

# Democracy, Gender and Armed Conflict: Exploring women's narratives of resistance in contemporary Kashmir

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper will primarily look into the crucial question of why a legal protest in a constitutional democracy fails to operationalize in a conflict zone eventually giving way to more radical ways of resistance by women. The question will be investigated by looking at the possible structures against which women in Kashmir are protesting. Analyzing the multilayered structure in the form of state, patriarchy and religion in a conflict zone will help in understanding how such a structure penetrates into women's lives and questions their roles. This leads to the next part of the paper which explores the potential such structure offers its women- the power to protest by questioning the structure sanctioned boundaries. However a consequential question is how are women protesting against the structure and how different is the nature of protest from legal ways of protesting what kind of challenges are these protests posing to the state and community? How these modes of resistance are different from the legal modes as far as the outcome of transforming the discourse on women is concerned. And what are the areas where the resistance by women has failed to subvert the structure?*

**Keywords: Protest, Agency, Patriarchy**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The paper traces the question of women's agency in conflict with state and patriarchal social structure. Drawing from the case studies I would be analyzing how women who have suffered loss on multiple planes in Kashmir, counter the structure manifested in multiple layers- be it fighting a state ridden in conflict or revamping the established norms and patterns used by Kashmiri society to gauge the behavior of women. And thereby I will argue for the need to see the women beyond the agency-victimhood binary.

However the paper before debating the question of agency of Kashmiri women would intend to advance four theoretical frameworks that would help in assessing the question of agency in the case studies. This would help me to arrive at a detailed analysis of the question of gender in conflict zones thereby formulating an alternative way to contest the dominant imagination of everydayness of such women.

## II. FOUR FRAMEWORKS

The first framework I have taken is by Lipika Kamra<sup>1</sup>, which attempts to theorize agency by tracing two women narratives from the Naxalite movement. These narratives, which exist as oral histories and autobiographies convey to us the stories about the everyday lives of women and the stories of their oppression. The experiences and the stories of struggle these women have gone through Lipika argues, haven't taken place in vacuum. Such struggles rather are located at the juncture where various structures of power in form of state, social structure, along with a network of other relationships intersect. Lipika argues that it is while countering such discourses of power that agency emerges in the subject. However the form of agency Lipika seems to be arguing for is a non-Sovereign agency. Where we can identify certain acts of the individual as agentive even when they are not undertaken through an autonomous consciousness and are shaped by the structures and the discourses of power. Though the Naxalite movement involved the participation of women in its struggle, the share of women however was reduced to mere supportive roles thereby brushing aside the existing gender division. Therefore the subsequent position of women suffering from an existing patriarchal bias in the movement survived unchallenged.

The second framework, which by Debarati Sen and Sarasij Majumder,<sup>2</sup> explores the idea of agency and its exercise by women who creatively engage with the microcredit thereby being neither passive victims of or willing participants in microcredit. While countering the 'riks' involved in the microcredit these rural women borrowers not only have trade and market as their primary difficulty but what intertwines itself with microcredit thereby becoming a risk is the hegemonic patriarchal order with its gender barriers established in the community. These existing hierarchical and patriarchal social structures place these women in a subordinated position. This is done by regulating and controlling the mobility, social interactions, work etc. of these rural women by the family and community. This kind of an oppressive order eventually draws them mute and invisible in the public spaces. However in the article the women by becoming active members of the micro credit self help groups started questioning the gendered ideologies of their community. However for the community these women are the ones who have transgressed the boundaries of the village social norms.

The third framework, which engages with the relationship with agency, is by Partha Chatterjee<sup>3</sup>. It tries to engage with and explore the idea of subaltern's agency. Partha Chatterjee adopts an interesting and noteworthy mechanism of 'negotiations' between population groups and governmental agencies while expressing his idea of subaltern agency. How Chatterjee finds this subaltern agency different from our general conceptualization is that unlike the conventional way of considering agency as a revolutionary challenge to the structure of power, some heroic political action taken by the poor and the exploited, a sustained resistance to the oppressive and corrupt state machinery, Chatterjee's subaltern's agency center's on negotiated transactions between the government agencies and the target population groups over the distribution of governmental benefits.

