

Editorial:

Why this Silence?

Women have been a driving force in any nation and history bears testimony to the fact that they have played a vital role in shaping a nation's future. They have been accredited with the honor of making or breaking a country. Their role in politics has been too important to be ruled out as inconsequential. They have led revolutions in many countries and changed the course of history and geography of the world. But surprisingly women in Kashmir have maintained a very low profile in the political circle. Perhaps for the reason that politics is considered to be a dirty game and men have encouraged women in shunning this big bad world of politics or women were never inclined towards it.

But the question remains that if educated Kashmiri women made mark in other fields or career, and if they became successful doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers journalists, academicians, wives, daughter in-laws, mothers and etc, Why didn't they come forward in political ground. The current situation in the valley is such that nobody can afford to shun it, its impact has been felt by every soul of Kashmir. And not to mention that in any conflict women and children are worst affected. Surprisingly though women suffered enormously, their sufferings went unnoticed in the eyes of their counterparts. The elite and educated women of Kashmir have maintained a cool and criminal silence. No common voice has been echoed to bring forth the sufferings of women and no agitation was launched to campaign against the atrocities inflicted upon them. Rape has always been used as a weapon of war and this tool has repeatedly intimidated women in Kashmir. Innumerable cases of rapes and molestation have come to the forefront including the infamous Kunan Poshpora case in 1991 where the victims publicly admitted they were raped, a rare and daring confession considering the fact that no victim wants to publicly admit this violation for fear of social ostracism. Rapes and molestation in far-flung areas go unreported and unabated. On 13th January 2000, a mother and daughter were raped by an army captain of 12RR in a village, Nowgam, Banihal area of Jammu division. In a summary court marshal, the captain Ravinder Singh was found guilty and sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment and termination of services. However, the captain challenged the verdict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) High Court and finally the J&K High Court on January 2003, quashed the proceedings of Summary General Court making it a rare case. But here rules have been made to be broken; the omnipotent security forces are above the law. Therefore human rights violations of women continue unabated. In the past few months many instances of attempted rapes have come to fore front. These violations will continue as long as the deadly silence continues. Here women lack an initiative to come forward and launch a campaign against the atrocities, especially the elite and urban women who have been mute spectators to the agonies of their counterpart. They have never led a movement to protest against the atrocities. Although there are some NGO's and other women groups working for women empowerment and stuff like this but they have never raised a voice against the brutalities against women, Perhaps for the fact that these NGO's are funded by the Government and they don't want to annoy them.

Situation in Kashmir is largely political and needs be a politically addressed, but by and large women have not participated in this political process not even to the point of raising their voice against injustice meted out to them. Their silence will go a long way in boosting the morale of the perpetrators of the crime, who feel they have the license to do everything and anything. The need of the hour is to shed these inhibitions and launch a massive campaign against the cruel tyranny. It is high time that we wake from the deep slumber and wage a movement. And who knows this movement might again change the course of history and redefine the geographical position of the world a wee bit.

Twenty-year-old, Kulsoom, should have been bubbling with the joy of motherhood conferred on her recently. Holding a six-month-old baby boy in her lap, she shows no such sign of ecstasy, instead she wears a fatigue look and fear haunts her otherwise pretty face. Reason, she has horrifying memories of her past, a past over which she had no choice, a past that was thrust on her, she being a victim of worst kind of Human Rights abuse-- that of a Rape. Sitting next to her is her pale looking mother, and both mother and daughter have the same ghastly look on their face, and eyes that reflect pain. Indeed there is a common factor binding them both apart from the fact that they have a relation closest in this universe (Mother and daughter), they have both been the victims of the same abuse (rape).

This is an infamous story of a mother and daughter who were raped by security forces in the intervening night of January 13 and 14, 2000 in a Village, Nowgam, Banihal Tehsil, of Jammu division of the Jammu & Kashmir state. The accused, an army captain Ravinder Singh Tewati of 12 RR, camped at Upper Gund Banihal, along with three jawans had committed the inhuman act and after leaving the house had threatened the family with dire consequences in case they revealed the incident to any body. But against all odds the mother and daughter supported by other members of family dared to lodge the complaint in police station. In a summary court marshal, the army captain was found guilty and sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment and termination of services. However, the captain challenged the verdict of court martial in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court making it one of the rare cases of setting aside the proceeding of the summary general court martial. (On October 11, 2001, the Supreme Court passed a judgment "Civil Courts not to interfere with sentence imposed by army court martial".)

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Defying the judgment the Jammu & Kashmir High Court on January 2, 2003 quashed the proceeding of the Summary General Court and the honorable judge, Justice Tejinder Singh Doabia said that the findings and ultimate conviction recorded were found vitiated. The quashing of the verdict also quashed the hopes of Kulsoom and her mother who had been waiting that the guilty will be punished and to some extent their wounds would heal, but that was not to happen, and it was another blow dealt to them.

Three years after the gruesome incident the wounds have never healed and the pain is writ large on their faces. The impact of the incident was such that the mother went in a state of shock and was hospitalized in the valley's lone Psychiatric Hospital at Srinagar for six months. Even today she is on strong anti depressant drugs. She fumbles as she speaks and not to talk of Kulsoom, who although married and mother of a six month baby lives in constant fear psychosis. The mention of the incident is a trauma. Her husband knows about the incident and has accepted her but that does not put her fears of insecurity to rest. She fears that owing to her past her husband will desert her any day and she dreads the day. In a feeble voice she says, "I have this feeling that my husband will leave me and re-marry, he can find a good girl anywhere, he is nice and supportive but the feeling persists." Even though otherwise she is leading a normal life yet she feels a void somewhere. The society also has contributed largely in

ascertaining her fears; her in-laws never spare a opportunity to remind her off her past. A minor tiff results in constant taunts and sarcasm, "I don't get the same respect that other daughter-in-laws command because of my past, my mother-in-law and sister-laws always pass sarcastic remarks, it hurts me like hell and I cry in silence. I can't retaliate back".

