

Armed Conflict in Kashmir, an Impact on Education: Analytical View

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Abstract

Culture embodies the intellectual development of a society. Its pattern in Kashmir has been affected due to the violence and trauma experienced by the people of Kashmir in past. Conflict often leaves an unfortunate legacy for the affected generations facing intimidating challenges for the women and children. Violence in Kashmir has transformed the lives of women by becoming victims of arrest, torture, disappearance and loss of the loved ones and direct victims of rape, kidnapping and murder. Alongside economic empowerment and psychological counselling, a key challenge is to ensure that women do not remain isolated from the broader community. Women have experienced role changes forging survival strategies for themselves and their families. This study examines the deep impact of armed conflict on Kashmiri women and their education, witnessing substantial progress towards female education in Kashmir in the past decade.

Keywords: Armed Conflict, Women, Education, Kashmir.

Introduction

Since the dawn of 21st century armed conflicts have become more internal, long-drawn, and complex, with civilians increasingly becoming the targets.¹ Traditionally, women are not seen as combatants; though history does bear to women combatants, as in Sri Lanka and Liberia, the majority of soldiers continue to be men. Even so, the essentialist

¹ Bennette, Olivia; Jo Bexley and Kitty Warnock. (1995). *Arms to fight, arms to protect: Women speak out about conflict*. London: Panos Publications.

positioning of men as war-makers and women as passive victims and peace-lovers may not always hold true.² Men may also be victims of violence, even sexual, in an armed conflict. Women, however, form the highest proportion of adult civilian population who get killed and targeted for abuse in war and they suffer physical, economic, and psychological abuse.³

On the whole violence in Kashmir has transformed the lives of women by becoming victims of arrest, torture, disappearance and loss of the loved ones and direct victims of rape, kidnapping and murder. What is more painful is that neither do these innocent women know of their fault for which they are being put to torment nor do they know how to present the atrocities perpetrated on them before the world in this age of women's rights.

The emergence of the modern state of Jammu and Kashmir⁴ in 1846 located in dual relationship with Dogra Maharaja's feudal exposition and the colonial fringes of British Empire was a result of the treaties⁵ by the British. For centuries, ethnic groups headed by princes, or maharajas, maintained sovereignty. Only gradually under British colonial rule did the idea of Jammu and Kashmir State come into sight as a distinct political entity. It came into existence in 1846, following the first Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, with Maharaja Gulab Singh as its first ruler. 'The State was not a personal creation of Gulab Singh but was rather the outcome of an agreement between him and the representatives of the British East India Company.'⁶ 'Kashmir, and all the hilly and mountainous country situated eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravi, which had been ceded by the Sikhs to the British Government in lieu of indemnity, made over to Maharaja Gulab Singh

² Cockburn, Cynthia.(2001). The gendered dynamics of armed conflict and political violence', in Caroline O.N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark (eds.): *Victims perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence* (13-19). New Delhi: Kali for Women.

³ Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) 2010. 'Violence against women in armed conflict; A factsheet', www.amnestyusa.org/women/women/pdf/armedconflict.pdf

⁴ There are good geological and mythological reasons to believe that the Kashmir Valley was once a vast span of water. But as a result of violent geological upheavals such as earthquakes, the mountain walls were breached at a few points and the water gushed out, turning the Valley into its present shape.

According to a legend the Kashmir valley cradled in the lap of Himalayans was created by the fabled Hindu saint Kashyap by draining the waters of "Satisar", the lake which once covered the entire area. Mehraj Hajni. (1997, June 8). Kashmir- the victim of history. *Greater Kashmir*.

⁵ For the British colonizers treaties were binding contracts guaranteeing their political and territorial authority. The gradual imposition of the Treaty system by the British transformed and reconfigured linkages, trade-routes, and political alliances forging new relations, new regions and drawing new territorial boundaries.

