WOMEN IN CONFLICT: TRACING THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AND MILITARISATION IN KASHMIR

INTERNERSHIP PROJECT REPORT

by

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BONAFIDE CERTIFICATE

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1. INTRODUCTION:- Kashmir has been the historical ground of Conflict owing largely to partition and India-Pakistan Relations since then. In such a turmoil, youth has to undergo several vulnerabilities and impediments to their development as individuals. Every aspect of their life revolves around the fear of conflict, detention, attacks and terrorism. In such cases, women become the worst sufferers because of their pre-existing position in the family as well as in other aspects of life. Their participation remains limited and they have to bear the brunt of losses. They are subjected to abuse and several social problems. In order to understand the conditions of women in Kashmir, it is vital to look into the history of Kashmiri women. This would give us a better understanding of their current status and would help us to move forward with a more comprehensive understanding of women in Kashmir.

1.1 HISTORY OF KASHMIRI WOMEN:- Women are the pillars of our country who play a vital role in assembling the nation. They are the basic unit of life, they construct family, the family makes home, the home makes society and ultimately society makes a nation. They are highly reliable for the prosperous continuation of the life of this planet and play a substantial role from their beginning till the end of their existence. The traditional lifestyle of Kashmiri women has remained unchanged for several centuries. They were directed by their male counterparts and were provided an inferior status in society. In the traditional Kashmiri Society, they were the sufferers of segregation and illiteracy. They stayed highly dependent on the male members of their families, hence they couldn't develop their skills and personality or be independent. In the past, the women were in a paradoxical situation, where their social role was undervalued. In the case of urban areas, those who belonged to the upper classes were completely confined to their homes and were not allowed to work outside. Working women had to work with their men both within and outside the house to earn a livelihood. Kashmiri ladies were highly confined to agriculture, spinning, weaving followed by the handicraft sector with no formal education. Meanwhile, in the rural areas, all Kashmiri women worked shoulder to shoulder with their family members in the agriculture sector. Hence, we can conclude that Kashmiri women in urban as well rural served for earning a livelihood and were socially and economically productive. But working didn't give them unlimited liberation and massive social status.
For half of the past centuries, they suffered from being treated unequally and unfairly. Their role was controlled by their families. But gradually, the role of Kashmiri women has changed and it's having a great impact on society. Their roles started changing from the early 20th century, with the establishment of Christian missionaries, spreading of cultural awareness in which Kashmiri Women felt concerned about the role played by them in and out of their family. Overall modernization of the society led to the change of this situation. Due to this changing process, women of Pundits and upper-class Muslim society reacted fully to the process of change. While women belonging to the lower class responded to change very late. After 1947, Kashmiri Government tried to rectify the condition of women by availing free education facilities to them, which led to the upliftment of their prestige. The Kashmiri Women slowly formulated a curiosity and courage to come out of their places for schooling and occupation. Due to this rapid upliftment and modernization, several paths for development in the political and professional arena opened for them. They began to come out of their houses and operated professional roles which benefited them to comprehend their potential and create a new meaning for themselves. The traditional Kashmiri housewife transformed into a professional working wife. They have entered into occupations that were dominated by men. Employment has given them a feeling of importance and economic independence. They can exist on their own and look after the whole family. This development had strengthened their self-pride and dignity. A complete dramatic change has taken place over there. Cultural and structural modifications have lessened the exploitation of women in numerous domains. The Kashmiri women have come out of their prudent homes and are now on the battlefield of life, fully armored with confidence and skills. No area vanished unconquered by Kashmiri Women.

1.2 CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN KASHMIR

1. Politics:- During the pre-independence era, Kashmiri women from the aristocratic families enjoyed political freedom and responsibilities. The king used to discuss important decision making issues with the Queen. However, it was only the women belonging to noble families that enjoyed this freedom. From the 14
century, with the coming of Muslim rulers the status of women in political decision making started to decline and they were leading a miserable life until the 20th century.

Women did participate in the freedom movement against the feudal rule of Maharaja Dyna. This uprising in 1931 led to the creation of a legislative assembly also called the “praja sabha”. Under this, the B.J Galancy commission came into force in order to formulate necessary constitutional reforms. This commission gave certain political rights to people excluding women from lower classes. One of the major platforms for women’s inclusion was provided under S.M Abdullah in the National Conference which adopted the “Naya Kashmir Manifesto” in 1944. This manifesto gave equal political opportunities to women such as the right to vote, right to elect and right to be elected in political institutions. It also provided provision of reservation in assembly. This was one of the first documents to provide political and economic rights to women.

