



Political Participation of Women in Jammu and Kashmir.

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Abstract:

Political participation is broadly defined as a process through which an individual plays a role in the political life of a society and has an opportunity to take part in deciding about the common goals of that society and the best ways of achieving these goals. Political participation is not just casting votes; it includes a wide range of other activities. With this understanding of political participation, the evidence shows that in most of the countries participation of the women is not impressive as the number of the women participating in the active politics is smaller compared to men. However, from the early decades of 20th century, women in the state of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir got conscious about their plight due to emergence of political consciousness, expansion of modern education, spread of cultural awareness and deterioration of economic conditions. Women participated in socio-political movements in 1930's and the subsequent years there has been rising pattern of women leadership in the politics of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiri women, from different walks of life, have managed against all odds to express their agency during the plethora of political, social, and military transformations in the past nine decades. The perception and manifestation of women's political struggle during the nationalist awakening in the 1930s became a wider part of the politics of democratization and empowerment. During the growing sense of nationhood in the 1930s, and during the political awakening in the 1940s Kashmiri women forged broad coalitions and informal networks to challenge state-centered, feudal, and elitist notions of identity and security. Kashmiri women perceived and articulated cultural and political resistance, during the invasion by Tribal raiders from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in 1947, in terms of clear nation-building programs, which involved reviving civil society, resuscitating the shattered economy, and building social and political structures. The paper will focus how Women in Kashmir have played a prominent role in all the spheres of society whether political, social, economic or cultural.

Key Words: *Political participation, Political life, Political consciousness, Modern education, cultural awareness, economic conditions etc.*

Introduction:

Political participation is broadly defined as a process through which an individual plays a role in the political life of a society and has an opportunity to take part in deciding about the common goals of that society and the best

ways of achieving these goals. Political participation is not just casting votes; it includes a wide range of other activities. With this understanding of political participation, the evidence shows that in most of the countries participation of the women is not impressive as the number of the women participating in the active politics is smaller compared to men. However, from the early decades of 20th century, women in the state of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir got conscious about their plight due to emergence of political consciousness, expansion of modern education, spread of cultural awareness and deterioration of economic conditions. Women participated in socio-political movements in 1930's and the subsequent years there has been rising pattern of women leadership in the politics of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiri women, from different walks of life, have managed against all odds to express their agency during the plethora of political, social, and military transformations in the past nine decades. The perception and manifestation of women's political struggle during the nationalist awakening in the 1930s became a wider part of the politics of democratization and empowerment. During the growing sense of nationhood in the 1930s, and during the political awakening in the 1940s Kashmiri women forged broad coalitions and informal networks to challenge state-centered, feudal, and elitist notions of identity and security. Kashmiri women perceived and articulated cultural and political resistance, during the invasion by Tribal raiders from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in 1947, in terms of clear nation-building programs, which involved reviving civil society, resuscitating the shattered economy, and building social and political structures. Women in Kashmir have played a prominent role in all the spheres of society whether political, social or cultural. But unfortunately their role and contribution has been ignored particularly in the political field or the active politics. From the earlier phase of freedom struggle till today they have got their place in the literature mostly as the sufferers and victims whether in the form of a girl, a mother or wife. Even if it is true but it is just one part of the story.

As is well-known, Kashmir was under the oppressive rule of the Dogras during the colonial period. In the people's struggle against the Dogra rule, it is often not recognized that women played an extremely important role. This chapter highlights the contribution of women in the struggle against the Dogra rule in Kashmir, focusing, in particular, on the period from 1930 to 1947. Indeed, women fought shoulder to shoulder with men, and even took up arms against the Dogra rulers. Women's active participation certainly makes the event a glorious chapter in the long history of popular resistance in Kashmir.. The state came into existence as a result of the conquest of the Punjab by the British in 1845. The state with its present boundaries was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh. In 1820, the Maharaja had obtained the principality of Jammu as a Jagir from Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in recognition of his loyal services. Ranjit Singh authorized him to rule over Jammu as the Raja of the place. The Anglo-Sikh war was concluded with the treaty of Lahore on 9 March 1846; the treaty recognized the independent sovereignty of Raja Gulab Singh in hills as "may be made over to him by a separate treaty". It created a new and separate territorial entity- Kashmir out of the Sikh territory which was placed under the sovereign authority of Raja Gulab Singh. A separate agreement was concluded by East India Company with Raja Gulab Singh at Amritsar on 16th March 1846. This agreement is popularly known as the 'treaty of