The last framework I am discussing is by Ajay Gudavarthy<sup>4</sup>, which comes largely as a response to the conceptualization of subaltern's agency framed by Chatterjee. Gudavarthy's analysis of agency draws a major objection to Chatterjee's idea of formulating agency. Gudavarthy's contestation emerges from the facts that how can a subaltern exercising agency aim for such 'molecular' change. Though agreeing to the fact that the

subaltern today has to strive for the basic strategies for everyday survival, his point of contestation is that one cannot call every survival strategy a potential act of resistance. For Gudavarthy subaltern's struggle lies beyond the daily survival strategies as there is nothing revolutionary in resorting to the basic survival approach by the subaltern. Though recognizing and respecting the survival mechanism taken to by the subaltern Gudavarthy eventually holds that such 'contextual negotiation' needs not to be valorized as the only mode of popular politics, as such acts are rooted in helplessness and the larger inability of the subaltern to subvert the oppressive structure. Hence such strategies of the subaltern cannot make the subaltern to make a claim for agency. If such modes taken by the subaltern were taken to build a case for subaltern's resistance and eventually agency then according to Gudavarthy what would then constitute a transformative event? Gudavarthy's subaltern therefore is not one who constantly bargains and compromises on various planes, not being conscious of how oppressive the structure is and how easily it exploits their negotiating abilities. Rather he would argue for subaltern exercising agency when the individual is endowed with a certain consciousness to understand the hegemonic structure and eventually rebel against it instead of reducing himself to an ordinary beneficiary of a mere negotiation. If the subaltern becomes a mere negotiator while interacting with the government agencies then what happens in this process is that the structure eventually takes over and decides and regulates the behavior of the individual thereby separating the individual from his agentive self. All that the individual is eventually truncated to is then a mere behavior to come up with *recoiling act* on every instance of helplessness, which is not agentive enough for Gudavarthy.

The alternative voices I have discussed explore the idea of agency by showing how it is tied to and shaped by several factors. Before proceeding further to the case studies to understand if and how Kashmiri women play an agential role what needs to be illuminated is what kind of questions do the above frameworks raise while I engage with them through the course of the case studies. One of the core arguments that the above frameworks seem to communicate is that defining women's agency undergirds the interaction of agency with gender embedded in a specific socio cultural setting. Taking to the victim agency debate therefore essentially kindles the external environment. Locating an individual's agency therefore involves locating the individual in a particular political, social, cultural and economic setting. So digging the question of agency doesn't take place in vacuum rather in spaces conditioned by certain factors.

By investigating these questions through the case studies of Kashmiri women I will try to explore the possible limits constraining women's agency as well as the liberatory possibilities.

### **III. STORIES COMING FROM CONFLICT ZONES: THE POSSIBILITIES OF RESISTANCE**

This part of the paper substantially will try to analyze the Kashmir conflict from the point of view of those who have been the worst affected- the women. It is important to understand that women experience conflict differently which makes it all the way more important to bring out women's voices, in contrast to the narratives till now dominated by men. What will be analyzed and explored through the narratives of these women is how

while taking to multiple experiences of living in the midst of a conflict they transcend the various boundaries thereby exercising their agency.

No mention of Kashmiri women and their struggle against odds is complete unless one doesn't open their troubled history of mass rapes from Kunan poshpora, an infamous village from the Kupwara district. Kunanposhpora incident occurred on 23 February 1993 when the village was raided by soldiers from the fourth Rajputana Rifles to conduct their insurgency operation thereby placing a cordon in the village. Using the alleged reason of search operation the army captured all men of the village, interrogated them, and tortured. Eventually the army breached into the houses and mass raped all the women. Army allegedly raped around 53 women at gunpoint that night. The village today is also called as the '*village of raped women*'. Facing the brute reality of pain, loss of dignity of their women, being mass raped, the villagers suffered a shock numbing them to think of any possible step. Such incidents in a conflict zone carry the potential to make the men of the place aggressive and alienated.

If men of this village till today conceal such anxieties about the incident what would one the say about the narrative of the women. Kavita Suri while mentioning the incident of Kunan Poshpora says that while trying to talk to the women of this village the words that greeted her were:

“You are not welcome here. Go away. We don't want to talk to you. People of your kind have been coming here sine all these years, selling the plight of our daughters and making money... please go away, we will not talk to you.”<sup>5</sup>

The women of the sleepy hamlets of Kunan Poshpora after 25 years of the incident still suffer and live with the stigma of belonging to the '*village of raped women*'. An unusual attribute of these women is that they continue doing the daily chores of everyday life while pretending to be normal from the outside. Suri finds it difficult to conclude if these women do it to live in a state of self-denial or is it that these women are not willing enough to acknowledge to themselves as to what happened to them fearing a complete breakdown of their lives. When such incidents happen they not only oppress the women in that moment rather oppression revisits them regularly through the memory, every time they see an army personnel.

