

# STRAIN IN THE HEART'S OF KASHMIRI WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW THROUGH THE NOVELS "IN THE VALLEY OF THE MIST"

Suganya. G <sup>1</sup> and Dr. V. Vijayalakshmi <sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages (SSL),  
Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages (SSL),  
Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai.

\*Corresponding Author Email: [vvijayalakshmi@vit.ac.in](mailto:vvijayalakshmi@vit.ac.in)

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## Abstract

In a patriarchal society, children and women are the utmost pretentious section in the society. Women in Jammu and Kashmir are the most defenseless and worst damaged members of society, particularly in violent situations stemming from militancy and armed conflict. They are subjected not only to severe humiliation and harassment, but also traumatic events that lead to long-term depression, leaving psychological problems. Continuous tensed situation has disproportionately affected the women of Jammu and Kashmir. The disappearance of the bread yielding men in the family adds on extra pressure in the women. The women in the valley are forced to play the role of the men after their loss or disappearance. Raising the children without their father and managing household expenses on their own are the main responsibilities of women in the valley. The purpose of the research paper is to throw a light on the difficulties and violence faced by women in Jammu and Kashmir. This paper focuses on qualitative research paradigm and textual analysis, based on Justin Hardy's "*In the Valley of The Mist*" through the perspective of Caruth's Theory of Double Trauma and La Capra's concept acting out versus working through. The research demonstrates that women are both victims and fighters. Finally, the article concludes by stating that the women in Kashmir experiences numerous forms of traumas in their life, few choose to stay within the trauma throughout their life but few works through it, as stated by La Capra in the concept of working through and moves out of the traumatic condition to lead a meaningful life in the society.

**Keywords:** Women, Education, Depression, Violence, Acting Out Versus Working Through, Double Trauma.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the colonial withdrawal by the Britisher from India, the Indian continent was subjected to serious political chaos. During partition, the United India was divided into two separate countries as Independent India and Independent Pakistan, which led to huge communal riots among the people. The division of boundary between India and Pakistan was the most difficult part during Partition. Though Jammu and Kashmir was a Muslim majority state decided to stay with Independent India. Since 1947, the Kashmir valley has witnessed numerous conflicts and riots because of the separatist movement formed in the valley demanding for Independence. These conflicts after Independence created political instability in Kashmir. Kashmir is the second most violent conflict zone in South Asia, following the violence witnessed during the partition. The Indian government accuses Pakistan of interfering and dispatching militants to Kashmir, while approximately eight million troops are deployed in the valley.

According to Yahaya (2007), the armed conflict in the Kashmir valley created negative impact as war does not discriminate in its choice to destroy the lives of common people, their property and means of subsistence. Both men and women suffer the loss of their loved ones and social relationship as common, but women are

disproportionately affected by the social and cultural responsibilities that society assigns to them. Loss of family members and social interactions causes sorrow in both men and women; however, women are affected differently than males due to socio-cultural roles assigned to them by society. Women may lose their husbands and sons on the battlefield, as well as their daughters and young children as civilian casualties, or watch their agony as attack victims. Women are the major victims of the political instability and suffers from different forms of sufferings. All the individuals of the society suffer different forms of political turmoil, but the women experience the worst in the patriarchal society (GSDRC, 2009).

The National Family Survey in India conducted in 2015 states that about 61% of married women in Kashmir report one or more reproductive health problems, significantly higher than the national average of 39%. Seventy-three percent of Kashmiri women said they have experienced difficulties with their reproductive health, according to the survey. According to research conducted at SKIMS, 15.7% of reproductive-aged women are unable to conceive even with medical assistance, and another 14% experience infertility for reasons that are not yet identified. The tragic experiences undergone by the women in the valley leads to numerous physical and psychological problems in them.

### **1.1 Review of Literature:**

Deepanshi Gupta's (2021) 'Women, Trauma and pain: a selected reading of Kashmiri narratives' analyses the suffering of people in Kashmir through Kashmiri short stories with the help of multi-dimensional writers like Akhter Mohiuddin and Siddhartha Gigoo. Moohiuddin's Jalla's Teeth and the Stain and Gigoo's the fistful of the Earth are one such kind of short story which expresses the deep pain of women in Kashmir.

