happen to be painfully personal and excruciatingly inarticulate for Kashmiri women. While "sexual violence has effectively been used as a weapon to crush resistance and break the morale" (Batool, 2018, p. 60) of the Kashmiris, the hideousness of such violence reproduces conditions of "coercion, disempowerment, and control" (Pemberton & Loeb, 2020, p. 9) and a collective traumatic rape culture for all Kashmiri women. This rape culture, as Manecksha's interactions bring to light, is vociferously intensified by the dogmatic patriarchy, political agendas, and outrageous militarism. What a woman should or should not disclose is a poignant reminder of how challenging it is for female survivors of sexual violence in Kashmir to talk about their experiences. Women in Kashmir (Manecksha, 2017, p. 60) struggle enormously to resist violent acts and the violence of a societal structure that humiliates them as victims. The unanswered question is how they will end up receiving the recognition they require for the heinous violation of their rights, given that gender-based violence has been a constant feature of military conflict throughout history. Manecksha's notion of rape culture in Kashmir echoes Baxi's arguments on the same:

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> Rape culture signifies ways of doing party politics and managing governance in which brutal collective sexual assaults on women remain enclosed in contrived orders of impunity. In an operative rape culture then women's right to be and remain human depends not on the normative necessity of law or constitution but on the sheer contingency of politics, law, and administration as well as of the ways of social protest and action.
>
> (Baxi qtd in Kabir, 2012, p. 148)

While rape is endemic in militarized Kashmir, the pitiful lacunae in the punitive measures have been more agitating for the Kashmiri women, who live in disquietude and subconscious threat. Women in Kashmir hardly have any safe space, and their mundane encounters are mired in "fears of stigma or reprisal, denial, and reluctance" (Maneckshа, 2017, p. 60). Even for those who have not experienced sexual assault, the threat of violation looms menacingly. Maneckshа writes that in the "militarized state [of Kashmir], lewd remarks, ogling, wolf-whistling, taunting, and other forms of sexual harassment are not uncommon" (2017, 65). Women in this region are subjected to everyday objectification, and their bodies are being unrelentingly inscribed and endangered by the patriarchal military forces, rendering the bodies docile, which means they can be invaded, defiled, and tampered with by the dominant state and other patriarchal forces at work. In his discussions on biopolitics, Foucault espouses that in a "political anatomy" there lies a certain "mechanics of power" which "defines how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the technique, that speed, and the efficiency that one determines" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). Foucault further argues that the governance and surveillance of bodies are enacted through multiple discourses, and that is how "docility" is invisibly effectuated (1977, p. 138). Foucault's conceptualization of 'docility' is instructive here as it manifests in the postcolonial state and nationalist discourses, which surreptitiously coalesce and converge to categorize women's bodies in Kashmir as 'docile' —who can be mastered, regulated, and controlled as desired for the successful accomplishment of sovereignty in power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 138–139). Women's predicament in Kashmir exemplifies the inherent trauma and realities of sexualized violence in controlled, militarized cultures where women serve as the foundation for masculinist, patriarchal nation-building efforts.

This creation of docile bodies is perpetuated through the militaristic dispensation that functions as one of these state-sanctioned nationalist discourses, or what Althusser (1971) terms a "repressive state apparatus" that aims to dominate and discipline the resistant Kashmiris by violating their women. In any "ethnic and nationalist struggles, women are regarded as the couriers of cultural and ideological traditions" (Ramachandran & Jabbar, 2003, p. 22), and the social perceptions of Kashmiri women have been no exception to this conventional notion. Hence, intimidating the Kashmiri women, curtailing their liberation, and upstaging their honor were all that the armed forces unflinchingly have been targeting as part of the state-championed nationalist discourse. Maneckshа describes how the rampant military intrusions into ordinary households and the penetrating gaze of the armed forces were enough to disorient the Kashmiri women and make them behave in the most docile manner. For instance, in this narrative, Uzma Falak, a gold medalist in mass communications from Jamia Millia Islamia, a passionate art and poetry enthusiast, an author, and a filmmaker, continues to face the same experiences of docility, panic, and paranoia that she experienced during her childhood. She recalls the army men approaching—their boots, their gaze, and the dark band that covered the soldiers' hair and a portion of their faces when they were equipped to fight. For her, those were fear-inducing symbols. She recalls,

