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Report-Book Launch

“Secrets of the Kashmir Valley”

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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised a launch of the book “*Secrets of the Kashmir Valley*” by Farhana Qazi on May 30, 2016. The Chief Guest at the launch was Senator Lt. Gen. (Retd) Abdul Qayyum. The event was also addressed by a number of distinguished speakers and participants including Ms. Farzana Yaqoob, Minister of Social Welfare and Women Development, Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK); Ambassador Arif Kamal, Director, Global Studies, Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defense University (NDU) ; Ms. Mushaal Hussein Mullick, Chairperson, Peace and Cultural Organisation (PCO); Mr. Ghulam Muhammad Safi, Convenor All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC); Shamim Shawl, General Secretary Kashmir Tehreek-e-Khawateen; Dr. Amineh Ahmed Hoti, Executive Director of Markaz-e-Ilm, the Centre for Dialogue & Action (CD&A); Mr. Ahmed Quraishi, Executive Director, Youth Forum for Kashmir; Shaista Safi, Manager Programmes, Youth Forum for Kashmir; Tahir Mehmood, Programme Coordinator of MUSLIM Institute and Tooba Khurshid, Research Fellow, ISSI.

In his welcome remarks, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan thanked Ms. Farhana Qazi for choosing the ISSI platform to launch her book which was published in India. He said that her basic objective to get this book published from India was to inform the Indian and American audience of the sufferings of the Kashmiri people. The book, he said, provides a way forward for the Kashmir cause. A noteworthy aspect of this writing is that she not only faced difficulties herself, but also witnessed the problems and sufferings faced by the Kashmiri women. She met those involved in the Kashmir struggle and observed the brutalities inflicted upon them. This is a distressing account of women persecution. Ambassador Masood said that the struggle of Kashmiri women is historic. Kashmiri women, despite their sufferings, have always supported their men. Despite molestations, pain and miseries they always supported the cause of freedom and the demand for the right of self-determination, whether it is through social media, political activities or imprisonment. This cause of freedom is not limited to one generation. The youth of Kashmir has reinstated this freedom movement and women are standing alongside them. This book unfolds the facts and makes us realise that this is an agenda which Pakistanis, the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and the Kashmiri Diaspora community abroad have to complete. We only need organisation and awareness.

Ms. Farzana Yaqoob said that it is always propagated by India that Pakistan’s internal and external challenges prevent Pakistan from focusing on the Kashmir dispute. However, gatherings like today deny the claim of labelling Kashmir as insignificant and unimportant. The significance of this book is that it is written by a woman and only a woman can comprehend the pains and sufferings of another woman which is a norm in Occupied Kashmir. India always tried to mislead the international community and categorised the events of brutalities as psychological theatre staged by people of Kashmir to gain world sympathies. Despite such false Indian claims, there are people in Indian society like Arundhati Roy, who support the Kashmiri struggle and highlight the suffering of Kashmiri women. India attempted to create confusion and impression that the Kashmiri narrative is divided, but Kashmiris always demand the right of self-determination. Ms. Farzana Yaqoob asserted that the Kashmiris will continue this struggle irrespective of the fact whether people support them or not. This struggle will continue till they succeed and asserted that it will succeed because the Kashmiri youth have reinstated this movement.

Ambassador Arif Kamal said that the book is an account of oral history of women and men of IOK from 2007-2014. The book presented the sufferings and resilience of the people of Kashmir, and it echoed the voices that underline the importance of conflict resolution. He appreciated the efforts made by the author in presenting the cycle of abuse and resolve of the Kashmiris through her book. It is a spotlight to human rights scenario in IOK and draws the attention of international community towards the responsibility they owe to this region. It is not a war chronicle, rather, it is story of those who faced the crisis and survived. It is a vivid description of the nature of conflict. He highlighted how brilliantly the author has managed to skilfully portray both the beauty and trauma that co-exist in Kashmir. It also highlights the psychological dimension interrelated to this conflict. Although people of IOK are religious, but there is no sectarian dimension to it. Kashmiris have an acute awareness of their identity and any denial to this fact will be counter-productive. He said that despite societal fragmentation, she underlined the strong bond that exists among the people of Kashmir. This bond is their consciousness of their identity and the 'pain' which they suffer. Despite sufferings, trauma, and torture, there is no fatigue in Kashmir. Forms of resistance in IOK have changed, but the determination certainly has not. This book highlights the primacy of the people of IOK in the conflict which is undeniable. It is only the people of IOK who can define self-determination; it cannot be imposed on them from outside. The marginalisation of IOK needs to be looked in tandem with international responsibility. He suggested that the book should be translated in different languages and be circulated worldwide.

