

Challenges and Problems Faced by Women due to Armed Conflict in Kashmir with Special Reference to District Anantnag

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Abstract—In this paper we examined the challenges and problems faced by the women of Kashmir due to the armed conflict which is going on for the last three decades. Whenever we hear about the armed conflict, the general feeling is that it is the men fighting against each other and inflicting injuries to each other. But this is only the half of the story there is more to it that is the impact of violence on women in its various manifestations. In any given situation due to the patriarchal mindset we always tend to neglect the women, their issues, their problems, their experiences and challenges etc. In this study, we interviewed 120 women in south Kashmir regarding their experiences, problems, issues and challenges faced by them due to the armed conflict. The findings of the study revealed that women face enormous problems and challenges and are the enduring victims of this armed conflict. Women bear the ultimate brunt of this armed conflict in Kashmir especially in south Kashmir which has seen a tremendous increase in violence in last few years.

Keywords: Armed conflict; Kashmir; Patriarchy; Violence.

Introduction:

The problem that we highlighted in this paper is one of the particular cases of vast number of such cases around the globe, the violence inflicted territories of the world, where violence is employed to either gain control of territories or consolidate the hold and counter the anti-state elements. The violence has been used as a tool by both state and anti-state elements for the gains on their respective sides. The field of our research (Kashmir) is a special case on which lies the future course of peace and progress in South Asian Sub-continent. The study would highlight the play of violence, its forms and the extent to which it interferes in the normal lives of its victims especially the women of Kashmir. The women in Kashmir are considered as the marginalized group in every sphere of life due to the Patriarchal nature of the society. They are lagging behind men in terms of education, occupation, empowerment and health status. No doubt, they are facing cultural barriers;

however the violence in the state have further blocked their ways of empowerment and improvement in the conflict proven areas. The present study is an attempt to explore the hidden dimensions of the violence beyond political and strategic spheres into the social sphere where violence creeps in the life of a common man and the victim finds no escape. The study would be an eye-opener for contending parties, so that they may shun the violence and act for peace at the earliest. The above account clearly shows the sociological relevance of the study and will certainly have deep implications for the future researches to be carried out in the violence related studies.

Literature Review:

Sivasankaran Sreekala (2001) analyse the Kashmir conflict from the perspective of women abuse. There has been no widespread condemnation against violent abuse of women. It has been pointed out that in conflict zones like Kashmir there has been outright policy of sexual abuse against women resorted to by government security forces and militants. Rape not only perishes the honour and identity of woman, but it has been used as a weapon of male defeat, that he could not protect his property. This way when state uses rape as a strategy in conflict, notion of female justice vanishes in thin air. Calamati, (2002) provides the sufferings of women in the armed conflict. The work brings forth the testimonies of the ordinary women from Ireland, which helps us to construct a sketch of the effects of armed conflict in the region. The individual accounts show horrific accounts of violence against women in the context of armed conflict. The death, brutality, molestation, interrogation and searches are just the simple accounts of state brutality to suppress the violence. The scars of these brutalities will remain with these women till their death. These stories just bring out the stories of brutalization

of the women in occupied territories and conflict zones. Ironically, while political elite search out for the peace processes, the women continue to be the soft targets of violence to which no attention is paid. The work aptly highlights the agonies and maltreatment of women in conflict situations. *Diwan Ritu (2006)* brings forth the inside story of mass rapes like Kunan Poshpora and highlights the suffering of victims in the aftermath. The social stigma associated with rape resulted in the divorce or continuous unmarried status of most of the victims in addition to teasing from men. *Shrestha and Thapa (2007)* present a vivid picture of impact of armed violence on women in South Asian Countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The authors discuss at length the ramifications of conflict like increasing dominance of patriarchy, impact of militarization on women. They highlight various forms of repression and abuse women go through at the hands of various agencies. Women living in conflict situations have been subjected to range of human rights violations like rape, molestation, physical and sexual violence. *Dhar Ruby (2008)* advocates for the empowerment of women who have been victims of violence at public and private sphere. The violence against women in war and armed conflicts has also been discussed. It has been pin pointed that victims of the armed conflicts happen to be civilians at large and especially women. Women are physically, mentally and emotionally tortured. Rape, abduction and forced abortion become a common sight. In armed conflicts, women are physically and economically forced into prostitution. Curiously, 80% of the refugees throughout the world happen to be women and children. (*Dabla, 2009*). Women have been subjugated to violence in Kashmir for the past two decades from Security forces as well as rebel groups. A study conducted in 2005 concluded, "There can be no two opinions that the women of Kashmir during the past two decades have been in the vanguard and have been fighting battles against all kinds of injustices and crimes against humanity committed by the State and by some dubious non-state actors" (*Dabla, 2009*).

