



Militarization and Everyday Life in Indian-Administered Kashmir Post-1989

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IJKS: Vol. 7 - No. 1/2025

The IJKS

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Chicago: Uzair Amjad, "Militarization and Everyday Life in Indian-Administered Kashmir Post-1989," *International Journal of Kashmir Studies* 7, no. 1 (2025).

Suggested
Citation:

APA: Amjad, U. (2025). *Militarization and everyday life in Indian-administered Kashmir post-1989*. *International Journal of Kashmir Studies*, 7(1).



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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the pervasive impact of militarization on everyday civilian life in Indian-administered Kashmir since the outbreak of armed insurgency in 1989. Drawing on a wide range of scholarly literature, human rights reports, ethnographic accounts, and journalistic sources, the research synthesizes how protracted conflict and the continuous presence of military forces have fundamentally restructured the region's socio-economic, political, and psychological landscape. The analysis is structured around four central themes: economic dislocation and structural violence¹; gendered experiences, particularly those of women facing displacement, trauma, and activism; youth alienation amidst educational disruption and identity struggles; and the widespread surveillance and militarization of public space. Guided by theoretical

frameworks such as structural violence, biopolitics, necropolitics, and everyday resistance, the study highlights how militarization operates not only as a security strategy but as a system of governance that penetrates all aspects of daily life. Despite enduring state control and systemic violence, Kashmiri civilians continue to exhibit resilience through subtle and overt forms of resistance. The paper underscores the urgency of re-centering civilian experiences in policy discussions and calls for a reimagining of peace that prioritizes demilitarization, justice, and dignity for the people of Kashmir.

Keywords: Militarization, Everyday life, Structural violence, Civilian resilience.

Introduction

Since the armed insurgency erupted in 1989, Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), particularly the Kashmir Valley, has evolved into one of the world's most heavily militarized regions.¹ Current estimates indicate a staggering military presence, with between half a million to 700,000 Indian security forces deployed for a civilian population ranging from 8 to 12 million. This extensive deployment translates into an unparalleled density of military personnel, reshaping civilian spaces into zones of sustained surveillance and conflict.

¹ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>

To sharpen the article's focus, this introduction explicitly locates the "everyday" as an empirical blind spot in mainstream security studies on Kashmir and outlines a clear roadmap. We ask: How does the post-1989 militarised governance structure permeate four civilian domains economic life, gender relations, youth trajectories, and spatial practices? The subsequent sections address this question in turn: Section 2 situates militarisation historically; Section 3 details the meta-synthesis methodology; Section 4 sets out a multi-lens theoretical framework; Section 5 presents findings under four inductively derived themes; and Section 6 offers limitations and policy-relevant conclusions.

Historically rooted in the contested accession of J&K to India during the Partition in 1947, the Kashmir conflict escalated dramatically at the end of the 1980s. Disputed elections and political disenchantment catalyzed mass protests and an armed insurgency demanding self-determination, prompting the Indian state to respond with a rigorous security crackdown and emergency legislation, notably the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). This law, granting extraordinary powers and immunity to security forces, effectively transformed Kashmir into a perpetual state of emergency, blurring the line between the ordinary and the exceptional. The resultant atmosphere—marked by widespread human rights abuses, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and persistent psychological trauma—has profoundly impacted Kashmir's civilian population.

This prolonged militarization has generated considerable scholarly interest, with attention often directed toward geopolitical dimensions, security policies, and diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan. However, comparatively less research has foregrounded the sociological and human dimensions, specifically the lived realities of Kashmiris under conditions of continuous militarization. Addressing this gap, this study offers an in-depth qualitative examination of how the omnipresent military environment reshapes daily life and how ordinary people manage, adapt to, and resist these invasive structural conditions.

