



Empowering Futures: Advancing Gender Equality through Education in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Women's education is a powerful catalyst for change, empowering individuals, communities, and societies as a whole. Educated women are more likely to break the cycle of poverty, improve their health and well-being, and exercise their rights and freedoms. Education provides women with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to challenge gender stereotypes, pursue their goals, and make informed decisions about their lives. Moreover, educated women are more likely to participate in the workforce, contribute to economic growth, and become leaders in their communities. Gender inequality is not only a significant issue at the state and national levels but also a global challenge. Education holds the power to nurture gender equality.

In Jammu and Kashmir, women's education has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, with a significant increase in female literacy rates and a steady rise in the number of girls enrolling in schools and pursuing higher education. This study examines how the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir promotes gender equality through education, and it aims to identify the causes of gender inequality in the region. The paper also analyzes the impact of education in reducing gender inequality and fostering gender equality to promote women's empowerment.

Keywords: Education, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Gender-equitable education systems empower both boys and girls, fostering the development of essential life skills such as critical thinking, communication, negotiation, and self-management. These systems help bridge the skills gap that contributes to wage disparities and generate wealth across entire nations. Investing in girls' education transforms societies, nations, and the planet as a whole. Educated girls are more likely to lead healthy, fulfilling lives and are less likely to marry young. They create better futures for themselves and their families, participate in decisions that directly impact them, and earn higher incomes. Girls' education boosts economies, reduces inequality, and helps create more resilient and stable societies, allowing everyone, including boys and men, to reach their full potential. However, girls' education is not only about access; it also involves ensuring that girls feel supported and safe in the subjects and careers they choose, even in fields where they are often underrepresented. Education brings resilience in life and plays a pivotal role in the fight for women's empowerment and equality within the home and community. The lack of knowledge, education, and literacy exacerbates deprivation in all areas of life. Through education, women can become more aware of their legal, social, political, and economic rights, provisions, and privileges, enabling them to combat various forms of social discrimination. Education empowers women to reach their full potential by helping them acquire new skills, seek employment, and take better care of their diet and health. It provides them with the tools to overcome cultural ignorance and strict domestic isolation, broadening their horizons and elevating their status in society. As a result, education not only promotes women's economic and political independence but also enhances their quality of life, ultimately benefiting their families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Impact of Education on Gender Equality

Education plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality by empowering individuals, challenging stereotypes, creating inclusive environments, and fostering equal opportunities. Education is the key to nurturing gender equality. Some significant ways in which education supports gender equality include:

1. **Access to Education:** Education is a fundamental right for everyone, regardless of gender. However, in many parts of the world, girls and women face barriers to education, such as poverty, discrimination, child marriage, and cultural norms. Ensuring equal access to quality education for both boys and girls can help end the cycle of gender inequality and enable women and girls to reach their full potential.
2. **Empowering Individuals:** Education provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and information needed to make informed decisions about their lives. Educated girls and women are better equipped to assert their rights, make autonomous decisions about their bodies, health, and careers, and actively participate in social, political, and economic spheres.
3. **Challenging Stereotypes:** Education challenges and breaks down gender stereotypes that limit opportunities and perpetuate inequality. By promoting gender-sensitive and inclusive curricula, educational institutions can combat harmful biases, encourage critical thinking, and foster empathy and respect for diversity.
4. **Preventing Gender-Based Violence:** Education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to make wise decisions about their lives. Educated girls and women are better able to assert their rights, make autonomous decisions, and engage actively in various aspects of life, helping to prevent gender-based violence.
5. **Leadership and Decision-Making:** Education provides the knowledge and skills necessary for participation in decision-making across social, political, and economic domains. By promoting gender equality in education and inspiring girls and women to assume leadership roles, education ensures that women's voices are heard and their perspectives are considered in policy and program development.
6. **Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Inequality:** Education has the power to transform individuals and communities. Women and girls who pursue education are more likely to raise their families in healthier environments, contribute to their communities, and achieve financial advancement. This helps break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and gender inequality, with positive ripple effects on society.

