



MILITARIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S LIFE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KUNAN POSHPORA, KASHMIR AND CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS, BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Women are the vulnerable groups in every situations of conflict whereas militarization boosts such vulnerabilities. It impacts women's life in some unique ways than of the men's. Militarization is a process that strengthens the presence of militarism in a system whether in whole state or in a region within the state. It is a belief that enroots the military values in civilian life. While defining militarization does not only the physical existence of conflict but gives equal importance to deeply embedded ideological and cultural aspects of the society. Militarization encompasses the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior dominate social and political systems and influence gender relations, resulting in the militarization of the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of both state and society. Militarism being one of the most used tool and representative of the highly patriarchal practices, cultivates the seeds of masculinity and emasculation at the very beginning of a male child's life. The present paper highlights various issues explaining 'militarization as a process', 'militarism as an ideology' and impact of both on the lives of women. In this regard, two case studies have been taken, one from Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts) and the other from Kashmir (Kunan Poshpora) to see the differential/ similar impact of conflict on women in two entirely different regions. The study is mainly secondary data based and supplemented with primary data also.

Key Words: Militarization, Militarism, Kunan Poshpora, Chittagong Hill Tracts, National Security.

Introduction

The perception of using militaristic attitudes towards problem solving dates long back in history. The evolution of state as an entity is far accompanied with the idea of expansion of itself. The expansionist attitudes come along with the threat to national security. It is the national security that made the way clear of militarism to play a central role in state's policy formulation. In case of the third world countries, the notion of just war (as mentioned by Marxist theorist) paved the way to use militarism as the way towards achieving independence from the colonial rule. The concentration towards the attitude of the states in this part of world did not come to an end with the independence rather it started to be more deepened.

The cause of national security is attached here as well but what is important in our part of the world is that, states usually deserve an intention to use military means to address the political conflicts. It results in the increasing militarization of the states. Both in internal and external affairs the use of military means emerge as the sole rescuer of time. In building up the nations following the European model of nation building or in other words being motivated by the nation state, theory newly emerged independent colonial states particularly the South Asian states started their journey in early 1950s. In reality the assimilative policies towards nation building deepened the possibility of internal crisis with in ethnicity, region, religion etc. and constantly contributed in creating the minorities as 'the other'. It made the strengthening of military force within states. The story does not end here rather it gets boosted. It is because, the enhancement of military force is to be considered from various perspectives like the politics, economic causes; also how gender is intertwined in the process etc. There had been ample research and study on these aspects in the contemporary globalized world.

All these works done so far makes it clear that the impact of militarization on human lives is unavoidable and too influencing. But taking into consideration patriarchal societies we need to go deep into militarization from a gendered perspective taking women's lives into consideration.

Militarization is a process that strengthens the presence of militarism in a system whether in whole state or in a region within the state. It is a belief that enroots the military values in civilian life. It is accompanied with construction of a strong masculinity that is also a necessary component of state power. It is a process that makes the ground to legitimate the use of force as a solution to conflict and dissent. The in depth notion of militarization is, it gets boosted from strong patriarchy and nationalism. The perception of national honor, national pride and the ambition of emerging as armed power forms the basis of strong militarization in most of the countries. It implies the growing dominance of militarist values in civilian institutions. Militarization encompasses the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior dominate social and political systems and influence gender relations, resulting in the militarization of the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of both state and society.



In explaining militarization, Anuradha M. Chenoy deconstructs the following definition; "It has been defined as an increased emphasis on military power by states to further their national interests with the option of using military threats and war as an extension of politics".¹

From the above discussion, it is clear that Chenoy, while defining militarization does not only the physical existence of conflict but gives equal importance to deeply embedded ideological and cultural aspects of the society.

In militarized area the democratic practices and institutions get retreated and dominance of militaristic practices gets accelerated over the civilian politics. This is the situation which cannot be considered as an isolated matter in a context rather it emerges out as a particular context. It is as much as ideology backed as mentioned by Anuradha M. Chenoy and have an in depth constant cultural impact over the militarized area.

