



2020

Gendering of Leisure Forms and its Impact on Women in Areas of Conflict: A Case Study of Jammu & Kashmir

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Recommended Citation

Wani, Anusha; Pillai, Vedika; and Azaad, Yana (2020) "Gendering of Leisure Forms and its Impact on Women in Areas of Conflict: A Case Study of Jammu & Kashmir," *The Macksey Journal*: Vol. 1 , Article 136.

Available at: <https://www.mackseyjournal.org/publications/vol1/iss1/136>

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Cover Page Footnote

To Editorial Board, We wish to submit an original research article titled Gendering Of Leisure Forms And Its Impact On Women In Areas of Conflict: A Case Study Of Jammu & Kashmir for consideration by the Macksey Journal. We confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. In this paper, we explore how women of conflict are socialised differently as they negotiate and bargain with existing patriarchal structures that overlap with an unstable political climate. It is also an attempt to understand how dynamics of conflict permeates into daily lives and impresses a larger social structure. This has urged us to re-examine our position to view conflict and gender studies simultaneously. Our vision behind this project is to enable our readers to delve deeper into standpoints and lived experiences of women living in conflict. By bringing to light the everydayness of navigating through these contesting structures, we hope it would broaden the scope of academia in some sense. We also believe that this pursuit fits well with Macksey Journal's consistent endeavour in bringing research projects that are intersectional and accessible. We believe that we have a story to tell, and that it is unique in its own cultural and socio-historical context. Hopefully by the end of this process, we will be able represent our realities more meaningfully to produce something worthwhile in the ongoing discourse. Regards, Anusha Wani Vedika Pillai Yana Azaad

Gendering of Leisure Forms and its Impact on Women in Areas of Conflict: A Case Study of Jammu & Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Kashmir has been intensifying post-1989, and the recent revocation of Article 370 from the Indian Constitution in August 2019 has changed the very rubric of Kashmir having multifaceted implications on the country. Adding to the history of continuing geopolitical and armed conflict in the State, this has especially placed a problem for the women of the Valley to take on new roles and adjust to volatile situations. With it being a heavily militarized zone, and the absence of males from the domestic household, women have had to shoulder heavy responsibilities. The nature of the society within and outside the homes means they must reconcile with the demands made by the private-public sphere while altering it in the process. Women have faced up to the situation bravely, dealing with the existing challenges through their personal subjectivities and experiences. Leisure is a complex phenomenon with its meaning and nature changing continually. Society dictates, or is conducive to a particular mode of leisure, determining its form and nature, and also the extent and limit of participation. These broad questions cannot be answered all at once as a widely accepted Sociology of Leisure is yet to develop. Through our research, we have tried to study leisure and how it occurs in the context and culture of Kashmiri society. It also tries to analyze the changing structure of the public domain and women's invisibility from it. While gender remains an important factor in the question of who participates in what leisure activities, access to public space can be attributed to

the role of class in urban settings and the nature of society in Kashmir. If leisure is commonly referred to as a state of freedom, an absence of obligations, a cluster of activities, how does it operate in areas of conflict?

Keywords: Women, Leisure, Forms of Leisure, Conflict, Urban, Kashmir, Public Sphere

INTRODUCTION

The Kashmir Valley, which remains bifurcated between India and Pakistan, has been the dwelling place for a conflict of more than five centuries. The Valley saw a transition from one tyrannical power to another, when Western colonial power attained a solid ground in South Asia. In the early phase of the 19th century, Kashmir's Muslim majority population rose up against a century of the Dogra rule. By 1944, a continued agitation had translated into a full-fledged demand for a sovereign democracy.

With its roots in India and Pakistan's colonial past, Kashmir was forced to choose between the two dominions in 1947. The Mountbatten Plan¹ did not present independence as an option. This was followed by partition carried out on religious lines leading to an obvious assumption that Kashmir being a Muslim majority, would part with Pakistan. However, Kashmir faced a paradox when Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu ruler, decided to stay neutral. It seemed as though Kashmir had resolved to be an independent territory. Maharaja Hari Singh resorted to

¹ The 1947 Indian Independence Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that partitioned British India into the two new independent dominions of India and Pakistan.

help from the Indian government, signing a hasty Instrument of Accession², thus marking the beginning of a decade long conflict.