This paper asks: In what ways has prolonged militarization affected social interactions, cultural norms, psychological health, economic stability, and public spaces in Kashmir since 1989? Moreover, how do ordinary Kashmiris perceive, cope with, and subtly contest this militarization? By exploring these queries, the research sheds light on the nuanced interplay between oppressive structures and everyday resilience, providing a richer understanding of life under prolonged conflict conditions. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are selected for their analytical utility in contexts of protracted militarization. The concept of structural violence, as developed by Johan Galtung, highlights how institutional and systemic structures perpetuate harm through normalized oppression rather than overt physical violence alone. Kashmir's economic stagnation, psychological distress, and disrupted education system exemplify

such structural harm, wherein societal inequities and suffering are embedded within the region's political and military arrangements.²

Complementing structural violence¹, Michel Foucault's biopolitics the regulation of life through administrative and coercive mechanisms illuminates how Kashmiri bodies and behaviors are subjected to state surveillance, curfews, communication blackouts, and spatial confinement. Further extending this concept, Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics the sovereign authority to dictate who may live and who must die applies to the extensive powers granted to military forces in Kashmir, evidenced by routine impunity in cases of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Lastly, James Scott's framework of everyday resistance provides insight into how oppressed populations exhibit resilience and defiance through seemingly mundane actions. This includes subtle acts of protest, cultural expressions, community solidarity, and persistent survival strategies that challenge the occupying force's narrative and assert indigenous identity. Through these theoretical lenses, the present study captures a complex reality one in which Kashmiris simultaneously experience severe constraints and yet navigate spaces for autonomy and resistance within their daily routines. By drawing from ethnographic studies, NGO reports, first-

² Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>

hand testimonies, and scholarly literature, this paper enriches our understanding of Kashmir as not merely a site of geopolitical dispute but as a vibrant community persistently struggling for dignity amidst severe repression.

The significance of this research extends beyond Kashmir itself. Globally, numerous regions endure similar conditions of prolonged militarization and structural violence, from Palestine to regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Therefore, insights gained from Kashmir can inform broader discussions on human rights, militarized governance, and civilian resilience. They also provide critical lessons for policymakers and humanitarian actors, emphasizing the necessity of centering human dignity and civilian perspectives when addressing conflict resolution and peace-building processes.

Ultimately, by foregrounding the lived experiences of Kashmiris, this paper aims not only to document the profound impacts of prolonged militarization but also to amplify local voices and experiences that have frequently been marginalized in mainstream narratives. The study thereby contributes a critical sociological perspective, stressing that understanding conflicts requires attending deeply and carefully to the everyday lives, struggles, and quiet resistances of those most directly affected.

Historical Backdrop

The contemporary situation in Kashmir has deep historical roots, dating back to the Partition of British India in 1947. At the time of Partition, princely states had the choice of joining India, Pakistan, or remaining independent. Kashmir, a predominantly Muslim region ruled by Hindu Maharaja Hari Singh, became the center of dispute. Facing an armed tribal invasion from Pakistan-supported fighters, the Maharaja signed an Instrument of Accession to India, contingent upon a promised plebiscite to determine the region's future a promise that remains unfulfilled to this day.

In subsequent decades, Kashmir saw intermittent political turbulence. The period from the 1950s to the early 1980s was marked by limited political autonomy under Article 370, which granted Jammu and Kashmir a special status within the Indian union, allowing for a degree of self-governance. Despite this arrangement, political disenchantment gradually intensified, particularly due to allegations of rigged elections and central interference in local governance, fueling local resentment and disillusionment.

By the late 1980s, political dissatisfaction reached critical levels. The disputed 1987 elections, widely perceived as rigged, became a catalyst for popular unrest. Massive protests erupted across the valley, quickly transforming into a widespread armed insurgency by 1989. Various Kashmiri groups demanded self-determination or merger

with Pakistan, reflecting deep frustration with political repression and broken promises by the Indian government. India's response was swift and militarized, deploying hundreds of thousands of troops to suppress the insurgency and restore order. This marked the onset of an era of heavy militarization that continues to profoundly shape Kashmir's social and political landscape.

