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IMPACT OF POLITICAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF HALF-WIDOWS IN KASHMIR VALLEY

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Abstract

Kashmir is known as paradise on earth, but this paradise has paved way from paradise to pandemonium due to septuagenarian disturbance, confusion, chaos, uncertainty, murder, mystery and brutality. These disturbances of seventy years have brought killings and disappearances evident to a large scale in the valley. Thousands of Kashmiri people are killed and disappeared in this turmoil. The focus of the present study is on the role played by militancy and Indian army on the tumult in Kashmir, impact of this turmoil on the lives of Kashmiris. The disappearances in the valley have dropped thousands of women without husbands. They don't know whether their husbands are alive or dead. The missing of their husbands has compelled to search for them, which brought them to the extreme poverty. First the earning hand of the family is missing, now the only one who was able to protect their family from the downfall is the plightful woman, mother of the children and half-widow of the disappeared, who spends much of his energy, time and money on the search of their husbands. This has dropped a deeper impact on the economy of those women and their families. Their poverty and roaming from place to place in search of their husbands have deteriorated their position, status and impact in the society. The focus of this study is to see the social and economic position of half-widow in Kashmir valley. It will also shed some light on the plightful condition of those half-widows and the cause behind their traumatic experiences.

Key-Words

Militancy, Military, Half-Widows, Killing, Disappearances, Turmoil, Kashmir Valley.

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Introduction:

Half-widow is a woman, whose husband is missing and not confirm whether dead or alive. It is a grave issue, which is neglected by everybody. Academicians and policy makers need to join hands for the eradication of this crime and provide immediate help to the victims in the form of financial support, moral support, and intellectual support, support of reporting, publicizing and all possible provisions. The half widows are entombed by two distresses, one is search for their own identity and another is to hold the burden of their family on their weak shoulders. They are deprived by the government, separatists, society, relatives and in most of the cases by their own families.

Women throughout globe in conflicted zones particularly in Kashmir Valley are the worst sufferers. They are physically, psychologically, culturally and economically deprived of the basic right to live a happy life. In Kashmir thousands of the women have lost their husbands, some are killed and other disappeared. Those whose husbands are disappeared are worst kind of sufferers when compared to those whose husbands are killed. At least they are aware that their husbands have been killed, some of them remarried and others have a definite propose to live but the women whose husbands are disappeared neither can they remarry, nor are they certain about their lives. The society and religion doesn't allow them to remarry. They have only two purposes of living, one for the sake of their children and second roaming here and there in search of their husbands. Sometimes society blame them for this also, they are called morally deprived, prostitutes, concubines and much more tags they receive from the so called civilized society.

Half widows face various economic, social and emotional insecurities. These various insecurities are compounded rather than eliminated by the authorities. Furthermore, their children are also traumatized, left in extreme and vulnerable poverty, exploitation, psychological depression and depravity. Irrespective of this terrible situation most of the half widows show

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immense strength and resilience acting as the sole breadwinners for their families. Their resilience to fight the odds is the image of hopefulness- which is the other reason they are surviving for.

The vulnerable kind of reality is that government doesn't have the actual figure of half-widows in Kashmir valley. They don't even take the burden of estimating their number, so what help can they supposed to get from such kind of authorities. Thanks to Human Rights Group in the region of Jammu and Kashmir in coalition with JKCCS, who estimated the number of half-widows in Kashmir which is said to be around 1500 approximately. JKCCS have also identified 2700 hundred unnamed mass graves in Baramulla district in 2009. They requested the authorities to identify their identity, so that the family and women, who are still waiting for the arrival of their husbands, can come out of their prejudices, illusions and dreams.

Statement of the Problem:

A group of poor half-widows from Kashmir are living in desolate conditions and are suffering from psychological illnesses are inclination towards suicide. Many have fallen prey to psychological problems including depression, phobia, and emotional instability and post traumatic stress disorders. For many half-widows, the constant dilemma of whether or not to remarry is juggled with a sense of loyalty and love for their missing husband and responsibility towards their children. The overburden of rearing, giving education and holding other responsibilities of children is a herculean task for a single mother in the conditions of turmoil and economic boom. In cases it has also been noted that many half-widows do not want to live with their in-laws as they are treated more as domestic helpers than as members of the family. As half-widows face hard and stressful lives, opportunities are desperately few and far between. The world must know how they grieve. Women as widows face various economic problems particularly in the region of Kashmir, where opportunities are already culminated and few. "There is no other source of economic support as most of the women don't possess property and eke outliving doing piece-rate work" (Dewan, 1994).

