

## IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON KASHMIRI WOMEN

**Roohul Amin Malik<sup>1</sup> and Subzar Ahmad Bhat<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Centre for International Politics, School of International Studies, Central University of Gujarat, India.

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Centre for Gandhian Thought and Peace Studies, School of Social Sciences, Central university of Gujarat, India.

E-mail: 1malikroohul@gmail.com, 2subzarbhat00@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*This paper has focused on two major questions; how does armed conflict impact the lives of Kashmiri women? And, what kind of problems are those women facing? Armed conflicts have created problems everywhere in the world and Kashmir is not an exception in it. In Kashmir, women have suffered a lot in comparison to the men. The worsening situations of many families occurred by this conflict have increased the number of traumatic patients. Apart from humiliation and rapes, women in Kashmir have suffered psychologically as well. Thousands of women in this conflict lead region are mentally depressed with the suppression. Militancy and armed conflict have taken a heavy toll of life and public property besides throwing normal life out of gear. Due to the instability in this region, women in Kashmir face much humiliation. The trauma patients are rising day after day. One section of this paper examine the increasing role of widows and their economic and social lives. It would also examine the factors that lead to sufferings and humiliations of widows. There are hundreds of disappearance cases in Kashmir as well. Every year parents, relatives, and other family members of the disappeared persons protest on the International day of the disappeared 30<sup>th</sup> August. Still, the pain of their wards has not reduced in them. The study has focused on the life of those mothers, widows and their families who have suffered due to the disappearances of their siblings. A fear of distress in the minds of women has created their lives very pathetic. Women are always in the trauma of uncertainties.*

**Keywords:** : Armed Conflict, Violence, Kashmiri women, Pain, Disappearances, and Trauma etc.

### Introduction

Armed conflicts have created problems everywhere in the world and Kashmir is not an exception in it. The worsening situations of many families occurred by this conflict have increased the number of traumatic patients. Apart from humiliation and rapes, women in Kashmir have suffered psychologically as well. Thousands of women in this conflict lead region are mentally depressed with the suppression and oppression. Militancy and armed conflict have taken a heavy toll of life and public property besides throwing normal life out of gear. Due to the instability in this region, women in Kashmir face much humiliation. The trauma patients are rising day after day. The international community commemorates 30th of August as the International day of the Disappeared every year. Kashmir, that has witnessed thousands of enforced disappearances, is remembering this day with a renewed appeal to international community to force India to disclose information about the enforced disappearances (Zargar, 2017). In international human rights law, an enforced disappearance (or involuntary disappearance) occurs when a person is secretly arrested, abducted,

detained or is deprived of his liberty by the state or its agents with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state followed by a refusal to acknowledge the person's fate and whereabouts, with the intent of placing the victim outside the protection of the law. The definition is wide enough to cover the enforced disappearances committed by State as well as non-state actors (Ibid).

However, the Valley is under siege. The basic rights of individuals like right to life, liberty and property are at great risk. For John Locke, the most influential of enlightenment thinkers, it's the protection of these three basic individual rights (life, liberty and property) that motivated people to overcome the inconvenience of the 'state of nature' and enter into peaceful political state. John Locks predecessor, Thomas Hobbes pointed out that "my mother gave birth to twins: myself and fear." Since 1990 the Kashmiri people were born under a similar threat. Therefore, the Hobbesian ruthless "state of nature" finds a perfect resonance in the Kashmir valley where the life of individual is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (copied from Padder, 2017). Consequently, everything considered abnormal in valley like killings, custodial disappearance, rapes, mass graves, unknown

graves, and extrajudicial killings, and fake encounters, political assassinations from both state and non-state actors. In this context, as pointed out by Saman Zulfqar that “In pursuance of their right to self-determination, people of Kashmir have been facing grave human rights violations. It is reported that since the rise of freedom struggle in Kashmir in 1989, around 100,000 people have been killed (mostly young people), and around 1,000 have disappeared. To date, 135,657 civilians have been arrested; 22,819 women widowed; 10,283 women gang raped; and 107,577 children orphaned” (Zulfqar, 2016: 57). As pointed out by Lubna Mohiuddin that “The atrocities and excesses, which include firings on civilians, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, tortures, burning of houses and gang-rapes have been extensively documented by various human rights organizations” (Mohiuddin, 1997: 75-76).