In our society victim is victimized, and Kulsoom and her mother stand as ideal examples. The two had dared to defy the norms of society and went public and raised a voice against the inhuman behavior meted out to them, but they hardly anticipated that they would have to face a hostile society. Instead of appreciating and commending their stance society ostracized them and adding to their troubles is the system of justice that prevails here. The court of law has failed to deliver in such cases, already to prove an offence of the kind of rape is itself a traumatic experience, the victim has to relive those moments, which they otherwise would have banished from their memories. And then after proving the crime, justice seems too



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far away. Though the family has appealed in Supreme Court, but they are not too optimistic about the outcome. Incidents like these have served as people losing faith in judiciary.

What happened to Kulsoom or her mother is nothing new in this state, such form of Human Rights abuse continue unabated here from the last 14 years. But the question is that the judicial processes and the callous attitude of our society have further subjugated those victims, who dared to raise their voices against atrocities. The guilty are never punished; every Kashmiri remembers the Kunanposh Pora incident. Rapes committed in year 1990, by Indian forces on large scale with rape victims publicly admitting the crime committed on them. What happened then? Nothing, the files were buried in the debris of judicial offices. Again in the Year 1997, there were rapes on large scale in Wawoosa, a village 8 Kms, away from Srinagar. The Wawoosa rape incident was highly agitated by the local papers then, again an enquiry was ordered and nothing happened except that the Victims were further humiliated. Owing to such incidents people have lost faith in judiciary, six years after the incident the victim of Wawoosa are reluctant to talk about it. Mother of one of the victim In Wawoosa, says "I don't want to talk about it, and I will not fight, what will come out of it, I have 2 daughters of marriageable age their chances of marriage will be spoilt if this issue is raked up again, already the neighbors never spare an opportunity to taunt us, it is a closed chapter know." They can hardly be blamed; society has never been able to accept victims of rape, a trait common in all societies. Even the educated class has maintained a tight-lipped silence over these issues. We have many NGO'S working here for women but not much has been done for the victims, in fact nothing has been done. Last year a girl studying in Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi was raped in broad day light, the girl stood up against it and as a result the whole national media both print and electronic supported her in her fight, resulting in enormous pressure on the

government to punish the culpable. All the NGO's and women groups supported her and held demonstration with the result that government acted fast and the guilty was arrested.

The need of the hour is that women come forward and launch a campaign against the atrocities committed on daily basis. Counseling centers should be established where women could be encouraged to talk about the crimes inflicted on them and victims like Kulsoom and her mother who are psychologically perturbed be provided with psychotherapy sessions in overcoming the trauma. In India, *Dalit* are exploited by the upper caste people and they live in extreme in human conditions, but a few *Dalit* women in Chennai who had the rare opportunity of getting good education have put it to a noble cause and they are helping the down trodden women in empowering them financially and socially by way of self help group formation. A similar kind of attitude is needed here. It is we who have to strive for our fellow beings and devise means and ways for helping the victims and bringing the culpable to book. Our silence will go a long way in boosting the morale of the guilty who, feel they can get away with anything. Silence is not always golden, it can be deadly too. Women don't have to compromise on vulnerable issues, strong voice is needed to agitate the atrocities.

Recently at a office of a women's welfare organization, which has a counseling center for women, a counselor was advising a woman who had some domestic problems. "Remember it is the women who has to compromise, be silent and patient and your husband will mend ways, he will come back one day" were the pearls of wisdom given to the victim who listened in silence. And in the same office a huge placard had following verses.

*I have tested my own hunger.
Sold my body to survive
Lord
I know
I am bound for heaven
I have done my time in hell.*

But remember we don't have to do our time in hell. Kulsoom and her mother dared to defy the norms of society and wage a war against a cruel establishment. It becomes imperative for us to support them, we believe they are not alone in their quest for justice; we are with them.

THE VILLAGE OF WIDOWS

Zainab

Ali

Death has served its cruel blow to every household in Wakoora, Ganderbal, and a village 25 kms away from Srinagar. Almost all the houses have the same story to narrate. One story is the story of sixteen households who lost one or more male members in the ongoing conflict. The village is full of widows and orphans and it is they who are bearing the brunt of the loss as happens in any armed conflict.

The astonishing feature is that all those killed belonged to same group *Ikhwanis* (renegades) and another amazing fact that their killer was allegedly the same man. Ganderbal is a constituency where the erstwhile National Conference had a strong hold, in the previous elections President of National Conference, Omar Abdullah contested and lost from the same area and coincidentally it was also a strong forte of militants in the early years of militancy. But

saw a subsequent decline in the numbers of militants and a considerable increase in *Ikhwanis* or renegades. *Ikhwanis* surfaced as a force to combat militancy but ironically they were to combat the same militancy of which they were once a part.

But all militants did not transform themselves into turncoats and those were still active brought them to their end. And this is the tale of every widow of the village. Raja is just one such lady. Life was once a happy story and today a sad tale. Her husband Mohd Maqbool Bhat (40) an employee in the agricultural department was killed in the month of February 1997. He was returning back home after duty, when at around 5 Pm he was shot dead by gunmen. The police registered FIR in which it was written that unidentified gunmen killed Maqbool, the family was paid *ex-gratia* to the tune of 1 lac Rs under SRO 43. Maqbool was father of five children, two sons and three daughters. At the time of his killing he was carrying a gun. His wife Raja says. "He was killed by unidentified gunmen, I can't say who the killers were". On closer introspection she revealed that her husband was working for the *Ikhwanis* for the last year and this triggered his death. However, she denied any knowledge about her husband's killers. There was actually more to it when she let a cat out of the bag as she said my husband had a surrender certificate from the army, which authorities wanted for paying *ex- gratia*, but she refused to comment further. The story did have a interesting twist as closer investigations revealed that Maqbool had been a top militant with Hizbul Mujahideen, working clandestinely with the outfit for 6 years.

And after six years had surrendered before the security forces and ended up being a renegade that was the reason behind his killing and the killer was also identified but for reasons kept a secret. Today Raja is burdened with complexities of life faced with financial worries. She gets her husbands pension and has some land, which she cultivates but at large feels dejected with the government. My husband worked for government but they turned a blind eye to our plight." she said bitterly.