Female education in Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir, a union territory of India, has been significantly impacted by over three decades of conflict, which has deeply affected various aspects of life, including livelihoods, living conditions, eating habits, employment, and access to education. Among those most affected by this prolonged unrest are the women of Kashmir, who have faced unique vulnerabilities and challenges due to both the immediate and long-term consequences of the conflict. However over the years, various government and non-governmental organizations have implemented programs aimed at increasing female literacy rates and encouraging girls to pursue higher education. These initiatives have led to a gradual but steady increase in the number of girls enrolling in schools and universities across the region. But the progress has been uneven, with rural areas and economically disadvantaged communities lagging behind. Access to education in Jammu and Kashmir is not just a matter of physical presence in schools but also the quality of education and the environment in which it is delivered. For many girls, even those who attend school regularly, the quality of education is often compromised by a lack of trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated curricula. Furthermore, traditional societal norms and conservative attitudes toward women's roles often discourage girls from pursuing education beyond the basic level, particularly in rural areas.

However, there is growing awareness of the importance of female education as a tool for empowerment and societal progress. Education is increasingly being recognized as a means to provide women and girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to challenge oppressive norms, make informed decisions about their lives, and contribute to their communities. Educated women are more likely to advocate for their rights, seek employment, and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

While the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has posed significant challenges to female education, there are signs of progress and resilience among the women and girls of the region. Education remains a critical factor in breaking the cycle of poverty and gender inequality, and continued efforts to support and expand access to quality education for women and girls in and has a positive impact on improving women's education, reducing gender inequality, and empowering women. In the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, education plays a crucial role in nurturing gender equality, broadening perspectives, and providing equal opportunities for all.

Objectives of the study

1. To understand the current status of women education in the UT of J&K.
2. To explore the role of education in nurturing gender equality in J&K.
3. To identify the causes of gender inequality in Jammu and Kashmir.
4. To find out the implications of different government policies and programs in J&K for promoting gender equality.

Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature. Data has been collected from the secondary sources that include related research papers, articles, official websites and reports.

Results and discussion

Women in J&K have made significant progress in various fields, including politics, business and entertainment. The Indian constitution guarantees legal right and equality for women, including the right to education and equal pay. But women still face many challenges, including gender based discrimination and violence. Many women, especially in rural areas, are malnourished and experience domestic violence.

Current status of women education in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir

Women's status is determined by a range of factors that define their well-being, and this is also true in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Over time, various indices related to women in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir have shown notable advancements. However, despite these advancements, women still lag behind men in many areas. Several statistical data points reveal the disadvantages that women in the UT continue to face.

First, Census 2011 revealed that J&K has a sex ratio of 889, which is lower than the national average and represents a deeply concerning outcome. According to the Digest of Statistics 2016–17, girls are enrolled at lower rates than boys at all educational levels, despite the Census of 2011 noting that women are less literate than men. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) provides further evidence of the low educational status of women in Jammu and Kashmir. It shows that 21% of women and 9% of men aged 15 to 49 have never attended school, and only 33% of women in this age group have completed 12 years or more of education, compared to 46% of men.

In terms of health, the NFHS indicates that 66% of women in Jammu and Kashmir suffer from anemia, including 25% with mild anemia, 38% with moderate anemia, and 3% with severe anemia. Employment statistics from the NFHS-5 reveal that in the 12 months prior to the survey, only 29% of all women aged 15–49 had a job, compared to 73% of men. The survey also highlights the limited resources and decision-making power currently available to women. All these things, indirectly add to the barriers in seeking education.

In addition to economic and health challenges, the issue of crimes against women remains alarming. According to the Crime Gazette published by the Crime Branch of J&K Police, the total number of crimes against women increased by 10% in 2021 compared to the previous year. The number of crimes, including rapes, kidnappings/abductions, molestation, and cruelty by husbands and relatives, rose to 3,873 in 2021 from 3,517 in 2020. The NFHS also underscores the prevalence of violence against women in J&K, with 10% of women aged 18 to 49 reporting having experienced physical violence, and 3% reporting having experienced sexual violence. Approximately 10% of women reported having been victims of either physical or sexual abuse, and 2% reported being victims of both.

