

Women Empowerment in Kashmir

–Ishfaq Ahmad Bhat*

ABSTRACT

The research on women empowerment reveals that in Kashmir the attention of planners and programme implementers is required. Policy decisions based on research findings are rooted to the ground, and therefore have the capacity to bring about improvement in the situation, whether it is with regard to health practices, income generation, domestic violence or rights of women. As research is a vital input for development, planners, administrators and researchers are therefore looking out for social factors that have the potential to impact the outcomes of various programmes. With this aim in view, the documentation of the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) and Athwaas and other self-help groups' documents make us familiar with the degree of women empowerment in the widely scattered areas of Kashmir. The research abstract on women empowerment is a new way of challenging and overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment. Women empowerment cannot be rigidly defined particularly in a situation like ours where there exist a lot of differences among women in different sectors, such as rural versus urban women, the public sector versus those in the newline, and educated women in the private sector versus uneducated women in Kashmir.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Gender Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

The term “empowerment of women” has become popular especially after 1980s. It refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. The term empowerment of women refers to the process of providing power to women to become free from the control of others, that is, to assume power to control her own life and to determine her own

* Researcher of Sociology, Jammu and Kashmir, India. Email: ishfaqsoc@gmail.com

conditions. The term “empowerment of women” could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role at par with the men in the society. Historically, women’s have been regarded as constituting a weaker section. They have often been treated as “second grade citizens”. They have been pictured and presented as “homemakers” who are good at household chores. The image of women has been changing everywhere.

On the contrary, women of Asia and Africa were not able to secure equal status and opportunities even after 1950s. Women continued to suffer from one or the other kind of disability. Their exploitation was also continued. They were given unequal treatment on the basis of gender. This development was treated as “gender discrimination”. The United Nations also through its various meetings and pronouncements has requested its member nations to remove as early as possible, the ugly practice of “gender discrimination”.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The 18th century was considered by many thinkers as the age of enlightenment. It is thought to be the time when the human kind shook up from darkness and ignorance into a new age. Enlightened by reason, science for humanity. It is only during this period of intense intellectual activity that the present struggle for women rights in the west began. Many of the stars filled the space to vie for feminist rights. Until then, the issue was never given attention by many of the thinkers who have profound impact on the future generations by the way of their writings. Even as many of the established philosophers and thinkers wrote on the issue or a fine departure from the previous line not to talk of any major paradigm shift. It is no wonder that if at all any idea had to take shape in the beginning, it was to come through conduct of literature. The river of the literature irrigates the minds of people with proper gestation and this was the route taken up by some of the shining stars of feminist movement.

The first wave of the feminist approach in fiction can be identified since Jane Austin had addressed the restricted lives of women who freed such predicaments in the society. Charlotte Brontee and George Eliot also espoused the cause of women’s pathetic state in their writings. However,

the feminist literacy criticism got its real strength in the women's empowerment of the 1960s, which was important in many ways as it speculated the social, psychological and political oppressions of women and henceforth, wanted to promulgate for their empowerment through literature. It created a new awareness and motivation, and tried to help many women to extricate from the restrictions and inhibitions of the society. Feminist saw it vital to combat for this sensitive issue. All forms of feminism posit that the relationship of inequality and oppression should be brought to an end. In this sense, the women's movement has been crucially concerned with books and literature.

The feminist movement also impacted Kashmir women. Begum Zafar Ali motivated many women in Kashmir to participate in the field of education. There was no looking back afterwards. Kashmir produced a galaxy like Mahmoda Ahmad, first principal, higher education Begum Akbar Jehan, popular leader, Nighat Basu, first women dean and head, faculty of education, University of Kashmir, Parveen Pandit, first chair person, women's empowerment cell and others. Thus, what was advanced in literature became a global movement and also irrigated our state. Our state too has to take lead henceforth, and particularly women have to realise that they are second to none. They must turn towards writing and literature. This way they would advance their rights and slowly the society will respect what they have to say. They must not tread the beaten tracks, but follow their dreams.

Historically, women's have been regarded as a child producing machine and a weaker section. They have often been treated as second grade citizens. They have been pictured and presented as "homemakers" who are good at household chores. The image of women has been changing everywhere.

