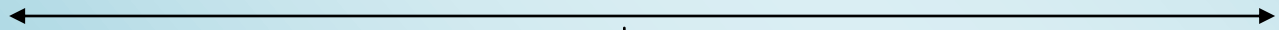


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HISTORY OF KASHMIR CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Presently the feminists use feminist methodologies in the social science research to emancipate women, to eradicate gender discrimination and to give voice to the suppressed group. Unfortunately concerned centrally with the relevance of feminism in the context of Kashmir, neither radical feminists nor liberals are contributing to the cause of women in the conflict zone of Kashmir. In this article it has been tried to highlight the plight of the people in general and women folk in particular in Kashmir. This is an attempt to fill the gap created by the negligence of the scholars and the feminists for not highlighting the atrocities faced by the women of Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Kashmir started immediately after India's independence and the birth of Pakistan in 1947. On the eve of independence there were around 565 Princely states under British-India and Kashmir being the largest was one of them.¹ Though all such states theoretically reverted to sovereignty upon the withdrawal of colonial power, their real choices were confined to merge with India or Pakistan. For most states, for reasons of geographic location and religion accession to India was forgone conclusion. There were, however three exceptions to this general pattern of accession and absorption, they were Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad. However, Junagarh and Hyderabad had a Hindu majority population under the Muslim sovereigns. Kashmir's Muslim majority was ruled by Hindu Maharaja.

At the time of partition, the delay in deciding Kashmir's future by Maharaja Hari Singh, the last king of independent Kashmir was the main cause of Kashmir conflict. The situation worsened and crisis reached climax with the entry of several thousand tribesmen from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) into the town of

Baramulla on the road towards the capital Srinagar. Maharaja felt insecure to defend his kingdom, he decided to seek help from India. He urgently requested India's military intervention to repel the invasion. Indian government agreed, but asked the Maharaja first accede to India, so that the India's role would be in defense of Indian Territory rather than a military intervention in a territory whose status was yet undecided. Hari Singh acceded to India on condition that accession was provisional and as soon as peace, law and order would be restored the people of J & K will decide its future.²

On 2nd November 1947 India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru announced that "Kashmir's future will be decided by its people by the means of referendum before the world under the auspices of United Nations" to determine whether the people of Kashmir ultimately preferred India or Pakistan. Almost 67 years have gone and the promise remained unfulfilled.

Hari Singh's decision to accede to India was immediately contested by Pakistan and led to the first India Pakistan war over Kashmir in 1948. More than six decades had gone now and Kashmir is still bone of contention between these two nuclear neighbours.

¹Jammu and Kashmir came into being in 1846, its founder Maharaja Gulab Singh paid 75 lakh rupees to British by virtue of Treaty of Amritsar and become its master.²India's viceroy Lord Mountbatten also promised military help to Hari Singh in return he signed "Letter of instrument of accession with India" which stands controversial ever since.

ARMED CONFLICT

The protest movement, peaceful struggle for right to self-determination continued till 1988-1989 and in this year armed conflict started. Because in 1987, State elections were rigged which resulted in wide spread dissatisfaction amongst the Kashmiri youth. Pakistan took advantage of the situation and began supporting the cause of Kashmiri disaffected youth who were calling for the creation of a separate state. Thus began a bitter proxy war against India and the situation gave rise to a virulent insurgent movement in Kashmir. By and large people supported the cause. Government of India brought more than seven lakh military and paramilitary troops to suppress the movement in Kashmir. This all resulted in frequent curfews, crackdowns, arrests, tortures and the implementation of draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), and Public Safety Act (PSA) which in turn gave birth to various kinds of human rights violation in Kashmir.

IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON THE ECONOMY OF KASHMIR

The conflict had been a great tragedy and a disaster in all respects. It has devastated the economy of Kashmir. It has destructed the overall infrastructure of Kashmir. It had reduced the capital income, employment, agricultural resources as well as human resources. Thousands of crores are spent on army expenditure to suppress the movement which otherwise could be used in developmental activities. Kashmir which is called paradise on earth, a beautiful place where tourism industry has a great scope and generates a great source of income is also affected by this conflict.

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The conflict in Kashmir has a wider and deeper impact on all sections of Kashmiri society. The impact of conflict is experienced by people of all ages who suffer displacement, loss of home and property, loss of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration. There is insecurity in Kashmir which fractures social ties, breakup families and communities and displaces populations. Society has scattered during last two decades and conflict had devastated people and communities, it has destroyed unity and solidarity of the society. There is social disorder, disorganization educational backwardness due to this conflict. Each individual of every family is mentally and psychologically disturbed which results in depression and suicides deaths.

DEATH TOLL AND IMPACT ON HEALTH

The conflict had resulted in loss of a significant number of people. According to official reports 20000 insurgents have been killed till 2006. And from 2006 the number of militants had decreased. According to un-official reports more than 80000 people have been killed since 1989 half of them were civilians. In addition to such a large death toll a large percentage of people are on medication these days. During these 25 years thousands of people got wounded by firing, shelling, torture, interrogation and many dread diseases erupted mostly neurological, psychological and mental diseases which cannot be stopped. Mental health experts of Srinagar believe that there had been a staggering increase in number of stress and trauma related cases in Kashmir and these psychological problems have also given rise to general health problems like diabetes, cardiac problems and hypertension (The News August 18, 2005). The psychiatric hospital of Srinagar is full of such patients.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

Another negative impact of conflict is human rights violation. The excessive presence of security forces on the one side and militants on the other side has resulted in human rights violation in Kashmir. There are draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Power Act AFSPA, Public Safety Act (PSA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act POTA which directly affects human rights.