As violence brings the unspeakable pain and trauma among people especially women, who force them self to be silent or bear the fear as communities' orthodox belief. The pathetic condition of two women protagonist is witnessed with the help of these two short stories. Both the women being well educated and posed good position in the society but still suffer from sort of pain and agony gifted by the conflicts and riots in Kashmir after Partition. In the story Jalla's Teeth and the Stain, Jalla, a young lawyer, she is the pride of her father and her society. She was shattered into pieces when she argued about her freedom of speech against the military forces. "In the Fistful of Earth", Gigoo talks on an unnamed young Doctor who mourns on the death of her mother due to communal riots and later feels bad as her grandmother was also brutally murdered in one such communal riot.

These short stories narrate us how communal riots of 1947 between India and Pakistan has shattered the relationship between Shikhs and Muslims. It can be communal conflict, displacement or the militarized area the main victims are the women in the society especially in militarized zone like Kashmir. Both the author has tried to bring out their bitter experience as a women, mother, daughter and human being in Kashmir. This paper stress that people speak more of violence and sexual harassment in Kashmir but fails to talk on the internal pain of women's life in the Kashmir valley.

### **1.2 Research Objectives:**

- To study the traumatic experience of women in Kashmir.
- To investigate the mental conflict of women in Jammu and Kashmir due to war.

### 1.3 Research Question:

- How conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has shattered the life and mental state of women in Kashmir?
- How women in Kashmir survive with the traumatic experience?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks:

The research paper examines the literary text through the theoretical prism of trauma studies by La Capra's *Trauma, Absence, and Loss* and Cathy Caruth's *Theory of Double Trauma*. Caruth and La Capra, concentrates on the specific trauma of the survivor or victim as influenced by Freud. Caruth states that the survivors of traumatic incidents provide flashbacks or hallucinations in future. The incident quickly turns to an incomprehensible event. Caruth's (1995) explains the notion of double trauma, that the survivors experience double trauma by surviving and perceiving after the death of loved one's providing double trauma. The victim experiences flashbacks of the tragedy after confronted with the loss or death of others and suffer double trauma. 'Trauma, absence, and loss' is a work by La Capra (1994) that examines the notions of absence and loss and demonstrates the transformation of disappearance into loss result in perpetual gloomy and grief. La Capra (2001) in his book, '*Writing History, Writing Trauma*', he defines the concept of Acting out and working through. Acting out is the process through in which trauma survivors are haunted by a traumatic event where the survivors cannot escape form it. While working through is a process where the survivor can distinguish the traumatic event and the regular life. The female characters in Bashir's *The Half Mother* are analyzed using the twofold trauma described by Caruth and the coping mechanism provided by La Capra.

### 2.2 Conceptual Frameworks:

The study of this paper is done through the eye of by La Capra's *Trauma, Absence, and Loss* and Cathy Caruth's *Theory of Double Trauma*, where the novels taken for this paper has numerous incidents, experiences and stories which brings out the causes for Traumatic experience among the women and children in the valley of Kashmir. The incidents which are discussed in the paper are the real face of Kashmir after Partition.

### 2.3 Research Methodology:

The present research paper Strain in *The Hearts of Kashmiri Women: An Overview through the Novel "In the Valley of The Mist"* is based on the analytical approach with the implication of by La Capra's *Trauma, Absence, and Loss* and Cathy Caruth's *Theory of Double Trauma*. Trauma is used to identity different forms of psychological problems like fear of survival, uncertainty of motherhood and fear of living among women in Kashmir through these novels. This paper addresses numerous incidents which has caused Traumatic experience among the women in the village.

