

RESEARCH ARTICLE

New Wars, New Victimhood, and New Ways of Overcoming It

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Contemporary conflicts, asymmetric conflicts, or New Wars as they are now called differ in nature and context from earlier, traditional, or Old Wars. As a result, the effects of these New Wars on women have also altered in various ways. However, when we say that women are suffering in conflicts nowadays, it does not negate their suffering in earlier or traditional wars. The assertion here is that because of the changing nature of conflicts, more civilians, and therefore an increasing number of women and children, are being negatively affected than in the traditional forms of war.

This paper will look into how New Wars have made an impact on the lives of women and how they have been rendered more vulnerable as a result. It will also look at the ways in which women have worked towards bringing about positive changes in their societies and tried to influence their governments to prevent violence and work towards sustainable peace. Examples from Jammu and Kashmir will be analyzed to show how women's groups from across the Line of Control (LoC) between India and Pakistan have come together to build a platform for people-to-people interaction, reduce stereotypes of the 'Other' and focus on arriving at a common ground. Individual case studies of women having moved beyond victimhood will be highlighted to show how women can make a positive impact and act as role models.

Introduction

The New Wars thesis identifies and delineates certain characteristics that are peculiar to the nature of contemporary, post-Cold war conflicts. Critics of the thesis hold that there may not be as thorough a demarcation in the causes and nature of warfare as is made out to be, or the supposed changes may be exaggerated (Newman 2004). This is true of many

a theory where the beginning of a structure does not necessarily imply the abrupt end of the one preceding it. There are certain characteristics that are carried forth, others that are modified and still others that become extinct in this process of evolution.

The use of the term 'new' for the purpose of this paper means a 'continuum of the old', rather than an abrupt break from it. Therefore, when the term 'new' is used, it refers to the changes that have taken place in the nature and structure of wars/conflicts, the new challenges it has thrown up in the form of an increased (willing and unwilling) participation of women, and how women

in particular have found ways of dealing with these changes. Scholars like David Duriesmith (2014: 236–254) underscore the importance of understanding New Wars from a feminist perspective and exploring ‘protest masculinity’ as a causal factor as well as one of the reasons that New Wars take the route that they do.

New Wars and their dynamics have forced international organizations like the United Nations to increasingly recognize these changes of cause and effect. The UN in particular has tried to incorporate modifications into its policies and functions accordingly. Significant among these is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and its follow-up resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010), which focus primarily on women and armed conflict, acknowledge the multiple roles played by women during conflicts, and ways in which they can bring about positive changes in their societies during and after conflicts.

This paper is divided into three main parts—the concept of New Wars, effects of these New Wars on women in the form of ‘new victimhood’, and efforts by women to act as agents of positive change despite their victimhood. The focus of this study will be on women in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).¹ In addition to the new victimhood brought forth by the armed conflict, Kashmiri women’s fight for justice and their agency in working towards positive peacebuilding will be analyzed through two case studies: the first, of a woman fighting for justice for herself and victims like her; and the second, of women from both sides of the LoC between India and Pakistan taking ownership of peacebuilding through people-to-people interaction. These women act as role models and encourage others to participate in peacebuilding with justice in J&K. Increasingly, young and educated women in professions such as, law, academics, and journalism are working towards building positive peace in Kashmir within the limitations imposed by a situation of protracted conflict (Qureshi 2018).

New Wars

Scholars and proponents of the New Wars thesis have identified certain characteristics of contemporary conflicts that differentiate them from traditional wars. One of the main characteristics of these New Wars is that they have shifted from interstate wars (between two states) to intrastate wars (within the boundaries of the state). The Carnegie Commission for Preventing Deadly Conflicts (CCPDC) states that “...one of the most remarkable aspects of the post-Cold War world is that wars within states vastly outnumber wars between states” (1997: xvii). Mary Kaldor (2013: 2–3) classifies actors, goals, methods, and forms of finance as the main areas of differentiation between Old and New Wars. Newman has generalized the basic premises of all theses on New Wars into six main characteristics: a decline in interstate wars and increase in intrastate wars, a failure of the state and social transformation, an increasingly ethnic and religious nature of conflicts, an increase in the number of civilian casualties and forced displacement of populations, a deliberate targeting of civilians, and a blurring of lines between combatants and civilians (Newman 2004: 174–175).

