

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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The appropriate study of the socio economic setting in the state becomes important in order to examine the state of political women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir. It plays a significant role in shaping the political destiny of the people. Also, the status of women cannot be examined in isolation as it is interlinked with socio economic conditions and political climate. The inequalities deeply placed in the traditional structure of the society, its norms, values, customs, and rituals play an important role in determining the participation and role of women in public activities.

Jammu and Kashmir also known as Heaven on the earth is the northern most state of India, where Russia and China lie to its north, to its east is Chinese Tibet. On its South and South-West lie the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. North West Frontier Provinces of Pakistan, China and Russia cover the western area. It consists of three divisions Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. It has two capitals Jammu, the winter capital and Srinagar, the summer capital. The state has some of the best tourist spots and owing to its high altitude, it is home to a lot of Himalayan glaciers and rivers. The major rivers flowing through the state are Jhelum, Indus, Tawi, Ravi and Chenab. Major tourist attractions in the state are Patnitop, Ladakh, Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Ladakh. Some of the major pilgrimage centers of the nation are located in the state, the two most significant being the Amarnath Caves and the Vaishnodevi Shrine. The Dal Lake houseboats are one of the major attractions of Kashmir. The unique climatic conditions found in state contribute to its diverse soil and vegetation. Blessed with lush green forests, it forms one of the most important natural resources of the state. Numerous trees grow in these forests some of the namely ones are, Chinar, Deodar, Poplar, Fir, Pine, Mulberry and Walnut. Some medicinal herbs are also found in these forests such as Menthol, Digitalis, Rubus and Artemisia. These forests give excellent shelter to the numerous rare species of animals and birds.¹

The region of Jammu and Kashmir is administered by India as a state from 1954, constituting the disputed southern and southeastern portion of the larger Kashmir region. The area has been under dispute between India, Pakistan and China since the mid-20th century. The

underlying region of this state were parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir,

whose western districts, now known as Azad Kashmir, and northern territories, now known as Gilgit-Baltistan, are administered by Pakistan. The Aksai Chin region in the east, bordering Tibet, has been under Chinese control since 1962.²

After the Government of India repealed the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution, has been passed by the assembly of India approved the Jammu and Kashmir reorganization Act, which seeks to dissolve the state and reorganize it into two unification territories, Jammu and Kashmir in the west and Ladakh in the east. The act came into effect from 31 October 2019. Jammu and Kashmir being the only state in India with a Muslim-Majority population.³

Socio-Economic Figure of Jammu and Kashmir

Parameters	Jammu and Kashmir
Capital cities	Summer capital- Srinagar Winter capital- Jammu
Geographical area (sq km)	222,236
Administrative districts	22
Population density (persons per sq. km)	100
Total population (million)	10.1
Male population (million)	5.4
Female population (million)	4.7
Population growth rate 1991-2001 (%)	31.4
Sex ratio (females per 1,000 males)	892
Literacy rate (%)	55.5
Male (%)	66.6
Female (%)	43.0
Birth rate (per 1,000 population)	18.8

Source: Government website of Jammu and Kashmir, directorate of economics and statistics, ministry of health and family welfare, sample registration system 2008, census 2001.

Women in Jammu and Kashmir:

In the Traditional Kashmiri society, women remain tied to the shackles of the patriarchal society. While far from being given equal status in the society, they were usually subjugated, abused, discriminated and maltreated in the social life. They could not develop their individual personality and live a life independent from their males' counterparts. The lifecycle of female dependency was supported by ditches of culture and religion. Though women were economically active in the traditional occupations and handicrafts in rural and urban areas, this had hardly elevated her to a higher status. The complete supremacy of men over women honestly reflected in the ill-treatment which got the latter at the hands of the former. The women, especially wives, were sometimes beaten in some families and there was not any collective protest against this brutal practice. Women in the domestic framework were not allowed to participate in the decision-making of important matters of the family as this was considered the area of male domain. Women in traditional Kashmiri society were considered to be weak, submissive and a baser creature. The idea was to deeply implant in the culture through myths, dogmas and belief systems that women too had started to see themselves as weak and fragile. However, the practice of endogamy kept the women in close contact with their parental families, which has acted as a restraint on extremely harsh cure of women at the hands of their husbands and in-laws family members.⁴

