Women Across Borders in Kashmir

The Continuum of Violence

BY ASHA HANS

L'auteure examine la place des femmes dans le discours nationaliste de l'Inde séparée, ainsi que la position de celles qui vivent dans les territoires limitrophes de l'Inde suite au conflit avec le Cachemire. Cet article évalue les doubles rôles attribués aux femme qui, du côté pakistanais, sont perçues comme des guerrières pour la liberté, alors que du côté indien, elles ne sont que des objets sexuels.

In recent years, an inquiry into the place of women in the nationalist discourse of a Partitioned India has emerged (Menon and Bhasin; Butalia; Aiyar). This partial filling-in of a vacuum in Indian history has been an important step in our understanding of women's history in the subcontinent. More specifically, both Menon and Bhasin, and Butalia, who spoke to women who crossed borders from the newly-formed state of Pakistan to India during Partition in 1947, have brought to light memories long suppressed. These memories needed to be revealed so that the language of the nationalist discourse would not continue to be exclusive and misleading where women's national identity is concerned. As this discourse is not static and linked to a political language that is ever-changing, their excellent work enables us to understand both the continuity and the present discourse in India.[1] I would like to use this backdrop of history to understand women's position in the border areas of India relating to the Kashmir conflict.

In recent feminist interpretations of Partition and women on the borders, Kashmir has found little space. Butalia, confines herself to the Punjabi odyssey while Menon and Bhasin make only one mention in regard to Azad Kashmir. One cannot blame them, as Kashmir has long been one of the intricate questions confronting history, which has defied every attempt at resolution. The latest conflict in 1999 is a part of the history of turbulence in the state. [2]

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Understanding women's position in the history of Kashmir

Fours wars have been fought between Indian and Pakistan (1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999) where Kashmir has been a significant even if not a direct causal factor. In the process Kashmir has been dismembered into three parts, and borders shifted. Today the northern part is known as Azad Kashmir and is under Pakistani control, the southern part, the State of Jammu and Kashmir is under Indian control, and the eastern in China. In each change and conflict the civilians have suffered, yet the written histories only document the national hostilities and negotiations and bargains between states (Gupta, 1966; Jha; Schofield). Male-centered narratives have no place for feminist action and evaluation. This absence of a feminist viewpoint is not surprising. Women's exclusion from historical chronicling is universal. Combined with a male construction of female roles, it has made the task of a feminist historiography difficult.

Recounting the yester-years

Among the well-known female rulers in India is Queen Didda of Kashmir. The following passage is reflective of the current male-oriented historical analyses. Dhar, chronicling Kashmiri history, writes:

> In 950, Khemgupta ascended the throne of Kashmir, a man of mediocre ability who married princess Didda. Queen Didda was the de-facto ruler of the state, as she was very dominating and exercised immense influence over her husband. In 980 AD Didda ascended the throne after the death of her husband. Before her, two other queens had ruled Kashmir namely Yashovati and Sugandha. Didda was a very unscrupulous and wilful lady and led a very immoral life. But *in spite* of these drawbacks, she was an able ruler, who firmly ruled the valley. She died in 1003 AD [emphasis added]. (19)

In the documenting of ruler's in Kashmir's history, women are mentioned only in this one paragraph. Dhar notes two other female rulers

besides Didda, but no narrative of their lives exists. Above all, in Dhar's analysis, Didda's immorality precedes her ability as a ruler. Women's power here is not perceived as power. Furthermore, universal sexual ethics are not applicable to women. Didda's sexuality is a barrier to her finding a place in history equal to male sovereigns of the period.

Nationalist interests have perceived women as objects to be controlled. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that different historical understandings have produced different constructions of female roles. Dhar implies that Queen Didda transgressed the role circumscribed to females and, therefore, presents her as a target of contempt and ridicule. As the historiography of pre-independence years in India from a feminist point of view has yet to be explored, for a more authentic rendering, older histories would need to be examined. This exercize is essential for understanding not only the past but, also, for understanding our identity (Sen).[3] The exclusion of women from these shared memories of history influences women's place in the current nationalist discourse.

Partition and shifting identities

During Partition, Kashmiri women suffered along with other women of a Partitioned India. Menon and Bhasin explain this with a story from Azad Kashmir. In October 1947, tribal intruders who forced all Hindus to leave invaded Muzzarfarabad (now across the border from India and the capital of Pakistani-occupied Azad (free) Kashmir. The medical assistant distributed poison to all the women who feared sexual assault at the hands of the invaders. Many women took the poison and died. The rest jumped over a bridge into the river. Those who did not take their own lives were raped. When a woman chose to commit suicide, often her husband and/or brother helped her. If they were not able to strangle her, they threw her into the river (52). Menon and Bhasin's story from Azad Kashmir is one of the many covered-up stories of mass rapes, suicides, abductions, sales, and honour killings. Most are of women who have become refugees twice over, once in 1947-48 and then again in 1990. During Partition, the women were considered sexual objects and of no use to the *Qwam* (the nation) if they lost their purity. Their purity had to be protected even if it meant death. The Partition drew a red bloodline of violence in women's lives. Women's vulnerability relegated her to a lower place in this *Qwam*.

