

# Kashmir Conflict through a Woman's Perspective: A Feminist Reading of Nayeema Mehjoor's *Lost in Terror*

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## **Abstract**

Jammu and Kashmir has been an apple of discord between India and Pakistan for the last 75 years, over which the two nuclear-powered neighbours have fought four wars that resulted in its bifurcation and caused enormous destruction to life and property. Nayeema Mehjoor's *Lost in Terror* is set in the turbulent times of the 1990's when militancy was at its peak in Kashmir. The present article examines how armed conflict affects people differently depending on their sex, and how women have been its worst victims. Among many predicaments which Kashmiri women face, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence are the two worst occurrences, having substantial psychological implications. This article dissects Nayeema Mehjoor's *Lost in Terror* from a feminist perspective, and understands the conditions of women and the trauma the characters face as representing the women of Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, Conflict, Insurgency, Gender, Psychological, Trauma.

## **Introduction**

It is a historical fact that wars have been mostly connected with patriarchal actions and frameworks of violence. The portrayal of women in these discourses has constructed a perception of their place and roles, which has helped the hierarchical systems to intensify the power relations in ways that widen the gap between genders. Women, while not intrinsically weak, have been powerless for most of Western and colonial history. They are presumed to be outside history because they were outside the power realms when history was written. Nayeema Mehjoor's *Lost in Terror* is based on a woman's experience in such a conflict. She addresses the Kashmir conflict through a female perspective and draws attention to the sufferings of the Kashmiri women. Throughout, her protagonist attempts to quantify the relationship between patriarchy and militarisation. The novel talks about the gendered effects of the conflict on women, and how differently they suffer compared to men. It challenges the dominant discourse of women being

passive victims and lacking a perspective of their own, while revisiting the peak militancy era in Kashmir.

Women are less directly involved in violence as soldiers, but it doesn't exclude violence from their lives. On contrary, their lives are affected by the consequences of conflicts and the political priorities of militarized societies as well as at mostly unprotected space: domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

Many critics are of the opinion that the writings of men as compared to women are inherently different, as their life experiences are different in many ways. It is alleged that male authors are not able to present female perspectives because they have not experienced the life of a woman themselves, and the same goes the other way as well. Men's writing tends to be informative and rational, focused on real world problems, while women writers focus on the inner world of their consciousness, writing more about individuality and selfhood rather than rationalisation and universality. French feminist Helene Cixous in 'The Laugh of Medusa' says, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies... a woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and the history- by her own movement."<sup>2</sup>

Women have historically been portrayed as weak and dependent upon their male counterparts. This vulnerability of dependency is because of patriarchal and socio-cultural limitations, rather than biological fact. Women, especially those living in a conflict area, face many challenges not experienced by men. Despite not being allowed to grow to their full potential, history has shown that women have not given up the hope of transformation and keep striving for empowerment with the limited resources they have at their disposal. This fight for the rights of women, seeking equality on par with their male counterparts and to remove the systematic discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of Medusa', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1976), p. 875.

against the female sex, is what came to be known as feminism.<sup>3</sup>

According to Janet Richards, “The essence of feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism.”<sup>4</sup> The subjugation of women is a historical fact, and has been for ages. S. Saravanan explains,

Feminism tries to bring forth the power structures in society, traditionally dominated by men, and other social practices that have been the main cause of the marginalization of women and consequently affecting their mental health. At the same time, they chalk out the strategies which can help bring society to an equal level, demolishing the old structure and bringing in new which may help in the liberation of women, and they mostly prefer, using art as their expression to convey their message and use this an instrument for social change.<sup>5</sup>

Elaine Showalter advocates for women to write their own stories instead of being portrayed by men. Her essay “Towards a Feminist Poetics” offers the concept of “Gynocriticism”,<sup>6</sup> “which intended to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature.”<sup>7</sup>

## Background

Indian society has historically been deep-rooted in hierarchy. Ashutosh Pandey explains, “Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship.”<sup>8</sup> In Kashmir, like the rest of India,

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<sup>3</sup> Feminism is usually defined as a socio-political movement that fights for equal rights for women on the socio-political and economic fronts, on par with men. It strives for woman empowerment, fighting gender stereotypes, which are prevalent in the patriarchal society.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> S. Saravanan, *Violence Against Women in India: A Literature Review* (New Delhi: Institute of Social Science Trust, 2000), pp. 53-69.