India and Pakistan fought their first war over Kashmir in 1947-48. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime minister of India took this issue to the United Nations in 1948. The UN resolution asked Pakistan to withdraw its troops immediately, followed by India withdrawing their forces. Once this would happen, a 'free and fair' plebiscite was to be held. The UN also brokered a truce that resulted in one-third of the territory becoming semi-autonomous, now known as Azad Kashmir. The remaining two-thirds went under India's control. On January 1st, 1949, a temporary ceasefire between both countries was initiated, but even now, the LOC remains a de facto border between the two countries. Despite the UN's efforts to stabilize the situation, Kashmir was never demilitarized and a plebiscite was never held.

Kashmir was formally incorporated into the Indian Union in 1957 and granted special status under Article 370, which entailed several political and economic rights. The Indian intelligentsia has often highlighted how the Indian State undermined the political freedom of Kashmir and its citizens. After the unequivocal abrogation of Article 370 on August 5th, 2019, the people of Kashmir yet again stood on volatile ground.

Due to the recurrent armed conflicts and counterinsurgency in Kashmir, women have become victims of exploitation and subjugation. Amidst the political strife, there have been various instances of atrocities committed against women, including induction, mass rapes, sexual assault, and torture. Furthermore, women with disappeared or killed sons and husbands are left in

² The Instrument of Accession gave sovereignty of the state to Hari Singh, J&K surrendered defense, external affairs and communications to the Union of India. Hari Singh assured the people of J&K through their own Constituent Assembly would draft their own constitution.

a state of emotional limbo, confronting the daunting realities, negotiating within their domestic spaces, and coping with economic losses.

These underlying complexities have shaped the everyday lives of Kashmiri women and the generations that follow. The presence of the army meant that women of the household needed to be protected. Such restrictions or force of control and domination impact the choices that women here can make. Thus, it becomes vital to analyze how militarization and the extremist responses within the Kashmiri society to it have reinforced the existing patriarchal structure, influencing the nature of the society.

A more evident impact of this change was a decline in female presence in public spaces. Women's forms of leisure remained restricted to the domestic space and became highly gendered. It is in this context that we try to put the concept of leisure under a critical lens.

Leisure has to be different and distinct from normal day to day work while still reproducing existing social institutions. It must also be a matter of priority over the supposedly productive activity, and thus leisure has to be a matter of choice. Two concepts that get associated with leisure are free time and quality of experience, and this involvement generally has no stark material benefits.³

Studying leisure as a subject matter has increasingly become an academic concern to social sciences. We may establish that leisure becomes a deeply personal experience because it lies at the intersection of socio-economic obligations and social institutions. If we take gender as a lens to analyze leisure activities, we find that the forms of leisure have been different for men and women and often correspond with their social roles. Historically, there was little distinction between a woman's work and her leisure. Since housework and childcare were tasks taken up by

³ Going by Thorstein Veblen's, theory of Leisure Class in which he views leisure as "unproductive consumption of free time"

her because "a woman's place is in the home."⁴, it is assumed that she *enjoys* it within the privacy of her household. There is no separation of work and leisure in her case. But since men are directly exposed to the public-private distinction, their work and leisure are separated distinctly. The nature of society has significantly changed with the advent of urbanization and digital medium, becoming a platform for social interaction.

SURVEY RESPONSE

Through this survey, we tried to ascertain some patterns in the leisure activities of Kashmiri women and compare them to the leisure activities of women in non-conflict areas, in our case, women living in urban areas of New Delhi. We aimed to study if and how conflict affects the leisure patterns of women.