Amritsar'. Under this treaty Kashmir was sold to Gulab Singh in lieu of a cash payment of Rupees seventy-five lakhs. The same treaty recognized Gulab Singh as the Maharaja of the J&K state. Under the treaty the British promised aid and assistance to the maharaja for defending and protecting his territories from external enemies. The innocent people of Kashmir were subjected to double tyranny. Being a protected state under British crown, they were tyrannized by both the British state and the Dogra rulers. The year 1931 saw the beginning of an organized freedom struggle initiated by the Kashmiris against the autocratic rule of the Dogras in which they had been suffering untold miseries for more than eight decades. The Muslims in Kashmir played an active role in the struggle against the Dogra rule. There were many causes of Muslim unrest. More than 80% of the Muslim population lived on agriculture, but they enjoyed no propriety rights in land. A peasant in Kashmir could be ejected any time by the state. The institution of kare-sarkar was introduced as a substitute for the begar which had been abolished in 1920. Under kare-sarkar the villagers were required to render services for the state whenever demanded. Further the policy of provincialism and racial discrimination followed by the Dogra rulers was bound to create the atmosphere of apathy amongst those against whom such policy was directed. The immediate causes which led to the political disturbances of July 1931 can be attributed to the emergence of a group of educated Muslims with modern outlook. They were deeply concerned with the pathetic condition of the peasants and workers, and the lack of employment opportunities for the educated youths in the state.

Role of women

The women of Kashmir played a conspicuous role in the struggle against the Dogra rule. In a meeting at Khanqah-Maula, one Abdul Qadeer, a non-Kashmiri Muslim who was in Srinagar came on the stage and said "we do not have guns, but we have plenty of stones and brickbats." On June 25, 1931 he was arrested. The trial of Abdul Qadeer started on July 6, 1931 at session's high court, Srinagar. On July 13, 1931, the judgment was pronounced at the central jail, Srinagar. According to an estimate a mob of four to five thousand people had gone to witness the trial. They shouted the slogans "Allahoakbar" "Qadeer Zindabaad" and in a short while the police started firing the protestors, killing a large number among them. Remarkably, the women of the working classes of the Muslim society fought shoulder to shoulder with their counterpart against the injustice and misrule of the Dogra despots. Clearly, then during its first phase of the freedom struggle, the women participants came from the lower sections of society, illiterate and uneducated. These women of the lower orders were not led and organized by educated women but it was their movement that educated women joined later in the period. With the imposition of martial law, a reign of terror was let loose in the city of Srinagar. The Kashmiris were forced to kiss the Dogra flag and lick the shoes of the soldiers and salute every soldier with the Dogra salutation, "Jai Dev Maharaj". Hand written revolutionary posters appeared in Srinagar after the arrest of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. During this period women precisionists, many of them with suckling babies in their arms, passed through the streets raising slogans against the oppressive Dogra regime and demanding the release of their imprisoned leaders and for the establishment of a democracy in Kashmir. The protesting women were surrounded by the armed police and were ordered to disperse. On their refusal, they were abused, molested, and then killed in large numbers by

the agents of the state. Their bodies were recovered from the river in the Srinagar, where they have been dumped by the police. Women came out in procession on July 27 again, carrying black flags. In 1931 when the government handed over the military administration to the command on September 6, a crowd of women agitators was Lathi charged and their modesty outraged; women received injuries. Addressing the procession on 2nd August 1931, a Kashmiri women speaker said;

Our men should sit in their homes and wear Burqas! We are proud of our Punjabi Muslim brethren but so far they have confined themselves to merely issuing statements. We request the members of British parliament to take our grievances to the League of Nations. We appeal to the army not to oppress women as it was no chivalry. But if they have any such instructions, they will find us ready to meet the challenge.

In the city the processions of women and children had become a common sight and every minute, news of these processions were coming from different parts of the city²⁶. It was a common sight to see a Ladi shah performing a ballad against the state, watched, sympathized and encouraged by large groups of women. Most of the ballads had the following refrain line each stanza;

“Kan thaw beh wanai sheri-Kashmir”

