



## **Women in Conflicting situation: A Study of Women Problems and issues in the region of J&K.**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The state of Jammu and Kashmir experienced the most difficult phase in modern history of India due to the more than one decade long armed conflict between the insurgents and the Indian security forces. Insurgency has brought catastrophic impact on the entire Jammu and Kashmir region. Due to insurgency there is large scale economic destruction, educational backwardness, mental and physical health related problems and diseases, human rights violations, breakdown of the social order etc. The insurgency has effected every section of the society especially women and children. They became the ultimate victims of this armed conflict. The armed conflict has created havoc in the lives of the women living in Kashmir. It has affected every aspect of their lives drastically.

**KEYWORDS:** Half widows, Mental health, Social stigma, Armed conflict, Violence.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The region of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has remained a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since independence (1947). It is a divided state, one-third of its region is controlled by Pakistan and the remaining two-third is within the jurisdiction of India. The dispute of the territory is basically that both the countries lay claim to the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. On the other side the people of Kashmir themselves have long been striving for independence and autonomy. At its core therefore, is a conflict that is both intrastate and interstate in nature.<sup>1</sup> Since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, this unresolved land and the people who live there have been at the root of constant tension between the world's most populous democracy, India, and its neighbour Pakistan. Global and regional implications aside, the instability and lack of any conclusive resolution to the political dispute have left the population of Kashmir divided and uncertain about their future.<sup>2</sup>

The armed conflict in Kashmir valley led to killings and displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure, and crumbling of support systems, etc. The general consequences of armed conflict in Kashmir are military harassment, deaths, human rights violation, loss of security, disrupted schooling, displacements and the like. Every section in the society was affected badly. The impact has put into challenge the major consequences for survival, development, health and overall well-being. Since 1989 when armed conflict started in the valley, property worth hundreds of thousands was raised to the ground or else destroyed. It led to social disorder, disorganization, educational backwardness, physical and mental health deterioration, mass psychological depression, mass humiliation and extreme helplessness and the degenerated cultural aggression. The conflict had resulted in loss of a significant number of people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Navlakha, Neha. 2009. Kashmir: The Clash of Identities. Beyond Intractability Project, the Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado. U.S.A.

<sup>2</sup>The Kashmir Conflict: Historical and Prospective Intervention Analysis. The Carter Centre. Nov 19-21, 2002

<sup>3</sup>Rather, A. Farooq. 2013. "Armed Conflicts in J&K and its impact on society: A case study of Kashmir valley". International journal of scientific and research publications, volume 3, issue 2, February 2013. ISSN 2250-3153 [www.ijsrp.org](http://www.ijsrp.org).



### **WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

Armed conflict is defined as the use of armed violence to resolve local, national or international disputes between individuals and groups that have a political, economic, cultural or social origin. Armed conflicts have drastic effects on the overall social fabric of the society. It devastates people, families, communities and nations. It not only obliterates the present, but also mutilates the futures. In situations of armed conflict communities as well as individuals are often affected in a way which destroys unity and solidarity of the social networks. Households are left without breadwinners, the livelihood of individuals is threatened and the safety of communities and the human rights of individuals are not preserved. Aside from physical and emotional trauma of these oppressive and deliberate actions, such events have long lasting effects upon the ability of these communities to recover in the wake of armed conflict. Kashmir conflict has continued for more than two decades now and shows little signs of ebbing, despite the fluctuating relations between India and Pakistan. The situation on-ground is still remains tense. This armed conflict has some unique hues. The long drawn armed conflict in Kashmir has immensely affected all the sections of society but women and children being more vulnerable are the worst sufferers.<sup>4</sup>

The dominant motif of women in violent conflict is the grieving mother. Yet, there are many faces of women in conflict in south Asia. Women have negotiated conflict situations by becoming citizens, heads of households; war munitions workers, prostitutes, producers of soldiers and war resisters, and political leader at the local and national levels. Although entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict, women and girls are particularly affected because of their peculiar status in society and their sex. Women increasingly bear the major burden of armed conflict. They experience armed conflict in a different way than men. These effects differ widely across cultures depending upon the role of women in particular societies. The women in Kashmir, whether Hindu or Muslim, have led a life of relentless sufferers; a life dictated by the patriarchal structures of Kashmiri society. Fighting a decadent system and society has been extremely hard for such women and the years of turmoil and violence affected the women of Kashmir in multiple ways, both directly and indirectly<sup>5</sup>.