Objectives:

1. To highlight the impact of armed conflict on women in south Kashmir.
2. To highlight the changes in role reallocation of women due to armed conflict.
3. To suggest measures for providing better services to women in armed conflict areas.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on both primary as well as secondary sources of data. The secondary sources included the following: newspaper reports, electronic media, health reports, research articles etc. The primary sources included observation and interview schedule. The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The universe of the

present study was south Kashmir. While conducting the research of this nature the researchers faced many difficulties due to the south Kashmir being the bastion of ongoing armed conflict but they tried their best to overcome these difficulties. The sample of the study was 120 female respondents belonging to the four districts of south Kashmir i.e. Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian and Pulwama. The respondents were chosen through stratified random sampling.

Findings and Discussions:

Although Kashmir conflict is viewed as male oriented, where on both sides males are involved such as army and police personals, militants or ordinary residents of Kashmir, nevertheless the consequences of this conflict have deep impact on day to day life of women in Kashmir. Violence due to the armed conflict leads to lot of problems to women. Based on the primary data the main findings of the present study are as follow:

- 114 (98%) respondents feel that women have been doubly affected by violence and only 6 respondents (2%) do not feel so. This is because besides being hit by violence in person, women get affected if someone in the family becomes victim of violence. The woman happens to be a mother, a daughter, a sister, and a wife and becomes emotionally and socially affected if her son, father, brother or husband becomes the victim of violence. The irony is that the victim of violence whether militant, policeman, counter insurgent or a common man happens to be Kashmiri first and hence affecting a Kashmiri family and women of the Kashmiri household in particular.
- Out of the 120 respondents, 25 respondents (21%) agree that a woman suffered as mother when her son was tortured and left half dead. 20 respondents (16%) are of the opinion that a woman suffered as a mother when her son or sons disappeared whose whereabouts could never be located. 28 respondents (23.3%) are of the opinion that a woman suffered being a mother at the hands of either government forces or militants when her son was picked up by them and later killed. 5 respondents (4.16%) feel that a woman suffered being a mother when her son was kept in long detention. Majority of respondents 42 (35%) believe that a woman has suffered as a mother when she saw multiple funerals in her family.
- Accordingly 27 respondents (22.5%) are of the opinion that a woman suffered as a daughter when she lost her father and was emotionally affected in the process. 21 respondents (8.4%) say that a woman suffered as a daughter when she was molested in front of her family by government forces, 48 respondents (40%) are of the opinion that the torture of different family members led to the suffering of woman as a daughter. 11 respondents (9.16%) are of the opinion that a woman suffered being the daughter of the widow of violence, who suffered the

same fate as that of her mother. 23 respondents (19.16%) feel that a woman suffered as a daughter when she happened to be the daughter of a militant, their house being searched and her modesty outraged in the process. It is noteworthy here to mention that 9.6% respondents feel that woman as a daughter of a widow of violence has suffered the same fate as her mother. The woman happens to be attached to both the family of orientation and the family of procreation. Being a daughter she feels most for her father to whom she is emotionally attached and family members with whom she feels secure and satisfied. The violence against the family happens to shatter her and make her emotionally weak as well as prone to threat and fear. The things get worse when she herself becomes direct victim of violence which leaves a deep scar on her personality and social life, the repercussions of which are beyond recognition.

