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GENDER IN DEVELOPMENT: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABOUT CIDS

CIDS (Conversations in Development Studies) is a peer-reviewed, quarterly research publication produced by the research team of Centre for New Economics Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University. The student-led editorial publication features solicited research commentaries (in the range of 2500-3000 words) from scholars currently working in the cross-sectional aspects of development studies. Each published CIDS Issue, seeks to offer a comprehensive analysis on a specific theme identified within the scope of development scholarship.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Gender in Development: A Feminist Perspective

Gender development has often evolved as a fundamental area of focus in development studies as some of the most important aspects of people’s lives such as: the talents they cultivate; the conceptions they hold of themselves and others; the socio-structural opportunities and constraints they encounter; and the social life and occupational paths they pursue are heavily prescribed by a society or culture’s gendered notions of identities. Gender studies and development studies are subjects that remain intertwined while touching upon issues as diverse as work & family life; health & population; labor & international economic change.

It is now widely recognized that pervasive pre-existing gender inequalities affect development processes in countries affecting women and men differently. Early feminist critiques emphasized the “marginal” position of women in development and advocated their “integration”. More recently, critiques have argued that women's “marginality” reflects the systematic gender bias in official statistics and development planning in general, and that women are already affected by and involved in development in locally variable and class specific ways. “Women are half the world's population, yet they do two thirds of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the income, and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property.” (United Nations, 1985). Women are mostly undermined when it comes to places of work or physical labor. They are often considered as the weaker sex.

It is very important to understand that while sex is biological, gender is a social construct. Gender refers to the socially determined ideas and practice as to what it means to be female or male. In different societies, there are different sets of rules, norms, customs and practices by which differences between males and females are translated into socially constructed differences between women and men, boys and girls. These culturally
determined gender identities define rights and responsibilities and what is ‘appropriate’ behaviour for women and for men. This often results in the two genders being valued differently, often reinforcing the idea that women are inferior and subordinate to men. The perception of femininity has evolved through years, but very often women are considered emotional and sensitive and due to this reason sometimes unfit for certain kinds of chores.

Tackling a deep, socially embedded problem like gender inequality or discrimination against women require coordinated social policy and long-term measures by any developing state. This theme, therefore, offers young scholars to write and engage on classical, neo-classical or third-world feminist discourses across a wide range of sub-themes which are vital for the process of development across nations. Under the theme of “Gender in Development” (underpinning a feminist approach), this Issue, publishes the work of scholars who presented their research at the Inter-Disciplinary Student Workshop in Development Studies (ISDS), organized by the Centre for New Economics Studies on March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2018.
A Swachh Bharat?

Examining the Assumptions and Erasures of the ‘Clean India Mission’ Discourse

Aarushie Sharma

This commentary undertakes an examination of the discourse of the Swachh Bharat Mission which has been accompanied by a major toilet construction drive since the beginning. It argues that an exaggerated focus on ‘behavioural change’ in the mission for ‘open defecation free’ India hides both – the infrastructural inadequacies in sanitation, and, a deeper engagement with social-cultural factors that play a role in informing the everyday of sanitation practices. The commentary also argues that while the question of caste is silenced in the discourse of the SBM, the question of gender often gets represented in tropes that further reinforce gender hierarchies. As a suggestion for policy action, the commentary argues the need for rethinking the assumptions within the SBM, as well as the assumptions that often accompany a mainstream perspective of development and developmental programmes. It argues for a bottom-up approach to sanitation that will problematise the silences of the toilet mission, and allow for a more participatory and inclusive space for re-thinking and designing sanitation futures.

INTRODUCTION

On October 2, 2014, the Government of India launched a mass campaign called the ‘Swachh Bharat Mission’ (often abbreviated as SBM or loosely translated as Clean India Mission), a major objective of which is to make India ‘open defecation free’ (hereafter ODF) by 2019. The genealogy of the SBM goes back to the centrally sponsored Rural Sanitation Programme (1986-1999), followed by the Total Sanitation Campaign (1999-2012), which was replaced by the Nirmal Bharat Mission (2012-2014). The rationale that has been suggested

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behind the restructuring and scaling up of the previous mission is to thrust new life into the sanitation programme in order to significantly improve upon the sanitation levels of the country and achieve the goal of ODF India by a certain deadline. This date, the same as the date of launch is significant because in 2019, it would mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and for the campaigners of the SBM, a ‘Swachh Bharat’ would be a befitting tribute to the leader.

This proposed objective is to be achieved through the construction and usage of toilets. Since its start, the impetus has been towards a massive toilet construction drive. The SBM is divided into two sub-missions – SBM urban and SBM rural. The construction of toilets – independent household latrine (IHHL), community sanitary complexes and public toilets feature as significant components of both missions. Further, along with toilet construction, great emphasis is laid on behavioural change. The assumption here is that despite the availability of toilets, people may still prefer open defecation due to cultural notions and habits and triggering of communities for behavioural change might increase demand for toilets and their use. Thus, IEC (Information, Education and Communication) constitutes an important component of the mission to spread the message of the benefits of ‘safe sanitation’ and ‘hygiene’. Infact, the SBM Gramin (Rural) proposes to engage not only the Panchayati Raj Institutions for carrying out awareness drives but also involves non-government organisations, field functionaries like Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers, school teachers, etc. to carry out field level activities. At the Gram Panchayat level, village-level motivators who are called ‘Swachhta Doots’ (cleanliness messengers) are hired to assist with activities such as identification of beneficiaries, IEC, and maintenance of records (Press Information Bureau 2014)

My larger aim, through this paper, is to attempt a reading of the current drive of Swachh Bharat Mission, with a focus on its emphasis on Toilets. With the aim of making India ODF by 2019, the programme has not only led to a massive push for toilet construction on the ground, but the toilet also features prominently in official discourses, politicians’ speeches, print and television advertisements. This commentary aims to examine some of the assumptions of the SBM, especially the focus on behavioural change. It argues that an exaggerated focus on ‘behavioural change’ in the mission for ODF India hides both – the infrastructural inadequacies in sanitation and a deeper engagement
with social-cultural factors that play a role in informing the everyday of sanitation practices. Both the erasures allow an analysis of the mission in terms of its relation to the question of caste and gender. The paper is divided into three parts:

- The first part of the paper examines the SBM’s focus on ‘behavioural change’ to tackle the problem of open defecation. It argues that an over-emphasis on behavioural change may undermine infrastructural inadequacies in sanitation that severely limit people’s access to toilet spaces. Further, this emphasis may also present a limited understanding of socio-cultural factors that could explain the non-usage of toilets. Even in cases of infrastructural availability, reasons for non-usage may go beyond the factors of will and habit as popularly envisaged in behavioral change programmes.

- The second section of the paper undertakes an analysis of popular tropes of the SBM, especially the ones focusing on women and safety. It argues that though the communication around the toilet mission is couched in terms of progress, upliftment, and empowerment, these emphases and plans at times may go on to reinforce existing power equations and hierarchies instead of challenging them.

