



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Psychology

FOOTPRINTS OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT (NARRATING WOMEN'S PERPETUALLY ALTERING ROLES IN KASHMIR)

KEY WORDS: Kashmir
Feminism
Conflict
Protests

Dhāār Mehak Majeed*

Research Scholar Department of Economics, University of Kashmir *Corresponding Author

Zahid Gulzar

Assistant Professor Department of Higher Education

ABSTRACT

The women whom we today see as the symbol of resistance and perseverance do not stand over the milestone of such nomenclatures out of nowhere. They have their own stories about the journeys they have made from time to time and continuously. This paper traces the path women living in this part of the world have walked all throughout up until now. The starkest fact about the timing of this paper is the odd timing of its composition. This paper is an endeavour of writing at a time when the conflict is perpetual, still existent, afresh and changing forms and manifestations to attain the goal of accomplishment. Women in Kashmir have seen a lot of hardship all throughout and are getting to face and brave the same with the difference of changing the face of adversity with each changing day. The paper begins the outlining of footprints from the Dogra Rule and traversing through the days of realization of the Naya Kashmir Manifesto. The paper goes on to see how the 1970s were different from 1950s and 60s. The paper goes on to study the radical changes and happenings of the 1980s and all throughout we see the position and condition of women in the changing forms of political conflict. The paper studies the impact of state-sponsored feminism on the young women of the land and how it all came down in the midst of the peak of its success. The paper concludes by acknowledging the strong part whether documented or undocumented women have been playing in the freedom movement of Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

As the whole course of understanding has it, the male population becomes the direct confronters of the conflict and at the same time, the first spell of victimization falls on them. Having a history of ascribed power and patriarchy, men are supposed to be at the forefront of the events that require the display and usage of physical power (Banerjee S., 2004). Exposure of this kind puts men directly under all the direct consequences of conflict. The range is vast; from death, at gun-shot to exile, all the proximities remain open during the times of conflict.

In Kashmir as the discord and discontent about the absence and delay of plebiscite grew and no approaching solution was visible, the rage took a stronger form and armed militancy came to the forefront during the latter part of the 1980s (Kanjwal, 2018). More and more men joined in the activities of conflict. Some died fighting while others got to bear the oppression and punishment inflicted by the state. As the summation of the result, men in Kashmir got a huge set back in terms of life and living.

This put the mothers, wives, and girls of 1980s and 1990s at an ugly sorrowful position. The macro-dynamics on the economic and women empowerment front that were showing positive outcomes with a growth rate corresponding geometric progression up until the early 1980s were drastically turning unfavorable (Bhan, 2016). Educational institutes were closed down for a considerable time and at the same time, women education was discouraged. Given the fear and hysteresis prevalent at that time, it was considered favorable to marry off girls as early as possible.

Despite the setback that female education got abruptly, their contribution in a demanding plebiscite and later freedom from all sorts of oppression and human rights violation remained high. Whatever the time commanded, these women provided. Kashmir conflict has had the first indirect impact on the household and thus on the lives of women (Banerjee N., 1998). It has impacted the economy, children and social life but the patience and perseverance of women in overcoming all these hurdles can't be challenged. As the available literature and memory of the contemporaries reveal, women association has always been creative and passionate.

METHODOLOGY

Literature Review
Semi-Structured Interview(s)

THE DOGRA RULE

Nothing was pleasant about the Dogra rule. The ruler, after all, had purchased the land we all come from. It was his property and he held the charge of enjoying himself and leaving a luxurious legacy to his progeny. In the same wake, the statistics that are already scanty and almost in-extant portray a dark grim picture. The condition of Kashmiri Muslims was worse than the Pandit counterparts (Chatterjee, 1989). Literacy level among Muslims during the 1940s was approximately 1.6% and for females, the number hardly rose above zero.

Illiteracy thus forms the characteristic number one of the female folks during the Dogra period in the history of Kashmir. Women from marginalized communities and backgrounds had little choice of staying indoors all the times. To make the ends meet they had to work. Work ranging from menial jobs to menial jobs itself. Their poverty and destitute found no solace and no end.