⁶ Zutshi, U K. (1986). *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir*. Manohar: South Asia Books, pg. 19

and the heirs male of his body, for the sum of seventy-five lakhs of rupees.⁷ This sale of Kashmir through Treaty of Amritsar by Maharaja Gulab Singh who won for himself the title of Maharaja by acting as an intermediary between the Sikhs and the British and then Treaty of Amritsar received Jammu and Kashmir against the cash payment of seventy-five lakh rupees (Nanakshahi).⁸ On 15 March, Gulab Singh had been bestowed with the title of Maharaja⁹, the emblem of sovereignty. The treaty commonly referred to as Treaty of Amritsar¹⁰ was signed between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the representatives of the company.

Mass movement erupted in 1931 towards secular politics. In 1947, the Indian subcontinent was partitioned to form two countries; India and Pakistan on the basis of religion professed by people. The princes were advised to sign their instrument of accession to either of the dominion. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir predominantly Muslim in population led by Hindu sovereign lingered on in futile indecision for sometime in hope to establish an independent state but finally signed the Instrument of Accession¹¹ acceding to India; in defiance of the basic principle governing the partition. The question of Kashmir's accession to India has been the subject of dispute ever since its execution.¹²

⁷ Lawrence, W.R. (1967). The Valley of Kashmir. Srinagar: Kesar Publications. pg. 201

⁸ This has been mentioned in Article 3 of the Treaty of Amritsar.

⁹ Joseph Davey Cunningham, A History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej, H.L.O. Garrett, ed. (Delhi, 1966), rep., pg. 228-89

¹⁰ This is so because the treaty was enunciated at Amritsar on 16th March 1846. This treaty between Gulab Singh and the East India Company was concluded on March 16, 1846 known as Treaty of Amritsar, (*Bienama Amratsar*).

¹¹ By 15 August 1947, the majority had signed the Instrument of Accession however the Maharaja of Kashmir lingered on in futile indecision, playing with the idea of establishing a precarious independence. On October 22, 1947, the fate of the State was swayed into further suspension with the quick succession of the Tribal invasion. By October 26, 1947 Maharaja fled to Jammu handling the signed Instrument of Accession. Lord Mountbatten, the governor general of independent India accepted Maharaja Hari Singh's Instrument of Accession and in letter dated October 27, 1947, wrote to Maharaja Hari Singh:

"where the question of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the state..... as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invader the question of state's accession should be settled by a referendum to the people."

Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru on November 2, 1947 broadcast the message from All- India Radio putting across his high sense of assurance saying:

"We have declared that the fate of Kashmir is ultimately to be decided by the people. That pledge we have given and the Maharaja supported it, not only to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, but also to the world. We will not and cannot back out of it. We are prepared when peace and law have been established to have referendum held under international auspices like the United Nations. We want it to be fair and just reference to the people and we shall accept their verdict. I can imagine no fairer and juster offer."

P.N.Bazaz (1978). Democracy through Intimidation and Terror The Untold Story of Kashmir Politics. B.R.Chawla Heritage Publications, New Delhi.

¹² The Muslim majority states were to accede to Pakistan.

As tension escalated in late 1980s an underground secessionist movement launched an armed struggle for the right to self determination. During 1989-90, the spirit of the people was sweeping towards freedom (*azadi*) that eventually scorched the landscape, particularly the development that had been made in providing women with educational and economic opportunities. The conflict became more internal¹³ and during 1989 sought the intervention¹⁴ of world human rights body, Amnesty International, for restoration of human and democratic rights and civil liberties of the people of Kashmir.

When we think of Kashmir Valley, what associations come to mind? Images emphasizing the region's scenic beauty. Such superficial knowledge offers many with little understanding of the complex reality of the place. As has been documented by Batra, Radhika Kaul (2006) *“Even after two decades of conflict the beauty of the place can be misleading. It can almost make you forget the tension because it is superficial for the tension is palpable. People in Kashmir live in a situation of extreme uncertainty when anytime anywhere life can change forever.”*¹⁵ Everyone is traumatized by the death toll of year 2010 when the number of dead reported was 115, between the age groups of 15-24 years and mostly, the dead were students and all were boys. The impact of conflict and traumatized conditions are ever present. Such violence can definitely create a ghost, fear of insecurity. Moving a decade back, when the present young generation would have been 8-10 years of their age. The children born and brought up have known situations which differ from those of earlier periods, from their parents' experiences who knew the place through different conditions. There are conflicts within the time shared, of the same place that is Kashmir. Professor Amitabh Mattoo and Souresh Roy survey the events of summer 2010 in Kashmir *“This is a generation that, somewhat paradoxically, has been*