### **Armed Conflicts and Women in the world**

The nature of wars and conflicts has been changed. According to the common statistics 80-90 per cent of the victims of the First World War were from the military. But in recent conflicts 90 per cent of the victims are seen to be civilians. It has also been seen that the victims of the recent conflicts have been mostly women and children (UNRISD, 2005). Charlotte Lindsay, 2004, in his book “*Women as Victims, Fighters, and Survivors of War*” quotes that “Women experience the conflict differently than men, so their needs differ both during and after the conflict. Conflict affects the women according to their age, context (rural or urban women), support networks (whether they together with their families and communities or not, and position in the conflict (displaced persons, politician, head of the house or combatant)”.

Since the ancient times, sexual assault and rape were used in conflict zones. However, in the recent times it gained much attention. The attention of the media and women organizations regarding this issue was first drawn in the news by the mass rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 (Amnesty International 2007). Using rape as weapon of war has also been used in Afghanistan, Algeria, East Timor, Liberia, Uganda, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and elsewhere. The forms of sexual violation also differ and can be extreme. Like as rape and torture of women in front of her husbands and other family members, use of

rifles and other thing for insertion, rape of pregnant women, the mutilation of breasts and other organs, mass rapes and other atrocities against women (UNRISD, 2005).

To count the cases of rapes in an area is not easy to obtain, due to the deep feeling of shame occurred to the victims. The victims also fear the community and public reactions. Most of the Iraqi women, who were raped during war times, have faced divorces and few were killed (Kuloglu, 2008). Reports are that women were not only sexually assaulted and raped by the enemy soldiers, but were also suffered by UN peacekeepers and people working for non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in those areas. African refugee girls were sexually assaulted and raped in the Liberia, Guinea and Sierra. Women were also sexually abused and raped by the UN peace keepers in Somalia, Kosovo, Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia and Bosnia (Carreiras and Gerhard Kummel's eds., 2008).

### **Understanding the Armed Conflict in Kashmir**

Kashmir conflict is considered to be one of the most long standing and intractable conflicts in the world. It is an international and unresolved conflict between India and Pakistan. Actually it is the conflict, which involves both inter-state as well as intra-state nature of conflict. This conflict, remains as a struggle for land and for the right to self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir to decide their political feature (Bhat, 2017: 8). In this regard, Kashmir valley has not seen semblance of normalcy since 1947, more so from 1989. The present condition with respect to gross human rights violations at the hands of Indian military forces, denial of political and civil liberties has become grim and alarming. The indiscriminate use of lethal weapons, bullets, pellet guns, pava shells to contain public rallies while chanting slogans for right to self-determination, has become a routine matter. Civilians are mercilessly killed, arrested, blinded, bruised and molestation of Kashmiri woman is used a war weapon by Indian forces. Kunal Mukherjee observes that “Kashmir is one of the most militarized conflict zones in the world. The stationing of the Indian military and paramilitary forces in the region has only exacerbated the situation since it is the security personnel who cause much of the problem. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act gives these security forces extraordinary powers in the region, which they often abuse. The armed forces have no

real understanding of the local culture or sympathy for local religious sentiments. Poverty, corruption, administrative failure, police brutality, identity politics and human rights abuses are some of the key features associated with this conflict” (Mukherjee, K. 2014: 44).

The conflict in Kashmir started gaining momentum in early 1980's. Many issues and problems including the governance problems, narrow political interests of union and state governments, social, political, and communal mobilization of Kashmiri society converged in the late 1980's. The elections of 1987 lit the spark in the conflict. This election is known as the most unfair elections in the history of Jammu & Kashmir. After the 1987 unfair elections the conflict of Kashmir merged with the conflict in Kashmir and it leads to an armed conflict. The armed conflict in Kashmir, however, was not massive. Initially lead by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), there was a rapid change in the principle actors and their objectives. The JKLF lead by Yasin Malik and javid Mir fought for an independent, but secular Kashmir. The hedging of Kashmir with Pakistan was never its objective. Other outfit of the JKLF in Pakistan occupied Kashmir was led by Amanullah Khan, who believe in the unification of Kashmir with the Pakistan (Suri and Chandran, 2010).

