

## Women empowerment in Jammu & Kashmir: An analytical reflection of initiatives and endeavours

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### Abstract

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at National and International level but also at State level. Many initiatives have been taken up in the shape of different policies and schemes at different levels which are inclined in the direction to ensure gender equality and women empowerment. Many such initiatives and endeavours have been taken up by the State Govt. also against gender discrimination and providing equal opportunities for women at every stage. Some of such initiatives are, 'Swayam Sidha' -the main focus of this policy is Self Help Groups for Women, J&K Social Welfare Department inclined to develop the vocational skills among women, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls-the main aim of this policy is to impart formal and non-formal education for improving the health and nutrition status, up-grade skills and enhance educational status of adolescent girls. But the implementation part of these initiatives needs to be taken care of properly. This paper is therefore inclined to analyze various such provisions at International, National and at State level and to find gaps in such endeavours. The whole analysis done in this paper will be supported by an empirical study along with some recommendation so that the status of women is elevated at the desired level.

**Keywords:** empowerment, equality and gender discrimination

### Introduction

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education in general and higher education in particular, has an enabling role in emboldening the women community. Dependent women are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Everyone must understand that empowering women doesn't mean empowering them in technical area only. Women should remember that they are also rational, intelligent and thinking human beings. Women play a significant role in the creation of family and making a nation better. Desai (1998) <sup>[2]</sup> presented a review of works done on women in India and suggested that women studies have to be understood as an instrument for women's development. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. Therefore a nation's development is incomplete without the improvement in the status of women. Women are as valuable as the natural resources in the progress of the country. Andrew, Lee and Schultz (1982) <sup>[1]</sup> presented a ground breaking analysis of the geographical distribution of women status in United States; by calculating world patterns of women's status on measures of life expectancy, literacy and fertility. Though many efforts have been done by Indian government and socio reform bodies to improve this status of women at all levels, in spite of all these instances, women have not achieved the deserving status in the society. For centuries, women were treated as less-than-equal to men in many ways. Women were not

allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. This situation is due to strong addiction to culture and tradition. Such patience is exercised not only for the sake of society and children, but also due to lack of confidence to live as a single woman and face the challenges of life. Devendra (1994) <sup>[4]</sup> attempted to look at the changes brought about in the status of women after 1947 and examined the effectiveness of legal reforms which were enacted from 1829 to 1992. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Now that we are out of those dark ages, women are more empowered to do whatever they want. This means that they have the ability to choose their own destiny, job, vote, and do anything a man can do.

### Meaning of Empowerment

The Oxford American Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "to make (someone) stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling their life and claiming their rights." Empowerment actually is a process that addresses all sources and structures of power. Empowerment of women is enabling women to realize their full potentialities and motivating them to utilize them to be truly empowered. Empowerment is a process which neutralizes the forces that try to marginalize the development of women socially, politically and economically. Empowerment of women is unavoidable process to seek the holistic empowerment of nation. Empowerment includes the social, political and economic aspects. Undoubtedly Women are important partners in economy of nation, so for overall development and growth of Economy women empowerment is necessary. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on basis of sex in all areas of legal rights.

Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

### **Meaning of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. The empowerment and autonomy of women are the improvement of their political, social, and economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Women Empowerment is of important Concerns of 21st century at every level be that national or international. This target can be achieved only when society at large will take steps combined, to eradicate this menace. The full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men, and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized. The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve women's access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, alleviate their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal impediments to their participation in public life, and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of women also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction. This, in turn, is essential for the long-term success of population programmes. Experience shows that population and development programmes are most effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women.

### **Initiatives taken by the central government to promote women empowerment**

The National Policy of Education (NPE), 1986 and the Programme of Action (PoA), 1992 act as the guiding force of influence both the qualitative and quantitative indicators regarding the need for empowerment of women. The NPE (1986) states that "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past; there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventional role in the

empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.

### **Mahila Samakhya (April, 1989)**

The scheme focuses on awareness of the need to educate the children, especially girls at village level, which has resulted of girls enrolment in schools. It was started with Dutch assistance in 1989 but government is funding since 2005-06 to get the NPE goals. The budgetary allocation for the scheme for 2007-08 was Rs.34.00 crores.

### **National Commission for Women (NCW)**

The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. It continues to pursue its mandated role and activities viz.; safeguards women's rights through investigations into the individual complaints of atrocities, sexual harassment of women at work place, conducting, legal awareness programs, campus, review of both women specific a women related legislations, investigates into individual complaints, atrocities, harassment, denial of rights etc. Problem of violence against women is multifaceted.