<sup>6</sup> Gynocriticism focuses on the endeavours of getting women into the tradition of writing, which had otherwise been systematically dominated by men. In order to break free from the oppressive chains symbolized by the woman’s silence or misrepresentation of woman’s narratives by men, it concentrates on female subjectivity, language, and female literary career. It is concerned with the specificity of women’s writing and experience.

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Showalter, ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’, in *Woman Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 22-24.

<sup>8</sup> Ashutosh Pandey, ‘Indian Societies and Ways of Living’ *The Times of India*, 10 August (2021). At: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/indian-society-in-modern-era/indian-society-and-ways-of-living-36197/>. Accessed 05/08/2022.

discrimination against women is related to cultural and social factors, which condition women into accepting stereotypical roles. Social structures make women believe that they are weak and in need of protection, be it physical, social, or economic, which can only be provided by men. This internalisation of cultural beliefs by women leads them to accept their place in the society, which is secondary to that of men.

Gender-based roles are pre-determined in accordance with societal values, and this is where the discrimination starts. These set rules help to maintain a hierarchical relationship between men and women, which creates rigid gender norms that restrict women's opportunities and stifle their development in the private and public sphere. Louis Althusser, in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," explains the concept of "interpellation."<sup>9</sup> This is a process in which people identify themselves with culture and internalise its ideas as their own. Ideologies play an important role in shaping culture and identity. Culture in itself is influenced by ideology and people interpellate into believing that the main centres of power and authority in our society are valid. Nurtured over the years, it becomes deeply embedded within personal beliefs and is internalised by everyone, including women. As the people in power have mostly been men, the existing rules tend to be more patriarchal, and women are forced to accept this as part of society. This is how ideology and interpellation mutually reinforce each other.

Nayeema Mehjoor is a Kashmiri author and journalist who formerly worked for the BBC and also served as the chairperson of the Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Women. The preface of her novel says, "*Lost in Terror* is dedicated to the women of tomorrow, who lost everything from their dignity to relations but never lost their hope for a better tomorrow."<sup>10</sup> She narrates some heart-rending stories from women victims of the conflict most of which are based on her memories and experiences.

Jammu and Kashmir has been an area of political dispute between India and Pakistan, dating back to the 1947 partition era, with both sides asserting claims over the entire territory. However, the current armed uprising and militancy have its roots in the alleged 1987 Jammu and Kashmir state elections. The Muslim United Front, an umbrella organisation of many small parties had accused the National Conference and Congress of rigging the elections in their favour and threatened stir if re-elections were not

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 127-188.

<sup>10</sup> Nayeema Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2016), 'Preface'.

announced. Things began to escalate rapidly, and the leaders of the uprising, many of them former legislators, who had sworn to protect the integrity of India, decided to wage war against it and crossed the “Line of Control”<sup>11</sup> (LoC) along with thousands into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir for arms training. By 1991, Kashmir was in the midst of a full-blown war. The streets had turned into battlefields with bombs and body bags a common sight.

Nayeema Mehjoor’s *Lost in Terror* is set during the same time when militancy was at its peak. The plot features an unnamed female protagonist who gives us a vivid depiction of Kashmir from a woman’s point of view. Its protagonist is a modern Kashmiri woman who yearns for freedom but finds herself caught between the patriarchy and the political conflict, from which she tries to break free.

