

Women Empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir under National Conference: A Study



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Abstract

The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at state and national but at international level. The Jammu and Kashmir National conference has made an unflagging and exerted effort to bestow an honor to Women's sense of empowerment and helped women to come out from the gloomy of incognizance and contributed to the development of the society by providing a vivacious platform to the women in the state. Many initiatives have been taken with different policies at different levels which are inclined in the direction to ensure gender equality and women empowerment and also a staunch efforts has been made and the major issue has been taken into consideration by state government of Jammu and Kashmir to work against gender discrimination and providing equal opportunities for women at every stage. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is a regional political party in the state and was founded by Shiekh Mohd Abdullah in 1939. Since its formation, National Conference (NC) has made untiring efforts and enlightened woman's sense of empowerment and involved them in the ongoing freedom struggle and socialized them for participating in the decision making process. It was due to the stimulus of National Conference by which progression has got flashed out to make aware of their rights and status in the society. The present study examines the Role of National Conference in empowering the women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: National Conference, Women Empowerment, Political Party, Sheikh Mohammad. Abdullah.

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is the only state with Muslim majority in India. The state has witnessed the tyrannical rule of Dogra's. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference emerged as the only ray of hope for the suppressed people of the state. Sheikh was termed as the god father by the local masses. National conference always tried to heal the wounded valley be it in one or other form. They not only had plans for the male masses but also paved a sigh of relief to the women residing in the state. They were the first to provide a political platform to the females residing in the valley. We can say that National Conference had done Society¹. A yeoman service for the upliftment of women and had also played a prominent role in raising their standards of living.

Objective of the Study

To find the role of National Conference in empowering the women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Research Methodology

The whole paper is theoretical in nature hence secondary sources are the subject and object of the study. The whole data is opted from books research journals, documents and research articles.

Women Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is of inherent value, it also has an instrumental value. 'Empower' means to make one powerful and an active multi- dimensional process which would enable woman to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life and 'Women Empowerment' means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. It also elaborates that social rights, political rights, economic stability, judicial strength and all

other rights should also be equal to women. Indeed, it means making both man and women realize their changing roles and status and develop a consensus for harmonious living in the context of a democratic Society¹. 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 adding, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. This target can be achieved only when society at large will take steps combined, to eradicate this menace.

Role of National Conference in Women Empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir

Kashmiri women have witnessed varying fortunes; they have been affected by the ups and downs in Kashmir society. The J&K national conference has made tireless efforts to get boost to women's sense of empowerment in the state. It was under the leadership of S.M Abdullah who provided them a space to represent themselves and also a vibrant platform in 1944. It was this party that helped woman to come out of their darkness of ignorance and contributed to the development of the society. The National conference adopted various policies in their manifesto, among them it included a special charter for woman empowerment subtitled as 'Women's Charter'. It was through this manifesto that the Kashmiri women were for the first time giving the equal rights like right to elect, right to vote and right to be elected in all institutions. This manifesto also incorporated a provision of reservation of seats for a woman².

Political Participation

As far as women were concerned, the right to vote was limited to those who have passed the middle standard or an equivalent examination. But with the establishment of the popular government headed by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the state elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1951 were based on universal franchise. The part of the constitution of J&K dealt with the election in the state. It grants equal rights to woman in all the fields of the national life including that of services in the state. This was a unique feature of the J&K constitution to ensure participation of women in decision-making process³.

Women Wing

It was in 1950's NC again come to the rescue and upliftment of the Women Folk and the establishment of Jammu and Kashmir National Conference women wing. The main purpose of the wing was to compare the level of awareness of political and educational rights among rural and urban woman and to study the awareness of political rights women activities of J&K NC made more efforts to interact directly with the vast majority of women in the villages and awaken their political consciousness and encourage them to exercise their franchise. Convention on the political and educational rights of women was organized from time to time by the woman activists aimed at granting the women's rights⁴. This woman wing has created a favorable

environment for women of J&K by which they are entitled to vote in all elections, like Municipality, Assembly and Parliament elections.

Constitution of NC Women's Wing

The Structure of the Constitution of NC women's wing included:

1. At the state level the provisional body comprises of two provinces that is Jammu and Kashmir which consists of two provisional presidents.
2. It has district president for each district. They also have vice district president, secretary and other members.
3. It has block president for every block with vice block president, secretary, joint secretary and members.
4. It has halqa president for each halqa level, vice halqa president, secretary and 31 members⁵.

Education

The Educational status of women in Kashmir like their counterpart elsewhere in the country is also depressing and quite dismal. Woman in the traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination and inequality. The role of women remained confined to domestic affairs and so they were also debarred from education with the partition and National Conference prepared a draft which was given the name of "Naya Kashmir". The draft provides a special arrangement for women's education. It was the National Conference who established the first women's college in Srinagar and Anantnag that spread a wide net of schools from primary to secondary level in the state. Kashmiri women started to gain popularity with the establishment of these institutions. There was a change in the attitude of women and their consciousness role⁶.

The Dowry Restraint Act: Act No xxxvi, September 10, 1960

This act has been enacted by the state legislature in the year 1960. The Act provides for restriction on taking or giving dowry in connection with marriages. The said law on the subject provides for punishment, imprisonment for one year and fine of rupees 500 also⁷. National conference formulated an institute for the welfare of females to uplift their status from the society. This welfare institute benefited the women of the state up to mark. The institute needs a deep study. Let's have some analysis on this institute.

