

SOCIO POLITICAL IMPACT OF CONFLICT SITUATION ON YOUTH IN KASHMIR WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON DISTRICT SHOPIAN

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ABSTRACT

Conflict as a social phenomenon of competition between actors with incompatible goals is as old as human civilization. Conflict is a part of social interaction when state delegates on issues on what concerns them, it becomes a conflictual situation. Nowadays conflicts and wars are numerous and often extremely cruel. As such they are a serious threat to the health and well being of millions of people. Emerging political struggle, armed conflict and wars have a very different impact on present population than the conventional war of the past. Psychologists dealt with inner conflicts and dynamics of attitudinal change and political philosophers addressed themselves to questions of power and authority, physiocrats concentrated on competition for the necessities of life; and anthropologists studied conflicts rooted in primitive customs that had integrative functions. To philosophical category, they denote conflict the clash of power in the striving of all things to become manifest. A distinct category of social behavior- as two parties trying to get something they both cannot have. The Kashmir conflict remains one of the most protracted in the world. It cannot be compartmentalized into a particular typology of conflict and its complex dimensions are geo-political, ethnic and religious in nature. High unemployment, corruption and nepotism are important factors for the alienation of Kashmiri youth who see bad governance as the failure of the Indian state. The student community has been extremely disappointed with the failure of the government to tackle the problems of unemployment and low-quality education at all levels. The sense of political powerlessness is strong amongst students who have no platform to be part of the political processes engaging with the conflict. Conflict in Kashmir has affected various aspects of the youth, including student life. Ahmad (2013) has argued that heavy militarization makes students vulnerable to insecurity, abuse and harassment, especially females. Another study has documented the widespread psychological disorders including depression and stress amongst the youth as a consequence of conflict and its impact on everyday life (Aminet.al, 2009). There is scarcity of literature on the theme of conflict and education in Kashmir. There is only study dealing with the impact of the conflict situation on youth. Freedom of expression granted by the Constitution of India is also applicable to discussions on nationalism. For Kashmiris, it is at the core of the Kashmir conflict and needs to be given a safe space to engage with. This will also facilitate discussion amongst the fragmented mobilizations of students and make them a strong stakeholder which can engage politically with the community and the political elite. The present study is identifying and analyzing the impact of ongoing conflict situation on Youth of District Shopian. The qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted to answer the research question.

KEY WORDS: Kashmir conflict situation 2016, youth impact, preventive measures

INTRODUCTION

Conflict as a social phenomenon of competition between actors with incompatible goals is as old as human

civilization. Conflict is a part of social interaction when state delegates on issues on what concerns them, it becomes a conflictual situation. "Generally conflicts arise

when people are competing for the same resources, when the people are unhappy with how they are governed, when people's beliefs clash religious and political views or ethnic difference cause conflict. Indeed, conflicts of all kinds most frequently arise when people feel threatened - regardless of whether the threat is real. It is harder to soothe and reassure people when they are frightened or angry.”

The history of **conflict theory** can be traced back to thinkers such as [Machiavelli](#) or [Thomas Hobbes](#), both of whom viewed humanity cynically. In its current form, conflict theory attempts to refute the functionalist approach, which considers that societies and organizations function so that each individual and group plays a specific role, like organs in the body. There are radical basic assumptions (society is eternally in conflict, which might explain [social change](#)), or moderate ones (custom and conflict are always mixed). The moderate version allows for functionalism to operate as an equally acceptable theory since it would accept that even negative social institutions play a part in society's self-perpetuation.

In August 1947, the British left the Indian Subcontinent after partitioning the Indian subcontinent into two independent nation states, India and Pakistan on religious communal lines. India and Pakistan established their political control over the territories of J&K. Thus two separate political entities were created on the disputed territory. The emergency of these political entities altered the ground situation. Since the independence, the two countries repeatedly fought three wars and engaged in low-intensity conflict over Kashmir.