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> When I was very little, I would sometimes try to hide within the folds of my grandmother's cloak to escape the gaze of the troops. As a teenager, I took to sitting in cupboards. Enclosed spaces made me feel safe—as though I were back in the womb—in that buffer between the worlds of life and death.
>
> (Maneckshа, 2017, p. 45)

The persistent danger of rape that Uzma encounters symbolizes the existence of a "female fear factory" (Gqola, 2015, p. 78), which serves as a constant reminder that her body is not entirely her own and hence she is not safe and secure. Upon hearing any tapping on her home's main door, her mother hurried out of the bedroom, extremely worried, and asked her to turn off the lights and vacate the living room quietly. This illustrates that fear was a recurring component in the fragments of Uzma's traumatic memories. Uzma here echoes Nyla Ali Khan's assertion that "the breezes of Kashmir, which once had the power to heal every trauma, now cause searing wounds. The throes of pain, palpable in every withering flower and trembling leaf, can lacerate the most hardened person" (Khan, 2010, p. 10).

Shazia Yousuf, another character in the narrative, describes how children witness the deaths and enforced disappearances of their loved ones in public spaces. Her traumatized memories and her emphasis on the profound consequences of violence on children are mirrored in her report on Mehbooba, a widow who had to accept an ex-gratia payment after three members of her family had been killed by the BSF (Maneckshа, 2017, p. 35). Similar to the recapitulation of Uzma's traumatic childhood is the story of Shazia's mother, who "could not tolerate the idea of unknown soldiers peering at her belly or commenting on her cries of pain" (2017, p. 29) and denied traveling to the hospital. Regrettably, she was compelled to suffer a perilous and nearly lethal childbirth in her residence, exemplifying the "masculinist military gaze" (Mushtaq, 2018, p. 57) in which women are objectified by the male gaze, constituting another manifestation of violation. Maneckshа enunciates that the horror of the army's authoritarianism and surveillance has infringed on Kashmiri women by truncating their carefree movements, affecting their sexualities, and usurping their fundamental rights of expression, "especially in a traditional milieu where it [has been] taboo to speak of body and feeling, menstruation, and sex" (Maneckshа, 2017, p. 29). This identification of perpetrators and remembrance of traumatic memories is crucial to the process of cultural trauma, which Erikson argues is a process "in which collective memory will be formative of collective identity, as recognizable victims and perpetrators are named and acknowledged, marking a membership group off against those outside" (2004, p. 70). Thus, cultural trauma in Kashmir is always preceded by a signifying struggle—a struggle to make sense of an experience that entails defining the true essence of the agony, the character of the victims, and the allocation of culpability.

Few Kashmiri women bear this cultural trauma so piercingly that they lose the sense of a normative, dignified identity and survival. One such case that Maneckshа draws upon is that of Mehbooba. Mehbooba's family dies in a firing in one of the random military searches, and she escapes a gruesome rape. But to one's utter shock, the first thought that came to Mehbooba on regaining her senses was if "her husband was comforted when she conveyed to him that she had not been raped?" (Maneckshа, 2017, p. 36). After several years, Mehbooba contemplates to Maneckshа that Muneer, her son, had started avoiding her following the horrifying event, and she was perplexed as to the reason behind it. While Muneer's avoidance of his mother undeniably reflects the disturbed psycho-social development of Kashmiri children who have been exposed to such terrible violence at their early stages, Mehbooba represents the pitiful plight of thousands of Kashmiri women whose bodies and lives have been denigrated by powerful

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state-sanctioned discourses. These recollections demonstrate that the existence of women and children in Kashmir is frequently framed by a grand narrative constructed on the principles of collective trauma in which "members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, 2004, p. 1). Hence, Uzma Falak, Shazia Yousuf, and Mehbooba each have memories and emotions that become part of a cultural collective trauma—outlined in Manecksha's text for public symbolic representation and wider interpretation.

