

SPECTRUM OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KASHMIR VALLEY

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Abstract

Women empowerment is still a debatable issue in India. She is still treated as a second class citizen especially in State like Jammu and Kashmir and the reasons are, besides illiteracy, customs, traditions, poverty, ignorance, her own lack of interest and motivation. The empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional aspect which demands active participation of various stakeholders in a developing nation like India. The focus of this paper is on exploration of women's empowerment and its challenges in Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu and Kashmir Valley, Women are the most vulnerable and worst hit section of the society especially under situations of violence caused by militancy and armed conflict. They don't only suffer from intense humiliation and harassment but also undergo traumatic experiences with prolonged depression making them mentally sick. Like many other places woman's role in Jammu and Kashmir has been central in the upbringing of children and managing domestic affairs. Men generally assume the role of breadwinners. Traditionally, the woman had a limited role in the economic life and her participation in the political sphere. However the disturbing situation prevalent in Kashmir has hit the Kashmiri women hardest. Thousands of women who have become widows have to bear the entire responsibility of bringing up their children and running

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the household expenditure. The Central Government and State Government are jointly working for the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir. This paper discusses to what extent the Central Government, State Government, have achieve women's empowerment and what the challenges for women's empowerment in the State.

Key Words: Empowerment, women empowerment,

Introduction

Empowerment of women, being a worldwide slogan and one of the Millennium Development Goals, aims at empowering of women in different spheres of life. Women groups, non-governmental development organizations, activists, politicians, governments & international agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. The word 'women empowerment' essentially stresses that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms- a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage.

Kashmir is famous by the name "Paradise on Earth" but the greedy needs of the two nuclear powers India and Pakistan have turned this paradise into a hell. Life here has become very uncomfortable and miserable to all. The minds of young generation have got contaminated by the issues developed by war. Women and children have suffered a lot. Children deviated from the studies as they failed to concentrate on them. The economic deficiency, displacement, poverty or gender based violence; the costs of conflict are borne excessively on women and children. It is very difficult to manage the things for a family by a woman who belongs to such a conservative society and volatile region like Kashmir. In a war crushed region women are now experiencing extra hardships due to stress and after effects of war and infertility as well as stress due to cultural pressure.

Jammu & Kashmir is the disputed territory between India and Pakistan, and unarguably the most beautiful State. Surrounded by the Himalayas and many other mountain ranges, the State is sanctified with deep valleys and breathtaking sceneries. It is also well known as paradise on the earth. Geographical conditions of the J&K comes in the way of rising adequate infrastructure and is further compounded by militancy and armed conflict that have taken a heavy toll of life and public property besides throwing normal life out of gear. The State has been the focus of interest over more than a decade and has drawn the attention of the world. A gradual rise in terms of gender discrimination especially during the last two decades due to the prevailing social, economic and political turmoil has become prominently displayed. Women's participation in the socioeconomic and political processes has taken a back seat. The effect of such a development results in an erosion of their freedom of speech, freedom to get education and enhancement of employment opportunities. The role of women has been marginalized affecting adversely the process of human development and well-being. Their lives have witnessed tremendous changes compelling them to be a silent spectator amidst the fast changing socioeconomic scenario. So much so, that the changes have developed signs of exclusiveness resulting in an identity crisis. So we can say that women are the most vulnerable and worst hit section of the society in J&K especially under situations of violence caused by militancy and armed conflict. They don't only suffer from intense humiliation and harassment, but also undergo traumatic experiences with prolonged depression, making them mentally and emotionally sick. Like many other places woman's role in Jammu and Kashmir has been central in the upbringing of children and managing domestic affairs.

In Jammu and Kashmir Woman are the most vulnerable section due to violence caused by militancy and armed conflict. They are facing number of challenges related to health, economy, education, politics, and more importantly they are traumatized due to prolonged depression of conflict in which number of women become widows. In this study researcher tried to access the freedom of movement within and outside their homes, freedom of acquiring education before and after their marriages and challenges faced by women were also identified with the help of secondary data. Researcher found that women had high level of freedom for their education before marriage and they had high level of freedom for their movement both within and outside their villages.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the present study are

- a) To highlight the issues of violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir.
- b) To explore the concept of women empowerment and also to identify ways in which the wellbeing of Kashmir women could be further enhanced.
- c) To identify the challenges behind women's empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir.