The blurring of lines between civilians and combatants makes it very difficult to arrive at exact numbers of civilians or combatants that are killed or affected. It also influences the ways in which such people are dealt with and requires Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be revisited when the state security forces are tackling armed rebels living within civilian inhabited areas (DNA Web Team 2017). For instance, a new trend that has emerged in J&K is that when militants and Indian army are engaged in an armed encounter, local youth from within and surrounding areas move towards the encounter site in large numbers and pelt stones at the army in order to help militants flee the encounter site (Gul 2015; PTI 2017). This led the Indian army chief, General Bipin Rawat, to state that these youth would be treated as “overground workers of terrorists” and the army would “go helter-skelter for them” (DNA

Web Team 2017). In the absence of a clear classification, it is left to individuals to label people as 'unarmed protestors', 'overground workers', 'terrorists', and the like. These classifications based on political dispensations and individual understanding or biases are dangerous not only in terms of their usage, but also in terms of how the armed forces deal with the people thus classified.

The blurring of combat lines, the 'helter-skelter approach', and the absence of established SOPs in general complicates the problem by bringing both the militants and security forces in close contact with women even inside their houses, making them more vulnerable as a result.

The problem is further compounded by the protracted nature of these contemporary conflicts, what Mary Kaldor (2013: 3) calls their "persistence and spread", which she sees as the main difference with Old Wars. Edward Azar (1990: 12) coined the term "Protracted Social Conflict" for conflicts occurring in the developing world. Azar underscored the prolonged nature of contemporary conflicts and emphasized the importance of the collective identity of a community in creating and sustaining these conflicts. Thus, it is in the very nature of such contemporary, protracted conflicts to self-perpetuate and get convoluted over time. This makes their resolution more elusive.

New Victimhood

It is in context of the above mentioned changes in the nature of conflict that New Victimhood can be understood. The intent, again, is not to create a binary distinction between Old and New Victimhood but to highlight the subsequent changes brought forth by a change in the nature of warfare. Two most important changes in New Wars have affected women disproportionately and thus brought about New Victimhood: large number of civilian casualties (Rupesinghe and Anderlini 1998) and the prolonged nature of New Wars (Azar 1990).

Among the civilian casualties, women form a majority of the affected population (ESCWA

2007).² According to Dyan Mazurana et al., (2005: 2), "Genocide, rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, trafficking, sexual slavery and the intentional spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS are integral elements of these new forms of conflict." Angana Chatterji (2012: 181) describes the nature and the use of sexualized violence as a weapon of war in colonial and postcolonial times. Nyla Ali Khan explains how women's bodies are used by the armed forces to avenge themselves against a population that dared to go against the will of the state: "A number of women have been ruthlessly violated by members of the paramilitary troops deployed in J&K as a tool to avenge themselves, and indelibly scathe the consciousness of a culture that dared to raise its insurgent head against the two mammoth nuclear powers on the subcontinent" (Khan 2009: 101–102).³ Contemporary wars have, therefore, entered homes and into the bodies of women who have been violated for being related to state or non-state actors, or to inflict collective punishment on an entire population.

In societies with a predominantly conservative and patriarchal structure, this punishment or revenge becomes more pronounced as women, being the symbols of 'honor', are targeted with the specific intent to emasculate the enemy. The bearers of 'honor' also bear the stigma of having been defiled by the enemy and as a result are considered impure and unworthy of the social status accrued to other women. Hypermasculinization of the powerful (militarized masculinities), therefore, becomes directly proportional to the symbolic emasculation of the weaker party through its women. Though most of the focus is on sexual violence against women, the social, economic, and political impact of armed conflict on their lives cannot be underestimated.