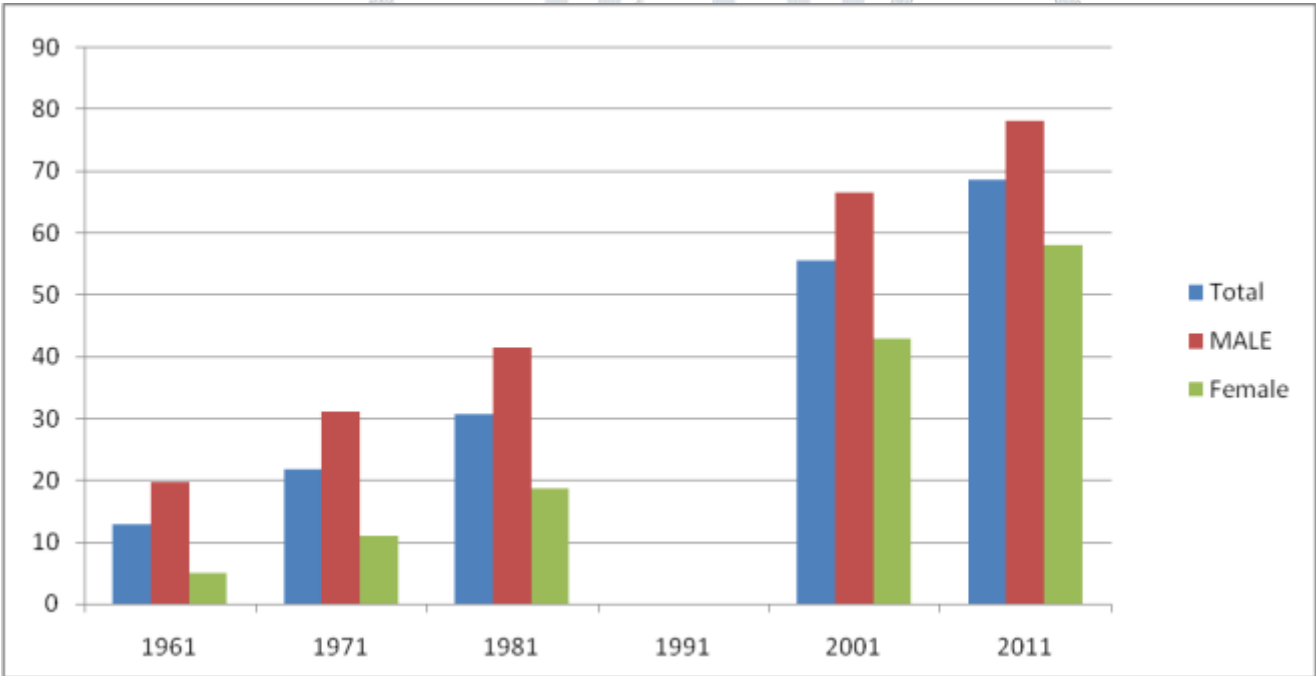
While assertive state policies could improve women's circumstances in terms of health, education, and other indicators, societal support is crucial for sustainable progress. As in other parts of South Asia, a significant portion of women's disempowerment in J&K stems from deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that persist despite modernization efforts. Although men control the majority of resources in society, women often remain dependent and under the "control" of men, perpetuating a cycle of gender inequality that hinders their full participation in social, economic, and political life.

Table No. 1: Literacy Rate of Male and Female in Jammu and Kashmir

Census Year	Male	Female	Difference	Total (J&K)	Increase in literacy percentage over previous census
1961	19.75	5.05	14.70	12.95	
1971	31.01	10.94	20.07	21.71	8.76
1981	41.46	18.73	22.73	30.64	8.93
1991	NA	NA	NA	NA	24.86(1981-2001)
2001	66.6	43.0	23.6	55.5	
2011	78.26	58.01	20.25	68.74	13.24

Source: Census of India, National Statistical Office (NSO) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)

Graph No. 1: Literacy (%) in Jammu and Kashmir from 1961-2011



Source: Census of India, National Statistical Office (NSO) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)

Table No. 1 and Graph No. 1 illustrate the literacy rates of males and females in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) over the decades. In 1961, the total literacy rate was 12.95%, with male literacy at 19.75% and female literacy at a mere 5.05%. By 1971, the total literacy rate had risen to 21.71%, with male literacy increasing to 31.01% and female literacy to 10.94%. In 1981, the total literacy rate in J&K further improved to 30.64%, with male literacy reaching 41.46% and female literacy 18.73%. The literacy rates saw a significant increase by 2001, with the total literacy rate of the Union Territory reaching 55.5%. During this period, male literacy was recorded at 66.6%, while female literacy rose to 43.0%. The upward trend continued in 2011, with the total literacy rate in J&K climbing to 68.74%. Male literacy in that year stood at 78.26%, whereas female literacy reached 58.01%.