¹³ *“There was rapid escalation of violence, subversion of the administrative apparatus and attacks on common people in the nineties.....In the years 2003-2006, there was some reduction in the scale of infiltration but not in the intensity of violent attacks or subversive activities..... The national parties in India have no clear policy for finding a solution to the Kashmir problem. No national or regional party has a clear vision about the future set up in Kashmir; moreover there is no consensus among the political groups on the core issues. Many experts see this as the main reason for a lack of any constructive approach towards the resolution of the problems of Kashmir.”* Major General Afsir Karim, AVSM [Retd.] (2007) *“An Analysis of the Turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir_ Present Situation and Future Prospects”* Published by FSSS, Forum for Strategic & Security Studies, New Delhi, India.

¹⁴ (1989, Sept. 23). *The Kashmir Times*.

¹⁵ Batra, Radhika Kaul. (2006). *Women in Conflict*. Public Service Broadcasting Trust. The film examines the impact of violence on women whether Muslim or Pandit in the backdrop of the ongoing militancy in Kashmir since the end of 1980's and their potential for leadership in conflict resolution.

empowered by technology. The internet is the powerful instrument of social communications, radicalization and political mobilization.”¹⁶

Need and Importance

In this paper, Kashmiri women is being taken within the context of the history of this region’s culture and offer insights into the progress women have made over the past 50 years towards greater control of their lives. The basic essentials of the study consist of the women trapped in conflict and about their struggle to survive with the challenges of the circumstances brought up in close touch with their education. Women education is essential for higher and better standards of health and also raises women’s economic productivity. Exploring and examining the impact of conflict on women and their education in Kashmir, it helps us to understand that improvement in literacy rates would directly influence their socio-economic and political status on national front. Hence, in the web of conflict it becomes extremely relevant to empower women in-order to develop society’s potential to resolve it through learning, research and advocacy.

Objectives

This study focuses on one hand on the popular protest and resistance within the region and especially the women in the context of conflict and violence which has dramatically impacted everyday lives. In the current scenario it becomes extremely pertinent to study the status of women in Kashmir so as to say in the web of conflict, women education has revealed the change in the trend. With this vision in mind, following objectives become significant for the present study:

1. To study the impact of armed conflict on women of Kashmir in general ;
2. To study the impact of armed conflict on educational aspects of women in Kashmir;
3. To understand literacy as a powerful medium to combat and resolve conflicts.

Methodology

The study conducted to review the impact of armed conflict on Kashmiri women and their educational set-up. Descriptive method was used in this study to obtain pertinent and

¹⁶ Mattoo Amitabh; Roy, Souresh. (2011). Summer of Discontent: Considering Conditions in Kashmir. *Harward International Review*.

precise information. The sample of the study included teachers, students, medical doctors and local community members selected by using purposive sampling method for the two districts of Kashmir Division. The two districts i.e. Srinagar district and Kupwara district, taken as a sample were considered on the basis of one being an urban area and the other being the rural area of Kashmir Division. The self developed questionnaire and an interview schedule (semi-structured) was used by the investigator to review educational set-up that had an impact on the people of Kashmir in general and women in particular.

Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and their Education

Women play a vital role as that of being herself, as a wife and a mother and education has been one of the major issues of concern of the government as well as the society at large due to which today the educated women hold a prominent position in the society as well as all over the world.

Women will be empowered through education leading to financial stability, to be confident enough to face the society and to gain prestige in the society. It enables women to acquire new knowledge and technology, required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields.

