Chapter – 5

CONCLUSION
AND
SUGGESTIONS
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The people of Kashmir valley have been in conflict with Indian Union since its partition in 1947. The struggle for Right to Self Determination or Independence has continued in Kashmir in various forms; but in 1989 it exploded into an armed struggle when youth took violent means to achieve their objective of independence. They targeted Government offices with a view to declaring their resistance against the continued occupation of Kashmir by India which occupation they believe to be illegal.

The Government of India used its entire means to suppress this movement, through military and Para-military forces and soon this movement turned into a brutal blood bath between militants and security forces. The military and Para-military forces armed with many powers under draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSA), Disturbed Area Act, Prevention of Terrorist Activities (POTA) and Public Safety Act (PSA), have been committing various kinds of Human Rights Violations in Kashmir. The army used curfew, crack downs, search operations, arrest, torture, custodial killings, and disappearances of youth, firing, shelling, rape, locals as shields and other atrocities as a weapon to
suppress the movement. They also destroyed the private property like land and orchards, educational institutions, health care facilities, childcare centres by occupying them. In defense, militants both local and foreign used different strategies. They dictated shutdowns, carried out grenade attacks and bomb blasts, resorted to killing and torturing of informers, put up resistance leading to destruction of public property etc. They burnt down bridges to restrict the movement of troops. Furthermore, school buildings, health facilities, tourist hurts etc were burnt down by them so that they could not be used by security forces for accommodation purposes.

All these measures during the armed conflict in the valley have had a demoralizing rather brutalizing and traumatising impact on the wellbeing of the civilian population particularly women. There is hardly any sphere of life which has remained unaffected due to armed conflict. The economy of the state, tourism, agriculture, trade industry, education and health sector all suffered a setback. It is estimated that around one lakh people mostly youth have lost their lives in the conflict and more than 10 lakh have been injured. It has also created 32,400 war widows, 97,200 orphans and nearly 3 thousand half-widows. Large scale displacement of the people from different parts of the State to rest of
India or urban centers of the State itself is another untold story of the conflict.

Women are the worst sufferers of this conflict. They have become indirect victims of arrest, torture disappearance, displacement and loss of dear ones and direct victims of physical violence like rape, abduction and murder. This conflict has also caused disruption of their education and job opportunities. The disruption of their services and break down of social support systems has led to a negative impact on the overall wellbeing of the women. However, the problem is grave for the women who have lost their sole bread-winner of the family and are left with small children. The burden of responsibilities of earning, educating and bringing up of children all alone has made their life all the more miserable. However, the following conclusions can be drawn from the present study entitled as “Impact of Armed Conflict on Economic, Health and Educational Aspects of Women’s Life in Kashmir Valley.”

5.1 Findings Related to Economy

1. While assessing the economic condition of women, it is perceived that the two categories of women who have lost the sole bread winner have suffered tremendously. In terms of monthly income, it is found that the economic condition of women was worsened with the death/disappearance of the sole-bread winner. No doubt, these
women were found to be helped and supported by many organizations and agencies like parents, in-laws, Government organizations, non Government organizations, sons / relatives etc. They provided support to them in different forms like; cash, food and shelter, fee to their school going children, or other items but this support was often extended for a while and not up to the mark.

2. The Social welfare department of the State is also helpless in fulfilling the needs of these women. In case of ex-gratia relief, it is found that all the eligible respondents have not received it and those who have received have faced many obstacles and hassles in the whole process of getting the same. With reference to SRO43 only a small number of women have received the benefit either for themselves or for their wards but there is a long list of deserving cases whose applications are still being processed in the Government offices.

3. It is also found that the wife of a killed militant was given neither ex-gratia relief nor any benefit under SRO43. In case of half widows, it is found that Government agencies are loath to help them as they have their own set of formalities and conditionalities in providing any benefit to them.
4. After the death of the sole bread-winners, the women started working outside their home environs. While assessing about their new responsibility of feeding and caring for their family members, it is concluded that some women took bold steps against all odds in the society. Most of them being illiterate started working as labourers at handicraft centres, and as domestic servants and it was found that they were exploited and were given meager wages and were left to live from hand to mouth. However, most of them were not in a position to shoulder the responsibility of their families. Mostly it was found in case of half widows because they did not consider their husbands to be dead.

5. The economic problems and social security concerns of these women can be solved through remarriage. In fact polygamy in Islam is allowed with a view to provide sustenance and social security to widows through remarriage. Regarding the remarriage of these women it is concluded that a small number of women had remarried and some others wished to remarry in future but an overwhelming majority had decided not to re marry at all at any point of time in future. They neither have any consideration of remarrying in future. There are multiple reasons behind this: the lack of any suitable marriage proposals being the most important of
them all. The dearth of marriageable men in Kahmri society has been exceedingly felt for all these in view of killing and disappearance of thousands of young men in the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, some women have not felt inclined to get remarried, either for the sake of their children or because of advancing age or simply owning to social ostracism in vogue against remarrying especially that of mothers.

