

Empowerment of Rural women: A Study of Kashmir Valley

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Abstract: The concept of empowerment has become a popular term used mostly by social scientists and especially by feminist scholars. It is deeply interlinked with gender equality which appears to be the ultimate goal of women empowerment. One of the vital facets of empowerment is that women being capable of participating in decision making process alike their male counterparts on all walks of life. Rural empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent times. In rural areas, women being the biggest segment are the back bone of the Indian economy. They are the key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. The focus of this paper is to highlight the rural empowerment of women in Kashmir valley. In Kashmir valley, rural women are the most vulnerable section of the society. They not only face extreme humiliation and harassment, but also are subject to prolonged depression. Rural empowerment of woman in Kashmir valley is being regarded as sine-quo-non of progress for that very state hence, the issue of rural women empowerment in Kashmir valley is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers. The self-help groups, MANREGA, Education, various schemes, Government laws and provisions, NGO's and also self-realization have paved the way for rural empowerment of women in Kashmir valley. Through that, they are becoming independent and providing employment opportunities to others.

Index Terms - Rural, Women, Empowerment and Jammu & Kashmir

1. Introduction

Women constitute half of the world population, and contributes two- third of world's work hours. She earns only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world's resources. It means they are the largest excluded category in almost all respects. They are treated as second grade citizens and are neglected and ignored in all walks of life. In the history of human development, women have been as important as man. In fact, the status, employment and work performed by women in society is the indicator of a nations overall progress. Without the participation of women in national activities, the social, economical or political progress of a country will be stagnated. (Soumitro, 2012) The world over women struggles to break the shakles that bind them and challenges the unequal distribution of power in society. The most famous saying said by the pt. Nehru is "to awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.

2. EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a multi-faceted concept, which should enable women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life (Surekharao & Raja Manamman 1999). It has become a popular term used mostly by social scientists and especially by feminist scholars. It is deeply interlinked with gender equality- equity which appears to be the ultimate goal of women empowerment. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or to

have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

3. Women Empowerment

Efforts for women empowerment as a phenomenon is not something absolutely new. It has been there throughout history in almost all societies. What could be considered as new is its increasingly coming out in public., it is shifted and reshaped for women's welfare and their development. It is being discussed, reported and critically evaluated (Fadia, 2017) A women empowerment begins with consciousness-perceptions about herself and her rights, her capabilities, her potentials, awareness of how gender and socio cultural and political forces affect her. In fact, women empowerment is the corner stone for the achievement of tripple goals of equality, development and social justice. The concept of women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, specially caste and gender based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Empowering women is to make them independent in all aspects from mind, thought, rights, decisions etc by leaving aside all the social and family limitations. It has also been realised and accepted that genuine commitment and efforts have to be made by each country at the government, non government and individual levels.

4. Rural women Empowerment

All though in rural areas, women being the biggest segment is the back bone of the Indian economy. They are the centre of rural development in terms of alleviation of rural poverty with economic growth and stability. But they face extreme violence and discrimination in all walks of life. They are neglected at family, community and societal levels and living as an oppressed class. Rural women persist with low levels of income, sparse access to education and health services, limited job security as well as limited land and inheritance rights. In addition to the entrenched pattern of discrimination, unsustainable development practices, climate change and violence against rural women intensify the burden placed on women and their families. Lack of access to services and infrastructures takes away time from education and other opportunities and this gap in access disproportionately affects women and girls. According to food and agriculture organization(FAO), rural women spend more than twice what men do on the same tasks. UN women sports the leadership and participation of rural women in shaping laws, strategies, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security and better rural livelihoods. Rural empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country, hence the issue of rural women empowerment is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers. The self help groups, MNREGA, Education, various schemes, govt laws and provisions, NGOs and also self realization have paved

the way for rural empowerment of women. Through that, they can become independent and get employment themselves and provide opportunities to others.

5. Rural women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir

Kashmiri society is patriarchal in nature, which has confined women within four walls (Mohd, 2009). Especially, in rural areas, women had limited exposure to modern communication tools and low level of education with limited freedom of interaction because of discrimination and violence. Gender discrimination is on rise due to prevailing social, economic and political turmoils. Low participation of rural women in the socio-economic and political activities, which has badly affected the process of development resultantly it has eroded their freedom of speech and expression, freedom to get education and enhancement of employment opportunities. Women in rural areas in Jammu and Kashmir also face a lot of greater challenges i.e domestic violence, inadequate and unorganised health care, lack of decision making authority, poor and low status of women, lack of awareness, illiteracy and ignorance and also many customs and cultural practices hinder the empowerment of women.