The presence of wider ideological and institutional structures that strengthens militaristic strategies is considered as prime elements that covers militarism. Militarism indicates a situation where the values and ideals of military get importance over the civil one. It clearly ensures domination of military as decision making along with implementation within a state where the civilian's role becomes lenient. Militarism has to be explained taking two phases of it, specifically earlier and contemporary phase of the development of it.

In its earlier phase militarism essentially meant the politics of power gaining, followed by increasing importance and influence of military force in a country. This would result in vivid presence of force in determining international relationship. In earlier phase of militarism the Realist perspectives of the states motivates the attitudes towards international relation among states. It unavoidably results in territorial expansion, conquest, imperialism and in final term war like situation or even war at times. But with the motivation of liberal theory of states relation the nature of international relation started to get changed and it does bring some change to the nature of militarism as well.

In the words of Eide Asbjorn & Thee Marek, the earlier forms of militarization like, German Imperialism under Hitler, the Japanese regime during the Second World War, are inadequate for the study of contemporary militarism which has achieved more sophisticated characteristics.²

In the contemporary phase of militarism, it goes beyond the external national security concerns. Here, it gains a strong foundation within the state having an intense influence on both external and internal issues of it. Thus, in contemporary world, militarism got access to all sphere of life including social, economic and political affairs of a country. The most noticeable point is that, it has an obvious impact of cultural shaping up and determination of that society. Militarism being one of the most used tool and representative of the highly patriarchal practices, cultivates the seeds of masculinity and emasculation at very beginning of a male child's life.

The term Militarism and Militarization are used interchangeably over the period of time. But there are some points of distinction between the two. "Militarization is a process, whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior result in the militarization of the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of state with a powerful impact on civil society. Militarism and militarization are mutually supportive, militarization is connected to the material aspects, and militarism to the ideological".³

Militarism as an ideology boosts the process of militarization. But mere existence of armed forces does not mean a state either militarized or militaristic. In this point presence of external threat and incompatibility to address the issue with nonviolence means may justify the use of force to eradicate the threat.

In contemporary world the extent and nature of militarization has crossed the boundary of external security threat of states. Now it is not a process through which military set up of a country will urge for political power. In today's world militarization develops and can develop under civilian government with the notion of saving the nation or solving political problems. The increasing use of militaristic force to subjugate regional, ethnic, religious or secessionist movement turns the

¹ Chenoy, A. M.(2002). "Militarism and Women in South Asia", New Delhi: Kali for Women Publications.

² Ibid.

³ Chenoy, A. M.(2002). "Militarism and Women in South Asia".pp.5, New Delhi: Kali for Women Publications.



society into badly militarized. In other words it also paves the way for the people engaged in movements and struggle to take shelter in armaments. It results in boosting up the rate of militarization in a society.

Militarization and Women

Militarization indicates the presence of armed male in every sphere of life in the militarized area. Here why I put armed male can be a point of odd feeling for some readers lets go into one of my experience that I along with my friends gathered from our visit to a defense school in Kashmir valley recently.

The school is considered as one of the best school in terms of academic and institutional set up in the valley. But the school is meant only for boys so we raised the question why girls are being deprived of such quality education! The school authority replied us that it is a foundation for the students who may opt for the National Defense Academy (NDA) of India, so boys are preferred here in. There are more 26 such institutions in India which are meant for boys. The reason behind is that the soldier image we can depict in the patriarchal society like ours a male person with arms in hands. Female as an entity is absent here in our psychology.

