

## **Education and Rural Woman: A Critical Study of Women Empowerment in Rural Jammu and Kashmir**

**Ahrar Ahmad Lone**

Assistant Professor Sociology  
School of Humanities,

Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, India

**Dr. Supreet**

Assistant Professor Sociology  
School of Humanities,

Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, India

### **Abstract:**

Women education is an essential element for the development and prosperity of any nation. From last two decades India has been through many reformative changes in terms of education and gender equality, but still the fact remain that our country is the home of largest number of illiterate population in the world. One third of the country's population is functionally illiterate and for female, 50% of them cannot read and write. Rural India is high on the index of illiteracy. Rural Jammu and Kashmir especially women of the said area are extremely disempowered educationally, economically and in employment.

Female literacy rate is quite low and stands at 58.01 percent. According to Census 2011 the literacy rate of the female of rural area in J&K is 53.36 percent and in urban area it is about 70.19 percent.

The present study examines the issues of education for empowering women in the rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir and seeks to address the challenges towards education of rural women in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Keywords:** *Women Education, Rural Kashmir, Women Empowerment*

### **Introduction:**

“Empowerment is a term ideally used in the context of development particularly women's development. Empowerment is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment” (Rajammal, (1999).

In spite of different policies made by the government, the position of women in India continues to be subordinate in social, economic and political aspects. They have unequal access to the various resources such as health, education and employment.

Even after independence and after all the prosperity witnessed by India in the form of new laws and amendments, yet almost sixty percent of girls/women are not literate. Most of them have never been to school or any other education programme. Since past many decades, the availability and importance of education got the central place in every countries priority list. In India also, there is a commitment to the “Millennium Development Goals” and “Education for All”. At the national level there is a commitment under National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) for increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP for universalizing the elementary education of good quality. The 86<sup>th</sup> amendment was passed to make free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Government has made many attempts to develop the educational structure of the country but still our country is home to the largest number of population in the world. Literacy rose from about 18% in the 1950s to about 52% in 1991 and then to about 74.04 % in 2011. In spite of this, about one-third of India's population is currently functionally illiterate and about 50% of the entire adult female population (aged 15 years and above) cannot read or write. Growth in literacy rate in India from 1901 to 2011 is shown in table 1.

**Table 1- Crude literacy rate in India**

Year	Persons%	Male%	Female%
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	64.46

Source: Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2001 & 2011

**Introduction**

Starting from M.K Gandhi in (Harijan, 1939) where he says “As for illiteracy among the women, its cause is not mere laziness and inertia as in the case of men. A more potent cause is the status of inferiority with which an immemorial tradition has, unjustly branded her. Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and ‘better half’ the result is a semi-paralysis of our society. Woman has rightly been called the mother of the race. We owe it to her and to ourselves to undo the great wrong that we have done her” (Harijan, 1939). Therefore a society without educated women is paralyzed and can never think of prosperity and development. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world especially in India. India has a history of miseries faced by women starting from birth, like female infanticide, Sexual harassment, Dowry and Bride burning, Domestic violence, Child Marriages, and ends with the death in the form of Sati or suttee where a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or commits suicide in another fashion shortly after her husband’s death.

After all the constitutional amendments and welfare schemes for women, the status of women has been somehow recognised. But educating women that too rural woman is still a dream apart. In India, one of the many factors hampering women's access to education and causing the gender gap is poverty. Besides, the cultural and social barriers such as parental indifference to educating their girls etc are other significant factors influencing the gender gap in India. In the recent years, much focus is being laid in the past couple of decades on gender equality in terms of education of girls and women. There has been an increase in education of girls and women in recent decades in both rural and urban areas. However, discrimination in access to education still exists.