The protracted nature of New Wars perpetuates violations and victimhood. It shatters longstanding and established structures without adequately providing means of replacing them with better and/or lasting

alternatives. In such situations, women find themselves caught up in “exploitative informal economies” (Mazurana et al., 2005: 5). Also, demographic changes that take place as a result of the loss of the earning male member of the family results in an increase in the workload for women as they bear the burden of becoming the primary caregivers of the family (Ibid: 5–6). In the state of Jammu and Kashmir in India, which has seen an armed insurgency against the Indian government since 1989, women who lost their earning male members to the violence have had to “assume, disproportionately, the task of caregiving to disintegrated families” (Chatterji 2012: 185). Caregiving in itself includes political, economic, and psychological issues. In some instances, this has provided a perceived, but temporary, ‘empowerment’ to women who are required to move out of their homes to assume more non-traditional roles and also to fulfill the dual obligations of providing for the family in addition to carrying out the traditional roles at home (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002: 2). More often than not, these women are relegated to their traditional roles in post-conflict situations, thus negating their experiences or ‘empowerment’.

In J&K, in many instances, the burden of trying to seek justice in case of an enforced ‘disappearance’ or death also falls on the woman (Chatterji 2012: 185). This is also a non-traditional field that she has to step into as a result of the change in gender roles during conflict. As can be imagined, trips to the police, army or courts by unaccompanied women are not devoid of social stigma in a patriarchal society. There is a threat of being branded a ‘collaborator’ with the state machinery, which carries its own retribution by non-state armed militants (Manchanda 2005).

Victims of rape often face social stigma and are ostracized because of the notions of ‘purity’ attached to a woman’s body (Ibid; Chowdhary 2010: 331). If married, women face the risk of being left by their husbands and if unmarried, there is a very slim chance that (marriage) might happen (Dewan 1994: 2655; Essar et al., 2016: 106–113; Chowdhary

2010: 327). In societies where women derive their social status from the male (in this case the husband), it is very difficult to lead a dignified life in such circumstances. It is important to remember, as claimed in the beginning of this paper, that rape is also a continuum of one of the effects of armed conflicts on women. However, the fact that rape has been used *systematically as a tool of war* is a trait of New Wars. Rehn and Sirleaf (2002: 1) explain the phenomenon in these words: “Their bodies, deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS or carrying a child conceived in rape, have been used as envelopes to send messages to the perceived ‘enemy’”. The very fact that women’s bodies are used strategically as battlegrounds in the wars of men against each other ensures that more women are victimized—sexually, economically, politically, and socially, and continue to live marginalized lives.

One such section of marginalized women victims in Kashmir are the ones whose male family member, often the only earning member of the family, has ‘disappeared’ after being taken away during raids by security forces or by ‘unidentified armed gunmen’. These ‘disappeared’ persons have no recourse to legal aid nor is their arrest documented anywhere, thereby denying the family members access to, or information about, their whereabouts (Public Commission on Human Rights: 96).

Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances defines enforced disappearances as follows:

“For the purposes of this Convention, “enforced disappearance” is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a

person outside the protection of the law” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights).

Disappearances of family members leave the whole families shattered—emotionally, physically, and financially as they spend all their energies and resources in looking for the missing person (Amnesty International 1999: 1–69). In the context of enforced disappearances, the website of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP Kashmir) mentions the following: “Uncertainty exists because people do not know what to do or where to turn. Terror is caused by the unknown yet undoubtedly terrible fate of the victim, and the realization that anyone can be subjected to enforced disappearance and any motive may be used to justify the disappearance”.