It is a psychological set up that is cultivated in us from the very childhood. It guides our understanding where masculinity and military are used interchangeably. The relation between masculinity and military emerges as the obvious one. As we see Tamanna Rashid in mentioning the works of David Morgan where he suggests; “Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity. In statues, heroic paintings, comic books and popular films the gendered connotations are inescapable. The stance, the facial expressions and the weapon clearly connote aggression, courage, a capacity for violence, and, sometimes, willingness for sacrifice. The uniform absorbs individualities into a generalized and timeless masculinity while also connoting a control of emotion and subordination to a larger rationality’.⁴

In our society it is the men who are taught and even are made bound to control their emotions from early age and considered as the rational being on the earth. So they emerge out with masculine character within themselves. There is another notion theory developed by R.W. Connell known as Hegemonic masculinity. It is to be understood from the practices that allow men’s domination over women to continue. He also argues that not all the men are hegemonic masculine in nature and it does not accompanied with violence all time. But it can be supported by force and achieved ascendancy of culture, institutions, practices and persuasions.⁵

Though R.W. Connell argues that all men are not hegemonic in nature but the notion of superiority and domination is attached with their character. It is something gendered imposition on male members of male dominated societies. In opposite the female are weaker sections of the society with whom the values of inferiority and to be dominated is very much attached. The women are the property of the society to be protected. And male are the brave enough to protect. In the arena of protection the militarized masculinities are produced.

In specific terms, masculinities emerge as the agency of protection and regeneration of community or national honor which is both nationally and socially desirable. The notion of protection get further intensified with the depiction of nation as a woman that is under constant threat of being dishonored by the enemy. So the male persons are responsible to safeguard the motherland.⁶

Over the period of time military has been exclusively male dominated, moreover the military and militarist ideology is based on conscious political policies and decisions. Many feminist scholars argue that military is an indispensable part of the centralized, masculinized pride and masculine practices.

In the analyzing the feminist intervention of militarization Anuradha M. Chenoy notes Chynthia Enloe in the following terms, “Since militarization occurs during war and peace, and in any part of society that may or may not be controlled by the

⁴ Rashid, T. (2009). “Militarized Masculinities, Female Bodies, and ‘Security Discourse’” In *Post-9/11 Pakistan, Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 33:4, pp.566-578, DOI: [10.1080/09700160902907100](https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160902907100).

⁵ Connell, R.W. & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” In *Gender Society* Vol.19, pp. 829: <http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/6/829>.

⁶ Siddiqi, D. (2014). “A Note on Gender and Militarism in South Asia”, In *Gender & Militarism: Analyzing the Links to Strategize for Peace*: www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org.



military, virtually anything can be militarized- toys, scientific research, motherhood and the school curriculum. It indicates that militarism has to be explained from a wider perspective”.⁷

Another dimension of societal structure that makes the military intensely male dominated is gender stereotyping. This stereotyping results in creation public and private spheres for men and women which are treated as inflexible. It is also believed that women are closer to peace and in opposition to militarism. Though it has been proved as a constructed belief as example we can cite the proportionate participation of men and women in Maoist movement in various places of India mostly in central India.

In modern perspective merely male depiction in case of military force has started to be changed with some minimal inclusion of women folk. But, as per the feminist analysis of such inclusion indicates, here feminine characteristics of the soldier get submerged by the masculine interpretation. In the words of Cynthia Enloe: “The message during military training is to “Kill the women in you”, to endorse the inferiority of women, destroy the feminist tradition of non-violence and increase the militarization of the society”.⁸

Feminist scholars like Enloe, argues that the linkage between violence, exploitation and threat to national security has to be determined with reference to the structural set up of race, gender caste, class etc. The masculinity of military contributes to maintain the gender differences and determines a lower rung for the women in social and power hierarchy. But in doing so it does not take into consideration the contribution of mother in promoting a soldier or the sacrifice of a woman or wife in the way to the success of militarization. So, the obvious result is feminine characteristics are lenient in the spheres of militarization which contributes in generating a controversial relation between women and Military.

Testimony of Women from Militarized Societies of Two Entirely Different Regions: Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts, CHT) and Kashmir (Kunan Poshpora)

The nature of the process of militarization and its impact on larger social groups may vary according to region, culture, ethnicity, religion etc. But, the experience of women in every conflict and militarized society is identical.