Women also participated in political movements such as against the Dogra regime or against invasion of tribes. Women formed the Women Self Defense Corps (WSDC) under Sheikh Abdullah.

In the post-independence era, however, political participation dropped. There were few women such as Begum Akbar Jehan and Zainab Begum who belonged from high class families and were given opportunities in the political realm. This reflects the patriarchal nature of the society embedded in the very idea of “Kashmiriyat”. In fact in the first assembly election in Jammu & Kashmir in 1951, there were no women registered as voters. Only in 1972, women were able to enter the assembly, ten contested for elections out of which four won giving the assembly the highest percentage of women (5.33%). Sadly, this record remains unbroken even after so many years. The percentage of women in assembly has remained less than 3%.

However, a few of them could make their mark, such Mehbooba Mufti, Firdaus and Sakina Itoo due to their political background. Together, parties like BJP, NC, PDP and Congress had given opportunities to 14 women with some other regional parties.

1. **Economy:**- Women of higher class were also not allowed to be engaged in any professional service as it was considered to be incompatible to their status. Lower class
women were engaged in several economic activities like agriculture, spinning, weaving and handicrafts. However, this by no means improved their overall economic status in the society.

The economic empowerment of women can be measured by their ability to run a business. The percentage of female share in the number of accounts and deposits in scheduled commercial banks stands at 32%. The total number of bank accounts held are half of men. The average wage earnings received by casual labourers of age 15-59 years as per 2011 data shows that rural women who work outside the public works department get an average of Rs 220 and RS 217 for urban women not working in the public sector. Salaries of urban working women is moderate i.e. Rs 484 while this is much higher in other states such as Manipur.

2. **Society:** Traditionally, women in Kashmir were merely seen as a commodity. No attention was given to their education. Earlier most of them were married at the age of nine or ten without their consent. Their role was only limited to family and children. Apart from this discrimination and inequality existed against women. They were completely dependent on the male members of the family and this resulted in a diminished economic growth. The sex ratio is 889 females for every 1000 males which is among the lowest in India. Over the period of sixty years there has been a very tiny 1.7% improvement. The child sex ratio has also fallen from 941 to 862.

The average age at which women are married however has seen an increase i.e. 24.8 years which is among the highest in India. The infant mortality rate has seen a drop. The anti-natal care of women in Kashmir is also better as compared to other states such as Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar etc. the literacy rate has also seen a rise from 43% to 56% from 2011 to 2011.

Female labor force participation force is 10.6% lower than the national figure which stands at 27.4%. There are many social evils that still exist in society, violence being the most prominent. Women in Kashmir have high rates of domestic violence. Excessive militarization of the region also had adverse effects on women’s physical as well as mental health.
i. Domestic violence is one of the major forms of violence against women in Kashmir. It is executed by a husband or his family, which comprises physical and sexual violence followed by psychological abuse. As per a survey, from 10% to 50% of women have gone through this in the Valley of Kashmir.

ii. Violence caused by ongoing political turmoil is another biggest threat to women’s existence in Kashmir society. The Shopian rape and murder case is the alleged abduction, rape, and murder of two young ladies between 29 and 30 May 2009 at Bonham, Shopian District. Two women were abducted from their orchards on the way home on 29 June 2009 and were found dead the next morning. Numerous cases of women's exploitation prevailed in the state in the last few decades due to ongoing political turmoil.

iii. Traditional Practices still exist despite advancing years. They often fall victim to several traditional practices which harm their human rights. Some psychologically and physically harmful customs are deeply rooted in their tradition such as deliberate neglect of girls and sex-selective abortion.

iv. Preference for son is another reason behind the falling sex ration in Kashmir. The notion of liking boys over their girls frequently leads to neglect of the girl child over her brother in terms of such essential needs as nutrition, basic health care facilities, and education.

2. CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE: ROLE OF WOMEN AS A PERPETRATOR AND AS A VICTIM

2.1 Impact of Conflict and Violence:- Women are the worst sufferers of the conflict. They are subjected to violence by both state as well as non-state actors. The number of rape, molestation, disappearances and the number of half widows, half-orphans and orphans since 1989 indicates the fact that women continues to be the worst sufferers of any conflict that occur in Kashmir. There is also an increase in crime against them, domestic violence and economic deprivation. The young population of Kashmir is extremely vulnerable to excessive militarization, surveillance, suspicion, joblessness and torn families. Most of them feel that they don’t have any agency over their life. For women, this experience becomes more horrible as they have to deal not only with the existing socio-cultural order but also the effects of violence in the region. Women remain the most targeted victims of conflict that takes place in Kashmir. In 2002, United Nations condemned the violence, especially rape and humiliation against women which are
considered to be the ‘instruments of War’. Even the economic and social conditions in these conflict zones contribute to the gender inequality and discrimination. Sometimes remarks from politicians stir up misogyny and sexism. In fact, due to such attitudes towards women and sensationalization of the remarks on social media made the phrase “How to marry a Kashmiri woman” one of the most searched phrases online.