They are, moreover, generally disadvantaged in terms of education and considerably less mobile because of their traditional role of caring for others. Furthermore, these inequalities continue after the cessation of hostilities. It was observed that armed conflict led to increase in domestic violence. Women are valued in Kashmir as markers of community identity, and the burden of preserving the cultural purity or Kashmiriyat falls on their bodies. Since women are seen as markers of community, identity, they are particularly vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse. Their vulnerability is heightened during times of conflict, and the battle among male contestants is mostly fought over women's bodies. Absence of organisations, both governmental and voluntary, working for women, at the grass root level, has worsened the plight of women. In the absence of female politicians, women's concerns and aspirations remain hostage to a male dominated Kashmiri polity and patriarchal militant leadership for whom gender is secondary. A great deal needs to be done to address the plight of women, where women

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<sup>4</sup> Bahadur, Bali.2017. Human Rights in India; Dalits, Women and Minorities. New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors.

<sup>5</sup> ibid



issues can be addressed. Women and girls receive far less education than man. Female education has been negatively affected by a general destruction of the educational infrastructure and the occupation of schools by the military. The situation is further exacerbated by the threat of sexual harassment and abuse of minor students by the militants. As direct consequences it affected the education of women.<sup>6</sup>

## **HALF WIDOWS:**

An important aspect of the problem of human rights violations in Kashmir valley is the emergence of the half widows. Majority of missing persons are men, which leaves a large number of women awaiting news that would decide their fate, living lives of half widows. A state like this results in a severe identity crisis amongst the women with the immense agony of not being sure whether they are still married or widowed.<sup>7</sup> Since 1989, the valley of Kashmir, due to political instability, has witnessed an exorbitant increase in the number of widows, half widows and orphans owing to increased intensity of turbulence.<sup>8</sup> Half widows are those women whose husbands disappeared in the shadow of violence and armed conflict and majority of half widows lives uncertain lives full of stigma, poverty and violence.

In the context of J&K, the half widows become the direct targets of disappearances. They have no source to sustain and to nourish their children. They undergo many hardships and come across many social and economic problems.<sup>9</sup> Living a miserable life under shadows of insecurity, helplessness and trauma, widows and orphans of the state have unending woes and agonies which can drive a normal human being to insanity. Since they form vulnerable group, it makes them ultimate sufferers in a conflict-torn situation prevailing in J&K. If anything happens in the society, particularly averse, it affects them badly. Say for example, if head of the family (usually earning hand) dies, its immediate impact is, his wife becomes a widow and children orphans. Their plight starts right from here.<sup>10</sup> In many cases half widows and their children are denied of any share from their husband's property by their in laws. In so many cases, remarrying is considered as a taboo and many half widows don't remarry because they think that one day their husbands will eventually come back. Many half widows do not remarry because they think that their second husbands may not accept their children from their first marriage.

In other words, the enforced disappearance of a single person can create multiple victims. Because Kashmir's cultural schema is subsumed within traditional gender roles and structural

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<sup>6</sup> Jan, gowsia & Dr Mir, Sofiya Hassan & Malik, Arif Hussain, 2016. "Women and Conflict Situation in Kashmir Post 1989: A Sociological Study of District Anantnag". Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 6, No. 4, April 2016, pp. 361-367. ISSN 2249-7315.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300372111>.

<sup>7</sup> "Reports of Independent People's Tribunal on Human rights violations in Kashmir", 2010, (20-21, Feb, 2010). Independent people's Tribunal. Human Rights Law Network, Srinagar.