Objectives:

1. To study the impact of political instability, on the lives of women.
2. To study the Socio-economic impact on the lives of women.
3. To assess the reasons and causes for disappearance of men.
4. To study the impact of disappearance (Psychological) of husbands on their wives.

Research Methodology:

This study used a survey research method, employing interviews, conversations and observation in both rural and urban areas of the Kashmir Valley, assesses the impact of the on-going armed conflict on women. The research is an Empirical Study. The Primary data is collected through field survey besides it researcher also reviewed the secondary data by referring the government records, reports of Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), Newspapers, journals, annual reports, police reports etc. Finally, the data is compiled systematically and analyzed in a scientific manner and presented in the form of this research paper.

Vol. 3 Issue 4 (August 2017)

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Area of Study:

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the 29 states in India. It has a distinct history and consists of three parts: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Those three parts are different from each other by composition of the population, historical background, topography and language etc. Ladakh is barely populated area of J&K. The State is further divided into 22 districts. Among these 22 districts 10 districts of Kashmir valley are conflict zone districts. The study is conducted in these districts only. Violence, oppression, depression, killing, murder, mystery, displacement and other grave issues are prevalent in Kashmir valley. Kashmir valley is called paradise on earth, but this paradise is most deprived region of the world. These disturbances have paved the way of Kashmiri people from paradise to pandemonium. The present study is done on one section of this deprived population which is known as half-widows.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Age Group of the Respondents

| S. No | Age | Number | Percentage |
|--------------|-------|------------|------------|
| 1. | 26-35 | 56 | 18.66 |
| 2. | 36-45 | 125 | 41 |
| 3. | 46-55 | 74 | 24.66 |
| 4. | 56-65 | 45 | 15 |
| Total | | 300 | 100 |

Age of the respondents is one of the most important characteristics in understanding their views about the particular problems; it, by and large indicates level of maturity of individuals. In that sense age becomes more important to examine the response. The table 1 and Pie Chart 1 reveal that majority of the respondents fall in the category of age group of 36-45. Besides this the researcher's aim is to also find out the impact of political turmoil on the women's lives in Kashmir valley. The political instability starts from 1990 onwards so this age group knows the ground reality of the situation and is the worst sufferers. 24.66% of the respondents belong to the age group of 46-55 while there is meager fall in the age group between 56-65 years. The table also reveals that 18.66 % respondents are in the age group of 25-35 years which is considered as the most reproductive period of life in terms of resources and livelihood.

Fig.1. Shows age group of respondents

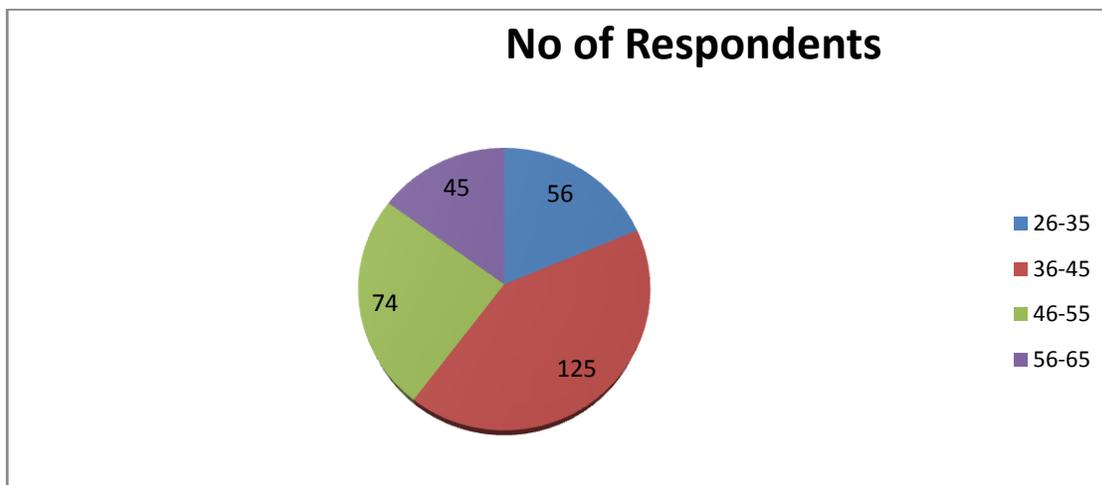


Table 2
Age group of respondents and their Health Problems

| Age | PTSD | Depressio n | Hypertensio n | UTI | Osteoporosi s | None | Total |
|--------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 26-35 | 32 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 56 (18.66) |
| 36-45 | 59 | 24 | 14 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 125 (41) |
| 46-55 | 22 | 14 | 17 | 10 | 7 | 4 | 74 (24.66) |
| 56-66 | 15 | 8 | 12 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 45 (15) |
| Total | 128 (42 .66) | 53 (17.66) | 48 (16) | 34 (11.33) | 17 (5.66) | 20 (6.66) | 300 (100) |

