

Women empowerment: Issues and challenges in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Women are becoming the victims due to domestic violence, social practices, armed conflict and militancy in the state. They are not only suffering from penetrating humiliation and harassment but also suffering from shocking experiences with continued depression that left them mentally ill. The conflicting situation in Jammu and Kashmir has snatched the women's right and hit their hardship. No one knew how many women became widow and also having the responsibility of upbringing their children. The researcher used the secondary sources of data and came to the conclusion that women in many regions of Jammu and Kashmir are still facing the issues and challenges related to education, health, domestic violence, politics, declining sex ratio, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wage, child labour and female feticide and infanticide etc.etc. To overcome these issues central government, state government and NGO's should work together for the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir. The present paper emphasizes the attempts of the authorities and describes current policies for the empowerment of women in the region.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Violence, Challenges.

Introduction:

Jammu & Kashmir is the Northern most state of India. After the partition it became a disputed zone between India and Pakistan that has resulted in huge loss of human life, Govt. and public property and has put normal life out of gear and due to which the state is the focus of attention of the whole world. People of Jammu and Kashmir are facing numerous problems and deprived of their rights particularly the women who are the most vulnerable and most hit side of the society. Existing social, economic and political conditions of the state increase the gender discrimination during the last two decades (Gul & Khan, 2013). Low participation of women in political and socioeconomic process has been witnessed. Such discriminations have snatched their right of freedom of speech, freedom to get education and employment opportunities, which adversely affecting the human development and their well-being. The lives of the women in the state have faced drastic change that forces them to be a silent spectator observing the fast changing socioeconomic scenario. Such changes have developed signs of exclusiveness, resulting in an identity crises especially under the situation of armed conflict and militancy. Women's in the state are not only suffering from penetrating humiliation and harassment, but also undergo traumatic experiences with prolonged depression, making them mentally and emotionally ill. Like many other states of India women in Jammu & Kashmir are also bound by customs and traditions and bearing the responsibilities of upbringing their children and managing domestic affairs (Gul, 2015).

The women in the state became the victim of violence from the past two decades due to armed conflict, Militancy, domestic and social violence etc. Domestic violence hinders the choices of women development. Militancy and armed conflict has unleashed a wave of violence against women. "There can be no two opinions that the women's of Kashmir during the past two decades have been in the vanguard and have been fighting battles against all kinds of injustice and crimes against humanity committed by the state and by some dubious non state actors" Dabla; (2009) . According to the Jammu & Kashmir police report violence against women are also found in the form of control of females by the males members and females are treated inferior, even the economically independent and educated women are also at the receiving end(Sharma, 2010). Whereas study conducted by Banday & Ganesan; (2016) concluded that women in the state have facing a considerable level of restriction in travelling alone and discontinue their education due to customary practices. Goswami;(1993)

reported that the main reason of domestic violence against women in India is the life style of men i.e. Alcoholism, drugs, smoking, extra marital affair, bad company and poverty promote men to commit domestic violence against women. Similar findings were revealed by the study (Bhatt ;(1998) and Mc Kenry etal;(1995).They reported that Alcoholism, drugs, smoking, extra marital affair, bad company and poverty is the main cause of domestic violence against women. Moreover Liz; (2012) reported that domestic violence has also influenced by the type of marriage, educational qualification of husband, number of family members. Similarly Gerstein;(2000) concluded that poverty and educational level are the main reason for domestic violence. Further early marriage also makes women vulnerable to domestic violence.

Violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir:

Table 1: Crime Head wise Number of Cases Registered under Crime against Women in Jammu and Kashmir (2001to2015)

