

## *HOW CONFLICT AFFECTS THE LIFE OF WOMEN OF KASHMIR- FROM A PATRIARCHAL ANGLE*

Atifa Naaz

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### **Introduction - Patriarchy and Conflict**

In casual usage, gender marks the biological sex of a person. Gender is more of a socially shaped phenomenon that distinguishes between the definition of masculinity and femininity. It is more of a societal hierarchy in which masculine characteristics are believed to be superior to feminine ones. It illustrates an unequal distribution of power between men and women. In all conflicts, social structures are under attack. Gender discrimination clarifies the role of men and women in society and also the social relationship between the two. The concept of war or armed conflicts is also a gendered one. This is common in many countries. These deep-rooted conflicts within and between countries are perennial and invincible. Mutual concurrence and agreements cannot be easily laid down. Violence and hostility has strengthened for decades worsening the possibilities of harmony in the future

Armed Conflicts have become quite a common sight across the globe in the twentieth century. These conflicts cause not only deaths at a large scale but substantial displacement, fear, destruction of natural resources, disruption of the economy, and above all a damaged self-esteem and dignity. Kashmir undoubtedly one of the most scenic places on earth also popularly known as “*Jannat*”[1], is now widely known for destruction, death, fear, and genocide in the name of so-called terrorism. The origination of the conflict of Kashmir dates back to colonialism when the British Raj sold the Kashmir to a Hindu Dogra King Ghulab Singh for Rs 75 lakhs under the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. To quell the mass rebellious movement of 1989 in Kashmir, the Indian Government brought around seven lac (7000,000) troops and

implemented various draconian laws like-AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), POTA (Prevention of Terrorist Activities), PSA (Public Safety Act), TADA (Terrorism and Disruptive Activities) and so on. These laws gave extra powers to the Indian military which resulted in various kinds of human rights violations in the valley[2]. Not to mention the perpetual heating between India and Pakistan. The quarrel over Kashmir has been the reason for the conflicts between India and Pakistan since both countries won their independence from Britain. Three wars have taken place as a result of conflict between the two countries, needless to mention that both of the nations are armed nuclear powers that add to the severe adversity of the wars. Article 370 was watered down several times before the decision of New Delhi to revoke article 370 to split the state into two union territories has caused a great deal of inconvenience and unfair treatment of the locals that deprived them of their differential ethnic identity and also was an example of India's asymmetric federalism. To ensure the order of law, countless manpower of armed forces were sent in and the entire state was tightened up rendering all forms of communications collapsed. The bottom line being Kashmir has been in a state of chaos for a very long history, with the lack of proper political order, Kashmiri people are prone to several vulnerabilities doing unimaginable harm to the women who are a major recipient of the harsh effects of conflict.

## Impact of Conflict on Kashmiri Women

The current state of the lives of women of Kashmir is deeply ingrained in its polity. Kashmiri women have always been an active part of society at large[3]. Most of it can be attributed to the benevolent patriarchal norms of the Kashmiri society[4]. The agitated Kashmir conflict, which is long pending for many years has delivered women as the most exceedingly awful victims. Women have been the most terrible victim of the conflict. They are sufferers of violence by state and non-state actors[5]. The cases of rape, molestation cases, enforced disappearances, and the number of half-widows, half-orphans, and orphans since 1989 bear testimony to the fact that women continue to suffer terribly. Violence has a long-lasting impact on women physically, psychologically, socially, and economically. The conflicts have paralyzed the entire social life of women depriving them of their basic rights like education and good health services. Apart from the prolonged life threat because of the Kashmiri conflict, they additionally face economic depravity. It seems to be women's voice is largely overshadowed by financial deficiencies. Women's smooth life transactions are heavily impacted by domestic violence, aggressive treatments for triviality, negative social attitudes, and increasing crimes

against them. Ever since the beginning of the conflict, Kashmir has witnessed a remarkably high incidence of violence in general and the rape of Kashmiri women by security forces in particular[6]. Although true data on rape in Kashmir are difficult to get, available information denotes that the act is prevalent. In a statement in Kashmir's Legislative Assembly in October 2013, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah affirmed registering more than 5000 cases of rape since 1989 armed rebellion against Indian rule began. According to the government reports a total of 1,326 rape cases have been registered in the state since 2006. In areas of the militant presence or activity rape by security forces functions as a tool of counter-insurgency to silence local resistance and destroy the morale of Kashmiri defiance.

Women have been subjected to harsh treatments in Kashmir for the last two decades from Indian Security forces as well as rebel groups. A survey done in 2005 concluded, "There can be no two opinions that the women of Kashmir for decades have been at the cutting edge and have been fighting constant battles against all kinds of injustice and crimes against humanity committed by the state and by some skeptical non-state actors". Even though violence has been a common issue in the region for several years, it has been hard to collect data on the number of women who have been the victims of rape and mostly murdered. Data of the number of women killed in the conflict, the dead, the missing, women widowed, raped women, children orphaned –all these differ broadly based on the place they belong to. Government data does not go with the statistics given by the human rights groups and activists. Despite the insufficiency of data, the bitter truth that women are being intensely physically and sexually abused and oppressed can't be over overshadowed.

The inert legal system is incapable to stop the exploitation of Kashmiri women and consequently, they are afraid to speak up. Turning women powerless could have a long-term devastating effect on the nation as a whole. Many of the victims are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and breathe in constant fear of attacks in the future.

## **Kashmir has a long way to go**

The testimony of these women gives us a hint of what life in Kashmir holds for the majority of women. They suffer abuses pointed at them by their family members as well.

Due to poor facilitation of services, women's literacy is quite disappointing. Therefore the majority of the women only have a very preliminary education. With marriage and kids enforced upon them, women become conditional to their husbands for living expenses and even their choices and opinions. Regretfully if their husband was captured or secretly went missing, the women were often left helpless and would be labeled as "*half widowed*". Such women are most prone to exploitation as they do not have a male guard as their protector,

which is a must in the Kashmiri Society.

The solution to the above-mentioned issues consists of an integrated and inclusive approach to the problem. Empowering women should be the first step towards this mission. Agency is crucial as it upskills women with economic and social skills that they can harness into positive changes in their own lives and society as a whole. The expanded outreach of women's agencies is one of the more ignored areas of development studies and most prominently needs to be addressed. Facilitating women's life can have unimaginable consequences. As women become a major part of the economic cycle, she grows more aware of the important concerns as education, health, marriage, birth- control, and beyond everything her rights. Being financially independent also tunes up the voice of a female figure in her household. Issues that adversely affect women can be given the front seat and dealt with effectively. Education being a basic right must be ensured to challenge a patriarchal society.

## References

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