

Role of Women in Kashmir Politics

(With special reference to abrogation of Article 370)

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Abstract:

The disharmony in Kashmir is as old as the Independence of India and Pakistan . The populace of Kashmir are yet to visualize the light of the promise made to them by the Indian regime at the time of accession . Women constitute half of the world population, but are excluded in almost all respects. They are neglected at family, community and societal levels and living as suppressed class. Historically they have been subjected to cruel form of physical , sexual and psychological violence and enjoy least socio economic status. They have been victims of gender based violence and their distress got strengthened further due to patriarchal nature of society . The doubt about the future has perpetuated the conflict to the present day where common kashmiri has become disappointed about the Indian state and its democratic values. This has given rise to violence that has taken shape of insurgency and counterinsurgency .The women of Kashmir have been on the receiving end in this conflict. They are the worst victims in this conflicts. Feminism was a major response to challenge patriarchy at global level as well as with in the national boundaries.

Like other states of India the women in state of Jammu and Kashmir remained subordinate all over the state. However from the earlier 20th century , women in the state of J&K got conscious about their subordination due to the emergence of political consciousness , modern education, cultural awareness and deterioration of economic conditions. Women in Kashmir have been active participants in political movement , whether against Dogra regime or against the tribal invasion of late 1947 in the form of Women Self Defence Corps. The liberal attitude of kashmiri society towards women was echoed by Naya Kashmir Manifesto of Sheikh Abdullah in 1944 which aimed at helping women in providing them equal and rightful place in the society and allow them to make there contribution to the task of nation building. There have been few women like Behum Akbar Jahan and Zainab Begum who rose to some sort of political stature. This was the result of their strong political backgrounds. Begum Akbar Jahan was the wife of first Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah whereas , Zainab Begum was sister of G.M.Sadiq, another Chief Minister of 70's . This reflected the dominant patriarchal structure of kashmiri society. The role of women in Panchayati Raj institution is attracting a lot of serious attention in the present context in the state.

Key Words- Kashmir conflict, Empowerment, Feminism, Women position in legislature.

Introduction

The nature of society in Jammu and Kashmir is mixed in terms of its ethnic as well as religious arrangements . This heterogeneity can be seen at racial, linguistics, cultural and religious level. Dogras , Paharis, Mangolian, Kashmiris, Ladakhis, Gujjars, Chibalis are the various racial groups inhabiting the state. The status of women varies from religion to religion, culture to culture and region to region. They are an integral part of the society yet they form a weaker section and are under the surveillance and control of men

in all the spheres of life. The women in traditional Kashmiri society suffered in all the spheres of life particularly economic, social and political.

The integrationist policy of Indian state severely dealt death blow to the special status of J&K that was affirmed by article 370 in Indian constitution. Around 273 laws and 28 constitutional orders were passed to reduce the importance of special status of Jammu and Kashmir. This approach of government of India aroused feeling of dubiety among the populace of Kashmir , which was already boiling with furor for being denied the promised Plebiscite by Nehru. The ousting and the arrest of Abdullah further triggered the conflict. The zenith reached in 1987, when MUF lost elections because of heavy rigging and JKLF along with the dissatisfied youth crossed over to Pakistan to seek training for armed struggle. India reciprocated with heavy militarization and Kashmir found itself in one of the worst military conflict of the century. Kashmiri women became much part of the movement . They suffered on all fronts . As a result, they were forced to live for mere subsistence.

The emergence of Feminist movement launched struggles against all the social inequalities and gender discriminations. The aim of feminism is to empower and authorise women. As a result feminist theory developed out for women activism . It was united nation who started paying attention to women's issue. This notion of women empowerment was later adopted by other countries of the world. India also got influenced by this notion of women empowerment. Women is treated as second class citizen particularly in UT like Jammu and Kashmir. Her lack of interest in her own political empowerment leads to such govt. policies , which lack proper wisdom and direction. It is important for the empowerment of women that the women should actively participate in the process of nation building. Women all over the UT of J&K have been traditionally marginal. They have been suffering on all fronts. However this situation in the UT started undergoing a noticeable change from the early decades of 20th century. As per Bashir. A. Dabla two sets of factors that mainly led to this transformation. Firstly, the emergence of political consciousness, expansion of modern education, spread of cultural awareness, degradation of economic conditions and social awakening created opportunities for the women in which they can think about their position. Secondly, the impact of outside developments in the Indian sub continents particularly in erstwhile- British, Punjab, Delhi had a positive impact on overall position.