When asked about what constituted "*leisure*" for urban middle-class women in New Delhi, they often stated that social media was the most used form of leisure. Despite hectic work schedules and/or academic preoccupations, most women found adequate time every day to check WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, etc. for leisure. Most respondents agreed that the use of the internet as a social sphere for leisure is ever-increasing in urban spaces and has become a medium of social interaction.

Apart from social media, many responded that sports like badminton, running, swimming and volleyball were leisure forms but added that they often gave it up due to lack of time, academic pressure, or apprehension about being outdoors during later hours. For most Kashmiri respondents, leisure activities are not dependent on the internet, even if they can spend ample time on social media whenever accessible. Internet and call services are often shut down unexpectedly in the Valley.

⁴ See Sherry B Ortner, "*Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*" 1974, pp.77

Reading is the one common leisure activity that is quite pervasive among both the categories of respondents. Almost all women interviewed from Kashmir stated that *reading* constitutes a big portion of leisure-time for them. Other activities included writing, painting, listening to music, and watching television. Most of these leisure activities are constrained within one's home. We may deduce that while reading is an individual activity for women in urban areas, in conflict zones, it becomes a collective hobby.

Only three respondents from Kashmir stated they played sports for leisure. Many of the respondents said that in times of curfew in Kashmir, reading, domestic work, and even the occasional visit outside for grocery shopping became a form of leisure for them. One of the respondents narrated an incident where women of their locality would watch interactions between army men and young boys hurling profanities at one another. She stated that “It became a spectacle for us. We would watch them make fun of each other and abuse each other.”

Social activities that characterized leisure were quite different in the two cases we took. Women living in urban areas often met with their friends, provided it was before nightfall. But respondents noted that in Kashmir, leisure time is spent more with family than friends. For younger people, time was spent with cousins living close by or neighbors rather than friends from school. The proximity of people mattered in this case. Areeba (respondent, Age 20) noted how she could not recall ever meeting her friends outside the school in Srinagar. Due to the situation of violence in the Valley, she says she “never bothered asking my parents if I could meet my friends just to hang out.” This was not only because she knew her parents would not allow her, but also out of fear of what may happen to her.

Respondents from both conflict and non-conflict zones agree that there is a drastic inter-generational change in the activities that used to qualify as leisure then and now. Gossiping has

been an integral part of leisure and is often associated with unproductivity. It is often assumed to be an exclusive territory of women within their domestic sphere. It was interesting to note that few respondents of our survey shared that it was actually men who have more access to gossip ranging from political news to socio-cultural events. This is because they had more exposure and attended public events like Friday mosque prayers.

There is a stark difference in how the Indian army is perceived by the two groups interviewed. Respondents from Delhi provided us with varying responses when asked their opinion on the army. These ranged from respect to indifference. Most women interviewed from urban areas have seldom had direct interactions or experiences with army personnel. Few were critical of the army, but due to the varied responses provided from this set, no singular trend could be identified. Of the Kashmiri women interviewed, many are apprehensive of the mass presence of army personnel in the Valley. The women interviewed said they felt threatened by their presence and felt reluctant to leave their homes. One respondent stated that though the threat of being *picked up* or taken by the army is higher for boys and men, women's mobility is curbed more than that of men their age. Women and girls face the constant threat of rape and sexual violence at the hands of the army.

Perhaps where a parallel could be drawn between two cases is in the realm of maneuverability and dress. Women from Delhi stated that they face strict restrictions after sunset. It is imperative for them to be home before it gets dark. Restrictions are also placed on what they can wear. They are often asked to dress 'modestly' while traveling to certain areas within Delhi. It must be noted the social norms operate so strongly that the stigma is often internalized. Rather, they often *choose* to cover themselves while traveling alone in public areas. From the Kashmiri women interviewed, a common response to the question of maneuverability

was that there exists a deep sense of apprehension due to the excessive military presence. They fear getting caught in the middle of a crackdown, and this has further curbed women's activities.