Though polygamy is a common practice among Muslims with certain conditions and limitations, it was never a common practice among the Kashmiri Muslims. The practice was socially insignificant and was generally considered undesirable, because of its abuse by some individuals. Moreover, factors like meager income and constant tension in the family acted as a restraining factor against polygamy in Kashmir. Similarly, the practice of divorce, religiously allowed with certain obligations on husband, was not common in the Kashmiri society. The concerned experts feel that divorces were rare in the valley and their number was socially negligible. In actuality, the practice of divorce is generally considered as an undesirable social phenomenon. Though the inheritance rights for women in Kashmir existed in theory, as the Islamic Shariah gave a particular share to women from their parental property, these were denied to them in practice. Again, though the Maher stood as a legal right of women, it was usually denied to them in part or full.⁵

In reality, women in Kashmir in the past were caught in a paradoxical situation. While their social role was projected as minimal, they participated actively in social, economic and other activities. In urban areas, while the women of Sayid and Hojja families were confined to their homes and were not allowed to perform any manual labour outside their homes, women belonging to various occupational groups and communities worked with their men both within and outside their homes for earning sufficient amount of money required to fulfill the family needs. In the rural areas, all women worked side by side with their male members in the agricultural fields.⁶

Traditionally, the women in Kashmir generally did not practice purdah which meant the wearing of the formal burqa from head to toe. This practice applied to all groups of the Kashmiri society except the Sayyid and Hojja women who practiced various forms of purdah for social and economic reasons also. Generally, there prevailed no separation between men and women in the customary society of Kashmir. The communication between the opposite sexes frequently took place at all levels, in all fields and in all sections of humanity. In fact, the institutional agreement of the occupations in the valley was well developed in such a method that the male female communication, both with insiders and outsiders, seemed have to must.⁷

Jammu & Kashmir is the disputed territory between India and Pakistan. Gender discrimination is on rise due to the prevailing social, economic and political turmoil's. Contribution of women in the socio economic and political processes has taken a backside seat, which has exaggerated the process of progress resultantly it has wrinkled their freedom of speech, autonomy to get education and improvement of employment opportunities. This circumstance has obliged them to be a silent observer amidst the fast changing socio economic scenario. They have developed signs of exclusiveness resulting in an identity crisis. They are facing traumatized experiences with prolonged depression of conflict, making them mentally and emotionally sick. Women are the most vulnerable section of the society especially under situations of violence **caused by militancy and armed conflict.**⁸

Due to prolonged conflict the women in Kashmir are subjugated to violence from the past two decades. Military, Militarization and cases of domestic violence against women proved to be a major hindrance in the roads of development in Kashmir and has unleashed a wave of bloodshed against women. Violence against women can be observed among different strata of the society. According to unreliable proof contained in police data even the knowledgeable and the

Cheaply autonomous women are at the receiving end. The practice prevails in both city and as well as rural areas of J&K among all learning, economic, social, age, civilizing and other groups and classes.⁹

Present Status of Jammu and Kashmir Women

Today Women constitute around 47% of the total population of the State. The development of women has without a doubt, been a part of the development planning process right from inception of five year plans but the shift in approach from welfare to development towards women took place in a systematic and programmed manner in the 6th and 7th five year plans. The 8th five year plan promised to ensure that benefits of development do not neglect women. The 9th five year plan further brought a change to the strategy towards women from development to empowerment and emphasis was laid on the preparation of separate women component plan (WCP) by identifying specific schemes/projects having direct bearing on welfare and development of Women. The 10th five year plan further strengthened the implementation of Women Component Plan (WCP). Moreover, the women and child development department in the Ministry of social justice and empowerment has also enjoined upon the states to monitor closely the flow of benefits and advantages of various schemes for the empowerment of women on regular basis. These initiatives have helped in uplifting the status of women in various spheres to a great extent, but the imbalance still exists which needs to be addressed over the years. The 11th Plan had taken numerous steps forward. However, the targets set out could be only partially achieved. In the 12th plan, the Government's priority would be to consolidate the existing initiatives and interventions relating to women, build upon the achievements and also move beyond to respond to new challenges. Most of the women spoke of the unbearable odds against conducting such safe, healthy, normal lives. But all of them, without exception, also spoke, in one way or the other, about their battles against these odds. About their anger and frustration, their protests, their plans of action, their travel in search of support. These women have had to make the language of resistance their mother tongue.¹⁰