On 28 Jan 1932 a number of women took out a procession. When they reached near the right bank of Jhelum, in the midst of the town, the police blocked their passage and the sub-inspector used abusive language against political leaders. Begum Bohru, a widow from Baramulla was carrying a Kangri (fire-pot) filled with burning charcoal. She hurled it at the sub-inspector. It crashed straight into his face which was permanently disfigured - the gallant woman was shot dead on the Spot. One Noor Gujri, a milkman's daughter, plagued the military and police through her vituperative utterance and pugnacious pranks. She was repeatedly arrested, clamped in prison for a few days and released. The National leaders boosted her and denounced the authorities for imprisoning her. In 1939 the Muslim conference was transformed into National Conference. In 1942 Indian National Congress launched quit India movement, many congress leaders were arrested in connection with the movement. In the middle of 1943 congress leaders were released and these leaders visited Srinagar in the summers of 1944 and 1945. They were in close contact with Sheikh Abdullah. That is why despite sheikh Abdullah's nonparticipation in the Quit India movement and national conference policy of extending verbal support in war efforts of the allies which ran counter to Congress policy, the far sighted congressman chose to ignore it and made every effort to cement their personal and political bonds with sheikh Abdullah.⁴⁴ The annual session of the party was held in Srinagar on the 25th, 29th and 30th September, 1944 in Panther Masjid. The session is important in that it adopted a political economic and social Programme for Kashmir known as “New Kashmir”. The historic new Kashmir manifesto granted women the right to vote and contest elections. Women were guaranteed equal rights with men in all fields of national life; political, economic, cultural as also in the state services.

In 1947, India and Pakistan had come into existence. Sheikh Abdullah was released on September 1947, but he refused to accept the two nation theory. The decision to accede to either India or Pakistan placed Maharaja Hari

Singh in a dilemma. On the one hand, if the State acceded to Pakistan, the maharaja's Dogra Hindu community would find itself in a position of subservience. He nourished hopes of an independent state. In August 1947, Maharaja's regime ratified an agreement with the government of Pakistan. This agreement stipulated that the Pakistan government assume charge of the state's post and telegraph system and supply the state with essential commodities, but India refused to sign on it unless the political prisoners were freed. The maharaja refused and the agreement was, thus inconclusive. The National Conference firmly placed its bet on India, and supported the accession of Kashmir to India. The National Conference asked people to collectively donate their weapons and their vehicles. Training session for volunteers were organized. This was the beginning of the people's militia of Kashmir. Girls also joined the militia. Zoni Gujjari, joined women's Defense force and received militia training at a place, where now stands the New Secretariat building. During this period, she vigorously struggled to topple the Dogra Regime, and to have a democracy in Kashmir. She was awarded with title "Zoni Mujahid" in grateful acknowledgement for her Services⁵⁸. Under the leadership of sheikh Mohammed Abdullah National Militia and women's Defense corps-volunteer forces of men and women were organized to ward off the onslaught by the tribal raiders. With its multifaceted and radical activities, women's self Defense corps (WSDC) was harbinger of social change. Attired in traditional Kashmiri clothes and carrying a gun around her shoulders, zoon Gujjari symbolized the WDSC. Begum Abdullah was also foremost in the women's wing of peace brigade, which fought the Pakistani invaders. Begum Abdullah was a very intelligent woman and devout Muslim. In 1947 when the country was under the grip of communal frenzy, she carried the torch of love and peace to far flung areas of the state. She helped the victims of partition in rehabilitation with a motherly care and love. It was only due to her tireless efforts that the state of Jammu and Kashmir was saved from the communal riots. She was awarded the title of "Mader-e-Meherban" (kind mother) by the people of Kashmir. Miss Mehmuda Ahamd Shah, a pioneering educationist and champion of women's empowerment, along with other leader women, was in the forefront of WSDC. During her student days in Lahore she joined the 'Punjab Students federation', which was fighting against the British imperialism. In Kashmir she founded 'Free thinker's society' which gathered under it the intellectuals of the state. Meanwhile she joined the freedom Movement under the leadership of sheikh Abdullah. She did great service in bringing normalcy to the state, when the sub-continent gripped in communal frenzy. Begum Zainab was a grass root level leader. She fought against the Dogra rule under the auspices of the NC. She took charge of the political dimensions of WSDC and shouldering a gun she was in the forefront, leading women's contingents. Sajida Zameer Ahmad was also associated with the Quit Kashmir Movement in its later stage. She joined the WSDC in 1947 and worked actively in various refugee camps.