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The history of wars and negotiations after independence relating to Kashmir, therefore, make no mention of women. Women were invisible factors in the negotiations that took place between India and Pakistan either on a bilateral or at the international level. Women were only given a critical place in the political mosaic of Kashmiri history, which was documented after 1989, when the current state of conflict started. As in all conflicts, even here, it is women's sexuality that has taken centre stage, whether from the angle of the state security forces or the *mujahideen* (a guerrilla group, whose members believe themselves to be the true defenders of Islam and wage a war to please God).

To understand the post-Partition phase, it is important to understand the ethnic composition of the state. Jammu and Kashmir, the constituent part of Kashmir which is Indian, is not Muslim as is generally indicated. The State is currently divided into four largely loose religious groups and sub-groups. The majority of the Buddhists are confined to Leh and Ladhak, Hindus to Jammu, Shia Muslims to Kargil, and Sunni Muslims to the Valley. The history of these ethnic divisions and subdivisions is long. Kashmir was a Hindu state from the second millennium BC. Part of it converted to Buddhism in the third century BC. A resurgent Shiavite Hinduism ended Buddhism in Kashmir as it did in other parts of India.

Central Asian incursions introduced Islam. Islam changed in the twelfth century as it began to be related to the Sufi school of Persia (modern-day Iran). In the Valley, the 700-year-old *kashmiriat*–tradition blended Sufi Islam's egalitarian spirit with a more liberal Hinduism. An easy relationship existed between Buddhists, Muslims, and the Hindus. The Mughal rulers 400 years ago did not replace this culture with the practice of a strict Islam as they had done in other parts of India. Therefore, it remained a liberal Islam different from the proselytizing of fundamentalist Islam (Kumar 21). It gave relatively greater freedom to Muslim women, as triple *talaq* (an Islamic practice which gives Muslim men the right to divorce a wife in the form of three repudiations used by saying the word *talaq* three times to formalize a divorce) and the practice of four wives were not adopted. Widow remarriage has been common. Today, the non-violence and secular ideals of *kashmiriat* have been destroyed in Kashmir and replaced with a newly-imported Islamic order which has no place for Hinduism or Buddhism, and which has a strictly circumscribed code of conduct for women.

Erika Simon Gottlieb, "Recollections: Last in the Line," oil on panel, 20 x 24", 1977.

"My green valley has turned khaki."

The present Kashmir problem started on January 19, 1990. Half-a-million Hindu families were displaced after loudspeakers broadcasting from mosques asked them to leave the Valley within three days or face dire consequences. The majority of the Hindus in the Sunni-dominated valley were forced to live in camps in non-Muslim areas of the state and in other parts of the country. Women left all that is familiar and secure to adapt to a new life of uncertainty. There is no safety even in other areas of Kashmir, outside the Valley, as conflict has entered Kashmiri lives in every part of the state. Women, wherever they are, remain targets of militancy and state controlled force (Bhatay *et al.*).

Since 1990, the violence and its consequent effects on the lives of Kashmiri women are comparable to those women have experienced in any other global conflict situation. Conflict, displacement, and the new and fundamentalist character of Islam has changed not only social but also physical structures. The Line of Control (LOC), a boundary dividing Kashmir, and agreed to by both India and Pakistan by the Simla Agreement of 1972. has again become a centre of conflict creating a new Hindu-Islam divide. The Valley is, thus, demanding freedom from the state of India. Hindus who lived in peace with their neighbours since the second millennium BC have been forced to vacate the Valley. This shifting of the LOC, though physical, has created new boundaries in women's lives. A Kashmiri-Hindu woman, displaced by the conflict, questions the "freedom"—a freedom in which women pay the cost by being restricted to play a role of the outsider or spectator—as well as her own and her community's position in this search for a new national identity.

AZADI (Freedom) 1989-1995

What nation
does not have a dream
like that?
History is a nightmare
from which we cannot wake:
we cannot arise.

I have heard of house to house
searches for young men with beautiful
hair who hide frightful weapons
in their sister's hope chests.

To the women who love them
they tell nothing except that
one day Azadi will arrive
at everyone's doorstep.
Life will become prettier, more
honourable, more pious.

Who are these men?
I would like to ask you.
I would like to know
why their dream of Azadi
excludes me (and my people).
—Pandit, June 30, 1999

Hindu women find themselves completely excluded from this quest for a new Kashmiri national identity. This search for freedom is only perceived in the context of Islamic vs. non-Islamic positioning. As Hindu women are extraneous to this search we are compelled to confine ourselves in this article to women restrained by Islamic boundaries.