- As a suggestion for policy action, the final section of the commentary argues the need for rethinking the orientation and assumptions of the SBM, some of which are highlighted here. It suggests the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of the sanitation mission so that the questions of equity, inclusivity, and accessibility are brought to the foreground.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESSIBILITY: MOVING BEYOND THE QUESTION OF ‘BEHAVIOR’

One of the dominant perspectives on development, which legitimised the study and assessment of ‘under-developed’ regions (often in comparison to the ‘advanced’ industrial societies of the west) in the two decades following the Second World War, was the modernisation theory of development. A key feature of the modernisation theory was to locate the reasons for ‘under-development’ internally, i.e., in terms of people’s role orientations, values, behaviours, traditions, primitive economies, etc. These theories obscured the wider political
and historical factors, such as colonialism, that had successfully under-developed the countries locked in a relation of exploitation with the industrial west. Critiques of the theory argued that under-development was not a natural state shaped solely by the ‘internal dynamics’ of these countries, but a state consciously created by the wider history of conquest (Harrison 1991) (Frank, The Development of Underdevelopment 1966). While challenged in successive critiques, the appeal of modernisation theory, which shaped the mainstream perspective on development, is seldom threatened. On the contrary, dominant themes, reminiscent of the theory, often find their way into policies, projects, and programmes of nation building around the world. This influence is clearly seen in the context of the SBM where open defecation is often couched as a ‘behavioural problem’ and outreach messages (through public advertisements) often adopt a moral-pedagogical logic. This section discusses the problems with an exaggerated focus on ‘behavioural change’ in the mission for ODF India.

First, an over-emphasis on behavioural change may underscore the importance of infrastructure and put the blame squarely on people for not wanting to use toilets. Here, I draw from a research that I along with my co-researchers had conducted in slums and resettlement colonies in Delhi in 2013. It aimed at understanding the dynamics of women’s access to toilet spaces. Data for the research was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, interview schedules, and in-depth conversations with residents of these areas, supplemented by meetings and interviews with resident and visiting doctors in these areas, and NGOs and civil society activists working there. Our research showed that women in these densely inhabited colonies were not averse to using the community toilet complexes (CTCs), where they were available but were dissuaded from using them due to various infrastructural concerns. Factors such as inadequacy of toilet cubicles, poor maintenance, dilapidated walls and ceilings (that posed a threat of physical injury), dysfunctional bathing compartments, low roofs (that allowed men to jump in from adjacent compartments and harass

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1 This research was carried out as part of the Krishna Raj Fellowship 2013 granted by the Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. The fieldwork for the study was conducted at four sites in Delhi—Janta Mazdoor Colony (JMC) (New Jaffrabad, near Seelampur); Bawana Resettlement Colony (Bawana); Masoodpur (on Kusumpur Pahadi in Mahipalpur, near Vasant Kunj in South Delhi) and Annanagar and Sanjay Amar Colony (behind World Health Organization headquarters, near ITO). An article based on this research was published in the Economic and Political Weekly: ‘Understanding Issues involved in Toilet Access for Women’ in Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. L No. 34, pp. 70-74 (2015).
women), no lighting (that discouraged visits to the CTCs after dark) were cited as some of the concerns women faced in their daily negotiations with public toilets (Sharma, Asaavari and Anand, Understanding Issues involved in Toilet Access for Women 2015). Some of the women who were particularly perturbed by the toilets being extremely dirty, mentioned, if the toilets continue to be this way, they would rather choose to go out in the open to relieve themselves, an option where at least they get to breathe some air, while going to these toilets requires a training in holding one’s breath for a good amount of time.

The narrative of ‘lack of requisite will’, as and when it does not pay heed to infrastructural concerns, may often also slip into a narrative of the infantilisation of the ‘other’ who is attributed to be not ‘clean’ or ‘hygienic’. These terms are not just bio-medical categories but are loaded in their implicit suggestion and reinforcement of certain power hierarchies. The Indian Express and other newspapers reported that in May 2017, the 100-odd Musahar Dalit families of Mainpur Deenapatti village in Kushinagar district received two bars of soap ‘Lifebuoy’ and ‘Ghari’, a sachet of shampoo, and instructions to ‘clean themselves’ before attending the public meeting organised on the occasion of the Chief Minister’s visit to the village (Singh, Before Yogi Adityanath’s visit, Dalit villagers got shampoo, soap to ‘clean themselves’ 2017). This incident (which was subsequently denied by the chief minister’s office as being their initiative) shows how state practices may be informed by and may go on to reinforce the concepts of purity and pollution associated with the ideology of caste in the Hindu fold. Here again, ‘behavioural attributes’ are spoken of or hinted at – the attribute of not being willing enough to keep oneself ‘clean’ – with sheer neglect of the political economy of infrastructure that disenfranchises many a people from their right to basic services of water and sanitation.

Now, secondly, to argue for the need for infrastructure does not imply that accessible and workable toilets would always guarantee usage. This shows that there may be some other factors involved in cases where infrastructural access and affordability are not the primary concerns. In other words, considering that infrastructural access and concerns are taken care of, how does one still explain the cases of abandoned toilets? Diane Coffey and Dean Spears (Spears and Coffey, Where India Goes Abandoned Toilets, Stunted Development and the Costs of Caste 2017) are confronted with this puzzle when they set out to do their research on the dynamics of open defecation in rural India. They realise that the correlation between poverty and open defecation may not always hold as other developing countries have been able to work with affordable pit-latrines.
However, the same affordable latrines do not have many takers in India. Their respondents claim that they do not find the government proposed latrines useful as they have smaller pits. The respondents, if at all they would want latrines constructed would want them to have larger pits, a factor that would also make these latrines more expensive and hence, unaffordable. In trying to understand these negative attitudes towards affordable pit latrines, Coffey and Spears soon realise the main factor operating here – caste. Affordable pit latrines would need emptying of pits at regular intervals and even though this period could be once in a year, the researchers find this factor of emptying pits as the biggest one that discourages people from adopting these latrines. The question here is – who would empty the pits once they are filled? Coffey and Spears’ respondents tell the authors that emptying pits has been the occupation of the ‘untouchable castes’ and they themselves (respondents) would not ever undertake this task. In the event of the traditional scavenger castes giving up this job, the other castes are left with two options – either to pay a higher fare to get people to empty their pits, or to do it themselves – an option that rarely has takers, primarily because of the attitudes towards caste and pollution. In this instance, it is not the case of infrastructure not being available, accessible or even affordable but a question primarily of caste. It makes one wonder if the focus of outreach programmes accounts for these attitudes as the behavioural ‘problem’ here is not simply a matter of using toilets versus defecating in the open. It is more a question of grappling with the idea of emptying one’s own pits oneself.

What this discussion suggests is that factors of cultural attitudes and infrastructure need to account for each other because any narrative that over-emphasises just one necessarily presents half the picture. But more importantly, the discussion also shows that though silenced in the official discourse of the SBM, the question of caste is anything but absent in the everyday of sanitation in India. Recent commentaries on the SBM (Gatade 2015) (Kumar 2014) have tried to interrogate ‘swachhta’ along the lines of caste, arguing that the campaign attempts to delink the relationship between caste and sanitation. In drawing attention to the Hindu notions of purity and pollution, their inextricable link with the oppression of ‘polluted castes’ who continue to be overrepresented and under-protected in hazardous occupations such as cleaning of city sewers, these reflections draw attention to the silences and erasures of the SBM. Though silent in the discourse of the SBM, caste is every bit at play in the everyday of the mission. Whether it is the people and caste-jobs left conveniently unmentioned or the case of abandoned toilets – these gaps in SBM tell a tale too familiar but one that a hurried target-oriented construction drive and a myopic behavioral
change programme may not be able to tackle. This also calls for a rethinking of
development and of programmes undertaken in its name. If this rethinking can
bring to light the assumptions and erasures of these programmes, it may also
show that the development discourse, instead of challenging, may reinforce
existing social hierarchies.