Source: Field survey 2017

From the above table 2 and below graph it clearly shows that various health problems faced by the half widows such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which constitutes 128 respondents i.e. 42.66 % suffer from this disorder. Besides it 53 respondents (17.66%) suffer from depression while as 48 victims (16%) suffer from hypertension which not only affects on their heart but also

their lungs and kidneys. The table reveals that 11.33% respondents are suffering from Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) and it is very difficult for them to consult the doctor because of various social factors. Osteoporosis is also one of the common diseases related to bones and joints of which 17 respondents i.e. 5.66% are having this disease. Only a small number of 6.6% respondents said they were free from the above diseases. This table also reveals that disappearance of their husband not only results the worst impacts on the mental health of the respondents but also the physical well being of the respondents which become impediments of their day today work.

Fig: 2

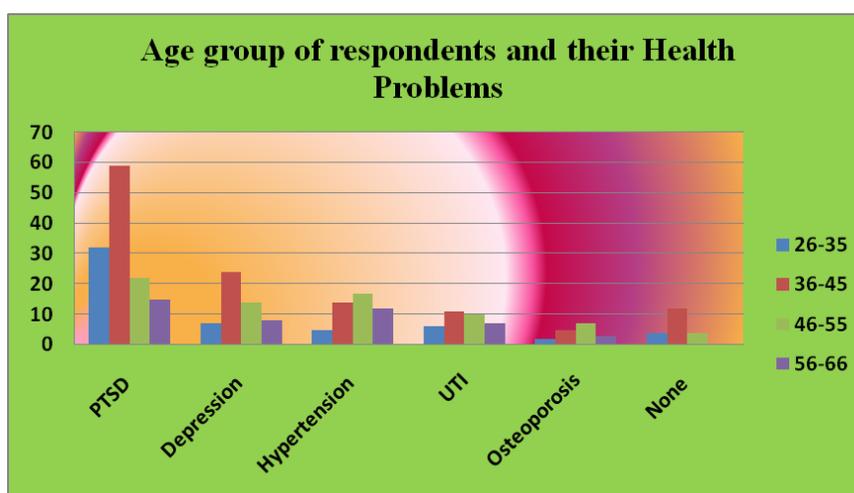


Table 3: % Distribution of Respondents by the Agencies Responsible for their Disappearance and the Reasons.

| Pick by whom | Army Worker | Active Militant | Surrendered Militant | Working in police | Religious teacher | Innocent | Total |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Army | 02 | 2 | 7 | 01 | 16 | 198 | 226 (75.33) |
| Militant | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 03 | 8 (2.66) |
| Unknown | 0 | 01 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 28 | 40 (13.33) |
| Do not know | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 26 (8.66) |
| Total % | 3 (1) | 3 (1) | 12 (4) | 9 (3) | 29 (9.66) | 244 (81.33) | 300 (100) |

Looking at the table 3 and figure 3, it can be seen that most of their husbands were innocent and were not involved in any criminal activities i.e. 81.33%. While interacting with these half widows researcher has come to know that 9.66% of victims husbands were religious teachers (Teaching Arabic in school or work as imam in the mosque) and only 5 % respondents says that their husbands were involved with militants among them 4% were surrendered militants (who have handover their guns to army) and only 1% were presently involved with militants.3% respondents says that their husbands were working in the police department and only one percent were working in the army. The above table shows one of the important finding that is 75.33% of the respondents were disappeared by the security forces (Army, BSF, R.R, etc.,) and only 8 % victims dare ones were disappeared by the militants while interacting with the respondents it has been came into lime light that among these some of them were working with army and supplying food material. As 13.33 % says that their husbands were disappeared by those persons whose faces were covered with the piece of cloth in order to hide their identity and only 8.66% says that they have no information regarding their husband's disappearance.

Fig. 3(a)