That was Raja then there is Mahtaba, whose husband Ghulam Mohidin Kambay (50), was killed on 10th Feb 1993. He was a contractor by profession. His wife spits fire and venom as she recalls her husband's death and says, "my husband was killed and his killers are roaming free and fearlessly". Giving the details she said, "in our area 2 boys working for Al Jihad militant outfit were picked by army and later released but they were picked up by the militants who accused them of having become informers, one of the boy was related to us, my husband along with my brother and two of our relatives went to militants to request them to release the boys. But they did not release the boys and killed them along with my husband". The family was paid *ex-gratia* & also Kambay's son was given a government job. The family claims that to avenge their father's death, the elder son. Abdul Rashid joined the *Ikhwanis* and worked with 13 RR from 1996-97 and vowed to eliminate all militants. But sources say that Mohidin Kambay was also associated with *Ikhwanis* and that is why he was killed. The family has accused Shafat Ahmad commander of Hizb outfit as the man behind the killings and

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- "The neighbors taunt us and whenever there is a fight they cast aspersions on us, they throw letters at our house & call us informers"

- "I will beg but I will not allow my kids to join Ikhwanis, today I am helpless."

also alleges that now he himself is Ikhwani and enjoys the patronage of army. The family is also not satisfied with the government and feels enough has not been done.

Another widow Rafiqa has a similar tale to narrate. Her husband Abdul Majeed Sheikh (35) was killed on 8th feb1998. She says her husband joined *Ikhwanis* to avenge the death of his brother Mohidin Shiekh who was killed along with the four person. The family has been paid the ex-gratia relief but Rafiqa feels that government cheated them. She has three children to support but no financial aid. She says, "my husband committed a blunder when he joined *Ikhwanis*, what did he get in return? What has the government done for his family they have deserted us" she also says that she had to face a lot of humiliation because of the tag of informers attached to them. "The neighbors taunt us and whenever there is a fight they cast aspersions on us, they throw letters at our house and call us informers. Our life has become hell, I don't let my children out after 7 Pm, Rafiqa says she tried to dissuade her husband from joining the rank but he did not agree. Today she says, "I will beg but I will not allow my kids to join *Ikhwanis*, today I am helpless." Or there is Aisha, whose daughter was killed on the same charge of being informer and later her son-in-law was also killed due to the same allegation leveled at him. This was not enough her second daughter was widowed after 22 days of marriage, her husband being active with *Ikhwanis* in the area.

The list is endless and the story is same of having succumbed to temptations and bared the fruit, there is Saja, Aisha, Hajra, the names are endless but all related through a common misery. Most of them have pointed fingers at one person Shafat who they allege is behind all the killings. He was the area commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, who was very active in his area. He could not tolerate that friends were turning foes and changing loyalties. All those who upto yesterday were friends and accomplices one fine day changed sides and killed their comrades. The betrayal was hard for him and he vowed revenge, eventually killing all those who had shattered his trust and belief. But the relatives of the victims claim that Shafat himself shifted loyalties and of present is enjoying patronage under the army. What is true and what is false, perhaps it is difficult to judge but the fact remains valuable lives have been lost. Women have been rendered widows and helpless. Lives have been tormented and history has been written... a cruel one at that. Whatever the motive behind the killings, it cannot justify the end. Every human has a right to live and this right should be respected.

WOMEN KILLED IN SHELLING

A woman was killed in Silikut, owing to the firing from across the border. Thirty five year old Sajida w/o Ghulam Qadir and mother of 8 children was killed on 8th August at about 9:30 Am while she was grazing her cattle. She received bullet injury and though she was rushed to Srinagar hospital for treatment, she succumbed to her injuries in the hospital. The residents were aghast against the incident, which they say has become a common phenomenon. While talking to the *KWIPD*, the locals said that the army was fencing the area and the Pakistani troops fire on them but the say that it was always the local who were caught in the firing and many lost their lives. Already a lady had received serious injuries and such cases were a common occurrence. Shafiqa Begum relative of the deceased Sajida said, "we are trapped in between the forces on both the sides, we have thought of migration but where will we go, we make a livelihood by rearing animals, what will we do there? Sajida has left behind 8 children, what will happen to them. Who will look after them? Irshad her elder son was

rendered handicap two years back when he received injury in the cross border shelling, his leg was amputated. These incidents have become common place from the last four days children are not going to school because of the cross firing". Another lady Zahira adds, "all the houses here have developed cracks due to shelling. We have acute water scarcity in this area, so to fetch the water we have to go close to border and get it from there, often there we get caught in cross firing and many people lose their lives, from the past few days we don't go to get water. Now we have no water ever since the army fenced the area.

Our lives have become hell, the other side is continuously targeting the army and the locals are torn in between. Nobody thinks of us". This area being very close to the border is facing lot of problems due to cross border firing and shelling, the locals say that administration continues to turn a blind eye to their plight.

ATROCITIES AGAINST WOMEN CONTINUE

There has been virtually no end to human rights violations against the women in valley, on the contrary there is a increase in the atrocities committed on them as is evident from the spate of incidents. All the atrocities committed against women do not get reported owing to reasons like social stigma, ignorance and illiteracy. Many human right violations of women in the form of rapes and molestations are not publicized, yet many cases do come to fore front. Below are some of the incidents, which came to limelight, and led to widespread demonstrations.