The state government is taking some concrete steps in empowering rural women by helping women to help themselves and their families. A huge population of women in Jammu and Kashmir is unemployed and another significant section consists of widows and halfwidows. The state government passed the protection of women from domestic violence act (PWDVA), in 2010 (Showkeen, 2015). The government implemented various schemes for rural empowerment of women in jammu and kashmir, schemes like: Umeed scheme, national backward classes finance and development corporation scheme (NBCFDC), Sher-i-kashmir employment and welfare programmes. One of the very important facet of rural empowerment of women in jammu and kashmir and other parts of India, is that the women should realize the importance of their own identity for society in general for their own self in particular. They should also realize that only education would empower them greatly.

5. Area of the Study

Jammu & Kashmir is northern-most Indian Administered state (IAK), lying between six mountain ranges and covering an area of 222,236 sq. kilometers. It is located between 32°17' and 36°58' North latitude, and between 37°26' and 80°30' East longitude (Guroo T. A. 2016) The region commonly known as Kashmir is bounded on the north by Afghanistan and China, on the east by China, on the south by the state of Himachal Pradesh and the state of Punjab in India, and on the west by the North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir actually comprises of three regions: the foothill geographical characteristics. Nestled in north- western folds of the Himalayas, the Valley is surrounded on almost all sides by mountain ranges characterized by snow covered lofty peaks plains of Jammu; the lakes and valleys of Kashmir with high

altitude plains and mountains of Ladakh which lies beyond narrow passes.(Guroo T. A., Jan.6- 2017). The valley of Kashmir, often been termed as the paradise on earth, has a unique; cover the area of 15440 km. The mountain range rising to a height of 5550¹meters on the north east-side, dip-down to about 2770 meters in the south, where the Banihal-pass (Jawahar tunnel) provides an exit from the valley. The only outlet for rivers is the Baramulla - George, where the placid Jhelum River leaves the smooth grassy banks and hurries headlong down its rocky course to the plains of the south. (Raze, 1978) The oval shaped valley is filled with thick deposits of alluvium, which has blanketed even the lower slopes of the surrounding ranges. The Jhelum and its tributaries drain it, among which Lidder, Indus, Pohru, Sandran, Bring, Vishav and Surkhmag are prominent. The valley is about 130 km long and 40 km wide.(Lawrence, 1996)Based on Stratigraphy and altitude, the valley of Kashmir may be divided into the four physiographic divisions of Jhelum valley floor, Karewas, Side valleys and the Greater Himalayan Range. The valley of Kashmir has continental climate characterized with marked seasonality.

6. Research Objectives

- ✓ To highlight the suffering of common Women folk.
- ✓ To highlight the state of empowerment of rural women in Jammu and Kashmir.
- ✓ To assess womens decision making in family matters.
- ✓ Another objective is to gain the attention of conscious people towards women empowerment.

7. Data Collection

As the approach followed in most social science research, present study is based on the both primary as well as secondary source of the data collection.

8. Methodology

The selected Area of study is constituted of ten districts, out of which ten have been selected for present study. From each district only10 respondents were selected for the collection of research data in relation to the demographic composition of the Kashmir valley. In this way, 100 respondents were selected in total from the concerned universe. Survey method is used for collection of data.

Table 1

Profile of Respondents

Selected Districts	Gender		Marital Status		Educational Status		Age status		
	M	F	Ma	Um	Lit.	Ilit.	18-28	29-39	40-above
Anantnag	4	6	8	2	5	5	3	4	3
Bandipora	6	4	7	3	8	2	4	3	3
Baramulla	5	5	7	3	9	1	6	3	1

¹<http://www.newkerala.com/states-of-india/jammu-kashmir.php>.

Budgam	4	6	6	4	7	3	3	3	4
Ganderbal	5	5	9	1	6	4	5	2	3
Kulgam	6	4	8	2	5	5	2	7	1
Kupwara	6	4	7	3	6	4	1	7	2
Pulwama	5	5	8	2	9	1	3	5	2
Shopian	6	4	9	1	8	2	2	5	3
Srinagar	3	7	5	5	5	5	4	4	2
Total	50	50	74	26	68	32	33	43	24

Note: M=Male/Married, F=Female, Um=Unmarried, Lit. =Literate & Ilit. =Illiterate.