<sup>8</sup> Rashid, Afsana. 2011. Widows and Half widows. New Delhi: Pharos Media and Publishing Pvt Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Parvez, Khuram. 2009. "From victims to healers- Psycho-moral support to the families of victims of Enforced Disappearance", APDP. Voice August 2009, Kashmir India. (afad-online.org/voice/aug\_2009/news\_features.html.)

<sup>10</sup> Rashid, Afsana. 2011. Widows and Half widows. New Delhi: Pharos Media and Publishing Pvt Ltd.



inequalities, the wives of the disappeared confront a plethora of overlapping harms-psychological, social, economic, and even political. Wives of the disappeared are often pushed out into public spaces, where they must become the sole breadwinner as well as the head of the household to feed her family. For many, this may mean entering the workforce for the first time in their lives. Most of these women are illiterate, inexperienced and lack skills, and have to take on low-paying jobs. Several are even forced to remarry within their husband's family- her husband's brother or cousin-for the sake of her children receiving her husband's share of the family property. Amidst socio-economic insecurity, some women struggle as single mothers refusing to remarry, believing that their disappeared husbands will come back one day, and whose children show manifestations of emotional trauma.<sup>11</sup>

## **SOCIO - ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

Violence has badly affected them physically, psychologically, socially and economically. Besides prolonged life threat due to Kashmir conflict, they also face economic depravity. It seems women's voice is largely overshadowed by financial deficiencies. Women's smooth life transactions are heavily impacted by domestic violence, aggressive treatments for trivial, negative social attitudes and increasing crimes against them. Ever since the beginning of the conflict, Kashmir has witnessed a remarkably high incidence of violence. By rendering women powerless, the long-term impacts are devastating. Many of the women who have experienced violence are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and live in constant fear of further attacks. This has led to an immense psychological burden carried by women. With access to birth control and abortion restricted, women have been gradually losing more of their freedoms. The patriarchal society has grown stronger with men having much more power and control over women's choices in dress, reproduction and marriage. The clear delineation of gender roles in Kashmiri society has further alienated women. When women disobey the orders given by men, they become victims of abuse and humiliation within their community and are completely segregated. Isolation has become a common practice in Kashmir. Women who are deemed bad are looked on scornfully by society and are segregated from the rest of the community. Due to the heavy fundamentalist influence, women who choose to wear jeans, makeup or not cover their heads are labelled as "fast women".<sup>12</sup>

Armed conflict has led to the emergence of female headed households in the valley of Kashmir. It has thrown women out of the traditional role structure and they have to perform roles like earning livelihood which were traditionally the domain of the males of the household. In most case of widows, the husbands were the main bread winners of their family. The death of their husbands brought unending economic miseries to them. The world of the many such widowed women in Kashmir changed overnight following the death of their husband. The burden of responsibilities on the widow increased manifold and she had to arrange everything for the house hold. Right from arranging food for the children and other members of the family she had to take care of the education of her children. Due to lack of education, many of them had to seek employment based on unskilled manual labour.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bhattacharya, Deya, 2016. The plight of Kashmiri Half Widows, Policy Report , No. 16, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy.

<sup>12</sup> Maqbool, Ouffee, 2017. "Impact of Conflict on Women in Kashmir". International Journal of Political Science and Development, Vol.5(3),pp.114-122,May2017, DOI:10.14662/IJPSD2017.017, ISSN:2360-784X, <http://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJPSD/Index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Qayoom, Farah, 2014. "Women and Armed Conflict: Widows in Kashmir". International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol.6(5), pp.161-168, May,2014, DOI:10.5897/IJSA2013.0512, ISSN 2006-988X, <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJSA>



## **WOMEN AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

Terrorism is the biggest problem in present days, which badly affect people's physical, mental, psychological health as well as social life. Terrorism in Kashmir has taken a heavy toll by increasing every individual of society and ruined their everything including Kashmiri people's physical, mental, social, and psychological wellbeing badly. Terrorist activities like killing people, suicide bombing etc results in emotional distortion, mental imbalance, feeling of insecurity, fear, economic instability, PTSD and anxiety among kashmiri people. Bomb attacks, cross firing, pressure from both army and militants have badly affected the life of people in Kashmir. Terrorist attacks are the means for causing mentally traumatic situations which affects the mental health of an individual. Before 1990 major depressive disorders in Kashmir were usually found among middle aged women .But in present women with age group of 14 to 18 years have experienced an alarming increase in panic, stress, or anxiety disorders.<sup>14</sup>