EXAMINING THE TROPES OF SBM: THE DISCOURSE ON
WOMEN AND SAFETY

Though the communication around the toilet mission is couched in tropes of
progress, upliftment, and empowerment, these tropes and plans may, at times,
go on to reinforce existing power equations and hierarchies instead of
challenging them. This is most evidently seen in the emphasis on having toilets
at home, especially for women. Considering the ordeal women face in going for
open defecation, this move may only appear as legitimate and much needed.
However, the popular tropes that are used to justify the need for toilets at home
for women often draw from and reinforce notions of honour and protectionism
- construed in terms of ‘safety’. In our research on toilets in Delhi mentioned
above, we were often told by our respondents how public toilets were ‘unsafe’
spaces for women as there was always a possibility of women getting molested
on the way to or in the fields or toilets. Reflecting from Phadke’s work (S.
Phadke 2007) (Phadke, Khan and Ranade, Why Loiter? Women and Risk on
Mumbai Streets 2011) on women and risk on Mumbai streets, we reali
s
zed how
the concern with safety of women often had little to do with their physical safety
and more to do with their sexual safety. Women having internalised the notion
of sexual safety seemed to pay less attention to other ways in which they risked
their physical safety. Restricting their fluid and food intake, avoiding the toilet
after evening, restricting themselves to one visit a day, they prioritised their
sexual safety over their physical safety and caused greater damage to their bodies
(Sharma, Aasaavari and Anand, Understanding Issues involved in Toilet Access
for Women 2015). This emphasis on sexual safety also serves to restrict women’s
chances of taking risks and their access to public spaces (Phadke 2007). Drawing
from Phadke, we argued that the concern with making women’s access to toilets
safer may be misled if it is limited only to the sexual safety of the women. If
safety concerns the level and extent of claim one feels to a space(Phadke 2007),
then basic infrastructural changes such as toilets remaining open all night, being
well lit, their architecture being gender friendly, their location being accessible -
will go a long way in making the public toilets safer. (Phadke 2007) (Sharma, Aasaavari and Anand, Understanding Issues involved in Toilet Access for Women 2015)

Phadke’s discussion challenges the dominant discourse on safety that lies in the realm of protectionism over rights. This dominant discourse features extensively in the public communication around the toilet mission that links ‘toilets at home’ with ‘protection of women and honour’. For instance, in one of the advertisements (by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation) for promoting toilet construction at home, actress Vidya Balan (who has been the brand ambassador for Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan) asks a bride’s to be in-laws if they have a toilet at home. On hearing a no, she tells the bride to take off her ghoonghat (veil), explaining the double standards of the in-laws who on the one hand would want to keep the daughter-in-law in ghoonghat and on the other hand, would expect her to go out for open defecation. Interestingly, this advertisement reinforces the patriarchal idea of keeping the woman ‘covered’ so as to avoid any potential threat to family honour. The ghoonghat and the toilet both would function to keep the woman inside the house and avoid exposing her to the outside.

There are two further implications of this message. One, this communication assumes and informs the ‘home’ to be the safest space for women, thus discounting the fact that often the domestic space is experienced as being violent and abusive. Secondly, in some cases, going out for open defecation may be the only legitimate exit from home available to women. This exit may allow them some relief from the surveillance of the family, the opportunity to socialise with their friends and the freedom to loiter. As Assa Doron and Ira Raja (Doron and Raja 2015) argue, traditionally, many women in rural areas are known to actively seek out public spaces such as the communal water tap, the river/canal side where they might go to fetch water or wash clothes. The authors write, ‘the fields and bushes where they go to relieve themselves likewise can serve as spaces for socialising with and befriending other women, at the same time as they allow them to escape the home, experienced as an oppressive space by many women’ (Doron and Raja 2015)

Doron and Raja suggest that ‘to assume that access to a private toilet would instantly render women safe from predatory men who prowl the streets is to reinforce the patriarchal claim that the home is always and necessarily safe for women, when, in fact, successive studies have documented the varieties of
violence women are subjected to in their homes’ (Doron and Raja 2015). This is not to take away from the importance of having household latrines which may be particularly useful in instances where women have to travel long distances for their daily ablutions. Although even in these cases, studies have been pointing out the better possibilities with community toilet complexes over individual household latrines especially in terms of the response of these options to water use and demand on rivers. However, it is important to point out the potential counter-effects of the toilet mission, especially so when these factors either remain absent from the discourse or when present, they may serve to reinforce the dominant ideologies and existing power hierarchies.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This commentary has tried to critically engage with the discourse of the Swachh Bharat Mission. It has suggested that this discourse may either paper over some factors that are critical to the everyday of sanitation or it may go on to reinforce the dominant ideologies of caste and patriarchy. Taking these debates into account allows for a more comprehensive reevaluation of the toilet mission and its assumptions and erasures. The commentary has also suggested that this evaluation calls forth a rethinking of ‘development’. The latter is the first step towards rethinking, re-working and re-designing policy recommendations.

Rethinking development may immediately make one question the impetus of target-oriented policies towards ‘construction’. What is needed is not so much a top-down approach that focuses solely on constructing toilets, but rather an approach that involves the people, especially women, in decisions and designs pertaining to their sanitation needs and concerns. This will not only allow an engagement with different concerns pertaining to toilets, it may also allow for the possibility of encountering alternative sanitation and waste management practices.

It is important to realise that the availability of toilets may not always guarantee access or access to all. Thus, it becomes imperative for policy to engage with the needs of different bodies. Finally, questions of equity need to be raised not only in terms of who uses the toilets but also in terms of who cleans the toilet and who are the people who continue to be overrepresented and under-protected in hazardous occupations such as cleaning of city sewers. A bottom-up approach to sanitation will bring the question of caste more centrally to the discourse as well as the planning of toilet missions.
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Understanding The Role of Space, Language, and Performativity in Feminist Politics

Aakanksha D’Cruz

In order to meaningfully understand women as political agents, the commentary delves into the various forms or modes of political assertion which feminist politics has engineered. The conditions of women’s political action need to be assessed and explained to start a conversation on women’s agency. This commentary embarks on a discourse analysis of feminist politics and activism. It attempts to explain the symbolism, content and language of feminist politics. The commentary is divided into three sections which discuss—i) The politics of space and feminism, ii) Constructing the language of feminism, iii) Performativity and protests. Bra-Burning, SlutWalk and Night-March are a few modes of protest which are read as signifiers of a certain political temperament, opportunism and negotiated agency. In this commentary, it is argued, that protest sites play a key role in creating the conditions which facilitate women’s access to public spaces. Further, the language of feminism is not uniform or singular; the construction of this language of feminism is deeply political. Gender performativity is the discursive terrain for feminist body politics which creates, resignifies, reclaims and reinforces meanings on the field of protest.

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, 24-year-old Hadiya, who used to be a Hindu woman, converted to Islam and consensually married a Muslim man (Jacob, 2017). However, her father filed a complaint against her conversion and insisted that she was converted under duress. He also challenged the grounds of her marriage suspecting ‘Love Jihad’ (Jacob, 2017). ‘Love Jihad’ is a term which refers to Muslim men allegedly luring, converting and marrying Hindu women to have them join terrorist activities (Jacob, 2017). According to Hadiya’s father, Hadiya is ‘gullible’ and walking a ‘dangerous’ path (Janardhanan, 2017). The Kerala High Court’s sentence nullifying her marriage read “A girl aged 24 is weak and vulnerable, capable of being exploited in many ways” (Express News Service, 2017). However, in all her statements, Hadiya

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has consistently described her conversion to be an act of free will and choice. Eventually, the Supreme Court overrode Kerala High Court sentence nullifying the marriage and ordered a fresh investigation into the matter (Editorial, 2018). No evidence of forced conversion was found (Mahapatra, 2018).