The high-class women known as the "Khandani" women in Kashmir have seen the confinement of four walls. It was highly looked down upon them if they stepped outside their homes that too without a male counterpart accompanying them (Abdullah, 2005). Leaving the house was the last resort when some immediate need or emergency arose. Leaving had to be made in a burqa (veil) with even the eyes covered with the netted eyes carved from the cloth. The lives of Kashmiri women were spent catering to household chores, raising up the children and looking after old.

Young girls would play in their homes until the basic understandings developed in them. Once they reached the minimum threshold of the understandable age, it was proxy for marriageable age and the girls married off. Girl education was looked down upon and was taken as a socially unacceptable thing. Once married, the girl was shifted from her parents' home to that of her in-laws. Whatever the circumstances and challenges in the second home, they were expected to bear it all and focus on their life there forever.

Women depended completely on what their husbands provided. There was no concept of empowerment and self-helping (Khan, 2010). Women were taught to be happy and content in what was provided to them. It was unacceptable to raise a voice or a question. The finest of the woman was the one who cared least about herself and dedicated her life completely to the family and household. The life was not easy but it didn't seem as though, the reason for the same being that there was no finer measuring rod with which women could compare themselves. Each member of

the second sex was sailing more or less in the same boat of submission and obedience.

THE NAYA KASHMIR MANIFESTO

Sheikh Abdullah's own ideology corresponded with the ideology of the party he created and the same was reflected in the pamphlet titled "Naya Kashmir Manifesto". Based on the Soviet-style model the main pillars of the formidable ideology were socialism, secularism and the notion of a welfare state (Zutshi, 2004). As the envisioned Kashmir was as per the manifesto, women constituted half of the workforce and thus needed to find the way out from their courtyards. The policies of the government if explained in one go can be summed up as the "state-sponsored feminism".

To target the plan well and implement it in full vigor huge focus was put on the education of women. Up until the time sending girls to schools was looked down upon, no one in the neighborhood found it to be a good idea. Girls were seen best in the roles of homemakers and were supposed to show all their creativity and efficiency in running the household. With the government working on the grass-root level, girls from comparatively elite backgrounds started to join the schools. Female education got the kink and the acceleration was all set to put the buzz in motion (Mufti, 1994).

After the school education gained some momentum, it was felt that colleges for women were inexistent. Already parents were unwilling to send their daughters for further education, a college in which boys study would be totally an unacceptable place. It was eventually in 1950 that the Women's College MA Road was set. To incentivize families and boost parents, it was promised on the part of the government that teaching jobs will be provided to females who finish graduation and later on the criteria was changed and shifted in favor of a university degree.

THE MAIDEN WOMEN'S COLLEGE

A miniature universe set to reflect the vision of the National Conference for one and to create competent female folk for two came in the form of Women's College MA Road in 1950. Initially, a number of teachers in the college were either men or outsiders as women education was still in its infancy. The college began to work efficiently. The dream of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was worked upon day in and day out.

Girls were getting an education. They were taking an active part in sports. Co-circulars like drama, music, and acting were worked upon simultaneously (Mattoo, 2002). Library in the college increasingly became a cherished place for the girls. From coming out of homes to reading about visionaries and ideas, the women folk increasingly became aware.

Social service as a part of normal college routine was increased. Once a week girls would go out with their professors to rural areas and marginalized communities. They would spread awareness among families in general and women in particular. These seemingly simple things went on a long way in making natives and locals realize that women education was actually a good thing. Not only did it bring awareness to the female studying for herself but it could be translated into a better awareness opportunity for the household and society at a bigger level.

After a point in time, some girls wanted to pursue a university education and this is what exactly the state-sponsored feminism intended to do. Eventually, those interested were sent to Aligarh Muslim University for a period of two years. One important and interesting account of the said times is provided by Shamla Mufti in her paper "Chilmam say Chaman". She was one among the students sent to AMU for a master's degree. She later served as a lecturer in Women's college M A Road and was then sent as the maiden principal of Women's College Nawakadal in 1960.