On the contrary, women of Kashmir were not able to secure equal rights and opportunities. Women continued to suffer from one or the other kind of disability present in Kashmir. Their exploitation was also continued. They were given equal treatment on the basis of gender and situation in Kashmir. This development was treated as "gender discrimination". The United Nations also through its various meetings and pronouncements has requested its member nations to remove as early as possible, the practice of discrimination against women.

The empowerment of women has improved day by day through civil society movements by central or state governments. Earlier, the women

were not doing work outside the home and they were recognised as a homemaker and child caretaker. The family was also patriarchal and the female had no authority in home affairs or decision making. At present, this trend has changed very much.

The empowerment of women in Kashmir has to some extent uplifted the situation of women, but sometimes not, because they depending on the situation in Kashmir or violators of women's empowerment in Kashmir. The research on women's empowerment in Kashmir that requires the attention of planners and programme implementers, policy decision based on research finding are rooted to the ground reality, and therefore have the capacity to bring about tangible improvement in the situation. Whether it is with regard to nutritional status, health practices, income generation, domestic violence or rights of women and children, such research on these social issues in Kashmir is conducting by a plethora of organisations, namely research institutes, government ministries and departments, autonomous organisations, home science colleges, social work departments of universities, medical organizations, as research is a vital input for development planners, administrators and researchers are on the look for social factors which have the potential to impact the outcomes of various programmes such as in the entrepreneurship, handicraft etc. for the upliftment of the women.

The Chief Minister, Umer Abdullah said, "Women empowerment a focus area in J&K". The empowerment of women is the key to solving various issues and building a healthy progressive and prosperous society. The empowerment of women is the key to solve various issues confronting them and involving a mechanism to ensure there is a holistic development in the society. Growth will be loop sided if women are not fully under its focus. Umer said, "Addressing beneficiaries of Umeed, a scheme for empowerment of women at Chenani in Udhampur District. The Umeed scheme is beneficial for women up to some extent, but has not fully empowered them socially and economically. The empowerment of women is not that we only empower poor and rural women. This empowerment also includes the victims, handicapped etc."

Some programmes of upliftment and empowerment to the women are such as internship, handicraft etc. The internship picks up at least 20 women which were among the 140 candidates in the latest batch of aspiring entrepreneurs trained at Kashmir Entrepreneurs Development Institute (EDI) signifying how the concept of starting new business is fast picking up among women in the state.

Though the number of women is still less as compare to the men who turn up or entrepreneurship training at the institute, but according to (EDI) statement it is still “lot encouraging”.

This is indeed a welcome trend both for the homes, Kashmir society and EDI because they are married women’s in this batch who could keep their kids at home and come for entrepreneurship training braving heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures. The EDI attract a more women aspiring entrepreneurs and incentives for them the entrepreneurship programmes implemented by EDI.

The 140 candidates were training at the institute’s Pampore campus. The unemployed youth who are all said to start their own business ventures now, were exposed to a comprehensive training course, Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) to equip them with tools they need to start business. On the other hand women receiving training, skill development, performance improvement but on the other side women’s are depriving because lot of profit gains the governments for them. When they get loans and surrendered from government jobs. This is the trend of the government for violating and upliftment the empowerment of women in Kashmir.

ROLE OF TEACHERS IN WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

The teacher’s role in women’s empowerment is varied from time to time and area to area. Some teachers have respected the women’s empowerment, women’s respect and their dignity; they know the value and status of the women. It is only the women who gave the birth to prophets. But others ignore this due to dominance against women.

The teacher is not a teacher without students but today both interact with each other when the institutes came into existence. The teacher student relationship is recognised as that of a father and son or daughter, but at present, it is reverse about this.

Now-a-days, the student looses honour to teacher’s lust, even when the teacher was given respect but today they are itself responsible for degrading themself. Police have launched a manhunt to arrest a “licentious” teacher for allegedly raping a student, who used to visit him for tuition.

A case has been registered in Police Station Sadder against teacher Parvaiz Ahmad (40) for allegedly raping one of his 9th class student in Bulbul area of Barzulla in Srinagar city. Parvaiz a private school teacher at Solina Srinagar was running a coaching centre at his residence located in

Bulbul Bagh. The victim student is from Raheem Bagh Colony, Mehjoor Nagar.

Police has registered the case after the complainant told them that the teacher has raped her at his residence after calling their for tuition. The complainant said, “that she visited the teacher’s residence with the purpose to handover tuition fee to him”. At last the Police arrested the teacher and given the punishment for them.