## 3. DISCUSSION

People of Kashmir are subjected to numerus suffering due to conflict after Partition, which has led to serious depressions like war breeds depression, crippling, dehumanizing nervous collapse and so on. Gender bias takes place even when it

comes to violence and suffering. Women have long been the victims of natural and man-made disasters. As the conflict progressed from months to years, Kashmiri women become increasingly frantic. They are required to establish a family, forage for food, care for their children, keep their husbands from the notice of security personnel, and protect their in-laws from the everyday violence that surrounds them. According to Harvey and Gow (1994), "History of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role assigned to be subservient to men". Being the vulnerable part of population, women stand witness to numerous misfortunes and challenges. In Kashmir there are around 32,000 widows (Dabla, 2010). Among widow 80 percent belong to the age group of 25 to 32 (Mustafa, 2014). Therefore, women invest themselves physically and mentally till death. In other instances, men too succumb to sadness and fail to protect their families, which naturally falls upon the women.

Domestic violence against women is pervasive across all demographics in Jammu and Kashmir, including socioeconomic status, age range, culture, and level of education. Physical and mental violence affects 15% of married women (Dabla 2009). The women in the valley are put to distress by both the militants and soldiers. Women have a perilous life in the valley, bounded with lots of rules and regulation framed by the patriarchal society. Starting from education to liberty it is difficult for the women in Kashmir to pursue their dreams and desire. A study conducted in Kashmir by Medicins Sans Frontiers (2006) says,

"Like any other armed conflict situation, the continuous violent situation prevalent in Kashmir since 1989 has hit the Kashmiri women in every aspect, every day due to the ongoing-armed conflict women continue to suffer. She is a mother grieving for her missing or dead sons, a widow or a half widow fighting for her existence and the bringing up her children and a refugee to find shelter once displaced from her land" (Frontiers, 2006)

In the novel *In the Valley of Mist*, Justin Hardy has portrayed numerous incidents that took place in the valley to put forth the status of women in the valley through Rafiq's wife, Rafiq died due Post traumatic stress disorder as the usage and production of *Pheran* was ban in the valley and considered to be a form of terrorism, his death changed the life of his wife by limiting her world to the walls of the kitchen. Witnessing the death of her husband, was unbearable to her and started to shrink her world within the four walls of the kitchen. Like Rafiq's wife, most of the women in the valley restrict themselves within the walls of the kitchen after the loss of their husbands. Repeated memory of her husband pushed her to a state of double trauma, where she has to witness the survival and experience the traumatic thoughts of her husband. She was not only haunted by trauma of survival but in terms of reminding constant loss of her husband. According to La Capra (1994), the traumatic experience is over whelming to the survivor and to return to normality is too difficult to the survivor.

Education and freedom have become the most expensive product for the women in Kashmir. Longing for freedom, liberty in dressing and to step out of the house has changed into a dream in the hearts of Kashmiri girls. They are trained to be a full-time house wife to take care of the house, ancestors, children, cook, sew woolen clothes and take care of her husband these things have created a deep scare and regression in the hearts of women in Kashmir. Hardy finds the nature of women in the valley to be different as they remained silent in all the situations.

*Pheran* a traditional costume of Kashmir was later considered to be the costume of terrorism. Another costume which had equal importance like the *Pheran* was the *Burqa*, which was considered as a skin of Muslim women in the valley. Providing education in the valley was another difficulty in the war affected area, especially to the girls as the condition outside the house was uncertain during insurgency. The author of the novel experienced an unusual situation in Dar's family during Ramadan evening as the ladies of the family spent most of their time in the kitchen in preparing snacks and lunch to the family members. Though things were strange outside they remained normal as if nothing had happened. Most of the women in the valley stopped experiencing their feeling and started to sacrifice themselves to the family.

Hardy mentions the state of girl's education in Kashmir using Saqeenah and Sabeena, who has a great desire to study but still knowing the condition in Kashmir, she starts to memorize Quran. The houses in Kashmir were built with huge walls so that they are unaware of what is going around them. Higher education for a girl in Kashmir was always a dream they never sent their daughters out of their house. Even for higher education in Kashmir the Muslim girls have to do Cultural Revolution and Revolts. The only possibility for them to study was to study in the boy's college.