Jammu and Kashmir, the Northern state of India is the most highly militarized place in South Asia. Kashmir erupted into militancy in 1989 and from then the presence of Indian security force is constant. There are about 7, 00,000 Military and Para military forces stationed in the region along with 70,000 state police forces.⁹ As per the Human Rights Watch Report 2006, the security force and civilian ratio in the region is 1 soldier for every 20 Kashmiri. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) of 1958 empowers the soldiers to arrest without warrant, use force against any suspicion of offence. With the increasing impunity of the security forces deepens the possibility and chances of strengthening the militancy in the region. Moreover, it results in gross violation of human rights both by the state force and native militants. Throughout the process the women are on the edge of highest victimization.

In a militarized society cordon and searches, either house or body with or without warrant is a common issue. The same is the case in Kashmir as well. Again, as per the patriarchal norms are concerned, women are considered as the main target during searches and interrogations, so molestation of women by security personals has been a common practice over the period of time. Most of the time it does not take place as a mere isolated issue rather it appears to be a planned strategy to break the morale of the people.¹⁰

The molestation of women is not limited in term of verbal abuse, most of the time it attack the dignity of women by sexual violence.

The paper concentrates on a particular place Kunan Poshpora where on February 23-24; the 4th Rajput Rifles of the 68th brigade conducted a cordon and search operation in Kunan and Poshpora two neighboring village of Kupwara, a north district of Kashmir. During the cordon men and women of the two villages were tortured brutally. As per the Human Rights Watch report the number of rape can be as high as 100 women.¹¹

The incident of February 23 can be viewed as a large scale, well planned ‘Rape Mission’ in which women were victimized irrespective of age, physical condition etc.

⁷ Chenoy, A. M.(2002). “Militarism and Women in South Asia”.pp.17, New Delhi: Kali for Women Publication

⁸Enloe,C.(1987). “Feminist Thinking About War, Militarization and Peace”, pp.116, California: Sage Publications.

⁹ Zia, A.(2010).www.kashmirlit.org

¹⁰ “Kashmir Imprisoned: A Report by Committee for Initiative on Kashmir, June 1991”, In Speaking Peace: Women Voices From Kashmir, Edited by Bhutalia, U. (2002). pp, 51-79. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

¹¹ <http://www.kashmirawareness.org/Article/View/71272/horrific-night-kunan-poshpora>.



Three teenage girls were raped brutally and they are still missing. Several pregnant women were raped irrespective of their health condition either had miscarriage or delivered deformed children. The worst part is even a woman of 80 years old was not spared.

In a masculine society stigmatization of women has reached to such a level that the entire village used to be known as the village of raped girls.

The incident of February 23 had impacted the women of whole society not only in terms of physical and mental exploitations rather it continued to exist at every stages of life in aftermath.

Again, the raping of the girls of a village was taken as dishonor to the whole society that nothing had been done to help out the victims. Rather it has been mentioned in a report of an investigation conducted by four-members all women team¹² that, till three years following the incidence no marriage proposal had been received in the village.

It indicates that, militarization does impact the psyche of the whole society in greater terms. Alongside the reaction to a certain incidence of it has to be noted that the psychic change in Kashmir is a constant one. With regard to women's life under continuous militarization of more than two decades has created the social transformation within the society. Women have been more and more confined within their home as they have started to internalize that being abused by security forces either verbally or physically is the normal one. And it is the women who are under obligation to keep them aloof from the normal life. The mentioned investigation report by four-member team quotes some victims of the incident which not only depicts the exploitation at the time of rape but also portrays the long lasting afterwards impacts.

The report refers to a woman who told, every time she sees a man in Khaki, she relives the trauma. It is not the case for women solely, specially the youth boys of militarized Kashmir has gone through very unique psychic change.

As the report mentions of a son who was forced to watch his mother being raped had a nervous breakdown and now refuses to look at her face. It is obvious that the son is going through the experience which is horribly inhuman. But, here also we cannot help questioning the afterwards attitude of the boy that he refuses to watch his mother's face though she is the worst victim. It is not the boy's fault rather it is the social construction that makes him to behave in a prescribed way.