From its inception through the decade of the 1960s, the college bustled with activity and progress. The former staff of the college bears testimony to the translation of the vision of Naya Kashmir into a practical reality (Butalia, 2002). The enrolment rates

increased and more girls began to excel in education and seek higher levels of academic attainments. Apart from traveling the dichotomous route from home to college and reverse, girls began to visit places of historic and aesthetic significance with the college. Their visions kept on broadening and understanding increases.

THE AIR OF CHANGE

One stark difference as affirmed by many academicians and contemporaries is that this growth in female literacy and awareness in Kashmir happened in the absence of any organized Women's movement in the state. The reasons for this primarily are ascribed to the state-sponsored feminism (Misri, 2002). The education of women came as a government policy instead of a mass awareness of people.

The political issues, however, were always there. The National Conference government was set up in Kashmir with the backing of the Indian state thus they owed their loyalties to the nation. Kashmiri people, on the other hand, waited for the plebiscite to happen. Nawakadal Women's College was set in the middle of the old city. The common ideology of the people in the region was pro-plebiscite. The same was reflected in the thought process of the students in the college. The NC government, on the other hand, wanted to create a literate class that would be pro-Indian.

In 1973 it was proposed that the name of Women's College MA Road will be changed to Kamala Nehru College after the wife of Pandit J Nehru, the students of the college protested. Sheikh Abdullah was arriving in the college for the said person and his vehicle was pelted with stones. As a result, the name of the college was left unchanged. The result of this event ended up rejuvenating the movement for the plebiscite. As the education level kept on increasing among the youth of Kashmir, both male and female the political awareness increased too. People began to demand more and more of what they perceived as being just.

All this while, politics and quest for power was interplaying at each level. Those people were preferred in government services that were believed to be loyal to the ruling family. The atmosphere of colleges was changing. From being the spheres of growth and progress, colleges reflected the political relations between those who wanted to be in power and those who wanted liberation from lies and demanded the freedom of choice (Rai). The vision of the government and the idea of consolidating legitimacy and power by the ruling party turning the educated youth of Kashmir into pro-Indians and turning the state as an integral part of India seemed to crumble steadily.

THE SETBACK OF MILITANCY

As the incidences pertaining to militancy kept on growing in the latter part of the 1980s, individual freedom and movement got curtailed. The situation worsened, hysteresis increased and rumors had a hot market. More and more male youth joined militancy. There were increased attacks and confrontations between military and militants. Infrastructure was destroyed and mass human rights violation took place. Markets closed and a perpetual strike became the order of the day for a long stretch of time (Sumit Sarkar, 2008). Public spaces shrank. Educational institutes remained closed for an extended period of time.

In such circumstances, no parent was ready to send his daughter to college. The enrolment rates came down drastically. There were many negative changes in the social order and the most feasible thing to save the honor of the girl and family came in the form of marriage. Girls were asked/made to discontinue education and were married off. Their freedom got curtailed and education became a setback for them. More so in the form of what was upcoming in the circumstances of the time.

As the number of men joining militancy kept on inflating, the recursive incidence felt on women. Death of a male counterpart created a wailing mother, a widow, an orphan girl, and a distorted family. From anxiety to psychological suffering the burden kept on falling on women (al, 2016). Having least or absent education and

no skills had made them a dependent population. The responsibility of earning bread belonged to the males of the household, losing them meant economic stagnation and deprivation. The households that once bloomed with family members and bread earners now crumbled helplessly.

The lag of education came to show the result after a pause. The negative spillovers from the conflict at the macro level pushed the women-folk into unconventional and unusual gender roles at the household level. All this coming as a sudden shock initially pushed women into deprivation and sufferings. Starvation became normal to such households. But as the conflict perpetuated, lessons followed. People learned to survive and so did women in learning the next and evolved responsibilities that felt on them.

During the peak of militancy during the early 1990s, women began doing all they could in safeguarding the men of the household and neighborhood (Cockburn, 1999). The idea of safeguarding men from army and police had found its way into their heads. Though more vocal in the memory of masses than written records are the accounts of how women have assembled in the neighborhood and marched to police-stations, jails and courtrooms demanding the release and whereabouts of the youth/men arrested or taken up by the authorities.