In her chronicling of Kashmiri women's narratives, Manecksha underscores that their gruesome experientialities attest to the intersectional functioning of ethnic nationalism, masculinized statehood, judicial impunity, religious conservatism, and Kashmir's traditional patriarchal structures. The traumatic and violent past of Kashmiri women demonstrates that their subjugation and marginalization differ according to some other facets of their individuality, such as age, ethnic background, class, and religious practice, and that their collective trauma is a larger part of 'intersectionality,' a term coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw to emphasize the "multidimensionality of marginalized subjects" lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). For women in Kashmir, this intersectionality serves as a force for "mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Intersectionality as an analytical framework here calls for an examination of the traumatic past of individuals and groups in the context of multifaceted social structures and denotations of "social identity such as culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality" (Sharoni, 1995, p. 31). One such instance of intersectionality is the collective trauma, physical exploitation, and claustrophobia of the widows and the 'half-widows'. Manecksha elucidates that 'half-widows' connote "a curious word that became a part of Kashmir's lexicon during the nineties and that persists till date—to describe women whose husbands have gone missing or have suffered enforced disappearance" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 31) and have no trace.

Psychological anxieties and the uncertain existence of their husbands befuddle these women, who have to struggle with financial burdens and emotional estrangement in the absence of their husbands. The primary challenges faced by widows emerge shortly after the passing of their partners, manifesting as emotional strain, deprivation of inheritance entitlements, sexual harassment, and overall social unappealingness (Bukhari, 2002, p. 41). Manecksha illustrates how the plight of the 'half-widows' has been increasingly unstable, and the judicial system has failed to guarantee justice as these women search for their spouses and navigate a complex and unsympathetic legal framework (Qutab, 2012, p. 258). Manecksha poignantly discovers that "the urgent need to establish contact with the army camps and security personnel for crucial information [has] left these women in a vulnerable position, open to cruel exploitation" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 25). These women are humiliated and assaulted by the officers on duty and also compelled to act as informers, which again ensnares them in heedless sexual and bodily violence. Manecksha comes across the disheartening stories of Sarla and Shirin, who, at different points in time, fell prey to the malice of the Kashmir militant groups. Being perceived as informers, Sarla and Shirin were raped ruthlessly, following which Sarla died a horrific death, and Shirin remained perennially entrapped in the nightmarish memories of that gory violation. Collectively, their narratives portray instances of anguish and distress, which have frequently been marginalized or pushed into a state of collective amnesia (Mehdi, 2021, p. 363). The expression "amnesia" in this context refers to Butler's notion of grievability (Butler, 2016, p. xxvi) and highlights the fact that their lives are not regarded as grievable due to the fact that they were never thought to be alive. Armed forces recognized these women as

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mere components of arsenals, military tools, and materials, rather than as women themselves. This further exemplifies how the manner in which their physical forms are perceived as instruments of warfare significantly impacts their worth as individuals and even their possibilities for survival. Thus, women in Kashmir, as Manecksha delineates, lead perilous and traumatic lives that are full of acrimonious brutalities and unabating mental perturbations.

4 | CAN THEY SAVE THEMSELVES? RESISTANCE AS COUNTER DISCOURSE

(Re)exploring the metamorphosed socio-cultural topography of Kashmir after the 1990s, Nyla Ali Khan laments that "the nexus between patriarchy and militarism has insidiously indoctrinated [Kashmiri] women, to the extent of making a virtue of helplessness and destitution" (Khan, 2010, p. 123). Concurrently, by analyzing the complicated political terrain of Kashmir in various phases of the conflict, women's accounts provide descriptions of self-constitution and an evocative overview of the realm of resistance politics. Although the official historical interpretations sometimes do not adequately emphasize the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict on women in Kashmir (Qutab, 2012, p. 276), it remains pertinent to note that a facile portrayal of Kashmiri women as helpless would be very redundant. Time and again, many violated and victimized women in Kashmir have displayed their strength and fortitude—be it through their self-inculcated coping strategies, active participation in protests, or the arduousness of survival amid family massacres and bloodshed. Kashmiri women have demonstrated significant and enduring resistance against the state's predatory nationalist rhetoric as they navigate the challenges posed by militarization and its various forms of gender-based violence (Mushtaq, 2018, p. 58). Kanth aptly says that Kashmiri "women's resistance to such violence is often expressed as the strength to survive after having experienced bodily harm" (Kanth, 2018, p. 45). While the victimized women in Kashmir are often stereotyped as voiceless and disempowered, an insightful probing of their ordinary acts of survival proves that they are not always subdued and that their "silence is not a semantic void" (Schlant, 1999, p. 7). These women create silent but uncompromising political "forms of everyday resistance" (Scott, 1985) in many trivial and meaningful ways through unwavering resilience and solidarity, demonstrating their political retaliation against menacing nationalist discourse.