Though men suffer the direct brunt of enforced disappearances, women are sufferers of a more indirect, lingering, but no less brutal impact of this tactic. One of the manifestations of the disappearance of young men is in the form of the half widows of Kashmir. These are women whose husbands have been subjected to enforced disappearances, leaving the women neither as wives nor widows. As a result of the ambiguity on the status of disappeared persons, the half widows live a life of psychological, social, and economic uncertainty. A half widow lives life in a limbo; the indefinite wait taking a toll in the form of stress and other mental illnesses such as, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PCHR: 96, 278–279). The social stigma of not having a male member to ‘dignify’ her existence further complicates her position in society. The absence of a man renders her emotionally rudderless and physically vulnerable. In principle, she has the option of remarriage but in practice there are many hurdles to that as well. For one, there is no consensus by theologians on how long a woman should wait for her missing husband before she can marry again.⁴ The issue of the custody of children, should their mother remarry, is also one of the hurdles these women face while trying to

carve out a future of emotional, physical, and economic stability.

In my interactions with the half widows,⁵ the irony is evident in their loss of hope in seeing the husband return. In this hopelessness, some women expressed that even the ‘status’ of being a widow seemed a relatively better alternative. (In the absence of a death certificate of the husband, the women often fall through the cracks of the already meager rehabilitation packages offered by the government for widows). These women are often shunned by their own family members and find it very difficult to survive. The women are thrown out of their in-laws’ home after their husband’s disappearance and some do not get shelter in their parents’ home either. The half widows, along with their children, are among the worst sufferers of the conflict. In Old Wars, war widows would wear their widowhood as a badge of honor which is denied to these widows (or half widows) of New Wars.

The phenomenon of disappearances and the family (especially women) left behind, led to the creation of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), an example of a grassroots movement working towards overcoming this effect of New Wars in Kashmir. The APDP is an organization (it prefers to call itself a ‘movement’) in Kashmir that was formed in 1994 to seek the whereabouts of the missing boys and men of Kashmir and justice for their families (APDP Kashmir; Essa 2011). It is headed by Parveena Ahangar whose teenage son was picked up by the Indian security forces in 1990 and has since been missing. Her struggle to locate her missing son brought her into contact with many other women like her who had no information of their sons/brothers/husbands after they had been picked up by security forces (Personal communication December 2017). The APDP emerged as an organized support group for such women that would make collective efforts to seek justice:

Parveena and other mothers like her seek to know the fate of their children who disappeared in the abyss of

political and military oppression before life had a chance to beckon them. The unknown fate of their children is a constant presence in their lives, like a leaden sky whose clouds are getting lower and lower. The lack of closure in their lives makes their existence unbearable. Their stories evoke tragic destinies, unredeemed by justice. (Khan 2009:103)

During the interview mentioned above (December 2017), Parveena narrated how she had asked her husband to continue running his shop to provide for the family while she searched for their son. Parveena went on to defy all conventional gender roles that would stop her from looking for her son. From visiting police stations, army camps, interrogation centers, courts and even forests to organizing protests in Kashmir and New Delhi, she has stoically stood for the cause of justice. She resolved to bring together and fight for all the mothers who had lost their sons to enforced disappearances and vowed to fight for other mothers even if she found her son (Ibid).

Parveena, who has had no formal education, attends conferences and delivers talks at national and international levels. She highlights the plight of women (especially mothers) of disappeared persons and mobilizes individuals and organizations to put pressure on the Indian government to disclose the whereabouts of these disappeared men and boys. Parveena has come to be known as the Iron Lady of Kashmir and epitomizes the 'forced empowerment' of a woman that can change her from a victim to an agent of positive change. She has been nominated for, and received various international awards, including being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

The empowerment of Parveena, and many women like her who continue to defy traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society like Kashmir, is forced because these are women who are rendered breadwinners of the family by virtue of losing the earning member and, given the choice, would rather

not be in that position. Once the woman is in the decision-making role, she becomes economically independent, relatively speaking, and has some say in the affairs of the household. However, in my interviews with women from the APDP, most of them had no sense of empowerment and considered the role they had been forced to perform as a burden.