This case highlights the conundrums of contemplating women’s autonomy through intersections of gender and religion/caste. It has reiterated issues relating to a woman’s constitutional freedom to marry beyond the boundaries of caste and community (Editorial, 2018). The long-drawn judicial proceedings show the reluctance of the constitutional authority to assertively and unambiguously establish the fundamental right of a woman to personal freedom (Editorial, 2018). Further, by infantilizing women and investigating the veracity of their individual choices, the judicial process has fed the construction of women as victims who are bereft of any agency (Editorial, 2018). It is in this context I raise the question—How do we envisage ‘agency’ on the part of ‘women’ in India?

Conventionally, a citizen within a liberal democracy is ‘free, equal and independent’—is someone who can make free and rational choices, and is capable of giving or withdrawing consent. The above discussion on Hadiya points to how women are excluded from this imagination of citizenship. Therefore, this commentary argues that ‘detecting’ consent in women’s personal decisions is not a reliable indicator of agency. To meaningfully understand women as political agents, the conditions of women’s political action need to be assessed and explained. Proximity to, exercise of and resistance to power, the capacity to contest and challenge societal norms, and to shape and engage with political discourse, student activism, personal resistances and transgressions etc. are all indicators of women’s agency. Women exercise power whenever they resist structures of power in the public sphere or within their private lives (Menon, 2008).

This commentary delves into the various forms or modes of collective and public acts of protests which feminist politics has engineered. It tries to explain the symbolism, content and language of feminist politics and activism. The paper is divided into three sections which look at— i) The politics of space and feminism, ii) Constructing the language of feminism, iii) Performativity and protests. The paper analyses feminist modes of
demonstration and reads them as signifiers of a certain political temperament, opportunism and negotiated agency (Chhachhi, 2012).

THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND FEMINISM

In this section, I argue that women have conditional access to public spaces. The ‘othering’ of protesters causes protest spaces to be ephemeral and provisional. However, these protest sites play a key role in creating the conditions to facilitate women’s access to public spaces.

Within a democracy, constitutional and institutional mechanisms like separation of power, federal power-sharing, the right to information, financial and budgetary audit etc. are put in place to keep a check on the elected government. However, there are other more participatory means through which citizens can hold an elected government accountable. Civil society—comprising non-governmental organizations, media, pressure groups, interest groups, and student activist groups etc.—oversees and scrutinizes governmental functioning from outside the democratic state apparatus. Carole Pateman tells us, how till the 1960’s, democratic theory viewed political participation, beyond the institutionally established checks on power, as political unrest (Pateman, 1970).

However, from the late 1960’s- early 1970’s onwards political participation intensified globally and mass movements became an intrinsic feature of democracy. Henceforth, political participation came to be justified on the pretext of the political rhetoric of ‘non-violence and peaceful demonstration’. Further, the validity of the claims made by protesters now rested not on the content of their demands but on the form and nature of their political protest. Physically violent means of expressing dissent and anger like guerilla tactics, stone pelting etc. were easily delegitimized and criminalized (Banerjee, 2010)(Rajagopal, 2018).

The protestors occupy a position of physical and ideological distance from those in positions of power. They are portrayed as the ‘Other’ when attempts are made to comprehend, legitimize and justify their dissidence on grounds of non-violence. For instance, after the brutal assassination of Gauri Lankesh1, Huffington Post made a ‘clarification’ on her association with the Naxalites, and published the following:

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1Gauri Lankesh, editor of a Kannada Weekly and critic of Hindutva extremism, was brutally assassinated by members of a right-wing Hindutva organisation in 2017 in front of her house.
For the last several years, Gauri actively worked in rehabilitating Naxalites to the mainstream. Several of them, including former Naxal leader Sirimane Nagaraj surrendered to the state in December 2015, thanks to her tireless efforts…(Ghoshal, 2017)

This ‘othering’ of protesters causes protest spaces to be provisional and temporal. The protesters are confined to the ephemeral space of protest sites till the time they can be co-opted or reconciled with the mainstream.

The idea of space and the emergence of protest sites are immensely important to feminist politics. According to Phadke, Khan and Ranade, women, when not excluded entirely from public spaces, only have conditional access to them(Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). The emergence of protest sites becomes one of the factors which facilitate women’s access to public spaces. Pinjra Tod or Break the Cage, a Delhi-based feminist collective, has struggled for the cause of removing institutional restrictions, like hostel curfew in women’s hostels, to ensure greater mobility of women students(Trends Desk, 2017). This exemplifies the significance of the politics of space for Feminism.

According to Edita Petronijewic, when an everyday public space transforms into a protest site, the daily routine is broken and there occurs a disruption of the established activity space patterns(Petronijewic, 1998). For instance, in 2017, the night-march that followed an incident of mass molestation on New Year’s Eve in Bangalore lacerated the atmosphere of fear and insecurity which attributed the city streets after the incident(Reuters, 2017).

BREAKING THE SILENCE: CONSTRUCTING THE LANGUAGE OF FEMINISM

In this section I argue that the language of Feminism is ‘constructed’. The construction of a feminist voice is a conflict-ridden and power-driven phenomenon.

“When I was eleven, after a beating
I took the ruler and smashed it to kindling.

Soon after her death, attempts were made to declare her an anti-national for her left-leaning political ideas and her association with Naxalite leaders.
Fingering the splinters I could not believe.
How could this rod prove weaker than me?"
— Breaking Out (Piercy, 1984)

According to Marder, the relationship of women’s experiences to feminist discourse has been taken for granted (Marder, 1992). Radical feminists, in the 1970’s, believed that women’s shared and common experience of subordination can create a sense of sisterhood. The assumption was that ‘women’ have similar experiences within patriarchy, and this collective experience of subordination leads to a feminist consciousness. The language of feminism expresses and comprehends women’s experiences of gender. However, there exists no single ‘original’ discourse or language. Feminist scholarship politically intervenes to clarify, only provisionally, what it means to be feminist (Marder, 1992). In contemporary times, the emphasis on experience as the basis of feminist theory comes from the need to believe in and acknowledge women’s narratives, their account of their metaphysical and lived realities (Paik, 2009).

The construction of a feminist ‘voice’ is a power-ridden phenomenon. Competing feminist articulations have to be negotiated; some are discarded, whereas others are invoked from the past (Marder, 1992). Therefore, various articulations of feminist politics and thought often supplement, compliment, and compete with each other to give form to the language of feminism (Marder, 1992). For instance, after 50 years of a complete blackout of the feminist history of suffrage, the 1970’s witnessed the resurgence of the feminist movement in the USA (Firestone, 1971). At the time, there were multiple factions within the feminist movement. These included—the conservative faction, the left-leaning Politicos, and radical feminists (Firestone, 1971). Radical Feminism drew upon a strand of militant feminism from the Victorian Age (Firestone, 1971). It was trying to keep intact the authenticity of a particular kind of feminist voice in a time when feminism was ridiculed and there lurked the fear of co-option by a male-dominated, masculinity-endorsing party system (Firestone, 1971). Therefore, constructing the language of feminism is deeply political as it determines the theoretical content and politics of the feminist movement.

Within the Indian context, we see how the difficulty in grappling with the intersections of gender and religion has led the ruling party to claim to be the saviour and custodian of Muslim women’s rights (Agnes, 2018). The
Modi government, by introducing the bill to criminalise Triple Talaq, claims to have championed the cause of Muslim women (Agnes, 2018). Political parties insidiously misappropriate the various constructions and language of feminism—‘empowerment’, ‘gender gap’, ‘progress’ etc. for their own electoral and political gain (Balagopalan, 2010).

