

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women and Violence in Farah Bashir's *Rumors of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*

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Abstract

A woman is considered as the strongest pillar in a family who takes up all the responsibilities and happily does them. And that woman is misbehaved with and ill treated by the family members irrespective of her contributions done for the sake of the family. Main focus of this paper would be on the conditions of Kashmiri women in the violence stricken society where they are doubly marginalized. One being at the hands of patriarchy and other being due to the conflict. Kashmir was facing one of the most dreadful time in its history i.e. period of mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90 when insurgency was at its peak. What was the impact of the conflict (between India and Pakistan over Kashmir) on Kashmiri women and how badly they were traumatized which left ever-lasting imprints on their minds.

Keywords: Kashmiri Women, Conflict, Marginalization, Exodus, Insurgency.

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir was a abode of saints and sages but now it has turned into a war area where peace and harmony have totally eradicated. Conflict over Kashmir is a never ending process and both the countries India and Pakistan claim their over territory. This conflict is as old as the independence of India because that was the root cause for this dispute. This took a horrific turn when insurgency and militarization took place in the valley of Kashmir in 1989-90. The life of Kashmiris has completely changed due to the disrupted and upset ambience in the valley. This unrest has changed not only their life to the great extent but also their livelihood, work culture, customs and traditions. Among all, the most affected were women be Muslim or Hindu, who led a life of great hardship;

physical and mental disturbance, rape, destitution, molestation, etc. It is even mentioned in the history that women have always been the subject to humiliation and subjugation. This paper would deal with impact of violence on Kashmiri women considering Farah Bashir's rumors of spring. Violence against women results in, physical as well as mental, sexual or psychological harm or pain to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. This paper aims to throw light on plight of women due to violence in Jammu and Kashmir and why they are the most unprotected and worst hit section of the society especially under extreme situations of violence caused by militancy and armed conflict.

Kashmir maintains the harmony between Hindus and Muslims but women of both the communities face various disparities socially, politically and economically. History manifests the sufferings of women as they are deprived of equal opportunities because of the society's patriarchal construction and this have been in existence since the invasion of Britishers and Mughals on the territory of Kashmir. Even Kashmiri Literature has witnessed the suffering of women in the form of discrimination, coercion, subjugation, exploitation, deprivation, degradation, aggression and humiliation. It has been noticed in Kashmir valley that women's privileges to education, employment and political rights and inheritance are violated. And this paper will study these issues related to women and how they can be improved.

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The feminist critic Gayatri Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Rightly calls the women 'doubly silenced, and doubly marginalized'. She further adds how subaltern's historical roots are torn apart and their voice is cancelled. In this context, the identity of a subaltern remains under a colonial shadow but subaltern as female is even more deeply shadowed. This context fits into the shoes of Kashmiri women as they are doubly marginalized; due to insurgency and militancy and at the hands of their husbands.

ANALYSIS

Farah Bashir's book deals with this problem and is studied through feminist aspect. *Rumors of Spring* is a memorable narration of Farah Bashir's girlhood spent in Srinagar in the 1990s. And, the book is written through the perspective of a teenage girl who just gets caught in the vortex of turmoil in Kashmir Valley. "As a teenage girl, growing up in a conflict-stricken territory happened to be a dual struggle: to make sense of the militarization of domestic spaces and to learn new social etiquette – informed by war – to navigate life" (The Wire. 16May, 2021). The title of the book is very ironical in itself because 'spring' is considered as the "month of change" but, in contrary, nothing changes for Kashmiri Pandits and women, their conditions and circumstances remain intact. And the writer depicts it very beautifully in the book as, "To expect change in the season in a month's time felt less like a reality but more like rumors of spring."

It is an embodiment of emotions, traumas, fear and anxiety seen through the perspective of a teenage girl who dreams of enjoying her teenage age but unfortunately, gets trapped in the fright of militancy and insurgency. "It was crucial to record what a teenage girl went through in one of the most important events in Kashmir's contemporary history in the last 150 years (the previous two being Amritsar Treaty and the 1931 uprising). A girlhood and adolescence, which is both familiar and universal and yet turned into a searing, heightened experience by the anxiety and fear of war" (Farah

Bashir's interview with The Hindu). Farah in her book simultaneously expresses the liveliness and resistance from her girlhood during the time of trauma and turmoil of passing years- secretly dancing to pop songs, writing her first love letter, going to the cinema for the first time.

It is important to note that the story unfolds in flashbacks showing the time period of 1988-1984 in which one can go through the minute details given by the girl (Farah herself) about her short lived happiness to the trauma she had gone through. On the one hand, militancy took place in Kashmir and the other; girl is enduring the pain of her first menstrual cycle. How pathetic it could be for a girl who is surrounded by people (family) but could not dare to ask for help. This is not only her story but represent dozens of people whose lives were crushed in the storm of political insurgency. The impact of violence and forced migration was worse on women in general but belonging to age group of above fifty years, the effect was worst. The study would deal with female characters in the book Women in conflict zones and especially in societies, they can become the dual recipients of violence and how they deal with violence and insurgency. one of most famous feminist Simon De Beauvoir in her classic work *The Second Sex* writes "one is not born woman, rather becomes one", it shows that patriarchy forces them to adapt to the prevailing situations and to act as being kind, forgiving, hostile, etc.