Jammu and Kashmir has been in conflict for decades have many problems in educational sector. There is no student participation in decision-making process and student unions are non-existent after being banned for security reasons in the past. Women and their education have been drastically affected with the evolution of the armed conflict. Women may not be the direct targets of violence in some cases. With the result, these women are left to struggle for survival on their own. A large number of women survived through socio-psychological stress after the killings and disappearances of their male partners. The ongoing conflict in Kashmir has caused a significant amount of human lives lost, causing a collapse of the family structure.¹⁷ In 2005, human rights groups and local NGOs put the total figure of lives lost due to the insurgency at more than 84,000, although most agree to 70,000.¹⁸ Many of the lost lives have been male heads of household, who leave their family for the Kashmiri cause only to die on the battlefield. These men leave behind

¹⁷ Mir, Imraan (2003). *A New Kashmir: Religion, Education and the Roots of Social Disintegration*. New York: Valley House Books.

¹⁸ Pal, W. (2006). *Kashmir: New Voices, New Approaches*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

families, who, after the father's deaths are led by illiterate mothers who cannot provide for their families.¹⁹ The number of orphans caused by the conflict is estimated to be around 100,000.²⁰ In early 1999, Amnesty International (*'If They Are Dead, Tell Us'*) estimated that since 1990 over 800 people have been victims of custodial disappearances; in August 2002,²¹ Kashmir Times estimated the figure to be 3,500. The widows and half-widows²² burdened with the responsibilities have strived to regulate their changing roles from being a dependent to a provider in the family. For this reason the change in their gender role becomes significant. Here the circumstance for survival becomes more painful for the illiterate widows and half-widows having least work skills. Many such women are supported by their parental home or strived to learn some skill for their survival most importantly for educating their children. For the countless widows of the conflict, education of their child is their top priority; irrespective of their economic status they want to provide quality education to their children.²³ In certain cases, women become the direct victims targeted for rape and abuse. The instances of rape cases have not been witnessed from the urban areas of the city²⁴ while as the rural areas often happen to be targets. *Kupwara*,²⁵ the border district has witnessed the most of violence in all the past years. They have often faced humiliation in the society and such cases of rape in armed conflict are not addressed. Many such women as survivors lead an invisible existence in suffering and neglect. In order to preserve the honour of the family and the community, many

¹⁹ Schofield, Victoria (1997). *Kashmir in the Crossfire*. New York: Viva Books Private Limited.

²⁰ Mcgivering, Jill (2000, August 7). "Kashmir's orphaned thousands." BBC NEWS. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/869953.stm.

²¹ Kashmir Times (1990). *Militancy in Kashmir Valley Completes Fourteen Years*.

²² Half-widows are those women whose husbands have disappeared or are missing in the conflict. These men are presumed to be dead but there is no proof of their death. An Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is an organization of the relatives of people who have disappeared after custody, have claimed that more than 10,000 people have been subjected to forced disappearances and were mostly picked up by the troops. There has been no survey till date to estimate the exact numbers. The figures provided by the government and the civil society organizations vary widely.

²³ Zahoor, Sheikh (21 February, 2002). "Impact of Conflict Situation on Children and Women in Kashmir." Kashmir Human Rights Site. Cited Hiba Arshad, *Education in Kashmir Historical Overview and Current Analysis*, Kashmircorps 2008.

²⁴ Srinagar

²⁵ There is no statistical data of rapes and molestations in the state because of the secrecy with which such acts are shrouded. *"Horrible narratives of women and adolescent girls being humiliated and brutally interrogated in remote villages are absent from official records and are fearfully voiced in the atmosphere of paranoia that pervades the Valley. For instance, in 1991, more than 800 soldiers of the Fourth Rajput Regiment raped 23-60 women in the course of one night in the village of Kunan Pohpora in Kashmir. These soldiers raided the village on the pretext of interrogating the local men who were allegedly insurgents. Another gruesome incident of a similar nature occurred in Handwara village in 2004, where a mother and her minor daughter were sadistically violated by a major of the Rashtriya Rifles."* Khan, Nyla Ali. (2009). *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir between India and Pakistan*. New Delhi: Tulika Books. pg. 108
A large proportion of rape victims are afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder, and are prone to suicidal tendencies.

instances of fathers forcing their daughters to live in marital unions have been reported even from the city so as to prevent them from being violated by the paramilitary forces during the period of armed conflict.