In 1950, a Kashmiri Muslim woman Mahmuda Ahmad Ali Shah was the first female head of women's college in Srinagar. The first set of girls who went to college studied their own history which was written in English by their professors. Many were the first graduates of their family. They were the first Kashmiri women who entered onto the professional life as lawyers, doctors, teachers, hoteliers, journalists, and Police women. The Central Government has spent a lot of money to nurture the education of girls in Kashmir. The girls were given identical uniforms like beige kurta tunic, white salwar and white dupatta and shawl as pride. There were many hurdles to run the Government colleges for women. Lots of leaflets were thrown on the walls of Kashmir and Srinagar. The leaflets were very clear in their message, it was to avoid unnecessary harassment. Muslim students have to wear full Burqa and Hindu girls Bindi in their forehead which is a traditional mark of married women, the symbol of wedding vows. For the first time the burqa and bindi has become as the communal division in the hands of the militants. Many girls were beaten with big sticks as they didn't follow the rules given in the leaflets. The girls got violent and opposed their activities. Their staffs were proud of the defense done by the girls.

These actions made the girls to leave the colleges and joined the militants to serve as secret militants. The militant group was Dukhtaran-e-Millat, known as the daughter of Faith or Daughter of Nation or the community. They worked as secret militant messengers beneath their burqas delivering packages of addresses, dropping bombs and so on. Asiya Andrabi, leader of the group has done many rallies against vulgar paintings of women. She was a strong lady with good English and had great opinion about Osama-bin-Laden, Al-Qa'eda, and Taliban. She was happy for the success of the attack on America. She doesn't believe in Kashmiriyat and Nationalism. According to her there are only two nations- the Muslims and the Non-Muslims. She was good in her studies and got excellent results in biochemistry and bacteriology. But as soon as she attained the age of eighteen, she stopped her studies and started to study about female Revolutionaries. She married a man who belonged to the militant group and began to preach the other way of *Jihadi*. She married her husband's widows who lost their husbands in jihadi. Hardy was so surprised to hear these words from her "I would be more than glad to share my house with other wives of Qasim (her husband)"

(Hardy, 2013, p.131). She mainly did this to stop the dehumanizing act of dowry. It was one of her boycotting dowries and asked poor women to marry *mujahideen* fighters. Many women in the valley supported her stance against dowry.

She says that she formed the daughters of Faith to fight for the rights given to women by Islam, but she then confuses many of those who watch her by insisting that 'women look after the kitchen and men are supposed to work' while she herself makes speeches, leads rallies and trains her cadres to use the burqa as a garment of jihad. (Hardy, 2013, p.132)

Women has to follow strict dress code for girls in the valley. The first set of girls who went to the college in Srinagar were given leaflets by the militants which contained, "In order to avoid 'unnecessary harassment' Muslim students had to wear the full *burqa*, and Hindu girls the *Bindi*, the forehead mark, even though it was traditionally only for married women, the symbol of the wedding vows taken" (Hardy, 2013, p.128-129). It was the first time in Kashmir that the *burqa* and *bindi* became as a weapon of communal division in the hands of militants.

Like Independence Day, Republic Day or any other important days in Indian calendar Martyrs' Day is a day on which women in pay homage for the dead people in conflicts, it would be the dead man's sister, mother or his wife. Some dead bodies of the militant or military officers never returned to the valley whose wives were considered as half widows. They were never given any compensation nor allowed to marry in their life. Praveena Ahanger, a local woman from a poor Mohalla ran an association the Association of Parents and Disappeared Person (APDP), as she lost her husband and son in the Martyrs' Day. She started a monument for the disappeared people in Srinagar but it was demolished by the paramilitary.