To overcome the situation, many agreements for example; Karachi Agreement of 1949, Tashkent Agreement of 1966, the Simla Agreement of 1972 were signed but remained ineffective. In addition to these, the peace talk process through Agra Summit 2001, Confidence Building Measures for peace, Zero Tolerance Programmes were seen with high publicity but no visible results were seen so far. Both the countries show commitments to follow the above mention agreements but again failed because the agreements are not very clear to implements hence, peace seems so far off. The history of the last 60 years in Kashmir is deeply connected with the levels of violence. Conflict in Kashmir has affected various aspects of the youth, including student life. Recurrent patterns of

repression, political assassinations and institutional chaos are historically correlated. The researcher discusses the various dimensions of the Kashmir conflict, provide literature on impact of conflict on students in higher education. High unemployment, corruption and nepotism are important factors for the alienation of Kashmiri youth who see bad governance as the failure of the Indian state. Many respondents said that they see the state government as puppets in the hands of the Indian state and do not have the trust of the majority of the Kashmiri people. The student community has been extremely disappointed with the failure of the government to tackle the problems of unemployment and low-quality education at all levels. The lack of scholarships and financial aid for economically disadvantaged students was also a significant grievance. The failure of the Indian and the Kashmiri political elite to resolve the protracted conflict has created a sense of disillusionment amongst the youth. The sense of political powerlessness is strong amongst students who have no platform to be part of the political processes engaging with the conflict.

The State policy document for Youth 2014, lists inclusion an important goal. Defining inclusion the policy states: Enablement and capability building for disadvantaged youth; Ensuring economic opportunities for youth in conflict-affected regions; Develop a multi-pronged approach to supporting youth with disability; Create awareness and opportunities to prevent youth being put at risk. In keeping with the spirit of this document, and especially in Kashmir, affected by prolonged conflict and lack of proper governance, it becomes important to understand and gather information on the nature of youth participation in political movements for Azaadi; the socio-political and cultural conditioning/contexts, ‘meaning’ creations and circumstances that become grounds for youth recruitment; the language of Azaadi in use both by the State and by youth/militants/community leaders/families that informs and impacts these movements; and the emerging trends in youth movements in different parts of the region, composition of protestors and their professed aspirations. Last but not least are the application and implementation and role of State Policy and the political repercussions of discriminatory and political incidents of violence targeting communities in the larger context of the country.

The ongoing conflict situation has disturbed all aspects of a common Kashmiri's life. Therefore to identify, analyse and understand the socio-political dimension of Kashmir conflict, the researcher carried out the research on the topic "Socio- Political dimensions of ongoing Conflict situation in district Shopian" as it fulfilled the need of the academic research. This endeavor could help in responding to emerging issues of concern which could result in long term and sustained development by designing a strategy in order to promote good governance.

METHODOLOGY

This empirical study gives us an insight of different dimensions based on the field work and observations carried out in district Shopian of Kashmir. The aim of the theoretical analysis of conflict situation is to develop an understanding of the variables to gauge the impact on youth of District Shopian. This enables us to understand, explain, analyze, and identify the present scenario and future mechanisms that help us out to look for impact of conflict. To study the impact and intensity of the political problems and social issues on youth emerged due to the ongoing conflict situation in Shopian. This research study was carried out in district Shopian of Kashmir. The total sample size was of 100 male respondents (literate and illiterate, Rural/ Urban).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social science and Medicine 55(2002) 175 -190 published a paper on "**Political Violence, Ethnic Conflict, and Contemporary Wars: Broad Implications for Health and Social Well-being**" by Duncan Pedersen. This paper focuses on the broader health implications of political violence and armed conflict. The researcher reviewed one of the sub chapters 'War trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' of the same paper. The overview of the paper is that in poor or developing countries, economic and environmental decline, assets depletion and erosion of the substance base lead to further misery and food insecurity due to the conflict. Despite the growing number of armed conflict and wars throughout the world, not enough attention has been provided to the patterns of distress being experienced by local masses. The short and long-term impact assessment of civilian population of these countries has multiple many health problems.

Varghese Koithara has authored a path breaking book "**Crafting Peace in Kashmir**" through a realist lens. In this case, a carefully researched and thoughtfully argued framework with which to view the current peace-processes on Kashmir has been presented. There may be many options to a Kashmir settlement, but the one advocated by Koithara seems both reasonable and feasible.