The depression is considered as the mostly important feature of mental health. It has been observed by many experts that majority of women in Kashmir face depression at individual and collective level. According to some unofficial expert, every family in the valley has one or more cases of depression due to violence. Similarly, stress, strain and tension have emerged other common factors of mental health among females after armed conflict got introduced in Kashmir. The perpetual tension was a permanent phenomenon for common people in Kashmir for the last two decades. This was mainly because of the continuous harassment and torture faced by the women folks due to insurgency sand the armed conflict. Anxiety also emerged as a grave social psychological problem in Kashmir after, under counter insurgency measures, an offensive and aggressive policy of catch and kill of insecurity among all individuals and families. The security consciousness developed in this background contributed to mass level anxiety among kashmiris. In highly depressing and stressful situation in Kashmir, a negative but strong trend of committing suicides by young males and females emerged with disastrous consequences, this has happened in all age sex groups, all rural urban areas, and among all socio-economic classes.<sup>15</sup>

Side by side with mental health problems, physical health deterioration in Kashmir could not be avoided among women due to the conflict situation. Consequently the normal public health became a dream. In the conflict ridden society of Kashmir some dreaded diseases with dangerous implications emerged recently especially among the women folks in Kashmir. In an informal estimate, it was revealed that there was a surge in neurological, cardiological, oncological, hypertension and cancer related diseases among women living in Kashmir region.<sup>16</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The violence in the trouble torn valley of Kashmir has taken a heavy toll by influencing each and every individual of the society and has ruined their everything, including psychological health. Apart from resulting in the death of thousands, conflict has resulted in emotional distortion of people, mental imbalance, feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, and economic instability among Kashmiri

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<sup>14</sup> Wani,Mohd.Wani,2014. "Study of Mental Health among the People affected by Terrorism in Kashmir". International Journal of Social Science and Language, Oct, Nov, Dec-2014,Vol-01 Issue-01 (67-72), ISSN: 2393-9982, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313285588>.

<sup>15</sup> Dabla.B.A. 2011.Social Impact of Millitancy in Kashmir. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

<sup>16</sup> ibid



people.<sup>17</sup> The armed conflict on Kashmir has touched lives of all people living in the valley in some way or the other. Though, many women have become direct and indirect victims of the conflict. They have faced violence indirectly in the form of death and disappearances of the dear ones or directly by being the victims of torture, rape etc. there is no denying fact that women in Kashmir have suffered immensely because of the armed conflict that have been plaguing their lives for two decades. Women are deliberately targeted in the war torn regions, they are being beaten, mutilated, sexually abused etc.<sup>18</sup>

Whenever there has been conflict, women and children have been known to receive the hard end of the stick. Women and children are often the most vulnerable and prone to being hit the hardest. They are faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter in what is in most instances destroyed infrastructure for their children and their families. Many women are left widowed. All dimensions of women's life such as education, overall development, social life and health are being impacted due to continued conflict in the Kashmir valley. The unpredictability that prevails over their homes, hearths and lives is gut wrenching. Women are seen as victims of conflict that need to be protected and kept safe rather than agents of change for peace. Because of such views and sentiments, the elimination of violence against women in conflict prone areas continues to pose challenges. Women must begin to play a significant and major part in peace talks and post conflict reconstruction and they should be empowered to be less of victims and onlookers and instead to take steps against gender violence.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hassan,Asima & Shafi, Aneesa,2012. "Attitude towards mental illness in Kashmir". International NGO Journal, Vol. 7(4), pp. 73-77, November 2012, DOI: 10.5897/INGOJ12.019, ISSN 1993-8225, <http://www.academinjournals.org/INGOJ>.

<sup>18</sup> Bahadur,Bali.2017. Human Rights in India; Dalits, Women and Minorities. New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors.

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