All teachers are involved in this action; sometimes the teacher’s illegal action or volition of the women’s empowerment are disclosed and some teachers remain fateful because their action are not disclosed in the society.

At a time when parliament is discussing the issue of women security, one more sexual harassment case has been surfaced and this time a professor in Aligarh Muslim University has reportedly harassed a Kashmiri female student sexually. Mohd Shabir, who is the chairman of Department of Law in the University was suspended. When the father of the girl lodged a case at Civil Lines Police Station against the Professor under relevant section of the IPC, police said on December 03, 2013, the girl studying L.L.M. has filed a complaint alleging that the Professor has indulged in sexual harassment when she met him in connection to a project report.

The University authorities immediately referred the matter to the women compliant cell and after preliminary inquiry the cell submitted the report. Which found charges of the girl “prima facie correct”. The authorities having suspended the teacher is not a concrete solution, whereas some teachers have been imprisoned but this Aligarh Professor was not. Perhaps the law has been varied from area to area and in accordance to the status of the individual. Thus some have the license for violating the women’s empowerment.

The government professors and lecturers do not teach properly students at colleges and universities because they want money and for this purpose they are running private coaching centers. Simply they are looting the money for the students. Some students can easily afford the private tuition fee (rich students) and some do not, meaning lecturers and professors are depriving the poor students and becoming violators of women empowerment. Those women students who cannot afford private coaching, leave their education, earlier in life and some attempt suicide since they do not qualify the examination. On the role of teacher in society, if an engineer does anything wrong, only a building will collapse, if a

doctor commits a mistake individual will die, but a nation will collapse in all dimensions if a teacher commits a mistake. His mistake reaches to generations.

Just Kirmani expressed concern over the condition of teachers in the state. Teacher should be morally, socially, mentally and economically sound so that they can deliver positively and invest in student to develop as a good human being.

On the other hand the armed conflict, the experiences of women are varied, from victims to survivors, and from peace builders to perpetrators of conflict, the categories of classification are indeed numerous. In the context of the conflict in Kashmir, however, what are the new opportunities that have been created for them? And what are their roles in it?

As victims of the conflict, women have continuously been the victims of physical, psychological and cultural violence as well as economic inequalities. On a daily basis they face a range of atrocities, from ever teasing to rape, and physical violence to murder. While women in Kashmir are victims of violence from all sides the security forces, militants, and the teachers still they have shown great resilience. They have emerged as survivors by not only continuing with their lives but also providing support to their families in both economic and for emotional terms.

For example the case of Kashmir's half-widows, who do not know the whereabouts of their husbands who not presumed to be dead. These men have left behind their wives and children without proof of their death, their wives are unable to re-marry. Female suicide is more than men suicide even when the suicide rate is higher among males than females all over the world, but it is reverse in Kashmir. Those women who do not re-marry live for their sons and daughters and provide them Education. Most of them are disowned by their in-laws, and live mostly high, however, despite the restrictive lifestyles then led.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN EMPOWERMENT

The role of civil society in women empowerment is increasing a lot due to English education and Islamic education and to some extent no one can ignore the basic rights, if there is in sporadic manner. The AFKP (Association of Families by Kashmiri Prisoners) led by Zamarooda Habib provides a psychosocial support to the families of Kashmiri prisoners held in various jails, as well as tracking and documenting their cases.

The civil society in Kashmir also changes the face of women empowerment and civil society not only by empowering women, but also empowering differently abled in Kashmir through civil society movements; it later led to a development in the Kashmiri society.

Ishaaroun Ishaaroun Mei Qabool! Marriage of differently abled couple is performed in Kashmir. The Mandatory “Qabool Hai” had not be uttered but signalled. Differently abled Ghulam Geelani Lone of Khawaja Pora, Nowshehra and Suhailah Ashraf Jon of Nowhatta became husband and wife. Their Nikkah ceremony was performed in the jam-packed Islamic Dawah centre, Chattabal, under the aegis of Hamsafar marriage counselling cell.

Both the husband and wife are born deaf and dumb, consented to the Nikkah using typical signals and signs used by such kind of differently abled people to the amazement of the audience. The Mehr was fixed at mutually agreed amount of 40,000. The groom singed the deed or Nikkah Nama in English, whereas the bride was represented by attorney, a near relation who signed the document on her behalf in the presence of a host of witness as the bride remained stayed in the adjoining hall meant for ladies. Her friends and close relatives kept her updated about the proceedings of the Nikkah throughout the ceremony using signs. While groom is matriculate and self-employed, the bride is a 10+2 qualified and into government service; a host of excited relatives of the couples attended the ceremony who then accompanied them to their home.