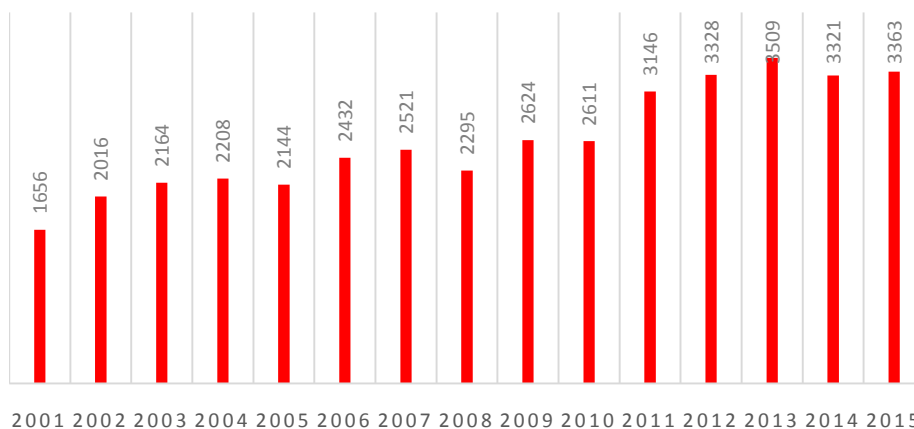
Crime Head	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rape	169	192	211	218	201	250	288	219	237	245	277	303	378	331	296
Attempt to commit rape	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	21
Kidnaping & abduction	504	596	615	632	658	723	707	656	825	840	1023	1041	949	813	1071
Dowry deaths	13	18	10	9	5	10	9	21	12	9	11	8	7	5	6
Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty	622	785	875	990	830	960	986	935	972	1038	1194	1322	1389	1421	1343
Insult to the modesty of women	288	368	376	264	371	347	353	296	371	262	350	347	354	237	175
Cruelty by husband or relatives	50	54	71	82	76	135	176	162	196	211	286	301	428	467	400
Importation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suicide	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	50
Dowry prohibition act 1961	3	0	4	2	0	2	1	2	3	2	3	3	3	1	1
Immoral Traffic Act	7	3	2	11	3	5	1	4	6	4	2	3	1	1	0
Total	1656	2016	2164	2208	2144	2432	2521	2295	2624	2611	3146	3328	3509	3321	3363

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India

Violence against women is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. It is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts; it cuts across age, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries; affects all societies; and is a major obstacle to ending gender inequality and discrimination globally. UN General Assembly;(2006).The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Violence against women is an extreme form of male control over women. Men's violence pushes women into a subordinate position. Domestic violence against women is on the rise in Jammu and Kashmir. Even the educated and the economically independent women are at the receiving end, according to anecdotal evidence contained in police data. Sharma, 2010). During the last two decades violence against women has increased and militancy and the effect of armed conflict had made the situation more tense. Domestic violence in the state are practiced against the women residing in urban as well as rural and in all economic, educational, cultural, social and age group and classes. About 15% of the married women are physically and mentally tortured Dabla;(2009).

On the other hand, militancy and militarization has unleashed a wave of violence against women While the misuse/partial-use of gun by pro-government and pro-freedom militants led to series of violent acts against women, the state-sponsored gun in the hands of military and Para-military forces led to all sorts of excesses against women, including abusing their chastity. The former kind of violence has no social, legal and political legitimacy, while the latter seems legitimized by draconian laws like Disturbed Areas Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act Dabla;(2009). As per the Jammu & Kashmir statistics crime against women are increasing at an alarming rate, these include rape, kidnapping, dowry, importation, suicide and the like as shown in the table: 1.



Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India

Figure-1: Graphical representation of crime against women in J&K from (2001 -2015)

From the above data we can analyze that all sorts of crime against women in the state is at climax and are increasing continuously. In the year 2001 number of crime against women were 1656 which became double in the year 2015. According to the police reports that near about 70% of the cases of crime against women are of domestic nature i.e. cruelty of husband, extra martial affair, dowry, physical and mental abuse. Whereas the state commission for women realize that superior nature of men is the main cause of domestic violence in the state and among all the crimes rape is more alarming, as it effected almost all the age group of female as shown in the table-2:

Table-2: Age Group wise Number of Victims of Total Rape Cases in Jammu and Kashmir (2015)

state	No. of cases reported	No. of victims age group wise.						
		Below 6 years	6-12 years	12-16 years	18-30 years	30-45 years	45-60 years	Above 60 years
J&K	296 (0.8%)	2	6	5	171	94	2	1
India	34651	451	1151	4244	16966	5677	637	98

Source: State commission for women report (2015)