The second face of the armed conflict in the early 1990s was overtaken by the Hizbul Mujahideen, the JKLF became the main causality. During this period JKLF distances itself from the Pakistan. Afghan Mujahideen and the JKLF militants started war against the security forces. Neither union governments nor the state governments learned lessons from the previous situations after the unfair election and the emergence of militancy in valley. In 1996 elections were held after a decade. The NC got the majority and formed government in the J&K. During this period Lashkar-e- Toiba (LeT) a Pakistan base militant organization entered in the valley. This organization overcomes the Hizbul Mujahideen, the local militant outfit. It also gave the slogan of freedom of Kashmir from the Indian domination and the establishment of Islamic Kashmir. This provides a new impetus to the armed conflict by a series of fidayeen attacks (Ibid).

The principle actors in the armed conflict of J&K include both state actors –India and Pakistan and the armed non state actors. The third principle actors in the conflict are all the successive state governments that have been accused of mis-

governance, corruption, and lack of accountability. All the three major parties came with their slogans like as NC came with the demand of autonomy to J&K, PDP came with the demand of healing touch and the congress came with the slogan of cross-LoC interactions. Non state actors like among them Hizbul Mujahedeen fights for political objectives and its focus are limited to J&K. Hizbul Mujahedeen's Abdul Majid Dar who was later killed in an internal power struggle within the Hizbul, had in 2000 announced a unilateral ceasefire and entered into a dialogue with the union government. He state that the outfit would cooperate in a peace process with the Indian government. For Lashkar, Kashmir is a means to achieve their broader objective of establishing the Islamic sharia in Kashmir. It is a group which mainly focuses mainly in the pan Islamic objectives.

### **Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in Kashmir**

The seventy years long armed conflict has taken a heavy toll in Kashmir. There is not a single family that has not suffered directly or indirectly due the violence in valley. Not a single village is there that has not being destructed in one way or the other. The armed conflict has also taken a huge toll of the Indian armed forces as well. Thousands of soldiers and paramilitary personnel have been wounded in the fighting. More than one lake people have been killed in the valley due to the armed conflict. Thousands have been disappeared. As per Association of disappeared persons (APDP), a non-govt. voluntary organization representing the families of victims, the total number of persons who have disappeared involuntarily are estimated to be in the range of 10,000 people till date (Zargar, 2017). These disappeared persons are those persons who have left their homes some times to join militants without informing their parents. Some have been killed in the torture centers of the security forces. Their bodies have been dumped in lakes or buried in remote areas without informing their families. Civilians have been used by both the militants as well as Indian armed forces as human shields (Ramachanran and Siddharat Mallavarapu, 2010: 34-35).

Today, Parveena Ahanger the well-known “Iron Lady of Kashmir”, who searches for her son since January 1990, has extended the search for the disappeared sons of hundreds of other mothers like

herself. In 1996 Parveena founded the Association for Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). Since, then APDP has more than three hundred members like Parveena whose sons or wards have been disappeared. When a boy goes missing, she advises his parents on the course of action they should take. She accompanies them to the police station and helps them file a complaint. She has led hundreds of demonstrations seeking information about boys who have been disappeared after being taken by the security forces for interrogation, meaning greater accountability from the state (Ramachanran and Siddharat Mallavarapu, 2010: 46-47). The miseries of these families whose sons, husbands, fathers and sometimes the only bread winner of the family cannot be expressed easily. In some interviews to the local media many of the families have shared their somehow feelings and emotions after their wards have been disappeared. However, they are very emotional to lessen. The heart crumbles after hearing their miserable stories of lives since their family members have disappeared.

Rape of a woman is far more widespread than killing of men during the conflict. Rape has often used as a weapon of war to punish, humiliate and intimidate. Raping a woman is not just about assaulting or punishing her; it is about humiliating and demoralizing her family, community and nation. As a UNICEF report 1996, points out, 'sexual violation of women erodes the fabric of a community in a way that few weapons can. Rapes damage can be devastated because of the strong communal reaction to the violation and pain stamped on the entire family. The harm inflicted on such cases on a woman by a rapist is an attack on her family and culture, as in many societies women are viewed as repositories of a community's cultural and spiritual values (Ibid.).

