

**SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN
KASHMIR (1947-2011)**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**In
(History)**

By

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LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB

2024

DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled “**Socio-Political and Economic Status of Women in Kashmir (1947-2011)**” in the fulfillment of degree of Doctor of philosophy (**Ph. D.**) is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Tariq Ahmad Sheikh** working as **Associate Professor** in the **History, Centre for Distance and Online Education** of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with the general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of another investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled “**Socio-Political and Economic Status of Women in Kashmir (1947-2011)**” submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.)** in the **History**, is a research work carried out by **Mudasir Ahmad Wani (41800931)**, is a bonafide record of his original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



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Abstract

The lives of women are affected by gender inequality in many different ways, both within and outside the confines of Kashmiri society. Many studies have been conducted to shed light on the difficulties faced by women in underdeveloped countries like India. Studies examining gender disparity at the local level in India, notably in the region of Jammu and Kashmir, still have a sizable knowledge gap. A thorough inquiry into gender discrimination in the Kashmir region is necessary, especially in rural areas. Such research ought to concentrate on thoroughly comprehending the underlying factors that primarily affect women's acceptance of their present situation of gender discernment. In both municipal and pastoral areas, gender inequality has become a big problem that presents a substantial challenge to society as a whole. Unfortunately, in several states across the nation, policymakers and governmental organizations have not yet properly tackled this problem. It is crucial to draw attention to the specific issues of gender inequality that are widespread in Kashmir's rural communities. An in-depth examination of the socioeconomic circumstances of women in union territory, as well as an investigation of the causes and effects of gender discrimination, are the goals of this study. It also aims to highlight how important education is to empowering women and promoting positive change. The two most important components of growth are women's empowerment and gender equality. Unrealized human potential is a barrier in many regions of the world because of inadequate gender equality and women's empowerment. Examining the various manifestations of gender inequality and the state of women's empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir is the goal of this research. After considering a variety of gender-related factors, the indicators—which include gender disparities in schooling, inheritance rights, preference for male children, resource accessibility, health and nutrition, decision-making authority, and domestic violence—were chosen. The socioeconomic standing of women in Kashmir is investigated in this study, with an emphasis on the chances and problems that these women encounter in all spheres of their existence. The purpose of the study is to determine how socioeconomic factors affect women's empowerment, employment, education, and general well-being in the area. The research endeavors to elucidate the prevailing differences and suggest feasible approaches to improve the socio-economic standing of women in Kashmir by investigating these factors. Policymakers, activists, and groups promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the area can benefit greatly from the study's conclusions.

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Mr. Mudasir Ahmad

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ABBREVAITIONS	
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Power Act 1990
APDP	Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons
APHC	All Party Hurriyat Conference (Jammu and Kashmir)
CID	Criminal Investigation Department (India)
CRPF	Central Reserved Police Force
DeM	Dukhtarane-Millat (Jammu and Kashmir)
HM	Hizbul Mujahidin
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya (India)
MKM	Muslim Khwateen-e-Markaz
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
NC	National Conference, Jammu and Kashmir
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NPEGEL	National Programmes for Education of Girls and Primary Level
POTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PSA	Public Safety Act, 1978
SHRC	State Human Rights Commission
TADA	Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention Act), 1987
WSDC	Women's Self Defense Corps
WISCOMP	Women's in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (New Delhi)

Introduction

"A woman possesses the same depth of feeling and clarity of thought as a man. Within her domain, she performs tasks of equal value to those undertaken by a man within his. She is entitled to pursue her full potential and freedom to develop her individuality, just as a man is. Upon marriage, she does not assume the role of her husband's subordinate but becomes his equal partner. While his work may hold greater significance in the community, hers holds equal importance within the family. Neither can function independently of the other; they are interdependent equals, neither superior nor inferior to the other."

