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## Impact of Low Intensity Conflict on the Women of Kashmir, India

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### **Abstract:**

*Low intensity conflict (LIC), as commonly understood, implies armed conflict between regular armies or law enforcement agencies and non regular armed militias which could include terrorist groups, guerrilla fighters, gangs, rioters etc. The participation or involvement of the local population is an important feature of most low intensity conflicts, which are generally intra-state in nature. The present paper explores the impacts of Low intensity conflict which directly and indirectly affects women. Conflict victimizes women in a variety of ways. They are being assaulted, beaten, humiliated, raped and murdered during conflicts. In fact, they have to face violence from the state and often in their own homes in the form of domestic violence. They have to face the loss of family members: fathers, husbands, brothers, children and relatives, which lead to emotional and psychological trauma. Inevitably, woman is a silent sufferer in the wake of Low intensity conflict.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, women, violence, Psychological Trauma

### **1. Introduction**

Low-intensity conflict is a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low-intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of the armed forces. It is waged by a combination of means, employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments. Low-intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications. (US Army). In India there is a continuous low intensity conflict going on, mostly in Jammu and Kashmir and in the North-eastern states. The north-eastern states have been experience separatist groups revolt and since 1979 more than 40000 people have been killed in the fighting. At least 6000 people got killed in the wake of attempts by Maoist insurgents to take over power in the eastern states of India.

There are insurgencies in these States of Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam and the growth of militant groups in Meghalaya. Besides this there are conflicts over land use and control as well as issues of language, identity formation and demographic change. There is an ongoing low intensity conflict where people are trying to establish their right to autonomy, in most of the seven north-eastern states, which has led to political instability, contention and outright violence in the region. In 1947, the British left India leading to the creation of India and Pakistan. This partition is the unforgettable and important happening in the history of Indian subcontinent, which led to the human sufferings when people from both the sides were forced to migrate by using of violence. The Kashmir crisis is an inheritance of the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. Pakistani raiders invaded Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947 and the state was acceded to India. The Jammu and Kashmir state has become a reason for the conflict going on since more than 70 years of independence. The Pakistan government claims the issue of Jammu and Kashmir a basic one and wants the state to get merged with Pakistan, which Pakistan claims to be an ultimate solution for the issue. In Kashmir a large number of armed groups have been fighting especially since 1989 either for the independence or for its integration with Pakistan and an estimate of 47000 – 77000 people have fallen victim of this conflict.

#### *1.1. Impact of Low Intensity Conflict on Women*

In low intensity conflict areas where everyone has to suffer, women are the silent sufferers. Women in their day to day life face a range of violence be it domestic violence, eve teasing, humiliation, physical and sexual violence and even murder. Low intensity Conflict makes women victim of physical, psychological and cultural violence. The women in low intensity conflict are being targeted because of the belief that, it is the women who are the carriers of honour and cultural identity. This leads to the increase of sexual violence. Rape is used as a weapon to humiliate the men. Sexual violence is also used as a horrible mode for ethnic cleansing. In a conflict situation women are raped and forced to bear children and even the pregnant women are being physically and sexually assaulted, which leads to miscarriages. In conflicted areas displacement also do take place which adds to the atrocities of displaced. Women becomes the most sufferer where almost everyone be it a government official, civilian authorities, aid workers demand,

misguide or force women for sexual favour for the sake of basic necessities. In the conflict the men have to face violence, humiliation, unemployment and lack of basic amenities which leads them to frustration, many times to drug addiction and gambling. In such a situation man mostly ventilate their frustration on the women at home especially wives which leads to domestic violence. The women have to face the loss of family members: fathers, husbands, brothers, children and relatives, which lead to emotional and psychological trauma.

### *1.2. Impact of Low Intensity Conflict on Women in Kashmir*

There is a continuous low intensity conflict going on in Kashmir since 1989 in which women has been experiencing violence from all sides be it the security forces or the militant groups. Women in Kashmir has been experiencing violence in every aspect be it physical, psychological or sexual. With the initiation of ambushes, crack downs, search operations against militants especially from 1990 the rate of rapes increased. During these processes all the men of the area are being made to gather at a specific place mainly in school yards. The security forces then search the houses where the women are alone and most often being molested or raped. Security forces target women for sexual assault whom they find having sympathy for militants and women have been raped who are accused of providing food or shelter to militants or have been ordered to identify their male relatives as militants. In February, 1991 the horrible incident of Kunan-Poshpora took place wherein security forces gang raped most of the women of these two villages. This incident was the most brutal assault on Kashmiri women, the echoes of which still horrifies them. The victims included young girls as well as old women. This incident shattered the lives of the inhabitants especially the victims among whom most of the women remained unmarried and have to carry the burden of stigma of the incident throughout their life.

At the same time armed militants are also involved in raping, kidnapping and murdering the Kashmir women. Militants do rape as a way to punish other family members and relatives whom they believe to be informers. In many cases, militant group members have abducted and raped after murdering or threatening other family members. The women have many times being threatened by different groups warning them that severe action will be taken if they do not wear and maintain the veil (or burqa). Many times some extremist women organizations have time and again warned the women not to come outside their homes without wearing burqas and even sprayed paint on women who violated the orders. In such a case four students were hospitalised with eye injuries from the paint. Reports of rape, kidnapping, extortion, murder by militants were at peak in the nineties. In some cases, women have been abducted and raped after threatening that they will kill her family members. Many times this way of abduction and rape are meant for forced marriages. Many times women have been raped by militant groups on the suspicion that they or their family members act as the informers. One such case is of Sarla Bhatt a staff nurse at Sour Medical Institute who was abducted on April 14, 1990, raped and killed. But most of the cases remain dormant because of the fear of reprisal.