### ***Lost in Terror***

Nayeema Mehjoor tries to voice the issues of Kashmiri women, who otherwise are mostly ignored. The Kashmir problem is usually seen through the political and geo-security prism, which lacks a humanistic perspective. If there are any personal accounts discussed, they are mostly of a masculine narrative, which is devoid of female voices. Nayeema tries to challenge this system by giving voice to the women of Kashmir. She tries to look at the conflict from a female perspective, where there are women in focus, even though men and masculinity, states and global politics are certainly part of the scene. She tries to show how women are doubly subaltern, they suffer both at the domestic level as well as at the political front. As Helene Cixous puts it, “She must write herself, because this is the invention of the new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history.”<sup>12</sup> She explores the stories of those directly or indirectly affected by the conflict. The book is replete with tragic stories of many women, who suffered at every stage and role of their lives. Militancy and counter-insurgency operations had wreaked havoc across the state and people were killed day in and day out, without any fault of their own. “To reach home safely was a miracle, and to find everyone safe at home was a bigger miracle. It was very rare if we didn’t have to pass through the crackdown, cross firing,

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<sup>11</sup> Line of Control (LoC) is a military control line which divides the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan. It is not a legal international border, but serves as a de facto boundary between the two countries.

<sup>12</sup> Cixous, ‘The Laugh of Medusa’, p. 881.

or search operations on our way to work and back."<sup>13</sup> The conflict had a severe effect on the dignity, honour, and security of the Kashmiri people. Counter-insurgency operations under the garb of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA),<sup>14</sup> which gives immunity to the security forces against any kind of trial, unleashed a reign of terror. This act has been abused numerous times, and many people have been tortured and killed, as a result of its exploitation.

Many a time, the mothers of these teenage sons had to lay down their honour and dignity before the soldiers for their release, which in turn led to physical, psychological, and social breakdowns. "The soldiers were... dragging the teenage boys with their hair ... the mothers were begging the soldiers to release their sons, touching their faces and shoes, and crying their hearts out to have mercy on them... [Their] cries fell deaf on their ears though. There was no sign of mercy and no let-up in the terror."<sup>15</sup>

Enforced disappearances have been one of the worst consequences of the Kashmir conflict. During peak insurgency, thousands of such cases happened where people disappeared and never returned, without any information of their whereabouts. Their disappearance mostly affected their wives, mothers, and sisters. The disappearance of Sadia's son in the novel is one such example: a woman belonging to a wealthy and prosperous family loses her mind longing for her son, and later on leaves her home and goes wandering around like a mad woman, and spends rest of her life in the border area of Kashmir where she had been told that someone had spotted her son there. She says that though she may not see her son, she will have the satisfaction that he is somewhere around and that his presence will be enough for her.

From the last three years, she had hardly slept. She would wake up in the middle of the night, crying and screaming. Almost every night, she had terrifying nightmares. Hassan took her to a psychiatrist for treatment. The drugs had little impact on her mind. Her situation became worse and the psychiatrist left her on her own.<sup>16</sup>

The novel has an unnamed narrator indicating that the novelist is attempting to characterise the long-ignored female identity. Nayeema uses her unnamed

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<sup>13</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is an act of the Parliament of India, which confers special powers to the armed forces to rein in the suspected areas declared 'disturbed' and to arrest a person without a warrant or fire upon or use force, with full immunity, without any prosecution or proceedings as the Act prohibits.

<sup>15</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, pp. 263-264.

narrator as a protest against the existing literature on Kashmir which mostly lacks the voices of women. Through her unnamed protagonist, she brings forth the miseries and traumas of women, who have been suffering alongside men in this conflict, but are rendered faceless, without identity and voice in the patriarchal discourse. The story is told in a first-person narrative and seeks to bring forth some significant events that happened during peak militancy period, and how it affected the lives of Kashmiri women.