Lord Denning in 1981

Geography

Jammu and Kashmir, positioned between 32.17° and 36.58° north latitude and 74.26° and 80.30° east longitude, transitioned into Union territory on October 31, 2019. Its total area now stands at 42,241 km², encompassing 20 districts. Following a government statement on October 31, 2019, the former state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two Union territories: Jammu & Kashmir (UT) and Ladakh (UT), collectively covering 2,22,236 sq. km, which accounts for 6.76% of India's total land area. Ladakh (UT) lies to the north and east of Jammu & Kashmir (UT), with Pakistan bordering the west and Punjab and Himachal Pradesh sharing southern borders. Jammu and Kashmir share western and southern borders with Himachal Pradesh, while Ladakh borders Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China. The annual temperature fluctuates from freezing to forty degrees Celsius, with rainfall averaging between 600 and 800 millimeters annually. Notable rivers such as the Jhelum, Chenab, Indus, Ravi, and Tawi traverse these Union territories, contributing to their geographical features.

In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as in the Union Territory of Ladakh, all 20 districts are characterized by hilly terrain; there are no tribal districts. Together, the population of these two UTs amounts to 12.54 million, constituting 1.04% of India's total population as recorded in the 2011 census. Of this population, 72.62% resides in rural areas, while 27.38% resides in urban areas, with 11.91% classified as tribal. The population density averages 125 individuals per square kilometer, which falls below the national average.

According to the 19th Livestock Census conducted in 2012, the global livestock population numbered 9.2 million.¹

Demography

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Jammu and Kashmir rose from 1.01 crore in 2001 to 1.25 crore in 2011. The 2011 census documented a total population of 12,548,926, comprising 6,665,561 males and 5,883,365 females, resulting in a decreased sex ratio of 883. The proportion of females in the population of Jammu and Kashmir decreased from 47.15% in 2001 to 46.88% in 2011. In contrast, the 2001 census reported 5,360,926 males and 4,782,774 females, with a sex ratio of 892. Over the decade spanning 2001 to 2011, the population of Jammu and Kashmir experienced a growth rate of 23.71%, which was lower than the 29.04% growth rate observed in the preceding decade. The state's population constituted 1.04% of India's total population in 2011, an increase from 0.99% in 2001, indicating a higher growth rate compared to the national average. Despite this, a demographic imbalance between men and women persists and has worsened over time.²

The child sex ratio nationwide has hit its lowest point since independence, standing at 914. The population growth rate for the recent decade is 23.71%, a decline from the previous decade's rate of 29.04%. Jammu and Kashmir's population comprised 1.04% of India in 2011, up from 0.99% in 2001. This difference signals a significantly higher growth rate compared to the overall national average. Despite this, there persists and worsens a demographic imbalance between men and women.

Sex Ratio

The ratio of females to males, known as the sex ratio, serves as a crucial indicator reflecting social conditions, particularly the status of women in a given society. A low sex ratio suggests the presence of artificial interventions, disrupting the natural balance and biological trend about the number of females per thousand males. In the current demographic transition of J and K, a significant concern arises from the unfavorable sex ratio, which stood at 892 in the 2001 census and 883 in the 2011 census. This decline is alarming and demands immediate attention. The accompanying figure provides insights into the ratio of change in the sex ratio over the specified period.³

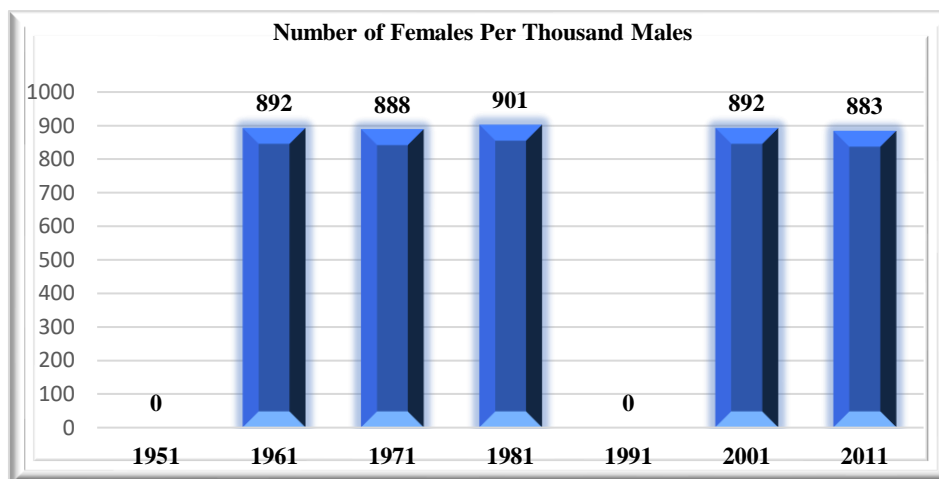
¹ India States of Forest Report, (2019), *Jammu & Kashmir Combined*, PP. 101.