Throughout the 1990s, Kashmir became the theater of intense armed conflict between insurgents, backed intermittently by Pakistan, and Indian security forces. This period was characterized by widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and the arbitrary detention of thousands of Kashmiris under draconian laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). AFSPA empowered military personnel with sweeping powers, including immunity from prosecution, exacerbating the cycle of violence and impunity.

In the 2000s, militancy declined somewhat, but civilian protests surged, most notably in 2008, 2010, and again significantly in 2016 following the killing of a popular militant commander, Burhan Wani. These civilian uprisings highlighted deep-seated grievances and persistent alienation from Indian governance. The government's response remained militarized, employing curfews, communication blackouts, pellet guns causing mass injuries, and aggressive suppression of civil dissent.

A significant turning point came on August 5, 2019, when the Indian government abruptly revoked Article 370, stripping Kashmir of its special autonomy and reorganizing the region into two separate Union Territories under direct federal control. This controversial move was accompanied by an unprecedented security lockdown, communication blackout, mass detentions of political leaders, activists, and thousands of civilians, effectively transforming Kashmir into an isolated and tightly controlled territory. This drastic change intensified the militarization of everyday life and deepened the sense of siege experienced by ordinary Kashmiris.

Thus, Kashmir's contemporary reality is shaped profoundly by a historical context marked by political disillusionment, failed promises, continuous military presence, and cycles of resistance and repression. Understanding this background is essential to appreciate how militarization permeates all dimensions of Kashmiri society, influencing economic prospects, psychological well-being, community relationships, and everyday resilience and resistance.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, focusing on a comprehensive review and analysis of existing qualitative literature, reports, and narratives related to the impact of militarization on everyday life in Indian-administered Kashmir. Given the sensitive and complex nature of conducting field research

in conflict zones, this approach ensures ethical rigor, minimizes risk to potential research participants, and utilizes the robust body of existing scholarly and credible sources.

Data sources include ethnographic studies, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books and theses, human rights report from reputable NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as local organizations like the Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS¹). Additionally, journalistic accounts and first-person testimonies published in respected media outlets have been utilized to enrich the qualitative insights. These sources were carefully selected based on credibility, depth of analysis, and alignment with the thematic objectives of this research.

³ Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society. (2024). Youth unemployment and militancy recruitment in Kashmir: Annual report. JKCCS.

The selection process involved a systematic search through academic databases, online research libraries, and reference lists from established scholarly works. Keywords guiding the search included 'Kashmir,' 'militarization,' 'structural violence', 'everyday resistance,' 'surveillance,' 'gender,' and 'youth.' This comprehensive search resulted in a substantial database of qualitative narratives, from which relevant excerpts and findings were meticulously organized and categorized into thematic clusters corresponding to the study's main

areas of interest—economic impact, gender relations, youth experiences, surveillance practices, public health implications, and the militarization of public space.

The analytical approach was primarily thematic, aimed at synthesizing and interpreting qualitative findings through clearly defined theoretical frameworks. Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence, Michel Foucault's biopolitics, and James Scott's theory of everyday resistance were applied to interpret and contextualize the empirical findings from the reviewed literature. These theoretical lenses provided critical tools for linking micro-level lived experiences and narratives to broader structural and political conditions, highlighting how militarization systematically affects everyday life. Validity and reliability of findings were enhanced through triangulation, cross-checking information across multiple independent sources to ensure accuracy and consistency. Peer-reviewed sources were prioritized to maintain scholarly rigor, while journalistic accounts were used judiciously to provide real-time qualitative insights and enhance contextual richness.