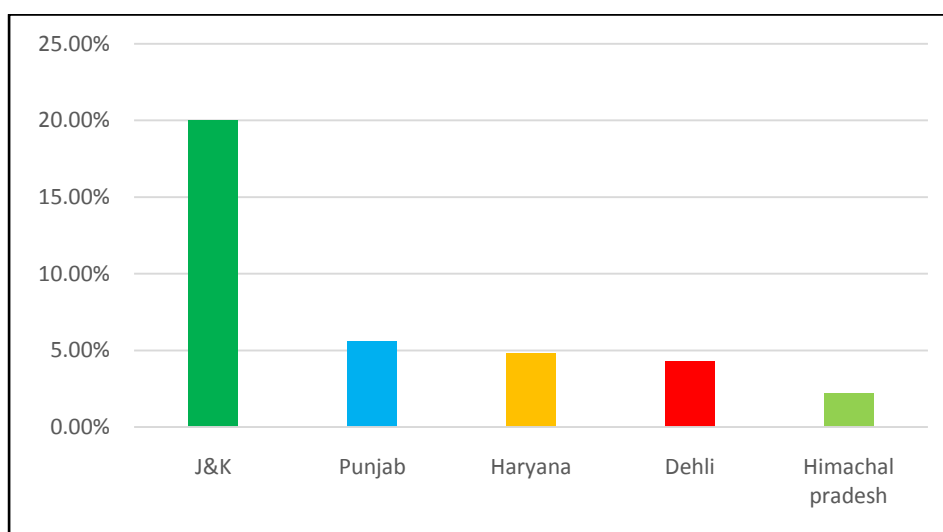
Violence against women also act as barriers in their education. Various traditional practices restrict them from receiving even the basic education. Literacy rate of females are far behind than their counterparts as shown in the table-3:

Table-3: Literacy Rate in J&K (2011).

Census year	Total person	Males	Females	Literacy rate	Male literacy	Female literacy
2011	7245053	437064	2874449	68.74%	78.26%	58.01%

Source: Census survey (2011)

Different kinds of violence, social and traditional practices against women not only restrict them from receiving education, but also made them unemployed and dependent. Even the educated women are also at the receiving end. Sharma (2015) reported that the rate of women's unemployment in Jammu & Kashmir is 20.2 %, which is much higher as compared to the neighboring states (Punjab,5.6%), (Haryana,4.8%), (Delhi, 4.3%) and (Himachal Pradesh, 2.2%). It is also higher than the national average of 3.7 percent, as shown in the figure-2:



Source: The Tribune, 26/05/2015.

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/community/in-north-india-unemployment-rate-among-women-highest-in-j-k/85402.html>

Figure-2: Graphical representation of unemployment rate of women of J&K, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh.

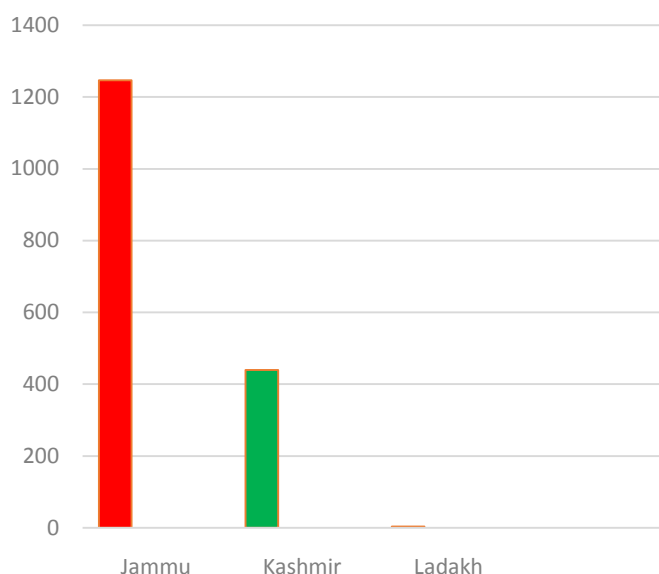
Unemployment rate of women is more in urban areas than in rural areas of the state. The unemployed rate among urban women stands at 25.6% whereas 16.6% stands for rural areas. According to the census 2011 the total workforce in Jammu & Kashmir stands at 43.23 lakh, out of which main workers constitute 26.44lakh (61.77percent) and marginal workers 16.79lakh (38.83percent) of this, female workers constitute 26.09 percent of the total workforce. Women comprise only 12.8 percent of main workers in Jammu and Kashmir compared to 47.02 percent of marginal workers. Sharma; (2015).