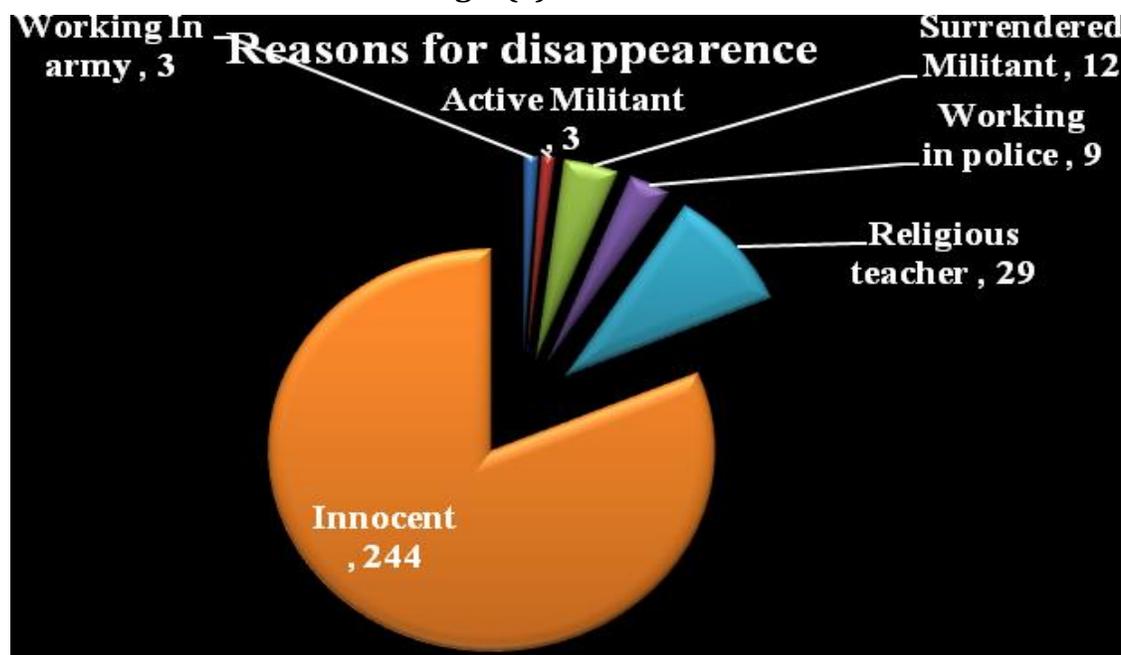


Fig. 3(b)