In the late 1980s, clerics coming from outside Kashmir pushed strict Islamic schools for children, the wearing of veils for girls and women, undermining the liberal Sufi ethos. The veil is a new phenomena introduced by the strict codes of Islam and imposed by the new Islamic leaders with links to Pakistan and Iran (Marquand). Women's lives have been inevitably affected, as they are perceived to be the representatives and emissaries of culture. The politics of culture and the presence of Border Security as well as the Armed Forces have had a profound effect on the lives of women in Kashmir. For example, Kunaan Poshpora in Kupwara, near the border, has come to be known as the "raped village." On the night of February 22-23, 1991, over 30 women and children were supposed to have been gang-raped by soldiers of the Fifth Rajputana Rifles. This village, like many other villages, has lost its honour. All its women remain unmarried and are shunned by the community (recounted during a visit in 1992).

Present-day Kashmiri nationalism traces it origins to the political-cultural interventions of Islam. Those excluded from the search for a "new" Kashmiri identity try to negotiate with the Indian State to counter the strategies of their rejection from

mainstream Kashmiri politics. This maneuvering for ending the politics of exclusion has not worked. The state is unable to support their pleas or even prevent the further dismembering of its own body. Pandit, in her poems, poignantly chastizes the policy-makers for the plight of the Kashmiri diaspora:

> Kings and king-makers play dice,
> bet on their mother, not the wife.
> —Pandit, May 30, 1998

In the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavas, was lost in a game of dice in a political battle for a kingdom. When Duryodhan, the Kaurav prince, ordered her stripping in public, she was saved by divine intervention in the form of Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu. The "betting" was then on the wife and, in the Hindu social order, it remains so. In any nationalist debate it is the "mother" as nation whose honour has to be protected and during Partition it was a major strategy employed by the state.[4] The strategy, however, did not work as Partition has dismembered the "mother" (Bose, 1998: 51). This cry of a patriarchal system, signifying the preservation of the purity of the national order at all costs, returns at the heightening of tensions between the two nations but remains as unsuccessful now as it was then.

In her work, Pandit reveals a significant shift as she perceives the rulers and policy-makers of a modern India staking their "mother" in a battle. The enemy is not responsible for the dismembering; the rulers themselves have created the shifting borders. The "mother's" purity and sacred identity becomes a victim of state inertia and the moral corruption of the public sphere. What Pandit does not see, however, is that "womanhood" in her poems is all-inclusive as neither mother nor wife escapes the violence of the state. All women, including the "mother" figure, find themselves caught within a continuum of violence. This change takes place in the political strategic field and, therefore, has political connotations.

To date, there has been little scope for academic work in the politics of violence. The curtain around Kashmir is dense and very little information escapes except what the state, or the militants, desire. What is indisputable is that the onset of violence a decade ago in Kashmir has engulfed the entire community of Kashmiri women.

Two rare studies provide insight into women's situation in Kashmir today (Women's Initiative; Kashmir University). In the first, the Women's Centre of Bombay University spoke to women in Kashmir in 1994 and the consequent report highlighted the abuse of women during conflict (Women's Initiative). The report documented large-scale rape and other forms of gender-specific violence that took place over the years as a result of the conflict. Consequently, the mosques, traditional centres of male power and dominance, have become centres of women's collectives (Women's Initiative). Women have sought assistance from a fundamentalist Islam, an exploitative agency, to create solidarity. This step takes them within the cloisters of conservatism where they have had to sacrifice the limited freedom they enjoyed under Sufism in order to protect themselves from violence.

The canons of the new Islamic order demand the continuation of progeny. Injunctions of the new regime require that remarriage of widows continue. It is common, even for widows who already have children, to remarry and leave their children with their former husband's family (Women's Initiative). The militants positing family planning as un-Islamic have threatened doctors who practise in the field of reproductive and child health (RCH) care. Abortion is not allowed even in cases when the pregnancy has occurred as a result of rape by security forces. Women though questioning the ban, cannot act against the militants, but do question their different positions towards sterilization and rape. While sterilization is considered as un-Islamic and banned, no such action is taken as far as rape is concerned. Resentment exists particularly in areas where the militants are trained in Pakistan—where reproductive health services including family planning is allowed—while the trained militants in Kashmir refuse RCH services to their own women (Bhatia). Women's health has, thus, become a major casualty of the conflict (Women's Initiative).

Contextualizing women's position in the Kargil conflict

The Kashmir crisis is a complex issue that has defied solutions over the past 50 years. This complexity is clearly discernible in the approximately 100 kilometres of the disputed border areas covering the Kargil, Drass, and Batalik sectors on the Line of Control which form the nucleus of the latest conflict. Like Kashmir in general, the Kargil region in which the conflict initiated does not have a homogenous ethnic composition. There are five ethnic communities: the Balti, Ladhaki, Zanzkari, Purki, and Dard Shin. In Drass the people are mainly of the Dard stock, an Aryan race believed to have originally migrated to the high valleys of the Western Himalayas from the Central Asian steppes. They speak Shina which, unlike the Tibetan-originated Ladakhi dialects spoken elsewhere in Ladakh region, belongs to the Indo-European linguistic family. One of the "Minaros" (or *Brokpas*), tribal inhabitants said to be descended from the army of Alexander of Macedonia, is an endogamous tribe that continues to practice its own ancient rites and rituals.