As always, the women bear the brunt of prolonged armed conflict; of crackdowns, cordons and search operations and all kinds of security checks. Rape is still the chief instrument of punishment, harassment, intimidation, humiliation and coercion and it is used freely in the society. Bringing the rapist to book is practically impossible as the police are non supporting and reluctant to register FIRs against members of the troops.¹¹

Then there are “enforced disappearances” and “half-widows”. Strange new terms become current when the inexcusable happens over years and years. Thousands of people, many of them married men, have been subject to enforced disappearance by state agencies”. In other words, they have been picked up by the troops. These are men with families at their back are left their mothers, sisters, daughters, wives. The lack of information about them causes the wives to become half-widows. Half-widows bear extra suffering as they are left without entitlement to land, homes, inheritance, pensions or social assistance. They face the constant threat of destitution and are more vulnerable to harassment by the troops. Trauma and wounds are not always visible. Psychiatric disorders thrive in such a climate of unpredictability. In the post-1989 years, there has been a sharp rise in mental illness among women from sleeping disorders to depression to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Lone Psychiatric Hospital in the valley is in Srinagar. In 1989, about 1,700 patients visited this hospital; by 2003, the number had gone up to 48,000. It does not take an expert to visualize which way the numbers go between 2003 and 2012. And these numbers account for one single hospital in one single city, and for women who are lucky enough to make it to a hospital at all.¹²

Empowerment of Women in Jammu and Kashmir:

Empowerment of women, being one of the millennium development goals and a worldwide slogan aims at empowering of women in dissimilar spheres of life. Women groups, non-governmental development organizations, activists, politicians, governments & global agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to make them self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities of which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to magnifying their position in the power structure of the society. 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.¹³

Need for women empowerment arose due to centuries of dominance and discrimination done against women by various hypocritical elements in the society; women have always been a suppressed lot in society. They are the target of various types of violence and discriminatory practices. In valley we have, through centuries, developed various types of customs, traditions

and practices. These customs and traditions, good as well as bad which has now become a part of our societies collective consciousness. Our society consists of people belonging to almost all kinds of religious beliefs. In every religion women have been given a privileged place and every religion teaches us to treat women with respect and dignity. But somehow the society has so developed that various types of ill practices, both physical and mental, against women have become a norm since ages. For instance, practice of dowry, sexual harassment at workplaces, domestic violence, common practice of divorce against the principles of sharia law and other varied kinds of discriminatory practices; all such acts consists of physical as well as mental element. Sadly, women in our society have faced significant violations of their human rights/ fundamental rights for centuries. From inequality to domestic violence, educational opportunities and now the braid chopping, the struggle for rights and empowerment is disheartening for women in our society.¹⁴

The reasons for such behavior against women are many but the most important is one of our own creations of patriarchal system. Though to eliminate these ill practices and discrimination against women various constitutional and legal rights has been framed and also various programmes and policies has been initiated by the state government for empowering women in Jammu and Kashmir but, in reality there is a lot to be done. Several self-help groups and NGO's are working in this direction, also women themselves are breaking the societal barriers and achieving great heights in all dimensions: political, social and economic. Last but not the least, efforts should begin from our homes, where we must empower female members of our family by providing them equal opportunities like, their basic right to education, employment, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination. But society as a whole has still not accepted women as being equal and crimes or abuses against women are still on the rise; Let's discuss in detail how the programmes, policies and schemes helps in empowering women in J&K.

The following are schemes and policies for women empowerment in J&K:

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 and low sex camps that 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 either were not able to join conventional education organization or were school dropouts. The system aims to provide educational opportunities to girls and women greater than the age of 15 years along with supplementary inputs of skill development professional training. The main focus of the scheme is to ensure that stuffing of the course are need-based and adapted according to local requisite, 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 the tool of 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, educational institutions, equipped with requisite infrastructure, experience in the field of women/Social development and education across the country.