Sharifa a mother of six children committed suicide along with another raped woman.<sup>6</sup> In another case seven sisters were gang raped and then left to their own selves. A nine month pregnant woman delivered a child after three days when she was gang raped by eight jawans- both the child's arms were fractured. The trauma and torture has rendered two mothers of raped daughters incapable to utter a word. A son who was forced to watch his mother's rape eventually had a nervous breakdown and now refuses to look at her. Another woman had a child from rape of which nobody is ready to take care of.

These women today are battling the social ostracism. The stigma of being raped still refuses to leave these women. Most of the women who were raped twenty years ago today still remain unmarried. Their lives have

stopped to make a progress since twenty years. These women have stopped going out, be it to schools, colleges, and brining firewood from the surrounding forests for the household chores. Slowly they have become invisible in the public spaces fearing the taunting remarks of the people.

In another case to find a match for her stigmatized daughter Shakeela, Dar had to face a really hard time. Shakeela's in laws would provoke her, insult her, torture her on the pretext that she was a rape victim. Today she has two sons, and for Shakeela survival is a difficult thing to do. Her father is worried about her, wishing if she had been educated she would had taken care of herself and her sons.

Like Shakeela, women suffer from the social stigma. Girls in this village have stopped going to school, as their classmates would taunt them. Today these girls who are now left uneducated, without money are facing severe problems. Women here have stooped travelling as in buses men raise fingers on them making them realize that they are rape victims. Nobody today wants to marry them. These women and the children they bore today receive no marriage proposals.

The social boycott and the resulting isolation these women face is so much that their own families, husbands don't want to live with them anymore. Many men have accepted their wives back only after they were forced to do so by militants. However such women were endlessly harassed and beaten at the smallest issue. One of the women begged her husband to forgive her for a sin she had never committed but he refused. The rejection of the woman came on the pretext that she was now impure and unchaste. Whether her being dirty was by her own choice or whether she was forced to, the underlying fact was another man destroyed her purity. Her husband also believed that she was sinner in the eyes of Allah since her chastity was tarnished and if he somehow manages to accept her again he will go to hell.<sup>7</sup>

Another story of social ostracism is of a woman who pleaded her husband not to throw her away as her children will turn orphan. Though she was somehow allowed to stay in the house but her husband refused to accept her as a wife after that incident. A woman of 80 who also was raped too wasn't pardoned by her son who kicked her out of the house.

The stigma of being a raped body hasn't left the village after twenty-five years. When the entire village of Kunan this year had assembled at the polling station during the State elections angry and hurt Janti Begum, 45 along with many other women blocked the entrance. She still feels herself as being trapped in the dark heavy night when the army barged into her house and rapped her. She still hears the echoes of her cries along with other raped women. Janti Begum says:

“I was 22 then; today I am 45, but the girl I was died that night. Since then I am barely living. And I don't believe in this democracy, which is based on injustice. We just want to remind our neighbors of why we should boycott.”

However what was surprising was that the men of the village when asked about these women protesting against the men casting votes refused to talk about these women saying they had nothing to do with them. They further said:

“They have only brought shame to our village and nothing else. We have nothing to do with these shameless women.”

These women though stigmatized are today fighting for justice. Apart from fighting the state as an oppressive structure, to deliver them justice they are also battling with the mindset of men for over twenty-five years. Jawahira Begum, one the rape victim in response to the social stigma says:

“Those Kashmiri men who were killed by the soldiers were called martyrs. How are we not martyrs then? Why is everyone ashamed of us and disrespectful to us for what we lost in our struggle?”

Women in conflict get targeted in ways more grave than men. However what is important to mention is despite such suffering women refuse to be passive inert victims of violence rather exercise considerable agency in such situations. In these situations these women take to new independent roles, challenging the notions of victimhood, thereby reconstructing their devastated lives. The hardships and exigencies of survival push these women into new roles strengthening themselves as agents of transformation. One has to find agency in the points where on one hand conflict causes immense pain and suffering to women but on the other hand women create spaces for thereby redefining their social relationships. Not only they negotiate spaces for themselves but also hold on to such spaces firmly.