Common violence against women in the state are as under:

Domestic violence:

Domestic violence against women is a complicated issue and an oppressive act against woman's personality and being. Domestic violence against women are practice to control their behavior through fear. It is carried out by a husband or his family. It includes physical and sexual violence, usually accompanied by psychological abuse it's estimated that from 50% of women in the State have suffered from this kind of violence. As almost 70% of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by their husbands. This is mostly relating to matrimonial

disputes and family squabbles and harassment for dowry Gul and Khan;(2014). According to the Jammu & Kashmir police crime branch report (2015), the number of incidence of domestic crime in Jammu division is high in comparison to Kashmir and Ladakh division as shown in the figure-3:



Source:<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/jammu-district-tops-in-domestic-violence-cases-in-jk/articleshow/47383216.cms?intenttarget=no>

Figure-3: Graphical representation of domestic crime in different division of J&K.

.As per the report since (2009) near about 4157 incidence of domestic crime has been reported from the entire state, Jammu division has reported 1,247 on top followed by Kashmir division with 439 cases, whereas Ladakh division has reported only 4 cases. In spite of strong backing of law, violence against women is increasing. Women are not only suffering from penetrating humiliation and harassment but also suffering from shocking experiences with continued depression that left them mentally ill. Malik; (2015)concluded that 55% of the patients visited the psychiatric hospital in Srinagar are women suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders. Also reveals that the violence against women involves beating, psychological exploitation and sexual harassment.

Traditional practices:

Women fall victim to traditional practices that violate their human rights. The persistence of the problem has much to do with the fact that most of these physically and psychologically harmful customs are deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of society. Some of these practices in the state include abortion, female infanticide and deliberate neglect of girls.

Violence by prevailing social and political turmoil:

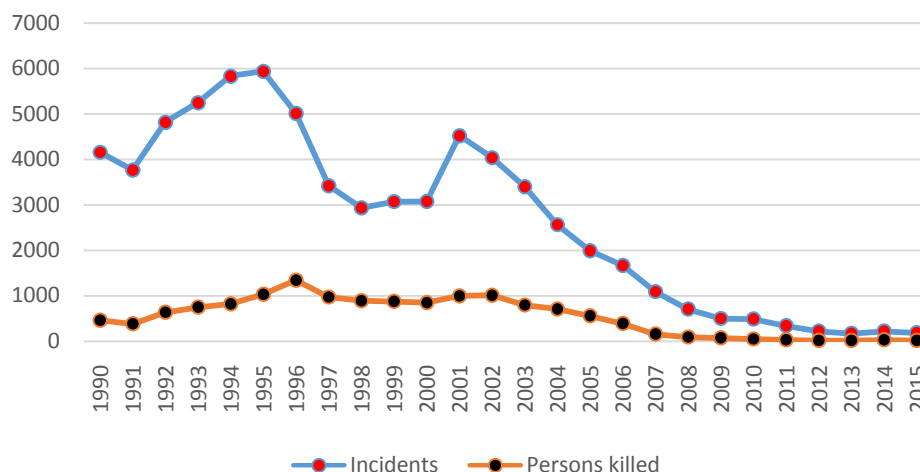
The insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir or the Kashmiri Insurgency is a conflict between various Kashmiri separatists and nationalists sometimes known as "ultras" (extremists and the Government of India. Few groups favour Kashmir accession to Pakistan, while others seek Kashmir's complete independence. Since (2002), skirmishes with the local insurgents have constituted the main conflict in the Kashmir region. Thousands of people have died during fighting between insurgents and the government as well as thousands of civilians who have died as a result of being targeted by the various armed and militants groups as shown in the table-4:

Table-4: Representing Militants Activities and Persons Killed in Jammu and Kashmir (1990 to 2015).