In 1948, during the post-Partition conflict, Kargil and Drass were captured by Pakistan, but were regained by Indian forces (Misra). As Pakistan

retained the surrounding area between 1948 to 1965, the Kargil area was specifically targeted by Pakistani artillery fire from the overlooking peaks. In 1965, Indian forces gained control of the hills around Kargil, but these were returned to Pakistan as part of the Tashkent peace process brokered by the former Soviet Union. The firing on Kargil continued and in 1971, the hills overlooking Kargil were taken from Pakistan and peace came to the region for a short time with the demarcation of the LOC in 1972 between the two countries. As militancy in the Sunni-dominated Valley increased, and Shi'ite Kargil did not support the militants, and Pakistani forces resorted to increased shelling (Akbar). Civilian casualties in Kargil over the years have resulted in the relocation of numerous people to Buddhist-dominated Leh (Akbar). Ethnic conflict has increased in this peaceful region as Buddhists resent this encroachment on their cultural and territorial homogeneity (*Hindu*).

In February 1999, India initiated a new diplomatic process to end the conflict with Pakistan.[5] The peace process did not last long, as in May 1999, while the diplomatic initiative was still underway, hundreds of new posts had been set up by armed raiders on the Indian side of the LOC. The borders are porous and it has been easy for armed combatants to cross them. The issue is complicated as the intruders are a combination of mercenaries, Afghan and Pakistani *Mujahideen* as well as Pakistani army regulars.[6] Kargil was not a civil insurgency but a bi-lateral conflict. The border war intensified on May 26th, 1999, when a full-fledged Indian army action took its place on the LOC. By the third day, India had deployed more troops to the Kargil region bringing the total to an estimated 30,000. India launched air strikes in Kashmir for the first time in twenty years. By July 11, 1999, a pullout was agreed upon and there was a subsequent reduction in the level of intensity in the conflict, although, it did not end.

The multiethnic and multinational composition of the border represents a unique political identity not shared by the rest of the state. Villages lie on both sides of the LOC. Here it is culture that mediates relations within the borders and outside them. For instance, a confusing situation exists in a village called Hundermann. Situated directly on the LOC, it is sometimes in Pakistan and sometimes in India. In 1948 it was part of Pakistan. In 1971, the Pakistanis destroyed the village and the Indian army occupied it, and overnight the villagers became Indians ("A Village Between Two Nations"). Since then, the people of Hundermann have had to live with intermittent shelling. The physical violence of bombing and the multi-psychological situational pressures, make the life of women in this village and many others in Kargil constantly traumatic.

As the war-like situation never actually ceases, violence in the lives of these people is a continuous oppressive component that decreases and increases at will. When the conflict intensifies, the boundaries of the LOC are extended to include all women who come into contact with it—the women living on the LOC, those crossing it, and those distanced by physical space but located in the centre by virtue of their very identity. The LOC transforms these women's lives during heightened tension by the use of different systems of control. Control is exerted through the use of language and over women's movements, therefore, their identities and sometimes their economies are affected. For the women who live on these borders, as well as the women who have never seen the LOC because of its physical distance but are nevertheless tied to it, the LOC embodies an all-pervasive identity, which they can neither denounce nor adopt.

The war has affected women's lives in these villages profoundly, as their location on the borders has enclosed them in different nationalisms at different stages of their lives. Conflict creates in the life of all these women a new language of nationalism, which acts as a control mechanism. Their autonomies and agencies are both objectified in the larger national cause. Fortunately not all women associated with the LOC are completely subsumed by the male ideological order. Some manage to discover windows left open where they can pursue avenues of empowerment and personal or group autonomy.

Control through language: female combatants from across the border and a reception by *houris*

The Line of Control, in a feminist context, provides not only the demarcating of a political boundary but it also engenders a language of its own. This language uses women's bodies in the nationalist dialogue. For instance, in the Tuloling assault in the Drass Sector, three-storied bunkers were found with the bodies of four women who had been armed, same as the men. An Indian army captain who found the bodies, interviewed by the media, was asked what women were doing at this high altitude. He replied: "Well, probably to look after their personal *adam* (administration), he said with a wink" (Sawant). Who were these four women? Insurgents, mercenaries, or women recruited by the Pakistani armed forces? What was their role in the Kargil conflict? The answers may never come. Indian soldiers in some posts have spotted women as well as found the bodies of women killed during air strikes. Some have suggested that the Afghan mercenaries have brought in women (Akbar). There is no proof that this information is true and the women's identity remains hazy [7].

What is relevant here is the male adversary's perception of their roles. The female crossing of borders symbolizes the violation of not only political but also social and cultural boundaries. The adversary's construction of the insurgent woman's identity is being called into question.

The female representation of the enemy becomes a symbol of the body politic. These women kept faith with the male martyrs and opted for death rather than capture. Their reconstructed identity, however, transforms the female warrior into a powerless sexual object, denying her full status as fighter/soldier. As, there is no one to uphold her community honour, the language pursued in the cultural context acquires violence and the "line of control" becomes a line of violence—an attempt to violate their bodies through this control. It is certain that women in nationalist struggles do not achieve the status of their male counterparts. Whoever these women holding rifles are, the response of their male adversaries is to attack them through the undermining of their national "honour."