Ms. Mushaal Hussein said that in consideration of United Nation resolutions 1325 and 2122, the author has taken empirical evidence through knowledge of women in conflict. The book highlights the issues of women in conflict situations. She emphasised that such books help in creating preventive measures and awareness in war time crimes. She pointed out that it is very hard to find gender-based discussions in mainstream security dialogues in our present times. She said that the book fills in the academic gap through its informative chapters and provides foundational data on victimisation of women. The world has long been ignoring the criminal silence. Now, they must shun this silence that surrounds the human rights violations in IOK. Despite ample evidences of molestations and rape of women against Indian Occupation Forces, they are not punished. The Kashmiri struggle, she said, is full of identity and full of right of self-determination. Today Kashmiris are punished and imprisoned only because they are fighting for their right against the colonisation in IOK. She concluded that the ideas of liberty and freedom that have been sown in Kashmir for decades will sprout one day and result in a bright future for generations to come.

The author, Farhana Qazi, said that her aim to write this book was to give a voice to voiceless in IOK who remain unrecognised even today. Her intent, she said, was to highlight the pain and sufferings of the Kashmiri women to the world. She said that Kashmir has always been defined in geopolitical framework; however, this book focuses on the collective effort of Kashmiris and struggle of men and women in IOK. Despite tragedies, trauma and terrible life incidents, there is a hope in Kashmir. The youth of IOK have chosen the resistance by choice and they will continue to resist the illegal occupation. She made three broad observations that came out of her book: one, women are resilient; two, American involvement in Kashmir is irrelevant; and three, there is a huge demographic change taking place in Kashmir, particularly in terms of the youth

bulge and secret societies. She cherished the fact that Kashmiris are able to speak for themselves and their voices will be heard.

The Chief Guest of the event, Senator Lt. Gen. (Retd) Abdul Qayyum lauded the efforts of Farzana Qazi and said it is an intellectual endeavour which focuses on sufferings of women in Kashmir. He regretted that the Kashmir dispute has been made a geographical dispute by India rather than a humanitarian issue. He highlighted the fact that Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru always honoured and supported the right of self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It was India who took the issue to the UN and committed itself to resolve the dispute earnestly as per the aspirations of the people of Kashmir. He also highlighted the fact that the people of Kashmir have been victimised through various black laws effective in Kashmir today. Today, a ‘shoot to kill’ policy is officially prevalent in IOK. India has about 4 million forces in total, and one third of the total force is stationed in IOK. This indicates the level of brutalities they inflict upon the people of IOK. He highlighted that since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, all its foreign policies have focused on developing friendly relations with all the countries of the world. It will never have aggressive designs towards any other country and would respect the UN Charter profoundly and work for the international peace from the forefront. Senator Qayyum said that while referring to the Kashmir issue, Muhammad Ali Jinnah had said that we will be supporting the cause of self-determination for all the oppressed and suppressed nations of the world, whether it is Kashmir or Palestine, whether it is Muslim or non-Muslim. He concluded that the people of IOK are facing all the threats and brutalities with courage.

All the participants lauded the efforts of Ms. Farhana Qazi in highlighting the problems faced by the Kashmiris through her writings and suggested that the detrimental conditions that prevail in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) need to be highlighted more frequently and proactively.

Mr. Ghulam Muhammad Safi, referring to the historian Kalhana, said that Jammu and Kashmir cannot be conquered through armies and weapons. People of IOK can only be won over on higher moral grounds. The women of IOK like late Asiya and Nilofer symbolise the resilience as well as sufferings caused upon Kashmiri men and women. He rejected the claims of Kashmiris being divided and said that the people of IOK fully support their one endeavour of self-determination, and their only demand is liberation from illegal occupation. The love and affection of the people of IOK towards Pakistan is immortal. The Kashmiri youth not only support Pakistan within Kashmir, but Indian universities also without considering the damage it can cause to their career and education. India always attempted to label the Kashmiri indigenous movement as Pakistan-sponsored movement. The resolution of Kashmir dispute can only be achieved as per the aspirations of people of IOK.