From each District of the Valley, we have taken 10 respondents, in which 50 are male and 50 are female respondents. On the basis of marital status among 100 respondents, 74 are married and 26 are unmarried and by the educational wise distribution 68 are literates and 32 are illiterates. And the above table visualize that out of 100 respondents, 33 are belong to 18-28 age group, 43 are belong to 29-39 age group and 24 are belong to 40 above group.

9. Analysis

Table 2

Q.1 Do you agree that women-folk faces numerous challenges in her life?

District wise Respondents in %	No	Yes	Total
Anantnag	4	6	10
Bandipora	6	4	10
Baramulla	5	5	10
Budgam	3	7	10
Ganderbal	4	6	10
Kulgam	3	7	10
Kupwara	2	8	10
Pulwama	1	9	10
Shopian	5	2	10
Srinagar	3	3	10
Total	44	46	100

The success or failure of women empowerment at the gross-root level depends upon the active participation indecision making process. If the goal of women empowerment has to be achieved, people's especially women participation is a pre-requisite for it. It is quite clear from the above table that 44% respondents are not supported with that women folk face numerous challenge in their lives while 46% respondents are agreed with the cited question and rest ten % respondent are not aware about it.

Table 3

Q.2 what are the factors responsible for women's non-participation in the decision making?

District wise Respondents in %	Male dominance	Illiteracy	Poverty	Total
Anantnag	4	4	2	10

Bandipora	5	4	1	10
Baramulla	3	5	2	10
Budgam	4	5	1	10
Ganderbal	2	7	1	10
Kulgam	2	6	2	10
Kupwara	1	7	2	10
Pulwama	6	3	1	10
Shopian	5	3	2	10
Srinagar	3	6	1	10
Total	35	50	15	100

From above table 35% respondents say Male dominance is a factor for non-participation of women in decision making processes of the family, 50% say Illiteracy and only 15% say that Poverty as factor responsible for non-participation of women in local governance. This calls for greater attention to female education in Jammu and Kashmir.

Table 4

5 Do you agree that women members of family are not intelligent as compared to male members?

District wise Respondents in %	No	Yes	Total
Anantnag	1	9	10
Bandipora	9	1	10
Baramulla	1	9	10
Budgam	4	6	10
Ganderbal	3	7	10
Kulgam	4	6	10
Kupwara	1	9	10
Pulwama	1	9	10
Shopian	2	8	10
Srinagar	2	8	10
Total	28	72	100

In general, women are not present when the decision is taken on family matters. It is also observed from the feelings of respondents that women members are not present in the decision taken meetings which matters even their life. And it is evident from the above table that 72.00% of respondents agreed on above mention question and 28.00% say 'NO' about the same. This indicates the plight of women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Table 5

Q.6 Do you think that the self-help groups, MANREGA, Education, various yojnas, government laws and provisions will raise the social status of women in Jammu and Kashmir

District wise Respondents in %	Yes	No	Total
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Anantnag	5	5	10
Bandipora	6	4	10
Baramulla	8	2	10
Budgam	5	5	10
Ganderbal	6	4	10
Kulgam	3	7	10
Kupwara	8	2	10
Pulwama	5	5	10
Shopian	4	6	10
Srinagar	6	4	10
Total	56	44	100

The above table reveals that 56.00% of respondents think that the self-help groups, MANREGA, Education, various schemes, government laws and provisions will raise the social prestige of women while 44.00% respondents think not so. Moreover, some of the respondents going to extent by saying that women social status would be up if they participate in any decision making process.

Conclusion

So far as the Jammu and Kashmir rural women empowerment is concerned, the position of rural women in Jammu and Kashmir is unbearable. Rural women in Jammu and Kashmir have always face lot of many issues and challenges related to health, economy education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, female feticide and infanticide, late marriages, state violence, sexual harassment, early marriages etc. To reduce all these issues and challenges, long term improvements in education and awareness opportunities will play a positive role in the overall empowerment of rural women in Jammu and Kashmir. The significant progress can be achieved only by providing essential awareness among masses about gender equality, improving policies and promoting favorable atmosphere for women. Not only this, but also counseling at various places should take place regarding these issues. Government and NGOs should take positive steps for reducing these challenges, wherein various laws and provisions should quickly implement to that very vulnerable group of the society. Empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity.

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