Due to the continued violence and conflicts in the region, Kashmiri women began to play a much important role in the society. Although many of them are still engaged in the traditional roles, still such a long period of conflict has challenged the hierarchies of gender structures in the Kashmiri society. There have been increases in resistance groups, fighters and even particular forms of female militancy.

Any civilian claim to compensation for disability caused due to military action is also a matter of struggle. For the compensation the victim has to prove that s/he was present during the action. This is risky as people present at that time are considered to be associated with militants. For women, it is even more difficult to avail compensation. Other than this, people who get the compensation are associated with social stigma. There is pressure against taking any state sponsored relief as it is considered to be weakening the collective cause. This is because they consider that the state which actually caused problems in their lives are then offering jobs and compensation to cover its actions. Similar treatment is seen in the cases of pellet victims. If the victims seek remedy in local hospitals there is a higher risk of getting under surveillance and interrogated and possibly get detained. Due to these reasons, the victims choose to go to distant hospitals in order to avoid interrogation. After the abrogation of Article 370 such suspicion and fear has intensified. To be honest, Kashmiri women have been at the receiving end of the conflicts. They have negative consequences for them. Often the state manifests itself in the form of its most powerful structure. This leads to a lot of legal inequalities and deprivations as in the case of Kashmiri women.

Out of all the fears, insecurity is the biggest one when it comes to women. Life in Kashmir is insecure and people do live in fear of death that may engulf them any moment in the form of a conflict. The sense of insecurity is greater in women as they are made to stay at their houses because of threats of sexual abuse and abduction. The statistics on rape in Kashmir are hard to find, however, in a statement in Kashmir’s Legislative Assembly by Omar Abdullah, it became evident that there were registration of more than 5000 cases of rape since 1989 armed rebellion.
In regions where military activity is prevalent, rape is in fact viewed as a tool of counter insurgency to local resistance and for destroying the morale of Kashmiri resistance. Despite of Indian Army denying it, allegations of rape became widespread. Many cases were filed from the villages of Kunan and Poshpora, but the cases continue to be pending. There are reports of many women disappearing.

2.2 Women in Conflict:- Some women are increasingly vocal about their freedoms and ambitions, indicated in the accumulating number of women and girls who take part in street riots despite tensions to fill traditional gender roles at home. They revolted against every move by Indian forces, shielded militants, and served as mothers and wives to take care of the household. Women took up numerous roles that maintained family and stimulated the widespread opposition against state hegemony. Women faltering in support would have incredibly maimed the movement. While young women activists protest Indian rule and militarization in Kashmir, they’re also battling against the societal intentions of women at home. Women and girls are increasingly on the beginning lines in public marches and have started to turn up in greater digits in street protests, rallies, and funerals, following the killing of popular militant commander Burhan Wani in 2016. The death sparked months of protests and lockdowns across Kashmir – as well as brutal clampdowns by security forces. They call security forces “black dogs,” “Indian dogs” and “Bihari’s” — a scornful epithet for people from one of India’s poor states. In India’s restive Kashmir territory, the weapon of choice among separatist youths targeting Indian security forces are stones and bricks. Indian soldiers have slingshots as well as conventional weapons and pellet guns that have killed and maimed many. Several see the existence of the girls in riots as an indication that the security situation in the valley is spiraling out of control. While men exemplify the majority of civilians killed in Kashmir violence, women are likewise sufferers. Of 80 civilian deaths recorded by the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society last year, 12 were women.

3. POLICIES FOR WOMEN IN KASHMIR
The Central Act, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, was enacted in 2005. It took half a decade for the government of J&K to pass this similar act, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2010. Nominal actions were formulated for the proper implementation of the above act. Economic empowerment has been recognized as the dominant
component. It is a certainty that if women gain economic strength they will gain visibility and voice at the home, workplace, and the community. Thus, it is necessary for women to know their economic role and improve material resources. Schemes carried out by Government are as follows:-

i. **Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Poor women**:- The primary goal of this scheme is to empower women by giving them knowledge regarding female foeticide, domestic violence, drug addiction, trafficking. Sex camps are organized through voluntary organizations working in the field of women and children welfare.

ii. **Family Counseling Centre**:- Under this policy, counseling, referral help is being provided to victims who are in mortal danger within the family.