² Jammu and Kashmir Population, Sex Ratio, Literacy, (2011), *Population Census*.

³ *The Economic Times* (2013), Population growth in Jammu & Kashmir declines 6%; literacy Rate Improves.

Jammu and Kashmir have always recorded a lesser sex ratio than the country as a whole. The sex ratio has consistently declined from 882 in 1901 to 865 in 1931. The lowest sex ratio during 1901-2001 was recorded in 1931. However, after 1931, it started improving and in each decade during 1931-1961, it improved by 4-5 females. The sex ratio did not show any change during 1951-61 and 1961-71, when during both the decades it was recorded at 878. The 1971-81 decade experienced the highest improvement in sex ratio when there was an addition of 14 females per thousand males in the state. The sex ratio in the state touched the new height of 900 during the 2001 Census and there was a further improvement of 8 women per thousand men in the state. However, during 2011, the sex ratio has once again declined to 889. Thus, while the sex ratio in J&K has always been lower than the national average, however the gap between the two has narrowed down. There was a deficit of 90 women in J&K in 1901 as compared to India but this deficit has come narrowed down to 33 women in 2001. However, due to some decline in the sex ratio in J&K and some improvement in it at the national level, the gap between the state sex ratio and national sex ratio has once again increased and currently J&K has a deficit of 51 females per thousand males as compared to India (Fig no. I).

Figure No. I: Number of Females per Thousand Males from 1951-2011



Source: Census of Jammu and Kashmir (2001-2011)

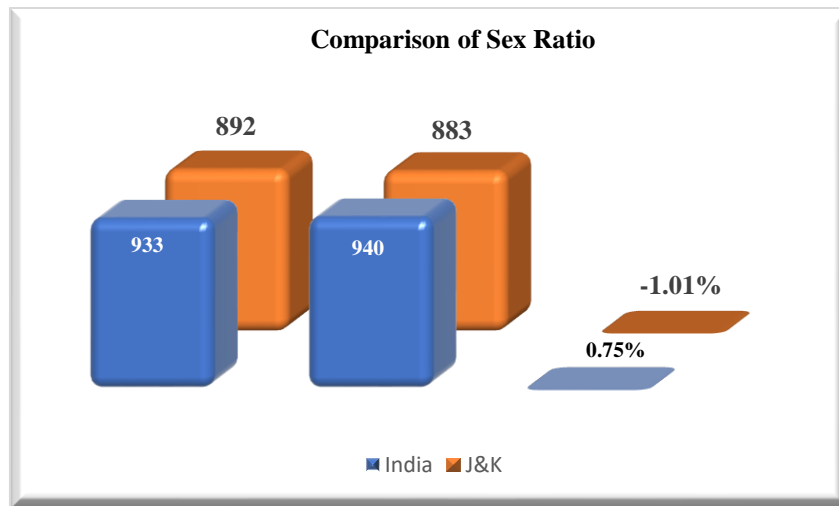
According to the 2011 Census, the population of Jammu and Kashmir increased from 1.01 crore in 2001 to 1.25 crore in 2011. The 2011 census reported a total population of 12,548,926, comprising 6,665,561 males and 5,883,365 females, resulting in a reduced sex ratio of 883. Over the period from 2001 to 2011, the proportion of women in Jammu and Kashmir's population declined from 47.15% to 46.88%. In comparison, the 2001 census indicated a sex ratio of 892, with 5,360,926 males and 4,782,774 females. The population of Jammu and Kashmir grew by 23.71% during the decade from 2001 to 2011, which was slower than the

29.04% growth rate observed in the preceding decade. The sex ratio in a region is the ratio of males to females, typically expressed as the number of males per 100 females. In the case of Kashmir, analyzing the shift in sex ratio from 1961 to 2011 reveals some interesting socio-economic and demographic trends.