The writer also sheds light on Ikhwanis, a dreaded group of surrendered militants, who initially fought against India but later switched sides and worked for the state in counter-insurgency operations. It was a notorious group that wreaked havoc in the valley and terrorised people. They would loot people at gunpoint and threaten the dignity and honour of women. In many cases, women were sexually assaulted, and their violators walked away with impunity. The narrator describes the situation as:

The streets had turned into the hotspot of looting, hooliganism, and plunder. Most of the girls were confined to their houses due to the increased incidents of teasing, extortion, bullying, and even sexual abuse. The locality became stigmatized in society. Girls from this area earlier considered one of the finest in the valley were being turned down by suitors for marriage.<sup>17</sup>

They fully exploited their position of power, acting with complete impunity, engaging in extortion, killings, and kidnapping, and sexually assaulting women, to instil terror among the people. One such incident is documented by Nayeema when the sister-in-law of the protagonist, who is very pretty, catches the attention of the Ikhwanis, who were stationed near her house. They would often visit her house, under the pretext of a search operation, and harass her and her family.

Her family was helpless, as slight resistance from them could have invited the wrath of the Ikhwanis. Left with no option, she is sent away to Jammu, to a safe place, as she could not withstand the continuous harassment at home. Usually, women are kind and soft-hearted and cannot bear violence, but the harassment was so gross that when they hear the news of the Ikhwani group blown to pieces in a grenade attack by militants, they weep tears of joy and celebrate. That was the kind of harassment they had gone through. The author describes the event as; “The Ikhwani death had been dreadful, but more dreadful was the fact that my family was celebrating his death by drinking Kehwa. I could never have imagined that Kashmir would turn into

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<sup>17</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 232.

such a dreadful place.”<sup>18</sup>

Nayeema has been very honest in her portrayal of the Kashmir conflict. Apart from highlighting the human rights abuses committed by the state and its apparatus, she has also thrown light on the brutalities committed by the militants, particularly on women showing how women were at the receiving ends of both sides. The narrator describes the story of her colleague, Shaista, who is killed by the militants for her refusal to smuggle arms to other parts of the valley. Her refusal is taken as a betrayal to the ‘Azadi Movement’, and she is accused of being a traitor and an informer working for the government and is brutally killed. Her gruesome murder is set as an example for others as a punishment for going against their orders. The “traitor” tag leads her family to be ostracised from society, and no one, even her neighbours and relatives dares to come to her funeral to share their sorrows with the bereaved family. She is even denied burial in her ancestral graveyard. This shows how the waging sides used brutalities on women as an apparatus to terrorise the population into submission. “Not a single relative or neighbour had dared to offer their condolences, share the bereaved family’s misery or cry with them. Shaista’s family was suffering the pain, disgrace, and humiliation all alone.”<sup>19</sup> She shows how physical and sexual assault of women was used both by the militants and security forces as a tool of oppression and terror.

Women in Kashmir were not only the victims the socio-political conditions, but also of the religious fanaticism. The author narrates the incidents of moral policing by the religious zealots, which was prevalent during that time. There would be sermons by the *Moulvis* in mosques warning women against wearing tight clothes; later their followers would stand outside the college gates, and beat girls whose heads were not covered with sticks. She also mentions patrolling public places by some women, belonging to a radical religious group, who would chase down girls who they believed, were wearing indecent clothes, and throw ink on their faces.

The more violent the conflict became, the more brutality was inflicted on the civilians, both directly and indirectly. The ordinary citizens became victims of both sides, i.e., the army and the militants, and on the slightest suspicion of aiding one of the rival camps, they were tortured and killed. The author tells the story of the newly married son-in-law of her father’s close

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<sup>18</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, pp. 119-120.



friend, Moulvi Sahab, who is taken away by the army without any warrant, after conducting a Cordon and Search Operation (CASO) in their area. Both Fareeda and her father beg the soldiers for his release, but are in turn thrashed by them. When the pleading did not stop, the soldiers kill the newlywed groom in cold blood in front of his wife, Fareeda, and he falls like a dead autumn leaf.

This state of living under the shadow of the gun had a severe effect on the psychological and mental state of Kashmiri people, especially women, who were witnessing gruesome incidents of violence on daily basis.