Besides day to day curfews, crackdowns, arrests, interrogations, fake encounters, abductions and disappearance of youth have created a hell like situation in Kashmir. A large number of people are missing in this disputed territory which not only is a great problem to them but also a great havoc to their survivors. Recently a movie "Haider" was picturised over Kashmir in which Vishal Bhardwaj to some extent had dealt with true reality of Kashmir.

ARMED CONFLICT AND WOMEN

As discussed above, For the last two and a half decades, Kashmir valley has been the scene of conflict between Government and militants. Grenade attacks, shoot-outs, pressure from both sides have affected the daily lives of ordinary Kashmiris. Human rights abuses from both militants and government forces are reported in the form of arrests, killings, house to house searches, abductions and torture. Violent incidents could happen everywhere at any time and the risk of getting caught in the crossfire is always present. The ongoing violence, the constant threat and poor future perspective put a heavy strain on the natural coping mechanisms of the people in Kashmir. The armed conflict in the state of J & K has not only affected the lives of one section of society but all sections of population particularly women folk in some way or the other. Many women have become direct victims of this conflict, who have faced violence in the form of torture, assault, rape, humiliation etc. And others are indirectly affected by loss/death of their near and dear ones.

Though mostly men participate in conflict openly, women and children are the ones mostly affected of such conflict. Their exposure to spaces of violence may sometimes have over-reaching effects on their overall social functioning. In the last two decades the conflict is thought to have produced more than 18,000 widows and above 40,000 orphans in the state. This growing population of indigents has become one of the biggest challenges facing Kashmiri society and yet is an escalating tragedy that has not received due attention. Most of the widows prefer to remain single, even when remarriage is possible for the welfare of their children. In situations of armed conflict households are left without bread earners which directly affects the life of women and children-because in

Kashmir society women are dependent on their husbands or fathers; death or disappearance of men have serious consequences on them.

Another negative impact of widowhood is that once a woman become widow means complete isolation, loss of dignity and individual identity. In this situation they are frequently denied inheritance and property rights. How can a woman survive in such a situation? More commonly the widows remain psychologically under stress and economically dependent on the labor of their small children. When these orphan children become bread earners for their affected family how is education possible for them. In this age their shoulders were able to pick up school bag but they are given huge burden of supporting family. This affects the present as well as future life of these orphans and their dreams are shattered.

In most cases widow becomes the head of the family also. They have to perform roles like earning livelihood which were traditionally the domain of the males of the household. The death of their husbands brought unending economic miseries to them. The world of such many widowed women in Kashmir changed overnight following the death of their husband. The burden of responsibilities increases manifold as she had to arrange everything for the household. Many of them had to seek employment based on unskilled manual labor. Some of them become sweepers of schools or other institutions and others learnt art of embroidery, shawl work etc. During agricultural season most of them go for agricultural work in their own or other's fields and had to work shoulder to shoulder from morning to late evening with peasant men.

After the birth of militancy thousands of people have gone missing in Kashmir, particularly youth. Persons are picked upon suspicion by some agency (including militants) and their whereabouts are not revealed leading the mental trauma for the whole family. Most families with missing members have, despite repeated efforts, failed to find satisfactory explanations for the disappearances. In 1994, a group of these relatives formed the Association of Parents of Disappeared persons (APDP). They have since visited security officials, police stations, politicians, courts and prisons throughout India with photographs of sons, brothers, fathers and husbands, trying to settle the uncertainty surrounding the disappearances.

This disappearance of young men has led to the emergence of new section in society called "half widows". Half widows are those women who did not know whereabouts of their husbands, whether they will return or not, whether their husbands are in the clutches of Indian army or have been killed by militants. Women whose husbands have died and have seen the dead body are better placed than half widows. At least they reconcile to the

fact that their husbands are no more. Half widows' life is full of sorrows as they had to live in hope that their husbands might be alive and may return one day. Their life ends in wait and do not remarry. No one comes to their help and government is doing nothing for them.

Women in rural areas suffer more than anybody as incidents of violence go unreported there and also illiteracy being high there. Hundreds of Kashmiri women have been molested and raped in these disturbed decades which resulted in psychological trauma, insecurity and suicidal cases. Statistics reveal that during the era of conflict (17 years) suicides have become the second common mode of unnatural death besides death caused by gunfire and blast injury in Kashmir in armed conflict.

CONCLUSION

Subaltern school of historiography began to develop from 1970. It came up with the agenda of 'de-elitization' of historical writing. A section of historians all over the world declared that the existing historical books were written on a few individuals, who belonged to the upper strata of society. The majority of the society of the common people remained 'history-less' and had no place in history. The advocates of Subaltern school began to de-elitize historical writing and began to write the history of common people, history of the oppressed, and history from below. My topic is also based on this school of thought. As we know the history of women has always been neglected. Here it has been tried to highlight the plight of common women of Kashmir, impact of conflict on them and their problems. To conclude this research topic it is worth to say that conflict in Kashmir is a great burden for India, Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the whole of South Asia in general and a catastrophe for the women of Kashmir. Besides, thousands of people have lost their lives so it is very important to find a better solution for the conflict and relieve the people of the region from their day-to-day turmoil.

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