One of the respondents from Kashmir narrated her experience of quitting sports because she was groped multiple times in public transport and could not travel for her training without being accompanied by an older male. Another respondent said, "Going out in Kashmir requires a series of lies. I was often made to sit at home and denied access to public spaces under the garb of safety". Bareen, a respondent, shared a story about her mother caught up in a military firing, and had to play dead in order to save herself. She believes this to have impacted her mother's perspective, which has resulted in Bareen losing out. She feels her mother, out of fear, restricted Bareen's maneuverability as an adolescent.

Some respondents also recall experiences where they felt they had missed out on opportunities because of the prevailing social and political conditions in Kashmir Valley. Maleeha (22), a Kashmiri college student currently studying in Delhi, describes the curfew imposed on July 8th, 2016:

There was an indefinite blockade on the internet and phones. It ended up lasting for 4-5 months. I was in 12th grade, you know how important it is... I did reasonably well, but I could have done better. It was really hard to study, I did what I could, but we only went to school for a month. On the rare days we did, we couldn't take the school bus. We'd have to go in casual clothes because being in the school uniform could be dangerous. It is worse since they've revoked Article 370⁵. My brother is in 12th this year; he didn't even know that October 5th was the last date to apply for JEE⁶. Thankfully it got extended to

⁵ A 90-day internet and call blockade was imposed in the Kashmir Valley immediately following the revocation of article 370

⁶ An Indian Engineering Entrance Examination

August 10th. I filled up his form today⁷, but there was no way for him to find out. I can't even call home, which makes me feel more helpless.

Denial of access to public space is a recurring phenomenon for many women in Kashmir. This shapes not only their leisure but also the opportunities they have access to.

We may infer that restrictions in terms of maneuverability and dress are imposed in both conflict-ridden and non-conflict areas. Though the immediate reasons given for such restrictions in both contexts are different, the underlying assumption of "safety" remains. Conflict aggravates this notion of safety and has resulted in heavier restrictions being imposed on women living here.

ANALYSIS

"You tell me your leisure; I shall tell your culture."

– Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work and Leisure* (1964)

Leisure, popularly referred to and understood as free time, is a sociologically complex phenomenon. The very meaning of the word has changed monumentally over time. In certain contexts, it comes to be seen as a state of freedom, an absence of obligation, or a cluster of activities that denotes a similar mental or physical state.⁸ But at others, at a more individual level, it has suggested a mood of contemplation. Leisure, often considered as an individualistic phenomenon from a sociological point of view, is a structural aspect of any society whose nature is determined largely by the structure and nature of that society. Thus, social structure will influence the nature and form of leisure and its activities prescribed.

What concerns us most in our research is the inequality of women in the context of leisure and having to deal with simultaneous, conflicting roles whilst trying to accommodate her leisure as per societal norms. Many women do not find the opportunities available for leisure that

⁷ This interview was taken in October of 2019

⁸ This is the broadest definition of leisure we shall be following.

they would like to pursue or are not satisfied with the opportunities that are available to them. In addition, for women as for men, the simple provision of more recreational opportunities is usually not enough to eliminate constraints without looking at the context in which constraints occur. Thus, although explorations of the meaning of and constraints to leisure raise a number of questions that do not have absolute answers, we could observe some kind of pattern in class, cultural background, their location within society, and the location *of* their society.

In most areas of conflicts, the process of women's incorporation into acceptable identities, which actually legitimize patriarchy, are done in the name of equal rights – usually in politics and by influential male figures.

The Domestic Sphere

It is often argued and rightfully so that the long period of militarization and conflict in Kashmir provides a fertile ground increase in violence against women as aversive attitudes towards them aggravate in an atmosphere of general impunity. The domestic unit becomes a virtual site for the overarching prevalence of male domination and the heavy influence of patriarchal views and norms. In this way, the very morality of women is regulated within and *by* the household. The most unfortunate part is that this attitude appears to legitimize violent acts against women in both public and private spheres.

