



Voices of Dissent and the Political Activism of Left behind Females of Baloch Enforced Disappeared Persons

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Abstract - The purpose of this article is to discuss the role and experiences of women who have lost their loved ones through enforced disappearances. It focuses on political activism, their silences, voices, grievances, search, hopes and despair. It discusses the economic background of missing person's families and the role of Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP)-a political and human rights organization which has given a space to the Voices of women relatives of enforcedly disappeared. This article is based on the anthropological research tools of both structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, conversations with the respondents and relationships formed during fieldwork.

Keywords: Political activism, enforced disappearance, Voices of dissent, ambiguous loss, hope and despair

I. INTRODUCTION

Enforced disappearances is defined by International Convention of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances as, "enforced disappearance is considered to be arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law" (2006, p.1). This human rights offence not only impacts an individual victim, but it is a continuous process of degrading and inhumane treatment to the family of the victim. The society as a whole is stripped off the right to know the truth and thus this situation puts the society in a state of fear.

In Pakistan, enforced disappearance is a widespread and a continuous phenomenon. According to International Court of Justice (ICJ) (2017), the practice of enforced disappearance has been happening since 1970's in Balochistan and in erstwhile East Pakistan. Disappearances were again reported in early 2000s amid the 'war on terror' with the involvement of US, majorly in areas of erstwhile FATA and North Waziristan. Balochistan has also faced cases of forced disappearances, since the start of this millennium, thousands of people have been enforcedly disappeared from Balochistan who are majorly students, political activists, and human rights activists; in recent cases there have been an increase in the cases of disappearances of labors and shepherds. There also has been a rise in incidents of enforced disappearances in Sindh of political activists and bloggers. Those enforcedly disappeared can be at high risk or torture, ill-treatment, and death (Amnesty International, 2016). The groups or individuals being the prime target of enforced disappearances are Baloch, Sindhi, Pashtun/Pakhtun ethnicities, Shia Community, human rights defenders, political activists, bloggers, members and supporters or sympathizers of nationalist, religious groups and suspected members of armed groups (Amnesty International, 2018).

Often in the struggle to reunite with the loved ones, women are the ones who come to forefronts; in such cases they suffer psychologically, and it might affect their health. If the victims are women themselves then the chances are high that they might suffer from physical and sexual dehumanizing conditions. The struggle then eventually turns into political activism by women in many instances. In modern world of technology, social media, more access to information and through propagation of issues, victim's mothers, daughters, and wives find a source through which they could channel their suffering to social movement, struggle and political activism. Through the said means the women relatives eventually challenge the social structures and occupy the male dominated politico-social spaces.

The children can also be victims and in various cases in Balochistan, children as young as nine or ten years of age or in some cases as young as one to two years old are among the disappeared persons (Amnesty

International, 2016). They are affected directly in the form of involuntary enforced disappearance or are affected indirectly by being the children of victims. In the fight for safe release of their loved ones, they face the greater risk of being disappeared, are threatened and face mental stress and deteriorating health. This article deals with the voices, silences, public discourse, enforced disappearances, the experiences of female family members of enforced disappeared persons and to understand Baloch Nationalism and the role of state repression in this political scenario and human rights issues.

II. METHODOLOGY

The history of Enforced disappearance in Balochistan is linked to the seventy-two years of military occupation, military operations, political resistance, and activism. The issue of missing persons has created a ground of political activism for women and specifically the female relatives of enforcedly disappeared victims. For the safe recovery of enforcedly disappeared an organization Voice for Baloch Missing Person's (VBMP) was formed in 2009 by the families of enforcedly disappeared victims, which started a new phase and continuation of protests and sit-ins throughout Balochistan, which was later limited to Quetta only, a hunger-strike camp was set in front of Press Club Quetta by missing person's families. Most of protestors were women relatives of victims comprising of wives, sisters, mothers, daughters, fiancés, cousins etc.

Missing persons' camp provides a space to the women for political activism which was considered unique in traditional-conservative culture of Balochistan. The route of struggle and activism later found its way through social media. Social media played a major role by giving a channel to express the families their grievances, do activism, ask for justice and inform the world of human rights abuses in Balochistan. Another reason for using social media is the negligence of print and electronic media to the issue of enforced disappearance and the families.