Years	Total No. of incidents	Civilians killed
1990	4158	461
1991	3765	382
1992	4817	634
1993	5247	747
1994	5829	820
1995	5938	1031
1996	5014	1341
1997	3420	971
1998	2932	889
1999	3071	873
2000	3074	847
2001	4522	996
2002	4038	1008
2003	3401	795
2004	2565	707
2005	1990	557
2006	1667	389
2007	1092	158
2008	708	91
2009	499	71
2010	488	47
2011	340	31
2012	220	15
2013	170	15
2014	222	28
2015	186	16

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

The above data indicates the number of incidents took place due to extremists and the number of persons killed in the state from (1990-2015). The victims include Men, women, and children. Such incidents directly affected the women, thousands of women become widow and bearing the responsibilities of upbringing their children. Many of them lost their young children, such shocks made them mentally ill. But data shows that these incidents are continuously decreasing, in the year (1990) total number of incidents by extremists were 4158 and in (2015) they were 186. Similarly the number of causality also decreasing as shown in the table, total number of person killed due to extremists activities were 461 whereas in (2015) total figure was only 16. However the data represents only the persons killed by militants from (1990-2015).



Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India

Figure-4: Graphical representation of Persons Killed in Jammu and Kashmir (1990 to 2015) by militants

Above figure represents the declining rate of incidents by extremist's activities and persons killed by such activities. However people of J&K are also effected by military and para military forces. Many shocking accidents took place in the state. In Feb. 23, 1991, Army launched a search operation in Kunan Poshtpora village of Kupwara district. During the search operation soldiers illegally ganged raped at least 53 women. However as per the human Rights organizations the number of raped women could be as high as 100 (Mattu, 2002). Similarly two young women were murdered and raped between 29 and 30 May 2009 at Bongam, Shopian District. Two women who were sisters-in-law went missing from their orchard on the way to home on 29 June 2009. The next day morning, their bodies were found one kilometer apart (GK, 2009). Many such other cases happened in the State from the last twenty-five years due to political turmoil.

Empowerment of Women in J&K

For the empowerment of women in the state various schemes has been launched by the center and state Government, aims at empowering women in different spheres of life, these are as under:

Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Poor Women:

The scheme of awareness generation programme aims to empower women by providing knowledge on important issues relating to status of women, female feticide, domestic violence, trafficking, drug addiction, low sex camps are organized through voluntary organizations already working for the welfare of women and children.

Condensed Course of Education for Adult Women:

The Scheme of Condensed Courses of Education was initiated by CSWB in 1958 to cater to the needs of adult girls and women who could not join mainstream education system or were school dropouts. The scheme aims to provide educational opportunities to girls and women above the age of 15 years along with additional inputs of skill development vocational training. The main focus of the scheme is to ensure that contents of the course are need-based and modified according to local requirement, simultaneously targeting various stages of educational levels of primary, middle, high school and matric / secondary level courses. The programme also aims at instilling confidence among adult women through education making them able citizens. Selection of candidates is required to be done by a committee comprising the institution and the Principal / representative of a local government school of the area where the course is to be held. The Scheme is being implemented through Voluntary Organizations' and educational institutions, having requisite infrastructure and experience in the field of women / social development and education across the country

Family Counseling Centre:

Under the FCC scheme, counselling, referral and rehabilitative services to women victims who are in moral danger within the family or society at large including those affected by disputes, marital discord or maladjustment is provided free of charge.

Janani Suraksha Yojana:

Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) being implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neo-natal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among the poor pregnant women. The Yojana, launched on 12th April 2005, by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, is being implemented in all states and UTs with special focus on low performing states. JSY is a 100 % centrally sponsored scheme and it integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care. The Yojana has identified ASHA, the accredited social health activist as an effective link between the Government and the poor pregnant women in 10 low performing states, namely the 8 EAG states and Assam and J&K and the remaining NE States. In other eligible states and UTs, wherever, AWW ((Anganwadi workers) and TBAs or ASHA like activist has been engaged in this purpose, she can be associated with this Yojana for providing the services.