Instead of having a sacred or religious basis, violence simply becomes more grounded in a geopolitical context. Violence against women influenced by such determinations also regulates gendered and classed bodies (like the domestic unit), which are used in ways that serve political and patriarchal interests.

The pressure of conflict also facilitates issues of *family matters* to the public sphere, leaving women more vulnerable and insecure. Women have to succumb to a male-dominated

household (which is in the family, i.e., private) and to the constant presence of the army that occupies most public spheres. If it is not the household restricting her movement, choices, or forms of activities and leisure, it is the heavy militarization of the society.

To substantiate, various studies reviewed have revealed that violence over the bodies of women, like rape or other forms of sexual assault in Kashmir, serves as a well-entrenched mechanism of political suppression. While the conflict in itself relegates women to an unfavorable position, the patriarchal setting of society further exacerbates their oppression.

Role of Conflict in Restriction of Women's Mobility

The armed conflict has imposed new and alien roles for women. In Kashmir, the killings and disappearances of men have left behind a large number of women struggling for their survival. Relatives often refuse to support them, and they bear the burden of raising their children with no or very little support in a conflict-ridden society. But, besides the increasing number of widows, the armed conflict has also given rise to many *half-widows*⁹.

Added to this, the impact of conflict differs for different categories of women, depending upon their placement in society. To present a full range of impact and experiences of conflict on women, one has to refer to the variety of positions occupied and the circumstances of women in society. "Not only are women living in conflict situations in the region victims of patriarchal structures that are found in most societies in the world, but caste and religious practices that are peculiar to the subcontinent."¹⁰ Though gender as a factor never ceases to operate, there is a different effect on women depending on their religion, caste, class, ethnicity, location, political affiliation, etc.

⁹ women whose husbands have 'disappeared' or are missing in the conflict and often presumed dead

¹⁰ Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake, *Between Reality and Representation: Women's Agency in War and Post Conflict Sri Lanka*, Cultural Dynamics, 2004, 16 (2/3) pp.141-168

Traditionally acclaimed as *caretakers*, women keep their families together and run their households when the culturally prescribed breadwinners of the house, men in the family, are not able to support the family due to various circumstances. New responsibilities make them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation with the unpredictable surroundings deeply affecting whose dependence on the social system is maximum.

Blurring Lines of Work and Leisure

These conflicting roles make contesting demands from the woman of the household. The aspect of the social context of the performance of domestic tasks becomes important. The aforementioned definition of leisure comes in clear contradiction with how women can choose to use their time and practice their leisure activity. After generations of conflict, we have observed that the two could become synonymous. Most of the leisure activities that women undertook became closely related to household chores, such as cooking, gardening, etc. These could be easily practiced within the realm of the household.

From the responses received, it is understood that only activities that suit the political situation qualified as acts of leisure. This is true for both men and women. We see how during periods of the blockade and indefinite curfew, the prayer time in mosques becomes an outlet and a form of social interaction for men. When asked, it was found that most small-town news, gossip, and rumors create a larger scope for dialogue within communities. The same happens on celebratory social occasions and funerals alike. For the domestic woman, this new space for articulation becomes a form of leisure, where she connects with the social milieu while passively sustaining the existing patriarchal norms.

Religion and Identity Formation

Religion has been a fundamental aspect of the Kashmiri society. Over the years Kashmir's political upheaval has generated a form of religious fundamentalism within which women remain most affected, with an expansive curb in their mobility. In the case of Jammu & Kashmir, religion has been a site wherein patriarchy has perpetuated. Religion also becomes a position that various political actors have manipulated to create new identities. When one traces the imagination of this identity, it appears that religion has played a principal role in mobilizing it.

The sub-nationalist discourse within Kashmir produced a new imagination of what the *Kashmiri woman* would appear to be. This definition affirmed that a Kashmiri woman was a *religious, modest woman* whose aspirations were contained by nature and placed within the existing patriarchal structures. However, a vital component of the Kashmiri woman was that she was different from the "*Indian woman*." This meant that the process of creating a subject also became a subsequent process of othering women. It disregarded any other category that emerged as a reaction to the rapid advances that the society was undergoing.