This methodology, while robust, has inherent limitations, particularly its reliance on previously published material, potentially leading to underrepresentation of certain perspectives, such as marginalized rural populations or minority communities. Nonetheless, given the extensive existing literature on Kashmir, this qualitative synthesis effectively illuminates the complex, nuanced ways militarization

permeates everyday life and identifies subtle yet significant forms of civilian resistance and resilience. Ultimately, the chosen methodology provides a practical, ethical, and academically rigorous means of examining the deep impacts of prolonged militarization, capturing the richness and complexity of everyday lived experiences within the constrained research environment of conflict-affected Kashmir.

Theoretical Framework

Building on the literature review, four critical concepts structure our analysis. Table 1 summarizes each lens, its analytical focus and the empirical indicators that guided coding.

Concept	Analytical focus	Empirical indicators
Structural violence	Slow-moving constraints on well-being embedded in institutions	Poverty rates, disrupted services, labour informality
Biopolitics	State management of populations through surveillance and health	Curfews, ID verification, vaccination camps
Necropolises	Power to decide who may live and who must die	Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances
Everyday resistance	Ordinary acts that subvert domination	Humour, symbolic defiance, digital activism

Findings

Economic Life under Militarization

Prolonged militarization has significantly disrupted the economic fabric of Kashmir, severely impacting livelihoods, employment, and local markets. Economic activities are routinely hampered by frequent shutdowns, curfews, and heightened security measures, leading to chronic instability and financial hardship. Tourism, traditionally a vital sector, has been particularly volatile, with periods of relative calm punctuated by intense disruptions caused by violence or political unrest. Consequently, numerous families relying on tourism-related income such as hospitality, transport, and handicrafts face persistent financial insecurity. Agriculture, another cornerstone of Kashmir's economy, faces its own challenges under militarization. Frequent road closures for military convoys or unexpected curfews often prevent farmers from accessing markets, resulting in significant crop losses and reduced profitability. This structural disruption exacerbates rural poverty, undermining food security and economic stability in agricultural communities.

Moreover, the extensive military presence has created a distorted war-driven economy. The influx of soldiers generates local demand for goods and services, benefiting certain sectors like construction and retail, but overall, this has fostered economic dependency rather than sustainable development. Many businesses cater predominantly to

military needs, resulting in economic distortions where long-term civilian economic interests are subordinated to immediate military demands. The economic consequences of militarization are starkly visible in rising unemployment, especially among youth. With limited industrial growth, low investment due to security concerns, and frequent disruptions to education, young Kashmiris face restricted job opportunities. This scenario contributes to deepening frustrations and disenchantment, fueling economic migration or, at times, driving youth towards political protest or militancy.

Recent tourism-board data show arrivals still only at 34 percent of their 1988 level,⁴ and household surveys indicate that families spend an average 5,700/month (US\$70) on security-related transport detours and permits. Such expenditures divert 18 percent of median household income toward what residents term the "cost of conflict."

Furthermore, structural violence¹ permeates Kashmir's economic realities. Loss of breadwinners due to conflict-related deaths or enforced disappearances has thrust many families, particularly 'half-widows' women whose husbands have disappeared into severe economic precarity. These families struggle with poverty, limited access to social welfare, and social stigma, highlighting the profound and long-lasting impacts of militarization on the social-economic fabric. Militarization in Kashmir significantly disrupts economic activities, fosters dependency, and imposes long-term structural

violence on civilian life. Despite resilience displayed through communal support and adaptation, the prolonged military presence fundamentally undermines sustainable economic prosperity, leaving generations trapped in cycles of insecurity and deprivation.

Gendered Impacts and Social Change

Militarization in Kashmir has profoundly gendered impacts, distinctly shaping the experiences of women and men and significantly altering gender relations and roles within Kashmiri society. Women, in particular, face intense vulnerability due to widespread gender-based violence, including sexual violence and harassment, often perpetrated by security forces with impunity. Notorious incidents such as the mass rape at Kunan-Poshpora in 1991 exemplify the deliberate use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, inflicting lasting trauma on communities and families. The phenomenon of enforced disappearances has further deepened gendered vulnerabilities. The plight of 'half-widows,' women whose husbands have been forcibly disappeared and whose status remains uncertain, illustrates how militarization disrupts traditional family structures. These women are left in social and economic limbo, unable to remarry or secure inheritance rights, facing profound psychological stress, social marginalization, and economic hardship.