The research question explores the experiences of families of victims and the patterns which arise due to enforced disappearance of a family member. The participants discussed various aspects of their experiences, patterns, issues, and struggle. The participant observation was conducted in VBMP camp Quetta. The interviews were recorded inside the missing person's camp, the sight was chosen because it is the focal point of protests and permanent sit-ins of missing persons' families. The research was conducted for an extended period of six months from March 2019 to August 2019. A key informant was selected, who held a great supportive role during conducted the research and during the rapport building process.

The data for this article has been collected through from March 2019 to August 2019. Primarily participant observation was used for data collection in Voice for Baloch Missing Persons Camp (VBMP) Quetta. Quetta is only city of Balochistan where Voice of Baloch Missing Persons movement is most active and where the missing person's families are holding protest camp, near Press club. So, it was the most likely place where we could find the respondents. Anthropological tools, interview guide, and case studies were used to collect data from the left behind females of missing person. 19 family members of the missing persons were interview, it included the women relatives of the enforced disappeared persons, particularly the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of the enforced disappeared persons. Purposive sampling has been used as per the precarious situation of the sitting. Both structured and unstructured interviews were conducted along with participate observation.

Rapport building has been used as a major ethnographic tool. Once the trust was established, then some female relatives of enforced disappeared victims showed their willingness for the interviews. All interviews were note down in the field diary. Local narratives and verborums were analyzed to understand the worldview and generated themes from the tales of the women. Later debate was generated to represent the life world of politically active women participants.

Experiences of Victims' Families and Women Activism

The early experiences of enforced disappearance victim's families and specifically the left behind female family members of the victims are related to political activism for the safe recovery of their loved ones. Through the political symbolism of sit-ins, protests and through political mobilization and participation these women have given a voice to their silences and grievances. The researchers have also tried to study the socio-psychological impacts of the lives of left behind families of such a gruesome incident. One common factor which was observed was the economic background of respondents, as all of them were from poor economic background and in many cases the sole breadwinner they had was the victim.

The principle factor which has compelled many Baloch women to get out of their comfort zone and come to the roads is 'the enforced disappearance' of their loved one in the hands of secret state agencies. The participants shared almost the same ordeal of enforced disappearance of their loved one from their

houses by uniform men or personnel of intelligence agencies in plain clothes and abducted their sons, brothers, fathers in the darkness of night, or the abduction of their relative, son, brother or father at work, or at a restaurant having a quality time with their friends. Every victim had different experiences and pattern of abduction, but they and their families share the same pain, ambiguous loss, emotions, problems, and story.

Taj Bibi aka Hajari (age unknown due to cultural practice of not noting down the date of birth and age), is an old lady who has been coming to the Missing Persons' Camp regularly every day. Her son was enforcedly disappeared on 9th June 2018 from their home at Quetta at 3 am at night. According to Hajari, "It was 3am, it was time of Tahajud (special pray time at early dawn), when we heard the sounds of tapping of boots. They (Frontier Corps) left other two streets and came directly to our street. It was a loud knock on the door. They woke us all. My elder son was sleeping in other room with his children and wife. They woke him up. We were scared. They asked for Imtiaz. He was sleeping in Bethak (male guest room), they woke him and dragged him away forcedly. They told us that they will release him soon after some investigation. But till today we have no knowledge of him and his whereabouts. Some of them were in civilian clothing and others were wearing FC (Frontier Corps) uniform (23, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)."

Another old mother, Bibi Madina's son Shah Nawaz Marri was enforcedly disappeared on 16 August, 2014 from Hazar Ganji where they live. According to Bibi Madina,

"We live at Hazar Ganji Kohe Bun, my son was abducted during Morning Prayer time. When he was enforcedly disappeared from there, we were not aware of anything, we did not know about it. He is missing. It's been a lot of time. It's been six years since he is missing. I don't know if he is alive or dead. I am not aware of anything. He was abducted. I don't know the exact date but he was abducted in a morning from the area where we live. I remember it was a morning, he went out of home, it was august. Since then we did not know of his whereabouts (24, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)."