**Discussion:**

Women in India and particularly in Jammu and Kashmir have been exploited from the centuries. There was a famous Kashmiri proverb used in Kashmiri language ‘*Kur Cha aasnes chenravan ti na asnas mandchavan*’ A daughter decreases the wealth of the rich, and is a cause of shame to the poor (Koul, 1992). By such kind of cultural setup expressed through proverbs, one can imagine the status of women in a particular society. Though, the situation is not same in the present era. New amendments and rules are being made to uplift the status of women form micro level. There is a an old practice in Kashmir of carrying cow-dung to the fields by women folk in baskets on their heads which now in 2019 was recognised as violation of human rights as it degrades the self respect of woman in particular and humans in general<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.risingkashmir.com/news/practice-of-carrying-cow-dung-baskets-on-head-degrades-self-respect-of-women-shrc-349860.html> accessed on 11-5-2019

Women empowerment is the main concern of every regime and this goal can be accomplished only through the process of education. Education is one such tool which is the prerequisite for achieving this goal. The literacy rate of Jammu and Kashmir is 68.74 percent. The literacy rate for Male is 78.26 percent while female literacy is 58.01 percent. The literacy rate for rural females is 53.36 percent and 70.19 percent for urban females. Earlier in Census 2001, it was 36.7% and 61.9% at rural and urban level, respectively thus there is a large gap in the male and female literacy rates. In Kashmir division the figures are 73.17 percent for males and 52.42 percent for females while as in Jammu the figures are 79.42 percent and 56.86 percent respectively. Even though the population of Kashmir is higher than other the two divisions of the state, which is 54.93% and for Jammu it is 42.89% and Ladakh which is 2.18% of the state's total population. Therefore the general female population of Jammu and Kashmir and particularly the female population of rural Kashmir are far away from the literacy epoch in comparison to the male dominance literacy rate. Kashmir because of 24 years of unrest and political insecurities remain shattered and mostly the female education suffered. Overall the illiteracy of rural women of Jammu and Kashmir is a hindrance in the process of women empowerment.

The process of universalisation of education is still a challenge in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Though the scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which aims at universalisation of elementary education and bridging the gender gap, but still there are many challenges in the area of education. The significant population of Jammu and Kashmir resides in rural areas. The state of Jammu and Kashmir resides in villages with 71% population living in its 6500 villages.

Although rural men seem to have good excess to the education but women still face the hindrances to get excess to education and other organised occupational aspects. Urban women because of mobility and access to the information and communication technologies (ICT) are in much better condition than rural women. There are issues like lack of accountability/ Teacher absenteeism, lack of Women Teachers and deterioration in the quality of instructors and instruction which are still creating hurdles in education of girls in rural areas. Accountability factor in the schools has gone down in these past years in Jammu and Kashmir. Teachers do not go to their places of postings as they do not want to serve in rural areas. Even those teachers who hail from rural areas like Kupwara, Baramulla etc want to be posted in urban areas or at least in district headquarters. Majority of schools particularly in the rural areas are suffering because of lack of supervision. Attendance of teachers in these schools is always very low and many schools having single teachers remain closed for days together. In rural and remote areas attending schools is the last priority of most of the teachers and it has in fact become a subsidiary occupation for them while as their primary occupations are fruit, walnut and other businesses. The state has inadequate schooling infrastructure. 33.68% of primary schools are without their own buildings and are being run in private accommodations which are not generally conducive for good teaching Atmosphere. 25.74% of upper primary schools have inadequate accommodation as per DISE data 2010-11. In fact, most of the schools upgraded to the upper primary have only three rooms against the requirement of at least 6 rooms. Teacher's absenteeism in rural areas, the costs of transportation, materials and uniforms are among other impediments to rural women education.

Thus, the significance of education for girls and women is shaped by the existing gender division in society. Rural Kashmir also echoes the popular sentiment that an educated daughter can be a liability to her family.

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has resulted in a breakdown of the society. Many rural families are without any earning member. The girls have become orphans and there is no source of sustenance in their families. This has also prevented them from seeking education. As the economy of rural Jammu and Kashmir has met with severe set-back during past years, parents are not in a position to educate their girl children. If they have to make a choice between educating a male child and a female, they prefer the former. Poverty, undoubtedly, is one of the main reasons of the inability for the girl child in rural areas to obtain basic education. Hundreds of girls in rural areas are not able to attend schools because their families are not able to provide money for the education.