Justin Hardy tries to talk about the pathetic situation of girl child in the valley where the birth of girl child is never celebrated by the people in the valley. The whole world of the women in Kashmir is shrunk within the place where she is born and where she is married too. The conflict that is going outside had made them silent inside their houses. Acids were thrown on their faces if they don't wear veil. Rapes were frequently taking place and only the bodies were returned home. At last, because of depression, they land up in the room 19 at Maharajah Hari Singh Hospital. The women in the Kashmir are not the same like the other women's in India; they never came out of their house to share their pain. A journalist came forward with a shocking story which was untold in the Valley. The subject of the reported rape cases by the security force came out. The journalist was shocked to hear some words from a soldier that it is obvious to enjoy a Kashmiri woman as they are so beautiful and if not, it would be a waste. Most of the women in Kashmir experience Double trauma; one being born in an unsafe land and the other by witnessing assassination or rape incidents to her neighbourhood. According to Caruth (1995) the dream of the survivor involves their unconscious and acts like trauma reenactment.

Toyeba Pandita (2015) commented upon the atrocities of the militant towards women in an article, "A Commentary on Armed Insurgency: A Catalyst towards Social Injustice in Kashmir".

Militant threats to women were reported as early as 1990, most frequently by group reportedly seeking to enforce their manipulation of "Islamic" culture in Kashmir. Reports of rape by militant groups were rare in the conflict's early years. In July 1990 warning were issued to the women to maintain purdah (or burqa-clothing which entirely

conceals the body). In May 1993 militants sprayed paint on women who defied the order. Four students were hospitalized with eye injuries from the paint. (Pandita, 2015, p.6)

Life in camps was another horrific experience for the Pandits who were forcefully moved out of the valley. Hardy expresses the condition of women in the valley through the voice of Nita, as two members from Nita's family were killed in the insurgency, the family moved out of the valley to refugee camps in Delhi. Nita's father was psychologically disturbed and mourned in sleep during night times by the forceful exile from the valley. Many families moved out with a hope that they would return to the valley soon. The camps were roughly of two feet by five feet. Nita's Mother curled herself in a corner with her blanket. "So many people came to talk to us but nothing happen" (Hardy, 2013, p.55). All in the family have to live in the small allocated place. The Pandit women felt as demeaning and humiliating the way of living. In Kashmir the houses for all the Muslims and Hindus were fairly divided. Women were given separate place to live. But there they were crushed together in a small place.

Though Nita's family was not happy with the camp they stayed there to a government job for her brother. Nita stayed unmarried as it would be another burden to her family and were afraid of getting married within the community or in the same camp, as it will not be good for the growth of the children. This was the situation of the Pandit women in the valley the suffering of the Pandit women is different from the Muslim women but still the suffering is common among them. Where the Muslim women longed to move out of their house but on the other had Pandit women struggled to own a small place in the valley.

Hannah Arendt (1973) in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Imperialism*, comments on the loss of one's homeland and says that the first and foremost loss which migrants suffer is the loss of their houses and their native place where they were born and brought up. This creates the loss of connectedness and loss of inner identity. The loss of language and culture due to migration contributes to perpetuated inner conflict which leads to an emotional disconnection to a new language and culture. The calamity of the migrants is unprecedented; they are cut off from their land and the roots which are embedded in their past. She says that:

The first loss which the right less suffered was loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distant place in the world. This calamity is for from unprecedented; in the long memory of history, forced migrants of individuals or whole group of people for political or economic reasons look like everyday occurrences. (Arendt, 1973, p.173)

On Feb 22, 1991 Friday night a unit of Indian Army's Rifles surrounded the Kurpwara region of Valley. They were more than eight hundred soldiers. All the men in the valley were asked to assemble for identification outside the village. The soldiers entered all the houses in search of explosives and weapons they raped all aged women in the village. Even the women in eighties were also brutally raped. This horrible incident rested within the village. The government of India hid the story totally and said it as a rumour which has no suitable evidence. In the end the report which contained three hundred pages was concluded as fake report given by all the women in the valley. Within two years the village was divided into two sections; many women were deserted by their husbands and families. Young girls remind unmarried though they were not raped old women were regarded as ill fortune and thrown out of the house by their

sons. All the men in the village were united in this case the condition in the village remained the same for seventeen years. Here La Capra's Acting out can be seen where the women are traumatized by the incident that took place in the village and stuck with those memory. Hardy could even witness women staying still in the same place for years together in the strained cloth. They also experience Double trauma by reenacting the incident that took place on the night in form of dreams and hallucination.

