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Research Article

KASHMIRI WOMEN: VULNERABLE SECTION OF SOCIETY

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Abstract

For last two and half decades tremendous political and social turmoil Jammu and Kashmir is facing by the proxy war between India and Pakistan. This unrest and deteriorated atmosphere has altered the people's life to the great extent. Their livelihood, health, work culture, education, thinking etc. have altogether changed. Among all the people it is the women of Kashmir, whether Hindu or Muslims, who led a life of great sufferings—psychological disturbance, destitution, poverty, illiteracy, rape, molestation, infertility etc. This paper highlights the problems, miseries, challenges of a weaker sections of society i.e., women who has been confined to child rearing, household duties and have hardly any role in decision making powers. Kashmiri women faced the double burden of a missing husband and social dishonor and isolation of being single women in a conservative society.

Keywords: Kashmiri Women; Vulnerable Section; Kashmir; Society; proxy war

Introduction

Kashmir is famous by the name “Paradise on Earth” but the greedy needs of the two nuclear powers India and Pakistan have turned this paradise into a hell. Life here has become very uncomfortable and miserable to all (HRW, 1999; Jan, 2012). The minds of young generation have got contaminated by the issues developed by war. Women and children have suffered a lot. Children deviated from the studies as they failed to concentrate on them. The economic deficiency, displacement, poverty or gender based violence; the costs of conflict are borne excessively on women and children. It is very difficult to manage the things for a family by a woman who belongs to such a conservative society and volatile region like Kashmir. In a war crushed region women are now experiencing extra hardships due to stress and after effects of war and infertility as well as stress due to cultural pressure. The Sher-e-Kashmir Institution of Medical Science, based in Srinagar, conducted a study finding that of 112 young and adolescent women suffered from polycystic ovarian syndrome—a condition that can cause infertility along with a host of other reproductive symptoms—roughly 65-70% of them suffered from psychiatric illnesses such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Perhaps the major source of psychological disorder is caused by women's own family whether it is force from in-laws or a husband for not being able to have a child or from girls own parents due to their fear of the disgrace surrounding sterility, on seeing the unsympathetic

condition of Kashmiri women it is necessary to strengthen the women with good opportunities, starting several programs, organizing free camps and seminars to enlighten the women folk with modernity etc. (Suri, 2013; Bashir *et al.*, 2013; Shamshad and Dabla, 2007).

Objectives and Methodology

The present study is purely based on secondary data. The data was gathered from NFHS-3, census, DLHS-3, SRS bulletin and Social and family welfare statistics in order to assess the conditions, status, problems and the miseries of Kashmiri women. The help from the internet sites have also been taken to make the article authenticate, genuine, accurate and up to date.

The objectives to bring forth this article are to assess the prevailing conditions of the women of Kashmir who is victimized by the multitude problems simultaneously. The main thrust was kept on the declining women education, rape and molestation, declining sex ratio and family conditions of women. To eradicate these problems up to the roots some suggestions have been written in this article that may be taken into practice to get the desired goal.

Gender Disparity

Gender is an ambiguous concept having ample overlapping meanings. It indicates the socio-cultural identification of masculinity and femininity and the way societies distinguish them and disperse social role and responsibilities. There is no common understanding of its

meaning even among feminist scholars (Acker, 1992). It is a range of physical, mental and behavioral, social, cultural characteristics of maleness and femaleness (Kessler and Mekenna, 1978). Gender biologically means state of being male or female but it was sexologist John Money who made the difference between biological sex and gender as a role in 1955. Today this difference is strictly followed in some contexts especially the social sciences and documents written by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is important to understand gender as different from sexuality. Sexuality concerns physical and biological differences that distinguish males from females. Gender is a socio-cultural construct associated with men and women. These social constructions attach themselves to behaviors, expectations, roles, representations and sometimes to values and beliefs that are specific to either men or women.

Kashmiri women quite some time past has suffered at the hands of the society. The customs and traditions over the centuries took such a shape that she was victimized. Inequality between men and women is one of the most crucial disparities in Kashmir. Women here tend to suffer quite badly in relative terms compared with men, even within the same families. This is reflected not only in education and opportunity to develop talents but also in the more basic fields of nutrition, health and survival. It is argued that ideal sex ratio should go more towards females than males as women are physiologically set to live longer than men. However the powerful desire of everyone to have son in inclination to that of girl as they deem sons are good earners, good care takers for the entire family especially for parents in their old age (Sheth, 2006). Sons are connected with pride and honor in the society and social power. Sons are regarded to carry on the family name to further generations. The property in terms of land, house etc. remains within the family (Bandopadhyay and Macpherson, 2003). In agricultural families sons are wanted as hands to work in the field and in small towns value of sons is regarded as an asset in the fight against the encroaching urban society (Arnold *et al.*, 1998). Studies across India have found that boys are much more likely than girls to be taken to a health facility when sick (Das Gupta, 1987). Girls are found emaciated than boys in both northern and southern states (Arnold *et al.*, 1998).