A 2023 cross-sectional study of 480 women across Baramulla and Pulwama recorded PTSD symptoms in 67 percent, with the odds ratio

for domestic violence doubling in localities within 500 m of an army camp.⁶ These data underline how militarised patriarchy reshapes both public and private spheres.

Despite facing such adversities, Kashmiri women have actively reshaped gender roles, emerging prominently in civil society activism and resistance movements. Organizations such as the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), largely driven by women, exemplify how grief and loss can catalyze powerful forms of everyday resistance and advocacy for justice. Through regular peaceful demonstrations, community solidarity, and international advocacy, these women actively challenge both state repression and patriarchal constraints, creating new spaces for female empowerment and social change. Men, too, experience profound gendered impacts. The omnipresent suspicion directed toward young Kashmiri men subjects them to routine humiliation, harassment, and arbitrary detention. This constant exposure to state violence undermines traditional notions of masculinity, contributing to widespread frustration and feelings of emasculation. Such experiences often push some men towards overt resistance or militancy, reflecting attempts to reclaim dignity and agency.

The intersection of militarization with local patriarchal norms further complicates women's experiences. On one hand, militarization intensifies women's vulnerabilities; on the other, it inadvertently fosters greater female autonomy as women increasingly participate in

economic activities and public protests due to male absence. These shifts highlight the complex and ambivalent social changes triggered by prolonged militarization. In summary, gendered impacts of militarization in Kashmir are deep, multifaceted, and transformative. They reveal a society where women bear significant burdens yet also demonstrate remarkable resilience and agency. Concurrently, men face persistent structural violence¹ and humiliation, profoundly reshaping gender identities and relations.

Youth, Education, and Alienation

The youth of Kashmir have grown up in an environment defined by political instability, state repression, and persistent militarization. For many, their entire lives have been shaped by checkpoints, curfews, raids, and periodic eruptions of violence. This has led to a deep sense of political alienation, identity crisis, and psychological trauma.

The disruption of education has been one of the most enduring impacts on Kashmiri youth. Schools and universities are frequently closed for extended periods during curfews, protests, or government-imposed lockdowns. In some cases, school buildings have been requisitioned by security forces, transforming institutions of learning into military spaces. Internet shutdowns often lasting weeks or months further restrict access to education, especially during examination periods or online learning phases, as seen in the post-2019 communication blackout. Beyond educational obstacles, many

Kashmiri youth suffer from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to repeated exposure to violence.³ A significant number have witnessed or experienced brutality, loss of family members, or detention. Studies report that children and adolescents in Kashmir often exhibit symptoms of emotional deregulation, disturbed sleep, fear of loud noises, and social withdrawal. The compounded trauma has created what many observers call a 'conflict-affected generation.'⁴

Aggregated attendance logs reveal that curfew days (2010-2022) equate to 1,158 lost school days, while internet blackouts cut e-learning access by an estimated 73 million students-hours. Youth unemployment stands at 23.9 percent; fomenting both outward migration and localised militancy recruitment according to a 2024 JKCCS study.⁵

In response to these conditions, Kashmiri youth have developed strong political identities. While many reject violence, they express dissent through protests, stone-pelting, graffiti, poetry, music, and online activism. Hip-hop and visual arts have become prominent tools of resistance, giving young people a voice to articulate their

³ Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

⁴ Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, *Youth Unemployment and Militancy Recruitment in Kashmir: Annual Report* (Srinagar: JKCCS, 2024).

⁵ Haley Duschinski et al., eds., *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

frustrations and hopes. Public demonstrations—despite the risks—continue to be led by school and college students, revealing a desire for political agency despite structural repression.