On the neighborhood level at the same time, people learned to come together and stand for one another. Mutual care was taken of the affected and victimized families in the neighborhood. They were provided for and catered to. Over the course of years, this spirit of brotherhood kept on growing and is visible in elevated forms to date. At the same time, the notion of exploitation, human rights violation and the atrocities committed by the state authorities and Indian agencies operational in Kashmir grew. Understanding of the same grew in the minds of the people (Kaul, 2018). Women internalized all that was happening and came to bear the consequences and costs quite explicitly.

ASSOCIATED PASSIVITY TO WOMEN'S ROLE

One obvious question arises about the role women played or denied to play during the period of armed conflict in the 1990s. The scanty records that we find in writing do not show any active role that women played (Kandiyoti, 1991). There is no record of women fighting with guns or otherwise. Instead, there is a victimized image of the 1990s Kashmiri Women, be it in the form of a wailing mother, a widow, half-widow or an orphan girl. Being born in the 1990s and growing up in the same place puts a person in a better position to explain the ground realities.

Every big journey starts with the courage one has in hand. At the time when armed conflict started and local youth realized that it was time to get up in arms with a dichotomous option of 'do or die', the courage of their mothers to sacrifice their beloved children for the cause of their landmarks the first big role women played for the sake of the common motive. A passive role would be attached to women if they like any average mother would stop their children from joining in such a life challenging commission. Instead, the mother of every household supported and motivated her son to go forth and fight for the common cause of the land and fellowmen (Zia, 2016).

The cultural chord and religious threads of average Kashmiri women expect her to cater to household chores and limit her domains to the outer walls of the house. This is what she had been doing most of the times, in most of the cases. But with the human rights violation turning out to be a routine and order of the day in the 1990s Kashmir, women from the mutual neighborhood came together quite often and marched in protests to places they never would have thought will visit. They went from police station to police station, from jails to courts and knocked every possible door for the whereabouts and release of their male counterparts and family members. It was the time when women played the inverse role of being the protectors of the men.

Oral testimony reveals to us how women have come in the way of army and police whenever they came to pick-up or arrest the men in the household or neighborhood. Women have pelted stones on

the state forces and gathered the courage to come out of their homes initially and later do whatever they found possible to help the movement. There is an apparent passivity about women's role during this time period because of many reasons. The prime reason for this is the absence of widespread media coverage at that time (Sikandar, 2011). At that time the world was still living in the 20th century and the mass media was yet to take over (at least in this part of the world). Nobody cared where the women went and what they did. Nobody cared what happened with them. Resulting in it all went undocumented.

Another important reason for the same can be ascribed to the lack of female education. As is mentioned in the first part above, the feminism in Kashmir was state-sponsored, education started to grow in the families that were mostly associated with the ruling National Conference and thus were to a great extent pro-Indian. Before it could increase its spill in a spiral fashion, the break of 1973 and the appearance of 1985 events had taken place. Education among the middle-class families couldn't grow at the hitherto rate. Nobody was up to the mark well aware and well educated to document all that (Thomas van der Molen, 2011). It was left to the memory of this generation and the will of the following to document it from the shards of their broken and forgotten reminiscence.

THE FIERCE WOMAN OF 21ST CENTURY

An episode that the media hyped on and the academicians captured is the one that took place in April 2017. Police tried to create a check-point outside the Degree College in Pulwama. This wasn't well received by the students. Agitated by it, the students of the college began protesting against the said movement of the government and the police. The news about the same spread and in solidarity with fellow students, protests erupted in other colleges across the valley. Students of Women's College MA Road also began to protest. They tried to take out a protest rally and marched towards the press enclave that is a 2 minutes distance from the college premises. As the students reached outside the college, police forces came to foil the rally (NDTV, 2017). This agitated the protesting girls and they began to pelt stones on the forces.

The news of this incident spread like wildfire. Media reached the spot and huge broadcasting coverage was aired. TV channels played the footage back and again. Media presenters had a multitude of opinions on the issue. Some people criticized while others appreciated. People began to talk of a new and rather rejuvenated freedom struggle in Kashmir that women seem to have taken on their own shoulders.

