



Women in Jammu and Kashmir: Political empowerment and participation

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Abstract

Women constitute an integral part of the social structure of the world. Women constitute almost half of the world's population but have always been discriminated against oppressed and repressed by the society and they scarcely make their presence felt the constitution of India as well as constitution of J&K is based on the principle of equality and guarantees equality before law and equal participation to all its citizens, despite all these provisions in the constitution women in the state of J&K has remain inferior to study the reasons for women voter's not voting for female candidates despite the wide spread awareness about the issues related to them, low participation in state elections in this context the present study analysis the political participation and empowerment of women in the Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: women, political participation, pre-independent era, post-independent era, empowerment

1. Introduction

Women make up half of the population of every country in the world but this half population is not well represented in the politics. At the team of twenty first century, almost every country in the world provides the legal right for women in polities women can vote, women can support candidate, women can run office etc. but in political life of every nation there is a dearth of female faces which suggest that the veiled discrimination against women remains

Kashmir women have witnessed varying fortunes they have been affected by the ups and downs in Kashmir society. The women in Kashmir had always struggled to make their presence felt and to make their voice heard in the society. From ancient times to twenty first of century there have been ups and downs regarding the political participation and the political rights of women. Women participated in sociopolitical moments in the 1930's and the following years there has been an increase in the women in the participation of state politics in J&K. There has been increase in political wakefulness in women, their role in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIS) is attracting a lot of serious attention their role is state legislator as the state is presently ruled by the women Mehbooba Mufti of PDP, the first chief minister of J&K.

2. Political power of woman in pre independence era

From ancient times down to the thirteen century A.D some Kashmiri women especially the women from aristocratic families enjoyed political freedom and exercised power and responsibility. The king discusses the problems of vital importance with his queen and also took the queen's advice. However this political freedom was enjoyed by only women's of aristocratic families.

In the middle of 14th century with the beginning of Muslim rule in the valley the status and position of women started degrading the political rights were snatched from them and they started living a miserable life from the early 20th century,

freedom movement again the feudal rule of Maharaja Dyna started in Jammu and Kashmir. The women of the valley in general participated in this movement. The uprising of 1931 led to the creation of legislative assembly (praja-sabha) in 1934 by B.J Galancy commission appointed by Maharaja for constitutional reforms in 1932. The commission gave some political rights to the people as far as women were concerned, the right to vote was limited middle pass women.

It was national conference under the leadership of S.M.Abdullah that provided women a vibrant platform in 1944. National Conference (NC) adopted "Naya Kashmir manifesto" The manifesto includes a special character for women empowerment sub-titled as "women's character". It was through this manifesto that the Kashmiri women were for the first time given the equal political rights that is the right to vote, right to elect and the right to be elected in all intuitions on the basis of equality with men. The manifesto also incorporated a provision of reservation of seats for women.

3. Political empowerment of women in post-independence era

After independence the economic status of women in Kashmir started improving but the political activism by the women in Kashmir was hardly visible. The wipe of first P.M of J&K S.M Abdullah played an active role in politics and she was the first women to reach parties but after 1953 episode the role of women government declined despite many initiatives taken by governments for women politics empowerment, the political participation of women remained very low till 1972. It was only in the elections of the year 1972 eight women candidates contested election and four of them won the elections. The four women who win the elections were Zainab Begum, Hajra Begum, Nirmala Devi and Shanta Bharti.

The election of 1977 showed a low participation of women candidates there were only four women contestants and out of this only one woman managed to win and that too was a

reserved seat for them. In 1983, elections the participation of women voters was high as 70.48 percent, however the contestants' women were only seven and not a single woman won the election. In 1987 and 1996, elections there were respectively (13) thirteen and (15) fifteen women participants and in 1987 only one and in 1996 only two managed to win. In 2002 the voter's turnout was not very high out of 709, there were only 13 female candidates and only two managed to win, and the 2008 elections witnessed the unprecedented women participation. Out of total 1354 candidates there were 67, women contestants however only 3, candidates managed to win in 2014 election only 2, candidates managed to win.

Table 1

Year	Total no of contestants	No of female contestants	No of elected women
1972	342	8	4
1977	409	4	1
1983	505	7	0
1987	528	13	1
1996	1027	15	2
2002	709	13	2
2008	1354	67	3
2014	803	26	2

Source: Election commission of India.

Despite the participation of women in state assembly election they have also took part in Lok Sabha election as well. The 330 reservation for women in local government institution's had played a tremendous role in empowering the women of Jammu and Kashmir. The present C.M of J&K Mehbooba Mufti is having the honor of being the first women C.M of J&K State. There is also a representation of women in her cabinet.

Comparative analyses of the Jammu and Kashmir elections of state legislative PRIS, urban local bodies as well as for Lok Sabha reveals that the numbers of female contestants always remain low. The party politics also plays a major role in women empowerment. The political parties both national as well as regional parties do not give tickets to large no of women to politically empower women the role of political parties at national, state and local level is very important. N.G.O'S, Media, educational institutions, have to play a vital role in this regard

4. Conclusion

From the dawn of history, women are being suppressed and oppressed by the patriarchal society. The women have been denied their rights during every period of history. Even in the 21st century when everyone talks about political empowerment of women still we see the dearth of female faces in the political life of every nation. Even the most liberal and democratic nations are far behind in giving equal political representation to women. The progress of a nation depends upon the development of manpower which includes 50% of women power because in every nation women constitute half of population unless and until this half population is not empowered the development of any nation is impossible. The J&k is a state where women have always struggled to make their presence felt and to make their voice heard the

J&K is a state which gave equal political rights to women before independence in 1944. But the women in J&K are still struggling for political empowerment. The political environment of J&K in post-independence era did not provide the conducive environment for women empowerment in spite of state being headed by a woman, there are very few women in Jammu and Kashmir at discussion making levels of public life the only activity where the women of J&K participate in large number is that of voting. There are so many reasons which effect the women political empowerment in J&K like political turmoil, non-fielding of female candidates by political parties, dynastic rule, patriarchal society etc. After assuming the chair of C.M by a woman, non a ray of hope has emerged in J&K for the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir.

5. Recommendations and Suggestions

1. Women should be given 33% of reservation at both central and state level legislatures so that problem of under-representation of women and the inadequate addressing of issues that affect women will be eradicated.
2. The issues related to women like rape, molestation, prostitution, domestic violence etc. are politicized by political-parties and are used by them as vote banks, these issues should not be politicized rather politicians should be united in addressing these issues.
3. In order to solve the problem of under-representation of women political parties of J&K should adopt the policies & programs regarding the political empowerment of women in their party manifesto and they should also show trust on women & give mandate to more & more women.
4. The Govt can encourage admission of women in universities technical & professional institutions by reserving seats for them and should provide them good scholarships for higher education.
5. State government should also give the reservation to female students in government services appropriate to their educational qualification.
6. The government should organize the leadership training camps for women politicians at all levels of governance from panchayat to the state legislature so that they can become aware about their crucial role in governance.
7. The govt of state should provide a kind of legal aid to the women so that in case of violation of women political rights they can approach courts & have access to justice.
8. In order to make the women of J&K independent (politically, socially, economically etc.) socioeconomic independence should be given to them.

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