The APDP has conducted extensive research and collected data on one thousand disappeared persons. The members of the APDP are the families of these disappeared persons. They meet on the 10th of every month to highlight their cause (APDP Kashmir) and to share their grief with each other. It also supports its members by paying them a nominal sum per month, or by way of medicines for those who need them. One of the factors which makes the APDP stand out and gain credibility in society and among its members is the fact that it has deliberately and successfully remained detached from all political organizations and does not receive funding from any of these organizations (Ibid).

Domestic Violence as New Victimhood

New Victimhood is also manifested in the form of increased violence against women within the home. This is more prominent in societies where gender inequality, patriarchy, and other forms of structural violence against women exist during peace time (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002: 9). Since wars have been brought in from the border areas to villages, towns, and cities and the strategy has changed from killing the enemy on the battlefield to deliberately targeting civilians (Kaldor 2013: 3; Duriesmith 2014: 238), the natural corollary is the effect of this violence inside homes and within families. Protracted conflicts result in the breakdown of social structures, which "fuels male aggression against women, who suffer from sexual violence both within and outside their domestic household" (Plumper and Neumayer 2006: 724; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002: 14–15). Until recently, domestic violence was not thought to have a direct link to armed conflict but

research has shown that there has been a considerable increase in the cases of domestic violence, particularly against women, in areas of contemporary conflict (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002: 15). Rehn and Sirleaf (2002: 24), in their UNIFEM report, cite the case of a man in Macedonia who commented that because of the stresses of war, it was “inevitable” that he would beat his wife. This is a departure from Old Wars where men would be away from home fighting wars and therefore would not come in daily contact with their families. In contemporary protracted conflicts, men have the chance to give vent to their stresses by way of inflicting harm on the women of their house, especially in societies where cultural violence against women is already prevalent in the form of patriarchy.

Domestic violence perpetrated by men who are stressed by war, occupation, or prolonged conflict may be an attempt to reclaim their masculinity which they feel they have lost at the hands of more powerful adversaries. A WHO (1997: 2) report states that the frustrations and powerlessness that men feel during conflict may be manifested in the form of domestic violence against women.⁶ They may try to regain the feeling of power by scapegoating women in their homes. Rleckmann states, “Domestic violence can be expected to occur more often in connection with conflict for two main reasons. First, the more intense a conflict becomes, the greater the acceptance of violence within the society. Second, domestic violence is often a means of venting stress” (2015: 24).

Crimes against women in general and domestic violence in particular see a spike in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. This phenomenon, particularly with respect to increased domestic violence, can be better understood by analyzing its link with what scholars refer to as ‘protest masculinity’. As mentioned earlier in this paper, ‘protest masculinity’ can be understood as both a causal factor for New Wars and a catalyst for shaping it, particularly with respect to exaggerated aggression associated with this type of masculinity. Duriesmith (2014: 242–244),

deriving from Connell’s definition of the term, explains it as the increased aggression that men resort to when they feel a loss of their masculinity to a more hegemonic masculinity. Placing this concept in a situation of conflict, it can be understood that men who are beaten up or humiliated by armed forces (hegemonic males), feel a need to reclaim their position as dominant figures in their homes, if not outside.

In Jammu and Kashmir, armed violence is focused mainly in the valley of Kashmir, which has seen a spike in the cases of domestic violence and crimes against women (Hassan 2017). Records of the Crime Branch office in Kashmir show that a total of 4362 cases of crimes against women were registered in Kashmir in 2013–14 as against 1088 registered cases in Jammu for the same time period. These cases included rape, harassment, kidnapping, molestation, and traffick-ing (Hassan 2017; Tantry 2017). The actual number of cases could be higher, keeping in view the fact that in patriarchal and conservative societies, women are reluctant to register cases against their perpetrators for fear of retribution by the community, or in cases of domestic violence, by the family. However, the general trend in terms of an escalation in the number of cases is evident.