Historically, in the 1990s, Kashmiri women participated in the mass demand for 'azadi' and also acted as couriers for militants (Manecksha, 2017, p. 19), whenever and however required. Despite the apprehended dangers involved in such roles, women, with fierce dedication and commitment, have never shied from aiding their male counterparts in their movements for political liberation and self-determination. Unfortunately, "the overwhelming participation of Kashmiri women in the azadi struggle and their resistance did not translate into a [viable] political space" (2017, p. 21) for them in the long run, given the rise and popularity of staunch male-oriented political organizations and groups in Kashmir in the 2000s. Over time, Kashmiri women have independently constructed their own emancipation trajectories, challenging traditional notions of female subservience, stepping out of their domestic spheres, publicly registering their grief, and transforming their memories into affective counter-state representations. These emancipating routes afford individuals with "relational autonomy" (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 4) to denote specific viewpoints based on a collective belief that individuals are socially interconnected and that individuals, entities, are shaped within the framework of social connections and influenced by social variables such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnic background. Women in Kashmir have eloquently made themselves 'visible' and given

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themselves autonomy through their poised protests and silent sit-ins on the roads, bereaving their loved ones. Maneckshа observes:

> In Pratap Park, protesters, most of whom are women, accompanied by their children or other relatives, sit with photographs of missing members. Sometimes they clutch these photos to their heart; at other times they tenderly caress the faces in the pictures.
>
> (2017, p. 84)

While the state produces 'invisible' instances of imposed and custodial executions, the APDP (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons) undermines the official narrative through its 'visual appropriation' of a prominent area like Pratap Park. Here, the explicit implementation of mourning 'into the public visual sphere' reorients the attention of visitors, bystanders, Kashmiris, and not least the state. This is noticeable in Manecksha's narrative when Mughli-maasi, one of the APDP's senior members, drew the attention of bystanders during the silent protests with her impassioned discussions with her 35-year-old son, Nazir Ahmad Teli, who, in September 1990, left for school and never returned. Mughli-maasi's public mourning for her dead son makes "a most poignant effort to keep him alive" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 85), thus creating a countermode of resistance. In creatively portraying the losses, which otherwise have always been considered casual or collateral, the grieving women in Kashmir fiercely resist the authority over their customary role of mourning for those corpses that the state rejects and also oppose cultural chauvinism over public venues. The public anguish of Kashmiri mothers has contributed significantly to the nationalist ideology of *azaadi* (freedom) (Malik, 2018, p. 66; Misri, 2014). Kashmiri women who have been oppressed, such as Mughli-maasi, have demonstrated their ability to transcend religious laws and challenge the authority of "the state's sovereignty through grieving for lives that the state has designated as non-grievable" (Malik, 2018, p. 66). This Public mourning constitutes a powerful counter-discourse to the patriarchal nation-state and a "formidable tool of moral protest against state injustice" (Banerjee, 2008, p. 150). The Kashmiri mothers have been resolutely challenging the state and its dysfunctional judiciary through their publicly displayed political actions of 'mourning', which, according to Butler, represents the potency of disruptive resistance. The mourning experienced by bereaved mothers in Kashmir has the potential to raise awareness about substantial losses in society at large, leading to a reevaluation of the frameworks utilized for managing bereavement (McIvor, 2012, p. 411).