The erstwhile J&K was the lone state of India that missed the census twice after 1947, first in 1951 and then yet again in 1991, due to political instability. Several factors might explain this shift in number of females per thousand males from 1951-2011. Conflict and Migration, the period between 1951 and 2011 witnessed significant conflict and instability in the Kashmir region. This could have led to migration patterns that disproportionately affected males, either due to conflict-related casualties or migration for economic opportunities or safety reasons. As a result, the sex ratio might have shifted towards more females. Healthcare and Education, Over the decades, there have been improvements in healthcare and education in the region. Better access to healthcare facilities and increased awareness about healthcare practices might have contributed to lower mortality rates among females, thus impacting the sex ratio positively. Social and Economic Changes, such as urbanization and changes in traditional gender roles, could also have played a role. Urban areas tend to have more balanced sex ratios compared to rural areas. Additionally, as women's participation in the workforce increased, there might have been a more equitable distribution of resources, including healthcare, leading to better outcomes for females. Gender Bias, despite improvements, gender bias and discrimination against females still exist in many parts of the world, including certain regions of Kashmir. This bias might have influenced factors such as access to healthcare, nutrition, and education, affecting female mortality rates and consequently, the sex ratio.⁴

Figure No. II: Comparison of Sex Ratio

⁴ Khan Bilal Ahmad (2018), Demography of Jammu and Kashmir in Historical Perspective, *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, Vol.7 No.3, PP. 143-153.



Source: Census of India (2001-2011)

The declining trend in the sex ratio of Jammu and Kashmir from 892 in 2001 to 883 in 2011 contrasts with the overall national trend in India, which saw a slight increase from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011 (Fig II). This discrepancy suggests specific challenges within Jammu and Kashmir that may be influencing demographic patterns. Factors such as cultural preferences for sons, limited access to healthcare and education, and the impact of ongoing geopolitical tensions could contribute to this decline. Efforts to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment in the region are crucial to reversing this trend and ensuring a more equitable society.

Status of Women in Kashmir (Historical Background)

Kashmiri women have experienced different levels of misfortune. They have occasionally reached the highest levels of grandeur and made a name for themselves as independent monarchs, regents of lesser princes, strong consorts, diplomats in peace and war, army commanders, frugal land ladies, reformers and builders, and guardians of religious knowledge. They have gained notoriety for their house management, dancing, and singing. In actuality, they have engaged in every social activity imaginable with their men. However, development was not constant, glory was not permanent, and they had to deal with numerous instances of ill fortune. There came a time when the rights they had previously enjoyed were gradually taken away from them. They were both physically and intellectually enslaved throughout those times. Nevertheless, they did not completely surrender to their captivity; during the protracted, depressing period, they bravely fought against injustice despite the soul-crushing shame they endured. Women had gradually begun to reappear in social life when Kashmir saw the advent

of modernism at the end of the 19th century, offering their fair contribution to the fight for independence and the rehabilitation of their home nation.⁵

A cursory examination of history reveals that the subjugation and coercion of Kashmir started well before the creation of modern-day India. The Kashmiri people have never ruled Kashmir while the Mughal Empire conquered it in 1598 AD. In addition to bringing Kashmiri individuals to Afghanistan as slaves, the Afghans also executed unfair labor laws on the province's well-known wrap weavers, which caused the cloak industry to collapse. Then came the Sikhs, who treated the Kashmiris "little better than dairy cattle," according to British traveler William Moorcroft.⁶

Since ancient times, the history of Kashmir tells us that this land was controlled by different Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim traditions. In any case, the fourteenth century was set apart by huge changes when Islam came into Kashmir. Islam changed the whole structure of socio-political life. Taking everything into account, the Mughals caught Kashmir in 1586, and they changed the administrative arrangement of Kashmir. Following the Mughal era, Kashmir witnessed successive rules by Afghans and Sikhs, marked by deceit and oppression towards the Kashmiri people. The Afghan rule is often regarded as the darkest phase in Kashmir's history. Subsequently, the Sikhs continued the policy of subjugation and exploitation. After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, his successors lost control of the empire in the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845. Through the Treaty of Amritsar, commonly known as the 'Sale Deed of Kashmir,' Jammu and Kashmir, along with Ladakh, were conferred to Gulab Singh. This agreement is widely considered the beginning of Kashmir's troubles, as it transferred ownership of Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh in exchange for a sum of 75 lakhs. Under this treaty, Gulab Singh was proclaimed as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, establishing the state's current boundaries during the same period.⁷