Kashmiri women have gone through immense turbulence and torture in the last two decades. The strength inside her has proved herself in a healthy superior circumstance and is better in every aspect especially education. The conservative patriarchal ideology of Kashmir struggle cast women as grieving mother, martyr's mother and raped women. The ordinary woman has forged survival strategies for their family by entering into the negotiations of power with the security forces and administration of their rescue and safety of their families by acting as a mode of resistance. Women have always joined men in protests. Survival became politicized as women were pushed into the public sphere by the synergetic collapse of the division between the public-private spheres. If a boy was picked up by the security forces, neighbourhood women would go to the security bunker and raise slogans and get him released. It is a kind of activism rooted in their cultural role as mothers, wives, sisters and was socially legitimized. She was used to enforce a shutdown/curfew in the markets to join public demonstrations. In this conflict situation, every activity of ordinary women gets politicized arising due to affirming concern for the safety of their family and community. It was not for the first time when the women were pushed into public sphere. It was a populist activity during the upheaval in 1931 and Quit Kashmir Movement of 1946. Women repeatedly get reverted from the public sphere to the private realm but the recurrent protests, has again brought her in the public sphere.

Culture provides certain fairly uniform experiences for all members of any society. Experience develops personality similarities within groups and differences between groups; the unique experience of each person shapes his or her individuality. Personality development cannot take place in vacuum and it is one's total behavior tendency. The normal personality differs radically from one society to another. Each society develops a normal personality, produced by the total experience of a person raised in the society. Such cultural influences many kinds of experiences. Since the world is quickly advancing, college is becoming more and more of a requirement or necessity to get where a person wants to be in life. During the years of college, students learn a profession(s) that keeps them choose a career that will keep them financially stable like everyone would like to be. Also since the world is advancing, many jobs rely on new technological ideas and problem

solving skills that will be learning in college if that is the person's choice. College is a key to success in life. In order to achieve success in life with little or no struggles financially one has to go to college to get an education that will lead them later on to a career of their choice.

During the period of unrest²⁶ in the Valley, frequent strikes as a form of protest have caused a great difficulty to everyone especially the students. The situation in schools, colleges or universities is disconcerting with several forces competing with each other in polluting the academic atmosphere. Examinations frequently delayed leading to loss of precious academic years. The experience of college life that is essential for the proper development of personalities remained suspended for a long while due to which there was lack of interaction and exposure among the students. With the result, many students could not take proper decisions regarding their education and career. The years from 1950 to the '70s were the kind of years when everything seemed within reach, anything possible with hard work and determination. The Kashmiri girls fitted themselves into the routine of a modern college life by participating in co-curricular activities like sports, debates, NCC, educational tours, cultural activities and drama. The achievements of women during these decades were so significant that they altered the gender landscape of schools, colleges, offices, courts, police stations, hospitals, hotels and business establishments. Women were everywhere, making their mark in every field. The events from mid-'80s onwards leading to the total collapse of the educational edifice in the 90's could be attributed to some extent, also to the frustrations generated from the unnaturally high expectations of the rewards from free education. The political flux entirely collapsed the optimistic thought of the students in 1990s with the burning of a large, fully equipped auditorium formed in 1960s. Schools and colleges were targeted and the libraries and laboratories went up in flames. Extra-curricular activities received a set-back. There has been a heavy loss of infrastructure, hampering educational development. The sickness that affected the world outside suddenly entered the colleges in a dramatic way. The Muslim girls were forced to wear veil (*burqa*) and the Hindus wear a *bindi*²⁷. At first the girls refused to follow it but there was no other option for them to be in dispute. The burden of the new adjustments has disproportionately fallen on women.

²⁶ Everything comes to a standstill during the period of unrest in Kashmir Valley, as was observed in 2008, 2010 and now in 2016.

²⁷ Bindi, a dot worn on women's foreheads is one of the most recognizable items in Hinduism.

Data-Base and Inferences

After a significant amount of violence, the State has been able to manage an education system that has helped in the empowerment of women.