### **Balika Samridhi Yojana (Oct, 1997)**

This scheme was started by Child and Women Development Ministry to provide education to girls. Girls get scholarship by going to school. Every year 12 lakh girls are benefitted from the scheme. It aims at to change negative family and community attitudes towards the girl child at birth and towards her mother. It improves enrolment and retention of girl children in schools. It covers both rural and urban areas in all districts in India.

### **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Nov. 2000)**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is implemented to address the needs of children in the age group of 6-14 years and has special focus on girl's education and children with special needs with computer education. It includes provisions for providing basic facilities to schools to remove education barriers. The expenditure on the programme is shared by the central government (85%) and the state government (15%).

### **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (July, 2003)**

NPEGEL is an integral component of SSA and provides additional support to education for underprivileged / disadvantaged girls at elementary level gives stress upon the relevance and quality of girls' education for their empowerment. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks where the level of female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average; in blocks of districts which are not covered under educationally backward blocks but are having at least 5% SC/ST population and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10%; and also in some selected urban slums. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (July, 2004) KGBV scheme ensures easy access and quality education to the girls

of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level. This programme provides for development of a model school in every cluster with more intense community mobilization and supervision of girls enrolment in schools. In KGBV, 75% enrolments are reserved for girls from the target group and 25% for below poverty line category.

#### **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)**

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti) and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in the same year to bring about the advancement development and empowerment of women. This policy has endorsed the Provisions of NPE 1986. The policy prescribes:

- Equal access to education for women and girls.
- Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination.
- Universalize education.
- Eradicate illiteracy,
- Create a gender-sensitive educational system.
- Increase enrolment and retention rates of girls
- Improve the quality of education.
- Development of occupation / vocation / technical skills by women.
- Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education.

#### **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010)**

The launch of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) on 8th March, 2010 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development was an important development to translate the NPEW prescriptions into reality.

#### **Initiatives taken for women empowerment in the state of J&K**

##### **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)**

The State Women Development Corporation has been declared as channelizing agency of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh for the women of 155 in J&K state. This is also a centrally sponsored loan scheme. Under this scheme, micro loans are provided to the poorest of the poor women of the target group, i.e. those below the poverty level at an interest rate of 9.5 per cent as against an interest rate of 8 per cent charged by Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. The corporation could charge interest at 12 per cent per annum from the beneficiaries but keeping in view the economic condition of the poor women artisans of the state; the Board of Directors has fixed the same at 9.5 per cent. During the year 2002-03, the corporation proposed to lift and disburse an amount of Rs. 10.00 lakh to cover sixty women. An amount of Rs. 0.50 lakh needs to be earmarked as monitoring charges.

##### **Support to trainees and employment programme (Step)**

The scheme envisages support to rural women for better training in socio-economic developmental activities in the agriculture and allied sectors, viz., dairy, handloom, etc. Under this scheme, the Government of India provides funds in

the pattern of 90 per cent: 10 per cent per beneficiary to impart training to a cluster of minimum five hundred beneficiaries of a particular area to take up income-cum-employment generating activities. In the current year, the corporation has submitted a proposal for Rs. 2.50 crore to the Government of India through the administrative department in dairy development, handlooms, handicrafts and mushroom cultivation. The corporation has already got the area surveyed through the Department of Management and Studies, University of Jammu. After receiving the sanction for the same from Government of India, the Corporation intends to take up some more areas under this scheme. An amount of Rs. 25.00 lakh as 10 per cent share will have to be earmarked in this regard.

#### **National backward class's finance and development corporation (NBCFDC)**

This is also a centrally sponsored loaning scheme wherein the loans are being lifted from the apex corporation, viz., National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation for assistance to the women of the backward and other classes. An amount of Rs.1 crore stands allocated to J&K Women's Development Corporation during the year 2002-2003; the corporation intends to lift the said amount as the case for government guarantee is under process in the administrative department. For this purpose an amount of Rs.10.00 lakh (10 per cent contribution) will have to be earmarked. The corporation has also released an amount of Rs.5 lakh under the micro financing scheme. The amount is to be disbursed through NGOs.