Family Counseling Centre:

Under the FCC scheme, counseling, referral and rehabilitative services to women victims is provided, who are in moral danger within the family or society at large including those affected by disputes, marital discord or maladjustment. The service 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 aim of reducing maternal and neo-natal mortality by encouraging 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 (Empowered action group) 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 sponsor accessibility of safe and easily located accommodation for operational women, with day care capacity for their children in city, semi urban, or even rural areas where service chance for women exists. To get this objective, the proposal will assist projects for structure of new hostel buildings, increase of existing hostel buildings and hostel buildings in rented property. The operational women's hostel projects being assisted under this scheme shall be made accessible without any difference with respect to caste, religion, wedded status to all working women subject to norms prescribed under the scheme. Women under training for job are also entitled for a safe aboard in the hostels subject to the condition that, capacity limit shall exceed 30% of the total number of girls and will be accommodate only in the case of vacant seats availability. Children of functioning 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 boarding house with their mothers.¹⁵

Umeed:

The hope which was launched by congress leader Rahul Gandhi in June 2013 is a Government of India funded flagship project to empower women in conflict ridden Kashmir. The Scheme could be made possible only after a group of students from Kashmir University visited Aameeti (U.P) to study the model and its successful implementation. It is aimed to empower women in Jammu and Kashmir and rest parts of India. The project aims at encouraging rural women to make small savings that will boost their SHGs which 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% P.A simple to be liquidated within a period of 5 years. Maximum loan amount for an individual beneficiary is Rs. 1.00 lakh.

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% with the repayment period is 3years.

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

In addition to the above mentioned centrally sponsored schemes the social welfare department has 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 which arises to create self employment avenues for educated unemployed youth. The nominal interest of 6% charged on the credit being provided to prospective entrepreneurs is appreciated well by the unemployed youth women and in fact the corporation is getting encouraging response in all parts of the state.¹⁶

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. While interest rate of 8 per cent charged by Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. This scheme provides loans at an interest rate of 9.5 per cent. 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 have 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-unemployment generating activities. 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 also stands 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 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):-

Swayamsidha scheme was launched in the year 2001 dedicated to women's empowerment. The J&K state women 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 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.¹⁷

Inspite of this several decisions taken by the Mehbooba, s People's Democratic Party, Bhartiya Janata Party coalition government, in Srinagar on May 11, 2018, was to completely abolish the levying of stamp duties on property, both urban and rural, purchased and registered in the name of women with the several decisions it had taken. This incentive will promote families to record their properties in the name of their sisters, daughters, wives and mothers leading to a possibility of raising the shaken status, security and the overall economic stake holding of the women in J&K society. Mahbooba mufti is one such domineering (though

polarizing) political figure who has taken the incentive to empower the women of Jammu and Kashmir, endowing them with a boost in educational entrepreneurship and health care facilities with the release of her first budget.¹⁸

Political Empowerment of Women in Jammu and Kashmir:

The idea of political empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir has been a debatable issue, since its inception have witnessed varying fortunes as have been affected by the ups and downs in Kashmir society. The struggle for Kashmiri women to make their presence felt and to make their voice heard in the society is real and has always existed. Women in Jammu and Kashmir are treated as secondary citizens. Women here are lacking the power and authority in politics due to innumerable reasons. From ancient times to twenty first century there have been hiccups in the journey of women regarding the political participation and the political rights. 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.¹⁹

Political power of women in pre Independence era

From ancient times down to the thirteen century A.D Kashmiri women the women from aristocratic families enjoyed political freedom and exercised power and responsibility. The king discussed the matters of vital importance with his queen and also took head of queen's advice. However this political freedom was enjoyed by only women 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 to degrade as the political rights were snatched from them and the era of they started living a miserable life started from the early 20th century with the freedom interest group against the feudal rule of Maharaja Dyna in Jammu and Kashmir. The women of the valley in general participated in this group. 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 and as far as women were concerned, the right to vote was limited middle class women. It was National Conference under the leadership of S. M. Abdullah that provided women a vibrant platform in 1944. "Naya Kashmir Manifesto" was adopted by NC. 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 status in political sphere as they were given, the equal political rights. Mainly the right to vote, right to elect and the right to be elected in all Institutions on the basis of equality with men. The manifesto also incorporated a provision of reservation of seats for women.