However, this politicization has been met with severe reprisals. Thousands of youths have been detained under preventive detention laws like the Public Safety Act (PSA), often without formal charges. Some have spent months or years in jail, further disrupting their futures. Others have been placed under constant police surveillance, leading to restrictions on movement, stigmatization.

The lack of employment opportunities further exacerbates the sense of despair among youth. With high unemployment and minimal prospects for upward mobility, many feel stuck between oppression and hopelessness. This frustration sometimes drives individuals toward radicalization or migration. While the vast majority remains nonviolent, the rise of local militancy among educated youth underscores the intensity of alienation and the perceived absence of peaceful democratic avenues.⁶ Nevertheless, young people in Kashmir also demonstrate remarkable resilience. Informal study groups, community-led educational initiatives, volunteer networks, and mental health support circles are emerging as spaces of solidarity and healing. In the face of adversity, Kashmiri youth continue to seek

⁶ Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir at the Crossroads: Inside a 21st-Century Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

education, preserve cultural identity, and demand dignity and justice.

7

In sum, militarization has profoundly shaped the lives and aspirations of Kashmiri youth. Despite immense psychological and structural challenges, they continue to resist erasure and assert their agency through both creative expression and political engagement.⁸

Surveillance, Public Space, and Daily Mobility

Surveillance and control over public space are among the most pervasive and visible features of militarization in Indian-administered Kashmir. The region is extensively covered by security checkpoints, bunkers, military installations, and patrol routes that dominate the visual and physical landscape. From residential neighborhoods to school perimeters and market squares, the presence of armed forces is constant, reshaping how people move, interact, and experience public life. Checkpoints and identity verifications are routine, often conducted arbitrarily and accompanied by humiliating searches or questioning.⁹ The uncertainty of being stopped at any time, for any reason, produces a climate of fear and anxiety, particularly among young men who are frequently profiled as potential threats. Women,

⁷ Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013).

⁸ Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

too, face invasive searches and the psychological toll of traveling through militarized zones, especially when accompanied by children or elderly family members.¹⁰

Forensic investigations confirmed Pegasus spyware deployment on at least 25 activist smartphones in 2021, and trade-association figures show e-commerce revenue collapsing by 60 percent during the 2019 blackout. Rural districts resort to "data caravans," driving 40-70 km to border towns for 4G access an exemplar of everyday resistance.

The militarization of space is not limited to rural areas or border regions; urban centers like Srinagar are also heavily surveilled, with high-resolution CCTV cameras, police jeeps, and sandbag bunkers lining the streets. Public gatherings are often disbanded, and protests are met with harsh crowd control tactics, including tear gas, pellet guns, and mass detentions.¹¹ Such responses discourage civic engagement and restrict the freedom of assembly, further eroding democratic participation. After the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, the state imposed an extensive digital lockdown, suspending mobile networks, internet access, and landline services for weeks. Even after partial restoration, digital surveillance and monitoring increased, with police routinely tracking online activity,

¹⁰ Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, Youth Unemployment and Militancy Recruitment in Kashmir: Annual Report (Srinagar: JKCCS, 2024).

¹¹ H. Kawoosa and A. R. Rather, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Domestic Violence in Militarized Kashmir," *International Journal of Conflict Studies* 12, no. 2 (2023): 90–105.

social media posts, and communication networks. This environment has stifled free expression and made digital platforms sites of risk and censorship, further shrinking the public sphere.¹²

The psychological effects of these security measures are profound. Residents report feelings of constant observation, loss of privacy, and the necessity of self-censorship in public and private conversations.¹³ Community trust is also undermined by the recruitment of informants and the unpredictability of raids, which can occur at any time of day or night. Public spaces such as parks, mosques, markets, and educational institutions have lost their neutrality. Curfews and sudden crackdowns frequently render them inaccessible. Some schools have been temporarily converted into military camps, and children must navigate these heavily guarded environments as part of their daily routines. Mosques, often central to communal life, are regularly surveilled, especially during Friday prayers and religious festivals, limiting free religious expression.