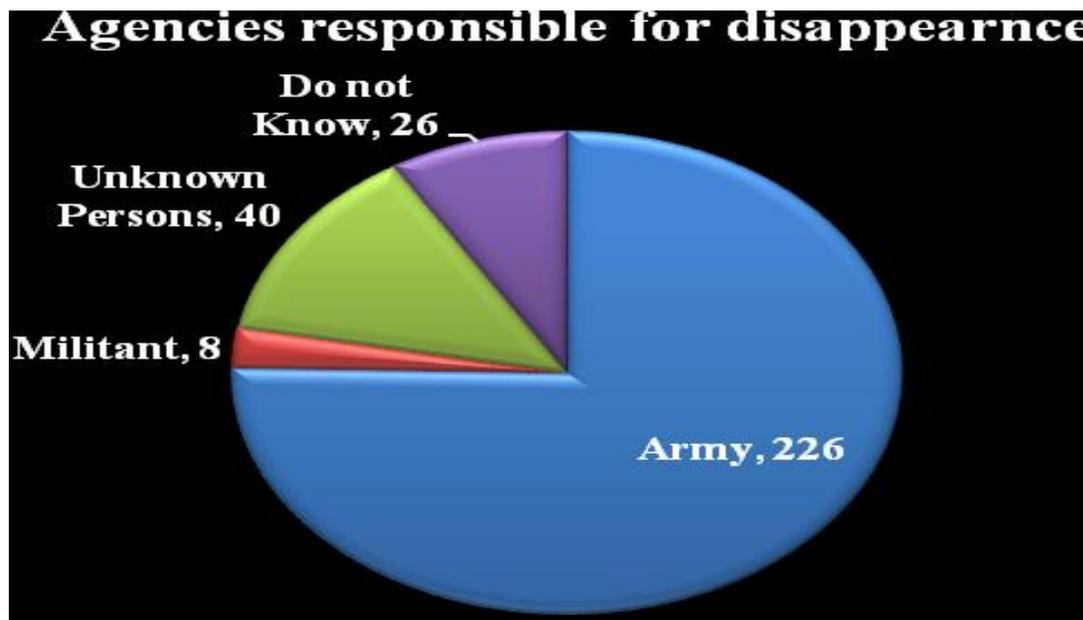


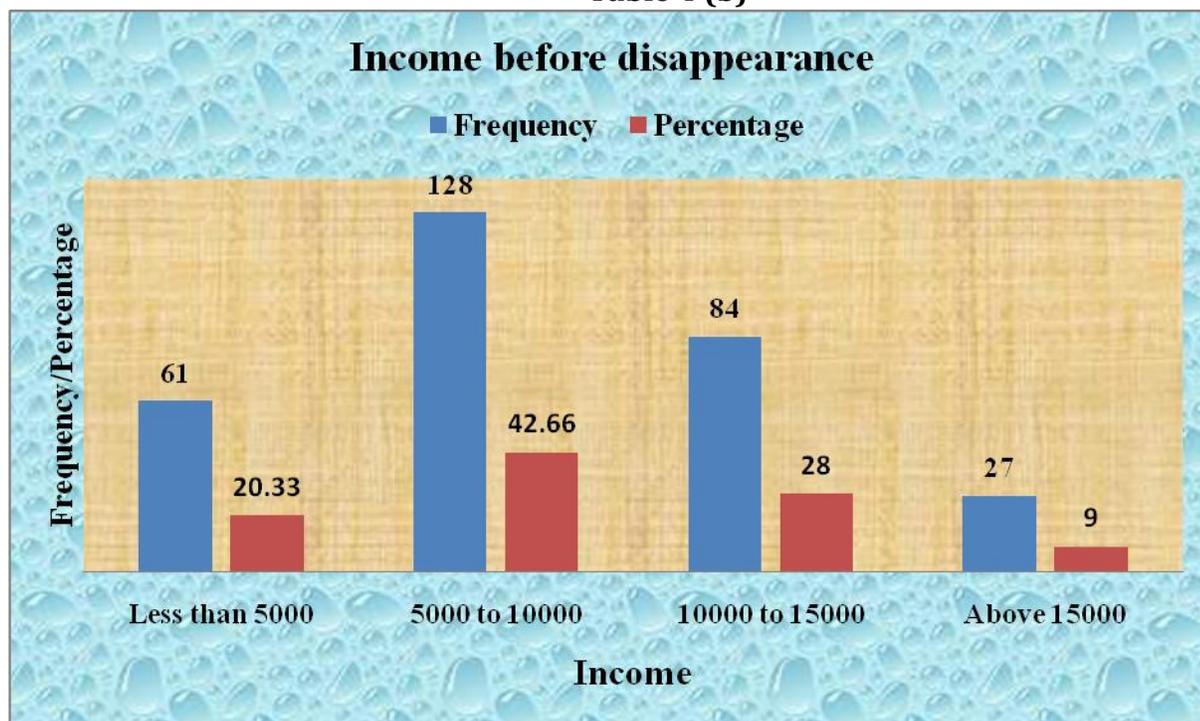
Table: 4 (a)

Income of the family before disappearance of their family member.

| S. No. | Income before disappearance | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1. | Less than 5000 | 61 | 20.33 |
| 2. | 5000 to 10000 | 128 | 42.66 |
| 3. | 10000 to 15000 | 84 | 28.00 |
| 4. | Above 15000 | 27 | 9.00 |
| Total | | 300 | 100 |

The above table 4(a) and below graph 4(a) reveals that 42.66% families are having monthly income in the range of 5-10 thousand rupees while as 28% comprises of those who earn 10-15 thousand rupees after that 20.33% respondents say their monthly income was less than 5 thousand rupees and finally only 9% are those families whose monthly income was more than 15000 rupees.

Fig. 4 (a)
Table 4 (b)



Income of the family after Disappearance of their family member.

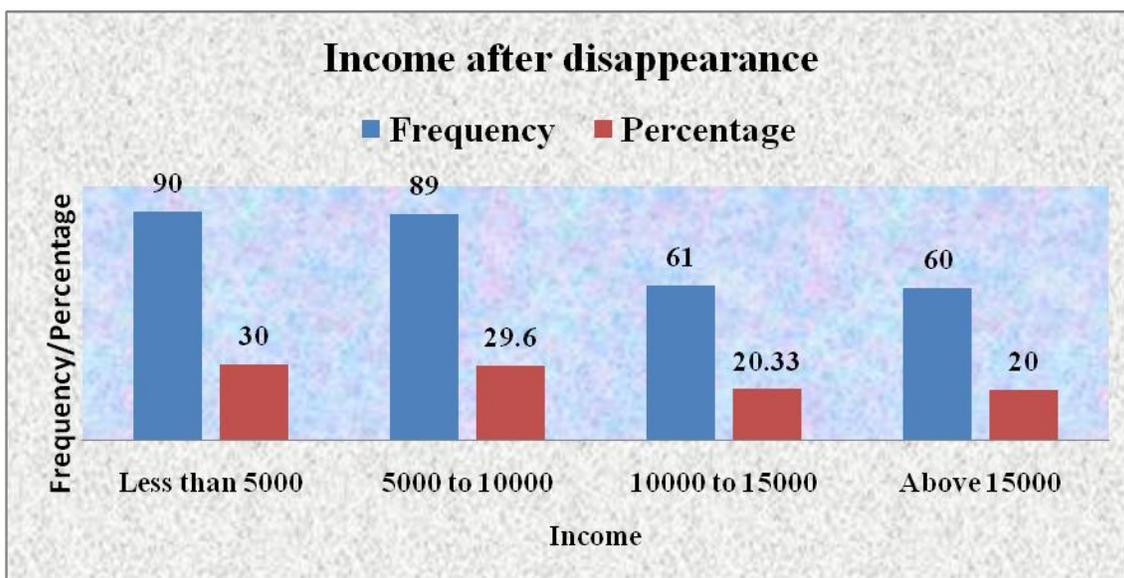
| S.No. | Income after disappearance | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1. | Less than 5000 | 90 | 30 |
| 2. | 5000 to 10000 | 89 | 29.6 |
| 3. | 10000 to 15000 | 61 | 20.33 |
| 4. | Above 15000 | 60 | 20.00 |
| Total | | 300 | 100 |