While on the other side, the chairperson of Dukhtaran-e-Millat, Asiya Andrabi made a fervent appeal to women to play a vital note in disseminating Islamic education among their wards.

According to a seminar on the role of women in Islam and her responsibilities, Islam has granted women a highest status than any other religion.

“Everyone has his own responsibility for which he will be answerable before Allah hereafter. Every individual has to make Efforts according to his power against the evil. Women rights and duties are defined in Islam and women have been granted her due rights”.

Throwing light upon the Seerat of Hazrat Khadija ^(RA) She is the role model for the whole Ummah.

“Women who preach Islamic teachings and its values to others are jailed by the authorities. Dr. Asiya Siddiqui is victim of same treatment. History Islands testimony to the fact that truth has to prevail. She impressed

upon the audience to follow the path of Islam, human rights and fight against injustice”.

CONFLICT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Kashmiri women have adopted themselves to the conflict and are attempting to make a positive contribution. Parveena Ahanger founded the Association of Parents of Disappeared person (APDP). The association seeks justice and acquires information on the whereabouts of disappeared people. It is an important initiative on the part of women towards bringing peace in Kashmir; AFKP led by Zamranda Habib provide psychosocial support to the families of Kashmiri prisoners held in various jails, as well as tracking and documenting their cases.

Athwaas (handshake in Kashmiri) is an initiative by Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) to bring from all parts of Kashmir together to explore possibilities for empowerment and peace. This is done through a range of activities, including trauma counselling, conflict transformation workshops, articulation of the concerns of women to policy makers and government interlocutors, and initiation of programmes that facilitate economic empowerment and politics, and awareness. South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) initiated a programme called Daughters of Kashmir, which is involved in mobilising women in the state, where the conflict has deeply divided the people. Its strategy is to build a network of local coalitions or networks that move between social justice and welfare interests to human rights and peace building.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT

The participation of women in Kashmir conflict is very less, but in existence for the purpose of achieving the empowerment and save the Islamic state against the foreign cultural habits. The all party Hurriyat conference, which is the Umbrella organisation spearheading the movement for independence has women's organisations, namely, the Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) and Dukhtatran-e-Millat (DEM), as constituent members. Both MKM and DEM have a political mandate professing separation from India, as India is violating the empowerment of women's development, norms and values in Kashmir. The MKM and DEM are carrying social

and human rights in Kashmir. It is the reason why the DEM is the only women separatist group in South Asia and it wants to establish an Islamic state in Kashmir.

Another strain of activity engaging women that keeps coming to prominence intermittently yet consistently is the role of women during protests. They were seen wearing shrouds and they were seen wearing shrouds and chanting pro-freedom slogans in marches against Indian rule and oppressor in the early years of the conflict. Many were killed or injured in shootouts by Indian armed forces while demonstrating. In the mass protests of 2008 and 2010, an increasing number of women participated alongside men and at times even lead all women protest marches. The former was triggered by the illegal transfer of Kashmiri land by the local government, and the latter by arbitrary teenage killings by Indian paramilitaries.

The Kashmiri society is still not comfortable with the active participation of central government in the public sphere. Basically, the Kashmir issue is a dispute issue, and the participation of every Kashmiri will remain until and unless the name of the Kashmir is given as dispute and the fully launched women's empowerment.

DEVELOPMENTAL SCHEMES FOR WOMEN

A number of schemes have been launched with a view to make women economically independent and self-reliant. The programme, Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) seeks to train women for empowerment in the traditional sectors of agriculture, animal husbandry, handlooms and handicrafts, etc. The Norwegian Agency for International Development funds the scheme training and production centres to train women belonging to weaker sections of the society and to provide them with employment on a sustainable basis. The scheme also provided Rs. 10 crore for the training cum production centres from 1996 to 1997.

RMK was set up in March 1993 for meeting the credit needs of poor women. Started with the initial input of Rs. 31 crores, this corpus since has been recycled four times to reach cumulative learning operation of Rs. 178 crores by 2006. RMK provides smaller loan assistance, maximum of Rs. 5 lakhs to newer and smaller but potentially capable organisations having at least 6 months' experience in the formation of self-help group.