Ather Zia, in her article 'The Spectacle of a Good Half-Widow,' explores the concept of *Asal Zanan*, a term that translates as "a good woman." Zia states that the concept of *Asal Zanan* can be found in many global cultures wherein women as a category are limited to being obedient, modest, caring, responsible, and passive beings. Even though Zia discusses the concept of *Asal Zanan* in the context of a half widow,¹¹ The idea remains relevant in examining other standpoints of intersections between gender and conflict. The significance of the conversation Zia has started lies in the fact that women's mobility is under constant threat under conditions of militarization.

¹¹ Half-widow is a term given to Kashmiri women whose husbands have disappeared and were still missing during the ongoing conflict in Kashmir. These women are called "half-widows" because they have no idea whether their husbands are dead or alive.

In this context, one can argue that leisure activities are restrained not only through the action, but also the process of it. Zia discusses how the change of dress is seen as an important component of an *Asal Zanan*. In this context, one can also discuss the Burqa discourse that became widespread among Kashmiri Muslims. The peak of militancy saw that the stalwarts of armed struggle were pushing for an organized Muslim identity. Women became hyper-visible representing a certain political stance backed with religious consciousness.

Religion has thus created a dichotomy of legitimate and delegitimized forms of leisure. Within such circumstances, only activities that shadowed women from the public sphere became *the* legitimate forms of leisure. The restraint put in by religion affected the ordinary lives of a Kashmiri woman's existence. Even though patriarchal figures within religious institutions have generated these dichotomies actively for both men and women, in the case of the latter, these activities blur the existing lines of work and leisure, making it legitimate for women to acquire activities that obscure them from the public. While a facile explanation of this relationship would suggest that patriarchal religious norms are the grounds for repressing women's mobility, the realities are more complex.

This standpoint can be argued by historicizing the various forms of leisure within Kashmir before the peak of militancy. Singers like Raj Begum, Shameem Dev Azad, Shazia Bashir remain popular names in a typical Kashmiri household. These women remained present in the music industry as prime actors and initiators, upholding the rich musical culture of the Valley. However, a holistic analysis of the gendered nature of armed conflict reveals that religious patriarchy alone cannot be the reason that has systematically curbed women's mobility.

In an article for the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), Nitasha Kaul and Ather Zia argue that in a disputed zone, "the intersectionality of militarism and masculinities means that

competing patriarchies of oppression and resistance become mutually constitutive and women remain at the sharp end of both." ¹²

The long history of sexualized violence in Kashmir wherein women are treated as "cultural property" has initiated a complex debate within which one can locate religious patriarchy. Religious patriarchy has delegitimized certain forms of leisure through an androcentric standpoint of political feminism, signifying men as protectors of cultural honor.

The religious standpoint is vital to understand how masculinities are created under war-like situations. Women become the site wherein masculinities of the State overlapped and engendered a politicized religious masculinity. The *Asal Zanan's* aspirations and interests should align with the larger political discourse operating within the society. There exists conditioning at a level that compels women to adopt activities that are seen closer to nature and also remaining invisible from the public gaze.

This conversation also brings out the vitality to question of the definition of a Kashmiri woman. The *Asal Zanan* is not only a modest and passive woman but carries the weight of gender binaries upon herself. In this context, the voices of transgender women, prostitutes remain completely overlooked, reflecting on the status of feminism in Kashmir. For the *Asal Zanan*, domestic labor, grocery shopping, attending funerals and weddings as a mediator, and simply put, the act of survival becomes a legitimate form of leisure. Aspirations and activities that are deviant to the dominant political discourse are shunned and disdained.

This worldview speaks volumes of the current State of Kashmiri women. The difficult act of passing as an *Asal Zanan* has left no space for forming a truly feminist discourse. The process

¹² Pp. 35

of passing thus requires invisibilizing oneself and negotiating with the dominant androcentric feminist standpoint.