Mahdem, a quite young woman in her twenties is the sister of Abdul Hai Reki also shares the same story as other families of the missing persons. Her elder brother Abdul Hai Reki has been enforcedly disappeared. She has been coming to the camp for some months for the purpose of sit-in protest for her brother. According to Mahdem,

"Abdul Hai Reki was abducted on 21st May, 2018, from Mach near Koh-Bash hotel. He was with his friends when he was enforcedly disappeared. According to his friends' abductors were in civilian clothing when they abducted him. He used to take care of our lands, he was married and had two children. (11, May, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)"

Nagina 10, the fifteen years old daughter of Abdul Wahid Kurds is a patient of lungs and other emotional illness. She often comes to the camp with her ten years old brother, sister, cousin, grandmother and aunts. Abdul Wahid Kurd was abducted along with his brother Dad Muhammad Kurd in 2010 and they are still missing. Nagina tells her story and says that,

"I was five when my father and my uncle (father's brother) were abducted from our village home at Maroo, Bolan. They were abducted by FC personnel and Pakistani agencies. My brother Balach was a baby at that time. Now he is ten years old and has not seen father yet (15th, April 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)."

Ayesha Baloch 11 from Awaran, is the sister of Shabir Baloch. 22 years old Shabir Baloch was a student as well as Central Spokesperson and Information Secretary of BSO-Azaad (Baloch Student Organization-Azaad). Ayesha says that,

"My brother was abducted on 4 October 2016 at 4 am during a military operation in Gwarkop, Turbat. They abducted him in front of his wife. Agencies had also abducted other people along with Shabir, later other abductees were released, but kept Shabir in custody. Since then I have been in protest for release of my brother in Karachi and Quetta. My brother is still missing; we have no knowledge of his whereabouts (09, July, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Sabira, a middle-aged woman from Panjgoor comes to the Missing Persons Camp for his three cousins who were abducted separately. She showed me the pictures of her cousins and told me that,

"Two of my cousins were abducted before and now my third Cousin Muhammad Zareef was enforcedly disappeared by security agencies from his home, at 1 a.m. night from Paroom, an area at the outskirts of Panjgoor. There were three vehicles of security forces. They did not only take him away but also they took away all the valuables from his house, his motorcycle, his car, fridge, washing machine, even his watch, and his mobile phone along with his wallet. At his house, our other cousin was also staying as a guest, they also took away his money, mobile phone and watch (03, August, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Bakht Bibi is the wife of Shah Nawaz. Shah Nawaz was enforcedly disappeared in 2011. Bakht Bibi says that,

“My husband was a labor, he had a vegetable cart, he went to Barkhan, when he was abducted along with Dinoo, he also had money with him. He was the only bread winner of our family, now we don't have anyone to look after us, we are helpless, and we have no one. His father is paralyzed, old mother and he has small children, no one to feed these children and us. We went to everywhere and have asked about his whereabouts, we have no idea where he is, whether he is alive or he is dead, we have no information of him (29, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)”.

The respondents shared almost similar experiences of their loved one being abducted, and a similar pattern of abduction was recorded. They shared the identical situations and experiences of how their loved one was abducted. The respondents reported that their loved ones were enforcedly disappeared by law enforcement agency personnel. Some of respondents confirmed that their loved ones were abducted in front of them. After enforcedly disappearance of the person, the whereabouts of the person are kept hidden from the family. In many cases along with the enforced disappearances, valuables were also taken away. These experiences have transformed the lives of these women. These experiences have gotten them in despair, mental problems and ambiguous loss, but these women have taken to the path of political activism.

Political Symbolism

Sit-ins and protest has become rituals of political action for the families of enforced disappeared persons. The families use the method of social protest as a non-violent civil disobedience against the state elements who disappear their young sons and relatives in the darkness of night into dust.



(Picture from Field: Women activists holding sit-ins and symbolic hunger strike at protest camp.)

No doubt it's an unusual and unique phenomenon in Baloch culture and society that so many women have taken to the roads and having sit-in, the reason was the political opportunities women had, which were created by the existing political crisis.

Redefining Roles of Women

The issues of missing persons and the struggle of women for their enforced disappeared loved ones have considerably transformed the conventional-expressive roles of women. Socially defined roles which society has allocated are marital and household roles. But this humanitarian issue has provided political opportunities to women and has redefined the roles of women and created the space to be political and human rights defenders.