Madri - Meharbaan Women and Children Welfare Institute

In 1975 the National Conference established at voluntary organization known as the J&K Markazi Behbodi Khawateen or Women Children Welfare Trust. Its aim was to provide education, training in the art and crafts, proper health care and social security so that the women would earn not only respect and status but also become economically independent. The general body of the society was framed on 17 July 1975 and the executive committee on 31 July 1975. Begum Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was elected as its chairperson and this organization was formally inaugurated by late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Oct 1975. The organization was registered under the society's registration act 1998 with the following objectives:

1. Imparting intensive training to women folk in various arts, crafts and social work which could become a source of means for them.
2. Running homes for destitute women and needy orphans.
3. Providing supplement nutrition to preschool children residing in slum areas.
4. Providing residential accommodation to working women/ girls coming from rural areas.

During the period of training, the trainers are being paid a stipend of Rs 300/month. Besides this all the raw material and training aids needed by them are provided free of cost. In 2000, the chairperson begum Abdullah died as a result of which the name of the society was change to "Madri- Meharbaan woman and child welfare Institute". The centre has provided training to more than 4000 women so far who are now entrepreneurs in different fields of art and craft⁸. These women are not supporting the family of their own but are giving employment to thousands of unemployed youth.

At present the organization provides training to the women in the following arts and crafts:

1. Sozaan kari
2. Paper Machine
3. Crewel Embroidery.
4. Tilla Dogi
5. Cutting and tailoring
6. Staple
7. Carpet weaving

The Panchayati Raj Act: - Act No XI of 1989

This Act has been enacted in the year 1989 and was emended from time to time. In this act 33.33% reservation has been provided for women at the Grassroots level. By providing such reservations, the male domination in decision making process has been avoided. The aim was to bring women at par with men in all spheres of life are there reservation in the local bodies has ensured speedy justice to women who are victims of domestic violence and deprived of their fundamental rights⁹. Women were benefited by this act in 2005 then the elections were held for Srinagar and Jammu Municipal Corporation after a long gap of 28 years.

The legal Aid Services Authorities Act No XXXIII of 1997

The J&K legal aid service act was enacted to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker section in general and women in particular. The objective of the legislation was to restrain begging and trafficking of human beings/women. It is also envisaged grant of legal aid to persons who are victims of mass disaster, violence, caste, flood, earthquake etc. in addition Lok Adalts have been established to provide opportunities for securing justice on the basis of sex, religion, or any other disabilities and to ensure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunities.

J&K State Commission for Women

This commission was formed under the leadership of Dr. Farooq Abdullah in 1999. This commission was brought into existence by state legislature under act number V of 1999. This

commission act as a civil court for women in the state but it is rules are different from the Civil Courts. According to this commission women have no need of any personal Advocate for pleading their case and get help without making any payment for it. Functions of the commission are as under.

1. Investigate and examine all matters related to the safeguards provided for women under the constitution and other laws.
2. Present to the government annually and at other such times as the commission may deem fit reports on the working of those safeguards.
3. Make in such reports, recommendations for effective implementation of those safeguards for improving the condition of women by the state.
4. Call for special studies or investigations into specific problems or situations arising out of discrimination and atrocities against women and identify the constraints so as to recommend strategies for their removal.
5. Evaluate the progress of the development of the women under the state.
6. Make periodical reports to the govt. on any matters pertaining to women and in particular various difficulties under which women toil.

In addition, J&K state commission for women organizes many seminars and discussion every year in every region of the state in order to aware the whole society regarding women development. We believe that if woman have to develop and have to get an equal and respectable place in society. The first and foremost job is to train and prepare men for this very objective. According to official records, more than 1800 cases have been registered in SWC in which about 350 cases were solved¹⁰. It is pertinent to mention here that the National Conference lost power in 2002 and since then the commission has been suffering governmental apathy. In June 2015 Nayeema Akhtar Mahjoor was appointed as chairperson of J&K State commission for women. In June 2018 she resigned from the post of chair person. The development came a day after BJP pulled out of the Coalition with PDP and paved way for the Governor's rule. At the end of the day, one has every reason to conclude that the National Conference has worked for the betterment of the weak link of the society since its establishment. The efforts of NC haven't gone waste. Women are comparatively in a far better position today from that of their past days.

The Jammu and Kashmir Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2010

The act provides for the protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution, which are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected there with or incidental thereto. It extends to the whole of the state of J&K. The domestic violence constitutes:

1. Harms or injuries or endangers to health, safety, limb or well being. Weather mental or physical that includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse and emotional abuse.
2. Harasses or injuries related to meet any unlawful demand Formation any dowry or other property or

Prohibits or restricts to continue access to resources or facilities which the aggrieved person is entitled to use or enjoy¹¹.

Conclusion

In 2^{1st} century when everyone talks about political empowerment of women, still we see the dearth of female faces in the political life of every nation. The women have been denied their rights during every period of history. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is the first only party who worked tooth and nails for the upliftment of the women of the state. Sheikh Abdullah the tall leader had many concrete plans that showed a sigh of relief for the general mass and women in particular. It was in his tenure the women left the chores of house hold and joined the main stream political platform. They not only participated in political activities but also became a main frame for the betterment of society. It was National Conference who played an active role in awaking the women of the state in particular about their basic rights. One can conclude that national conference has done a yeomen service for the upliftment of women by empowering them with different schemes and policies that are discussed above.

Endnotes

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