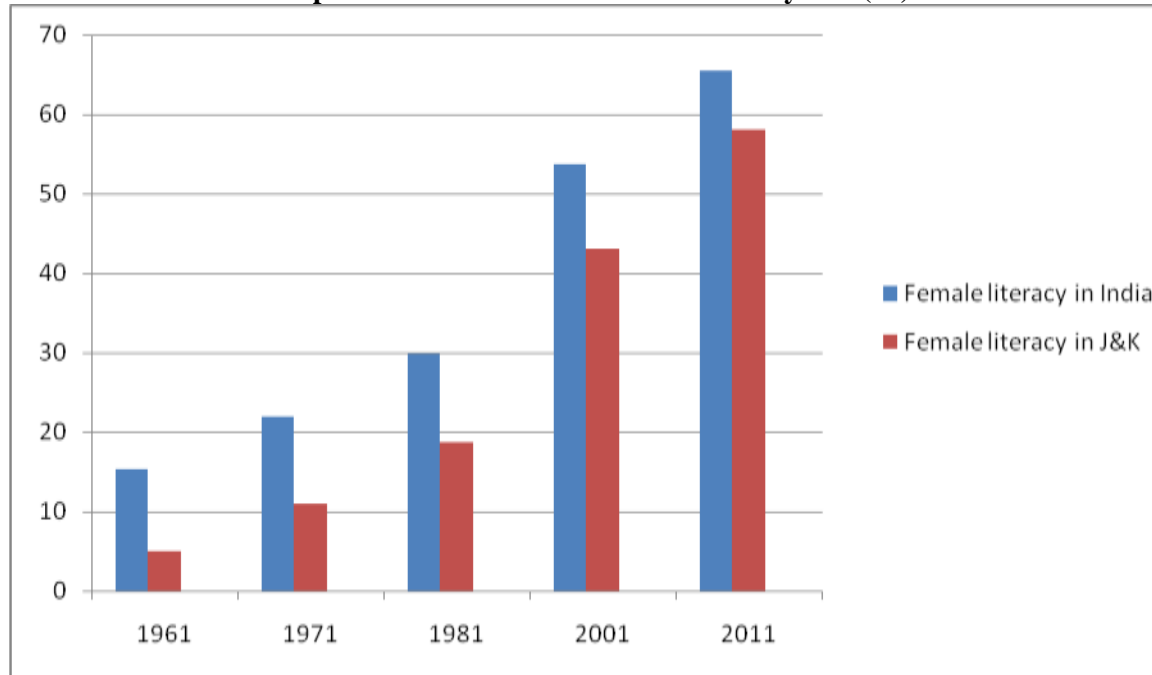
These figures clearly indicate that while female literacy has increased substantially over the past decades, a notable gap still exists between the literacy rates of males and females. This persistent disparity highlights the ongoing need to address gender-based educational inequalities to improve the status of women in society. Efforts must be made to further reduce this gap, as closing it is essential for the empowerment of women and their full participation in the social, economic, and political spheres of life.