Violent conflicts have the potential to disrupt or completely destroy state machinery and its functioning. Besides destruction of physical capital, the impact on human capital (because of deaths, casualties, brain drain due migration) can obstruct delivery of public services and economic development in general. Milton (2013) argues that higher education has an important role in post-conflict peace building by providing human capital for physical and sectoral re-construction of the economy (health, education, infrastructure, etc), facilitating rule of law by providing legal training counseling on human rights and providing humanitarian assistance. Milton makes his argument in the case of post-conflict countries of Iraq and Libya where the state authority has completely collapsed. Higher education institutions can contribute to democratic culture and dialogue in conflict settings where democratic institutions and governance has collapsed or weakened. By creating a civic and democratic political culture amongst students through engagement in civil society activities, political organization and student elections, higher education can provide the breeding ground for future leaders and citizens (ibid).

Higher education can potentially play a constructive role in developing a socio-economic infrastructure which helps in engaging with conflict in a peaceful and just manner. This engagement includes facilitating community dialogues, engaging with human rights violations and transitional justice and reconciliation. Community dialogues become important in conflict environments and higher education has a recognized role in processes of 'conflict transformation' in conflict affected societies. Conflict transformation may be defined as "actions that seek to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of conflict by addressing its root causes over the long term, with the aim to transform negative ways of dealing with conflict into positive, constructive ones" (Austin quoted in Milton, 2013) with focus on structural, behavioral and attitudinal aspects of conflict. One way by which higher education can facilitate in

conflict transformation is through building academic co-operation amongst students and faculty divided by identities, which helps build social capital and facilitates trust and co-operation (ibid).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Young people have much at stake, yet they have little say in the policies and activities that pertain to their lives. The debate over the precise causes and effects of armed conflicts on youth to be analysed through many interlinking components—including social, health, economic, political, psychological and cultural factors. Political conflict generates other conditions that pose risk to development. Such conditions include features of the social ecology like displacement, access to basic resources, destruction of social networks, among many factors that threaten safety and security (Catani et al., 2010; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Steel et al., 2009). The relatively few studies that have discriminated between types of conflict conditions suggest that disruptions in access to resources in the social domain (e.g. loss of life, separation, loss of social support) and economic domain (e.g. economic self-sufficiency, ability to buy staples, breakdown of basic services, access to health care) are significantly related to greater difficulty among youth and adults.

Historically, young people have consistently been involved in political conflict. This has been especially apparent in recent years with the uprisings in the Kashmir. It is important to understand how young people function in these challenging circumstances

The outburst of Political conflict in Kashmir late 1989 led to the vulnerable situations of year 2008, 2010 and 2016. This spate of unrest is but the most recent sobering reminder of just how often and how durably societies confront violent conflict. These fresh instances (2016) of conflict also bring to the fore the awareness of how young people are involved in political conflict. The wave of youth-generated political unrest has increased the uncertainty among the population of entire Kashmir region. It has arrested all the development activities in valley. It tragically kills, maims and disabled many. How have their experiences impacted their functioning and development? This is a crucial question for social scientists to answer, not only to improve theoretical understanding of youth functioning in the face of adversity, but to also offer valid insight to those who write policy and design and

conduct programs on behalf of youth well-being. Unfortunately, answers from research are thin, incomplete, and sometimes misleading. In this study, the researcher has reviewed .

The period of militancy between 1989 and 2008 had an unprecedented impact on Kashmiri society. An uncertain future has created an identity crisis and divided the youth along ideological and political lines. Continued conflict may militarise young Kashmiris, which can potentially constrain peace and give rise to future extremism. Economically weak, unemployed and vulnerable youth are a soft target; and religious fundamentalism threatens to lead young people down a violent path that could derail the peace process. Kashmiri youth in general oppose any sort of violence and increasingly realise the need to strengthen the peace process through use of confidence building measures. The aim of this study is to identify the socio-political issues of youth confront against the backdrop of the Kashmir conflict.