Another challenge to the women of this place, which surfaces from the disappearances of the men, is the issue of Half-widows. Kashmir has witnessed thousands of disappearances, which owe their explanation to multiple reasons. The paper doesn't engage with the reasons for such disappearances however investigates as to what happens to the wives of such men who go missing. The women such men leave behind are termed as half-widows.<sup>8</sup> Most of these half-widows are not able to get their compensations. Left with no male member these women in most of the cases are abandoned by their in-laws and families. As a result of which they step out of their houses to search not only their husbands but also to look for a source to survive themselves and support their families. The never ending wait for their male members, failure of the state to deliver them justice, bleak provisions of aid leaves the half-widows in a zone of uncertainty about their future. Having lost her son in 1990, Parveena Ahanger who today heads the organization, Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) says:

“Ladkay ke saath mera dar bhi kho gaya. (Along with my son, I have lost the sense of fear).”<sup>9</sup>

Parveena today shows her strength and resistance by encouraging and mobilizing similar women who akin to her have been consumed by the disappearance of their dear ones. Such acts of resistance by women like

Parveena subvert the stereotype about women as victims by transcending the boundaries earlier accepted by the society.

“My life is a fight not against army, state or against anyone else but a fight to keep my life going.”

The above words came from Khalida, widow of Yusuf Mohammad, District commander of a militant outfit-Hizbul Mujahedeen. Life was harsh for Khalida be it her brief married life of almost eleven months with her husband and the life after her husband's death in September 1995. At the time of marriage Khalida knew that Yusuf, who earlier was working as junior assistant in Kashmir University is now a militant. However though the marriage was objected by Khalida's family, Khalida considered herself blessed to marry a Mujahid.

“Meri kismat acchi thi ki mera nikah ussay hua. Mei duaoun mai maangti thi ki mera nikaah mujahid se ho. (I am blessed to marry a Mujahid. I used to pray for such a marriage).”

When Khalida got married in 1994, the freedom struggle had attained its extremes. As soon she got married Khalida had to leave her in-laws house and keep moving with her husband. Her husband being a militant had had to keep hiding himself along with his wife in forests as crackdowns and search operations in villages were very common. She says:

“Everyday there was a crackdown. Army was after my husband and me. Life in forests was hard as some days we would manage to get some food from the jungles but other days we had to stay hungry, trek mountains, sometimes it rained heavily and we would find no place to sleep.”

Though Khalida struggled a lot in her married life, she however says that she has never regretted her decision of marrying a him. Being with a Mujahid was a right decision to her. Living with a Mujahid she realized her urge to contribute her bit to the freedom struggle. Though she is happy to count the married time as the best time of her life, but she also complains that the time didn't last long as army one day by help of some informer managed to capture Yusuf. When Khalida received Yusuf's dead body a piece of paper with Yusuf's body read:

“Hizbul Mujahedeen Ko Humari Taraf Se Bhaeint.”

Yusuf died before even seeing her daughter, Abida who was just born few months ago. Khalida was left in a state of shock. The events and the subsequent sufferings have today affected Khalida to an extent that since 1998 she has been visiting a doctor complaining her memory becoming weaker as she often tends to forget people and events.

Life however after Yusuf's death took a miserable turn for Khalida. Soon after his death Khalida stayed with her in-laws for sometime. Her in-laws who were rich, before Yusuf's death had promised him to give the required share of property as per Sharia to Khalida. Being nice to her for a couple of months soon her in-laws disintitiled

her for a single penny. As soon Khalida's period of Iddat was over she was forced by her in-laws to leave the house. The reasons given by them were that since she was the wife of a Mujahid and was actively involved with his activities so Army would often visit the house in search of her. Army wanted Khalida as capturing her would help the army to know about Hizbul Mujahideen's hideouts, weapons and other important secrets. Complaining that they had daughters and didn't feel safe when the Army visited the house, her in-laws forced her to leave and go to her father's house.

As Khalida came back to her father's house more troubles came her way. Soon Army started visiting her father's house enquiring about her. They would torture her brothers. One of the brothers was eventually picked up by the Army and is missing till date. As the Army would ill-treat and abuse her brothers they transferred all their worries to Khalida by pressurizing her to leave the house and spare them. Everybody be it her in-laws, her family, her relatives and her friends considered Khalida to be an object of scare for them. She was now a source of burden creating inconvenience with whomsoever she stayed with. Her family had stopped to bother about her. Soon the wives of her brothers started to trouble Khalida by saying that she was a burden to them and should leave the house. With no education or job, Khalida in a state of despair and hopelessness decided to leave the house. While leaving she took with her Abida, her daughter along with a suitcase having last few memories her husband had left.