Table No. 2: Comparison of female literacy rate in J&K and India

Census years	Female literacy in J&K	Female literacy in India
1961	5.05	15.33
1971	10.94	21.97
1981	18.73	29.76
2001	43.00	53.67
2011	58.01	65.46

Source: Census of India 2011

Graph No. 2: Comparison of female literacy (%) in J&K and India



Source: Census of India, National Statistical Office (NSO) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)

Table No. 2 and Graph No. 2 shows that female literacy rate in 1961 in India was 15.33% and in J&K it was 5.05%. Similarly For the year 1971 it was 21.97% in India and 10.94% in J&K. For the year 1981 it was 29.76% in India and 18.73% in J&K. For the year 2001 it was 53.67% in India and 43.00% in J&K. For the year 2011 it was 65.46% in India and 58.01% in J&K. Thus we can say that female literacy lacks behind in J&K as comparison to India's Female literacy rate. So, there is need to improve the educational status of women in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir in order to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

Causes of Gender Inequality in the UT of J&K

Gender inequality is a major issue in Indian society. Despite the legislation and a constitution that guarantees equal rights for men and women, gender inequality remains deeply ingrained in India as well as UT of J&K and have a significant impact on the lives of women. The gender gap persists in spite of substantial economic growth. India has been ranked poorly on various indices of gender disparity due to a number of factors that contribute to gender inequality, such as the high rates of discrimination against women and the prevalence of discriminatory social norms, laws, and cultural practices.

Gender inequality in the UT of J&K can be attributed to following points:-

1. **Illiteracy:** There has been a decline in education in J&K as a result of factors contributing to gender inequality for girls. Despite the country's educational reforms, it is a sad fact that girls in J&K are still not allowed to have an education. People need to change the way they think and realize how important it is to educate girls. A woman who is well-read and educated ensures that her family members, especially the kids, receive a quality education.
2. **Patriarchal Setup:** In Indian society and the family, men are the majority. This has always been the case, and many households still follow this practice today. In the UT of J&K this approach is prominent. This is also a big cause of gender inequality in J&K.
3. **Poverty:** Another factor contributing to gender inequality in J&K is poverty. One of the main disadvantages is that families would rather send their sons to school than their daughters this practice is more common in rural areas. In the rural areas of J&K poverty is one of the main cause of gender inequality.

4. **Women's Lack of Awareness:** Another factor contributing to gender inequality in J&K is women's ignorance of their rights and the obstacles in their way of achieving equality. This lack of awareness is often caused by prevailing cultural and social conventions that dictate women should submit to men.
5. **Social Practices, Beliefs, and Customs:** Even in modern times, many households still prefer to have a son over a daughter. In terms of economic, political, and religious factors, sons are valued more than daughters, especially in rural communities and business societies. It is also a big cause of gender inequality in the UT of J&K.
6. **Child Marriage:** Many girls in many districts of J&K still get married at an early age, which affect their education to a great extent (Dabla, 2007). So; early marriage is also one of the cause of gender equality in the UT of J&K.
7. **Habitat:** The majority of the tribes are found in isolated locations, woods, and challenging terrain. The tribal girl children's low attendance rates are caused by the lack of schools in these areas.
8. **Transportation facility:** The distance between schools and girls' homes, especially in rural areas, may be a barrier to their education. A sufficient transportation network is required for girls to attend school. For them, it will be more convenient if school buses accountability for the girl children's pick-up and drop-off service. Other modes might be tried in rural areas.
9. **Inappropriate school timing:** Girl's education should not take place in the morning in rural areas because they are working on farms and in the fields or doing household chores. When educational facilities are made available during a suitable period of time then enrollment and retention rates are high (Bose, 2000). Inappropriate school time is also a big cause of gender inequality in the UT of J&K.
10. **Toilet facility:** This could be one of the causes of girls' lower enrollment rates in school, particularly in upper primary. It is necessary to construct separate toilets for girls on the school grounds. This needs to address the girl's security as well. Additionally, toilet facilities are also required of female educators (Ahmad Gul and Khan, 2013).
11. **Female teachers in School:** - One study found that girls are more likely to attend school when there are female teachers present. With women, they feel more at ease and expressive, which helps them pay attention and actively participate in the learning process. Parents are also interested in rural areas sending their female children to school in where there are female teachers. Parents feel more secure about their female children when there are qualified female teachers in the school. Parents might be hesitant to enroll their female children in schools with a predominantly male student body (Ahmad Gul and Khan, 2013).

There are so many causes of gender inequality that exist in the society and they become barrier in women empowerment not only in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir but also in the whole county. Central as well as state Govt. should try to overcome these barriers in order to promote gender equality and women empowerment. Women should have the same opportunities as men in life, including the capacity to engage in public life. This is known as gender equality. A "bottom-up" approach to changing gender power relations is known as gender empowerment, in which people or groups become more conscious of women's subjugation and strengthen their ability to confront it.