The people of Kashmir suffered unspeakable suffering under the Dogras. The oppressive methods of tax collection and the unjustly high taxes burdened the peasants. The arrogant administration that sought to impoverish the common people was a problem for them. Debt bondage was common, with estimates putting the number of rural residents in debt at over 80%.⁸ The lives of common villagers were extremely miserable, while the merchant moneylenders amassed riches through rack-renting and extortion. In keeping with its

⁵ Akhter Shahzada (2011), *Kashmir: Women Empowerment and National Conference*, Jammu and Kashmir: Jay Kay, Srinagar, PP. 61.

⁶ Halder, T. (2019, August 15), Kashmir's Struggle did not Start in 1947 and will not End Today, *Al Jazeera Media Network*.

⁷ Khan G. H. (1980), *Freedom Movement in Kashmir 1931-1940* (1st ed.), Light & Life, P. 3.

⁸ Ibid., P.11.

repressive, feudal nature, the state asserted that it was the owner of all land and that the producing classes were only its tenants. The state also claimed ownership of all produce.⁹

The only state in colonial India where prostitution was both legally sanctioned and not considered a criminal act was Jammu and Kashmir. There could be several explanations for this, and although culture played a significant influence, the state's financial gain was essential to its acceptance even encouragement of the Dogra regime. Following the devastating famine of 1877–1878, the British Government became aware of the infamous trade. As per the accounts from British officials, the state obtained approximately 15 to 25 percent of its revenue from taxing prostitutes, who were then granted licenses by the government. The Report states that 18,715 "registered prostitutes" in Kashmir in 1880 paid taxes to the government representing a portion of their "income." It seems that the prostitutes who were registered belonged to the lower strata of society, with a considerable proportion originating from the untouchable groups, including the Bhangis (scavengers) and Hanjis (fishermen).¹⁰

The official British annals tell us that young girls in Kashmir were typically vended by their parents to brothel owners for a fee ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 200. The state acknowledged child trafficking legally, and the purchase of a girl by a pimp or a brothel operator was documented, sealed, and recorded on stamped paper. Usually, the kids who were sold into prostitution were tricked into thinking they would get married. The majority of impoverished parents did not view marriage as a viable choice. The Dogra state levied taxes on marriage, which were typically too exorbitant for them to afford. The sum of the marriage tax, according to our data, was between Rupees 3 and 8.¹¹ However, by the 20th century, the prostitution trade had expanded over all of India, not just the surrounding areas. Girls from Kashmir were discovered in other Indian states' brothels.¹² "Forty-one of the 2995 prostitutes in Bombay's brothels were Kashmiri residents, according to the census taken in 1921."¹³ The condition of women in the Dogra rule deteriorated to such a level that they not only turned out to be suppressed and oppressed bodies, but were also included in the economic domain. They were seen as commodities and objectified in a manner that they were sold and bought like any other commodity. During a regime wherein, ordinary people were debt ridden and enslaved to the government, the behavior of women turn into more painful. Their physiques turned out to be

⁹ J&K State Archives, Letter from Maharaja Pratab Singh to his Prime Minister, December 14 1918, file no. 191/h-75, Kashmir Government Records.

¹⁰ National Archives of India, File no. 86, Foreign Department., Secret-E, March 1883, P. 10.

¹¹ Ibid., P. 10

¹² National Archives of India, File no. 469, Home Department, 16 November 1921, P. 3.

¹³ Ibid., P.12

sensualized, wherein their bodily form and existence was turned into a means by which people could pay their debts.