Soon Khalida started to live on rent. She did it seven years of her life. Neither her family nor her in-laws cared as to where she will go, how she will live along with her small daughter. Initially she had some jewelry from her marriage, which she sold to get some money. Khalida initially made her utmost effort to find herself a job. However soon she got exhausted, as nobody was ready to give the wife of a Mujahid, a job. Knowing that Army wanted her was enough of a deterrent to scare people thereby obstructing any chance of having a job. Left with no other option she complied her documents to qualify for SRO and approached the Minister Ali Sagar. Telling him to help her with the SRO, Sagar on getting to know that she was the wife of a militant told her:

“Shukur Karo Aap Yahan se Zinda Wapis Jarahi Ho. Aap Ne Hizbul Mujahideen Kay Saath Kaam Kia Hai. Apki Hum Laash Yahan Say Bhej Saktay Hain. Apkay Shauhar Dehshat Gard The. (Thank your stars that we are letting you free from this place. Considering that you have worked with Hizbul Mujahideen, we should have sent your dead body to your house. Your Husband was a terrorist.)”

Khalida says that the words of the minister pierced her heart. On her way to her home she was thinking that throughout her life she held deep respect for her husband and today anyone could anytime rob her of that respect and dignity. Soon on her way Khalida became unconscious.

Khalida had to change her rented room many times as sometimes she could manage the rent and sometimes she was forced to leave as she was out of money. Sometimes her family somehow used to send her a sum of rupees thousand, which she used for paying her rent. Soon Khalida shifted to another house, which belonged to an old man who had four sons. Khalida says that the old man was a good person and considered her as her daughter.



He gave her a small room in his house. Khalida lived in this house for about three years during which the old man didn't take any rent from her.

Things were hardly fine and balanced that one while looking at her daughter playing with charcoal instead of being in a school, the idea of her education started worrying Khalida. When one day Khalida was no more able to bear the fact that the daughter of a 'martyr' who gave his life for the 'Tehreek' doesn't even get a narrow possibility to study in a school, she in a moment of extreme pain and anger took Abida in her lap and went to Shabir Shah. Talking to him, she argued how come he and people with whom her husband struggled for the freedom movement turned away from her when she needed them the most. She said:

"My husband laid his life for his people but the same people forgot him and his family. Today my daughter is not getting an admission and the reason the schools are rejecting her is that she is the daughter of ex-district Commander of Hizb-ul- Mujahideen. Why my daughter is denied the basic right to seek education in a school. Isn't it the moral obligation of men like you to see and get her admitted in some school?"

Hearing her Shabir Shah decided to help her getting admission in a school. The entire finances- her school fee, uniform, books were borne by a Yateem trust in Fateh Kadal. During all these years Khalida recollects that she had no contact with her family. She says that the times with her husband though difficult didn't however trouble her. She had no worries. Today life unlike her yesteryears is far worst. However every time Khalida is captured by moments of helplessness and grief, she somehow manages to fight her fate with confidence and faith in God. She says:

"Sometimes on Eid somehow I am able to put food on the table for my daughter. But there are also times when we have no food." Remembering one of her Eid's Khalida says, "God alone knows how we used to manage such days. Sometimes having nothing to eat in the house I just used to boil water along with some tea leaves. On such days somehow I managed to send my daughter to her grandfathers house so that she could have some food there. However I used to remind Abida not to tell anyone there that we had no food in house on Eid."

Soon the old man's health in whose house Khalida was staying on rent, started to deteriorate. He called Khalida and advised her to move to her father's house. The old man called her father and convinced to take her to his house. Initially Khalida refused to come to her house saying that I can prefer any hardship in life but wont prefer to come to a house where I am forced to live in a guilt and without dignity for some crime I haven't even committed. After her father convinced her Khalida after seven years of staying in hardships, struggling to survive, to get a proper education to her daughter moved to her father's house. However today things are still not fine at her father's house. Her brothers still don't talk to her, for reasons Khalida herself doesn't know. She feels she is accused and treated as an outsider because her brothers feel that because of her they faced torture

from army, shame from society eventually losing one of their brothers, who went missing after army picked him up while searching for Khalida. She says:

“ In the same house I now am living with my bothers as if we are strangers.”

It was during this time Khalida came to know Asiya Andrabi and her association with Dakhturan-e-Millat grew. Respecting Asiya as her elder sister she says how much she has learnt from her and much peaceful she feel while visiting her place. Khalida today receives a monthly sum of Rs 2000 from Dakhturan-e-Milat.