When male combatants cross borders they provoke a different response, even as adversaries. For instance, another view presented of women's role in this conflict is that of *houri*—women sent by the God's to tempt mortals. Pakistani soldiers are seen as being tempted by tantalizing, nubile nymphets waiting for them on the Indian side of the border, promising them entry to God's own "dancing hall." By all accounts, as an Indian newspaper correspondent suggests, our forces are firmly set on the path to a glorious victory, matched by the boundless ignominy of the Pakis who have been foolish enough to believe that the barren Kargil hills are crawling with *houris*. It is a tribute to the Indian soldiers that they did not mow down the fleeing enemy—that is not the style of this side of the line that divides Hindu civilization from Islamic barbarism (Gupta 1999).

The difference evident in the two examples presented above lies in the construction of "theirs" and "ours." "Theirs" are sexual objects—whether as *houris* of a sexual fantasy or insurgents that administer to men's sexual gratification—while "ours," by default, are not. Women are seen as objects of sexual fantasy or mundane providers of sexual favours. Through the women, the purity and cultural inferiority of the other nation is attacked.

Controlling the "identity": displacement and the violence of conflict

With every resurgence of the conflict, victims of Partition settled on many parts of the border are faced with displacement and fear of being uprooted once again. Control over mobility of populations is an inevitable part of war. In this context, people living on the Line of Control have lived under the shadow of the guns since Partition and, with each conflict, have shifted to safer places. The Partition and the new boundaries have meant an extended violence, which has become a routine and inescapable part of daily life. In the Kargil conflict the number of persons rendered homeless are somewhere in the region of 2,78,601 and the majority who have moved are women and children (Government of India). The displaced are from Kargil, Drass, Batalik, and the border areas of Punjab and west Jammu and Kashmir. Kargil has a very low-density population and, even if the conflict is in Kashmir, most of the displaced are from the Punjab sector of the border.

The displaced in Kashmir have resettled in places such as Kupwar, Uri, Gurez in Kashmir and Pura, Akhnoor, Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu and Pallanwala. Most women and children have left their homes to find safer places on their own. In neighbouring Himachal Pradesh in the Chhamb region more people have joined the exodus for safety (*Hindu*). The most unsettled are the people on the Punjab border. Inspector General (border) of Punjab Police, J. P. Birdi, estimates that over a quarter-of-a-million people left their homes on the Punjab border. The numbers given out by the Indian Government and Birdi are different, as here as in most refugee situations, due to incessant movement enumeration is difficult. It was noted by Birdi that, the worst affected areas are the Khem Karan and Khalra sectors. Most of the people from these sectors have moved to Taran Taran, Amritsar, and other places. People living in these sectors suffered heavily in the 1965 and 1971 conflicts because they had to vacate their lands and homes in a hurry which were looted when they fell into enemy hands. This time around they were prepared and the women and children moved to distant and safer places (Birdi). Often, in these areas the man will stay back to look after his house and fields. Since Partition, the violence associated with displacement has not diminished. While the majority of women in this region have been forced to move in with friends and family during the war, there is an enormous difference between them and the movement of women on the borders. On the LOC where there are army operations the women face complete dislocation and exclusion.

In Kargil, Drass, and Batalik it has not only been the shelling from the Pakistani side which has forced people to leave their homes, but also the occupation of villages by the Indian army which has "temporarily" inducted men into the army while shifting women and children to "safe places." For reasons of "security" women and children of villages on the LOC have been loaded into small trucks and "relocated to safer areas." As the army moves into the village, the men are inducted as temporary workers in the armed forces specifically to carry heavy guns up into the mountains. The women already removed to "safer" places are moved again, this time to unknown places. The men are not told where the women are, and at the end of their forced servitude in the army, the men move from village to village searching for their once-united families.

Toko, a small village with a population of about a little over hundred, about 500m. from the Srinagar-Leh

road towards the Line of Control in Kashmir, is a ghost town as the Indo-Pak artillery exchanges have caused large-scale migration (Shreedharan). Many women and children have been relocated to Somat. The village of Chaukyal, is another village from where people have been moved to "safer areas." Gagangeer, on the Srinagar-Leh road, has been host to an increasing number of displaced (*Indian Express*). All the displaced in Gagangeer are from Pandrass, a village near Drass and ethnically close to Baltistan. Families live in tin sheds provided by the government each measuring 1800 square feet and each housing approximately 20 families (Bose 1999). The 400 displaced, mostly women and children, live without adequate cooking facilities and clothing. As the army trucks, which brought them here, were too small and too few to carry their belongings, they arrived without clothing, bedding, or cooking utensils. The government provided only some rice and cooking oil. With temperatures falling below five degrees Celsius, the coming winter threatens their very survival.