When an earning member of the family disappears or dies it not only affects the economic condition of their family but also the social well being of their family indirectly. Due to the deep roots of patriarchal mind set up of a society, man is considered as the main bread winner of their family and women were confined to the 4 walls of the house hold or considered as helping hand of the family. And suddenly when their life partner disappears it compels them to feed up their children so it is very difficult for them. On one hand they work hard in searching of their husbands and on the other hand they have to fulfill their responsibility by raising their children.

Similarly, it can be observed from the above table 4 (b) that majority of the respondents i.e., 30% have less than 5- thousand rupees' income per month presently as most of the families'

children have discontinued their education and work to support their families particularly their mothers. The table also reveals that 20% families have above than 15 thousand rupees monthly income. Besides it 29.6% families have income in the range of 5 -10 thousand rupees monthly while as 20.33 % families have income in between 10-15 thousand rupees. Their income is the joint contribution of their family members as most of the respondents are working in both organized and in organized sectors.

Fig. 4(b) Table: 5



Period of Separation of Respondents from their Husbands.

| S.No | Year of separation | Respondents | Percentage |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. | 1-4 years | 14 | 4.66% |
| 2. | 5-9 years | 37 | 12.33% |
| 3. | 10-14 years | 55 | 18.33% |
| 4. | Above 14 years | 194 | 64.66% |
| Total | | 300 | 100% |

The above table reveals that the respondents are residing alone after the disappearance of their husbands and majority of the respondents i.e., 64.66% are separated from their husbands from last 14 years which is not a short passage of time. Similarly, 4.66% respondents say they are separated from their dear ones from the last 1-4 years