iii. **Janani Suraksha Yojana**:- This Policy is a safe motherhood intervention under NRHM. In April 2005, it was launched to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among the poor women who are pregnant.

iv. **Umeed**:- It is an Indian government-funded flagship project for increasing women empowerment. It was launched by Rahul Gandhi in 2013.

v. **Scheme for working women hostel**:- Primary aim of this program is to promote the availability of safe and convenient accommodation for working ladies, along with a daycare facility for their wards in possible areas where employment opportunities are in abundance. Under this scheme, new hostel buildings are being constructed. Wards of working ladies (Fogirls up to 18 years, For boys- up to 5 years) may be accommodated in hostel buildings with their mothers.

vi. **Swayamsiddha Scheme**:- It is a self-help-based program that highly emphasizes helping group members to avail the benefits of all schemes holistically. It was launched in 2001 for empowering women in conflict-ridden areas like J&K.

vii. **National Minority Development and Finance Corporation** :-communities like Sikhs, Buddhists, and Muslims are being granted financial help under this policy at a nominal rate of 6% per year. The maximum amount of loan is Rs. 1 Lakh per individual.

viii. **National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation**:- Women from backward classes are eligible to get financial aid at a very low rate of interest i.e. 4% annually.
ix. **Educational Loan:** It is being provided to all the women under all of the above-mentioned policies/schemes for technical training.

x. **Micro-credit Loan:** This facility is available to Self-help groups at the rate of 5% for which the repayment period is 3 years.

xi. **Sher-I-Kashmir employment and welfare programme:** This policy was implemented by the Government to create awareness regarding employment for educated but unemployed youths. 6% interest rate is charged on the credit being provided to entrepreneurs.

### 3.1 REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN KASHMIR

The government of India has carried out various schemes in the Valley to improvise the situation of women. In this paragraph, authors of the paper have tried to write the reviews of the government policies implemented in Kashmir.

The Umeed program is a centre sponsored policy for inspiring youths to be independent and self-motivated. With the help of this policy, youth in Pulwama, have established milk centres. Milk is collected and supplied to Srinagar. Besides, the quality of the milk is good enough. Milk societies in this area have played a vital role in enhancing the income of milkmen and attracted youths towards this lucrative business.

Even after introducing several schemes for providing educational loans for educating women, the female literacy rate is 68% which is much lower than the male literacy rate of 85.70 in Kashmir. The Janani Suraksha Yojana scheme was implemented with a motto of providing safe motherhood but there are several cases of ignorance in Kashmir. A lot of pregnant women are dying due to the alleged medical negligence at maternity hospital. Situation gets worse in rural hospitals during evening time. Most of the hospitals lack the required infrastructure to treat pregnant women and their newborn babies. The situation is so bad that the majority of the district level hospitals don't even own ICUs and HDUs. Kashmir will fulfill its dream of having an efficient maternity and child care system only through the coordinated and sincere efforts of the general public as well as the government. Government needs to take action for the women belonging to the lower class because even after the implementation of government policies for them, they are still struggling for their identity and equity.
4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Construction of Educational Institutions:** The education of girls carries a special implication in society as it makes them familiar with their rights. It encourages them to battle against every kind of racism and exploitation. As per a few reports, there has been an upgrade in literacy rates among women in urban areas but the situation is more or less the same in rural areas. They similarly lag far behind in technological and professional education. Due to political fluctuation, they don't know what's going to happen next. Due to the absence of understanding and poverty, most of the girls avoid attending the schools. Government and other suitable councils have to come forward to eliminate this discrepancy and spread awareness about the importance of girl's education. Safer places are required to educate girls. We can conclude that sound decisions by policymakers and a positive attitude from the local community can surely help in raising the standards of women's education.

2. **Establishing better health care services:** Although the government is spending more on health care, pregnant women say they don't see substantial improvements in the quality of services. The lack of trained gynecologist specialists is the main reason behind the unnecessary referrals to tertiary-level healthcare institutions. The shortage of medical staff is a massive problem. One nursing home within one Km distance from every home is a basic necessity. Construction of more hospitals is the need of the hour.

3. **Mandatory learning the art of self-defense:** To combat rising incidents of crime against women, should join the camps across the state for learning self-defense. Learning this art would make them less dependent on others. Girls these days are facing severe problems. They are unsafe and they should be taught to fight against every evil. Learning to protect themselves is vital in this unsafe and patriarchal society.