Manecksha also writes with admiration about the female activists who have been real inspirations to the disparaged and the despised in Kashmir. One such brave activist is Parveena Ahangar, who spearheaded the inception of the APDP with the aid of Parvez Imroz, one of Kashmir's most dedicated human rights lawyers, in 1994. Parveena's seventeen-year-old son was forcibly picked up by the state security troops in 1990, and thereafter, Parveena received no news of him. Manecksha writes:

> In the early days after her son's disappearance, a distraught Parveena seesawed between the hope that her son was alive and would be released. .. [but] finally surfacing from the extreme sorrow, she took the first step in the long odyssey of a mother in search of her son and a woman in pursuit of justice.
>
> (2017, p. 79)

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Parveena's quest in this context suggests the principles of "mortality, vulnerability, and agency" (Butler, 2004, p. 26). It highlights how her search for her son brings together the personal and the political, involving nearly every aspect of her life and allowing for a liberating teleology. Parveena's quest, in the words of Manecksha, create a "sea-change in the way Kashmir's women are perceived—strong entities even as they mourn" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 83). No less is Anjum Zamrud Habib, who has shown indomitable courage in being a vibrant spokesperson for the human rights of Kashmiris "incarcerated in jails, either booked under the dreaded PSA or awaiting trial" (2017, p. 95). Imprisoned in Tihar Jail for five years under the POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), Zamrud was 'not accorded the status of a political prisoner' (2017, p. 96). Instead, policemen, doctors, and even the jail staff abused, inhumanly beat, and tortured her. Despite facing such hostilities, Anjum emerged as a strong-willed and defiant woman who refused to "indulge in rancour or bitterness. .. [or] sink into an abyss of self-pity" (2017, p. 98). Proudly and dauntingly, Zamrud proclaims, 'Don't use the epithet *bechaari* (someone to be pitied). Call me instead *tehreek nawaazi* (someone who loves movement)' (2017, p. 98). The departure of Anjum for a new life, accompanied by an entirely distinct identity, symbolizes her conceptual demise as an immutable entity and her reemergence as a constructed entity characterized by subversive potential and autonomy, thereby aligning with Butler's claim that "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency" (Butler, 1999, p. 147).

Parveena's and Anjum's activism epitomize Kashmiri women's tenacious quest for rights and justice—which has been deferred and evaded by the dominant system. Then, there are also ordinary women like Munawara Sultan who have fought the state's indifference with a determined and unassailable spirit. Munawara had filed a case "against the security troops for the death of her husband in the 1990s" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 100) and then pursued it unfailingly from one court to another for years. Manecksha is amazed to find that Munawara has "attended every hearing, no matter how unwell she is or how bad the weather" (2017, p. 106). Munawara unswervingly declares to Manecksha, "I will go to any corner of the world to get justice; I will die fighting" (2017, p. 106)—testifying to the righteousness of her cause. Manecksha's text also testifies that women, by means of writing, possessed the ability to critically examine tenets of resistance, gender-based oppression, and the mechanics of the state-supported military occupation. By doing this, the text itself becomes a means of acquiring and retaining knowledge; a structure or arrangement that allows for the organization of information and the preservation of experiences of Kashmiri women (Malik, 2018, p. 126; Martin, 2007, p. 6). On a broader level, the essay emphasizes the need for community institutions, family structures, and civil society organizations to rebuild Kashmiri society. They are required to collaborate with those who have experienced trauma and provide them with a restored feeling of safety and inclusion. Nyla Ali Khan emphasizes in her interview with Goutam Karmakar that the inclusion of marginalized women in Kashmir necessitates the establishment of vocational facilities, where women can receive training and acquire skills to enhance their potential for livelihoods and capabilities. Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure the participation of women in the political and public domain. Women, in their roles as mothers, wives, and members of civil society, possess the potential to significantly contribute to the process of nation-building. Regrettably, this valuable contribution has not been acknowledged by either mainstream or separatist organizations (Karmakar, 2021, p. 116). Thus, *Behold I Shine* urges one to behold how tortured and violated Kashmiri women shine, either by embracing activism or by opposing the majoritarian state's insensitive attitudes through their passionate voicing of the ongoing injustices that substantially create subversive solidarities and counter modes of resistance.

