



## IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF KASHMIR \*

**Abstract:** *Women from time to time have been exploited due to its weakness of being a female. As for as the position of women in state of Jammu & Kashmir is concerned, it is very pathetic because she has not equal rights as compared to men folk. Further due to ongoing violence, Kashmiri women has been hit by sexual and by physical violence both by militants and security forces. They have been worst hit in the war of Kashmir but their experience of the conflict has led them to recognize the potential for their constructive engagement for enabling peace. So the underlying objective of the initiative of the present paper is to understand the contribution of Kashmiri women on peace building with special to Kashmir.*

**Key words:** Kashmiri women, Militancy, Conflict, Violence, Peace, Militarization.

Women are the integral part of the social structure throughout the world. They are the social conscience of a nation and their contribution to the society and humanity is great. But throughout the globe women form a weaker section and are under the supervision and control of men-folk in all walks of life. They are at the receiving end of much socio-political ill-treatment, harassment and are driven out of the mainstream of politics.<sup>1</sup> In spite of a series of formal and informal efforts aimed at uplifting them, they are still in the dark and are forced to continue in this age old deprived condition. She constitutes the target, the object, the stake of a masculine discourse and debate among them.

India and Pakistan- administered Jammu and Kashmir is a space in which conflicting discourses have been written and read. The role played by the nation-states of India and Pakistan in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir echoes the animosity created

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<sup>1</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali For Women. 1998

during the partition.<sup>2</sup> The political and social upheaval that followed upon the creation of the two nation-states in 1947 has left legacies that continued to haunt the future of the state. Kashmiri women were no exception to it. Kashmiri women have witnessed varying fortunes. The studies of the History shows that the women in Kashmir at times have risen to pinnacles of glory, distinguished themselves as rulers in their own right, as regents of minor princes, as powerful queens-consort, as diplomats in peace and war, as commanders of armies, as thrifty land ladies, as builders and reformers and as perceptor of religious lore. From early times down to the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Kashmiri women enjoyed remarkable freedom, wielded ample power and exercised responsibility which gave them a high status in the society.<sup>3</sup> During the Muslim rule in Kashmir women were gradually and increasingly deprived of those rights and privileges which they had acquired and enjoyed for many centuries.<sup>4</sup> Likewise in the Sikh rule and Dogra rule Kashmiri women lost everything for which they were illustrious in the past ages. Continued suppression for centuries and tyranny of wicked rulers had deprived them of their physical beauty<sup>5</sup> and intellectual refinement they were reduced virtually to a sub-human state and lived merely through sufferance. It was only in 1946 when the quit Kashmir movement was launched by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah that the politically minded Muslim women came again in the fore. They actively participated in the demonstrations along the men.<sup>6</sup> It was in this context that the women in Kashmir were given equal rights which were enshrined in the Naya-kashmir Programme that guided all the post independence programmes in Jammu And Kashmir State.

### **Impact on Women:**

As the Kashmiri history witnessed a change during 1980's because of militancy, the position of women came to a very low level. Regardless of their rich contribution in every field, the women of the state have failed to get their due place in the society.<sup>7</sup> They don't enjoy equal rights as the men-folk enjoy. They even are denied their lawful share in the ancestral property. Since the inception Kashmir conflict in late 1980's people of Kashmir in general and

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<sup>2</sup> Nyla Ali Khan, "Islam Women and Violence in Kashmir between India and Pakistan", Tulika Books, New Delhi, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Prem Nath Bazaz, "Daughters of Vitasta", Srinagar 2003, p.26

<sup>4</sup> G.D.M.Sofi, "Kashmir: Being a History of Kashmir from Earliest Times to Our Own, Vol.1, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, p.23.

<sup>5</sup> Shahzada Akhter, "Kashmir Women Empowerment and National Conference", J. K. Publisheres, Srinagar, 2011, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Yasin Madhvi, "Role of Women In the freedom Struggle of Kashmir", In History of Freedom Struggle in Jammu And Kashmir. (eds.), Dr. A. Q. Rafiqi and Mohammad yasin, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, p.202.

<sup>7</sup> Seema Kazi, "Between Democracy and Nation Gender and Militarization in Kashmir", Tulika Print communication, New Delhi, 2009, p. 175.

women in particular have been the victims in the ongoing circle of violence and abuse. Sexual and physical violence been appropriated by both security forces and militants in order to coerce, humiliate or punish women who are also subject to the rules and conditions imposed on civilians in a situation of armed conflict. Women have been worst hit in the war in Kashmir. They have been killed in the crossfire, shot at in public demonstration, blow up in grenade explosions or in shelling across the line of control and have been raped by security forces. Yet their voices or experience of the conflict remains absent.