Political Empowerment of Women in Post-Independence era

Post independence on the economic front the status of women in Kashmir started to improve but the political culture didn't witness any major change as political activism by the women in Kashmir was hardly visible. Though the wife of first P.M of J&K S.M Abdullah played an active role in Kashmir Politics. She was the first woman to reach parties but after 1953 the role of women in politics declined despite innumerable initiatives taken by governments to bring a change in the political culture in the direction of the political participation of women remained very low till 1972. It was only in the elections of the year 1972 eight women candidates contested elections and four of them won it. The four women who won 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 which only one woman managed to win and that took on a reserved seat. In 1983, elections the participation of women voters was as high as 70.48 percent, all the seven contesting women lost the election. However 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 just two managed to win. On the contrary, 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 elections only 2, could see average victorious.²⁰

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.

Apart from women participation in state assembly election, they have marked their participation in Lok Sabha elections as well. But only a only woman contender could be designated for the Lok Sabha. However, since then not even a lone woman might win the parliamentary election till 2004. Mehbooba Mufti president PDP won parliamentary elections twice one in 2004 and another in 2014. In 1989 general election, there were only 1.59% women contestants. Except for 1996 and 1999 parliamentary elections, wherein there were 7.27 and 7.23% women contestants correspondingly, the number of women candidates has remained insignificant. Even in the parliamentary election held in 2004, the number of women contestants remained obviously low. In 2014 parliamentary election only a single woman candidate, Mehbooba Mufti won the election. The gain changing law of 33% reservation for women in local government institutions had played a huge role in empowering the women of Jammu and Kashmir.

Comparative analyses of the Jammu and Kashmir elections of state legislatures, PRIS, Lok Sabha as well as urban local bodies as well as for Lok Sabha reveals that the numbers of female contestants has always remained low. Party politics has always played a major role in women empowerment. Both national as well as regional political parties do not give tickets to large number of women. N.G.O'S, Media, educational institutions, have to play a critical role in this regard.²¹

Women in Panchayat Raj in Jammu and Kashmir:

The State Government had succeeded in conducting Panchayat elections during the first quarter of 2001 after a very long gap of 23 years. Despite the inhospitable security environment and desperate attempts from many to thwart the attempts of the government to hold Panchayat elections. The election in 2011 was held in a phased manner. In 2001 The elections for 1230 Sarpanch and 10090 Panch constituencies in Jammu Division and 1472 Sarpanch and 10469 panch constituencies in Kashmir division was conducted in a staggered electoral process by the State Election Authority on non-party basis and with a high degree of transparency and in an impartial manner. The total percentage of women was 2.46% of the total candidates. In 2011 election for 1966 Sarpanch and 13760 Panch constituencies in Jammu and 2164 Sarpanch 15959 Panch constituencies in Kashmir division was held in a staggered electoral process by the State Election Authority in cognizance on non-party basis, the spirits of election process/machinery. In 2011 the state govt. of Jammu and Kashmir passed welcoming law that reserves one third of seats for women in Panchayat, grass root administrative bodies in villages. According to state records women have benefited from the law and have successfully gain one third of Panch seats in 2011, but a female Sarpanch is still rare, as out of 1966 seats, only 25 women won in Jammu and out of 2164 Sarpanch seats in Jammu only 25 women had won the elections.²²

Table no 4.1 Information regarding Sarpanch and Panch constituencies

Province	No of Sarpanch Constitutes		No of Panch constituencies		No. of blocks		No. of electors	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Kashmir	1472	2164	10469	15959	64	77	1859311	2519024
Jammu	1230	1966	10090	13760	57	66	1942991	2549951
Total	2702	4130	20559	29719	121	143	3802302	5068975

Source: directorates of rural development, Srinagar/Jammu.