The report also highlights some other examples which are actually replica of the attitude of the boy mentioned above, like; some husbands of the raped women refused to accept their wives. As the report mentions of a wife who told that she had begged her husband to forgive her for a sin she had never committed but he refused.¹³ "He said she was unclean, whether by choice or by imposition since she had been defiled by another man. She was a sinner in the eyes of Allah and he would go to hell if he took her back".¹⁴

Such patriarchal practices of stigmatizing women for the sin they have never committed initiates some other aspects also. Here, women becomes some 'objects' to be protected and the responsibility of ensuring protection lies only with the male members of the society. Accordingly, it has been noted by many scholars that many youth joins armed militancy to protect their women folk from molestation and to address their hatred towards the exploitation and exclusion.

Likewise, other militarized societies Militarization in Kashmir has been accompanied with the social and economic structural change. Forced and voluntary disappearance and killing of the male members of the society contributes to deconstruction of social structure where women (who were relatively out of work force) were bound to manage their life on own. The most distinctive issue in Kashmir, as mentioned by Ather Zia, there are over 32,000 widows and more than 97000 orphans in the valley along with about 2500 half widow (the women whose husbands have been disappeared), it contributes to making an imbalanced and hopeless situation for women.¹⁵

But in a society like Kashmir the sufferings of women got more intensified with the fear of losing their dearest one like, husband, son, daughter or someone else now and then. As a result they become far concentrated in protecting them. As a result parents nurture their children being more conscious of the situation. It has some impact on the children especially if the child is a girl the impact is more intensified. Over the period of time, for her the 'Green Valley' turns into 'khaki' as she grows up with the sense of being aloof from normal life to secure her family, community and state from being dishonored!!

¹² Team members were Gouri Chowdhury, Ritu Dewan Manimala and Sheba Chhachhi.

¹³ Adapted from 'The Green of the Valley is Khaki', Women's Initiatives, a report of an investigation conducted by a four-member all women team. Team members were Gouri Chowdhury, Ritu Dewan Manimala and Sheba Chhachhi.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ather Zia, 2010; www.kashmirlit.org.



From Kashmir to Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh is a distance of 2500 Kilometers makes comprehensive difference in economy, culture, social structure, religion etc. but the women in both societies are in same condition. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is also militarized with the notion of making the nation one by ignoring the civil, political and socio-economic and cultural rights of the indigenous people of the country. The militarization in CHT had started soon after the independence of Bangladesh. The state's initiatives to settle 40,000 Bengali settlers in 3 hill districts (Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachari) of Chittagong was accompanied with appointment of more than 120,000 soldiers. It was an initiative taken by President Ziaur Rahman to bring change in demographic composition Chittagong Hill Tracts in early 1977.¹⁶

The state initiatives were considered as the invasion to their native place by most of the indigenous people of the region, so an armed group known as the Parbottyo Chattagram Jan Samhati Samiti (PCJSS or JSS) emerged as the medium of ensuring the autonomous status of it. The result was militarization of the society at the very root. Militarization comes in a society with distinctive masculine agenda so, whether it is Kashmir, Jaffna or Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) women are the targets both within society and from outside. The women in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have experienced a great deal of violence including verbal abuse to rape both by Bangladesh Army and Bengali settlers.

Local Jumma women have been the most susceptible to sexual violence and much other exploitation. In Bhusanchara Massacre, 31 May 1984 which was carried out jointly by the 26 Bengal Regiment of the Bangladesh Army and the Bengali settlers at least 400 Jummas were killed. Many women were gang raped and later shot dead.¹⁷

In 1990, information from a refugee camp in India indicated that one in every ten of the total female population was a victim of rape in CHT. Survey shows that 94 percent of the alleged cases of the rape of Jumma women from 1991 to 1993 were by security forces.¹⁸

Sexual violence and constant threat of sexual violence created a situation in which most of women of the region were bound to leave their home and continued to be hunted by fear. One of the rape victims named Rupali Chakma described her alienation as "I have lost everything, there is nothing more to lose.... I have already moved out from Rangamati (a district of the CHT) and now living in Bagerhuh . . . Now fear remains an unpleasant part of my life . . . Closed narrow places became quite a threat for me. I had always loved walking in the forests. It could be said that forest was my life but it has now become like an enemy".