- The inhabitants of a village called Pana Kijran in Bijbehara were subjected to severe torture, men were beaten and humiliated and women were molested. According to the villagers on June 30, army personnel from 3 RR barged into houses of villagers and asked them to come out of their houses. While these men were taken to Jungle the women were forced to remain in the villages. The men were ruthlessly tortured in jungles; some personnel of 3 RR pressurized women to accompany them for door-to-door search operations. "They tried their every bit to force us to accompany them," said a woman, adding that women were severely beaten and showered with abuses. When they refused to obey the orders of RR men, all the women were beaten and abused and they had to fight hard to safeguard their chastity added another women. When things were getting difficult and the women sensed that they no longer could sustain the resistance, an elderly lady ran towards the forest and told the men folk about the episode. The male on hearing the tale forgot their own ordeal and broke the siege laid by army and rushed towards the village. In the villager both men and women staged a protest and marched towards DC office Islamabad and demanded action against the perpetrators.
- August 24; Rashtriya Rifles personnel allegedly made an abortive attempt to outrage the modesty of a handicapped girl at Thana Mandi village nearly 17 kms from Rajouri Town, triggering a massive protest in the area. Locals said that about a dozen. Jawans of Doriwal army post were on patrolling the area at the evening and during the patrol the soldiers first called out all the male members from their house and asked them to report to the major of the post and later started search operation. At about 12 o clock some soldiers allegedly entered into the house of Abdul Qayoom Dar, a teacher by profession where his handicap sister Fatima was alone. The RR personnel dragged Fatima towards storeroom but before they could succeed in their nefarious designs, the girl raised alarm. Few women in the neighborhood heard her screams and rushed to the spot. Meanwhile other permanent patrolling party reached the spot and

got their colleagues out of the spot. This incident led to a huge demonstration and later the protestors lodged a FIR under section 354 of RPC against the army personnel.

- Aug 25: A 17-year-old girl managed to escape from the clutches of A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) at industrial estate Zakura. Shakila of Pulwama district came to Zakura to stay for few days with her aunt Zubeda w/o of Abdul Samad, watchman at industrial estate. Around 12 pm Samad and Zubeda went to a doctor and left their three-year-old baby and Shakila at home. He also closed his grocery shop adjacent to house. About 60 metres away from the house there is a CRPF camp of C company 37 batallion. Sensing the girl at the house is alone at the house a CRPF man from the camp went to Shakeela's uncle's provisional store even though it was closed.

Shakila told the CRPF man that the shop was closed and there was no body at the house "this proved to be the undoing, the man entered from the main gate and showed me a bundle of notes and proposed marriage to me, when I refused he threw me on the floor and tried to outrage my modesty" says a shaken Shakila. But she used her presence of mind and told the personnel that she will pacify the crying child in the other room and come back as the child had started to cry when he saw the personnel forcing Shakeela.

Shakeela fled from the house and took shelter in the neighbours' house. As soon as the news spread around, the unit holders called a meeting and decided to go for strike until the erring personnel was brought to book.

- A Border security forces (BSF) personnel allegedly made criminal assault on a girl, namely Rehana resident of Watergam, Baramulla in north Kashmir. She raised a alarm which attracted the attention of passerby and they rushed to the spot, while the BSF man escaped from the scene. The people of the area staged a massive demonstration to protest against the incident. The joint posse of police and BSF used force to disperse the crowd resulting in injuries to several people.

TURMOIL AND TRAUMA

Aasia Jeelani

The decade long violence and the adverse living circumstances prevailing in the valley have transformed the mental health status of the majority of the inhabitants in the negative sense. With killings, rapes, molestations, extortions, custodial and other form of torture, having become a daily routine, the rise in mental disorder is the expected outcome. In fact the situation in Kashmir is a perfect set up for any person to loose sanity and become insane as there is always a very thin line between the two and any stressful event can make an individual to cross this thin line.

Most of the people living in Kashmir have developed some kind of mental disorder be it depression or anxiety. The continuous threat to life and security has led to feeling of insecurity among the masses. In any conflict zone women and children have been found to be the worst hit. Not only has a whole new crop of widows and half widows come up but an alarming number of women are seen to be afflicted

Mental disorders both in men and women have shown an alarming increase when compared to pre conflict days in 89. Statistics reveal that in the year 1989 about 1700 patients visited the valley's lone Psychiatric hospital and in the year 2002, the number of patients had gone to 48000. In the year 2003, up to the month of September already 48000 patients have visited the hospital for treatment with still more months to go, one can imagine what the figures are going to be.

with various psychosomatic diseases as a result of the continued trauma of the past decade. Mental disorders both in men and women have shown an alarming increase when compared to pre conflict days in 89. Statistics reveal that in the year 1989 about 1700 patients visited the valley's lone Psychiatric hospital and in the year 2002, the number of patients had gone to 48000. In the year 2003, up to the month of September already 48000 patients have visited the hospital for treatment with still more months to go, one can imagine what the figures are going to be.

Before the onset of militancy certain mental disorders, which were unknown to Kashmir, have shown a phenomenal presence after the conflict. "One such disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), no case of this kind was reported before 90, this kind of disorder was completely unrecognized in Kashmiri society as the situation was peaceful but now 15 to 20 % patients in Out Patient Department (OPD) are suffering from this mental disorder, followed by Major Depressive Disorder and the cases pouring in are just the tip of the ice berg. As there is social ostracism attached to visiting a Psychiatric hospital. It is a common notion here that any body visiting a psychiatrist is insane. There are other mental diseases which have shown four fold increase like bipolar disorder, panic, phobia, generalized anxiety and sleep disorders," says Dr. Arshad, a, P.G student in the department of Psychiatry in the government Psychiatric hospital. A study conducted in the department of Psychiatry by Dr Mushtaq Margoob, Dr Arshad, and Dr. Zafar, show that shows that after 5 to 6 years of the commencement of any mental disorder, do the patients visit the psychiatrist. Till then they visit different doctors, as they are not even aware of the fact that they are suffering from mental disorder. The study also showed that Substance Use Disorder or drug addiction and suicidal tendencies has been another repercussions of the outgoing conflict. And the studies have also shown that these disorders are assuming epidemic proportions in the community and interestingly patients who come to seek help are in the productive age group of 20-35 years. It is not surprising as youth are vulnerable to depression, already they are coping with the growing complexities of adolescence, and when faced with additional conflict related problems, the going is tough.

But this is an expected outcome, as the Kashmiri people are living under stressful conditions exemplified by a state of learned helplessness with a sense of constant insecurity and uncertainty, watching helplessly their dear ones being killed, injured, themselves fearing the same. Such circumstances carry every potential of rendering the masses vulnerable to mental health problems.