Women’s Agency

Though the victimhood mentioned above are common to women in most New Wars, it is important to bear in mind that women are not a homogenous group of people. Based on their socioeconomic status, region (rural-urban), religion, and several other factors, they view themselves differently and can be active participants in a conflict rather than simply being passive recipients of violence inflicted on them (Mazurana et al., 2005: 2–3). Amartya Sen (2005: 207) sees gender as a contributor to societal inequality, but something that is not independent of class. Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, with reference to Kashmir, writes “...the woman’s role as a victim is often so glamourized that it has forbidden the evolution of women’s identity as

distinct from the male one in any community, caste or region of the state" (Chowdhary 2010: 343). Therefore, to see women only as victims is to take away from them their capacity to be rational individuals capable of making decisions. It is this capacity which is often overlooked while peace agreements are signed and decisions taken. Even those women who actively participated in the conflict are relegated to the background where decision-making is involved. The United Nations Resolution 1325 made a very important contribution towards recognizing the impact of armed conflict on women and the importance of gender mainstreaming at all levels (Schirch and Sewak 2005: 2). However, there is still much left to be desired as far as implementation is concerned. The United Nations Security Council conducted a Global survey on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the fact that despite resolutions and women's participation in post-conflict scenarios being the priority, little has been done towards actual implementation of women's participation and in bringing women in leadership roles that would make a significant difference on the ground (2015).

Notwithstanding the limitations, women affected by conflict have worked in different ways and at various levels to emerge as agents of peacebuilding, seekers of justice, and builders of society.

Overcoming victimhood in New Wars

In the context of New Wars, overcoming, or moving beyond victimhood is fraught with hurdles considering the persistent nature of these wars. Victims are required to seek justice from the system that perpetrated the atrocities on them in the first place. Also, it is a term not bereft of political intonations. The term has been politicized to the extent that it could mean that the victims should stop 'feeling' like victims and 'move on'. This is a very slippery slope. On the one hand it implies, and rightly so, that the victimized women need to rebuild their lives and

not continue to live in the past. In addition to rebuilding their lives, they can use their experiences to help others rebuild theirs.

On the flip side, the very idea of moving beyond victimhood is sometimes used as a tool to deflect attention from seeking justice and punishing the perpetrator. The victim is made to believe that moving away from the past is the best way of moving forward. This can mean impunity for the perpetrators, especially if they are in league with the politically powerful elite. One has, therefore, to be cautious in urging the victims to 'move on' and 'leave behind' their victimhood; the oft-debated prioritization of peace over justice.

This paper discusses the term in its positive meaning whereby women act as agents of positive change within their societies, not just being passive recipients of violence, oppression, or even welfare, as Amartya Sen (2005: 222) suggests, but as facilitators of social transformations and reconstruction in conflict-ridden societies. Essar Batool (2017) writes about the women of Kashmir who have invaded the spaces that men traditionally held, as those of being active participants in resistance against oppression. She talks about the individuality and agency of women, their ability to speak for themselves and be part of the narrative, and be, as she calls them, the "backbone of the resistance movement".

Another change that has been brought about by New Wars is the role of the civil society in working and moving towards conflict resolution. Again, the nature of New Wars, their beginning and thriving within society demands a resolution from the society itself, an elicited response more than a prescriptive approach.

A case in point is a group of women who decided to act as peacemakers and peace builders. Actions like increasing people-to-people contact among women from both sides of the Line of Control could contribute to confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan.

Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation (CDR) (Cross-LoC Dialogue)

The CDR is a non-governmental organization based in the Indian state of Haryana. The mission of this NGO is to work towards building peace in South Asia with the ultimate goal of reconciliation brought about through a process of dialogue and discourse (CDRIndia). CDR has been working in Jammu and Kashmir since 2003 and has facilitated the coming together of Kashmiri women from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC). In the process, it has successfully been able to make Kashmiri women take ownership of peacebuilding in Kashmir. Women have come together to build connections, to remove stereotypes, and to share experiences—both positive and negative—across the LoC. From 2005 to 2015, CDR organized 17 cross-LoC dialogues between women. Women stressed the need to move beyond the narrative of victimhood and to take charge of their own agency; participate actively in peacebuilding, socio-economic, and legal issues in women's empowerment (CDR 2012: 10):

“Acting as a platform for women to unanimously reject violence in Kashmir and articulate their needs and concerns, the Gulmarg Dialogue became a milestone in forging a path to peace building, reconciliation and reconnection between women from either side of the divide in Kashmir” (Ibid: 12).

