

Half -Widows of Kashmir

Women are labeled 'half-widows' when their husbands have been disappeared but not yet been declared dead.

There are an estimated **8,000 enforced disappearances** and at least **1,500 half-widows** in Kashmir.

Throughout the troubled decades, Kashmiri women have challenged the label of 'victims' and played a robust role in civil society, even though they are not often seen in leadership positions.

Wives, mothers, and sisters of the disappeared have organized under the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) towards bringing peace and justice.

Here are the stories of the half-widows of Kashmir:

"My children would hide under the table whenever there was a knock. They said, 'If those people could take our Papa, they can take us too!'"
-Samina*, Lolab Kupwara

"What do I want? One meeting. If he's alive, just show me...If he's dead, tell me where his body is. When I go back to the police, or the army, the officers leer, like I am available...like I have to remind them that I am there about my missing husband! It's been 8 years."
-Zara*, Srinagar

"In ten years, I don't think my mother has slept. I sleep next to her every night and scold her, 'Go to sleep now, go to sleep.' My sister sleeps on the other side. Ma wakes up early in the morning and starts 'get up, have tea.' Because she can't sleep she won't let us either. And she hurts all over."
-Afroza*, daughter of a half widow, Baramulla,

"I suppose I have this determination and fearlessness because of anger... if he was a militant, then, fine, he would have killed and gotten killed...but he was a civilian. Unless I keep going to court, we create an environment where this just goes on."
-Raja*, Kupwara

"I was asked by an Army Major to pay 50,000 rupees cash at the local military camp if I wanted to see my husband."
-Rubina*, Palhallan

"We looked everywhere, we even rented a shikara, in case he was killed and his body thrown in the water." Hena recalls with painful anger how some of the policemen she approached "had the gall to say, he's probably gone across [to Pakistan]... just like that, they said it! My husband was taken from the family sitting room. Yet those men roam free, and I am neither a married woman nor a widow...I'm just waiting."
-Hena*, Baramulla

India signed the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance on 6 February 2007 but has yet to ratify it. While the Government of India has reiterated to the Human Rights Council several times that it is committed to ratifying the Convention, the National Human Rights Commission of India observed in 2012 that there was no evidence to show that the government was seriously planning to do so. The Commission added, “**enforced disappearance was not codified as a criminal offence in domestic law**, nor were extant provisions of law used to deter the practice.”

In 2014, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed deep concern about the reported high level of violence, including enforced disappearance, against women in conflict-affected regions, including Kashmir. On 24 October 2017, SHRC directed the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to complete investigations into **2,080 unmarked graves** in Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu division within 6 months. It is believed that these graves come from earlier waves of security operations in Kashmir. SHRC Chairperson Bilal Nazki said that as the state government had previously admitted the existence of mass graves in these districts, the Commission was reiterating its call for the authorities to complete their investigations. In 2011, the SHRC had conducted its own investigation into mass graves in northern Kashmir and identified **574 bodies** out of 2,156 bodies

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