Dr. Amineh Ahmed Hoti said that today Islam is linked to terrorism which is very unfortunate. However, this book has challenged this connotation successfully. It has surfaced the conflict which is both raw and human in nature. This is a sad account of human sufferings in IOK. She compared this writing to her own experience of interacting with people of Srebrenica, Bosnia, where about 8000 Muslims were brutally killed and thousands were raped. Muslims of Bosnia and Kashmir share similar beauty and sufferings. The continuous struggle of people in IOK

increases the optimism for victory. She suggested that more writing on Kashmir should be encouraged.

Puruesh Chaudhary lauded the efforts of the author in depicting the stories of Kashmir so skilfully. She briefly inquired the author about the aim of this research and how did she find the response to her writing across the world?

Ahmed Quraishi said that every writing on Kashmir is essentially a lobbying effort for the Kashmir cause. It is always complained that despite sacrifices there is limited literature available on Kashmir which supports the struggle. He praised the efforts of Ms. Farhana Qazi for presenting the role of Kashmiri women. He said that the world community well receives the soft stories as written in this book. Referring to the Kurdistan movement, he said that recently, the movement has received a boost due to the highlighting of the role of women.

Shamim Shawl said that the book very expressively highlights the pains of the Kashmiri Muslims and non-Muslims, and demonstrates the hope and dignity of the Kashmiri society. The people of IOK are very tolerant and peaceful and have been dragged into the resistance movement. The women of IOK are determined to carry this resistance forward despite molestations. This narration depicts the courage of the Kashmiri women. War is always imposed on the oppressed people, and it has been the case with regard to the people of IOK. The courage of Kashmiris will endure till the success of their cause. She suggested that more work needs to be done on the role of the UN in addressing the suffering of the people of IOK.

Shaista Safi said that the book describes the sufferings of youth, women and men of IOK. It also presents an account of past brutalities. It is essential for the oppressed people to demonstrate their present to the world. This book helps the people of IOK to explain the agony they faced to the world. Along with their normal life settings, the Kashmiris never ignored their cause of self-determination.

Tahir Mehmood said the book describes the atrocities being committed on the people in Kashmir. He suggested that the Kashmir cause needs intellectual as well academic input. India has lost even the moral grounds to win Kashmir. Despite internal challenges, Pakistan remained focused on Kashmir. He regretted that the Pakistani media failed to play an effective role in highlighting the issue of Kashmir. Pakistan Media should increase its airtime for the Kashmir cause and must highlight the suffering of the people there. International community, while extending their alliance, must also consider the dire ground realities in this region. He recommended that the Kashmir cause must be highlighted in individual capacity.

Tooba Khurshid said that the book describes the conflict in Kashmir valley through the eyes of the Kashmiri women, who are committed to the cause of freedom of Kashmir. Despite torture, trauma, and terrible life altering incidents, the Kashmiri women have stood firm for their cause and demands for their independent homeland. She highlighted her research on women in Kashmir and said that in the recent years, the transition of social and economic mainstream has been marred by conflict. Women seeking jobs and educational opportunities are not just a means for achieving gender development, but it is often an issue of survival and livelihood. She stressed that the challenges, be they social or economical, that effects women in Kashmir have their roots

in the existing political situation and these challenges would remain until and unless the issue of the freedom of Kashmir is resolved. In this regard, she lauded the effort made by Farhana Qazi and said that it gives a strong message that Kashmiri women are a symbol of strength and courage. The interaction of the writer with mothers and wives of martyrs, prisoners, protestors, and political activists presents a missing history of suffering and struggle of the Kashmiri women.

The remarks were followed by a vibrant question and answer session. People from a broad spectrum of society raised questions on current discourse on resolution of Kashmir dispute and suggested that the plea of the Kashmir cause must be rightly presented in the United Nations

Ms. Farhana Qazi said that Kashmir made her a writer, and the tipping point for her writing was the narration of the miseries and atrocities perpetrated on the Kashmiri women.

Ambassador Masood Khan in his concluding remarks said that the Kashmir struggle is inter-generational. Men and women are making joint efforts in the freedom movement. People in Pakistan, IOK and the Diaspora community are determined to take the cause forward. He suggested that American women and citizen involvement should be increased in the struggle of Kashmir. Despite the demographic shifts, the youth of IOK will remain connected to older generations and leadership. However, there is need for continuity. There are many gaps in our policies and we have not been able to bridge them. This is the cause of defending humanity; hence, we need to project our efforts more proactively. The Kashmiris cannot be overwhelmed through coercion, but they can only be won over by maintaining the moral high ground.