The power in the construction of a feminist language is most clearly visible in the recent controversy relating to sexual harassment within Indian academia, whereby names of several academic stalwarts found a place in an online list, now popularly known as LOSHA (List of Sexual Harassment Accused) (Gopinathan, 2017). Spectators were quick in making a crude distinction between old and young feminists. While a faction of prominent feminists were in favour of ‘due process’ and sided with institutional means of reporting sexual harassment, a lot of younger feminists brought to attention the crisis of institutions due to failure in taking strict action against the perpetrator and leniency of punishment (Gopinathan, 2017) (Chowdhury & Deep, 2017).

PERFORMATIVITY: THE POLITICS OF MEANING-MAKING

In this section, I argue that gender performativity is the discursive terrain for feminist body politics. Performativity allows us to create, resignify, reclaim and reinforce meanings on the field of protest.

The concept of gender performativity shows how gender is socially constructed. Gender is practiced, performed and internalized regularly. The early socialisation of every individual into heteronormative gendered roles shows how gender identity is not innate, but socially constituted (Butler, 1999). Gender identities are based on culturally available representations of femininity and masculinity. These representations are not free from meanings of good and bad, normal and deviation, desirable and undesirable etc. Within the frame of performativity, these representations can attain new meanings so that one’s gender identity can be constantly defined and redefined (Butler, 1999). Hence, performativity is deeply embroiled in the craft of meaning-making.

How does performativity then help create meanings on the site of protest? Butler draws from Julia Kristeva’s reading of Lacan and distinguishes
symbolic from semiotic (Butler, 1999). The symbolic refers to the canonical reference of meanings, it is dominant and powerful (Butler, 1999). Semiotic, on the contrary, is the subversive reference of meanings (Butler, 1999). The distinction between the two is similar to the difference between great-little traditions. The symbolic draws from the dominant discourse, whereas the subversive is marginal to the dominant discourse.

There are semiotic and symbolic dimensions to body politics. For instance, protest marches like SlutWalk challenge a symbolic of rape—the idea that women dress a particular way to invite rape and a woman’s morality is reflected in her appearance (Nguyen, 2013). This is countered using a set of images for a semiotic subversion—6-inch heels, bras, dominatrix outfit, G-string, pasties for nipples etc (Nguyen, 2013). SlutWalk celebrates the bra and other ‘sexually explicit’ feminine articles as a way to problematize the ideas of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ woman represented through women’s clothing (Nguyen, 2013). Contrariwise, during the 1970’s Miss America Protest radical feminists burned articles which objectified women’s sexuality; one of the articles they burnt was a bra. Since then, bra-burning is viewed as a quintessentially feminist expression of anger—the act of condemning bras was viewed as the way to liberation. Henceforth, the above discussion prompts us to find out how and why does the bra attain different meanings in different contexts and scenarios.

According to Judith Butler, the semiotic arises from a different kind of construction within the same continuum as the symbolic, and is therefore not entirely free of the cobwebs of the organization of power it is trying to subvert (Butler, 1999). SlutWalk and bra-burning share the same discursive terrain irrespective of their celebration or condemnation of the bra. They are both referring to feminist discourses on sex positivity and women’s sexuality in their attempt to subvert the patriarchal symbolic of bra as sexually objectifying and titillating. The performative nature of protest spaces anointed different meanings to the same article in two different moments in the history of feminist politics. Therefore, reclamation and resignification of ‘slut’ or the bra is performative; it needs to be repeatedly and continuously wrenched from the symbolic to be redefined.
CONCLUSION

The commentary introduced the question of women’s agency in the context of Hadiya’s conversion and inter-religious marriage. It was argued that consent, as the basis to assess women’s agency, can be misleading. To understand women’s political agency, one needs to look at their everyday transgressions and power to shape, challenge and reject political discourses. A discussion on the politics of space is particularly important for feminist politics to understand women’s access to and role in the public sphere. Protest sites are provisional and ephemeral in nature however they create favorable conditions for women to access public spaces. There is no singular language or discourse of feminism. The phenomenon of constructing the language of feminism is conflict-ridden and power-driven. Performativity is the discursive terrain of feminist body politics. Within the frame of performativity, feminist politics can define and redefine its methods to subvert the dominant discourses of patriarchy.
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A Comparative Study on The Impact of Growth on Female Labour Force Participation Rate

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It has been postulated by many researchers that there exists a U-shaped hypothesis that can explain the Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) in an economy as it embarks upon the path to economic growth and development. The U-shaped hypothesis, as noticed during the course of this process of growth and development and well-established across the journeys of currently developed countries, can be explained by the existence of three phases – the first where a declining FLFP rate is observed, followed by a certain degree of steadiness in this participation and finally marked by a phase whereby women again attempt to actively join the labour force.

The objective of this paper is to re-examine the U-shaped hypothesis which links economic growth to FLFP rate by running linear OLS regressions, by making use of pooled cross-sectional data. The paper first tests the U-shaped hypothesis at the macro level by analysing country level data obtained from the World Bank database. After proving the hypothesis, the paper analyses if there is any divergence in the pattern amongst the developing nations.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 40% of the world population is composed of females. Despite this significant composition, the role of women in contributing to the economy remains poor leading to numerous macroeconomic challenges. (Elborgh-Woytek, et al. 2013)

The trends seen in case of female labour force participation have witnessed many changes. These variations have occurred parallel to shifts in the dominant sectors of an economy. Both the male and female labour force participation is high when

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an economy is driven by agriculture. The women especially are economically active due to large employment in the sector. The changes in female labour force participation are however, not independent of economic development. As the economy walks the path of development, the home-based production activities are transformed into market-oriented activities. A typical example would be the transformation of cottage-based industries. A majority of the cottage-based industries are women-centric. However, with growing demand comes the need for mass production. As a result, the need to expand sales and increase profits results in the need to make changes in the mode of production. These market-oriented activities call for introduction of technology. Women lack exposure to technological skills which results in the female labour force participation experiencing a dip. The economy after a certain point seeks to feel the need for female labour force participation and the rate of female labour participation takes an upward movement again. This trend of a sharp rise in the beginning of the development process, a dip in between and a rise again causes the female labour force participation curve to be U shaped when measured against growth. (Godlin 1995)

The fall that is denoted in the first place marks the onset of economic growth. According to Goldin, the production process gets enshrined in a wider market and is no longer dependent on households, small scale home businesses and the family farms. During this phase, one of the most important sources of income for women is indulging in manual labour which gets strongly discouraged due to prevalent social norms. Earlier, when it was the agriculture sector that dominated the economy and households were characterised by lower incomes, women did participate in the labour force to a certain degree. The World Bank database shows female employment in agriculture decline from around 76% in 1991 to about 56% in 2017. This major decline has been seen after the liberalization policy that is said to have changed the Indian growth trajectory. Though majority of instances noted this labour to be largely non-remunerated, there were instances where they did receive remuneration for work done. The major outcome of this is seen in the phenomenon called ‘feminization of agriculture.’ Greatly seen in developing countries, the idea here is that while men quit family farming, women tend to stay in the sector and take up jobs and responsibilities. It is quite pronounced in Northern Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. The recent Agricultural Census of 2015-16 also shows similar sentiments. The figures show a rising number of female operational farm holders, from 12.79% to 13.87%. However, with an increase in family income due to economic growth, their participation in the labour force declines. Thus, this decline can be largely
accounted for by the income effect along with a downward trend in the prices of goods produced by households and the demand for female agricultural labour.

The participation rate of females in the workforce has always been a contested discussion in developmental studies. With the current issues that grapple the female labour force like wage gaps and sexual harassment, it becomes necessary to have a theoretical underpinning in order to develop better policies. There are also a range of socio-economic reasons. These reasons could be further broadly broken down to include, economic growth, education and social norms. (Verick 2014) Social constructs most definitely play an integral role in shaping the role of females in the work force. However, this is not an issue that is restricted to a certain section of the globe. In order to address the issue as a global one, a macro study is needed to provide a broad guideline. This could then be modified to suit the social fabric of individual states.

Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) is seen as a shield to combat economic shocks which target the households. (Chaudhary and Verick 2014), points out that FLFP and economic development share a two-way relationship. A high degree of FLFP increases the labour inputs for a country and therefore, the economy experiences faster growth. A simultaneous impact could be, economic growth provides women with the access to education, better health care, liberalizes the social norms and thereby, raises the female labour participation rate.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The global commitment towards equality among both the genders is often questioned. Women continue to participate in the labour force in lesser numbers than men; their work remains non-remunerated and their participation is concentrated in the informal sector. The male gender is also seen to receive higher remuneration. It was observed that during the course of child carrying and upbringing, the wage gap shows a rising trend. This gap is at its peak in China, Indonesia and South Africa and is lowest in the case of The Middle East and North Africa. Such poor participation implies foregone economic opportunities with countries losing out on GDP per capita by almost 27%. Were the participation to rise, the USA can expect an increase in its GDP by 5%, Japan by 9%, UAE by 12% and Egypt by a whopping 34%. Worldwide, the average FLFP has continued to remain poor that is, around 50% and it has remained at this level for nearly 2 decades. It ranges from a 21% in the Middle East and
North Africa (where it is the lowest) to 63% in East Africa, Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa (where it is the highest). The Latin American and the Caribbean have shown a powerful increase in the FLFP by nearly 13 percentage points over the course of last 2 decades. The participation has shown a declining trend in the case of South Asian countries and has remained stable in Europe and Central Asia. Though the average gender gap has shown a downward trend post 1990, this was mainly due to a fall in the male LFP but still remains a cause of worry and an outcome of policy failure. A high participation and low per capita income are indicative of an absence of social security policy measures. Employment undertaken on the basis of gender showed a downward trend during the economic recession with more and more women being employed in the service sector. The situation reversed to its original during 2009 to 2011-12. (Elborgh-Woytek et. al, 2013)

With further development that translates to greater gender equality, the educational qualifications of women improve and once again they move back to the labour force. There are white collar jobs available and women actively get employed for the same. This is accounted for by the upward portion of the curve and is largely explained by a substitution effect. Social stigma here would be applicable only for the poorer and less educated sections of the society. It would therefore mean that such a society is reflective of greater liberty given to its female population in the social, political and economic aspect of life. (Goldin, 1995)

The U shape of feminization is subject to quite a few criticisms. According to Lechman & Kaur (Lechman and Kaur 2015), the diversity in the rate of female labour force participation among economies with the same growth level is evident. Religion is one of the major factors that makes this variation possible. For example, in a Muslim country, females are bound to be unemployed. For such countries, the U- shaped hypothesis disproves itself because, the female labour force participation will be indifferent to change in the growth patterns.

METHODOLOGY

Two distinct variables were deployed to conduct the analysis. The first variable taken into consideration was Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR). It is the percentage of female population above the age of 15, as
modelled by the ILO estimate. The participation rate is a measure of the active portion of an economy's labour force. It refers to the number of people who are either employed or are actively looking for work. The variable can be defined as the number of females above the age of 15 who are a part of the labour force, divided by the female population.

Next, as an approximation for economic growth, per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in constant 2010 US$ is considered. Furthermore, log of this variable and its square was calculated. GDP is a monetary measure that is used to find the market value of all the final goods and services produced in an economy for a specific period of time. Per Capita GDP would be an estimation derived by dividing the GDP of an economy by its total population. This study is considering the effect of economic growth on the female labour force participation rate. Hence, per capita income is the only variable that has been taken into play. Other factors like schooling and education levels, fertility rates, unemployment have not been taken into consideration in order to keep the model as simple as possible. Nonetheless, other studies have shown that female labour force participation rate is affected by other variables as well and an increase in the female LFPR is not entirely due to economic growth.

The data for the abovementioned variables was extracted from the updated 2018 World Bank database. The sample size covers 160 countries, spanning 27 years i.e. 1990-2016.

First, the pooled OLS method is used to verify if the relation between the two variables can be explained by the following two-degree polynomial function:

\[ \text{FLFPR}_{ct} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 Y_{ct} + \beta_3 Z_{ct} + u_i \]

Where,

\(\text{FLFPR}_{ct} = \) Female labour force participation rate

\(Y_{ct} = \) Log of per capita income of country ‘c’ in year ‘t’

\(Z_{ct} = \) Square of log of per capita income of country ‘c’ in year ‘t’

The independent variables were log values. The U-shaped hypothesis holds true if the estimated coefficients follow the given conditions:
$\beta_2<0$ and $\beta_3>0$. This is a simple cross-country equation, which ignores time and country specific effects, but has been used in literature to validate the U-shaped curve hypothesis.

In order to understand the variations in the relationship between the two variables in developing and developed countries, the available data on different income group countries was utilized.

ANALYSIS

The OLS regression of the pooled data yielded the R2 value of 0.2159, which indicates that about 21% of the variation in FLFPR can be explained via this model.

Figures 1 and 2 show a graphical representation of the regression of the pooled data. The graph further verifies the existence of U-shaped curve explaining the relationship between female LFPR and economic growth.

Figure 1: Trendline for the Pooled OLS data.

![Figure 1: Trendline for the Pooled OLS data.](image)

Source: Author’s Calculations

Figure 2: Plotting Pooled FLFP rate against Log and Squared Log of Per Capita Income.
The major world trends in case of female LFPR show that between 1995 and 2015, the global female labour force participation rate decreased from 52.4% to 49.6% (ILO, 2016). This might lead us to question the results for the pooled data. However, it is interesting to note that economic growth hasn’t been constantly rising. This evidence suggests that the results of our study may in fact be true. The U-shaped curve may truly exist for the world economy as a whole. The curve may however be increasing at a diminishing rate.

In order to study the relation between the two variables in the context of development, a regression on the varying income levels was carried out.

Figure 3: Plotting the trendline for different income groups.
The trend seen for high income countries was an upward sloping line, which is consistent with the hypothesis. Within the given time frame, developed countries should be witnessing an increase in the FLFP rate. for instance, since the end of the WWII, Denmark has moved from its traditional agriculture-based economy to an economy that is thriving in manufacturing. However, the service sector seems to be absorbing most of its labour force. Statistics show that in 2005, about 73% of the total labour force was in services. Furthermore, the official German micro census shows that female-dominated sectors—health and social services, and education have grown substantially. Also, the increased participation of women in the labour force is primarily attributed to the increased level of education of women.

However, the trend seen in low income countries seems to follow the same trajectory. This can be understood when the dominant sector in most of these economies is seen to be agriculture. The Kenyan informal sector is gaining more and more prominence as a source of obtaining employment and earning incomes. The formal sector is slackening and this is due to numerous causes. Among these are – the recession prevalent in the early 1990’s induced by the disagreeable weather conditions and an observed economic decline in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors which are the core of the Kenyan economy. The fall in employment in the formal sector is followed by a rise in the employment by the informal sector. One of the significant features of the rise of the informal sector is that it comprises of a large number of female employees. Female labour is concentrated in unpaid family work, the agricultural and the informal sector. To be noted is also the fact that an upward trend observed in the case of female labour force participation is Kenya corresponds with a downward trend in the fertility rate during the same period.