Central Government schemes for women empowerment:

In an effort to empower women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development is putting various plans and programs into action to get them involved in all facets of the national economy. The information is as follows:

Approximately ten well-known and active programs have been established for the betterment of women. Among these programs are the One-Stop Center Program, the Working Women Hostel Program, the Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao Schemes, and others. Some of them are explained as under:

Table No. 3: Govt schemes for women empowerment in J&K

S.No.	Schemes	Explanation
1.	One Stop Centre and Universalization of Women Helplines	The Universalization of Women Helplines and One Stop Center are the two Nirbhaya Fund schemes that are managed by the Ministry of WCD. The One Stop Centers (OSCs), also referred to as Sakhi Centers, are designed to provide women who have experienced violence—including domestic abuse—with a variety of integrated services under one roof. These services include police support, medical assistance, legal aid and counseling, psycho-social counseling, and

		temporary housing, among other things. The Women Helpline (WHL) Program connects women who have experienced violence in public and private settings with the appropriate authorities, including the police, one stop center, hospital, legal services, etc., offering them a round-the-clock emergency and non-emergency response.
2.	Swadhar Greh Scheme	The Swadhar Greh Scheme is a centrally sponsored program designed to assist women who have been subjected to adversity and require institutional support for rehabilitation in order to live respectable lives.
3.	Ujjawala Scheme	A centrally sponsored program called Ujjawala is being implemented to prevent human trafficking and to rescue, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and repatriate victims of trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.
4.	Working Women Hostel	The government's Working Women Hostel Scheme aims to give working women safe, easily accessible housing along with child care services, whenever feasible, in urban, semi-urban, or even rural areas where there are opportunities for employment for women.
5.	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao(BBBP)	Launched on January 22, 2015, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme aims to address declining child-sex ratios (CSR) and related issues of women's and girls' empowerment throughout their lives. Preventing gender- biased sex-selective elimination, ensuring the girl child's survival and protection, and ensuring her education and participation are the goals of the program.
6.	Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)	In order to empower rural women through community involvement, the Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) Scheme was approved in November 2017 as a centrally sponsored initiative. The intends to make it easier for plans and initiatives targeted at women to converge across sectors. With the exception of the North East and Special Category States, where the funding ratio is 90:10, the program is administered by State Governments and UT Administrations at a 60:40 cost sharing ratio with the states. There is 100% central funding available for Union Territories.
7.	Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)	The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme that is centrally sponsored and is slated to be implemented nationwide on January 1, 2017. All pregnant women and lactating mothers (PW&LM) are eligible for the maternity benefit under PMMVY, with the exception of PW&LM who work regularly for the federal government, state governments, public sector undertakings (PSUs), or who receive similar benefits for their first living child from any currently enacted law. In

		accordance with the program, eligible beneficiaries receive Rs. 5,000 in three installments during pregnancy and lactation if they meet specific requirements related to nutrition and health seeking. In accordance with established guidelines, the qualified recipient also receives the remaining cash incentive for the maternity benefit.
8.	Rajiv Gandhi national crèche scheme	The government launched the National Crèche Scheme as a women's empowerment program for kids of working mothers. It offers daycare services to help children's physical, social, and holistic development; it also educates parents on how to provide better childcare practices; and it improves the health and nutritional status of the children.
9.	<u>Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)</u>	Mahila Shakti Kendra is one of the most well-known programs in India for women's empowerment. It is intended to provide women with all-encompassing support services to help them advance their digital literacy, find employment, and acquire new skills. The government intends to build 920 Mahila Shakti Kendras in the 115 most impoverished districts. The program functions at multiple levels, including the national, state, and district levels.
10.	Mahila Police volunteers scheme	The Ministry of Women and Child Development and Home Affairs initiated the Mahila Police Volunteers program in all States and Union Territories. In order to guarantee police outreach on crime cases, this centrally sponsored program seeks to forge a relationship between local communities and police authorities.