The impact of conflict on women and children:

Doctors at the government psychiatry hospital say that women comprise more than the sixty percent of the patients they examine. A leading Psychiatrist of the valley, Dr Mushtaq Margoob says, "women have to bear the brunt of every tragedy. They have to support the family after death of their husband, father or son or brother. Their injuries are more than physical and unlike men they do not share their tragedy with anybody and that makes them all the more ill" Dr. Arshad also echoes the same view as he says, "women are forming major patients of Major Depressive Disorders followed by PTSD, almost 50 percent of female patients coming to this hospital suffer from his syndrome. This is probably due to the fact they have now assumed the status of the head of the family after the death of the male members in the family. Women especially in rural areas are not able to accept this responsibility and are finding it very difficult to cope up with this situation leading to stress related disorders". He

adds that for women whose husband have disappeared have shown different symptoms, "usually in depression patient is left with no desire to live but these women amazingly have expressed a strong will to live, they exhibit a strength unknown in depressive patients perhaps for the reason that they believe that their husbands are alive and their heart refuses to accept the fact that they might not be alive. A woman whose husband has disappeared even after 9 years believes he will come back and she longs to live for the day. For women, whose husbands have died, although they are suffering from depression yet psychotherapy has not been able to yield the desired affect. From the last 10 years a women whose husband was killed in the ongoing conflict is not getting well in spite of all the medicines that she is taking". Firdausa (name changed), a lady from Batmaloo, Srinagar saw the body of her brother who was killed in the custody of security forces, the body had been split open and did not have heart in it. The gruesome incident shattered her and she has been in a state of shock since then. She is in a state of disturbed bereavement and PTSD. She re lives that moment again and again. She does not want to forget the scene of her brother's body. She has not been able to accept her brother's death. Such patients are said to be in a state of denied grief. This form of depression is very visible in women whose son or husbands or relatives have disappeared, as they are not able to perform the last rituals, which would lessen their grief. Time does not seem to heal their wounds. Women in rural areas often suffer more than anybody as incident of violence go unreported there and also ignorance and illiteracy being high there. The victims of rape or molestation who are undergoing psychological trauma do not visit the hospital. Also the suicidal cases don't come to the psychiatric hospital, they are treated in other hospitals, but they never reach the psychiatric hospital owing to social ostracism. According to Dr Margoob women have become increasingly suicidal and resorting to drugs via sleeping pills, injections and inhalations". Initially women suffering from other forms of mental sickness had certain inhibitions to visit a psychiatric hospital but now the number of female patients visiting hospital has shown a considerable increase. Truly speaking women always bear the brunt of conflict, women are said to be emotionally stronger than men, but the impact of violence of conflict has rendered their emotional strength into weakness engulfing them in a constant state of depression.

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Children are the most vulnerable to any conflict. They have grown up in an era, which is not normal. From the last fourteen years, Kashmir has witnessed unprecedented violence and all the children who were born and brought in this period have a different mind set than a child who was born before the conflict started in 1989. As Dr. Arshad says their pre occupation with violence is obvious. **"Whenever I ask a child to visualize something in his mind and draw the picture on a paper, they draw pictures of war or something violent which shows their pre occupation with violence. As a child if I had been asked to draw a picture I would have drawn a cricket match picture. This shows the subtle impact of violence on their vulnerable minds. Besides bed wetting other disorders like night terror, sleep disorders are common in them".**

There has been a considerable increase in the number of orphanages, a culture alien to Kashmir in pre conflict days. Doctors say a visit to any orphanages show that all of them are suffering from some kind of disorder not necessarily PTSD, but that need to be addressed. Sense of security is missing in them.

All the killings and violence around the children have taken its toll on their young minds. Ayesha (name changed) a 6th class student, witnessed a bomb blast in October 1991, and saw dead bodies around, since then her life has not been the same again, earlier a topper in the class, today she is disinterested in her studies. She keeps on sleeping all the day and gets angry quiet often. Her father is a doctor and he sought help from psychiatrist yet she is far from better. There are scores of women and children who do not have access to help and often come in the later stages of depression. And by that time the damage is done.

But the question is not whether people seek timely help or not, the question is that there has to be a larger solution to this wider problem. Until the political unrest does not stop, mental disorders will continue to bloom with fervor. Visiting a psychiatrist does not end problems; it in fact is the beginning.

Dr Aarshad ends with the note that all biological problems do not have biological solutions. Sometimes solution lies in political and social set ups. Until there is political solution to the problem of Kashmir, the problem will persist, the figures will increase and the trauma will never end.

Just Married, Just widowed --- a dream shattered

Every girl has a dream, a dream of becoming a bride. Every girl awaits this big day of her life and dreams about it often much before the actual day arrives. For any girl this special day is the most important and precious day. And from here starts a new journey of her life, a journey she waits so eagerly and happily.

Twenty year old Afroze, from Magam, Handwara, had the same dreams and feelings when she tied the nuptial knot with 19 year old Tahir Hassan Shah Makhdoomi, a class 12th student from Tujjar Sharief, Sopore north Kashmir. On September 11, Afroze got married to Tahir and she could not have asked for more. Finally the wait had come to an end and dreams had come true. But do dreams always come true? Not here at least for Afroze could not have dreamt of what future had in store for her. The happiest day in her life turned to be



the most horrible day. Her husband was killed barely three hours after the bride entered the bridegroom's house.

On the intervening night of 11th and 12th Sep, Major Rajinder Singh of 22 RR camped at Bomai with other army personnel raided the house of Ghulam Hassan Shah, a teacher with

Jamaat-e-Islami school and father of Tahir shah and picked Tahir from the house and after three days was blown to pieces. The bridegroom had been blown with IED so brutally that only one of the limbs could be recovered from the bloody spot in Lalkol Harwan forest area.

After his arrest on 11th September, the family members and relatives for the next three days persistently beseeched Major Ravinder Singh to release the boy as he had never associated himself with militancy and was a student in Sopore College. They were told to wait and that he would be released soon. But on 14-09-03, Major Ravinder, himself came to Shah's house and asked him to collect the dead body of his son in nearby jungle. This news shocked the family members and they burst into screams and tears. The army officer and the other security men accompanying him immediately frisked away. As usual the army version was that the boy had been taken for effecting recoveries from a militant hideout. During the seizures, an explosion took place in which he died and five soldiers got injured. Police accordingly registered FIR.