Women survivors of rape suffered social death as did the women of Kunan Poshpora. On the night of 23 February 1991, reportedly more than seventy women of this village were raped by the Fifth Rajputana Rifles during the search operations. Other rape cases like as in shopian rape case in 2008 that was reportedly from public views done by Indian armed forces near the site. In this incident, two women Asiya and Nelofer were first raped then drowned to the nearby river. Many other cases that have not been reported and highlighted have also been happened by the armed forces. Most of those victims have remained unmarried and even are seen with the immoral eyes by the villagers. Women are

therefore not only the victims of sexual violence but, of social ostracism as well (Ramachandran, 2001). Even if a long period of time has passed women still suffer from those assaults.

Kashmiri women across the religious divide feel that the conflict has restricted their movement. Violence, curfews, army's behavior and decreased mobility have restricted the girls of rural areas from the education, because the parents are worry of their daughter's safety during the distances of their schools and colleges. Even in cities girls complain during interviews that their life is restricted to schools and homes due to the armed conflict (Ramachanran and Siddharat Mallavarapu, 2010).

The armed conflict in Kashmir has impact the lives of all the people in the Kashmir valley in some way or the other. It devastated people, families, societies and nations. Therefore, the impact of armed conflict on women living in a conflict zone leads to a variety of social and physical problems. Women are more exposed to insecurity because they are pre-occupied with the children and they cannot run away to safety. Such a situation approximately fits for the Kashmir valley. The Kashmiri women have been going through these traumatic conditions for last few decades of conflict. The particular armed conflict has created a situation of tremendous fear and uncertainty in the lives of women in Kashmir valley. Stress, depression, trauma, spontaneous abortions and miscarriages among Kashmiri women are common (Shamsirfan, 2015). As stated by Farah Qayoom that the Kashmiri women have become direct or indirect victims of this particular conflict. They have faced violence either indirectly in the form of loss of near and dear ones or become the direct victims of torture, assault and so on (Qayoom 2014: 161).

Furthermore, Soudiya Qutab pointed out that the armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has given rise to a category of women known as 'half-widows'. These are women whose husbands have gone missing in the on-going armed conflict since twenty years in the region (Qutab, 2012: 255). Moreover as stated by Ouffee Maqbool that: "The unsettled Kashmir conflict which is long pending since decades has rendered women as worst sufferers. Women are the worst sufferers of the conflict. They are sufferers of violence by state and non-state actors. The number of rape, molestation cases, enforced disappearances and the number of half-widows, half orphans and orphans since 1989 bear witness to the fact that women continue to

suffer immensely. Violence has badly affected them physically, psychologically, socially and economically” (Maqbool, 2017: 115).

Living in conditions of tension and prolonged conflict has put women under severe emotional pressure. A gynecologist in Srinagar says that stress has affected menstrual patterns. Kashmiri girls are getting puberty early and women in the 35-40 years of age groups are showing signs of menopause. The most common problem is depression, followed by anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosomatic illness. Domestic violence has increased in those families where boys have joined militancy. Indian forces use violent methods to deal with such families. Sometimes Indian forces ransacked their properties, injured the militants brothers, sisters, parents and sometimes their relatives also feel the pain of violence by forces. An alarming increase in the women suicide attempts have been reported from Kashmir. In 1995, only 12 cases of attempted to suicide were registered in the government hospitals. The number of suicide attempts was increased to over one hundred in 1998. And it was found that seventy per cent of the cases were of women (Ramachandran, 2001).

Ilmas, Futehally and semu bhatt, In their book “*Cast of Conflict Between India and Pakistan*” 2004: 66-67, wrote that the number of patients visiting the hospitals for psychiatric diseases in Srinagar is surging from 775 in 1985 to 1762 in 1990, 17584 in 1994 and 43, 652 in 2002. Two to three cases are registered per day in the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital and Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Srinagar. Seventy five per cent of the cases of attempting to suicide are in the age group of 16-25 years.

Kashmiri women have suffered much on account of the violence and bloodshed over the past twenty to twenty five years in this disputable region. The gun culture and lawlessness, the creeping religious conservatism and economic uncertainty have clearly conspired against them. They see themselves as the conflicts worst victims. Women use words like nuksan (loss), barbadi (destruction) and dukh hi dukh (nothing but sorrow) to describe their experiences of the armed conflict. Even those who believe that the militancy was partially positive admit that it has been an enormous human cost. Hamdia Bano, a lecturer at university of Kashmir, pointed out that militancy has taken a

heavy toll; it has left us exhausted (Ramachanran and Siddharat Mallavarapu, 2010).