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5 | CONCLUSION: '*UMEED HAI*'

South Asian women and their families frequently refrain from pursuing justice for themselves due to their hesitancy to disclose their traumatic experiences as they grapple with complex forms of violence. Over the past twenty years, activists in South Asia have emerged to challenge societal norms, increase public knowledge, reveal instances of violence, launch advocacy efforts, implement programs to develop life skills, and include men and household members in a structured manner to combat and oppose violence and gender inequality. South Asian writers have made a remarkable effort to depict the symbolic, cultural, and epistemological violence that affects women, while also striving to challenge the silence that a biased societal structure imposes on victims (Karmakar, 2022b, p. 11). Likewise, Manecksha's perspicacious revisiting of Kashmir in *Behold I Shine* reveals how the "interlocking nature of militarism and masculinity" (Kaul & Zia, 2018, p. 35) has hideously affected women's subjectivities and sexualities. Through her empathetic vision, Manecksha recounts the constricting experiences of Kashmiri women, evident in their disconnected stories, fearful memories, and confounding silences. On speaking with the marginalized victims in several villages in Kashmir, Manecksha deciphers that the corrosive state and legal machinations have beleaguered their normative sociality, mobilities, and bodies. Kashmiri women's suppressions, as Manecksha upholds, are typically grounded in the intersectionality of dictatorial state laws, militarized ethnic hostilities, and entrenchments of fundamentalist patriarchy. What is unique, even in such a repressive and tormenting environment, is the "liberatory potential" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 34) embodied and demonstrated by Kashmiri women. Manecksha highlights that the Kashmiri women have not only repudiated the hegemonic impositions but have also recuperated from the traumatic memories through their shared sense of pain, afflictions, and strengths. Certainly, thus, the "Kashmiri women deserve to be recognised for their tremendous role in challenging the narratives and impacts of occupation" and channelizing the "generational struggles [which are] at once poignant and powerful" (Kaul & Zia, 2018, p. 35). Defiantly, the Kashmiri mothers have negated the traditional social assumptions of womanhood and participated in "performative politics by using their bodies as a theatrical site at the monthly sit-ins"—a political gesture that unquestionably conforms to "nothing less than a radical statement" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 86). Also, these women have not led Kashmir to forget and forgive the merciless brutalization of the Kunan's and Poshpara's women. The 23rd of February is now commemorated as Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day (Kaul & Zia, 2018, p. 35)—a day that reminds the Kashmiris of eerie violence perpetrated by the state army. Victims and survivors have collaborated to organize protests and consolidate female alliances and companionships (Falak, 2018), even in the face of escalating political turbulence. Terror and trauma have shaken these Kashmiri women, but their spirits remain unbreakable. So, their stories perpetually symbolize hope for peace, justice, and reassertion of their identities, signaling the term '*Umeed Hai*', (taken from Manecksha's *Behold I Shine*), which literally means to have hope. It is worth noting that storytelling, interviews, and testimonies of Kashmiri women are necessary to prevent the possibility of 'double violation'. Instead, they are presented as a means to encourage heightened caution among those who wish to navigate this challenging situation with the appropriate amount of care, reverence, and solidarity (Kabir, 2012, p. 161).

Besides this, young women in Kashmir are now making active choices, as Essar Batool informs Manecksha about her workshops, in which "she also tries to make girls more sexually aware of their bodies" (Manecksha, 2017, p. 130). Interestingly, Manecksha also finds, through her conversations, that young women in Kashmir are more confident, assertive, and

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well-informed about their gender roles in the cultural contexts of their religion. The victims and survivors, through their enabled participatory voices, subvert the hegemonies of state militarism that have always endorsed Kashmiri women as vulnerable and fragile. Additionally, female activists, human-rights workers, journalists, and writers, with their unyielding zeal to mediate these voices to the larger world, also play a crucial role. Quite significantly, Manecksha's involved narrative also justifiably lines up with such mediations for not only delineating the subjugation, trauma, and injustice inflicted on women in Kashmir but more rigorously for emphasizing their resistance to despotic militarization and the reconstruction of counter-women-centric historiographic discourses of Kashmir—that need to be heard, addressed, and accounted for.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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