The wave of thought at this point in time began to think that the passivity of women's role has taken a new active turn and the role has changed. That is how the issue looks at the exterior. However, the actual matter of the fact is that the transition of time was from the 20th to the 21st century. Women had been active then, women are active now. The only difference between the two time periods is of the communication. Back then there was no media coverage. There was no internet and so complex web of social media. There was no writer then and now each second person happens to be either a blogger or a vlogger. Women have been active viz. multitude of roles during the whole tenure of the conflict situation and continue to be so till it perpetuates, the knowledge about the same happens to be the only difference during the whole course of events.

Many academicians call this new portrayal as the 'Spectacle Image'. It refers to the image of the same women of the next generation viewed by the world through the lens of a camera. The spontaneous reaction captured by the camera gets a worldwide circulation and these results in a poster like an image of the said event/person. For the local media, it meant a new generation of Kashmiri Women redefining the political agency (Kazi, 2009). This is what they wrote and spoke about creating a new representative image of the females in the continued struggle to attain freedom. National media of India, on the other hand, took it as an intensification of the movement in Kashmir and as an added radicalization of the youth of all genders.

As a conclusion from the source-full discussion up until now, we can safely say that women have been active participants in the freedom movement with constantly changing and altering roles. Women in the attribute of their flexibility and exposure have done everything possible in their ambit to give full support to the movement. The 2017 hyper-visibility has its own distinct importance and relevance. Protests and the corresponding visuals from the said time and space sent a new and rather rejuvenated message across all sections of people throughout the world that Kashmiri women are powerful and mightier than the rest of the world had otherwise imagined.

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

Witnessing the shocks and jolts of recurring manifestations of rage and instability we have come to live in a perpetual conflict setting with all its manifestations due in place. There is a perpetual shadow of the military under which the people of this place live. Apart from the spontaneous acts like protests and stone pelting, women in Kashmir have a faceoff with conflict every day.

The story of an average woman's normal day will begin by her avoiding any sort of interaction with the army personnel or vehicle. In this part of the world police and military is placed on roads and everywhere else in bulk (Kanth, 2018). Having a grim history of all kinds of sexual violence, these people with a certain degree of unnecessary power are the one's women distress to share the common walking street pavement with. As children (especially girls) grow up they are asked to avoid walking alone when either a convoy or army men happen to pass or be there under the closer radius. There are incidents of all sorts of human rights violations and sexual offenses such people have committed and the punishment for the same has never seen the light of the day.

On the bifurcated front, the story of a rural woman is more terrifying. Population density is already low in such areas and then people have to walk long distances to reach here and there. On the contrary, more and more army personals are placed in such areas, fields etc. This puts the rural female folk on an added risk of sexual violence and offenses by these men in uniform. As statistics have it, such offenses have always outnumbered in rural areas as compared to urban spaces. This prevents rural women to go out in fields and do the normal rustic chores. All these piles up and their normal life gets disturbed.

Summing up these and many other associated tribulations of militarization, there tends to grow a perpetual sense of rage and dissent against such agents of the state. Whenever any untoward event happens, it comes as a kink to the fire. All the rage and anger finds a channel and people hit the streets. They pelt stones, raise slogans and do all they can to manifest hatred towards the state and its agents. As the awareness and information increases and females acquire education and consciousness their contribution grows through multiple channels and the ugly facets of conflict come to the forefront and at the same time attempts and quest to end the crisis grow.

CONCLUSION

From reviewing the literature to talking to contemporaries, it is quite evident that the role women have played from time to time has been one fundamental reason for the survival of the quest for freedom the people of Kashmir are in search of. Women have successfully met the needs and expectations of their traditional roles. They have supported the movement with vigour in all the possible ways they have been able to. Women whose households have been direct victims of the conflict have shouldered the responsibility of double parenting, doing the tasks of both mother and father.

The fact to highlight here is that the role and responsibility of women don't come to an end here. It has to be more and more supportive and dedicated till a peaceful solution to the on-going problems is charted out, deliberated and finally implemented.

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