

## **WOMEN AND VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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### **Abstract:**

The focus of this paper is to highlight the violence against women's in Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu and Kashmir Woman 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. However the disturbing situation prevalent in Jammu and 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 the household expenditure. The results drawn were; women in Jammu and Kashmir are still left with lot of issues and challenges related to health, economy, education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, female feticide and infanticide, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wages and child labour. The central government, state government, NGO's and local bodies should work jointly for the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Keywords;** Tata Women, Violence, Empowerment, Challenges .

### **1. Introduction**

Jammu & Kashmir is the disputed territory between Indian 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 (Gul and Khan, 2014). Geography condition 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 (Gul and Khan, 2013). 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 processes of human development and well-being. Their lives have witnessed sweeping 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 (Gul and Khan, 2013). 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.

## **2. Literature Review:**

Women have been subjugated to violence in Kashmir for the past two decades from Security forces as well as rebel groups. A study conducted in 2005 concluded, "There can be no two opinions that the women of Kashmir during the past two decades have been in the vanguard and have been fighting battles against all kinds of injustices and crimes against humanity committed by the State and by some dubious non-state actors" (Dabla, 2009). A factor clearly responsible for inhibiting the choices of women in development is domestic violence. Abuse has been observed to impede the public participation of women, undermine their economic efficiency, cause increased health burdens, and impose a drain on scarce national resources (Heise et al., 1994). The study conducted in India indicates that physical abuse of Indian women is quite high, ranging from 22 percent to 60 percent of women surveyed it showed the lifestyle of men such as smoking, alcoholism and drugs promote men to commit domestic violence (Goswami, 1993). Many other researchers also find same things to be responsible for the domestic violence, they indicated that influence of drugs, smoking, alcoholism, bad company, poverty promote men to commit domestic violence (Bhatt, 1998 and Mc Kenry et al., 1995). The number of family members, type of marriage and qualification of husband other to those menstrual problems has significant influence on domestic violence (Liz, 2012). The low educational level and poverty are important reasons for domestic violence. Further, marriage at a younger age makes women vulnerable to domestic violence (Gerstein, 2000).

### 3. Objectives Of The Study

The specific objectives of the study are as under:

1. To highlight the issues of violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To explore the concept of women empowerment and also to identify ways in which the well-being of Kashmiri women could be further enhanced.
3. To identify the challenges behind women's empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir.

### 4. Material and Methods

The present study was conducted among women residing in Jammu and Kashmir. The secondary sources of data were used in the study. The data was taken from various research papers published in journals, reports from newspaper, NGO and the government of Jammu and Kashmir.

### 5. Domestic Violence against Women

*The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1994) 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). The

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violence against women has increased both qualitatively as well as quantitatively in Jammu and Kashmir over the past more than two decade and the direct impact of the militancy and armed conflict has intensified the problem. “The practice directly or indirectly related to domestic violence against women prevails in urban as well as rural J&K in all educational, economic, social, age, cultural and other groups and classes. 15 percent of married women are physically and mentally being abused (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). The most common forms of violence against women across the state are:

- ❖ **Violence by prevailing social and political turmoil:** The Kunan Poshpora incident occurred on February 23, 1991, when units of the army launched a search and interrogation operation in the village of Kunan Poshpora, located in Kashmir's remote Kupwara District. At least 53 women were allegedly gang raped by soldiers that night. However, Human Rights organizations including Human Rights watch have reported that the number of raped women could be as high as 100 (Mattu, 2002). The Shopian rape and murder case is the alleged abduction, rape and murder of two young women in mysterious circumstances 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 home on 29 June 2009. The next day morning, their bodies were found both one kilometre apart (GK, 2009). So many other such cases occurred in the State from last twenty-five years due to political turmoil.
- ❖ **Domestic violence:** 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 10% to 50% of women in the State have suffered 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).
- ❖ **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 J&K include sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and deliberate neglect of girls.

- ❖ **Son preference:** Son preference affects women in the State. Its consequences can be anything from foetal or female infanticide to neglect of the girl child over her brother in terms of such essential needs as nutrition, basic health care and education.

## 6. Empowerment of Women in J&K

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 (Suri, 2007). 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 (Bhuyan, 2006). The word women empowerment essentially means 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.



Kashmiri women shout slogan as they take part in a protest against the killing of teenager Zahid Farooq in Srinagar.

The Central Act, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, was passed in 2005. It took half a decade for the state government to pass a similar act in the state. Keeping in view the growing incidents of domestic violence, the state government passed the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) in 2010. Since the Act was passed, little or negligible efforts were made for the proper implementation of the Act, though the domestic violence against women is rising in Jammu and Kashmir (Narchoor, 2012). Economic empowerment has been recognized as the dominant one because it exerts a strong

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influence on all other components of empowerment. It is a reality that if women gain economic strength they will gain visibility and voice at home, workplace and the community. Thus it is imperative for women to know their economic role and increase their power and command on material resources. The following are Schemes for Women's Empowerment in J&K.

1. **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 Ameeti (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.
2. **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% p.a simple to be liquidated within a period of 5 years. Maximum loan amount for an individual beneficiary is Rs. 1.00 lakh.
3. **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.
4. **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 a 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.
5. **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

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entrepreneurs is well taken by the unemployed youth women and in fact the Corporation is getting encouraging response in all parts of the state.

## **7. Challenges to Empowerment of Women in J&K**

The State government is taking some concrete steps in empowering women by helping women to help themselves and their families. A huge population of women in J&K 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. But are these programs sufficient? Are they bringing about a change in the attitude of a patriarchic society? Here are some important challenges of women empowerment:

- ❖ 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
- ❖ Under/unemployment leading to poverty

As we see, 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"!.

## 8. Conclusion

Empowerment of Women in J&K 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 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. 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 setup counselling cells, organize community programs, form social groups for reducing violence through group work process.

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