The incident of 1989-90 has left a mark on the minds of Kashmiri Pandits and the most affected was women. Bobeh (Farah's grandmother) the main character of the plot is shown as a brave lady but surrenders at the hands of militancy. She is an asthmatic who finds difficulty in breathing fresh air. At the time of asthmatic attack, whenever she tries to open the window, it would risk up their lives. Because she never knew of coming a bullet shot which might result in her death. This shows a 'how a woman is devoid of air' due to the impact of insurgency. Home which is an abode of happiness

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and peace for humans becomes a 'prison' for these women. The writer quotes, "even a peep could be dangerous. Letting in fresh air could cost us dearly" (24). A mother's emotions and feelings are beautifully depicted in this book. Farah's mother gets anxious when her daughter does not return home and gets caught in the vortex of violence and it conveys the persistent soreness and agitation of a mother who is feared for the life of her daughter. With the start of insurgency, a kind of calamity evolves in the valley which makes lives of women more sorrowful and they revolved around the same things: insomnia, headaches, and ration.

There is a book by Xue Xinran *Good Women of China* that shows how women turn against themselves when exposed to the threatening circumstances. In some cases, women also develop an adverse relationship with their bodies. Some mutilate, some disfigure, and some are apathetic. Taking an example of Farah (book has autobiographical elements); she is so depressed and agitated that she starts pulling out her hair out of her scalp. And the process of rooting out gives immense pleasure and calmness to her which resulted in the baldness of the writer. "The movement felt pleasurable, but intensified the pain. Sometimes, I'd forcefully pluck out a chunk of hair trying to get rid of any possibility of hurting myself further, but the pain persisted" (16). Even their dressing sense changes drastically as one of the woman forces the school girls to adapt to the new dress pattern. "Women's lives are a part of social history that cannot be ignored. The ordinary and mundane exists in lives despite conflict or wars. It would have been difficult to write about the basics of adolescence by omitting essential details of a teenage girl's life: falling in love, menstruation, puberty related changes, which are rather natural. By omitting a significant part of a gender, however undesirable or unspeakable, what's the point of objective writing? It creates a space which our societies sometimes bar from existing" (The Hindu). Women are dual recipients of violence in the territorial conflicts area; violence leaves them

in the state of apathy and patriarchy puts boundations on women. In the chapter 'of men, mice and violence', Naseer vents out his frustration on his wife Nasreen just because he was beaten by the military troop in the act of suspicion. Nasreen becomes a medium for Naseer to reveal himself from the angst he had. Women are longing for their identity, lost cultural and tradition and lost home. However, the scenario is that women are forced to change their dressing pattern just for the sake of their lives. Traditionally, the veil was not part of the culture in the valley. Before militancy and insurgency period, society was truly liberating for women. Women-folk would equally contribute to agricultural activities in rural areas with men. No gender segregation or discrimination was witnessed. The veil was not part of the dress code. But the situations have completely changed.

"The way women of Kashmir are eroticized and objectified on a daily basis in India, the way their bodies are portrayed as vulnerable and used to create fear and intimidation, has heightened the sense of being preyed upon, said Samreen, a 22-year-old make-up artist from Srinagar"(The Hindu).

This study aims at propagating the sufferings of Kashmiri women so that people from different backgrounds can feel their pathos and agony. How women (especially Kashmiri Pandit) were given choices by the militants either to adopt Islamization or to leave women behind for militants to prey on them so that they can sexually satisfy themselves.

CONCLUSION

Over the past three decades, the conflict in the valley has intensified the situations and has given a life time trauma which can never healed. Kashmiri women have been harassed by men in the family and that has surpassed their dignity and identity. The Kunan and Poshpora incident is the most terrific for women which took place in 1991, when 53 women were gang raped by the militants.

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These situations are needed to be changed so some strict actions should be taken to empowering the women of Kashmir. Improvement in education and employment opportunities will do wonders for women as they will be independent and can take a stand for their rights. Social initiatives should be taken by the society to reduce the overall rate of domestic violence and to fight against social evils like early marriage, dowry, assault etc. Farah Bashir's *rumors of spring* are an epitome of identity crisis for Kashmiri women and what challenges they had to go through in their entire life. It manifests that trauma could be either individual or collective which leads to identity change and this change is bore lifelong. However, while coping up with these traumas, women also become resilient beings who confront all the obstacles and try to manage with the hostile circumstances with the ray of hope that one day their existence will be considered by the society and would be given equal respect and opportunity to enhance them.

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