The process of dialogue continued with women from Indian Administered Kashmir (IAK) crossing over to Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK), which was a milestone in itself. A very important result of this dialogue was the breaking of stereotypes about each side and discussions about how the media feeds propaganda which, if not verified, can result in building up of differences between the two sides in a conflict. Women from IAK told their counterparts that they would much rather be called 'survivors of conflict' than 'victims

of conflict'. They needed to be recognized as agents of positive change in their society. These interactions also gave rise to women's organizations within Indian administered Kashmir like 'Women for Peace', which has brought together women from within Kashmir to discuss their problems and work towards solutions in an indigenous framework.

Though the duration and frequency of these initiatives waxes and wanes with the heating or cooling of the political relations between India and Pakistan, a sustained effort is being made by both sides to ensure ongoing communication and work at each end to put pressure on their respective governments to facilitate a dialogue between all stakeholders of the conflict in Kashmir and ensure the involvement of women's voices in the resolution of the conflict.

Conclusion

Women are struggling to escape the constricting grip of victimhood and regain control over their lives, sometimes of their own volition and at other times by way of circumstances forced upon them. During conflicts, women often experience a change in their lives/status from being the ones 'provided' for to becoming the 'providers'. It is often a forced change in the economic status of women that is brought about by the fact that the men of the family either leave to fight, or are incapacitated, or unavailable to provide for the family. In such scenarios, women take on the additional responsibility to provide for the family left behind. This creates not only a change in the economic status of these women but also a change in the way they are viewed by their family in particular, and the society in general. It falls on the patterns and priorities of post-conflict reconstruction policies to ensure that these women's roles during conflict are acknowledged and their experience and expertise is put to use while formulating new policies.

It is imperative that such women be accepted and heard so that society may learn and transform at the very basic level and that violence against women in all forms may cease

to exist. Women who have faced violence are in a much better position to bring forth the effects that this violence has had on them and consequently better placed to provide a bottom-up approach to exercises in peacebuilding and conflict transformation which will eventually lead to sustainable peace.

However, as mentioned earlier, the structures of violence are so deep rooted in certain societies that it is very difficult to change attitudes in a short period of time. Changes in attitudes can be made by dismantling the structures of oppressive power that have led to structural injustices in the form of women being passive recipients of power derived from above. More and more women are now questioning their passive role in society and are trying harder to move towards political, economic, and emotional independence. Participation has become the keyword in this process. The skills of women in regrouping and rejoining fractured societies are slowly being recognized, but implementation on the ground still seems some way off. An exchange of letters between Freud and Einstein suggests that people need a collective and sustained movement against oppression if there is to be an impact. In the same vein, Krishna Misri says that “limited empowerment” generates “limited identities” (Chowdhary 2010: 314) and therefore, we can add, limited results.

Even then through all the resistance against them, Kashmiri women have been inching towards making themselves heard and are being increasingly recognized as agents of positive development and not just passive recipients of oppression.

Notes

¹ The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan after Indian independence in 1947. Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is the official name for the Indian administered part of Kashmir. The official name for Pakistan administered Kashmir is Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Both India and Pakistan

refer to AJK and J&K as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) respectively.

² Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. For further details on the topic, see Manchanda, Rita 2005: 4737–4738. See also Rehn and Sirleaf (2002): 10, where they claim that violence against women have reached ‘epidemic proportions’.

³ For case studies in J&K, see Bashir 2015.

⁴ For further details on the plight of women affected by violence in Kashmir, see PCHR report: 273–283.

⁵ semi-structured interviews conducted over a period of two months (June–July 2017).

⁶ Also see Rehn and Sirleaf: 14.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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