A political process that ensures participation, equity and inclusiveness is the hallmark of democratic governance. Good political governance provides stable micro and macro-economic development and promotes free competition. Participation can be made possible either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent young people's interests, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and accountability. Conflict and governance are interlinked. Young people believe that the Kashmir conflict has negatively affected governance. They believe their socio-economic deprivation derives from it. The people of Kashmir have been politically aware since partition. The struggle for adult franchise and democratic space for the people is still debatable. People had to face state repression, hundreds of thousands were jailed, but they did not give up the struggle for their basic rights.

They believe political process serves only the interests of political elite whose survival is maintained by close family ties and connections with power holders. "I cannot get a party ticket because I'm not the daughter of a political leader, or bureaucrat, nor do I have the support of big clan " *a boy of district Shopian expressed his view on governance*"

The majority of youth of Shopian strongly believe this dominance has given birth to a privileged political class buttressed by the religious belief of "Azadi"(freedom).

This found that many of Shopian youth participate in elections and are civically engaged. However, their opinions regarding existing political system are fragmented. Youth of Shopian showed very low level of trust and believe that it is marred with corrupt practices and revolves around few influential clans. Young people view Kashmir as a politically misgoverned and unstable entity. They associate it with inept political parties, corrupt political leadership, family patronage and excessive dependence on central administrative setup. Youth tend to believe that intraparty democracy, which mainly includes leadership and candidate selection, does not follow any fair and transparent process. Youth generally term political parties as 'family parties'. Most candidly display their mistrust of leaders and are disgruntled over the distribution of party tickets, which they believe are 'bought'. They think that the selection of candidates depends solely on ties with the political party heads in Pakistan. They also say that politicians do not have any respect for legal, ethical or social obligations towards people. Lust for power and personal gain is regarded as having weakened the political system. "My fate is at the mercy of those for whom I did not vote."**Feroz, an unemployed youth said**

Therefore, Respondents showed no faith in political system in Kashmir. Contrary to this, a significant number of youth were showed interest participation in order to revival of system. During research it was found that levels of civic participation among the youth were high. Youth use different means to express political views through speeches, debates and social networks. Many regularly donate money to social organisations or unions to keep them running. Print and electronic media is a great source for youth to find out about the government's activities.

Although most young people in Shopian are civically engaged and aware of their basic rights and duties, they widely believe they do not enjoy the constitutional rights that citizens of a state should. They feel their rights have been denied on the pretext of war and

that questioning the status quo has had unprecedented socio-political consequences.

In addition to express concern about politicians, young people show scared support for the democratic process because they believe that elections are rigged always in the valley therefore not the way to bring about peaceful change.

Youth is critical engaged – the overwhelming majority vote, act as volunteers, and use electronic, print and social media (Facebook), radio, processions and rallies to express their voice.

Youth brain drain is a direct consequence of migratory push and pulls factors. Migration is widespread in the subcontinent and the loss of talented and trained human capital has greatly affected socio-economic development.

The support for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict was shared in focus group discussions and it was found disagreement and disengagement towards the process because of mistakes are repeated many times. Youth of Shopian consider the conflict of Kashmir as a political issue and stressed that the human dimension of the conflict of Kashmir should not be ignored. Youth believe the peace process should continue with all seriousness.

Further, political unrest contribute to the mobilization of youth towards protest and gains nothing but destruction. Democracy and political stability are closely associated with maintaining peace and preventing the eruption of violent conflict. This type of situation is generally reflected in low standards of living and in both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

It was found that College students are especially vulnerable because they felt victimized and humiliated. They may have experienced repression, human rights violations, and deprivation of needed resources and/or alienation. Their aggression appears to be a form of retaliation deriving from past feelings of indignity and degradation. It was found that that uneducated youth, educated unemployed youth and school dropouts are engaged in protest. This is perhaps because they are less secure and unsaid resulting into unrest.