Present Scenario of rural education in Jammu and Kashmir is quite poor. Persistent female illiteracy is a major impediment to women's empowerment; empowering women and adolescent girls through literacy and education can enable them to develop analytical skills on gender development and other issues.

There is one such scheme which according to the economic survey 2015 has succeeded to reach out the rural areas of Kashmir. ICDS Scheme was started in J&K State in the year 1975. Currently ICDS is the only

programme that reaches out to lakhs of women and children living in remote villages. It is and will continue to be the flagship programme with a holistic package of six basic services for children up to six years of age and for pregnant and nursing mothers. These services are: health check-up, immunization, referral services, supplementary feeding, preschool education and health and nutrition education through one platform i.e. Anganwari Centre. At present, J&K State has 141 ICDS Projects (including one migrant project) and 29599 AWCs have been sanctioned by Government of India out of which 28594 are presently functional. About 1000000 beneficiaries which comprise children of 6 months to 6 years of age, Pregnant and lactating mothers, are being given supplementary nutrition. About 1500 inmates which include orphans/destitute children/women and widows are being provided free boarding and lodging in 24 Bal-Ashrams and 12 Nari-Niketans spread all over the State.

## **Hindrances for rural women**

### **Poverty**

A poor parent has an option either educate your male child or female child because he has not enough resources to send both of his children to school. Therefore women education has be sacrificed because of poverty.

### **Parental Illiteracy**

Children in general and female child in particular surrounded with uneducated environment remain unconcerned about education. Illiterate parents show vey cold response towards the education of their children.

### **Political conflict**

The women in the state became the victim of violence from the past two decades due to armed conflict, Militancy, domestic and social violence etc. Domestic violence hinders the choices of women development. Militancy and armed conflict has unleashed a wave of violence against women. "There can be no two opinions that the women's of Kashmir during the past two decades have been in the vanguard and have been fighting battles against all kinds of injustice and crimes against humanity committed by the state and by some dubious non state actors" Dabla; (2009) .

### **Child Marriage**

The issue of child marriages has already affected more than 50 million girls worldwide according to UNICEF. ATHWAS a group working for women's rights in Kashmir<sup>2</sup>, found that Child marriages are a reaction to extreme poverty. They mainly take place in rural areas where poor families see daughters as a burden and for money the girls are forced into marriages. The girls are given into the "care" of a husband, and many of them end up abused. Moreover, they are often under pressure to bear children, but the risk of death during pregnancy or childbirth for girls under 14 is five times higher than for adult women which ultimately block their opportunities towards achieving education.

### **Customs and cultural practices**

In rural areas of the valley there are many misconception and cultural practices which prevent girls to acquire higher education. Parents became more conscious and

Many customs and cultural practices hinders higher education of girls, many parents do not allow their daughters to attend schools in puberty

### **Molestation/abuse in school**

Jammu and Kashmir has touched a new low when it comes to the safety of women across the three regions of the state. During 2016 the police had registered 2920 cases of rape, molestation, kidnapping and abduction, eve-teasing, dowry-death cases, and other atrocities against women. The new figures released by the police make for a grim reading; in 2017 the horrifying nature of sexual violence that the women of Kashmir are subjected to has shown an upward trend. The police say that it has recorded 3363 cases of sexual violence and other type of crime against women in Jammu and Kashmir. So these kind of situation became hostile for women any step towards empowerment.

### **Toilet facility**

This is another stunned block for lower participation of girls in education especially at upper primary level. Separate toilet Facilities for girls, female staff and security measures are warranted to upgrade their participation

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/opinion/the-practice-of-child-marriage/>

## Lack of girls' schools

Parents hesitate to send their daughters to co-educational schools especially at upper primary level. There is an urgent need to open separate schools for girls especially at upper primary level. Strong provision of good quality schools for girls is needed in the state.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study was an attempt to study the velocity of women empowerment and role of education in the process of women empowerment in rural J&k. About 72.79 percent of population of Jammu and Kashmir lives in rural areas. Literacy rate among rural men is high then the literacy rate of rural women, which are 75.51% men and 53.36% among women. The female literacy rate in J&K, as per Census 2011, is 58 %. Among the other Indian state and Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir has one of the lowest female literacy rates at 58 % besides Rajasthan (52.7%), Bihar (53.3%), Jharkhand (56.2%), the processes of government initiatives to provide access to primary education may be in progress, but issues of equity, quality, and access remain areas of concern in rural schools.