The Mahila Samsidhi Yogana (MSY) launched possession and control over their household resources. Under this scheme, any adult rural woman

could open the MSY account in the post office with a minimum deposit of Rs. 4 or in multiple of Rs. 4, subject to a maximum of Rs. 300 to encourage women empowerment.

DIVERSE PERCEPTION OF EMPOWERMENT/ DISEMPOWERMENT; A DISCUSSION

Today, there are as many perceptions of women being discriminated against as there are cultures. The issue of women empowerment have only turned to power relations between men and women and shaped up hostile relations rather than an acquisition of empowerment in reality. The tussle is of ego clashes, access, control of resources, decision making and public visibility, life with dignity, economic independence and so on. Are women really so disempowered today that we mostly discuss such relevant issues only on women's day. Similarly, the title of disempowerment due to patriarchy too has wider interpretations and misinterpretations. Frankly, women are not so much in discomfiture as is told or perceived. However, it is mostly the academic and political domains that over exaggerate and represent gender issues in a more belligerent format.

I think we have lost the real vision of understanding both the women suffering and their empowerment and mere imitation of the west perhaps to us is almost synonymous to development or women's being at par with men to feel empowered. An important perspective of women's self-evaluation, perception of self-satisfaction and self-actualisation is still missing in the dominant gender discourses. To a larger section of the populace and so-called social analysts, rural or tribal women are disempowered perhaps because they do not go to beauty parlours every week or attend meetings or conference, but stay at home and attend to mundane tasks such as to rear cattle, work in fields, and take care of their children.

Society titles them as downtrodden or weaker sex of the society, but it is not this formula at all of course. In some societies, this is illegal but in general perspectives such women are not the violators of the rights neither for the children, cattle rights, agricultural rights or any other rights. Also, they do not know how to prepare creams or pizza/pasta or other food stuffs. A researcher studying gender issues on finding women working in fields in a village, abruptly concludes that they are slaves, made to work by men, lack government jobs, are illiterate and thus disempowered and disadvantaged, ignoring the fact that women are not always disempowered or slaves. They are not made to work against their will instead they keep on

motivating their family members to work hard for the progress. The basic facts remain hidden, like the fact of the people's sense of empowerment in different contexts and geographies, the sense and spirit of coexistence and division of labour among people, women's own sense of empowerment and their consciousness of responsibility towards home, the culture of work and hard work amongst women, as well as women's working alongside men in the fields also imparts a sense of equality to them.

REFERENCES

- Aleem, S. (1996). *Women's development problems and prospects*.
- Ashraf, M. (n.d.). *Renewing old routes and exploring new area in J&K*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Tourism as a CBMin J&K.
- Chopra, J. K. (edition 2009). *Unique quintessence of sociology*. Delhi.
- Cohen, E. *The sociology of tourism*.
- Edgell, D. (2011, September 20). East Carolina University.
- Gopal, A. K. (2008). *Research abstracts on women's empowerment*.
- Heard, A. (1997). *Human Rights: Chimeras in sheep's clothing*.
- Huchchanavar, R. (2012, December 26). *Womens empowerment*.
- John Muzamil, *Entrepreneurship and women empowerment*.
- Kaur, K. (2013). *Study of women's empowerment in Kashmir in relation to social freedom*. Retrieved from www.confabjournals.com/confabjour-nals/.../8102013757512.pdf
- Newspaper, *Greater Kashmir*, Thursday (16 January 2014).
- Newspaper, *Greater Kashmir*, Sunday (15 December 2013).
- Newspaper, *Greater Kashmir* (10 December 2013).
- Newspaper, *Greater Kashmir*, Monday (30 December 2013).
- Newspaper, *Rising Kashmir* (11 December 2011).
- Ojha, N. N. (edition 2009) *Chronicle sociology of mains Q & A*.
- Rao, C. N. S. (2009). *Sociology of Indian society*. Mangalore: S. Chand & Co Ltd.
- Rao, S. (2007). *Principles of sociology with an introduction to social thought*. Mangalore: S. Chand & Co Ltd.
- Shafiallaie, I. *Feminist movement impacted Kashmir as well*.
- Stein, A. I. (2009). Women lawyers blog for workplace equality: Blogging as a feminist legal method. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, 20(2), 357–408.
- A team of experts, sociology of development. IGNOU (edition 2011, two volumes).