Within Kashmir's traditional society, women were always viewed as inferior to men; they were dependent on the men in their families and were unable to develop their own identities or become independent within or outside of their families. The explanation of any social system and culture is incomplete without reference to the position and role of women because, in every social order, it is truly women who are answerable for rising to the new age. In the case of Kashmir too, there are examples of women in the very past and in recent times who have exhibited their valor, talent, intellectualism, and other qualities that determine their position in various spheres. In antiquated Kashmir, women have received a lot more regard than in the medieval period. There was a special provision for their education, and the period produced a good number of highly cultured women. Awanti Sundari had arranged a lexicon containing words used in Prakrit, and she had given her own compositions to demonstrate the usage of words.¹⁴

In antiquated Kashmir, numerous women accomplished incredible capabilities, even in organizations, and delivered a respectable situation in society. Also, women like Rani Dida, Kota Rani, and many others indulged in politics. In the long history of Kashmiri history, the value of Lal Ded's poetry has a place of its own in world literature. The profound knowledge of human existence and its reasonable viewpoints unfurled by Lal Ded are evaluated as exceptionally unrivaled and high. After her, Habba Khatoon's and Arnimal's idyllic refrains, however of an alternate tone and example, have shown the type of Kashmiri ladies in the field of writing, which simultaneously underlines their intellectualism in the past bygone eras and after. It couldn't have been without the presence of underlying foundations of education in Kashmir, and, the Kashmiri women's society, all around, was taking to proficiency in the long past, when in some different parts of the world, women were living under the murkiness of ignorance. In Jammu and Kashmir's historical context, women once held esteemed status within India's landscape. However, over time, their position significantly deteriorated. The birth of female children became disapproved, aggravated by Turko-Afghan invasions where the involvement of women in combat was viewed as advantageous.¹⁵

In conclusion, women in Kashmir made a significant contribution to the fight for independence. In great numbers, they departed from the comforts of home and joined the freedom movement in Kashmir. Their contribution has been overlooked by history. One significant finding from

¹⁴ Altekar A.S (1938), *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Banaras, PP. 21 & 187.

¹⁵ Khan M. I. (1978), *History of Srinagar 1846-1947: A Study in Socio-Cultural Change*, Amir, Srinagar, P. 115.

my research is that, as equal partners with males, women opposed the Dogras and the colonial state. Second, women of all social strata were visible in the nationalist movement in Kashmir, and their involvement was not limited by their class. In the past, women in traditional Kashmiri society had a contradictory role in society; they actively engaged in social, economic, and other activities, but their social status was low. While women from upper-class families were prohibited from working outside the home and were entirely confined to their residences in metropolitan regions, for a living, women from a variety of occupational groupings collaborated with their men both within and outside of the home. Since the beginning of time, women have typically been limited to employment in the handicraft industry, agriculture, spinning, and weaving. They have also historically been denied formal education and were expected to assume specific social roles in a society dominated by men. Every woman in the rural areas toiled alongside her family members in the fields of agriculture. These women's roles represented important regulations. As a result, Kashmiri women were productive members of society and employers both in urban and rural settings, working both within and outside the home. However, this did not elevate their social standing or grant them total economic independence.

In essence, women in Western society were encouraged to leave their homes and pursue careers much like men. These changes were having an impact on women in Kashmir as well as other locations. The early 20th century saw a significant shift in Kashmiri women, particularly in the early 1930s, when the state's independence movement got underway. The men of the valley did not impose any restrictions on the women who took part in the campaign against the Maharaja dynasty's feudal control. That was the first time in Kashmiri history that a sizable number of women left their homes to take part in a sociopolitical campaign.¹⁶ In essence, the campaign was responsible for granting equal rights to women in Kashmir. Other women from lower socioeconomic classes or groups responded to change much later than the upper-class women in that shifting setting, who responded to the processes early and fully.¹⁷

Post-Independence Development Related to Women

In the post-independence era in Jammu and Kashmir, three significant developments took place for women. Firstly, women became more aware of their rights both within and outside their homes, transforming family dynamics and the status of women. Secondly, Kashmiri women from diverse backgrounds experienced increased social and cultural mobility, leading to the

¹⁶ Op. Cit., P. 167.