Women in Kashmir obviously suffer with a lot of issues and challenges related to health, economy, education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, female feticide, late marriage, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wages, child marriage, child sex abuse, child labour, acid throwing and sexual harassment at work. In terms of nutrition, girls and women folk are discriminated almost in every family of Kashmir. It has been seen girls are lactated for lesser time than boys (Das Gupta, 1987).. This reason is accountable for more mortality of women than men (Kundu and Mahesh, 1991).

Sex Ratio

It is a significant parameter that reflects Female- Male Ratio (FMR). The position of women in society is one of the vital manifestations of the evident and conspicuous disparities lying between the male and female. In India female-male ratio averaged 933 in 2001 and it was 940 in 2011 which is one of the lowest in the world (Patel, 2004). In J&K the female population recorded from 47.15% of the total population in 2001 to 46.88% in 2011. In 2001 female-male ratio averaged 892 in 2001 and it was 883 in 2011. This declining sex ratio is a matter of great concern and need to be rectified on priority basis. The Table-1 depicts sex ratio of J&K.

Table 1: Sex ratio of J&K and all India

Year	Population group	J & K	All India
2011	Over all sex ratio (OSR)	883	940
	0-6 age groups (CSR)	859	914
2001	Over all sex ratio (OSR)	892	933
	0-6 age groups (CSR)	941	927
Gap 2011-2001	Over all sex ratio (OSR)	-11	7
	0-6 age groups (CSR)	-102	-3

Source (Census India, 2011)

On seeing the results shown in Table-1, it is clear that the sex ratio is favoring to males both nationally and state level. But the gruesome concern is about the declining sex ratio in J&K as we are becoming modern day by day in every field but here we have lagged behind in conserving and preserving the women community of society. If we look towards the various districts of J&K we see the following six districts having worst results in 2011 census in terms of decrease in number of females

Table 2: District wise number of women

S. No	District	CSR	Change since 2001
1	Pulwama	836	-173
2	Budgam	832	-170
3	Kupwara	854	-167
4	Anantnag	831	-130
5	Baramulla	866	-83
6	Srinagar	869	-82

From the above Table 2 it is seen that the Pulwama district where from the author belongs shows the highest decline in the number of women.

Diet and Nutrition

A diet should be balanced one means that it should have all the nutrients present so that the body's immune system remains strong. A healthy body is possible with the help of healthy food (IIPS and Macro international, 2007). Nutritional deficits that lead to disease and health problems are not a product of any worldwide shortage of food, but of the politics of its distribution (White, 2006). A family can be sound if the mother is sound both mentally and

physically. The overall development of a child depends upon how the mother nourishes them. It is said that mother's lap is the first school for a child so it is necessary to keep the mother healthy by surviving her best diet in terms of both quality and quantity. Due to the low status of Kashmiri women their diet lacks in both quality and quantity. These conditions not only complicate childbearing and result in maternal and infant deaths, maternal reduction, and low birth weight infants but also harshly affect women's efficiency and quality of life. The table-3 gives us the information on how females get inadequate food than males. Women in comparison to men in Jammu and Kashmir utilize low consumption of food items which are rich in protein content such as fish, egg, milk, curd and pulses or beans

Table 3: Types of food used in Men and women of J&K in comparison to India

Type of food	J&K		India	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Milk or curd	79.8	70.7	67.2	55.4
Pulses or beans	77.0	71.6	90.7	89.5
Dark green leafy vegetables	94.5	90.5	93.6	92.9
Fruits	57.4	49.6	47.4	39.8
Eggs	31.7	20.4	41.3	32.3
Fish	7.0	3.0	31.3	28.2
Chicken or meat	46.9	44.0	28.3	22.7
Fish or chicken/meat	48.1	44.4	40.9	35.4

Source (IIPS and Macro international, 2007).