The issue of enforced disappearances has paved the way for women political activism. Women have gotten out of their conventional roles but has adopted more political role. The respondents interviewed were all housekeepers, they have never known any other world other than their social roles and cultural jobs i.e. bearing and rearing children and doing household chores and keeping up with social relations. But

the issue of enforced disappearance of their loved ones has compelled them into a political world, to protests, to press conferences and to social media. It has completely transformed the world of these women, as they have occupied the political space which was predominantly male centered before. Through their activism mothers, sisters and daughters have become defenders of rights of those who were enforcedly disappeared.

But this phenomenon also creates an environment of paradox, at one hand is the suffering, disappearances, pain and at the other hand are the opportunities these horrible conditions possess for women, and provide them an agency, no matter for how temporary that might be.

Social, Political and Emotional Alienation-Bewassi

Enforced disappearances has proliferated fear in Baloch society. The fear has caused a situation of alienation of families. Upon asking the families that, 'if their community and their other relatives support them in any way?', their response was negative, they all denied that no one support them due to their social standing after the disappearance of their family member. Almost all of the respondents called themselves Bewass (helpless). According to the respondents, they are Bewass (helpless), they have no one and no one support them. Neither any one support these families emotionally nor socially or politically. Due to fear prevailing society other relatives fear that they might face the same fate as enforced disappearance, so in this process the missing person's families were left into alienation. Families not only feel alienated socially, but authorities also alienate them. Families think that they are alienated because they are poor, have no identity, particularly for being women and mothers they are denied identity and power to do something for recovery of their sons, so they see the camp as their only hope of being included and being able to do something for their enforced disappeared relative.

Bibi Madina says that,

"Being a mother I am struggling to find him. I don't have any identity, I have no one to go to police station with me and report of case. I just go and randomly ask this person and that person about my son, ma bewassa (I am helpless). What a mother can do? Nothing. Besides, I am illiterate and un-educated. Ma bewassa (I am helpless) (27 March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Bakht Bibi is the wife of Shah Nawaz. Shah Nawaz was abducted in 2011. Bakht Bibi tells her story and says that,

"He was the only bread winner of our family, now we don't have anyone, we are helpless, and we have no one. We have no power, we can't do anything, and we are helpless (25, August, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Gul Bibi mother of enforcedly disappeared Gul Mahmud emphasize that,

"Ma Bewass a' o ghareeb a' (We are helpless and poor) (04, April, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Ganj Khatoon (she later died in 2020 due to old age while still waiting for the return of her son), mother of Zafar Ullah Bangulzai says that,

"He was abducted because we are poor and helpless (02, May, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

These families and particularly women show their powerlessness and alienation through the word 'Bewass' (helpless/powerless). The Bewass represents their grievances, inability, poverty and powerlessness. It represents their source of silences and reason for it, and it is one of the reasons that women have turned to the protest camp as it becomes their only hope to overcome their powerlessness, helplessness and Bewassi.

Search for the Loved Ones

For the families the whereabouts and wellbeing of their loved one becomes a big question, as they never get to know about their enforced disappeared relative. The women political activism of the respondent is a product of constant search for their loved one.

Bibi Madina is one of the mothers of a missing persons, during her interview she constantly repeated and said,

"I ask the authorities why he was abducted and disappeared, I want answers. We don't know what they did to him. (24, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)."

Fatima Bibi is the mother of Sajid from Panjgoor. Sajid was abducted in front of Commissioner's Office by security agencies along with FC personnel in 2015. According to Fatima Bibi, they have been to the FC camp in Panjgoor and asked for her son, they have asked the released persons about her son, if they have met him during their disappearance to the camps, they have asked their captains, they have been to police, been to former speaker of Balochistan Assembly they have been to Mir Qudoos Bezenjo and to former MPA from Panjgoor Barkat Baloch.

Murad Khatoon is the enforcedly disappeared Nizar M. Shah Wali's mother Murad Khatoon tells her story and said that,

"I have gone everywhere for my son, I have gone here and there, have submitted his case, his CNIC, mobile number, done everything. I have nothing with me now. He is still missing. I come here at missing person's camp, we have no one, and he has no one. I have gone to this corner to that, went to higher authorities, to Sardars, to the people of government, but they have not helped me, not listened to me, they did nothing to help me (17, August, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Shabir Baloch's sister Ayesha Baloch says that,

"My brother was abducted three years back, my father been to Meer o Muthber (unofficial authority of an area) of our area, they said they will do something, but till now nothing has happened. I have had protests and press conferences at Karachi and Quetta (09, July, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Mahdem is the sister of abducted Abdul Hai Reki's sister. Mahdem says that,

"My father went to Akhtar Mengal the prominent nationalist political figure and Member of Parliament for release of my brother, he said he will do something but it has been six months since my father went there, but nothing has happened since then. My father has been to various political workers, Sardar's and ministers since this has happened, and they are just keep saying they that will do something, but they are doing nothing (11, May, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Families keep searching and bearing the costs of searches for years. The search becomes physically challenging and emotionally disturbing for the family members. Some families and particularly women, mothers, daughters, and wives of missing, and they keep searching their whole lives for enforced disappearance loved ones.

