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Revisiting Dabla's work on *Domestic Violence against Women in Kashmir Valley*

Book Review

Bashir Ahmad Dabla. *Domestic Violence against Women in Kashmir Valley*. Srinagar: Jay Kay Book Shop, 2009. XIII+ 115 PP. Rs. 495 (INR). ISBN 81-87221-23-2

Reviewed By

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Late Professor Bashir Ahmad Dabla, was a prominent Sociologist of Jammu and Kashmir. He was the founder of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at University of Kashmir. Dabla, has produced more than twenty books and more than sixty articles on various sociological themes most of them related to society of Kashmir.

Domestic violence against women in Kashmir valley was published just few years before the death of Dabla. The theme of the book is very interesting and the subject is very important. The book is based on empirical quantitative data. The book has discussed and highlighted some very important issues confronted by women in domestic affairs. The author deserves appreciation and acknowledgement for carrying out an important study on a very important theme in a particular context. The exercise of academic scholarship in conflict zone is not an easy and comfortable walk.

The beauty of the book is that it does not jump to the theme of domestic violence. Dabla, remarks that “the term violence against women has not set definition”. He demonstrated an operational definition of violence: “force whether covert or overt, used to wrest from an individual [a woman] something she doesn't want to give her own free will and which causes her either physical injury or emotional trauma or both” (p2).

Dabla, believes that domestic violence against women is found in every society irrespective of regional, religious, political, economic, social, cultural, educational and demographic difference. The valley of Kashmir is no exception however militancy has intensified the menace, he adds.

The author remarks the concept of domestic violence against women is in vogue in Indian society. He presented reports of International Clinical Epidemiologists Network and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai to support his argument. However, he maintains that domestic violence against women in the Kashmir valley is not a serious issue as the degree of domestic violence is not high or intense (p7).

Chapter two of the book deals with the methodology in which author justifies the theme and states that “domestic violence against women in the Kashmir valley have emerged significantly in the recent past. It has also been observed that these problems are fast increasing qualitatively as well as quantitatively” (p 10). Dabla, justifies the techniques of data collection by pointing out: “since all these problems are primarily empirical in nature, this research is fully based on detailed field investigation”.

Dabla, maintains that women are conscious of their discrimination the fields of education, employment, diet, decision making, social treatment and property inheritance. He has concluded that both male and female have “general belief” that women face discrimination in society.

In sum up the book is interesting to flip. However, there are serious concerns and issues. The book hardly appears a sociological monograph. It is a mixture of technical, grammatical, empirical, methodological and theoretical ambiguities.

The ambiguities begin from the beginning of the book. There is no philosophical debate and presentation of sociological theories on the selected theme. The operational definition of domestic violence is ambiguous and delimits domestic violence only to physical and emotional violence ignoring structural, cultural, sexual, psychological, economic and other forms of domestic violence. Moreover, the cause of domestic violence is not that women do not want to give up the things they possess. It is surprising to observe that reports presented to back the argument on domestic violence are not consulted by the author but quoted from a news paper.

The author remarks that domestic violence against women in Kashmir is “not in high degree/intensity” (p7). However, contradicts himself by writing that domestic violence in Kashmir valley has “increased qualitatively as well as quantitatively” and is “increasing day by day” (p8, 10). Moreover, there is no mention of what author meant by quality of violence? Can there be quality of violence?

Dabla, rightly remarks that domestic violence is found everywhere in the globe irrespective of social, economic, political and religious set up of society. In context of Kashmir with militancy domestic violence has intensified. However, it has been mentioned nowhere in the book how militancy increased the horror of domestic violence. Sociologically speaking domestic violence is not so simple and easy to understand married, unmarried, newly married, old, widows, differently able, issue less women have altogether a different experience. In addition conflict zones have their own peculiarities and women in conflict nature and causes of domestic violence are different for instance a women molested by men in uniform, widows, half widows have altogether a different experience and impact of domestic violence which author has given no space in the whole monograph.

The book is confined to quantitative methods. Methodologically speaking it is very difficult to do sociology on the selected theme by reaming confined to quantitative methods. . Durkhiem, a stalwart of sociology remarked that ‘data must be collected not just any how, but keeping certain

rules in mind'. It is difficult to understand that why only 200 respondents were selected as sample from a huge population of six districts. There is no mention of the technique of sample selection, margin of error and confidence level. Data "collected" has been simply tabulated and presented in percentile bases without sociological explanation. No statistical test has been carried out on data to observe, correlation, standard deviation, significance, variance and impact of different variables.

Studies conducted across the globe have revealed that doing research is not an easy walk. Moreover, researchers from conflict zones have revealed that doing science is not only difficult but dangerous. A researcher must avoid suspicious and sensitive activities and questions (Clifford Geertz 1958, Bhat 2014, 2017, Shah 2017). However, it is difficult to understand how author managed to interview women especially in rural areas and ask sensitive question like, "Do you face torture/ harassment at the hands of in-laws?" "Do you face any kind of discrimination at home?" The questions like "suspicion of the husband about extra marital relations" molestation and so on put question marks on the study.

Author has used different socio-economic variables to examine domestic violence against women in Kashmir. However, variables taken either does not reveal domestic violence, or interpreted out of context and wrongly or both, take the example of money (salary) spend by women. Spending money or not by doesn't show prevalence or absence of domestic violence. In traditional families it is not uncommon that salaries or earnings are handed over to the head of family no matter the earner is male or female. Spending money by women or keeping it doesn't connote that she is independent, free, and boss. Domestic violence is prevalent almost all over the globe including in the countries where women are salaried, doing business etc and spend it on their own. It is common that women as a sole bread earner not spend and keep salaries or earning but take care of education, health, food, clothing etc of family members. In case of ailing parents or due to other reasons (migration of male members) women take care of household and manage affairs. In addition in matrilocal families women has command and upper hand than her husband but it too does not ensure absence of domestic violence. The author has not taken these factors into account.

Descartes in his book, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1991), pointed out that the basis of the scientific method is doubt. The things, events and phenomenon need to be doubted in order to reach understand social reality. It is beyond comprehension how author accepted everything he listened from the respondents and concluded things on these bases.

The book misses sociological terminology, concepts and theories and used things very loosely, for instance author writes , 'the practice of wife beating, harassment of women, grabbing of working women's money, threat of divorce to wives, eve-teasing of girls, denial of property rights (p3). There are specific terminologies and concepts in sociology for these practices and scholars have categorized these practices under different forms of violence like, sexual, physical, structural, cultural etc but the author has limited himself to journalistic lexicon.

The end of the book is more disappointing as there is no reference, bibliography or notes. However, the book is a good read for trivial understanding of domestic violence against women in Kashmir. It is affordable with nice, paper, print and design.