“I am in my undergraduate college. Our schools and colleges are closed since 8th of July 2016. Curfew was imposed in whole Kashmir, calls to protest the deaths of youngsters at the hand of the security forces..... we would be restricted to our homes..... Our examinations are postponed. In the end, we had to prepare on our own for a very diluted syllabus. the situation always tense.....it can deteriorate any moment. Every day, there is stone-pelting by youth, new call for hartal and I see no future in such situation. There is uncertainty so I don't dream as far as my future is concerned” .Riyaz, Youth of Shopian

“Hartals disrupt our class work and fieldwork. Even if we can afford to travel, our families are concerned for our safety because of the uncertainty. Because of the delay in academic work, some of my friends received their M.Phil Degree one year late. They lost one year.” M Phill Scholar from Shopian

The heavy presence of security forces in the vicinity of educational institutions has also created a sense of fear of being persecuted amongst students.

“ To get a job, we need to get No-Objection Certificates from the local police station and the Procter. If we are booked under PSA or a FIR is lodged against us..... if we are part of a demonstration, we can be booked for being involved in anti-national and anti-state activities our careers can be destroyed. “ A researcher from Shopian

It was also found that the vast majority of studies on the impact of political conflict on youth have focused on negative psychological functioning as the sole or prime indicator of youth well-being. Thus, an immediate focus of attention when considering well-being would be the youths' assessment of the adequacy of the change that conflict has produced in their prevailing contexts.

It is too early to assess the impact of these and other activities in the case of conflict situation of Kashmir in 2016. However, several lessons have been learned and conclusions drawn from the post-conflict experiences with regard to demobilizing, reintegrating and preventing the involvement of youth in conflict

- There is a need to strengthen preventive measures. Educational opportunities, including the teaching of peace and tolerance, should be

provided for all children, Projects for which there is high demand, such as the World Rehabilitation Fund's income-generating and skill building initiatives (supported by UNDP and other international organizations) need to reach greater numbers of people.

- Constant efforts for advocacy work with local organizations, the media, teachers, Religious leaders, and community leaders are critical.
- For demobilization, channels of contact with non-governmental groups need to be identified. Coordinated efforts among NGOs and international organizations could facilitate this process.
- In the reintegration, trust needs to be established before they can engage in a dialogue about their future.
- While respect for native customs and traditions is considered tremendously important, as in most developing countries, local conventions should not be observed to the extent that the rights and protection of youth are jeopardized. Transitional periods need to offer a window of opportunity for youth and marginalized group. Serious efforts to be created, maintained, mechanisms need to be established to help affected people and provide them with more promising prospects for the future.
- Increased youth participation at all levels, including within the political sphere, would help put an end to negative feelings towards traditional authority and governance structures. Media can assist in reconstructing trust by, for example, disseminating important information to a wide audience. In addition, youth oriented programmes should better assess the effectiveness of measures designed to address the needs of their stakeholders—by listening to them. Failure to listen means a failure to meet the needs of stakeholders.
- To understand the dynamics surrounding youth and violence, however, the underlying social injustices must be analyzed at various levels. Building a more complete picture of realities on the ground provides a solid foundation for the development of appropriate prevention

mechanisms. In implementing prevention strategies, injustices must be addressed not only in areas where armed conflict is prevalent, but also in areas where high tension levels threaten the security of civilians.

- To ascertain and address the roots of the problems that cause violent acts, conflict prevention and peace-building processes must incorporate efforts to identify the frustrations and interests of youth, who bear the brunt of these injustices, as well as those of other groups in society.
- Aid agencies and Governments must ensure the integration of religious leaders, teachers, youth, their relatives and other community actors in these processes, and each actor must take on specific responsibilities. Conflict is one of the most complex issues the global community is facing today; its impact is apparent in every part of the world. Preventive measures have become an essential component of efforts to ensure a brighter future. Enabling youth to make major positive contributions is one way to minimize or neutralize factors that contribute to violence, increase global security, and prevent further armed conflict. Exposure to violence during the formative years can have a defining influence on the character of young people involved in armed conflict—either as perpetrators or as victims. The effects of armed conflict on the physical and psychological well-being of young people, and on their future prospects for leading normal lives, are a cause for serious concern.
- Notwithstanding these considerations, there have been numerous examples of young people taking part in activities that build peace, promote a culture of peace, and ultimately prevent conflict. These efforts should be strengthened and supported.

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