Most of the families whose relatives been enforcedly disappeared are poor. They struggle with their basic human needs like food and clothing. They struggle to come to the camp every day for the purpose of sit-in protest. That's why you will find a very few families in the camp as compare to 45,000 thousand enforced disappearances, which makes up 45,000 families. The families who struggle for food, it becomes a costly deal for them to search for their relatives. As they lack money for legal proceedings and other processes during the search. Majority of my respondents were below the level of poverty and some were poor and very few were middle class or lower middle class.

Fears

Due to the enforced disappearances in the hands of security agencies, a fear has gotten into the society. The fear of unknown, the fear of unknown people and alien forces, the fear of unknown fate, the fear of abduction and disappearance, the fear of pain and torture and the fear of not having a peaceful death, as the enforced disappear lose their rights to proper rituals of funeral and mourning, they lose their identity and everything.

The fear has proliferated in the society, other who are not missing fear that they might face the same fate at any time, and the families fear the fate of their enforced disappeared relative and they constantly fear that they might get abducted for their political activism of recovery of their loved one.

According to Ayesha Baloch,

"Commission for enforced disappearances wants witnesses of Shabir's abduction, the only witness is his wife and other people who were abducted along with Shabir. The court doesn't accept his wife's statements; they say because she is his wife. And other people who were abducted along with Shabir and later were released refused to come in front of the committee as they fear that they might face the same fate as Shabir (09, July, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Fear has given birth to suspicious doubt and distrust in society. People fear of unknown and the fear that the unknown lives with them in a black sheep's clothing. And fear that if they be the witness of the abduction, they will also be enforcedly disappeared. They fear of abduction and facing the same fate and compelled many to adopt displacement many other to constantly live in depression and anxiety. In the case of abduction courts and committee wants the statements of the witness and out of fear they refuse to appear to the court and record their statements.

Many times fear has become the reason that justice has been denied to the victim. Such as in the case discussed above, due to fear of being abducted, the witness refused to present in front of commission. Fear has developed a situation of suspicion and terror among the masses, and in return the fear has broken the general trust in interpersonal relations in community.

Hopes and Despairs

Hope is the element which is giving the strength and motivation to these mothers, daughters, sisters and wives to keep going and keeping their struggle for the recovery of their loved one. Every day these women come to camp, to the sit-ins and to the protests in the hope that their loved one is alive and will return one day. They keep praying all day and protesting in the hope of return of their loved ones. And the ones who come back from these dungeons gives them more hope that their son, brother, father or husband will also return one day. Though the pain is unbearable for the relatives but the hope keeps them doing.

During ethnographic study we have come across many such conversations where the relatives were giving hope to other women as well as themselves by saying words like “Allah e sra Barosa pkn, inshallah kethe aa zaroor”, which means have your faith on Allah, inshallah he will definitely return.

One of the respondents Hajari, mother of enforced disappeared Imtiaz, while crying at a protest at Eid day for missing persons, showed all the dresses she has bought for her son at every Eid since he has gone missing, in the hope that he might arrive at Eid and then he must have his Eid dress.

The act of coming to the missing person’s camp regularly is the sign of hope, hope that through this action, their voice might be heard, and their loved ones might come back.

Wait for an extended period can result in loss of hope, and the discovery of mass graves of enforced disappeared persons further added up the loss of hope and despair.

During this ethnographic study a mother of a missing person was saying to another respondent that, “We are still waiting for my son, now I am exhausted”, and the other respondent replied that, “People are waiting for eight and more years, don’t lose your hope so early” (03, June, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta).

Families sit in protest camp due to their hope, but the hope is also sided with despair. Years of wait and search has been the cause of despair and loss of hope among families. Most interesting thing here is that, whenever a member of the protest camp experience despair, other members try to revive the hope of other despaired member, and the members also provide emotional support to each other.