In Kargil, Drass, and Batalik the state has been responsible for the dislocation of the family life of its citizens as well as the loss of honour of the male. Men lose not only their homes but also their rights as citizen as they are forced to become unpaid slaves in the army. This loss of autonomy as a head of family, in the eyes of their communities, is a loss of honour. Simultaneously, by keeping the women in their families out, these men have also lost control over their homes and personal lives. For the women, it is a dispossession of their ownership of goods and the autonomy they exercised within their own homes.

Unlike other women on the border, the women on the LOC have been removed not only from their homes, but also from their family and communities, and find themselves without any support. The women of Kargil live in a vacuum with no links to anyone else in the country. Unwanted, unheard, and disregarded they are excluded from the nationalist undertakings, and their nationalism always remains suspect.

Though unheard and isolated by the state, many women have however managed to support themselves and their children in the unknown places where they have been relocated. They learn to network with local communities in an attempt to overcome hostilities and contract solidarity. They master the art of negotiating with local bureaucracies, and in a very short time, strive to position themselves within the mainstream.

Control over economies: widows of freedom and the iconization of social displacement

The LOC controls all women who encounter it—the women on the borders, those who have crossed over, and those whose husbands are stationed there as soldiers. War treats all women alike whether they are of suspect nationalities or not. This war in India eulogized only the wives and mothers of "martyrs." This group has been used by the state to create a war hysteria and gain sanction and sympathy for its war-like actions. The symbolism of honour and the war widow as victim, projected by the state, challenges the autonomy of the war widow and sends her back to a privatized existence within the family.

At the funeral of Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja, his widow Alka, clutching her fidgety child, presented a perfect picture of bereavement and sacrifice. The government promised her a house, pension, and compensation. This was the beginning of a process where the state manipulated the image of the war widow as sacrificing herself at the altar of the nation. The colonization of women's bodies for exploitation is a historical tradition and women are at the mercy of the subjugator and their supporters. In this case, it is the dominant authority of the state that exploits them, assisted by the community, which carries out its directives. The imperatives of colonialism require that these women be iconized as widows of freedom. Their bodies, in the process, are used to further the cause of the nation. As most of the men who died were between the ages of 19 to 35 (Akbar), war widows are usually young and find themselves manipulated by both the state and their families.

A soldier's death leaves behind a windfall and a divided family. At stake are a compensation of usually 2-3,000 *rupees* (about US$75—a large sum when spent in Indian currency), a job, a gas agency, and a plot of land provided by the state. The money meant for the widow rarely reaches her. Most women have to hand over the money to other men in the family for safekeeping and proper use. Some have been brutally beaten for not agreeing to the demands of a dead husband's family. This matter is further complicated by the fact that, for most part, widows in the villages are illiterate. They are not aware of the financial assistance that is owed to them. They do not know where to go, nor how to complete any necessary forms. Some husbands' families have even been known to force a widow not to sign the official papers so that she does not get the money, as it will provide her freedom to marry someone else. In many cases where there are male relations, force is used to marry her off to them, so that the money remains within the family (Patnaik). The lump sum paid out at the time of a husband's death and the monthly pension belongs to the soldier's widow, but widows are too often victimized, blackmailed, and exploited, their attempts at empowerment threatened as they remain dependent on their husbands' families.

As money is collected by the state from public contributions in the name of the war widows, political parties are not left behind, making

promises that "we will look after our own." The media recounts earlier stories of war widows to feed temporary war hysteria. Soon these stories of Kargil war widows will be buried in oblivion like Major Batra's wife whose husband died in the 1971 conflict. A park and a road were named after Major Batra, but his widow today is homeless. Another 1971 war widow, Indra Sood's gas agency in Agra was revoked. Mohini Giri, former Chairperson of the National Commission for Women found a war widow crying outside a private school as the child born after her husband's death was denied admission (Sarkar). In Bihar, a flat and land promised to war widow Balamdina Ekka, as well as land to another widow, Jeera Devi, are yet to materialize (Prasad). Only 20 per cent of widows actually benefit as a result of bureaucratic obstructions (Akbar). The war widows of 1971 have lived with years of financial uncertainty, social ostracism, and daily needs that remain unmet. They know the nation has a short memory.

The war widow becomes the longest suffering casualty of war.[8] The systemic banishment of these women to the outskirts of society begins from their own homes. Upon widowhood, tradition demands that the woman's *mangalsutra* (a gold and black bead chain worn as a sign of marriage) be removed. Her bangles are broken, her *bindi* (red dot on forehead signifying auspiciousness) is wiped off, and she is obliged to dress in white. She remains in white dress, a symbol of purity, for the rest of her life. She is inauspicious, barred from wearing coloured clothes and ornaments. To be a true "Indian woman" one must be a *Sati Savitri,* a mythical character whose husband died but was pulled back from hands of *Yama,* the God of death, by her love and dedication, thus saving her from widowhood. Savitri is the epitome of a sacrificing womanhood and not Sati (self-immolation) as usually represented. Savitri is willing to sacrifice herself (by going with *Yama*). To escape this public shame of widowhood, a woman must die before her husband.