This news shook the whole Sopore town and led to a massive protest. The whole area wears a gloomy look and has been closed for the last four days. The police had to resort to tear smoke shells and fired several rounds in air to disperse a huge gathering of protestors. So far three cops were wounded and six protestors detained. Chief minister Mufti Mohd Sayed visited the family along with his daughter Mehbooba Mufti and has announced a judicial probe in the killing.

Yes! a probe has been ordered but what, will the guilty be ever punished. So many probes have been ordered and they have yielded nothing. The omnipotent security forces cannot be punished and if by a miracle the guilty were punished will it bring the joy of a bride back, will the glow of her face come back, will she forget the pain and shock. At Tahir's house Afroze lies in a dark room. She hasn't spoken a word since her husband's death. "The *henna* on her hands is still fresh, why didn't they kill her also?" says her mother. "She hasn't taken off her jewelry. How can she accept the murder of her husband a few hours after her marriage," asks her brother Khursheed Ahmad. For Afroze life has come to a halt, her dreams have been shattered and it might take an eternity to come terms with this loss of her life. From a newly wed to a newly widowed is a journey which no girl would ever imagine and Afroze was no exception.

WOES OF A WIDOW

NAZIR

AADIL

Everyday brings in more and more miseries to already trouble-torn people of Kashmir. The incessant threat to life, liberty and modesty, have led to a sense of insecurity particularly among the women. Women have suffered in all forms, as a mother she has mourned for her son, as a wife she lost her soul mate, as a sister she suffered the loss of her brother. A woman has multifaceted role to play and in every role she played, she suffered. The victims are often from remote places where human rights violation, is a common place and often go unreported, as the accessibility to media is low.

It is a very difficult task to ask a victim what exactly has happened to him/her? As most of the victims while revealing their trauma feel uncomfortable. They are often at loss as what to reveal and what to hide, the atmosphere of mistrust developed since the inception of armed conflict.

One such woman who finds it tough to narrate her woes is Zoona, a widow of a surrendered militant, from far-flung Kupwara in north Kashmir. To pen down only the gist of her miseries is indeed a very tough job.

While narrating her tragedy, her eyes are moist and the depression amply visible from her face.

“How hard, how hard is this life? I had never thought of, how things would change in short span of time”, says Zoona. Her saga strikes any heart. Her pain started the day her husband, Ghulam Nabi, was killed; he was a militant who had surrendered but was killed by the renegades.

“A number of questions annoy me, like my husband surrendered for his and his family’s security. If he left the path of militancy, which the government wants then why was he killed? When my children ask me where their father is, I am at loss, how will I explain things to them, they are too young to understand what death is. My younger daughter was born after the killing of my husband,” says Zoona. While recalling the most unfortunate day of her life, she says, “yes, yes! My husband crossed over Line of Actual Control (LOC) for arms training in the year 1992, at that time there was a huge rush of youth to cross LOC for arms training. My husband spent 1 ½ year in other part of Kashmir. I never deny he had worked for few months with the guerilla outfit Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). But soon after he surrendered before the Rashtriya Rifles (RR), camped in our area, after realizing the growing responsibilities of his family as our daughters were growing up.

After surrendering, he was performing his duty in Public Works Department (PWD), and everything was going fine, and we were living a happy life. But then fate intervened otherwise.

On that fateful day, the 8th June, 1996, which repeatedly strikes my heart and mind, my husband used to come to home for lunch, as it was his daily routine, perhaps, it was noted by the government sponsored militants of our area, who always forced him to work with them, but he always refused, which might have been the reason of his abduction. They kidnapped him before he entered the home.

Expecting support from the army before whom Ghulam Nabi surrendered, we met the major of the camp, who assured us his support in releasing my husband from the *Ikhwan* captivity. But when the Major did nothing in this regard, I became worried.

Thereafter, we made extensive efforts to locate Ghulam Nabi but the *Ikhwanis* prevented us from meeting him, it was after five or six long days of wait that they permitted us to meet him. But they demanded 1 lac rupees to release him. For me the amount was a big one and, our savings and, possession would go in it, but nonetheless, I agreed immediately, for nothing was dear to me than his life. I along with my husband’s cousin and nephew went to meet him. We were shocked when we saw him, he was in morbid state and it was evident that he would not live long, The brutality and callousness of *Ikhwanis* was visible and clear on his body, he was not able to talk as his lips were burned by cigarette bits. It seemed that some wild animals had pounced upon him and tore him. This was not the end, he was tied with a taxi and dragged in Kupwara town in broad day light of which the whole Kupwara was witness, then they put him in a well for hours, not only that the interrogators rigorously kicked his body, due to which his kidneys and ribcage was damaged. The torture inflicted on his body left no chance of his survival. Subsequently, only after eight days we were informed that he died of torture and his dead body was thrown in Halmatpora, Kupwara”.

Zoona's miseries are infinite, like thousands of widows and half-widows she is suffering from mental and physical trauma, her financial condition worsens day by day, which is directly proportional to her mental agony. Though her in-laws support her occasionally, but future seems uncertain, for how long will they help her and for how long she and her children will live on the mercy of their relatives; after all everybody has responsibilities and liabilities in life. How long will she continue to be a liability on others? A question, that haunts her.

What would be the future of her children? They are too young to understand the situation around them, their innocent minds wandering in their own thoughts. Will they grow in fear and hatred? Their father's death has changed the course of their lives. Their mother Zoona will do all she can do make their future better. But the insecurity will continue to haunt them, and each passing day will bring in more uncertainties.

HOW LONG SHALL I NURTURE ONLY TO LOOSE

Shazia Kamili

Of all the incarnations of a woman, her role as a mother is the best. For not only does it symbolize the realization of her sojourn on earth but it also brings out the best qualities uniquely bequeathed on a woman. Therefore, not surprisingly a mother so naturally quintessence creation, endurance, selfless love, sacrifice and devotion. Only a mother is capable of giving herself up so completely and absolutely sans any personal considerations and if at all there exists something like pure love, then nothing comes even close to the mother's heart.

God could not be everywhere so he made mothers and there is a mother in every woman. God ordained her to be the living force. The eternally brimming chalice that quenches the thirst called life. Truly, the fountainhead of creation.