Mourning

Enforced disappearances take away the right and ritual of mourning, because enforced disappearance holds the element of ambiguous loss. Mourning and ritual of death are linked to existence of the body of a person, rituals are performed in the presence or in the knowledge of the presence of the dead body, but in the cases of enforced disappearances there is absence of ritualistic mourning. And the bodies of missing persons found in mass graves are buried without proper rituals related to the belief system of victim’s also exempt ritualistic mourning.

But the exemption of ritualistic mourning doesn’t mean the complete absence of mourning at all. During field work, scenes of crying and mourning mothers, sisters and daughters were often observed; they mourn for the wellbeing of their loved one, for the pain and torture they be suffering and their life and whereabouts. Memories remain the only possession they have to keep their loved ones alive and to keep motivated for the fight of safe recovery of the victim.

Keeping up with Memories

Memories play a prominent role in giving hope and motivation to the families and particularly women to keep their struggle for their loved ones. During field work, we often heard mothers talking to each other about their sons’ possessions. We heard mothers crying, praying and sharing with each other that how they have kept the new shoes and the clothes of their sons’.

At the protest for the release of enforced disappeared persons at Eid day, one of respondent Taj Bibi aka Hajari had brought Eid dresses and shoes of her son Imtiaz which belonged to Imtiaz, and which Imtiaz had bought for himself for Eid just before his abduction.



(A respondent showing the Eid dresses and sandals she has bought for her missing son.)

A respondent Ganj Khatoon mother of enforced disappeared Zafar, also confirmed that she still has her son's clothes and shoes with her, put safely at a nice place at home, and every day she looks at them and weeps for her son.

For Fatima Bibi, since her son Sajid has been enforcedly disappeared four years ago, her grandchild Hammal is the way of keeping Sajid's memory. Hammal is the nephew of Sajid. According to Fatima Bibi, "When Hammal's mother was pregnant with Hammal, Sajid named the baby Hammal (23, June, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

In the process of healing and keeping up with struggle, memories play a vital role. Memories are the elements of motivation for the families and women activists. They keep the victims alive in their minds and as well as in material aspect i.e. belongings of the victims.

Ambiguous Loss

Many victims have been missing since a decade or more, and there is no news of their whereabouts and no news of their being dead or alive; but the families still hold hopes and search for their loved ones. They still hold the hope that their loved one might be alive somewhere and might come back some day. They have an ambiguous loss situation which traumatizes them for lifetime, and they take this ambiguous loss with them to their graves. The families are in limbo, in an ambiguous and uncertain situation if their loved one is alive or not and uncertain about the wellbeing of the victim, in this process families become the direct victim due to their mental and physical tensions in the search for their enforced disappeared loved one.

One case is the case of Mehr Gul Marri's mother. Mehr Gul Marri was enforcedly disappeared in 2016. His mother had protests, press conferences and sit-ins for him, till she herself embraced death in the pain of abduction of his son in 2019 during this fieldwork.

One of the respondent, Jannat Khatoon's ambiguous loss can be predicted from her statement from her interview, she says that,

"Agencies abducted him, he is missing, I have no idea where he is and about his whereabouts. If he exists or not, I don't know anything, it's the eighth year since he is missing (15, May, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

In her statement it is certainly visible that she is in a state of limbo and uncertain if her son exists or not, if he is alive or not.

Another respondent Bibi Saeeda whose two sons been missing for the last ten years also depicted a similar ambiguous mental condition, in her words she explains that,

"We don't know if the live or not, if earth has swallowed them or the sky has taken them (06, July, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)".

Bibi Saeeda's is also in a state of limbo, as she is also in ambiguous loss of her sons, and in an uncertain situation about her sons being alive or not and about her loss.

Ambiguous loss is a common mental condition all the families of missing persons feel and experience. The unawareness of the whereabouts of the victim and ignorance about the wellbeing of the missing person creates an uncertain environment. It puts the person in a situation of limbo and suspicion.

Political Opportunities

The Baloch women and families took to the roads for the recovery of their loved ones who have been enforcedly disappeared by the state. It was a surprising thing that why in a patriarchal structure women were in majority number in occupying roads and public spaces. Besides, in spite honor being the main theme around which all Baloch culture revolves, why when women took to the roads, there were very few men who showed their sympathy and support to the victims' families.