The state, and sometimes the society, temporarily suspends this tradition of inauspiciousness, especially during war, by allowing a widow to remarry. However, despite the newly defined national identity of Indian womanhood, the patriarchal order remains entrenched. A war hero's death bequeaths his widow with deprivation and societal discrimination. A 15-year-old widow, Ranjita, the wife of Jyoti Kumar, cries for the death of a husband she barely knew. Her marriage is the result of a marriage conducted during a one-day leave granted to the soldier. The marriage is unconsummated as her husband was summoned away by a call of duty. She cries not for her husband, but for her fate—a widow trapped in a hostile environment. She will have to spend a lifetime suppressing her sexuality. It will be a life robbed of any vestige of self-esteem under the guise of sympathy (Giri and Khanna).

Some attempt to challenge the Hindu constructions of widowhood, which bars their participation from social life, have been made. There are a few stories of empowerment and acceptance, where a mother of a slain son accepts her daughter-in-law as a daughter and treats her as a son (Akbar). In a patriarchal society this is an achievement of the highest order that a daughter–in–law can hope for, and that a mother-in-law can bestow. In Punjab, the custom of marrying a dead husband's younger brother still exists, and this makes it easy to control the widows. As women try to break these barriers, excuses are made that the objective is to protect their honour, which becomes tainted especially when they are living in a joint family with other males. Usually, however, these marriages ensure that compensation stays within the family. Twenty-two-year -old Sunita, pregnant and barely widowed for 15 days, is expected to marry her 18-year-old brother-in-law. She wants to find a job and look after her child. Her mother-in-law disapproves and feels that if she uses force, Sunita may call in the *Panchayat* (local elected leadership), creating a rift in the family structure (Iyer). The potential empowerment of women is seen as a threatening force that will break the traditional forms of control.

The widows therefore, become similar to the women living on the LOC and those crossing it victims of conflict.

Conclusion: women across borders and the nationalist discourse

I began with the nationalist discourse of a Partitioned India, situating Kashmir in the context of the borders and boundaries in peoples lives created by the state. Considering that nationalism has a language of its own, and that this language is gendered, one can assume that it is reconstructed with each change in the political structures. To uncover the journey of nationalist discourse in Kashmir, it is important to question if nationalist discourse is the sum total of a people's perceptions, views, and concepts, or is it something more? Does it include women?

We realize that the nationalist discourse in Kashmir today cannot be discussed in a homogenous setting of territorial space and gender. Women across contested borders are in a zone of a nowhere land. In this vacuum, the production of gender in the discourses and practices of nationalism, as elsewhere, constructs women as subordinate to men (Maunaguru). The answer to Enloe's questions of whether nationalism has sprung from a "masculinized memory" (3) is affirmative. In the history of the Kashmiri "nation," it is the men who have constructed not only the ideology of freedom but also women's space (and place) within it.

Women remain on the sidelines, dominated by men, whether in exile, or as widows, or as women living on the LOC. Since 1947, nothing has

changed in terms of Kashmiri women's rights, responsibilities, and equality, frozen in a time warp at the borders of two nations. The widow of Kargil symbolizes the dignity, the sacrifice of the nation, and the *hourie* of attaining the non-achievable. The widow's place in the nationalist discourse is related to the government's use of methods to retain ascendancy of power, and remaining within the cultural strategy of the party.

Women's most significant attributes have been seen as signifiers of ethnic differences and in the reconstruction of the Kashmiri ethnic national category. Veena Das's questioning of the commitment to cultural rights which leads to empowering the community against the state, but in which the individual is totally engulfed by the community, applies to Kashmiri women. The nationalist discourse acquires great significance in the shifting of identities and of cultures.[9] The women in the Kargil war are currently positioned between the state and community, their identities merged in one or the other as necessitated. The Kargil conflict has confirmed the pattern of Kashmir in general where what counts are class, caste, and ethnicity, but what cuts across all these factors is the marginalization of women in Kashmiri politics.

In the Kargil conflict, the Kashmiri narrative of nationalism has little meaning, as the historical origins of the two are different. To contextualize, where do the women of Kargil stand in this widespread narrative of violence for the achievement of a Kashmiri nation? We find that they neither fit into the Hindustan, land of the Hindus, Pakistan of the Sunni Muslims, or Ladhak of the Tibetan Buddhists. Ideologically closer to Iran (Khomeini's) of the Shia Muslims, they are nevertheless physically distanced from them.[10] Linking their nationalism with Iran fulfils Benedict Anderson's conception of a nation belonging to "a kinship" or religion rather than an ideology (5), but one is tempted to ask whether the hanging of Khomeini's photographs in their houses does not contradict this understanding of nationalism. Only in assuming that adherence to Khomeini's thoughts is not ideology but religion, can one understand Khomeinism as a religious cult that fulfils these people's needs for a barrier against Sunni nationalism on the other side of the border, where the *jihad* is not only against the Hindu or Buddhist, but also the Shia. I would argue that perhaps it would be better to understand them, as Perry Anderson has perceived them—that theirs is a nationalism, which is yet not born, because it has not been opposed. Presently we can assume that this nationalist space is filled by the nations on both sides of the border, which are the "other" and, therefore, incompatible with their feelings of nationalism. Khomeini, thus, fills the space until they discover their own identity.