¹⁷ Dabla, B. A (1991); *Working women in Kashmir*, Rawat, Jaipur, P. 27.

breakdown of traditional family structures. This newfound freedom allowed women to expand their roles beyond traditional norms. Lastly, the increasing desire of Kashmiri women to leave their homes in search of pleasure, work, and education was, finally, an important development. This shift resulted in the recruitment of many women across different employment sectors, creating a trend where educated girls actively pursued education and subsequent employment in both rural and urban areas. Three significant advancements about women occurred in the region of J&K in the decades following independence. These changes included: First, a general awareness of women's rights both within and outside of their homes spread among them and other members of society. This had a qualitative effect on family life, particularly about women's status and roles. Secondly, women from Kashmir, across all socioeconomic classes, groups, and communities, attained a reasonable level of social and cultural mobility, which contributed to the rapid disintegration of the institutional framework of the traditional family. Women found it comparatively easier to expand their roles and stray from customary traditions in this particular situational environment. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Kashmiri women as a whole became motivated and interested in leaving their homes for a variety of reasons, including work, education, and leisure. This progress led to the recruitment of several women in a variety of job fields. A widespread trend developed in both urban and rural communities, stating that all educated ladies needed to pursue further education to obtain jobs.

Here, it's noteworthy that the above-mentioned shifts in women were geared towards their transformation and progress. Collectively, these alterations play a gradual role in their liberation. However, these changes brought about additional challenges for women and their families. Notable among these challenges are issues related to childbirth and child-rearing, unfavourable socialization and uncontrolled behaviour, the dual role of women, post-marital conflicts or maladjustments, and instances of discrimination and harassment outside the home. This acknowledges that women in traditional Kashmiri society encountered a distinct set of challenges, like complete reliance on men, lower social standing, being confined to domestic roles, and the imposition of specific ideas and behaviours. In the evolving landscape, women face a different array of challenges, including managing dual roles, addressing issues related to childbirth and child-rearing, and dealing with marital discord. In this scenario, women's challenges have become more intricate, with their complexity escalating day by day.

Discrimination Patterns in the Family

Within the framework of family dynamics, prejudice can be comprehended through the perspectives held by family members toward the arrival of a female child. Regretfully, a female

baby's birth is still not met with the same fervour and celebration as a male baby. The idea that only a son can secure the survival of the family is maintained by the patriarchal structure of Kashmiri society. This bias extends beyond the birth of the female child to the discrimination faced by both the child and her mother, her in-laws, and her husband. Within the family unit, girls continue to experience discrimination in areas such as nutrition, healthcare, education, and leisure activities. The importance of economic independence or pursuing a career of one's choice is often not emphasized for girls, with marriage being perceived as their primary and sometimes only option as they grow older. Even within the institution of marriage, societal expectations place the burden of adjusting and making compromises solely on women. Additionally, daughters-in-law often encounter a negative attitude from their in-laws, and significant decisions are typically made by the in-laws and husband without much input from the woman herself.

Discrimination against women is commonly perceived as the oppression exerted by men over women. However, there is another facet of discrimination that is equally troubling and undermines the quest for women's equality in society. This involves women suppressing their counterparts in superior positions, such as daughters-in-law being subjected to taunts or even mistreatment by mothers-in-law. Additionally, women may be deemed inferior if they cannot bear children or if they only give birth to female offspring. Reports of violence against women, including mental abuse and physical beatings, have surfaced in Kashmir. Women in Kashmir often lack the freedom to make independent decisions, frequently having to defer to the choices of their parents, in-laws, and husbands. There is substantial evidence indicating that some employed women do not truly experience economic independence; their earnings are not under their control and require permission from their husbands or in-laws, limiting their autonomy in spending their salaries. Consequently, Kashmiri women often lead lives in which their individuality is suppressed at every stage.

Discrimination Patterns outside the Family

In contemporary Kashmir, there is a prevalent bias favoring boys over girls when it comes to education, starting from early childhood. Girls, even if they manage to enroll in schools, face discrimination, particularly in co-educational institutions where they are often excluded from certain sports and extracurricular activities. The disparity continues in admissions to professional colleges and university departments, with a higher number of male candidates compared to females. In the employment sector, males are consistently preferred over females, resulting in a lower representation of women in various departments. Women who secure jobs

outside their homes also encounter discrimination, facing challenges in promotions and other employment benefits that are often seized by their male counterparts. Even more discriminatory practices are seen in the unorganized sector, where women are paid less and put in longer workdays than men. Women who work in unorganized sectors are also not eligible for maternity benefits or service benefits. Certain work environments foster an unwelcoming atmosphere where women are regularly subjected to harassment and bullying by men who use offensive language.