Participation of Women in Jammu and Kashmir Politics

The people of Jammu and Kashmir were granted right to vote in 1934 for the very first time and was done on a very limited scale. As far as women were concerned , the right to suffrage was limited only to those who have passed the middle standard or an equal examination. The excuse for its limited scale is as given by the franchise commission was, "The inclusion of women voters would increase the administrative difficulties of the election ". But with the establishment of the democratic government headed by Sheikh Mohd Abdullah, the state election to the constituent assembly in 1951 were based on universal adult franchise. The part 10th of the constitution of J&K dealt with the election in the state. It proposed the right of the women to elect and to be elected in all institutions on the basis of equality with men and also the grant of equal rights to women in all fields of the nation life including service in the state. Section 47 guarantees that if the governor is of the opinion if the women are not sufficiently represented in the assembly, he may nominate not more than two women to be members of it.

The women in Jammu and Kashmir participated in assembly election for the first time in 1972 . In this election the majority of the women contestant (4 out of 6) won. This election serve the way for the entrance of highest percentage (5.33%) of women in assembly. After 1972 election the number of women in the assembly has never been more than 3%. In most of the assembly election many women gave up their deposits. The trend continued in 2002 election also. Thus the government was forced to nominate two women as per the constitutional provisions. Height was this that there was not a single women minister in J&K for a long time. Sakina Ittu daughter of Wali Mohd Ittu was elected to the 1996 assembly and was appointed as deputed minister for education in Farooq Abdullah's government. As per the data available in 1972 election, for the first time women entered in Jammu and Kashmir assembly. That year, 10 women filed nominations, 6 of them contested and 4 won. This made the percentage of women legislators 5.33% in J&K assembly. The 4 women who won the elections were Zainab Begum, Hajra Begum, Nirmala Devi and Shanta Bharti. Similarly, in 1977 elections, the number of independent candidates was 2 out of a total of 4 and 2 contestants were from Janta Dal. This election of 1977 showed a low participation of women candidates , only one woman managed to win and that too on a reserved seat.

In 1983 elections, the participation of the women voters was high as 70.48 %, however the contesting women were only 7 and a single woman won the election. In 1987 elections 9 out of 23 women stood as independent candidates and 3 contested on the ticket of JKPP and 1 of INC. In 1996 elections 3 out of 15 were in election battle as independent, 5 were from INC , 3 from BJP, 2 from JD,1 each from NC and JPP. In 1987 elections only one and in 1996 only two managed to win. In 2002 elections, INC and PDP both fielded 4 women contestants each and Samajwadi Janta Party gave tickets to 3 womens candidates each. 2 JKNPP women candidate got the mandate of the party while Janta party, BJP, National Congress Party, Lokjan Shakti Party and Jantadal secular made bet on one woman candidate each and in this elections only two women managed to win. In 2008 elections there was an unprecedented women participation. Out of total 1354 candidates there were 67 women contestants however only three women candidates managed to get victory. In 2014 elections out of 829 candidates 26 were women constituting 3% of total candidates. Only two women candidates managed to win namely Asia Naqash of PDP and Firdous of NC. PDP became the single largest party and BJP became the second largest party which together formed a coalition government. Mehbooba Mufti became the first woman Chief Minister of the state. We should also look at the separatist politics in Kashmir and women's role in it.Organisations like Dukhtaran-e-millat of Asiya Andrabi or people like Anjum Zamrooda Habib are politically very active even though separatist party is more dangerous than main stream, where chances of getting security and funds are more . If the conflict stabilises there is a great chance of women's representation becoming much better than any Indian state because women in Kashmir are more advanced and educated than elsewhere. In contemporary situation Shehla Rashid Shora an Indian Kashmiri politician and activist joined the Jammu and Kashmir people's movement political party founded by Shah Faesal.She is vocal about the human rights situation in Kashmir. However at present she have resigned from the above mentioned party.