It is not only the case of individual Rupali Chakma who was raped by the security forces rather the women and the girls of the indigenous community were in a state of fear and threat. As we see Meghna Guhathakurta mentions of Moitri, a young activist who tells of her childhood memories: "we had to flee to the jungles for a week. That was the worst nightmare in my life. On the one hand, I feared ghosts! On the other hand, I was frightened of tigers, bears and the army! The days used to go by somehow. But at nightfall, my fear increased. There was no sleep in my eyes, only tears. Whenever I think of those days it fills me with dread. I start up inadvertently."¹⁹

In 1997, a Peace Accord was signed between the Parbottyo Chattagram Jan Samhati Samiti (PCJSS or JSS) and the Government of Bangladesh to stabilize the situation in the region. The indigenous women constitute the most vulnerable community even after the formal signing of the peace accord in CHT region. Because, though the state party to agreed to remove the soldiers from the region, it remained in draft only. Moreover, the peace agreement itself was a 'gendered instrument'²⁰ where no gender specific issues were included. Even, women were not part to the negotiations in spite of being actively present in the struggle throughout the manifested conflict period. It has been alleged that between 1998 and 2008, approximately 20 Adivasi women have been raped and in 2009, there were more incidents of rape, sexual harassment and murder of Adivasi women, which included a thirteen year old Adivasi girl's rape incident by a police officer.

Impacts of militarization on women's lives were not confined only within physical and mental violence rather it victimized women both economically and environmentally. As the male members of the society were in constant threat of searches and

¹⁶ Chakma, A. S. (2014). "Peace building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT): An Institutional list Approach." In *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum)*, Vol. 59 (1).

¹⁷ UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,MARF,,BGD,,469f38681e,0.html>

¹⁸ Guhathakurta, M. (2001). "A Women's Narrative of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Conflict", In *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*, edited by Manchanda, R. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

¹⁹ Guhathakurta, M.(2004). *The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord and After: Gendered Dimensions of Peace. Prepared for the UNRISD report Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World.*

²⁰ Mohsin, A. (2003). *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace.* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.



arrest they were bound to hide themselves from the public domain. So, women were to save assure the hiding of the male members as well as support the family economically. But, women couldn't continue their traditional agricultural activities i.e. Jumm cultivation as larger military set-up caused high displacement. Again, military expansion has snatched away the forest (the land of livelihood) from the indigenous people. By 2012 the situation became even more worse that a report of Amnesty International mentions of a woman who said; "We are now left with no land to farm and grow crops, or forest to go to for collecting fuel, wood, and fruit. Life has become very hard as we have [the] army at very close proximity and I feel very insecure even walking short distances."²¹

In both Kashmir and CHT targeting women is the common weapon to disrespect 'the other community' in an easiest way. It is backed by the hegemonic masculine nature/ attitude of the state itself. The exploitations and experiences of women are identical not only in these two cases rather it is true of all the women in militarized societies. And of course, responses of the powers are also same particularly in both these cases. Here, rape or physical violence against women is not a matter of concern rather number politics gets the preference. But, there are some points of difference in terms of response to the violence.

In Kashmir, a religion dominated and highly patriarchal society women became further victimized with social stigmatizations. They became subjects to religious sanctions at an accelerated rate. Moreover, the conflict in Kashmir is still ongoing so is the militarization so there is less hope for the women to come out of the victimization or the threat of being victimized. This notion makes creates the situation where women patronize the movement against conflict from different platforms.

In CHT women were the integral part of the movement against conflict and militarization from the day one. Societies in CHT are less patriarchy dominated compared to Kashmir. As a result, we find less social stigmatization after the sexual violence against women. Again, the conflict in CHT is deemed to come to an end with the signing of a formal agreement but the root causes of conflict remains therein only. Moreover, lack of proper initiatives to implement the agreement does not bring any substantial change to the conflicting situations.

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