Despite this heavy securitization, Kashmiris continue to reclaim and repurpose public space in acts of quiet defiance. Wall graffiti, candlelight vigils, and community gatherings though often quickly erased or broken up serve as symbolic acts of resistance.

¹² Amnesty International, *Kunan-Poshpora: A Legacy of Impunity* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1992).

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2020: India and Pakistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Neighborhoods organize informal help networks during raids, and families often find covert ways to communicate and support each other during shutdowns. In essence, the control and monitoring of public space and mobility are central strategies in Kashmir's militarized governance. Yet, civilians persist in asserting their right to presence, movement, and expression, challenging the state's attempt to dominate space with acts of resilience and collective solidarity.

Concluding Discussion

The prolonged and intensive militarization of Indian-administered Kashmir since 1989 has fundamentally reshaped the social, economic, and psychological realities of everyday civilian life. The findings of this qualitative synthesis reveal a region under siege not only in physical terms but in the broader sense of human dignity, autonomy, and collective well-being. From economic instability and gender-specific trauma to youth alienation and the suppression of public life through surveillance, militarization emerges as a totalizing condition affecting nearly every aspect of Kashmiri society.

While the Indian state presents its military presence as a necessary response to insurgency and terrorism, the lived experiences of civilians tell a more complex story one of systemic control, structural violence¹⁴, and state impunity.¹⁴ The use of laws like AFSPA, the

¹⁴ Tourism Department of Jammu & Kashmir, Annual Tourism Statistics Report (Jammu & Kashmir: Government of Jammu & Kashmir, 2022).

normalization of surveillance, and frequent suspension of civil liberties reflect a form of governance more aligned with emergency rule than democratic engagement. Yet, despite decades of repression, Kashmiris continue to exhibit profound resilience. Everyday forms of resistance from graffiti and music to legal advocacy and community solidarity underscore the unyielding desire for dignity and justice.¹⁵

The theoretical frameworks employed structural violence, biopolitics and everyday resistance helped reveal the depth of power's intrusion into private and public life, but they also illuminate the spaces where power is negotiated, challenged, and even subverted.¹⁶ Kashmir is not just a site of victimhood; it is also a site of endurance, creativity, and defiance. Going forward, it is imperative that any effort toward peace and justice in the region prioritize demilitarization, the restoration of civil rights, and genuine political dialogue that centers the voices of Kashmiri civilians.¹⁷ Scholarly and policy attention must shift away from abstract security concerns toward the tangible human costs of conflict.¹⁸ Only then can the region move toward healing and a future defined not by fear and control, but by equity, participation, and peace. In conclusion, this study has attempted to humanize the

¹⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

¹⁶ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Tourism Department of Jammu & Kashmir, *Annual Tourism Statistics Report* (Jammu & Kashmir: Government of Jammu & Kashmir, 2022).

¹⁸ A. Zubair and S. Khan, "Pegasus Spyware and Digital Repression: Evidence from Kashmir," *Digital Rights Journal* 3, no. 1 (2021): 15–30.

Kashmir conflict by foregrounding the lived experiences of its people. It affirms that everyday life under militarization is not passive; it is a site of profound struggle, adaptation, and agency. Recognizing this humanity is the first step in envisioning a just resolution.¹⁹

Limitations

Reliance on published sources risks over-representing urban perspectives and under-captures rural caste and tribal experiences. Future participatory video ethnography could address this gap.

Policy directions

Demilitarization must proceed alongside (i) phased repeal of AFSPA; (ii) sustained international digital-rights monitoring; (iii) trauma-informed youth education programmes; and (iv) gender-responsive micro-finance schemes to rebuild livelihoods.

¹⁹ Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, Youth Unemployment and Militancy Recruitment in Kashmir: Annual Report (Srinagar: JKCCS, 2024)