One of the paramount setbacks that the women of the UT have faced in last few years relates to the provisions of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of the Indian constitution. These constitutional amendments have brought about a silent revolution by providing 33% reservation for women in the institutions in the local self-government. These PRI amendments have brought a great change in India as far as the participation of the women at the gross root level politics is concerned.As per article 243D of the 73rd constitutional amendment one third of seats in panchayats and one third of panchayat chairperson positions be reserved for women, across all three levels of panchayati raj system. In J&K the participation of women remains low in the local bodies.

Municipal elections have been held in the state only 4 times since 1947 with the october 2018 election being the 5th time. In the panchayat elections held in J&k in 2002 after a gap of 23 years , only 2.46% of the candidates were women. The result of the 2002 panchayat elections were like this that out of total 22,700 elected panchs and sarpanchs only 28 and 2 respectively were women.

State Government of Jammu and Kashmir in 2011 passed a law reserving one third of the seats for women in panchayats gross root administrative bodies in villages. Each panchayat consists of not more than 10 panchs and is lead by a sarpanch. The women get victorious in gaining one third of panch seats in 2011 but a female sarpanch is still rare only 3 women won the 2150 sarpanch seats in Kashmir and 25 women managed to win the 1956 seats in Jammu.

In 2018 Jammu and Kashmir panchayat elections an overwhelming 82.4% polling was recorded in Jammu division, 33.2% was registered in Kashmir division.Around 26000 panches and sarpanches were elected. All the panches and sarpanches of panchayats voted to elect the chairperson of the Block Development Council. Congress, NC and PDP stayed away from the election because of continued detention of their leaders. 4 blocks have been reserved for women. The success of BDC election and democracy at the gross root level are some achievements of the Narendra Modi lead BJP government at the centre. The election of BDC was the first electoral exercise in the state after the centre's 5th August decision to scrap the special status under article 370.

Abrogation of article 370 and its advantages for women

On 5th August 2019, the Union Home Minister of India , Shree Amit Shah announced the abrogation of article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution which granted the special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The state is now divided into two Union Territories -Jammu and Kashmir(with a legislature) and Ladakh (with no legislature).

Advantages

- A woman from J&K can still retain her rights and citizenship even if she marries someone out of the J&K
- The panchayat will enjoy the same powers as in other states.
- Right to information and right to education will be applicable now
- Panchayats and municipalities will have financial autonomy.
- Minorities will have reservations.
- There will be scope of other job opportunities for women apart from tourism.
- Now Governor can nominate two women if their representation is inadequate.

Objectives

- To know the status of women in political arena and their political cognizance in J&K.
- To examine the reasons responsible for meagre participation of women in politics in J&K.
- To persuade the intention of political party in the recruitment of women candidates for contesting elections in J&K .
- To investigate the hurdle faced by women in their political activity in J&K.
- To see into the problems faced by women in main stream politics.
- To examine the participation of women in panchayati raj institutions in J&K.
- To know the benefits to women after scrapping of Article 370 in the main stream politics.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women is the need of hour. It is very important to give every women awareness about their political rights. The reservation for women in panchayat constituencies will ensure their greater participation in managing the affairs of the gross root level democratic institutions. The defeat of the male candidates has shattered the myth that the women are not interested in politics. Role of women is a need in panchayati raj institutions. It will enhance both the quality and quantity of human resources with which development is possible. Thus if any nation has to build up women development is must. No improvement is possible without cooperation and change of hearts from the part of men.

The status of women in the political sphere of J&K is inadequate. Like the other states of India, they remain on the margin of the political sphere. The women reservation bill is still pending in Indian parliament . The bill reserved 1/3rd of the seats in Lok Sabha, and in state Legislative assemblies for women. The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill in 2010. The Lok Sabha has not yet voted on it. Therefore the big gap between male and female gender is mandatory to be reduced so that the society as a whole could play its role in the main stream politics just to utilise the talent of half of the population of women in the politics.

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