Her story of taking up challenges from life doesn't end here only. Khalida today has adopted two daughters of her brother who got disappeared. Her wife soon after the disappearance married an Ikhwani leaving behind two daughters, the responsibility of whom Khalida has undertaken. The room in the house where she is staying for about fifteen years now, she says is smaller than a grave. With grief in her eyes she says:

“I along with my daughter can't even stretch legs properly as the room is so small. For this room also my brothers and their wives fight with me.”

Talk to her about her in-laws she would tell you that after almost sixteen years, now her mother-in-law has started making concerned enquiries about her. She says today her in-laws regret the harshness they subjected me to, years back. She says:

“Maine buhat sakhti uthayi hai. Abh woh waqt laut kay nahi aayega. Meray who bees saal nahi lautkay aayeingay. (I have gone through harsh times in my life. My in-laws today can't return me my twenty years, which have been very difficult to me.)”

Today despite having a share in her husband's property, Khalida is being denied her part. Two years back Khalida made a strong effort to establish a Darzghah to give Quranic education to girls. However the people in her society soon disrupted her efforts saying that she was training women for '*Jihad*'

When asked what she looks up for herself in future, she says:

“I know nothing about my future. I have left everything upon Allah. I have no more desires in this life. Today all I want is to get my daughter a good education so that she has a good job and doesn't face the kind of life I had to.”

Khalida who has spent the greater part of her life struggling against her odds today complains of memory loss. She struggles to remember people she has met few months back, events that have occurred few days back. She says:

“ I will fight against my odds till I can. I am not the only one fighting. There are many other women like me. Only Allah knows how we live.”

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Like Khalida there are many other women who have their own stories of struggling against the odds and finding their space. What cannot be denied is that the women who have engaged with the freedom struggle- be it their through ideological support or their sacrifices as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, have time and again voiced their narratives of resistance. The above stories show that the women are not voiceless. However what needs to be enquired is that despite having their stories of resistance and eventually voicing them why are women's accounts of resistance then rendered voiceless and therefore invisible in the dominant understanding of stories coming from conflict. So the issue is not that women in conflict zones are just victims of their fate. They surely have their stories, which they are very willing to speak. But where the paradox lies as far as the women in Kashmir are concerned is if like men, women also have played an important role, have been the stakeholders then why is it that only the visibility is being offered to the men with women being pushed into their long established private spaces. These are the spaces, which according to the society belong to women. Where women are supposed to behave in a manner the society opines to be right

The way Khalida and other women strived to live against the difficulties would not make case for a woman who is just a victim. There is more to these women than being a victim. Understanding Khalida as a victim is to deny the fact that she actually survived the difficult periods of her life, many-a-times articulated and rebelled against others and created a space of her own.

Despite such stories of resistance reducing stories of women to mere victim stories, denying them their share of agency in essence sources from the fact that any possible identity of women as one bearing agency, no matter how embryonic it is, stands the potential to disrupt the traditional roles of women in society. Such traditional roles of women are inherently maintained by conservative societies as these roles turn out to be the legitimizing foundations for patriarchy to thrive and flourish. The idea of a liberated resolute woman, who has the courage and fortitude to demand her rights, her share of freedom, to survive her sufferings, be it the woman who survived a gang rape in front of her son, from Kunanposhpora or be it Khalida who till today despite the odds harbors a dream of giving a good education to her daughter ,finds no acceptance in societies which thrive on the essential silencing of women's stories from conflict.

In fact conflict in conservative Islamic societies operates as a double-edged sword for women. During the peak of conflict support is harnessed from their on the grounds of their being the mothers, sisters, daughters and wives of martyrs. The entire contribution of women once again relegates them to the traditional gendered roles.

However the paradox is that even after making significant contribution in the first half of the militancy and then struggling with its devastating effects in the second half, the body and behavior of women is controlled through cultural and religious means. Women aren't even allowed to articulate their questions. The freedom struggle

they are so actively being a part of, what eventually will it give the women? In the Kashmiri struggle for Azadi where do the women stand with men? How are women's voices different from men's while fighting for Azadi? And if Azadi happens to Kashmir, who and how it would be decided as to how women will live? Do women have the space to decide their future on such issues or is it that women have to take a departure from such questions when it comes to living within the patriarchal norms. Such questions ought to be raised by the women of the place.

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