Material and Methods

The secondary sources of data were used in the study. The data was taken from various research papers published in journals, reports from newspapers, NGO and the Departments in the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

Present Status of Women in J&K - A Brief Overview

As revealed by Census 2011, those Female populations of J&K State come down from 47.15% of the total population in 2001 to 46.88% (prov.). Total population of Jammu and Kashmir is 12,548,926 of which male and female are 6,665,561 and 5,883,365 respectively indicating a reduced sex ratio of 8839. The corresponding figures of male and female as per Census 2001 were 5,360,926 and 4,782,774 respectively indicating sex ratio of 89210.

Sl. No	Population	2001	2011
1	Male	53,60,926	66,65,561
2	Female	47,82,774	58,83,365
3	Child Population	14,85,803	20,08,642
4	Child sex ratio	941	859

**The Child Sex Ratio at All India level (914) is lowest reordered since independence.*

As revealed by 2011 census Jammu and Kashmir ranks 3rd in declined sex-ratio i.e., 883 which is a matter of great concern and needs to be addressed on priority. The following Table sheds light on percentage change in the sex ratio over the period.

Challenges to women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir

In this State like Jammu and Kashmir where a huge population of women is unemployed and another significant section consists of widows and half widows, the importance of women's economic independence for their overall dignity and even survival is brought out by the fact that there is a linkage between the physical survival of women and their entry into the workforce.

Though there are many challenges to women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir, the main barriers to women empowerment are:

- Violence against Women
- Lack of decision-making authority
- Lack of participation in political affairs
- Poor and low status of women
- Lack of education
- Lack of awareness
- Inadequate & unorganized health care delivery system
- Under/unemployment leading to poverty

As seen, the challenges we face in empowering women are far away from the prospects of development programs initiated by our government. Though some of the recent steps taken by the government seem to indicate that these are the right steps to take, but what State really needs right now are sizable leaps. As we progress from a developing nation towards a developed nation, every care must be taken to compositely develop and empower women along the way to stand true to what our great Jawaharlal Nehru said "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"

Conclusion

Women of Jammu and Kashmir need to be empowered as it would not only shape the path for peace and reconciliation but also lead to peace and development of the State. Peace building attempts in order to promote sustainable peace need to address and transform structures which not only refer to the system of access and distribution of resources, but also social and political institutions, situations and relationships. In this process, principles of democratic participation, human rights and gender equality are crucial elements for the longer-term process of building peace based on social justice and equality for women.

A three-tier effort is needed which should include individuals, society and the state who need to coordinate, organize and implement relevant programs for the betterment of the women and children. There should also be the involvement of grassroots functionaries and nongovernmental organizations in a big way which can help shape a community approach to tackle the problems.

Empowerment of Women in Jammu and Kashmir requires a strong and sustained commitment by Governments and other Stakeholders, a favourable policy environment, and well-targeted resources. Long-term improvements in education and awareness opportunities will play a positive role in the overall development of women. In the short term, significant progress can be achieved by strengthening and expanding essential awareness among masses about gender equality, improving policies, and promoting favourable atmosphere for women. The development of women in Kashmir, no doubt, has been a part of the development planning process right from inception of Five Year Plans. Despite these attempts, women in Kashmir are still left with lot many issues and challenges related to health, economy, education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, female feticide and infanticide, late marriage, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wages, child sexual abuse, child labour and sexual harassment at work. To reduce the domestic violence overall society need to take initiative against social evils like dowry, drug addiction, early marriage etc. Counselling at various spheres like in Masjids, Mohalla Committees meetings, at peer groups should take place regarding domestic violence. Government and Non-government agencies should take positive steps for reducing domestic violence, wherein government can strength their law enforcing agencies, Non-governmental agencies can set up counselling cells, organize community programs, form social groups for reducing violence through group work process. Ultimately, beyond the overhang of violence, a lot of the contestations with patriarchy are essentially minuscule.

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