Can there be a pain more potent than that of an empty chalice. Can there be an ache greater than the denial to create and nurture. A little aberration of fate and the entire essence of a life can be sapped out and what life would reside in the dead silhouettes of human forms. Surely there can be no curse more severe than that of infertility, no agony more enduringly stinging than that of barrenness.

And yet is not a barren womb better off than the one ploughed by the blood of its sons. An empty chalice better than the one turned crimson. An empty lap much richer than the ones that hold the heads of their children soaked in blood, gored with bullets, at times mutilated beyond recognition, bearing the marks of inhuman torture. While the garden that cannot blossom has only to mourn its sterility what does the garden do that has suffered the pangs of birth and the pain of tender nurturing only to loose its bud and bloom, hence its glory.

Is there a balm that can bring solace to the pain of having loved and lost, and lost so untimely and so unfortunately? A prayer that ebbs the tormenting yearning to hold but for once the head that would refuse to be dislodged from the shoulder, the arms so adamantly entangled around the neck. A surgery that can relieve the eyes of the pricking debris of the shattered dreams. A medicine that cures the longing to caress the face that lies buried in unfriendly earth-unloved and unattended. A redemption that salves the lacerating souls.

Can anybody undo the pain of thousands of Kashmiri mothers who have lost their sons and daughters to the ensuing turmoil? Can any power plug their wounds, wipe away the blood that flows incessantly from the eyes and enliven the souls that died with their dear ones? Can anybody hold the torch of hope for those whose die every moment, awaiting the return of

the sons who left the nest never to return? The innumerable mothers for whom the sun never sank after the black dawn.

Can there ever be rest for the mothers who have witnessed the desecration of their daughters? Can anything obliterate the throbbing that comes from looking at innocence defiled, at the childhood lost to the house of shame, at the souls that shall always live in the specter of smart and guilt? Can there be helplessness greater than that of a mother who puts the child to her bosom and yet cannot offer anything beyond the spring of her eyes?

Which mother on the earth has the heart to see her child reduced to a vegetable, a half dead, half living mass? The heart to look daily into the dark pits that were once her windows to the world-gorged out by some merciless brute in uniform. The strength to look at the bodies maimed. The courage to live with the living dead.

Every time I see my child's face, I cannot help to think of all those Kashmiri mothers who have suffered immensely in the last 15 years. Every time I look into his eyes, I see the streaming tears falling on the empty eye pits. Every time I look at the pout, I see a woman kissing the sweet mouth, one last time. Every time the arms are wrung around me, I see a mother shaking the limp body of her son as if to put life into the arms that were supposed to carry her hearse.

Every time I look at him, I am frightened of the future. I cannot think beyond bullets, grenades, mines, cross firing, custodial deaths. Life for me holds little meaning other than living from one minute to the next in the specter of fear and death. I struggle to hold my sanity and most of the times to affect an air of sanity. Sanity in the landscape of death and yet death is the easier way out, for life has come to mean to expect the worst, to walk down the street with your mind telling you that this could be your last journey, to see bodies blowing up in blasts, blood and flesh splattered all around, to run for safety by stepping over the dead

Every time, I ask myself why did I bring him into this world? I, who has no right on the air that I breathe, the earth that is me, the streams and falls that are my songs, the mountains that bear my footprints, the woods that smell of me. Then, do I have the right to be a mother? To drink from the sacred spring of motherhood?

The crestfallen mountains that looked so invincible in times not so long back resonate the gunfire. Again, the landscape turns crimson. Somebody's son has fallen yet again. Yet, again collapses a mother's world. Yet again, a mother shall scorch till eternity.

I am also the mother Kashmir. I have in my bosom thousands of my sons - fine young lads. I am all soaked in their blood. Every inch of me is full of the dead and yet there is no redemption for me, for every day there is yet another son to be embraced. Can a mother carry the mutilated bodies of its children and yet not choke. I continue to witness the massacre of my sons, the desecration of my daughters- all in the name of democracy and the geographical integrity of a noble nation.

My sorrow is heartbreaking and sad considering the fact that it is not a curse from the heavens but an induced catastrophe that panders to the greed of a nation. My condition is sadder considering the hype about the world being a global village and the hoopla about human rights. Is the world ignorant of the human tragedy being perpetuated in Kashmir or is it that Kashmiris simply do not qualify as humans.

Moreover, I am baffled by the indifference of the women across the world who are mothers like myself, who could be expected of a better, if not complete understanding of my sufferings. I do not know the colour of motherhood across the mountains. Perhaps motherhood beyond my recesses is defined more by economic and political interests, religious affiliations,

the consideration of black gold hidden inside me...? Or is it that the mothers of the world have grown strong enough to see their children to graves. How is it that I suffer so acutely and so tragically and yet the mothers across the world have not even raised a voice. **I may not have anything, neither oil reserves nor any tabs on the world economy nor any kickbacks for the international construction companies or the arms dealers, neither any pressure groups or lobbyists to plead my cause yet is my blood less valuable, my sons lesser beings and my motherhood doomed for persecution. While the champions espousing the cause of freedom have no qualms about sexing up reports to redeem people of oppression, my blood flows incessantly on the streets and down the drains.**

How long shall my motherhood be ploughed by the blood of my own sons? How long shall my womb be pierced by the ruthless bayonets? How long shall my womb suffer the bullets? How long shall it burn in the torture chambers? How long shall it nurse the festering wounds suffered in the interrogation centres? How long shall it be mutilated beyond recognition to suit the cloak of encounters? How long shall my womb wait for the sons that vanished without a trace? How long shall it be plundered and defiled and lose its honour? How long shall it have to nurture only to lose? How long shall my motherhood become the scapegoat of political, economic and strategic agendas of interests who neither know the pain of begetting, the toil of tending nor the sorrow of losing?

WOMEN - CHILDREN KILLED

IN THE MONTH OF JULY

July 6: Two children were killed and one injured when a bomb went off while they were playing in a ground at Raj Mohalla, Warpora, Sopore in north Kashmir.

The deceased have been identified as Sameer Ahmad Bhat and Ishaq Ahmad.