All the three factions of the middle-income group—low, middle and high, are seen to showcase a downward sloping trend. The reasons for countries not following the trend could also be attributed to the time period that was considered. In case of India, the major period in which the decline could be seen would have been the period of Green Revolution which was essentially in the 1960’s. Also, another interesting case in point for India is that, the Indian economy has completely skipped the manufacturing stage in its economic transition. This however, cannot explain the reason for the decline in female LFPR in India.
Developing countries may be on the same trajectory as the developed countries, as far as FLFP rate is concerned. However, the manner of this absorption shows variations. Studies conducted on labour have shown that FLFP rate has risen over time. However, in most developing countries, the bulk of women’s work is considered to take place in the “non-market” economy, either at home or in the informal economy (World Bank 1995). This suggests that collectively, countries behave in the same manner as put forth in the hypothesis.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Maglad (Maglad 1998) emphasises the importance of human capital in increasing female labour force participation. The reason for married women to join the work force comes from a desire to give their family with a higher standard of living, thereby underscoring the welfare improvement rationale for female labour market participation (Sackey 2005).

While there has been an increase in female labour force participation, most of this has occurred in the low paying, flexible and precarious occupations with low wages and no security. Most of them are also concentrated on the “traditional” female occupations and the informal sector. Such employments are the ones likely to be affected by shocks like the economic crisis. Inequalities between men and women in assets, earnings, education and employment still dominate the work place. In addition, men largely control decision making on household expenditure, thus constraining women’s ability to make strategic investments. These affect women’s ability to improve their human capital status and hence their access to employment (ILO, 2004).

The policies need to be structured in a way that addresses these issues. Major reforms taking place to formalise the informal sector need to consider the case of the female labour force. The welfare quotient is lost due to the participation being in the informal sector. The social disparities are still quite wide and require to be addressed. Research mentioned in this study has shown that simply an increase in the levels of female employment is not indicative of improved conditions of women in the economy. Most of the developed countries are not exactly looking forward to a massive influx in the work force in the coming times. For them, utilizing the existing underutilized female labour force would be a prudent choice. While getting rid of the social stigma seems to be mammoth task, it necessary that women are brought to the forefront and given equal
opportunities. This is mainly keeping in mind the developing economies, who have an untapped female labour force and an upcoming large labour force in the coming decades. The downfall of not being able to provide for an inclusive environment would be economies missing out on their demographic dividends.
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Women and Armed Conflict: Stories of Resistance from Contemporary Kashmir

Urba Malik

ABSTRACT

The paper will primarily look into the crucial question of why a legal protest in a constitutional democracy fails to operationalize in a conflict zone eventually giving way to more radical ways of resistance by women. The question will be investigated by looking at the possible structures against which women in Kashmir are protesting. Analyzing the multilayered structure in the form of a state, patriarchy and religion in a conflict zone will help in understanding how such a structure penetrates into women’s lives and questions their roles. This leads to the next part of the paper, which explores the potential such a structure offers its women—the power to protest by questioning the structure-sanctioned boundaries. However, a consequential question is how are women protesting against the structure and how different is the nature of protest from legal ways of protesting? Moreover, what kind of challenges are these protests posing to the state and community? & how these modes of resistance are different from the legal modes as far as the outcome of transforming the discourse on women is concerned. Lastly, what are the areas where the resistance by women has failed to subvert the structure?

INTRODUCTION

The paper traces the question of ‘women’s agency in conflict within the state and the patriarchal social structure’. Drawing from the case studies, I will be analyzing how women i.e. who have suffered loss on multiple planes in Kashmir, have encountered the structure, manifested in multiple layers. The manifestation ranges from fighting a conflict-ridden state to revamping the established norms.

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and patterns used by Kashmiri society in order to gauge the behavior of women. Consequently, I will argue in favor of the need to see women beyond the narrow agency-victimhood binary.

However, before debating the question of ‘agency of Kashmiri women’, the paper will advance four theoretical frameworks that will help in assessing the question of agency in the case studies. This will help arrive at a detailed analysis of the question of gender in conflict zones thereby formulating an alternative way to contest the dominant imagination of such women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first framework by Lipika Kamra (Kamra 2013), attempts to theorize agency by tracing two narratives of women from the Naxalite movement. These narratives exist as oral histories and autobiographies and convey to us the stories about the oppression faced by women in their everyday life. The experiences and stories of struggle faced by these women do not take place in vacuum, argues Lipika. Rather such struggles are located at the juncture wherein various structures of power (in the form of a state, a social structure complemented by a network of other relationships) intersect. Lipika argues that it is upon countering such discourses of power that agency emerges in the subject. The form of agency being argued for by Lipika is that of a non-Sovereign agency i.e. where we can identify certain acts of the individual as agentive even when they are not guided by an autonomous consciousness and instead are shaped by the structures and the discourse of power. Though the Naxalite movement involved the participation of women in its struggle, the share of women remained confined to supportive roles. Thereby, brushing aside the existing gender division. Therefore the subsequent position of women suffering from an existing patriarchal bias in the movement survived unchallenged.

The second framework by Debarati Sen and Sarasij Majumder (Sen and Majumder 2015) explores the idea of agency and its exercise by women who creatively engage with the microcredit. In doing so, they are neither passive victims of nor willing participants in the microcredit¹. While countering the risks

¹ Micro-credit: It is the extension of very small loans to impoverished borrowers to help them become self-employed. It is designed to support entrepreneurship and alleviate poverty.
involved in the microcredit, not only do these rural women-borrowers face difficulties at the initial stage viz. trade and market but also face much of the risk from the hegemonic patriarchal order. The existing hierarchical and patriarchal social structures place these women in a subordinated position through regulating and controlling the mobility, social interactions, work etc. of these rural women via the family and community. This kind of subordination eventually draws them mute and invisible in public spaces. However, by becoming active members of the micro credit self-help groups the women in this case study started questioning the gendered ideology of their community, making them outcasts (to an extent) as per the village’s social norms.

The third framework, which engages with the relationship with agency, is by Partha Chatterjee (Chaterjee 2012). It tries to engage with and explore the idea of subaltern’s agency. Partha Chatterjee adopts an interesting and noteworthy mechanism of ‘negotiations’ between population groups and governmental agencies while expressing his idea of subaltern agency. Chatterjee finds this subaltern agency different from our conventional conceptualization of agency. Instead of viewing it as a revolutionary challenge to the structure of power, some heroic political action taken by the poor and the exploited or a sustained resistance to the oppressive and corrupt state machinery, Chatterjee’s subaltern’s agency centers on negotiated transactions between the government agencies and the target population groups over the distribution of governmental benefits.

The last framework is by Ajay Gudavarthy (Gudavarthy 2012), which comes largely as a response to the conceptualization of subaltern’s agency framed by Chatterjee. Gudavarthy’s analysis of agency draws a major objection to Chatterjee’s idea of formulating agency. Gudavarthy’s contestation emerges from the question, ‘how can a subaltern exercising agency aim for such ‘molecular’ change?’ Agreeing to the fact that the subaltern (of today) has to strive for basic strategies for everyday survival, his point of contestation is that one cannot call every survival strategy a potential act of resistance. For Gudavarthy, the subaltern’s struggle lies beyond the daily survival strategies because there is nothing revolutionary in resorting to a basic survival approach by the subaltern. The survival mechanism taken to by the subaltern Gudavarthy holds that such contextual negotiations should not be valorized as the only mode of popular politics because they are rooted in helplessness and in the larger inability of the subaltern to be able to subvert the oppressive structure. Hence, such strategies of the subaltern cannot make a claim for agency. Gudavarthy poses a question, ‘If such modes taken by the subaltern are supposed to be
utilized to build a case for subaltern’s resistance and agency, then what would then constitute a transformative event? Gudavarthy’s subaltern therefore is not one who constantly bargains and compromises on various planes or of not being conscious of how oppressive the structure is and how easily it exploits their negotiating abilities. He argues for the subaltern exercising its agency when the individual possesses a certain consciousness to understand the hegemonic structure and eventually rebel against it instead of reducing himself to an ordinary beneficiary of a mere negotiation. If the subaltern becomes a mere negotiator while interacting with the government agencies then there is a fear that the structure will eventually take over and regulate the behavior of the individual, thereby separating the individual from his agentive self. The individual because of his helplessness to understand the way the structure operates eventually submits to it, which is not an agentive act for Gudavarthy.