Women in Kashmir suffer from stress, depression, insomnia, poor physical health, psychiatric health, bipolar disorder, panic, and phobia. According to the research findings of *Médecins sans Frontières* in 2015, the percentage of women suffering from mental disorders was significantly higher than men in Kashmir, where 50% of women and 37% of men had probable depression, and 36% of women and 21% of men had anxiety disorder, and 22% of women and 18% of men had probable PTSD.<sup>20</sup>

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and it should be prioritised, especially in conflict-affected regions. Kashmir is the world's largest militarised zone, but most people living there do not prioritise mental health, and those who suffer from it are stigmatised as lunatics or as possessed by 'evil spirits'. Nayeema Mahjoor gives instances of two women in the novel. These are Sadia and Fareeda, who lose their son and husband respectively. When these losses start taking a toll on their mental health, their family members first consider taking them to 'Peer Sahab', a kind of a faith healer, instead of to a psychiatrist. This shows lack of awareness regarding mental health in Kashmir, because of which talking about mental illness is still considered taboo.

Apart from the political issues concerning women, she also sheds light on the patriarchy ingrained in Kashmiri society. She says that Kashmiri society at that time was not in favour of girls getting higher education. She tells how the protagonist's father resists pressure from society and relatives and sends his daughters to college, and later also provides support in getting her into the journalism field, which was at that time considered taboo, working in a place full of men and non-natives. The protagonist details how her sister-in-law, Faiza, an otherwise very bright student, is prevented by her

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<sup>20</sup> Nusrat Ali, 'Women in Kashmir: Caught between Patriarchy and Conflict', *Kashmir Reader*, 16 January (2021). At: <https://kashmirreader.com/2021/01/16/women-in-kashmir-caught-between-patriarchy-and-conflict/>. Accessed 05/08/2022.

brothers from continuing further education. The brothers boasted about doing this. When she tries to fight, she is told by her husband that she was ruining her family's reputation by going against social norms and family discipline. She says:

Despite the government constantly boasting about having raised the literacy rate of women to 60 percent, our society still looked at daughters and daughters-in-law as personal property to men. Even if a girl hailed from a rich family and had several hectares of land to her name, she owned nothing in reality... she couldn't take my important decisions without the prior approval of her father, brother, or husband.<sup>21</sup>

In a society where the institutionalised culture of violence and discrimination against women is there even before the outbreak of the conflict, the abuses are only going to be increased in that case, and the same thing happens.

Troubled marriages are also a major theme of the novel. The protagonist tells how she had an on-and-off relationship with her husband, and how his controlling demeanour clashed with her resistance, which often ended up in domestic violence. He accuses her of ruining his family's reputation by going for a job while he did nothing, and tortures her physically and mentally for not giving him a child. "What I came to know later was that he found my restraint attitude insulting to his manliness. And so he had become outraged - his eyes were bloodshot and he started abusing me physically and mentally."<sup>22</sup> Nayeema juxtaposes her situation with the Kashmir problem. She says that they were not allowed to complain against their husbands as it would have been catastrophic for them. There was no one with whom she could have shared her agony. Even her most loving father tells her that in marriage, one has to adjust accordingly as it was a sacred bond. This was the situation in Kashmir at that time where things were going from bad to worse, and instead of listening to the woes of its citizens, the government kept doing what it deemed fit without taking its citizens into consideration. "I could not afford to mention this to anyone. People would ridicule me. In our society, the husband is the sole proprietor of the woman he was married to just like the government treated Kashmir as its property."<sup>23</sup>

The narrator portrays her husband as an ironic character. On the one hand, he dreams of liberating Kashmir from Indian control, while at the same time, depriving his wife of all the 'limited freedom' she had. He behaves as

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<sup>21</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 41.

if she was her acquired property, often denigrating and physically assaulting her. After the birth of their baby, he does not visit her for two years and maintains an extramarital affair during that time. Instead of taking his daughter's side, her beloved father also tells her to conform and forgive her husband's misdeeds. She is left with no option but to return to her husband, despite knowing what he had done to her. Here Nayeema links increasing militarisation with increasing domestic violence, highlighting the link between nationalism with the increased control over the female bodies.