Fig.5

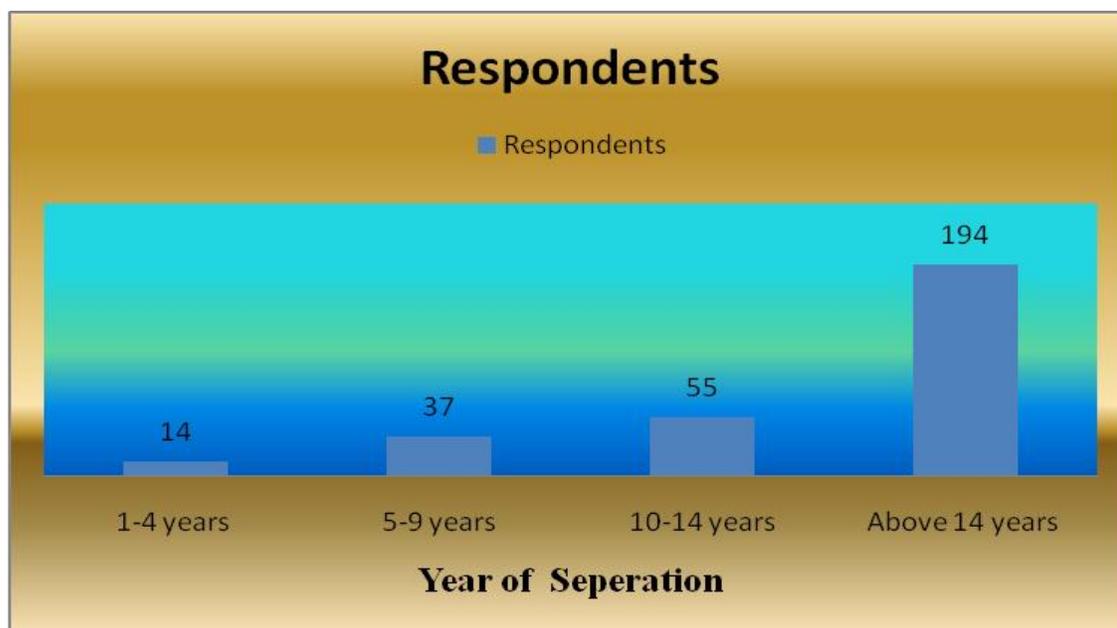


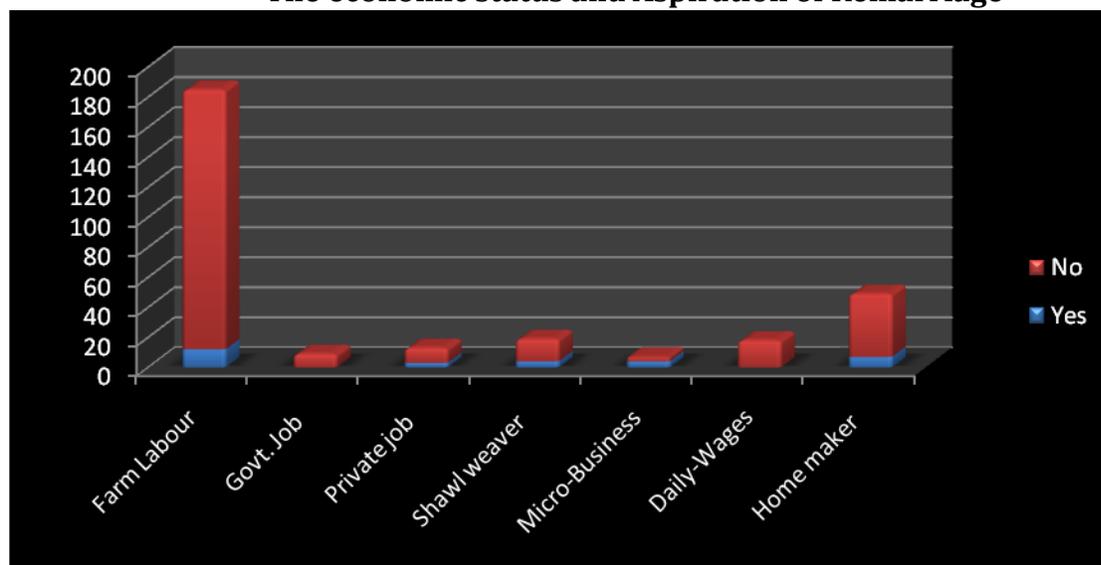
Table 6

% distribution of Respondents economic status and Aspiration of Remarriage.

| Economic Status | Yes | No | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Farm Labour | 12 | 173 | 185 | 61.66% |
| Govt. Job | 0 | 9 | 9 | 3% |
| Private job | 3 | 10 | 13 | 4.33% |
| Shawl weaver | 4 | 15 | 19 | 6.33% |
| Micro-Business | 4 | 3 | 7 | 2.33% |
| Daily-Wages | 0 | 18 | 18 | 6% |
| Home maker | 7 | 42 | 49 | 16.33% |
| Total | 30 | 270 | 300 | 100% |
| Percentage | 10% | 90 % | 100% | |

The above table reveals the sources of income and the aspiration of remarriage of respondents. Majority of the respondents means 90% respondents are not interested in remarriage due to either social stigma attached with them or due to religious boundaries as in 2014 there was a futwa that a half widows are allowed to marry only after 4 years. And only 10 % respondents are willing to remarry but due to social setup they are not getting married. Most of the respondents are earning their livelihood by working in the agriculture field i.e., 61.66% respondents are directly working in the agriculture as women are the cheap labour there is a huge difference between the wages of a male and female as still women is not considered as a main bread winner of their family. only 3% respondents are engaged in the government jobs among them 2% respondents getting the jobs on behalf of their husbands (SRO-43) while as 4.33% respondents were involved in the private jobs and 6.33% respondents are making of shawls but nowadays due to the impacts of globalization people are now preferring machine made shawls which results the decline of income. only a meager percent i.e. 2.33% start their own business to run their families besides it 6% respondents are working as daily wages but they are not getting the work through year either due to different climatic condition or due to frequently strikes in the valley.

Figure 6
The economic status and Aspiration of Remarriage



Case 1

The family under consideration hails from Dardpora, a village in North-Kashmir district of Kupwara. The respondent family has 10 children, including 9 daughters and one son. In 2015 the family head, a sole bread winner, was asked by his neighbor to accompany him to some place for work and assured him that they would return in two days. As they were to return after two days, the neighbor advised the family head to put his mobile phone at home only. But as till date the

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family head is yet to arrive at home and there are no whereabouts of the concerned person. As the family head did not arrive after the passing of a few days, the family members approached the nearest police station for filing of an FIR. In the first instance police were reluctant to file the FIR and the family had to retreat empty handed. Many a times they had to wait for hours outside the police station gate and at the end of the day they were ordered to retreat, with police officials making excuses like the SHO is in meeting. There are multiple instances when they have been abused and treated inhumanely by the police and security officials. After a lot of insistence from the family the local police finally filed an FIR, regarding the disappearance of the above said person. According to disappeared person's family they received a cheque of Rupees Ten Thousand every month from the security (Army) forces. With the lodging of FIR army stopped the monthly imbursement given to them in the form of cheque.

