

Abstract

PhD Thesis: Women, Conflict and Nationalisms in Kashmir: A Study of Gender based Violence in the Baramullah and Kupwara districts

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This research attempts to analyse how the interplay between the three different forms of nationalism operational in Kashmir conflict – Indian nationalism on one side, Pakistani nationalism on the other, and Kashmiri nationalist aspirations for *Azaadi*, plays out, especially on women's bodies, affecting them in multiple ways. It focuses on the engagement between gender theory, conflict violence and the notions of nationalism to develop a theoretical framework within which Kashmiri women's experiences, gathered through an ethnographic study based in Baramulla and Kupwara districts in the valley, have been placed. The research also analyses how power, written through the sexed 'other' body, works to produce a certain subjectivity and idea of the self which is seen in how women challenge subjectification to power by participation in the popular movement for *Azaadi* and their changing role from direct to more institutionalized forms of resistance.

What emerges is narratives of women's lived realities of the Kashmir conflict spread over the spectrum beyond the binaries of victimhood and agency. The political violence has continued to impact the everyday lives of people, as the state has become more militarized. The daily lived experiences, the varied forms of violence, and how they impact the subject formation of women demonstrates that women and gender-based violence become contested sites of power as they are simultaneously marginalized and centralized in the political arena. The individual cases of violence taken up in this research are linked to each other in terms of the overall nature of how systemic and

systematic forms of violence are prevalent against women marked as the “other” owing to the gendered as well as ethnic or political identities they are seen to represent. The violence is perpetrated by individual or collective actors backed by a structure seeking compliance and control through coercion and thus this research looks at these cases within the larger institutional set-up dominated by the culture of violence and impunity.

It is important to bring to the fore that this research does not claim to reflect the experiences of all Kashmiri women, neither does it intend to present the category of “Kashmiri woman” as a pre-given or homogenous. It acknowledges the multiplicity of experiences, subjectivities, interactions and relationships that have formed a part of this research, making the usage of ‘Kashmiri woman’ anything but a monolith. While centralizing women’s experiences, the research does not claim that Kashmiri women are the only marginalized group, rather it attempts to make gender a starting point for understanding the multiplicity of women’s experiences in Kashmir conflict and as one of the ways to understand the workings of nationalist imaginations on gendered bodies.

Keywords: Gender, Nation, Violence, Militarization, Kashmir, India