Presence of the Military and its Implications

Through the interviews conducted, it was inferred that the presence of the military and paramilitary forces in the Valley had curbed the Kashmiri women's everyday access to public space. Though the government states that the army deployed in Kashmir is for the protection of the civilians, women and girls are often afraid to leave their houses because of the threat of rape and sexual violence at the hands of the army. This fear stems from decades of attacks on women's bodies by the military and paramilitary forces.

In 2009, in the Shopian rape and murder case¹³, two women were raped and killed by security personnel deployed in the Shopian district. The post-mortem reports were tampered with, and the cause of death was stated to be 'drowning,' despite the claims by the villagers that the women had been raped and murdered. Official documents on this case also claim that the two women who had allegedly been raped were married and related to a militant residing in the area. This is a trend that can be seen in most cases of rape by the armed forces. There is an attempt made by the armed forces to link these 'allegedly' raped women with militants. They claim that these women are either wives of sympathizers or of militants and or are accused of protecting a militant.

While this should have no actual bearing on how the case is being examined in the judicial sphere, it is often done to discredit the claims of the women and to provide justifiability to their rape in the interest of "national security."

¹³See The New York Times 'Women's Deaths, and Inquiry Findings, Enrage Kashmir', 2009 ([nytimes.com/2009/12/25/world/asia/25kashmir.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/25/world/asia/25kashmir.html))

A report of the Human Rights Watch in 1995 gave a detailed account of how by targeting the women that the forces believe to be sympathizers of the militants, they attempt to punish and shame the entire community¹⁴. It is the honor and the stigma attached to being raped that makes it difficult to mobilize women to protest for a rape victim. Thus, protests against incidents of torture, custodial killings, and missing youth witness higher support than those against rape.

Further, the presence of the Armed Forces Special Provisions Act (AFSPA)¹⁵ allows Indian Army personnel entry to any premises at any time in the Valley, without a search warrant, and use lethal force if they deem it necessary. This provides the Indian army complete impunity, without any accountability. The Indian State has used this act to shirk its responsibility countless times, making this act a loophole in the system, denying justice to the victims while vehemently protecting the rapists in uniform.

The fear of military forces among the families of Kashmir has led to restrictive and controlled lives for the women and girls of Kashmir. They are advised by their families not to go to certain areas because they are in close proximity to military camps; they are advised to dress in a manner that does not gain any attention. There is thus a skepticism on behalf of Kashmiri women when it comes to laws and government institutions. These institutions have historically failed to protect their rights or represent their interests.

FINDINGS

Regression in Women's Mobility

The paper is an attempt to examine the Kashmir conflict from the standpoint of the everyday realities faced by Kashmiri women. Kashmir has indeed been a big and complicated question. It is often criticized that the Indian State has undermined the identity of Kashmiris as a

¹⁴ See Human Rights Watch Global Report on Women's Human Right, 1995 (hrw.org)

¹⁵ See The Armed Forces(Special Power) Act, 1958, Ministry of Home Affairs website (mha.gov.in)

people. The situation of conflict has created not only a space for polarization but also a sense of distrust and alienation amongst the people.

A sociologically adequate understanding of leisure must be situated in historical, political, and economic aspects of the society. The sociological analysis of leisure forms in Kashmir reveals a stark regression in women's mobility. This paper also reveals that women have become simply invisible from the public sphere.

An analysis of the generational impact of conflict on women's movement revealed a reversal in the engagement of women in public endeavors. The Kashmiri woman before the 1990s had a greater agency to leisure forms through movie theatres, boat rides, singing, music, and dance than the women now. The process of engagement in a leisure form is restricted through the complexities of everyday survival.

Leisure, as a form of expression, is politicized and very often exploited. In political terms, curtailments are often used by state agencies as a source of social discipline or a means of moral transformation, particularly in places of unrest. Thus, the gendering of leisure in conflict situations raises additional questions and raises questions of cultural sensitivities.