Violence against women has taken a heavy toll in terms of damage to their health. The prolonged brutality, trauma, anxiety and dislocation have ripped apart the psyche of women. Increased emotional stress levels have given rise to psychosomatic and gynaecological disorders. The health related problems of large number of women are bound to have long-term negative impact on their children, families and even the society<sup>8</sup> Even women in Kashmir are attacked and sometimes killed for what they wear or don't wear thus striking fear in their hearts.<sup>9</sup> There is scarcely any woman in the valley who would walk around in public places without covering her head.<sup>10</sup> Women in Kashmir insurgency have been boxed into the human rights discourses of victimhood-as victim of direct violence. Of rape as a weapon of war by the security forces and of indirect violence which has made them widows, half Widows of the disappeared and mothers of sons killed or orphaned. Women in Kashmir are known as symbols-grieving mother, martyr's mother and raped women.

Interestingly, women in Kashmir are victims of violence from both sides: security forces as well as the militants. They are caught amidst two guns with no neutral space. Yet, they have shown resistance, by, for instance, refusing to veil. They have emerged as survivors by not only continuing with their lives but also providing support to their families in both economic and emotional terms. The setting up of the Association of the Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) in 1994 by Parveena Ahangar is arguably an important initiative on the part of women towards bringing peace in Kashmir.<sup>11</sup> In another role, the women in Kashmir have been at the forefront in the initial period of militancy when there was a mass uprising. Besides, they have also been active in supporting the militant movement. The all-women fundamentalist group Dukhtaran-e-Millat is an example in this context.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding, it is quite

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<sup>8</sup> Rekha Chowdary, "Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir" (ed.), Vitasta Publishers New Delhi, 2010, p.317.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.318.

<sup>10</sup> Rita Manchanda, "Guns and *Burqa*: Women in the *Kashmiri* Conflict", in Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia; Beyond Victimhood to Agency*), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001 p.59

<sup>11</sup> Nyla Ali Khan, "Islam Women and Violence in Kashmir between India and Pakistan", Tulika Books, New Delhi, pp.102-103.

<sup>12</sup> Rekha Chowdary, "Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir" (ed.), Vitasta Publishers New Delhi, 2010, p.320.

interesting to note that women have remained almost invisible as far as the separatist politics is concerned. Their 'contribution' to the militancy has though not remained Unnoticed due to media but the same has remained unrecognized.<sup>13</sup> Even, in the peace processes, initiated from time to time, the gender dimension has remained Invisible. Thus, the whole saga of women is that of getting 'used' and 'abused' amidst conflict led violence.

The lack of democracy and democratic accountability in Kashmir is synonymous with the denial of justice for Kashmiri widows and half- widows these women may have escaped direct violence by the state but cannot avoid their own social marginalisation, as a result of widowhood within the family and the large community. The tragedy of Kashmiri widows demonstrates precisely why the illegitimate state offensive against Kashmiri men has reinforced social hierarchy and women's marginalisation at the local level. It further highlights the failure of Kashmir's militant leadership to criticize societal attitudes towards survivors of rape and sexual abuse that condemns such women to a life of social ostracism and individual trauma.<sup>14</sup> Although these leaders are ostensibly committed to struggling for democracy in Kashmir, democratic rights for Kashmiri Women do not figure in their agendas, their disinterest and lack of concern at women's absence within their own political outfits reflects their maintenance of the gendered status status quo.<sup>15</sup> Neither the state nor the militants nor indeed Kashmiri society has any support or solace to offer women driven to destitution, prostitution or becoming informers as a result of militarization. The tragedies of these women have no bearing on Kashmir's national and international politics evoke little sympathy from any quarter.

#### Conclusion:

Studies on the gender reveal that in contrast to state violence against men that is publicly acknowledged and challenged through legal/institutional means no such recourse is available to Kashmiri women, for whom all violations and psychological trauma must be borne in solitude, because there is no legal recourse against forms of violence, discrimination, marginalisation and social censure that occur in private spaces. For the development of the state women need to be developed right from the grass-root level especially in the areas of education, health, employment, economic welfare and attainment of social and psychological security. She should be involved in the decision making from the home to the Parliament. She

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.119.

<sup>14</sup> Seema Kazi, "Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir", Tulika Print communication, New Delhi, 2009, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> Walikhanna Charu, *Women Silent Victims In Armed Conflict; An Area Study of Jammu And Kashmir*, Serial Publications, 2004, p.2

should be given equal rights and opportunities in every field like the men. Kashmiri women's are brave enough to face any challenge and people should realise that women has the capability to change the society.