Being the lone bread winner of the family and his subsequent enforced disappearance resulted in the deterioration of the family economy which eventually led to the economic crisis of the family. Past these years the respondent family has been making rounds of police stations and Army camps, throughout the valley, in order to trace their family head. This whole exercise has gone in vain. This trauma has had adverse impacts on the family as a whole with one of the daughter being affected in the worst manner. The father's disappearance has affected her, both physically as well as mentally. The incident has resulted in her suffering from psychological problems and along with this she suffers from eyesight problems, which are related to her continuous weeping for the sake of her missing father. After all of the ordeal they have been facing, the concern personnel of the Dardpora police station have time again said to them as to don't come again and again in the police station and advised them to search for him in Chandigarh instead. Well the story does not end here. Most often, at night, outside lamps surrounding the house are being broken down by the security forces. Security forces have been continuously raiding the house in search of weapons and machines are used manually to check for hidden weapons in and outside the house. The family has been continuously receiving threats from the day the FIR was filed. Many a times they got phone calls at night and receive death threats. The only son continues to approach to the police department for searching of the enforced disappeared person of the family. The family daughters have also been getting calls during late night hours. Due to this pressure nowadays the family does not visit the army camps or any police station because of their rude behavior towards them.

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Source: Field survey 2017

Case Study 2

One of the respondents, namely, Asia became a half widow in November 1997. She was just 23 years old when she lost her husband. She is having three children and all of them are dropouts from class 9th due to financial constrains. Being an illiterate person she could hardly manage to make both ends meet and consequently could not afford to provide for the education of her children. Her husband had been working as a laborer in Jammu as it was winter season. As reported by Asia, her husband disappeared from the Jammu city, the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir. After some time, she somehow managed to lodge FIR in the Kulgam Police Station, with a lot of reluctance in the first place. Till date she did not receive any positive response from the police authorities, but every time she went to police station the concerned police authorities would ensure of enquiry. According to respondent and I quote, "I have no trust in this system. From last 20 years I am observing the false promises of Government". The initial years of the disappearance of her husband were no less than an ordeal which she wishes no one among the women folk should go through. She has been subjected to raids and enquiries by the security officials after her husband got enforced disappeared. Well there has been a period of time when she thought that she was no longer being followed by the security establishments. But hers fears came alive again on 25th June 2017 when her son was called by the Kulgam police Station regarding verification.

From the day one of the enforced disappearance of her husband she has been working very hard to raise her children. She is working as a cook in a school and manages to earn a maximum of Rupees Ten Thousand per month. The loss of her husband has had adverse effects on her, physically as well as mentally. She is suffering from a lot of health problems. In the absence of a male bread winner she has been working hard to provide a respectable living to her children and

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continues to do so. After going through this entire ordeal, Asia expected an SRO from state government. But to her dismay she did not get any kind of help from the government authorities, as many victims of the same kind had been rehabilitated by the state government in many cases by providing government jobs. She asks a simple question, "If others have been provided relief why am I being singled out". Due to lack of knowledge she is not aware about NGOs, as well, working for these Half-Widows.



Source: Field survey 2017

Conclusion

The present study is empirical in nature. It is being observed that Kashmir is the most conflicted zone in world particularly in India. People of Kashmir are facing violence from last seven decades. The human rights violation is prevalent in Kashmir. People of Kashmir are tortured, killed, disappeared. Rape, molestation, immorality, theft is also widely present in Kashmir. The focus of this research work was on condition of women, whose husbands are disappeared. It is observed and interpreted that the women whose husbands are disappeared called half-widows are surviving in the worst condition. Nobody has come to their rescue during this prevailing uncertainty and turbulence.

Half-widows are facing social, cultural, political, psychological and economic depravity. They are roaming from place to place in search of their disappeared husbands. Irrespective of coming to their rescue, the people of their locality gave them ridiculous names like witches, prostitutes, concubines and more commonly husbandless, free bitches. The government officials

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completely ignore them; sometimes people try to hold the opportunity to exploit them physically and economically. The disappearance of their husbands leaves a great responsibility over their weak shoulders. Which some of them are not able to hold? This makes them psychologically weak and miserable.

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