4. **A feeling of patriotism:** If you are Kashmiri and care for Kashmiri women, the decent thing you can do is to merge with India. The population size is quite small. However, for locals, the youth, and women, the promising bet is to make the Valley truly part of India. Instead of two parents as planned, J&K became nobody’s child and an orphan. Pakistan took advantage and utilized the common factor of Islam to start a militant action. The Indian army tried to control it. Don’t blame the Indian army. It has the dangerous job of weeding out terrorists from a civilian population which is nearly impossible without
collateral damage, terrible as that might be. However, criticize those truly accountable, the Pakistani army, the local leaders who manipulated the situation, and the specialists who did nothing for Kashmiris.

5. **Awareness camps:** Self-help groups along with the help of the government must organize awareness camps for women in the valley. The aim of the camp should be to spread awareness about various government-sponsored welfare schemes and legal awareness. Several women never speak up about domestic violence and harassment because of the fear of getting condemned by society. Cases of domestic violence usually go unreported in Indian-administered Kashmir because the media tend to focus on political issues. These awareness camps would help the women in believing themselves and boosting their confidence to speak up against all the brutalities happening to them. Awareness mixed with education will lead to the empowerment of Kashmiri Women.

6. **The police force is required to act immediately:** The danger of violence against women is escalating amid coronavirus lockdowns around the world. But one area that has lived through a military clampdown for approximately a year – Indian-administered Kashmir – could have foretold the surge. Being locked-in by government order is nothing new in Kashmir, nor is the arising spike in gender-based violence, women’s advocates say. Today, Kashmir’s women confront both the military lockdown and the pandemic, but there’s limited help available for survivors of gender-based violence. There are no domestic violence shelters in Kashmir. Sieges on mobile phone connections are repeatedly re-imposed, while action restrictions hinder NGOs from doing their work. And India disassembled the women’s commission last year along with Jammu and Kashmir’s statehood – axing an administration body that endorsed survivors of gender-based violence. Since the women’s commission was shut down, sufferers of family violence no longer have a devoted avenue for reporting abuse. There is merely one women’s police station in the entire Kashmir valley, and male officials aren’t qualified to handle domestic violence. Unless a woman has serious injuries, maximum male police officers refuse to take such reports, notifying victims instead that the attacks are a family matter, said Shah Faisal, state director of the Human Rights Law Network, a collective of Indian lawyers and activists who provide legal support to vulnerable populations.
7. Initiatives like SEWA should be made the ideal model for women’s economic development in Kashmir. The Self-Employed Women’s Association equips rural women to acquire managerial and vocational skills that can help them to rebuild their homes and communities. This initiative was launched in the background of regional conflicts and natural disasters. Under this initiative, training is provided to women so that they can increase their income as well as contribute in building networks that help women to cope with psychological challenges of conflict.

5. CONCLUSION
This research paper concludes an understanding of Kashmiri women by concentrating on the question of their agency in the historical resistance movement to Indian rule. It exhibits that women are not merely accidental sufferers and they prefer to utilize within clashes of self-determination in Kashmir to enroll their political agency and fight for their rights. Women are constant in their battle against injustice and the abundance of the social patriarchy. The experience of victimization often stimulates women to take control and direct their lives into struggles pressing for change. It is only by engaging in political actions that they come to realize the lack of freedoms and injustice in Kashmir.

The researchers came out with several challenges to women's empowerment which are; lack of knowledge, inappropriate and unauthorized health care delivery system, illiteracy among women, the meager status of women, absence of female participation in political affairs of the state, cultural exercises hamper the empowerment of women. For example:- Parents reluctantly agree to send their daughters to school after attaining puberty. Turmoil against women in the valley, society often ignores the issue regarding women empowerment, inadequacy of decision-making authority.

The Indian government and state government have initiated various schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana, Umeed, and other educational loan schemes for the betterment of women's condition in the valley. Despite these undertakings, women in Kashmir are yet left with problems and challenges associated with health, economy, education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, female feticide and infanticide, late marriage, state violence, dowry harassment, eve-teasing, unequal wages, child sexual abuse, child labor, and sexual harassment at work. To curtail domestic violence, society requires to take initiative against social evils like dowry, drug
addiction, early marriage, etc. Counseling at numerous spheres like in Masjids, Mohalla Committees meetings, should take place regarding domestic chaos. Government and Non-government agencies should carry positive steps for lessening domestic violence, wherein the government can consolidate their law enforcement agencies, Non-governmental agencies can set up.

People need to overcome these challenges at the quickest because without overcoming them, we can't accomplish the desired target. Though the Government of Kashmir has initiated steps previously, what they want right now are sizable jumps! We all should join hands and come together for developing and enhancing the status of women. As India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru quotes

“*You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women.*”

Therefore, if we want to see a glorious and promising future for our country, we need to initiate steps for empowering the women of Kashmir.

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