The regression we see is a direct outcome of the distrust and fear that Kashmiris share. In such situations, the performance of gender is altered and aligned with the larger political context. The home-centeredness of women's leisure form is an outcome of these aspects. Outside the domestic space, a woman is expected to denude her femininity, protect her honor, and symbolize the resistance against military oppression. Within this context, we may observe a reversion in individual freedom having a significant impact on a Kashmiri woman's aspirations.

Victimization in Conflict Areas

It is well established that Kashmir has witnessed rampant violence since the conflict. Women have endured sufferings by loss of loved ones, facing sexual exploitation, and destruction of home and hearth. Conflict has the maximum tendency to hit the vulnerable, and women being the *most* vulnerable, have been subject to maximum marginalization in Kashmir.

Thus, this vulnerability of women leads to their victimization in a conflict situation. The most common type of violence against women is sexual violence inflicted both by security personnel as well as the militants. During all these years of conflict in Kashmir, women have been subject to increasing patriarchal controls. All the vulnerability of women made them face stricter norms and controls over them during the period when militancy was on peak in the region. With the society getting characterized by violence, the freedom of women got increasingly curtailed.

Broadly, deriving three dimensions of our analysis, we can arrive at three factors that operate in ways to render women as victims of exploitation. The first would be the *patriarchal pressure* exerted by society and by the family itself. Second, the role of the *military* and their direct, outright violence practiced against women. The third is the *role* of patriarchal figures who tend to be influential and possess the power to make major decisions the society must follow. In the last case, it is either a *religious* leader or a *political* member exerts this kind of control.

Although these are cases of male-dominated figures, it is important to note that women, too, play a vital role in perpetuating such structural inequalities. We know that patriarchy is traditionally sustained through generations-old practices. Women may get conditioned to such situational factors and, thus, recreate the same. The years of conflict have institutionalized the same conditions that exploit and perpetuate violence against Kashmiri women.

CONCLUSION

We chose two axis points: gender and a context of conflict, to analyze their relationship with leisure. It was revealed that the type of leisure and the way to engage with it depends on a number of factors like gender, class, the socio-cultural, and historical context.

An important conclusion derived from this research is that it becomes difficult to demarcate and distinguish a particular sphere of social activity as pure *leisure*. What qualifies as leisure is often in consonance with recreation, engagement in the public sphere, making a political statement, an attempt to vouch for socio-cultural change, socialization, etc.

As Sherry Ortner suggests in her work – *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture*, the domestic sphere is relegated as the natural sphere of women. Though the public role exists occasionally (going out to buy groceries, shopping, etc.), it is less visible when compared to men. The line is blurred between a woman's natural job as a housekeeper or child-bearer and her leisure time. This becomes stark in conflict zones wherein women are pushed back to the private sphere of their homes.

The regressive notions of patriarchy have been well ingrained in the minds of both the victims and the perpetrators, so much so that the victims (largely women) come to play two roles: They are the victims at the hands of the patriarchal influence; they are also the bearers of patriarchy by socializing and rearing their families in the way as they have been victimized.

It is interesting to note how leisure is a byproduct and source of socialization for generations. Leisure activities may be unique only to a particular socio-cultural context, but it also has the potential to redefine this context - as collective reading leads to the strengthening of relationships among the women of the household.

The review of responses and empirical sources has led to gripping revelations over the State of women's rights in Kashmir. While our research uses gender as its vantage point, it is

vital to understand that the question of how other gender identities, including trans-women lives, negotiate within the praxis of leisure forms is yet to be explored. Questions of class, caste, economic and physical stability¹⁶ can be included to further explore the concerns raised by this research. However, as young women researchers, we believe that the lived experiences of women cannot be homogenized under the loosely defined term of 'conflict area.' The spirit of grounding this research in lived experiences is an attempt to acknowledge that women can provide valuable contributions not just as mere objects of study, but also active agents of change.

¹⁶ Women with disabilities (WWDs)

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