Table no.4.2 Information regarding Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir, 2001

District	No Of Blocks	No of Panchayats	No of Sarpanches elected	No of sarpanch vacancies	Total no. of Panchs to be elected	No. of Panchs elected	No. of vacancies of Panchs
Srinagar	04	93	67	26	666	247	419
Kupwara	09	224	168	56	1471	915	556
Baramulla	14	276	162	114	2148	902	1246
Leh	06	68	68	-	448	448	-
Kargil	07	65	65	-	453	453	-
Budgam	08	199	61	138	1444	315	1129
Ananthnag	10	309	251	58	2242	1191	1051
Palwama	06	236	202	34	1586	654	902
Total(Kashmir) division	64	1470	1044	426	10458	5155	5303
Jammu	11	295	294	01	2448	2443	05
Kathua	08	183	182	01	1394	1391	03
Poonch	05	115	115	-	1028	1026	02
Udhampur	12	215	212	03	1840	1792	48
Doda	14	262	216	46	2004	1698	306
Rajouri	7	160	160	-	1376	1364	12
Total(Jammu division)	57	1230	1179	51	10090	9714	376

Source: Directorates of rural development, Srinagar/Jammu

The above table reveals that there are 1470 Panchayats in Kashmir division against 1230 in Jammu division. There are 952 Panchayats of the total of 1470 in Kashmir division and 53 Panchayats of 1230 in Jammu division, which are yet to be notified by the government. Similarly there are 426 Sarpanch vacancies in Kashmir division against 51 in Jammu division. Also, oddly Kashmir division has 5303 Panch vacancies of the total 10458 against 376 of the total 10090 in Jammu division. However it does not present an encouraging picture particularly for Kashmir division where more than 50 per cent Panch seats are vacant. The Jammu division seems to be enjoying a better position.

Table 4.3 No of women elected Panch and Sarpanch seats Jammu and Kashmir division 2001

Jammu Division			Kashmir Division		
District	No of Women Elected Sarpanch	No of Women Elected Panch	District	No of Women Elected Sarpanch	No of Women Elected Panch
Jammu	1	42	Kupwara	-	02
Kathua	1	23	Baramulla	-	04
Poonch	1	13	Budgam	-	02
Udhampur	3	38	Srinagar	-	01
Doda	1	26	Leh	-	36
Rajouri	0	24	Kargil	-	02
Total	7	166	Ananthnag	02	24
			Pulwama	-	-
			Total	02	71

An analysis of the information given in table 4.3 reveals from the picture in respect of women candidates elected in respect of Kashmir Division is quite dismal, ranging from 0.19% in respect of Sarpanches to 1.37% in respect of Panches. In Jammu division it is ranging from 0.5% in respect of Sarpanches to 1.70% in respect of Panches.

Table 4.4 No. of Women Elected Panch & Sarpanch in Jammu and Kashmir Divisions (2011)

Jammu division			Kashmir division		
District	No of Women Elected Sarpanch	No of Women Elected Panch	District	No of Women Elected Sarpanch	No of Women Elected Panch
Jammu	02	746	Kupwara	-	937
Kathua	04	562	Baramulla	02	714
Poonch	04	524	Budgam	-	686
Udhampur	05	548	Srinagar	-	25
Doda	01	489	Leh	-	199
Rajouri	05	690	Kargil	-	204
Samba	01	260	Ananthnag	-	673
Ramban	01	292	Pulwama	-	218
Kishtiwar	-	287	Bandipora	-	288
Reasi	02	354	Ganderbal	-	277
Total	25	4752	Shopian	01	177
			Kulgam	-	324
			Total	03	4319

Source: directorates of rural development, Srinagar/Jammu.