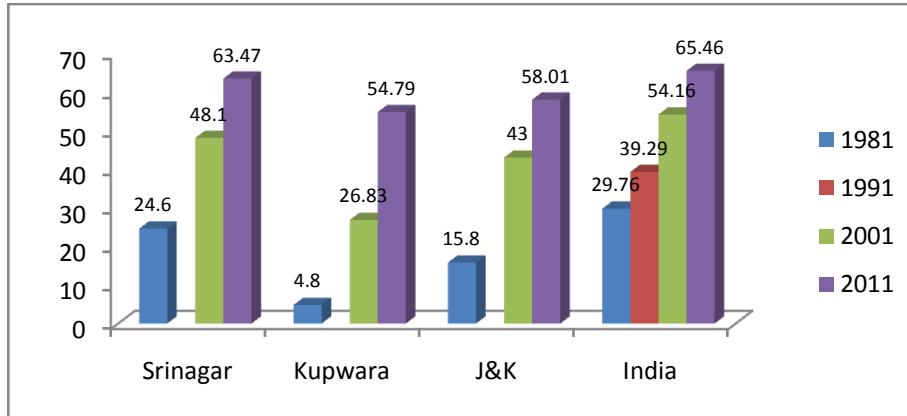


Fig. 1: Female Literacy Rate from 1981 to 2011²⁸

Source: Census of Jammu and Kashmir & Census of India.

According to census 2011, female literacy in Srinagar and Kupwara district is 63.47 per cent and 54.79 per cent. Viewing as such, of course, female literacy has improved a lot and is quite impressive. These statistics are representative of State that is moving towards developing their education system. The State's accession to India in 1947 proved a turning point in history. Among the very early steps taken was making education free up to the University standard. For the last many years a vigorous effort has been on to expand education and root out the legacy of massive illiteracy. All women are having valuable aspirations for their children wanting them to mark their progress in the field of education. Hence these women and female students have increased self-confidence and assertiveness, realistic expectations from literacy, to be financially independent that can help to improve the chances of achieving an improved status mobility. The results supported that education is a kind of an industry that has transformed Kashmiri women directing them towards their all round development and their community's development.

Violence has badly affected the education sector. Even in the present situation the suitable educational environment is still missing and it has badly affected the potential and career of the students. Here it becomes mandatory on the part of the government to help the students, come out from the psychological impacts of conflict, by providing psychological

²⁸ The Census of 1991 was not recorded in Jammu and Kashmir due to turmoil.

help to them. It is very unfortunate for the students of the valley not to have counselling and career guidance facilities. More importantly counselling as an integral part of education must be addressed by the Government and State Education Department in its current policies since a counsellor has a much more role to play in conflict torn society like Kashmir. The conflict and violence have long term impact on the minds of the people and the students are no exception. Besides helping the students to come out from the psychological impacts of conflict, it further helps students in overcoming their academic difficulties and helps them in developing realistic educational plans by choose suitable vocation for their life.

Discussion

Education has emerged as the most important single input in promoting human resource development. The paper has analyzed importance of education on human development and its impact on educational growth. Education of women in the state has facilitated her to achieve rapid economic development and technological progress creating a social order based on the virtues of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities. It plays a vital role in the present world for raising the standards of living and acts as a mechanism to prevent conflict situation in the society. Till today, the role of education in Jammu and Kashmir has gained significant attention within the community of academia and policy makers in the recent past. Conflict in Kashmir has been a part of life since two decades, hence it was impossible to avoid its impact on socio-economic and socio-political life of the people.

This can be witnessed from the past where lessening of attainment of quantity of education includes destruction of infrastructure, fear of sending children to schools, negative economic shocks to households etc. The education sector in Kashmir valley has been hit during the long unrest causing irreversible loss to students. In the last two decades of conflict, Kashmir has witnessed transformation of families and communities for survival, like children were employed, very often on exploitative basis, potential of youth was not properly cultivated for a kind of psychological fear was set permanently in their minds, and the net result was therefore the wastage of human resources.

In the light of the above observations about the impact of armed conflict on one of the very important dimensions that is education for the overall growth and development for any society, region or country, the only possible way is to resolve the issues of any kind so that

the negative impact on education and for that matter for other dimensions which the people are suffering in the conflict zones including the region under study.

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