**The children of IIOK**

[**Sadia N. Qazi**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/sadia-n-qazi)

February 28, 2021

What’s more beautiful than the innocence of childhood? Laced with dreams of wonderland and stories of utopian fantasy, it is a time in life laden with perfection and prettiness of the creative little minds. Everything seems beautiful in the haven of childhood innocence—far away from the brutal realities of life. But this innocence of the children of Kashmir is being snatched at a tender age by the tyrannous and atrocious cycle of violence, whipping the Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, for the last seven decades.

Children who grow in active conflict zones like IIOK are deprived of a normal childhood as they are shoved into the harsh actualities of life too soon. As they open their eyes, they are exposed to violence and become aware of the struggle of the Kashmiris for their freedom. There are countless tales of the sufferings of these children. It’s unfathomable to fully comprehend the horror these children experience every day. Every trip to the market comes with an uncertainty; if all of the family members will be back safe and sound. Their homes are barged into by paramilitary Indian forces and they witness their elders, fathers and brothers being dragged, beaten, arrested and women of the house disrespected. Going out on the streets, they are unsure of what quandaries await them. Young boys can be questioned and beaten for no reason at all. Young girls can be harassed and be subjected to inappropriate behaviour.

[Zlatan Ibrahimović to miss Man Utd Europa League due to injury](https://nation.com.pk/02-Mar-2021/zlatan-ibrahimovi-to-miss-man-utd-europa-league-due-to-injury)

Last year, a viral photo of a toddler posed on the slain body of his grandfather shocked the world. Shooting an elderly man in front of a three-year-old wasn’t enough, adding insult to the injury, he was made to sit on the dead body of his grandfather as the photos were taken and shared.

The violations of human rights in IIOK by the Indian security forces are massively determined by their use of pellet guns on the Kashmiris. Thousands have been critically injured and dozens died at the barrel of this noxious weapon. Hundreds of people including children are blinded. Some of them even got injured while they were in their home and became victims of stray pellets. Dozens losing their lives and hundreds losing their sight, Amnesty International compiled a 109-page book displaying the ill-fated victims of pellet guns to draw the attention of the international community. Asrar Ahmed, an avid student and zealous cricketer was returning home from playing cricket when he was hit when ISF opened fire at a crowd. Hiba Jan, an 18-month-old baby, was playing at home when she was hit by a pellet damaging her eye. This happens every day and children become victims of violence.

[ECP to make final decision regarding ballot papers today](https://nation.com.pk/02-Mar-2021/ecp-to-make-final-decision-regarding-ballot-papers-today)

Violence is not new for Kashmiris. Striving hard, enduring brutalities, they have lost thousands of precious lives. The number of children enduring physical injuries and traumas are in the thousands. In August 2019, New Delhi revoked the special status of IIOK ripping off whatever little autonomous identity the Kashmiris had. Modi’s oppressive action instigated a strong reaction. As a result, the valley was caged into a lockdown and curfew was imposed converting IIOK into a prison. To contain the repercussion, the road connectivity was bunged, internet jammed and all media and news agencies were barred from the valley. During the lockdown a fact-finding commission stated that around 13,000 boys were picked up from their homes. The girls and women reported cases of sexual molestation during these raids.

When the pandemic hit, it was already six months to the lockdown. The UN declared the access to the internet a basic human right. Blocking the internet to suppress the freedom of speech is a declaration of human rights violation by the Indian government. The right of education is also denied to the children living in IIOK as the internet hasn’t yet been restored. At few places, broadband services are opened up but the speed is kept so sluggish that neither student can engage in online classes, nor can access any study materials online. J&K region has more than 2.5 million students and around 10,000 schools. Recently, a report compiled by a Delhi-based group of human rights activists and psychiatrists published in November 2020 cites that commotion began in August lockdowns had an intense effect on children’s lives and their mental health.

[MQM-P to support PTI in Senate elections: Amin-ul-Haque](https://nation.com.pk/01-Mar-2021/mqm-p-to-support-pti-in-senate-elections-amin-ul-haque)

Many children suffer anxiety and panic. They cannot go out to playgrounds anymore as it is perilous. They do not have friends any longer as they do not go to school or mingle freely with other children in the neighbourhood. They are being snatched off their childhood. Even if the educators or schools attempt to produce online content, it is impossible to access those online. As the world moves forward with stepping into pioneering interactive virtual platforms, Kashmiri children are left behind.

The entire conception of childhood has suffered a methodical transfiguration in the lives of children in IIOK. From these children the right for a normal happy childhood is cruelly taken away. They do not enjoy kindergarten or learn happy nursery rhymes while playing with toys. They are not nurtured under the adoring warm care of their parents in a setting where they sense freedom and safety. Relatively their memories of childhood are filled with horrors inconceivable entailing an environment fraught with fear, endless gory violence, insecurity and chaos. They no longer have fantasy filled imaginings of butterflies and pirates or big dreams for a buoyant tomorrow; they just dream of freedom, safety and the security of their loved ones by their side. The chalice of innocence of the children in IIOK is contaminated with the poison of blood, violence, death and pain.