Apart from the conflict that had shrouded the whole valley, the narrator is seen fighting another war within, not being able to conceive a baby. She is psychologically traumatised by her in-laws and relatives for being childless, who threaten her instead of comforting her. When she finally hears the news she is expecting a baby after six long years, the readers get a momentary sigh of relief from the tensions that the novel had built. The author portrays her excitement as:

I was in a state of joyful bewilderment. A miracle had happened. I was capable of conceiving. I was carrying a life in my womb... my mind raced through my seven years of marriage spent waiting and hearing the sarcasm from the relatives for not being able to bear a child.<sup>24</sup>

Nicknamed "crossfire baby"<sup>25</sup> by the hospital attendant, the baby demonstrates a deep-seated conflict that had left a deep scar in the people's psyche. Even during her pregnancy, her in-laws are more concerned about the sex of the baby, rather than her health. They would make it a point, each time to tell her to pray to God for a son, so he could continue Asad's lineage. When the narrator tells her husband, Asad, that she had dreamed of having a girl child, she is severely scolded by her husband who says that she would be the only woman in the world who wants to have a daughter. Later in the novel Asad, overjoyed to finally have a son, prepares to come to his wife but cancels his plan when his two friends get killed by the security forces in a search operation. Asad is gutted, and the person who always wanted to have a son sobbingly says, "I would have preferred to father a girl instead of a boy because I know what his fate will be."<sup>26</sup> This quote shows that even a misogynist like Asad regrets having a son, fearing that he will suffer the same

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<sup>24</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> Cross Fire Baby is a name given to the protagonist's son by the hospital attendant, as during his birth, the hospital had been under fire because of the encounter between the army and the militants in the hospital premises.

<sup>26</sup> Mehjoor, *Lost in Terror*, p. 183.

violent fate as his friends in the future. It shows the intensity of bloodshed that had swept the whole valley, where people were getting killed like insects, though no fault of their own.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the issues pertaining to the Kashmir conflict are realistically evidenced in *Lost in Terror* by Nayeema Mehjoor. Above all, Mehjoor seeks to highlight the traditionally ignored predicament of women in conflict. She uses her female characters as mouthpieces to depict the plight of Kashmiri women. Through this novel, the author brings forth the affliction of women, how conflict affects them physically and psychologically, and how they are the victims of any conflict or war. Furthermore, she talks about the increasing social vulnerability of women due to the conflict, and exposure to gender-based violence and sexual assault. She sees the military structure as a part of the patriarchy, which asserts itself through the oppression of women, the same way patriarchy does. She describes how sexual assault on women is used as a tool of oppression by state agencies as a means of control over the population. Nayeema gives a critical insight into the insurgency and 'Azadi Movement', and the counter-insurgency operations that followed, portraying the agony of the Kashmiri women who turned out to be the worst victims of this conflict. Nayeema is successful in her attempt to voice the miseries of Kashmiri women, whose pains are often masked by the political discourse, and the narratives of men, through the Kashmir conflict is mostly perceived.

She talks about how power relations contribute to the formation of gender roles, which help them exert power over women, which constitute about half of the population. She discusses various forms of gendered discrimination that occur at the household level but mostly go unnoticed. Women consider it a privilege if they are allowed to do something or receive what otherwise is the bare minimum of rights a woman should have. Saira, one of the characters of this novel, when the protagonist tells her that they have been lucky enough to be allowed to work, laughingly tells her to enjoy her 'controlled freedom'. Even today, women struggle to get their fair share in property, occupation, education, and rights in marriage. The author pleads her case for the women of Kashmir, and discourses like these can encourage women to become more vocal in speaking up for their rights.