(Picture from Field: Women holding pictures of their enforced disappeared loved ones on Hunger strike at



Missing Persons protest camp.)

(Picture from Field: Women protesting for the recovery of their enforced disappeared relative)

The basic fact of absence of men out of the political space for the cause of recovering and providing justice to the families provided political opportunities. But we cannot give the statement that women lacked sympathy for the cause. The men who passed in front of the camp showed guilt and shame for not being there and not being able to support due to the fear every individual and society is facing.

These were some of the factors which were observed and deduced from the interviews which provided political opportunities to the women.

- Absence of men from political sphere
- Most of the respondents reported that there is only one man at home who is happened to be seriously ill, or there is no other men at home
- Other men relative can't come to protest because they have jobs and helping the family financially
- Men are afraid of being abduction that if they support or come to the camp, they may face enforced disappearance
- Besides, men use the position of women by using women as political shield and using women as a channel through which voices of the discriminated and missing could be reach to the world
- Women, because of their cultural and social standing in a receive more sympathy, support and public sentiments

Two-Pronged Resistance

Through political activism, women have captured a considerable level of political space, but it still does not mean that society has still provided a positive political space to these women. There is still a large segment of society which has negative sentiments towards women taking to the roads, being vocal and doing protests.

One of my respondents, a 30 years old female activist, had to leave the protest camp under the family and social pressure excreted by male segment of the society.

The respondent says that,

“The people of my village approached my father and showed their reservation against me for being participated in the protest camp as a female of the area. (01, August, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)”. (Later her father and sister came from village and took her with them).

One other respondent just before a protest asked to set her veil, and while doing so she said,

“The men at my family do not allow this. They say if you are going for it then you must put veil on your face (19, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)”.

Another respondent, who also happens to be an activist said that,

“My father has thrown me out of home for my human rights activities (20, March, 2019. Missing Persons Camp, Quetta)”.

There are a lots of social barriers to political activism of these women. Women political activism is considerably a very new phenomenon for the people. It still possesses a cultural lag, and it is hard for people to accept this change. Political crisis and enforced disappearance have provided chances of political opportunity but the acceptability from social structure is still lacking.

From the area the respondent belonged, the respondent reported that at that particular area education of girls was considered a modern and bad thing. If a girl or woman chose to get education and do job, then it is considered against the *Dodh o Dodhman* (customs) of that place. The society consider a woman coming out for protests or coming on social media is considered as a deviant act against the culture and against honor of parents. The people consider the behavior to be countering the popular customs or *Dodh o Dodhman*. So this act of my respondent to come to the roads and being politically active on social media while doing political participation was met with harsh reaction from her neighborhood and relatives.

III. CONCLUSION

The study is focused on state discrimination and ill treatment of Baloch ethnic group which gave birth to Baloch women political activism. All the women shared their early experiences of how their loved ones was enforcedly disappeared. After abduction missing person camp is the hope these women have. So they use their sit in and protest as a political symbolism and as a channel of resistance and struggle against the ones who has enforcedly disappeared their loved ones. These Baloch women have certainly occupied a space for themselves in raising their voices against enforced disappearances and recovery of their missing loved ones. They have certainly taken over the urban space for their political activism. The political activism by women has transformed the conventional-traditional meanings of public-urban spaces in Balochistan.

Most of these women are old mothers, sitting there for the safe release of their sons. There is very low flow of men at the protest camp, the reasons given by the women are that, either the men are doing job, or sick or there is no man left behind after the enforced disappeared person. In some cases, men are living in fear that if in case they came to the protest came and will be get noticed by the intelligence agencies and their fate will not be different from the missing persons.

The enforced disappearance incident has created multiple social, economic and psychological tensions for the left behind families of the victims. In most of the cases the victim is the sole breadwinner of the family, which created economic hardship for the family. Due to the prevailing fear in the society, families sometimes face alienation at the hands of their other community members. Besides these all grievances, the families suffer from ambiguous loss, in which after decades family members fail to accept their loss. But some of the members suffer from loss of hope and disparities after years of unfruitful search. The cost of the search cost the families, their health, wealth and everything else. The only hope the families could have, are the memories of the victims and the material belongings the victim had. These all circumstances create a situation where families fail to mourn for the victim due to ambiguous loss.

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