Scheme for Working Women Hostels:

The objective of the scheme is to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist. To achieve this objective, the scheme will assist projects for construction of new hostel buildings, expansion of existing hostel buildings and hostel buildings in rented premises. The working women's hostel projects being assisted under this scheme shall be made available to all working women without any distinction with respect to caste, religion, marital status etc., subject to norms prescribed under the scheme. While the projects assisted under this scheme are meant for working women, women under training for job may also be accommodated in such hostels subject to the condition that taken together, such trainees should not occupy more than 30% of the total capacity the hostel and they may be accommodated in the hostels only when adequate numbers of working women are not available. Children of working women, up to the age of 18 years for girls and up to the age of 5 years for boys may be accommodated in such hostel with their mothers.

Swayamsidha Scheme:

Swayamsidha scheme was launched in the year 2001 dedicated to Women's Empowerment. It is a Self Help Groups based programme with emphasis on convergence activities. The objective is to ensure that Self Help Groups members avail the benefit of all schemes and services in an integrated and holistic manner.

Umeed:

The hope, a Government of India funded flagship project to empower women in conflict ridden Kashmir, was launched by Congress scion Rahul Gandhi in June 2013. The scheme was made possible only after a group of students from Kashmir University visited Ameen (UP) to study the model and its successful implementation. Umeed scheme is aimed to empower women in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. The project is aimed at encouraging rural women to make small savings so that their SHGs will eventually become bankable at reduced rate of interest.

National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC):

Women belonging to Minority Community viz. Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians and Zoroastrians are being financed under this scheme at a nominal rate of interest 6% per annum simple to be liquidated within a period of 5 years. Maximum loan amount for an individual beneficiary is Rs. 1.00lakh.

National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC):

Women belonging to backward & other classes as prescribed under State SRO 126 are being financed under this scheme at a very low rate of interest 4% p.a up to Rs 50,000/- & 6% p.a up to Rs.1.00 lakhs for which the repayment period is 5 years.

National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation (NHFDC)

Handicapped Women with 40% disability. Are being financed under this scheme at a very low rate of interest 3% up to Rs. 50,000/- and 4% p.a up to Rs. 1.00 lakh which is to be liquidated within period of 7 years.

Educational Loan:

Education loan is also provided to the women beneficiaries' under each of the above mentioned schemes for professional/ technical trainings.

Micro Credit loan

Micro Credit facilities are also provided to Self Help Groups (SHGs) at the rate of 5% for which repayment period is 3 years.

Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme (SKEWP):

In addition to the above mentioned centrally sponsored schemes the social welfare department is also implemented "Empowering Skilled Young Women, 2009" scheme taking a lead role in the implementation of Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme (SKEWP) envisaged by the Government to create self-employment avenues for educated unemployed youth. The nominal interest of 6% charged on the credit being provided to prospective entrepreneurs is well taken by the unemployed youth women and in fact the Corporation is getting encouraging response in all parts of the state.

Challenges to Empowerment of Women in J&K

The central & State government is taking some good initiative for the empowering women by helping women to help themselves and their families as well. But still large population of women in the state is unemployed, illiterate, widows, half-widows and lagging behind in every spheres of life. There are some challenges that act as hindrance in the way empowering the women:

- Violence against women is on leaps and bounds in J&K.
- Illiteracy or ignorance of people also a constraint in the empowerment of women.
- Many girls in many districts of J&K still get married at an early age, which affect their overall development to a greater extent.
- Lack of decision-making authority
- Many customs and cultural practices hinder the empowerment of women. For examples many parents do not send their daughters to schools when they attain puberty.
- Lack of women's participation in political affairs
- Poor and low status of women
- High level of illiteracy among women.
- Lack of awareness
- Inadequate & unorganized health care delivery system

All these challenges are act as a barrier in the way of various developmental programmes for the empowerment of women. These challenges need to overcome at the earliest, only than we can achieved the desired target. Though state government has taken some good steps recently, but what State really needs right now are sizable leaps! As we progress towards a developed nation, so 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:

Empowerment of Women in J&K requires a strong and sustained commitment by governments and other stakeholders, a favorable 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 favorable 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 of 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. Counseling 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 setup counseling cells, organize community programs, form social groups for reducing violence through group work process.

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