Empowering women without education is impossible. This is the need of the time to provide education to the rural women so that they would be aware of new productive opportunities in the area of entrepreneurship skills acquisition. Rural women should be encouraged to enrol in literacy programmes; here media and social workers have an important role to play in spreading awareness and message of empowerment among rural women. Teachers and teacher educators need to be trained for gender sensitization. More teachers need to appoint especially female teachers. Additional Early Childhood Care centres need to be opened up to meet gaps in the Integrated Child Development Scheme and relieve girls from the burden of sibling care. In addition to the provisions already available under SSA, community mobilization should be exclusively in enrolling out of school girls, retaining and enhancing the learning ability of the girls already in the schools. In fact, girl's education should be made a community agenda. More women teachers need to be appointed in the institutions in order to attract more girls. Besides, special allowances can be given to those women teachers who volunteer to work in rural areas.

The falling off of sex ratio from 892 in 2001 to 883 during 2011 census is one of the alarming signals for J&K. Although Government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy entailing schemes, programmes, and awareness generation/advocacy measures, to build a positive environment to save and protect the girl child through gender sensitive policies, provision and legislation. Further, under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and within its umbrella the Reproductive and Child Health Programme, many interventions have been launched to improve sex ratio. Different measures should be taken both by the civil society and the government to stabilise the sex ration. Awareness programmes should be conducted to educate people about gender sensitization. Economic support should be provided to the girl child for education and free health care system. And govt should provide some social support in the form of money at the time of marriage of girls. Strict laws should be enforced to stop Pre-Natal diagnostics. And the role of NGO'S is to spread message of making women as safe, prosperous, confident and capable creation equal to men.

## REFERENCES

- Koul,O.N. (1992). *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs*. Delhi: Indian Institute of LanguageStudies.
- Devadas, P. Rajammal; (1999), In University News. The Weekly Journal; New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities, p. 1.
- Dabla, N., & Islam, K. (1995). *Gender discrimination in the Kashmir Valley*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- Annual Status of Education Report-Rural, (2011). *Survey Results*. ASER Center, Pratham.
- Chothani, S.K. (2013). *Rural Education in India*. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 3(3).
- Gupta, N.L. (2003). *Women's Education Through Ages*. New Delhi: Concept Publications Co.
- Kavita, S. (2011), *Voices Unheard-Women, Conflict and Kashmir*. Gurgaon: Shubhi Publications.
- Directorate of Economics and Statistics (2011-2012). *Economic Survey*. Jammu and Kashmir Government.
- Kavita, S. (2006). *Impact of Violence on Girls Education in Kashmir Valley*. New Delhi: Wiscomp Monograph Series.
- Khaliq, S. (2012). *Women in rural Kashmir are forced to quit education early*. Asian News International (ANI).

- Madhosh, A.G. (2004). *Study on Women and Children under Armed Conflict in Kashmir*. National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development.
- Ministry of Home Affairs (2011). *Census of India 2001 and 2011*. Government of India.
- Nayar, U. (1993). *Universal Primary Education of Rural Girls in India*. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
- Olufunke, A.M (2011). Literacy: A Potent Tool for Women Empowerment. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(2).
- Ramachandran, V. (2009). *Towards Gender Equality in Education*. New Delhi: National University of Educational Planning and Administration.
- Sudha, T. (2010). *Employment and Empowerment of Rural Women in India*. New Delhi: Global Research Publication.
- Dabla, B.A.(2009). Violence against women in Kashmir. Retrieved from [http://voilence against women-in Kashmir](http://voilence%20against%20women-in%20Kashmir)