- Out of the total 120 respondents, 38 respondents (31.6%) are of the opinion that woman suffered as a sister when her brother or brothers lost their lives in violence. 9 respondents (7.5%) feel that woman suffered as a sister being the sister of militant who couldn't get suitable marriage proposals. 29 respondents (24.16%) are of the opinion that woman suffered as a sister when her brother got disappeared in violence after being picked up by army. Again 30 respondents (25%) believe that woman suffered as a sister when she was beaten up or detained in cordons for protesting against the victimization of men at the hands of government forces. 14 respondents (11.6%) believed that woman suffered as a sister when she was raped in front of her brother by government forces.
- The woman has suffered most as a sister on the account of the loss of life in family in the form of her brother, the disappearance of brother and direct violence on her during violent situations. The worst form of suffering is when she is molested or raped in front of her family or brother. It tears apart her identity and honour, from which she never recovers.
- The Kashmiri women have also suffered the bane of widowhood; there are a number of women in every locality who happen to be widows of combatants or Out of the total of 120 respondents, 12 (10%) respondents know the single case of widows of violence each. 20 (16.6%) claim of having knowledge of 2 cases each of widows of violence. 30 (25%) respondents know about 3 such cases each. Majority of respondents 52 (43.3%) claim having knowledge of several cases where women became widows of violence. Only 6 (5%) claim to have only heard of such cases.
- Kashmiri society being patriarchal in nature confines women mostly to take care of household work and the men work outside to earn a livelihood. The loss of the husband not only leads to absence of the head of family, but also the source of economic and emotional support to

wife and children. These women (widows of violence) are subjected to multiple pressures of maintaining household, bringing up children and maintaining their honour and modesty. They often become victimized either at the hands of in-laws or sometimes amorous men trying to exploit them.

- The health and maternity services were thrown out of gear with the onset of violence which saw the disruption in every institution of valley. The health services were affected too, the premier hospitals like SKIMS (Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences) and SMHS (Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital) of the valley couldn't function normally owing to checks and searches by security personnel for wounded militants.
- Out of the 120 respondents who feel that emergency services have been badly hit due to violence, 70 respondents (58.3%) strongly agree with the statement. 26 respondents (21.6%) are undecided on the issue. 24 respondents (20%) disagree on the issue and there is no one who strongly disagrees with the issue. Most of the respondents (89.5%) are of the opinion that emergency services have been disrupted due to violence. The emergency services in relation to health, chronic disease, accident and in relation to elderly people couldn't be availed by people because of disruption due to violence.
- Another dimension of violence is the role conflict experienced by the women. The Kashmiri women used to be associated with certain roles as far as her domestic sphere is concerned. But the violence has forced her either to shun certain roles she used to play in the running of the household and everyday life or at times she had to pick up the new roles for which she was never socialized. Out of the total 120 respondents 30 respondents (25%) strongly agree with the statement that violence has affected women in terms of their free movement, role performance and economic activity, (58%) agree with the statement, (6.4%) are undecided on the issue, (7.2%) disagree with the statement and (3.4%) strongly disagree with the above statement. The Kashmiri woman used to have a freedom of movement in the domestic sphere and outside as she commanded her own respect and position. But she became an easy prey for various forms of violence during the last three decades of conflict. 87.6% in total are of the view that violence and its resultant fear has resulted in unhealthy transfer of roles from one status to other status. The worst role conflict has been in the cases where men lost their life and the widows had to take up the additional roles of father, breadwinner and caretaker of the children. She even had to work for the sustenance of the family where she became victimised again in various forms.

Conclusion

In a study conducted in Kashmir by Medicins Sans Frontiers in 2006 says, "Like any other armed conflict situation, the continuous violent situation prevalent in Kashmir since 1989 has hit the Kashmiri women in every aspect, every day due to the ongoing armed conflict women continue to suffer. She is a mother grieving for her missing or dead sons, a widow or a half-widow fighting for her existence and bringing up her children and a refugee to find shelter once displaced from her land". Men perceive peace as a condition free of any kind of violence in society. This implies the co-existence of all people with basic human dignity. This concept of peace begins with one's immediate family and goes on to cover the whole region, country and the world. When there is violence in society, women feel its impact first. Therefore, women must play a decisive role in negotiating the peace process. In order to make this possible, they must be empowered politically, economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making. However, state and non-state agencies make no effort to involve women in peace processes. They ignore the impact of conflict on women and marginalise their needs and aspirations. Mainstreaming gender as a major human rights priority becomes complicated when a technocratic and masculine concept of 'national security' dominates the discourse on conflict-affected areas such as Jammu and Kashmir. An alternative concept of 'human security' has acquired salience in recent global discussions on development. At last to quote Julinda Abu Nasr, founder and director of institute for women's studies in the Arab world once said, "If a child especially a girl grows up with the idea of violence, that you get what you can by force, what kind of world will this be?". Perhaps it fits the story of Kashmir.

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