In Kashmir there is a section of women whose husbands are disappeared and these women are called "half- widows" who do not know the whereabouts of their husbands. The women do not know whether their husbands are dead or alive. According to an estimate by APDP (Association of parents of disappeared persons) there are thousands of half widows in Kashmir. Government forces police or military or militants are responsible for the disappearance of these persons. These half widows leave no stone unturned to know the whereabouts of their husbands. Many times government officials directly demand money or even sexual favours. In this way these women are misguided by various agencies, which drain out their money and assets. In this all women have to face a continuous psychological trauma. There are several cases where half widows leave or are forced to leave the home of in laws which makes them dependable on their maternal homes. But with the passage of time they and their children become burden for their maternal homes as well, which in turn leads children move to the orphanages. In this way woman also has to face the trauma of separation from their children. Without proof of their husband's death, the women are unable to re-marry and receive government funding. Many women whose husbands have disappeared prefer to wait for them and do not remarry for fear of social exclusion. Many among do not remarry because for the welfare of their children and many have to support their old parent in-laws.

These women have lived such a life for many years and still hope for better tomorrow. In this all the health of women is affected. According to the doctors at psychiatry hospital the patient they examine, 60% are the women. This continuous conflict and its apprehensions make them live a suffocating and stressful life. The rural women suffer the most because of their illiteracy and backwardness. Women are said to be emotionally stronger than men are, but the impact of violence of conflict has rendered their emotional strength into weakness engulfing them in a constant state of depression. 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. Women are the majority of patients of Major Depressive Disorders followed by PTSD, almost 50 percent of female patients coming to the hospitals suffer from this syndrome. 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. Women have become increasingly suicidal and resorting to drugs via sleeping pills, injections, and inhalations. A clinical psychologist at the Psychiatric Diseases Hospital says that continuing violence has also resulted in the loss of self-control, people overreact to any kind of situation." Women are more sensitive, and therefore the incidence of suicides among them is much higher than among men. Many women in Kashmir who have experienced violent incidents also complain of nightmares and dreams full of blood and violence.

In the wake of low intensity conflict the Pandit community have to get internally displaced from their homeland Kashmir. The Kashmir Pandit women have to face before displacement and even after displacement. Due to the trauma of displacement faced by the community women became a silent sufferer and developed many various health problems. These women have to face premature menopause at the age of 35 years, which hampered their ability to conceive and more over the overcrowded camps did not provided

privacy to Kashmir Pandit families which lead to the decrease of sexual desire, hence effecting their sexual and psychological health. As per the report issued in 2005 "The Impact of Migration on the Socio-Economic Conditions of Kashmiri Displaced People; by the Jammu and Kashmir Centre for Minority Studies brought to light some unbearable conclusions related to the physical and psychological health of camp dwellers. The report revealed that an alarming 79% of migrants suffer from depression, while 76% suffer from anxiety disorders such as Phobias and panic attacks. 8% even suffer from delusional disorders and psychosis." in addition it confirmed "More than 36 per cent of women become infertile by the time they reach 40 years of age". The women are mostly more attached to home than men, so the trauma of losing homeland, traditions etc. made women live a life full of psychological trauma.

The Pandit women have suffered from several health diseases like diabetes, thyroid gland malfunctioning etc. which were unheard of when they used to live in the valley. There is rise in stress-related disorders like depression, hypertension, lack of sleep etc. among the Pandit women. Dr. KL Choudhary, renowned Kashmiri physician in his investigation on the exiled Pandit women found that there was fall in population of Kashmiri Pandits. In Kashmir the women were used to very pleasing moderate climatic conditions, so they were not able to adjust with the hostile conditions and environment outside. Many women even died when the temperature became intolerable which resulted in sunstrokes, heart attacks etc. Many Kashmir Pandit women have to face domestic violence. The male folk in order to ventilate their mental trauma because of unemployment, harsh climatic conditions, lack of privacy, decrease in sexual desire etc., made women face domestic violence. The women also have to face sexual assaults from camp dwellers due to overcrowdings and open toilets.

## 2. Conclusion

Low intensity conflict spares no one but it mostly affects the women. A woman in the wake of low intensity conflict has to face in different ways especially physical and sexual assaults, domestic violence, trauma etc. Similarly, the Kashmiri women irrespective of the religions or caste have to suffer and face the miserable traumas of low intensity conflict in one way or the other. Low intensity conflict in Kashmir has degraded the psychological health of the women, where she has to face depressions, anxiety, nightmares and a continuous fear of any kind of miss-happening with her or any of her family members which keeps on haunting her. Women mostly suffer silently and in isolation and mostly are unable to ventilate her mental trauma, hence has to live a life of suffocation and isolation. In such conflict women are mostly targeted, raped, assaulted. At the same time, displacement also becomes a reason of a number of problems for any one, but for a woman it is more disastrous. A woman in such circumstances gets badly affected in every respect.

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