Nitasha Kaul (2013) a London-based academic, public intellectual, media commentator and writer of fiction and verse, in her essay, "Everything I cannot Tell You About the Women of Kashmir" writes about plight of women in Kashmir. Their tragedy is to live their life under constant threat of militancy and military. They have endured a lot during period of 90s. They lost their near and dear ones in the war:

You must know that the women of Kashmir today are also victims of mass rapes in village whose names have become shorthand for uninvestigated crimes. The women of Kashmir are the tens of thousands of widows and half-widows; wives of killed and disappeared men; as well as mothers and grandmothers of missing children. Vulnerable, often impoverished, the sorrows, struggles and humiliation of these women of Kashmir are a catalogue of charges against the occupation of Kashmir. (Kaul, 2013, p.252)

Hardy pictures the pathetic state of women in the valley through the narration of Nowgam village women begging milk before Noor Khan's shop. They travelled from far place walking through the homes, orchards, climbing the fences, concrete walls, crossing the rivers and streams. They asked nothing for themselves, they asked some milk for their babies who were in hunger. They had nothing to feed their babies and have even eaten grasses in their village to feed their babies. Few babies have died due to lack milk. They were ready to do anything to them for the sake of milk. According to La Capra, Acting out versus Working Through, are used as coping mechanism for traumatic loss. For Freud (1895), healing process requires various stages for the survivor. Melancholy and bereavement are two crucial phases of the coping mechanism proposed by Freud. The women who were begging for the milk are seen through the perspective of La Capra's Working through, where they can differentiate between their traumatic experience and the need for their child in the real life.

This was the status of the mothers in Kashmir, they have nothing to offer their children as all are burnt in war and conflicts. They struggled every day to feed their children. At last, they were even ready to beg. This shows the pity state of Kashmir. Baba managed to gather milk powder from Noor's shop and gave the ladies to feed their babies. As La Capra states these women work through their struggles for the survival of their children and moves out of the village to fight for it. Thus, the state of women is so miserable that they have to struggle for their basic needs like education, security, freedom and rights.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Women and children are always the prime victims of any sort of conflict or any insurgency in the society. Torturing women, separation of family members, regular rape and dislocation of people from their native place are few human rights violations against women in armed conflicts. Thus, a conflict between two armed forces causes various psychological and social traumas in the society. Women in Kashmir are experiencing social and economic insecurity as a result of war. The ladies of the valley



were traditionally reliant on their husbands' money, but with their abrupt disappearance, they are left to fend for themselves and their families. Women have to deal with social disbelief and humiliation. It is so hard for those people to get proper assistance. "Like any other armed conflict situation, the persistent violent situation existing in Kashmir since 1989 has hurt the Kashmiri women in every aspect, every day owing to the ongoing-armed war women continue to suffer," according to research done in Kashmir by Medicins Sans Frontieres (2006). According to Julinda Abu Nasr (2006) the founder of The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, once said that, "If a child especially a girl grows up with the idea of violence, that you get what you can by force, what kind of world will this be?" ... "Perhaps the tale of Kashmir is the same." There is a high prevalence of trauma in the general population of Kashmir, but they do not seek treatment for it. Measures must be taken to educate the general population, and healthcare providers must identify the trauma and its consequences among the Kashmiris as soon as possible to prevent crippling consequences and improve the quality of life in the valley.

## 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Issues between India and Pakistan are a never-ending problem lasting for almost seven decades which has to be seriously noted by the Indian Government and other NGO's. This paper is a piece of work which tries to voice out the violence that remains in the life of people after partition and the deep wounds that are created in the hearts of Kashmir people after partition between India and Pakistan.

## 6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is a contribution to literature which brings out the main causes of trauma and speaks deeply on the situation of insurgency in Kashmir, which has ruined the life of women in Kashmir. It also brings out the inner feeble voice of Kashmir who has been suffering for past seven decades; for liberty, education and for a safe life.

### Conflict Of Interest

The author has no conflict with this research paper.

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