

## From known to unknown in an unspoken world

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### Abstract

The present paper aims to trace the subjectivity and situatedness of Kashmiri Muslim women. Philosophically trying to understand the lives of a half widow in the valley. Using certain theoretical understanding I would aim to bring their lived experience in order to understand how tough life they are leading, which is largely a failure of state, government and its policies.

**Keywords:** spivak, kashmiri women, situatedness, subjectivity

### Introduction

Post-Colonial Feminist Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak once said "Whatever you read, just Gender it" <sup>[1]</sup>. Primarily, she wanted to make us understand the importance and necessity of gendering lives, gendering the possible avenues as well as gendering the mundane existence and conflicts. The present paper would take this as a departing point in order to understand the life of women in a conflicted territory. The paper would be contextualized in Kashmir and would deal with the mundane existence of a Kashmiri Muslim Women. I would deal with the situated ambiguity of a half widow's life in the valley. Before moving towards the contextualization of her situation it's essential to discuss what my intentions in this paper are.

The present paper endeavor to discuss the unknown and known gendered violence in the life of a half widow. Therefore I aim to see the trajectory and contradictions between her different forms of existence. This also shows us that to what extent a women's freedom is situated as well as constrained in her body. That's why this paper traces the historicity of mundane existence of half widows in the valley.

Authors, writers, Ethnographers, Philosophers all have described Kashmir in one way or the other. Places offer many stories, it depends on us whom we choose to tell and hear among various versions available. In the words of Agnew:

"The question of space and place in geographical knowledge is ultimately not just about whether the question of 'where' matters in the way that 'when' does in explaining 'how' and even 'why' something happens. It is also about how it matters." <sup>[2]</sup>

### Problematizing the Problem

Therefore it becomes essential before theorizing to keep in mind what are the historicity as well as the present aspect of a particular place. Kashmir, Kashmiris and its women's lives need to be understood in the nature of the conflict that territory is surrounded by. In the words of Uma Chakaravathy:

"It is not Shikaras, lakes or mountains that hit the eye but barbed wire, soldiers with guns, at the ready and armed trucks which over whelm you with their presence as you enter Srinagar. The valley of Kashmir where a road side sign still tries to evoke a now forgotten past, 'welcome' it says: 'to happy valley where the world ends and paradise begins'! Is a valley under siege?" <sup>[3]</sup> That's why perhaps Kazi said in her work "Women in Kashmir experience conflict 'differently'." <sup>[4]</sup> One should wonder what

does this differently stands for? It lies in the ambiguity of their situation and lived experience. Because in a way this violence is suffered as well as unleashed in the form of collective. Half-widows are basically those women whose husbands are disappeared from the valley. Either because of para- militarily operations or militarization they have gone missing. In search of their husbands they have to visit many military camps, police stations and what not which puts them on the other side of the table making them the other.

Manchanda said, we can see two narratives about women in Kashmir conflict.

"The first derives from a human rights discourse when women figure as victims of direct (state) and indirect violence that transforms into widows, half- widows of the disappeared or bereaved mothers of lost sons and children. The second centers on the conventional patriarchal ideology of the Kashmiri struggle in which women symbolize the Grieving Mother, the Martyrs Mother and the Raped Women." <sup>[5]</sup>

These are the two popularly known narratives when it comes to Kashmiri Muslim women. Here I would try to trace the mundane existence of a half widow in the valley that in between these two narratives where does she stands? Can these two narratives could be the only possible ways to understand her existence? "Those who continue to function in terms of black and white categorizations. long for a world that never existed." (Miria, Cooke) I would try to understand the silence in their existence by merging these two narratives by the "Wait which a Half widow has to go through". When their husbands disappears no one knows neither those women that when they will get back, if they would. Here I have tried to understand waiting as a philosophical tool because it's a lived experience for them where waiting is involved which gives them a possibility, a hope. Then it becomes a surviving technique for half widows which make them an agent. The manner in which Deleuze said that life is a continuous possibility for change. His words are: "it is never the beginning or the end which are interesting, the beginning and ends are points. What is interesting is the middle- all the points between the beginning and end." <sup>[6]</sup>

The time that they have to wait with the prolong desire of their husbands return, the way it has been felt, the manner in which it's been affecting them and again the alienation which it has brought to them all comprises and consists in making it worth reflecting upon. Bergson even said, in waiting we experience

time. This experience makes us unique as well as an agent if analyzed closely upon. "His disappearance is still a mystery says Begum Jaan, 52, whose husband Shamsuddin left home for evening prayers in 1998 to never return again." [7] It's this connection between gender and conflict which waiting brings up. Would this waiting would have been the same if a women would have been disappeared? This is the difference between conflicts when we gender it.

10,000 half- widows whose husbands have disappeared with no trace of their whereabouts or existence. "Kashmir's landscape is dotted with hamlet and villages of widows: like Sheikh Mohalla a ten family strong hamlet with 11 widows, 30 orphans and just three men. Or Dardpora, a village in north Kashmir, that has lost over a hundred young men and is home to 122 widows and almost 300 orphans." [8] Sorrow and pain has been the only support for them. But in spite of all this, she performs, she speaks, she protests, she mourns and these activities makes her agent. All this is an act of agency. In words of Veena Das, Agency can appear in various modes: atone and it is an active manifest form, on the other it can be more nuanced, hence different than just a simple notion of resistance to oppression. (2008)

These aspects of a half widow comes into light when one tries to understand the centrality of gender in conflicted areas the way they act and talk to each other in everyday lives. And this dialogue brings with itself the invisible as well as the visible violence which they have to go through in moments. Its not only in the moments of resistance that we understand agency but also in small, fleeting moments of transgression, mundaneness. "Methodologically one can best detect agency at moments of resistance or at moments of transgression. I see everyday life as a kind of achievement, not just as part of habit." [9]

These symbolic violence (visible as well as invisible) leads to trauma in a life of a half widow in the valley. But my argument lies in the fact of not treating this self-expression resulting in Trauma as futile but as something which brings a certain kind of meaning to her life. It gives a certain dimension to her life. The pain which is followed by and which carries trauma possibly leads to resistance and assertion in her life. In the testimony of a half widow: "Media has only sold our tragedies. We are fed- up with giving out interviews. Will your report bring back my husband?" [10] This testimony is a glaring example of how ambiguous violence, gender and conflict is in relation to each other. And if cultivated and analysed critically how deep and interesting insights it could give.

In a place like Kashmir, a territory torn by conflict women's voices in contrast to men have hardly been raised in the way they want it to. Men have dictated the narrative of the Kashmiri conflict. Here, an attempt would be made to understand the narrative of a Kashmiri women in her own voice. The purpose of this work is firstly to analytically understand the language of Mourning, shame and vulnerability and secondly to bring in the lived experience of Kashmiri women as a counter example to counter critique these western views of mourning, shame and vulnerability. The language women use in Kashmir is very different from the language men speak, which is main stream or 'male stream' as she calls it. As a mourning mother, a vulnerable rape victim and a shameful innocent bystander they do not only comprise Kashmir's women voices. My aim in the present work would be to bring the Other though not suppressed and oppressed but a string voice and narrative in the history of

Kashmir. The purpose would also be to give an analytical vocabulary to the voice of the other.

The contemporary Kashmiri Women faces tripartite challenges. Not only she is supposed to fulfill the role and expectation of society as an idle wife, daughter, Mother and in many other varied ways. Amidst the situation waiting gives her a possibility, a hope. Here waiting and pain could give us different dimensions to understand life and its different meanings.

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