July 7: Unknown gunmen killed two women at Manpur village. The dead have been identified as Tara Banti wife of Bela ram and Babli Devi wife of Sudesh Kumar.

July 14: Militants allegedly shot dead a girl Nazia Akthar at Arwami, Anantnag district of south Kashmir. She is said to be daughter of erstwhile ruling National Conference (NC) activist and the reason behind her killing is believed to be this affiliation.

July 18: A woman constable was allegedly shot dead by militants at Sariefabad in Tral township of Pulwama district of south Kashmir. She was identified as Inderjeet Kour.

July 22: Militants allegedly intruded into the residence of Abdul Ahmad Khan of Dolipora, Kupwara and fired indiscriminately on the inmates resulting into the death of his daughter.

The deceased was identified as Abida Khan, 18.

July 29: Unidentified gunmen allegedly shot dead a woman after they forced their entry inside the residential house of Ghulam Ahmad Najar at Ajas Bandipora. The deceased was identified as Nusrat Bano, 25.

*** IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST**

August 1: A girl was beaten to death by a group of gunmen, after forcing their entry in the residential house of Nissar Hussain. Before killing her, the gunmen asked the girl about her father's whereabouts and when she feigned ignorance, the irked gunmen started beating her

which resulted into her on spot death. The deceased was identified as Nazia daughter of Nisar Hussain

August 11: Gunmen whose identity could not be ascertained shot dead a woman Zoonia at Kandi Kupwara in north Kashmir.

August 21: A woman and her son were killed when Indian and Pakistani troops resorted to cross border artillery fire at Drass sector of Rajouri district. The deceased were identified as Khalida Jabeen wife of Bilal Ahmad and her son Sar Alamn of Gandyal, Drass.

August 25: Mother daughter duo was allegedly killed by unidentified gunmen inside their residential house at Kattar Mal, Manjkote in Rajouri district. The deceased were identified as Hakimj Bi, 50, w/o Mohammad Akbar and Zeenat Begum, 32.

August 29: Two minors brother lost their lives when a mortar shell hit their residential house at Sultantenki village in Uri, Baramulla. They have been identified as Mujahid Ahmad, 6, and Azhar Mehmood, 4.

August 31: Some unknown gunmen allegedly beat a woman to death after they forced their entry inside her residential house at Jagnu in Kishtwar. She was identified as Aishia Begum w/o Bahoru Gujjar.

* IN THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

September 2: A woman identified as Fatima w/o Muneer Ahmad of Chambalvas, Banihal was killed when a group of gunmen intruded in her residential house and opened fire indiscriminately at the inmates. Besides, Fatima four other members of family were also killed.

*Meanwhile, an infant lost his life when militants allegedly blasted a bus carrying soldiers by triggering off IED.

September 4: A woman was killed and three children injured when militants allegedly fired upon their residential house at Poonch when they refused to open the door.

The deceased has been identified as Zubeeda Parveen, 28, w/o Mohammad Ishaq.

September 9: A minor girl lost her life when a militant allegedly hurled a grenade towards the district police lines (DPL) Doda. It missed the intended targeted and exploded on the roadside killing Heena Akthar, daughter of Ghulam Nabi, of Akramabad, Doda.

September 11: Rehana (17) a college student was killed in the grenade attack in Lal Chowk.

September 18: A woman was allegedly shot dead by the security forces at Kralpora, Kupwara while she was walking in her field. The identification of deceased was not confirmed.

September 21: Unidentified gunmen shot dead a woman at Lolab, Kupwara in north Kashmir. The deceased was identified as Musmat Rehana wife of Bashir Ahmad.

DATE	WOMEN	CHILDREN
JULY 6	-	2
JULY 7	2	-
JULY 14	-	1
JULY 22	1	-
JULY 28	1	-
AUGUST 1	-	1
AUGUST 11	1	-
AUGUST 21	1	1

AUGUST 25	2	-
AUGUST 29	-	2
AUGUST 31	1	-
SEPTEMBER 2	1	1
SEPTEMBER 4	1	-
SEPTEMBER 9	-	1
SEPTEMBER 18	1	-
SEPTEMBER 21	1	
TOTAL	13	9

FUTURE

Courtesy: Al- Jazeera Website

They tell us to look ahead at the future
 And to stop referring to the past
 How can they ask us to do that
 When we lost so many people so fast?
 How could we look to a future
 That they don't want us in?
 How could we just forget about the past?
 And start new lives again?
 How can they tell us to forget the people that we have
 lost?
 The homes that they destroyed?
 How can they tell us to forget the pain
 Of the many young girls and boys?
 We can't ever forget the grief we have been through
 Our suffering the world heard before
 We can't forget the cry of our children
 The cries the world tried to ignore.
 Can't they allow our kids
 To live their dreams?
 Allow them to see things,
 That they never have seen?
 Will our children be able to sleep
 Without waking up or crying in the night,
 Will they ever be able to step outside their own home
 Without getting shot, or being in fright?
 Why can't they leave us to live our lives
 Like they live their own?

Why can't they permit us
To live peacefully in our home?
We try to gain back our property
Our precious lands, our paradise.
We try to make our children live peacefully
Live a life that's safe, a life so nice.
Not a life that we are living,
It's not even a life at all
It's a jail that we are living in
Jails where no one hears our calls.
It's an everlasting torture
A nightmare that is endless.
A pain we cannot escape
That brings our lives to sadness.
They took away all our dreams for our future
Brought our lives to sorrow
Made us never want to live
For another tomorrow.
When we get back our home
If that blissful day is soon to come
We can all smile once again
Because now the torment is gone.
All the martyrs will come down from heaven
And together we will rejoice
When that day comes, God willing soon
That meant the world finally heard our voice!
Don't ask us to forget the past
For that we cannot do
We can never forget all the agony
That we have been put through.
This nightmare we are living in
Will soon all go away
And then we finally have our peace
For this we all do pray!
God Bless!

Kashmiri Women's Initiative for Peace and Disarmament

The Bund, Amira Kadal Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir)

Tel: ++91-194-2482820

Fax: ++91-194-2478464

Email: kwipd2002@yahoo.com

Website: www.geocities.com/kwipd2002