Ultimately the rise of religious or cultural nationalism is a cause of concern for women but unsettled borders question the very belonging of women. To borrow from Menon and Bhasin's observation, the first can be explained in terms of a tendency to impose an idealized notion of womanhood. Their second observation of women across borders is much more complicated as it is related to women's identity in a volatile situation of continuing wars and violence. Women's emergence as full-fledged citizens of any country is countered by their very being on a border that is not acknowledged and a gendered-national boundary in which they are not provided a space.

For women living on the LOC, attaining a national identity is not easy. For instance, in 1971, most of the village women and children afraid of the war moved deeper into Pakistani and Indian territory. Zebunissa, from a small village on the LOC, was originally from Pakistan and married to an Indian. Borders did not mean anything to her. Her perception of nationhood has been mediated by kinship relationships. An outsider from across the border, she has lived under the shadow of fear. At risk is her body, which the Border Security Force can occupy at any time. A Shia in a Sunni-dominated country, she is also at risk in her former homeland of Pakistan. Do women on borders share in nationalism/national projects? Zebunissa has no answer. For her, nationalism is gendered and she has a role to play only if the male order of the state and the society allow her to. Border areas have little room for parliamentary democracy. Zebunissa, a Pakistani national, is today an Indian. What is her nationality? She has no passport, and her name is not in the voting list.

Women across borders have a difficult role to play. The duality of women's role can be assessed from the Pakistani side, which constructed them as freedom fighters, and from the Indian side which interprets their role as objects of sexuality. A woman of Kargil, steeped in poverty and a Shi'ite Islam, replies that nationalism for her means stability in her life. It means keeping the *mullahs* away from her domain. It means freedom to education and health services. It means that nationalism is mundane and steeped in the everyday.

Asha Hans is the Coordinator, Centre for Women's Studies, Utkal University

[1]I would use the nationalist discourse in Kashmir as part of an Indian discourse going by Sumantra Bose's description that the conflict in Kashmir is not of a Muslim-majority state against a predominantly Hindu state, but of a people against the brutally coercive power of the state as a whole (1998: 144). From a feminist perspective, where women are at the receiving end of state-controlled and militant induced crime, this paradigm is useful.

[2]The complexity of Kashmir's history has been documented mostly from a political angle. The best book written to date is by Sisir Gupta who provides a detailed analysis of the

post-Partition phase in an objective manner. Later writings have included Jha; Puri; and Bose (1996) who have tried to provide unbiased views but the Indian perspective is more detailed. Schofield provides a Pakistani perspective. Hasan (1993); Hasan (1997); and Rai, in general have analyzed Partition extremely well. There is some reference to abduction and sale of Kashmiri women by the raiders of 1948, in Menon's history on the integration of Indian states (qtd. in Misra).

[3]Amartya Sen argues that in India, the limits of national identity can be compared with the identities associated with first, the more restricted boundaries of community and groups within a nation, and second, the more inclusive coverage of broader categories. The latter, for instance, could be an Asian or even that belonging to the human race. Some identities, he argues, can go beyond the nation, and yet within the nation define a part of it. For instance, the identity of a woman as a Muslim, which is clearly not confined to the limits of a nation, and yet exists within a nation (such as India), will be a correspondingly circumscribed identity (such as being an Indian woman, or an Indian Muslim) (10-11).

[4]The Partition had little legitimacy in the eyes of the majority Hindu state. The dismemberment of the body of "Mother India" was an attack at its honour. The Indian war cry as projected by the soldier remains *Dharti ma ki kasam* (Hindi: I swear in the name of the mother earth) /or *Madre watan* (Urdu: mother nation). The Hindu state becomes significant today as the ruling party, the BJP, has been very closely linked ideologically to the RSS, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party which has refused to accept the Partition and the origins of an Islamic state carved out of Indian territory.

[5]The Prime Minister of India with a large group of officials drove across the border in a bus into Pakistan to meet Nawaz Sharif and his colleagues. This diplomatic initiative, after nuclear testing by both states, was seen as the beginning of a peace initiative.

[6]The two major groups are Lashkar-e-Toyeba made up of non-Kashmiri Sunnis, and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen which is composed mainly of Afghans, Pakistanis, and even some Arabs.

[7]There are some other views as provided by army sources that these women are porters forced to bring in weapons and other essential items because, unlike men, they would face less of a threat from Indian armed forces then men.

[8]*A World of Widows* by Margaret Owen provides an incisive analysis of the status of widows of South Asia.

[9]I take the nationalist discourse here as Kaviraj refers it—an intellectual process through which the conception of an India (read Kashmiri) nation is gradually formed and the discourse that forms it is in favour of it and gives it historical shape (301).

[10]Khomeini in 1980 ordered *Hijab* (curtain) Law and ordered women working in the state sector to veil. In Kargil, the women always covered their heads but the veil was never in practice. The Mullahs took up Khomeini's diktat though their power to implement the law was limited.

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