#### **Swayam Sidha women empowerment programme (SWEP)**

The J&K State Women's Development Corporation has been appointed as a nodal agency by the administrative department, viz., Social Welfare Department Government of Jammu and Kashmir to implement the scheme of Swayam Sidha Women Empowerment Programme (SWEP) in J & K. It is an integrated scheme for women's empowerment and is basically designed for formation of women into Self Help Groups (SHGs) wherein awareness and confidence will be generated in them both economically and socially regarding their status, health, nutrition, education, sanitation, legal rights, upliftment, control over resources, saving habits, access to micro credit, involvement in local-level planning, etc.

#### **Empirical evidence to study the level of awareness regarding various issues related to women empowerment**

Empirical study keeping review the following objectives:

1. To study the awareness among the PG students towards various policies and programmes regarding women empowerment.
2. To suggest some implications based on the findings of the study.

For the achievement of the above stated objectives following analysis have been done.

Table 1

S. No.	Statements	N	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Women are still socially deprived	100	84	84%	16	16%
2.	Instance of inequality	100	61	61%	39	39%
3.	Problem of domestic violence	100	26	26%	74	74%
4.	Act against 'Sexual Harassment'	100	40	40%	60	60%
5.	Educated women can bring change in the attitude of family members and society	100	92	92%	8	8%
6.	Need for 50% reservation for women	100	71	71%	29	29%
7	Policies and commissions for women					
	a) Swayam Sidha	100	19	19%	81	81%
	b) J&K Social Welfare	100	67	67%	33	33%
	c) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls	100	45	45%	55	55%
8.	Skill development programmes/workshop for the empowerment of women	100	95	95%	5	5%
9.	Scheme for Single Girl Child	100	63	63%	37	37%
10.	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhalaya	100	45	45%	55	55%
11.	Mahila Samakhya Scheme	100	45	45%	55	55%
12.	Kishori Shakti Yojana	100	35	35%	65	65%

Above table indicates that:

- Majority of the students (84%) responded that women are still socially deprived, minority (16%) of them responded that women are not still socially deprived.
- Most of the students (61%) responded that women faced any instance of inequality, whereas few (39%) of them responded that women are not faced any instance of inequality.
- Majority of the students (74%) responded that women are not faced the problem of domestic violence, whereas minority (26%) of them responded that women are faced the problem of domestic violence.
- Most of the students (60%) aware that there is an act against 'Sexual Harassment' of women at work place, whereas few (40%) are not aware that there is an act against 'Sexual Harassment' of women at work place.
- Most of the students (92%) responded that an educated woman can bring change in the attitude of family members and society, whereas few (2%) of them responded that an educated woman cannot bring change in the attitude of family members and society.
- Most of the students (71%) responded that there is need for 50% reservation for women whereas few (29%) of them responded that there is no need for 50% reservation for women.
- a) Majority of the students (81%) are not aware about the policy Swayam Sidha, whereas minorities (19%) of them are aware about the policy Swayam Sidha.  
b) Most of the students (67%) are aware about the policy J&K Social Welfare Department, whereas few (33%) are not aware about the policy J&K Social Welfare Department.  
c) Most of the students (55%) are aware about the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls, whereas few (45%) of them are not aware the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls.
- Majority of the students (95%) responded that there should be Skill development programmes/workshop for the empowerment of women, whereas minority (5%) of them responded that there should not be skill development programmes / workshop for the empowerment of women.
- Most of them (63%) aware that a single girl child in the

family can get a scholarship of Rs. 2000 per month for pursuing higher studies whereas few (37%) of them are not aware about this policy.

- Most of the students (55%) are not aware about the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhalaya Scheme, whereas few (45%) of them are aware about the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhalaya Scheme.
- Most of the students (55%) are not aware about the Mahila Samakhya Scheme, whereas few (45%) of them are aware about the Mahila Samakhya Scheme.
- Majority of the students (65%) are not aware about the scheme Kishori Shakti Yojana, whereas minority (35%) of them are aware about the scheme Kishori Shakti Yojana.

### Comparative analysis of the study

National Policy of Education, Mahila Samakhya, National Commission for Women, Balika Samridhi Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, KGBV, STEP, Swayam Sidha Women Empowerment Programme, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh all these are effectively run by the central govt. and the same may be started by the state govt. So the status of govt. can be uplifted.

### Recommendations

On the basis of above discussion the investigator suggests some recommendations as follows:

- Workshops and seminars should be organized by the higher education institutions so the awareness related to the policies of women empowerment are increased among the university students.
- Teachers should engaged students in the different activities related to these policies and programmes.
- Awareness programmes should be organized at the village level so that the women of the villages are aware about these policies which are implemented by them.
- Students/scholars must be engaged in the research work related to these policies and programmes to see their effective implementation.

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