The above table reveals that out of 4128 Sarpanch posts in the 22 districts of the state, only 28 women managed to succeed the elections with a dismal achievement rate of less than one percent (0.70%). The data compiled by chief electoral officer of the state shows that there is no woman Sarpanch in 11 of the 22 districts as male candidates have won the elections for all the posts in these districts. Although there is no specific evidence the data also corroborates to some extent the preferences from males over females in Kashmir valley as shown in census 2011. Out of 10 districts in the valley, 8 districts do not have a single woman Sarpanch. Baramulla in North Kashmir and Shopian in South Kashmir have been the saving grace but the two districts have elected just 3 women as Sarpanches out of 453 posts. Surprisingly Leh district of the state is where women are considered far more assertive than their counterparts. Other districts have drastically failed to elect women Sarpanches. The only district in the Jammu division to not elect

any women as Sarpanch is Kishtiwari. The remaining 9 districts of Jammu region have representation of women as Sarpanches but again the percentage of winners is insignificant.²³

The changing trends in the political culture of rural Kashmir can be marked as its renaissance as it is witnessing increased participation of women in the Panchayat elections. It has helped raise the women issues at the ground level. The rising political participation as Panches and Sarpanches indicates the changing nature of rural politics as women empowering and emancipating Panchayat politics. But the reality holds different as the proportion of women as Sarpanches is just 0.7% of the total no. Empirical evidences suggest that the elected Panches are devoid of the powers and knowledge of working and functions of institutions at gross root level. However the broader perspective of the scenario reveals that the role of women in gross root politics shall not be undermined as it helps provide a gender perspective gross root planning for women folk.²⁴

From the dawn of history, women suppression and patriarchal oppression has been the reality of society. Women have always been denied of their rights and power. And the trend continues even in the 21st century, where after innumerable efforts by different strata of the society regarding women empowerment, the fate of women have not changed to a great extent. The progress and development of the society greatly depends on the development of both males and females as, women constitute fairly 50% of the society. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has a glorious history of women equal representation in politics even before independence. But the changing times have resulted in increased plight of women as the progress has resulted in creating new inequalities between both rural and urban, men and women. Women today are constrained to enjoy only voting rights in the name of political rights. There are so many reasons which affect the women political empowerment in J&K include dynastic rule, political turmoil, non-fielding of female candidates by political parties, and patriarchal society.²⁵ let's discuss in detail;

The following are some issues and challenges faced by women in politics:

1. **Illiteracy:** - Illiteracy is one of the major hurdles in making women as politically empowered. Lack of understanding cause them to be unaware of their basic and political rights. Gender disparities in terms of education, ownership of resources and continual biased attitudes towards women have always acted as barriers for women leader. Formal education such as provided at educational institutions creates opportunities for leadership and impart leadership essential skills and thus education becomes a key factor that influences social mobility and upliftment of women.
2. **Patriarchy and conservatism:**-Patriarchy and conservatism poses a serious challenge of women in politics in Jammu and Kashmir. Patriarchy system prevails in J&K as top here only males hold primary power. Men Predominate in roles of political leadership, social priviledges, moral authority and also the control of property. The state has a conservative society, as a result of which females are not allowed to actively participate in political processes.
3. **Health issues:-** Due to poor health and sanitary conditions in J&K, women not only face the ill fate of becoming widows but also face serious health problems like depression, heart attacks etc. There health issues remain a measure reason behind the low participation of women in politics.
4. **Non fielding of female candidates by the political parties:** - Women in J&K political culture have always been given secondary treatment and considered most suitable for house hold work. They have not been provided space in politics by the political parties, as they think women as incapable of having and acquiring leadership skills and training. So it can be said that non fielding of female candidates by the political parties also the hindrance behind politics of women in J&K.
5. **External threats:** - External threats also remain a serious challenge to women in politics of Jammu and Kashmir.
6. **Gender inequality:** - Gender inequality also poses a serious threat to position of women in politics of Jammu and Kashmir as here, special preference is given only to sons.
7. **Lack of financial support** - Women does not get adequate financial support from the political parties to contest the elections.
8. **Lack of family support:** - Lack of family support is also on hindrance to the women in politics of J&K. Most of the times women don't get the desired support from the family, There

are many factors responsible for the lacking of family support towards women in politics of J&K namely religious factors, socio cultural factors and economic factors.

9. **Societal and cultural norms:** - Societal and cultural norms imposed on women have barred them from entering politics in Jammu and Kashmir. They have to accept the dictates imposed on them and bear the burden of society. They also bear their deprivation and undermining status thinking this as their fate and acceptance to the predominant a culture of the society.²⁶

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