This part of the paper will try to analyze the Kashmir conflict from the point of view of those who have been the worst affected i.e. the women. It is important to understand that women experience conflict differently, which makes it even more important to bring out women’s voices, in contrast to the male-dominated narratives. Through the narratives of these women, the question of, ‘how while taking to multiple experiences of living in the midst of a conflict, they transcend the various boundaries thereby exercising their agency’ will be analyzed.

NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE FROM THE CONFLICT

No mention of the struggle faced by Kashmiri women is complete without mentioning the troubled history of mass rapes from Kunan poshpura, an infamous village from the Kupwara district. Kunanposhpora incident occurred on 23 February 1993 when soldiers from the fourth Rajputana Rifles raided the village in order to conduct their insurgency operation. Using the alleged reason of a ‘search operation’, the army captured all the men in the village, where they interrogated and tortured them. Eventually the army breached into the houses and mass raped all the women. The army allegedly raped around 53 women at gunpoint that night. The village even today is known as the ‘village of raped women’. Facing the brute reality of pain and a loss of dignity because of being mass raped, the villagers suffered such a huge shock that they were numbed into thinking of any alternate course of action. It is because of such incidents in conflict zones that feelings of aggression, hate and alienation are instilled, primarily in men.
Up until today the men in this village conceal their aggression and anxiety about the incident. However, the internalization of conflict and the narrative of the women in such areas is more complex. While mentioning the incident of Kunan Poshpora, Kavita Suri (Suri 2011) says that on trying to talk to the women of this village, the words that greeted her were:

“You are not welcome here. Go away. We do not want to talk to you. People of your kind have been coming here since all these years, selling the plight of our daughters and making money… please go away, we will not talk to you.”

The women of the sleepy hamlets of Kunan Poshpora after 25 years of the incident still suffer and live with the stigma of belonging to the ‘village of raped women’. An unusual attribute of these women is that they continue doing the daily chores of everyday life while pretending to be normal from the outside. Suri finds it difficult to conclude whether these women do it to live in a state of self-denial or that these women are unwilling to acknowledge the reality of what happened to them out of fear of a complete breakdown of their lives. When such incidents take place, they not only affect the victim in that very moment but it also revisit the victim regularly through memory for instance, every time they see an army personnel.

Sharifa a mother of six children committed suicide along with another woman who was raped. (Sobhrajani 2014) In another case seven sisters were gang raped and then left to their own selves. A nine-month pregnant woman delivered a child after three days when she was gang raped by eight jawans- both the child’s arms were fractured. The trauma and torture has rendered two mothers of raped daughters incapable to utter a word. A son who was forced to watch his mother’s rape eventually had a nervous breakdown and now refuses to look at her. Another woman had a child from rape of which nobody is ready to take care of.

These women today are battling the social ostracism. The stigma of being raped still refuses to leave them. Most of the women who were raped twenty years ago remain unmarried even today. Their lives have come to a standstill as they have stopped going out- be it to schools, colleges, bringing firewood from the surrounding forests for the household chores etc. Slowly they have become invisible in public spaces fearing the taunting remarks of people.

It has become very hard to find a match for girls of the village. For Instance, Dar had to face a really difficult time for her stigmatized daughter Shakeela as
her in laws would provoke her, insult her, torture her on the pretext that she was a rape victim. Her father is worried about her, wishing if she had been educated, she could have had taken care of herself and her two sons.

Like Shakeela, many women suffer from the social stigma. Girls in this village have stopped going to school as their classmates taunt them because of which they are uneducated and unemployed. They have also stooped travelling in buses out of fear of men raising fingers at them and calling them rape victims. These women and their children bear no marriage proposals and continue to live with social stigma.

The social boycott and the resulting isolation these women face is so much that their own families including their husbands do not want to live with them anymore. Many men have accepted their wives back only after they were forced to do so by militants. These women were and continue to be endlessly harassed and beaten. One of the women begged her husband to forgive her for a sin she had never committed but he refused. The rejection of the woman came on the pretext that she was now impure and unchaste. Whether her being dirty was by her own choice or whether she was forced to, the underlying fact was another man destroyed her purity. Her husband also believed that she was sinner in the eyes of Allah since her chastity was tarnished and if he somehow manages to accept her again he will go to hell. (Women’s Initiative 2002)

Another story of social ostracism is of a woman who pleaded her husband not to throw her away as her children would turn into orphans. Though she has somehow been allowed to stay in the house, her husband refuses to accept her as a wife after that incident. An 80-year old woman, was kicked out of her house by her own son because of the incident.

The stigma of being a raped has not left the village even after twenty-five years. When the entire village of Kunan had assembled at the polling station during the State elections this year, angry and hurt Janti Begum (45) along with many other women blocked the entrance. She still feels that she is trapped in the dark heavy night when the army barged into her house and raped her. She still hears the echoes of her cries along with other raped women. Janti Begum says:

“I was 22 then; today I am 45, but the girl I was died that night. Since then I am barely living. And I don’t believe in this democracy, which is based on injustice. We just want to remind our neighbors of why we should boycott.”
However, what was surprising was that the men of the village when asked about these women protesting against the casting of votes, refused to talk about them saying they had nothing to do with them. They further said:

“They have only brought shame to our village and nothing else. We have nothing to do with these shameless women.”

These women though stigmatized are fighting for justice. Apart from fighting against the oppressive structure of the state to deliver them justice, they are battling with the mindset of men from over twenty-five years. Jawahira Begum, one the rape victims in response to the social stigma says:

“They have only brought shame to our village and nothing else. We have nothing to do with these shameless women.”

Women in conflict are targeted in ways that are graver than men. Despite such sufferings, women refuse to be passive inert victims of violence and rather exercise considerable agency in such situations. In these situations, women take to new independent roles, challenging the notions of victimhood, thereby reconstructing their devastated lives. The hardships and exigencies of survival push these women into new roles strengthening themselves as agents of transformation. One has to find agency in the points where on one hand conflict causes immense pain and suffering to women. Whereas on the other hand, women create spaces for themselves thereby redefining their social relationships. They not only negotiate spaces for themselves but also hold on to such spaces firmly.

On one hand such stories reduce women to victims of the conflict. However on the other hand the act of resistance inherent in such stories, no matter how embryonic, potentially stands to disrupt the traditional roles of women in society. Such traditional roles of women are inherently maintained by conservative societies as these roles turn out to be the legitimizing foundations for patriarchy to thrive and flourish. The idea of a liberated resolute woman, who has the courage and fortitude to demand her rights, her share of freedom, to survive her sufferings finds no acceptance in societies, which thrive on the essential silencing of women’s stories from conflict. For example- the woman who survived a gang rape in front of her son, from Kunanposhpora.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for my paper takes to a two-pronged approach. The theoretical dimension of my paper will be observed, analyzed and answered from the existing literature on this work. To substantiate this, qualitative research was undertaken in some sections. For the empirical data I profusely relied on secondary data such as project reports, testimonies of women, biographical and auto biographical accounts of women, reports published by the local groups, documentaries and the search engines for online forums.


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