

Gender, Conflict and Peace in Kashmir

Invisible Stakeholders

Seema Shekhawat





CAMBRIDGEUNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge House, 4381/4 Ansari Road, Daryagani, Delhi 110002, India

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107041875

© Seema Shekhawat 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2014

Printed in India

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shekhawat, Seema.

Gender, conflict and peace in Kashmir: invisible stakeholders / Seema Shekhawat. pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "Discusses the role of women in militancy in Kashmir from a historical perspective"--Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-107-04187-5 (hardback)

1. Women--India--Jammu and Kashmir--Social conditions. 2. Feminism--India--Jammu and Kashmir. 3. Social conflict--India--Jammu and Kashmir. I. Title.

HQ1744.J35S443 2013

305.40954'6--dc23

2013010249

ISBN 978-1-107-04187-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.



I dedicate this book to my mummy and papa





Contents

Preface	vii
1. Feminism, International Relations and War	1
2. Women Making War in South Asia	24
3. Conflict within Contested Kashmir	54
4. Engendering the Conflict	77
5. All-women Separatist Groups	101
6. Making Peace Sans Gender	120
7. Conclusion	144
Select Bibliography	172
Index	181





Preface

Traditional international relations (IR) has ascribed gender a low priority in the discourse on conflict and peace. Despite increasing feminist scholarship in reshaping international politics, gender appears a minor candidate, if not a pariah, in the domains of war and peace making. This book endeavours to interrogate such a deep-rooted notion by locating women at the centre of the discourse while focusing on one of the protracted conflicts in South Asia - Kashmir. Gender being an inseparable part of the social frame and a crucial component of every aspect of collective human endeavours including conflict and peace, it cannot be detached from them and their flow. The discourse on conflict and peace must be gendered, viewed from a gender prism, scrutinized, interrogated and explained through gender, not sans gender. Women are competent in conflict as well as peace building and their role in both needs to be acknowledged. The book throughout the analysis runs in salience with two crucial and inter-related assumptions. First, literature on conflict has mostly been inclined, with few exceptions, towards a gender-blind masculinized discourse. Second, this gender-blindness gets extended to the theory and practice of peace making in post-conflict scenario. It is crucial to recognize the role of women in conflict to make the case for their rightful role in peace.

The book is a modest effort in centrally engaging gender in the conflict and peace discourse in Kashmir, the idea of which came to my mind while pursuing doctoral study on militancy-led victimization of women. Though not a native of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, I grew up, studied and worked there for 23 years with my parents settling in the state in 1985. This was the time when a fertile ground was laid for a protracted internal armed conflict in the region. At an impressionable age I witnessed the rise of militancy and consequent socio-political changes. I moved out of Jammu



viii 🗪 Preface

and Kashmir in 2007 when violence in the region had substantially declined. I, hence, had the opportunity to observe the onset, growth and decline of the violent separatist movement from close. Several visits to the militancy-prone areas of the state prepared the background for this study. During my doctoral and post-doctoral studies I came across narratives of unremitting agonies of Kashmiri women, with occasional references to their crucial roles in the sustenance of the separatist movement. My interactions with Kashmiri women helped comprehend their told and untold experiences of encounters with conflict. At one end of the spectrum women were the victimized lot: the rape victims underwent physical, mental and social trauma; the widows lost sole breadwinners of the family; and bereaved mothers lost their only sons, and at the other end of the spectrum they were the perpetrators – propagandists, caretakers and facilitators. Conflict impacting women in Kashmir has been the focus of many works, including some of mine. However, women impacting conflict has remained under-researched. In this study I locate Kashmiri women in militancy beyond victimization, as agents, not in an exercise to either commend or criticize their involvement but to make a case for their due place in the peace process.

Militancy could not have sustained in Kashmir for such a long time without the participation of women. The women not only shouldered the burden of being a mother, wife, sister or daughter of a male militant but considered the struggle for freedom 'a family matter' that needed support of one and all. Though Kashmiri women did not take up guns, they aided militant operations in significant ways. The violent movement could not have been as widespread and effective in challenging the Indian state without the gender component as women could execute tasks such as hiding weapons behind their veils, or acting as couriers and messengers, which were difficult for male militants. Women displayed unparalleled courage in confronting gun totting Indian security forces, numbering thousands, during mass protests. As I witnessed scenes of violence during my surveys, and personally escaped some, the women in the initial days of heightened militancy appeared liberated, even though in a limited way from the traditionally framed concept of being a female. This limited liberation vanished with decline in militancy and dawn of a peace process, pedalled irreversible and sustainable. Women appeared in conflict and disappeared in peace, at the behest of the patriarchal separatist leadership. At the end, it was the male leadership that decided, and the female followers abided. The leaders strategized the inclusion of women in conflict and exclusion in peace. Interestingly, Kashmiri female separatist leaders who shared the credit for mobilizing women to support the violent struggle were



Preface so ix

in fact followers of a chauvinistic orthodoxy that facilitated instrumental use of women during conflict and marginalization afterwards. The all-women separatist groups could successfully organize women for abetting violence but failed to negotiate a place in efforts towards peace. Male-dominated decision-makers at both sides of the spectrum – militants as well as state authorities – did not feel it necessary to include women or their concerns in peace efforts. The simple arithmetic that none of the committees and groups constituted to facilitate conflict transformation in Kashmir duly represented women or paid due attention to their concerns provides ample testimony to the gender insensitive conflict and peace discourse in Kashmir, which finds resonance in many other conflict situations across the globe.

This work could not have been possible without the support and encouragement from family, friends, respondents and uncounted others. I am grateful to all of them. I am thankful to my respondents from Kashmir, Punjab, Odisha, Manipur, Nepal and Sri Lanka for sharing their experiences. I am indebted to my dear friend Janette Davies for her invaluable support during the course of the work. I am grateful to Veronica Fynn and Jenny Francis for their timely help during the preparation of the manuscript. Special thanks are due to Evelin Lindner, Linda Hartling and Immanuel Ness for their encouragement and thoughtful insights. I am thankful to Rekha Chowdhary, P. L. Dash and Renu Modi for their crucial support over the years.

This study has been completed with financial support from the Berghof Foundation. I am particularly grateful to Johannes Zundel who believed in the work and extended support throughout.

I owe sincere thanks to Suvadip Bhattacharjee at Cambridge University Press, for his enthusiastic support throughout the publication process. His motivation and optimism made the entire process less painful than it could have been.

I am fortunate to have a caring family, for which I thank the almighty. The constant personal and professional support of my husband Aurobinda is beyond the confines of words. He shares credit for every goal I achieve. He read and re-read the manuscript and offered constructive criticism. Without him the work would definitely have taken much longer to complete. I express my gratitude to my 2-year-old son, Asim for making my life beautiful. The fatigue of long hours of writing disappeared when he prodded me to play his favourite song on my computer so that he could dance. I hope one day he will read this book and understand and appreciate why I spent days away from him. I owe thanks to my nephews, Aditya, Ayush, Amar and Naman and niece, Shreya for always making me smile. I am forever beholden to my dear



x ca Preface

sisters, Laxmi, Amrit and Susheel, and brother, Shailendra for their unstinting support. They selflessly extended all help though I often failed to reciprocate and took them for granted. I sincerely appreciate the encouragement from my brothers-in-law, Dilip, Sunil and Vishal, and sister-in-law, Renu. Finally I thank my parents for always encouraging me to pursue my ambitions and supporting me at every step without fail. They always had faith in me and stood beside me in trying times. For me, they are god and it is to them that I dedicate this book.