6. In case of half widows, most of them preferred to wait for their disappeared husbands and did not remarry. But there are some who defying all norms and got remarried even though a lot of confusion regarding the remarriage of half widows is found among legal and religious scholars.

5.2 Findings Related to Health

Besides economic instability, the continued armed conflict in the valley has also taken a heavy toll on the health of women. The daily exposure to a variety of severe traumatic stresses has led to an escalation on their physical and psychological ailments.

1. While assessing the impact of militancy on the health condition of women, it is perceived that the women who were, by and large, in a
good condition before their respective tragic events, have registered a painful but palpable detoriation in their health.

2. The statistical figures revealed that most of these women were suffering from psychological disorders. The incidence of 'depression' among them was highest which was followed by 'anxiety' and 'Post traumatic Disorder'.

3. The psychological disorders were found more among the half widows because they were unable to perform the last rituals of their missing husbands which would have lessened their grief. Moreover, some of these women were found to suffer from physical ailments like hypertension, cardiac trouble, headache and general weakness.

4. The children of these families were also found to suffer from several diseases mainly due to the low income levels and burden of responsibility of the family after the death or disappearance of the sole bread winner. The children were found to suffer from depression, cardiac problem, intestinal complaints and aggression in their behaviour.

5. While enquiring about the treatment for their psychiatrist ailments, it is found that the majority of these women have not undergone
any psychiatric prognostications or therapies. This is because they do not want to categorize themselves as mentally ill due to the social ostracism attached to it as people with mental disorders lack social support and is disowned by the society. Furthermore, the loss of interest in life and ignorance about their psychological disorders are other reasons leading to indifference towards their maladies.

6. With regard to women who have undergone the treatment, it is found that local doctors or general physicians are consulted by most of them. Many among them go in for self-medication or visit Sufi Shrines or Pir's practicing various types of occultations etc. Some of them visit Government Psychiatric Hospital Srinagar.

7. It is clear that the sad killing and disappearance of their husbands have badly impacted on these women. But it is also found that their condition was aggravated due to the intolerable harassment by different groups almost on daily basis.

8. The half widows were found to be under constant vigil by a cluster of intelligence agencies and militant groups. They were subjected to frequent questioning with regard to the whereabouts of their missing husbands. It is found that the single largest group who
harassed the women most was security forces followed by militants and ex-militants.

9. About the nature of the harassment, it is concluded that women were tortured and harassed in several ways where physical punishment was on the top followed by psychological torture, demand for food and shelter and sexual harassment.

10. While enquiring about the lodging of complaint against their harassment with the competent authorities, it is found that most of these women did not gather the courage to complain owning to multiple reasons operating in the society like social ostracism attached mostly to complaints about the sexual harassment. Fear of their lives and fear of their children’s future were some other reasons that refrained them from complaining.

5.3 Findings Related to Education

Of all the sectors, the impact of militancy on education was most terrible. The academic atmosphere in the entire Kashmir was disrupted to its foundations. All principles, standards, norms and criteria of education were thrown to the winds.

1) While bringing about the impact of armed conflict on the education of children of the families who have lost the sole
bread winner, it is concluded that a small percent of children were not pursuing their education even before the death or disappearance of their sole bread winner mainly due to poverty of parents and ignorance of parents about the importance of imparting education especially to their female wards. But most of the children were pursuing their education and were studying in different grades from primary to higher levels.

2) Women belonging to social strata, could not continue the education of their children after the death or disappearance of their husbands and as such it is found that 46.5% of male children and 53.25% of female children dropped out due to multiple reasons and among them economic problem topped for male drop outs followed by shouldering the responsibility of the family and poor health condition.

3) In case of female children most of them dropped out due to economic reasons besides social restrictions, poor health condition and occupation of school buildings by security forces.

4) It is found that the drop out percentage was higher at middle level.

4) While investigating about the work engagements of male drop outs it is found that majority of them were working as labourers,
some were working at handicraft centres as well. Some were found working at Government offices and some were staying idle at home due to poor health condition.

5) Female drop outs were found to help their mothers in their domestic work besides; some were working as domestic servants and some at handicraft centres as well.

5.4 Implications for supportive measures

The recent developments in the valley of Kashmir do not augur well for the overall welfare of the people of Kashmir valley. Especially they adversely impact the welfare of women with regard to their economic status, healthcare and educational opportunities.