Marginalized Women and the State, in Kashmir: (19th -20th centuries)

Scholars working on Kashmir have largely focused on its political processes, and the nature of its relations with the central government. The recurring and ever increasing cycles of violence and political conflicts have actually inhibited scholars from studying the social and cultural developments in the state. There has scarcely been any effort to examine the lives of women, in particular marginalized Women, in the state. This work seeks to study

the lives of one such group of marginalized women- the prostitutes-in relation to the social and political developments in the state marginalized women- the prostitutes-in relation to the social and political developments in the state. In colonial India, Jammu and Kashmir was the only state where prostitution was legalized under law and was not a punishable offense. There could have many reasons for this, and while the role of the culture was certainly important, the pecuniary benefit to state was crucial in its tolerance, even encouragement, under the Dogra rule. The ill-famed trade came to the notice of British Government after the devastated famine in 1877-78. According to the British Official reports, about 15 to 25 percent of the revenues of the state came from taxing the prostitutes, who were for this reason provided licenses by the state. In 1880, there were in Kashmir, according to the Report, 18,715 'registered prostitutes' who gave away a share of their 'income' to the state in the form of taxes. The registered prostitutes, it appears, belonged to the lower sections of society, and a significant number of them actually came from the untouchable classes, such as the Bhangis (scavengers) and Hanjis (fishermen).

Women Empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir

Women empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfil 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 programmer 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. 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 turn of the twenty first century, almost every country in the world provides the legal right for women in politics 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 socio-political 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.

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 against 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 class 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 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

After independence the economic status of women in Kashmir started improving but the political activism by the women in Kashmir was hardly visible. The wife of first P.M of J&K S.M Abdullah played an active role in politics and she was the first woman 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.

Year	Total no of contestants No of female contestants No of elected women	No of female contestants	No of elected women
1972	342	8	4
1977	409	4	1
1983	505	7	0
1987	528	13	1
1966	1027	15	2
2002	709	13	2
2008	1354	67	3
2014	803	26	2

Women in Jammu and Kashmir did not yet enter in the assembly before the election 1972. In this election for the first time the majority of women contestants (four out of six) won. This election thus, paved way for the ingress of highest percentage (5.33%) of women in assembly. Since then, the number of women in the assembly has never been more than 3%. This is despite the fact that except 1977 & 1983 elections, the number of women contestants had constantly increased. In, most of the assembly elections, many women forfeited their deposits. Since the trend continued in 2002 election also, thus the government was compelled to nominate two women as per the constitutional provisions. There was not a single women minister in the state for a long time. Sakina Itoo was made minister in 1996.

As per the data available in 1972 election out of 8 women contestants 4 stood as independent candidates and 4 were in election fray on INC ticket. Similarly, in 1977 election, the number of independent women candidates was 2 out of a total of 4 and 2 contestants were from Janta Dal. 9 out of 23 women in 1987 election stood as independent and 3 contested on the ticket of JKPP and 1 of INC. In 1996 elections 3 out of 15 were in election

fray as independent ,5 were from INC ,3 from BJP ,2 from JD ,1 each from NC and JPP. In 2002 INC and PDP both fielded 4 women contestants each. NC and Samajwadi Janta Party (ashtray) gave tickets to 3 women candidates each. 2 JKNPP women candidates got the mandate of the party while Janta Dal ,BJP ,National congress party ,Lok Jan Shakti Party and Janta Dal Secular made bet on 1 women candidate each. In 2008 there were 68 women among 1,354 candidates and % of women contestants 4.95 % and the seats won by women 3.4%. In 2014 election only 3 % women get tickets 26 out of 829 candidates were women 3 %were contested in these election. In terms of party wise break up out of the total of 26, 5 women contested on NC tickets, 4 on BJP, 3 each on congress and SP, and one each on PDP, BSP, JKNPP, and RPI tickets. Seven women entered the electoral fray as non - party independent. However, the total number of women who really go elected as MLA was only two.

Despite the participation of women in state assembly election they have also took part in Lok Sabha election as well. The 33% 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 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, none a ray of hope has emerged in J&K for the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion

The Constitution of India is based on the principles of equality and guarantees equality before law and equal protection to all its citizens. It not only guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, but also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth. However, these rights have remained de jure and have not been translated into de facto rights. As such, women have been denied social, economic, civil and political rights in many spheres. An important area where women have been inadequately represented is in the political sphere. Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India guarantees political equality, equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively Women's political participation and representation at decision - making level are two different issues.

Participation is necessary, but an insufficient condition for representation, because representation does not flow automatically from participation. Women all over the world have participated widely in political movements in times of crisis but, once the crisis is over, they are relegated again to the domestic arena. Women's active participation in local bodies is creating a paradigm. The buzz word today is "Women can do it" which is proved very emphatically by various luminaries in different walks of life. Despite the participation of women in state assembly election they have also took part in Lok Sabha election as well. The 33% reservation for women in local government institutions had played a tremendous role in empowering the women of Jammu and Kashmir. The former C.M of J&K Mehbooba Mufti is having the honour 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. NGO, Media, Educational Institutions, have to play a vital role in this regard.

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