### Conclusion

United Nations reports have claimed that in recent armed conflicts, 90 per cent of the victims are seen to be civilians. It has also been seen that the victims of the recent conflicts have been mostly women and children. Due to the Armed conflicts people have suffered everywhere in the world and Kashmir has not been an exception to it. The principle actors in the armed conflict of J&K include both state actors –India and Pakistan and the armed non state actors such as militant groups. The armed conflict in Kashmir has impacted the lives of all the people in the valley in some way or the other. With the armed conflict in Kashmir valley, a huge toll of the Indian armed forces had lost their lives. Thousands of soldiers and paramilitary personnel have been wounded in the encounter fighting’s. More than one lake people have been killed in the valley due to the armed conflict. Thousands have been disappeared. Women survivors of rape suffered social death, as did the women of Kunan Poshpora, a village in Kashmir. Kashmiri women across the religious divide feel that the conflict has restricted their movement. The Kashmiri women have been going through these traumatic conditions for last few decades of conflict. The particular armed conflict has created a situation of tremendous fear and uncertainty in the lives of women in Kashmir valley. Stress, depression, trauma, spontaneous abortions and miscarriages among Kashmiri women are common.

The armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has given rise to a category of women known as ‘half-widows’. Those are women whose husbands have gone missing in the on-going armed conflict since last twenty years in the region. Living in conditions of tension and prolonged conflict has put women under severe emotional pressure. Kashmiri girls are getting puberty early and women in the 35-40 years of age groups are showing signs of menopause. The most common problem is depression, followed by anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosomatic illness. An alarming rate of women suicides are also reported from the Kashmir valley. In nut shell, Kashmiri women have suffered much on account of the violence and bloodshed over the past twenty to twenty five years in this disputable region. The gun culture and lawlessness, creeping

religious conservatism and economic uncertainty have clearly conspired against the women.

### References

1. Bhat, S (2017). "The Cost of Conflict", Greater Kashmir, copied from: <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/opinion/the-cost-of-conflict/242048.html>.
2. Carreiras, Helena. Women in the Military and in Armed Conflict. Edited by Gerhard Kümmel. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften/GWV Fachverlage GmbH, Wiesbaden, 2008.
3. <http://epaper.greaterkashmir.com/Details.aspx?id=5461&boxid=133618293>
4. Kuloglu, Ceyda. "Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones." Women in the Military and in Armed Conflict (2008): 227-238.
5. Lindsey, Charlotte. "Women as Victims, Fighters and Survivors of War." Vlachova/Biason 2004 (2004): 22-37.
6. Maqbool, O. (2017). "Impact of Conflict on Women in Kashmir" International Journal of Political Science and Development, 5(3), 114-122.
7. Mohiuddin, L. (1997). Human Rights Violations: A Case Study of Kashmir. Pakistan Horizon, 50(2), 75-97.
8. Mukherjee, K. (2014). The Kashmir conflict in South Asia: voices from Srinagar. Defense & Security Analysis, 30(1), 44-54.
9. Padder, S. (2017). Kashmir: Dialogue and Deadlock, Greater Kashmir, <http://epaper.greaterkashmir.com/home.aspx>.
10. Qayoom, F. (2014). 'Women and Armed Conflict: Widows in Kashmir'. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 6(5), 161.
11. Qutab, S. (2012). Women victims of armed conflict: Half-widows in Jammu and Kashmir. Sociological Bulletin, 61(2), 255-278.
12. Shamsirfan, (2015). "Hurriyat Report: Impact of Conflict on Women". Kashmir Life, copied from: <http://kashmirlife.net/hurriyat-report-impact-of-conflict-on-women-73785/>
13. Suri, Kavita and D. Suba Chandran, (2010), "J&K: From Militancy to Jihad in D. Suba Chandran and P. R. Chari's (eds.) Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2009: Continuing Violence's, Failing Peace Processes, New Delhi:Routledge.
14. UNRISD, Gender Equality. "Striving for Justice in an Unequal World." Geneva: UNRISD (2005).
15. Zargar, Abdul, Majid, (2017), "Kashmir and Enforced Disappearances Day", in Kashmir Watch, accessed on 27-10-2017. <http://kashmirwatch.com/kashmir-and-enforced-disappearances-day/>.
16. Zulfqar, S (2016). "Kashmir: Nature and Dimensions of the Conflict", Journal of Current Affairs, 1(1&2), 51-65.