Providing gender equality is very important at present scenario. Central government formulated so many policies in order to improve the status of women. These policies are also applicable in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

Initiative taken by govt. of J&K for women empowerment:

- **National backward class's finance and development corporation (NBCFDC):** This is a loan program, which is centrally sponsored, lifts loans from the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation, the apex corporation, for support to women from lower socioeconomic classes.
- **Swayam Sidha women empowerment programme (SWEP):-** It is a comprehensive program for empowering women that is primarily intended to help women form self-help groups. (SHGs), wherein knowledge and self-assurance about their situation, health, diet, education, sanitation, legal rights, empowerment, control over resources, saving practices, availability of microcredit, participation in local planning, etc., is fostered in them on an economic and social level to put the Swayam Sidha Women Empowerment Programme (SWEP) plan into action in J & K.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP):-** Under this Scheme, loans are available to skilled and qualified women irrespective of caste, creed, religion and income.
- **National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation: -** The target group under this scheme are differently abled women with 40% disability (as per PWD Act 2016). This Corporation provides loans to target group at very low rate of interest.
- **Tejaswini-the Radiant :-** Through the Tejaswini Scheme, young women in J&K can establish profitable self-employment businesses that fit to their abilities, backgrounds, and local markets. Under this scheme young women

in J&K can establish profitable self-employment businesses that fit to their abilities, backgrounds, and local markets. Under the scheme, J&K Bank makes it easier for female entrepreneurs to apply for all eligible young women who reside in J&K and meet the requirements of matriculation and above are to receive assistance under this scheme.

- **Women credit Cooperatives:** - Two Women credit cooperatives, one each for Jammu and Kashmir divisions, have been registered under the provisions of the J&K Self Reliant Cooperatives Act 1999. Nearly 6200 women have become members of two credit cooperatives.
- **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA):-** SABLA was launched in Jammu Division as pilot scheme in two Districts only i.e. Jammu and Kathua in total of 18 ICDS Projects in 3978 Anganwadi Centres (2370 Jammu and 1608 Kathua).
- **Condensed course of education for Women:** - Under this programme the Board provides financial assistance to Non Governmental organizations / Voluntary Organizations for conducting 2 year Primary, Middle, Matric level Condensed Courses for female school drop outs in the age group of 15-35 years.

Thus both central as well as state government implement so many policies in order to uplift status of women in the society. But till this date the status of women has not improved properly. So, it is need of society to improve the status of women by giving them equal educational opportunities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, women have historically faced significant discrimination, often exacerbated by cultural, social, and political factors unique to the region. However, in recent years, there has been a marked improvement in the situation, thanks in large part to the concerted efforts of the Indian government. The introduction of various policies aimed specifically at promoting gender equality in Jammu and Kashmir has brought about positive changes. These policies, implemented at both the central and UT levels, have provided women with greater access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, thereby helping to uplift their status in society.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that while progress has been made, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir still lags behind that of more developed states and countries. The improvements, though significant, are not yet sufficient to bridge the wide gap between Jammu and Kashmir and other regions where gender equality is more advanced. This discrepancy highlights the need for a more robust approach to policy implementation. While the formulation of policies is an essential first step, their success ultimately depends on how effectively they are put into practice.

In many instances, policies that are well-intentioned and sound in theory fail to produce the desired outcomes due to poor implementation. This gap between policy and practice can be attributed to various factors, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of political will, and societal resistance to change. To address these challenges, it is imperative that the government not only enacts policies but also invests in building the necessary infrastructure, training personnel, and raising awareness among the public to ensure that these policies are implemented effectively.

Furthermore, the role of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector cannot be underestimated in this process. These entities can play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality, providing support and resources for women, and holding the government accountable for its commitments. By working together, the government and these stakeholders can create a more conducive environment for gender equality to flourish.

In conclusion, while the situation for women in Jammu and Kashmir has improved compared to the past, there is still a long way to go before true gender equality is achieved. The progress made thus far should be seen as a foundation upon which further advancements can be built. It is essential that the government continues to prioritize gender equality, not just through policy formulation but through meticulous and committed implementation. Only then can the vision of a society where women enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and respect become a reality. This will not only benefit the women of Jammu and Kashmir but also contribute to the overall development and prosperity of the region, making it a model for other areas to follow in the quest for gender equality.

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