The year 2008 witnessed a great public turmoil for three months across the valley over Amarnath land proprietary and allotment rights. In 2009 the valley witnessed highly surcharged protests in view of the rape and murder of two Shopian girls allegedly by security forces. The year 2010 i.e. the ongoing year witnessed unprecedently protests, hartals, and curfews, ceaseless stone pelting on security forces by youngsters of the valley for about four months and still continues to characterize the valley here and now. Around 109 lives, mostly teenagers, were lost in these stone pelting demonstrations.
Thus, despite the exceeding control over militancy related incidents in the valley, new forms and modes of protest are being increasingly applied with a view to achieving the separatist goals by inviting the international attention on Kashmir question. The impact of 2010 stone pelting public demonstrations has been so immense that Government of India sent an all party parliamentary delegation to Kashmir with a view to mollifying the political injuries of people in protest and persuading them to find a resolution of Kashmir question within Indian constitutional parameters. The gravity of the public demonstrations can be fathomed by the fact that for the first time a Jammu and Kashmir State Chief Minister, Mr. Umar Abdullah, almost questioned the status of the very incorporation of Kashmir into India by saying that while states such as Hyderabad and Jonagarh merged with Indian Union, Jammu and Kashmir State only acceded to Indian Union and did not merge with India.

It shows that the turmoil in Kashmir is almost uncontrollable till date. Despite considerable control over militancy, the public disaffection with Indian State is an ongoing process. Such a state of affairs is not conducive to the betterment of the women of Kashmir. Their economic status, health profile and educational achievementlessness continue to be a cause for profound concern. Although new school buildings are being constructed and other infrastructural facilities are being extended, yet the
educational scenario of women refuses to register any drastic turn for the better. It is so because almost seven lac military and paramilitary forces continue to camp in the state creating an atmosphere of great uncertainty, insecurity, fear and often leading to depression and traumatisation of women, naturally resulting in their educational restlessness. In view of the same fear psychosis their health continues to suffer and their employment and development opportunities continue to shrink both at provincial and national levels.

The paramount need of the hour is to engage in a multilateral political dialogue with a view to resolving the Kashmir question. Only a fully fledged political resolution of Kashmir can lead to demilitarization of the valley, which, in its turn, can open up the atmosphere leading to improvement of the economic, health and educational status of women. So long as massive concentrations of military and paramilitary forces continue to camp in the valley, the conditions of women are not going to be improved in any significant manner. They imperatives of peace, justice and human rights, demand and entail a serious political engagements by all the stakeholders inside and outside of Jammu and Kashmir State leading to economic, health and educational reckoning of the women of Kashmir valley.
A woman has to play multidimensional roles in any given sociopolitical context. Kashmiri women have suffered while carrying out any of these roles in this era of hyper militarization in the society. All the primary and secondary sources used in the present work confirm that with the outbreak of armed conflict in Kashmir, women have suffered in all forms; as a mother she has mourned for her son, as a wife she has lost her soul-mate, as a sister she has suffered the loss of her brother. Every aspect economic, health, educational, social etc of her life has been tremendously affected by the ongoing conflict. It is a very difficult task to get to the bottom of their problems but some suggestions may be in order and helpful in various ways.

5.5 Suggestions

The first step that needs to be taken is to collect inclusive data about all the dimensions of the problem – in particular, the number of widows, half widows and orphans left to fend for them by this conflict.

At the time of tragedy, it is only the parent’s family and the in-laws (in few cases) which come to help the victim’s family. The Government and NGOs help the family after they get the information about the tragedy. It is therefore, necessary to have a proper information system/centre whereby concerned Government and non-Government
organizational agencies can get information immediately after the occurrence of tragedy.

It is necessary that procedures for payment of ex-gratia relief are simplified and other items of relief are also made available without any hassles.

Government and non-Governmental agencies should all together take steps to impart suitable skills to the widows for earning their livelihood in various fields. Literate women should be given proper guidance with a view to improving their abilities so as to get various private sector jobs.

The Government should also provide credit to widows on concessional rates of interest and the whole process should be hassle free.

Widows of militants, who are not deemed to any relief by the Government, should also be granted the same relief as is given to the widows of innocents.

Women need special attention, particularly those who are victims of rape and molestation. Counseling centres should be established where women should be encouraged to talk about the crimes inflicted on them. They should be motivated for campaigning against the atrocities they have gone through.
Besides, the present strength of 11 psychiatrists in the Health Department State is sadly inadequate. Psychiatric Department should be established in each District Hospital with a view to extending psychiatric therapy to all those who suffer across the State.

Mental health camps should be organized for the women of the far-flung areas, who may not even be able to attend the District Hospital.

There is an urgent need to listen to the voices of women in Kashmir. There is a need to give representation to the women in any peace initiative. It will bring a fresh and proper approach not only to women’s problems in Kashmir but also lead to a holistic approach in general paving the way for the resolution of the problems of people in Kashmir.

Children should not be allowed to suffer for the sins of their parents. All the families that have lost members to the bullets of militants or security forces should be helped out with funds.

The children who are victimized and are severely affected physically or mentally by the armed conflict should be cared for, understood and provided assistance in all possible forms.