Education

Education is prerequisite for expansion and development. It is an important indicator of the social, economic, political, human development of a society and thus basic to any programme of social and economic progress. The problem of illiteracy was provoked by economic disparity, gender disparity and rigid social stratifications. Inequality between genders is one of the most crucial and yet one of the most unrelenting disparities in Jammu and Kashmir, where differences in female and male literacy rates are obvious, more so in the rural areas and among the deprived sections of society. It has been observed that even though the literacy rate has been improved for past fifty years both in India and Jammu and Kashmir as well but the gap between female and male literacy still continues. The literacy level has enhanced from 12.95% in 1961 to 68.74% in 2011 but is still unparalleled to that of national level i.e. 74.04%.

Table 4: Literacy rate from 1961 to 2011

Year	1961	1971	1981	2001	2011
Total	12.95	21.71	30.64	54.46	68.74
Male	19.75	31.01	41.46	65.75	78.26
Female	5.05	10.94	18.73	41.82	58.01
Gap	14.7	20.07	23.09	23.93	20.25

Source (Census of India J & K, 2001)

The data in the Table-4 shows that the male literacy rate has increased to 78.26% in 2011 that was only 19.75% in 1961 whereas the female literacy

rate increased from 5.05 in 1961 to 58.01% in 2011. Thus female literacy still fails to surpass the male literacy rate.

Rape & Molestation

Rape & Molestation of Kashmiri women has become an easy job for men in power. Since the partition of India and Pakistan, Kashmir has been a disputed and divided territory with Human Rights abuses in both the sections controlled by India (Jammu and Kashmir) and that controlled by Pakistan (Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan). In Jammu and Kashmir Human Rights abuses that ranges from mass killings, forced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual abuse are an ongoing issue to political repression and suppression of freedom of speech (Hartjen *et al.*, 2011). The Indian Army, Central Reserve Police force, Border Security Force and various other elements has been accused and held responsible for committing severe human rights abuses against Kashmiri civilian (Hartjen *et al.*, 2011; Rediff News, 2012; Hindwan, 1998).

As we all know that whole country got shackled and shattered about the barbaric and heinous crime that took place in a moving bus in Delhi where a 23 year old girl was raped and an iron rod was inserted into her genital parts. However Jammu and Kashmir rape victims in spite of fighting for justice from past many years have remained dissatisfied as the culprits continue to remain scot free. The government has registered 1336 rape cases since 2006 in Jammu and Kashmir but has remained unsuccessful to punish the culprits. Some rape victims are below the age of 18 and how pity it is! The Kashmir based NGO claims that more than one thousand women have been raped, molested or abused during the last 20 years. However international agencies like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have calculated the number of such victims at around 900. Many rape cases have not been registered due to the fright of reprisals besides having trust deficit. Khurram Parvez, the coordinator of Jammu and Kashmir coalition of civil society (JKCCS) said that if perpetrators of Delhi rape case were arrested in a speedy investigation then why not culprits involved in the rape cases of Kashmir women- why this difference? The rape victims of Kashmir are unable to get their mates for whole life and remain burden on parents and the married rape victims are either betrayed by husband or by in-laws. This agony of mind leads the victims to commit suicide. The mass rapes of Kunan-Poshpora were 62 women including some teen aged girls by the Indian forces has devatated the future of that village. A case study in 1994 carried out by the Kashmir Women's Initiative for Peace and Disarmament (KWIPD) had reported that for three years after the incident of Kunan-Poshpora in Kupwara district on 23 Feb. 1991, not a single marriage proposal had been received for any women raped or not, in the village. The Shopian alleged twin rape and murder, Kunan-Poshpora case, Wavoor case could not be solved and the culprits are still free (The Milli Gazette, 2013).

In this paper we have taken only few aspects related to Kashmiri women as there are many such issues where the condition of women is miserable and troublesome. The female feticide and infanticide, late marriage, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wages, child sexual abuse, child labor etc are other issues that a Kashmiri women is victimized by.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the above mentioned problems, miseries and challenges of a Kashmiri women their empowerment is inevitable process to seek the holistic empowerment of nation. Empowerment includes the social, political and economic aspects. Women in Kashmir are having myriad number of issues and challenges related to 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. Moreover, there are rising issues and challenges of elderly women and widows in Kashmir. Besides psychological disorders, rape and molestation of women has become common and easy to perform because neither any private organization nor any government organization is able to check the same. Women in Kashmir is suffering from infertility due to recurrent stress in the cross fire of conflict between India and Pakistan. The sex-ratio as per census 2011 was 883 which is a matter of great concern and needs to be addressed on priority basis. The central government should not treat Jammu and Kashmir with a step motherly approach as they treat it as its integral part. The pending cases in the judiciary related to women subjugation should be solved by the cordial approach of state and center.

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