Additionally, women encounter numerous obstacles, making it challenging for them to engage in the political sphere, which has historically been dominated by men. This difficulty is exacerbated by the unfavorable conditions prevailing in the state since 1989. The Kashmir conflict and evolving societal perspectives pose new challenges for women. Despite existing reservations, their political participation is hindered at the local (panchayat), state, and national levels. Various policies addressing women's welfare and empowerment exist at different levels, covering health, education, economic opportunities, and political involvement. However, there is a substantial gap between policy advancements and their practical implementation on the ground. The stark reality is that the representation of women in legislative assemblies and councils is minimal. Political parties also fall short of fielding an adequate number of female candidates in elections. Women often face socio-political mistreatment, harassment, and exclusion from the political mainstream. Despite formal and informal efforts to uplift them, women continue to endure a longstanding state of deprivation. Consequently, the global community focuses on women's issues, sparking discussions and debates among the public, academia, and policymakers to improve their marginalized status and restore their dignity and self-respect.

In this situation, the contemporary study tries to comprehend and analyze the socio-political and economic status of women in the Pulwama District of Jammu and Kashmir. This current research aims to explore shifts in women's status in Kashmir through the lenses of education, empowerment, and economic and political independence. These factors play a crucial role and are anticipated to contribute to the socio-economic and political advancement of women in the region. The study expects positive impacts on literacy rates, employment levels, decision-making abilities, and financial autonomy. Additionally, the research acknowledges the challenge of assessing fewer tangible aspects like personal dignity, freedom of association, and safety from physical harm. Nevertheless, the researcher is committed to making efforts to comprehensively examine the evolving status of women in Kashmir.

Statement of the Problem

The population of the region is 12,541,302 as per the 2011 census, a significant rise from the 10,143,700 reported in the 2001 census. The numbers for males and females in 2011 were 6,640,662 and 5,900,640, respectively. Ten years prior, in 2001, there were 5,360,926 men and 4,782,774 women in the population. In 2011, 1.04 percent of India's entire population lived in Jammu and Kashmir, an increase from 0.99 percent in 2001. About Kashmir province specifically, the 2011 census indicates that 6,907,623 people are living there, 3,647,466 of whom are men and 3,260,157 of them are women. This decade's population growth rate is 23.64 percent, which is lower than the growth rate of 29.04 percent in the preceding decade. Regrettably, there is insufficient information available about women's status in the area. Women's growth and development are impeded by several factors, including the physical environment, cultural standards, family dynamics, education, job, and political climate. More thorough studies that address women's status, education, employment roles, skill development, leadership qualities, risk-taking abilities, entrepreneurial capacities, and pursuit of appropriate livelihood activities to improve their standing within the family and society at large are needed because the literature and research on the topic are currently lacking. The lack of adequate data indicates the necessity of enhancing the position of women in specific domains:

- Addressing socio-economic deprivation and severe marginalization,
- Eliminating the sense of insecurity,
- Effectively managing the education system and overcoming educational backwardness,
- Providing opportunities for women in Kashmir to take leadership roles in economic organizations and power structures.

Without the development and empowerment of women in these four areas, achieving socio-economic and political transformation and empowerment in Kashmir would be unattainable, remaining merely an illusion. The literature review reveals two key findings: Firstly, there is a significant deficiency in the quality and standard of education in Kashmir, which has the potential to adversely impact the employment prospects and job opportunities for educated women in the region. Secondly, improved quality education catalyzes the economic empowerment of the community. The majority of women in Kashmir face challenges such as socio-economic, cultural, and religious constraints, leading to unsatisfactory educational dropout rates. While some women in the study area possess a good education, they lack suitable employment and empowerment opportunities. This study provides a keen insight into the

challenging conditions faced by women in Kashmir. Despite historical setbacks and limited access to development benefits, there has been a noticeable shift in recent years, indicating a potential positive transformation. Women in Kashmir find themselves at a crucial juncture, navigating through societal issues disguised as opportunities for equality.

This research aims to explore the challenges hindering the socio-economic and political advancement of women in Kashmir. It delves into issues related to their education, empowerment, economic, and political independence. Additionally, the study examines whether religious, familial, and societal factors impede the transformation of women's status in these areas. Our goal is to identify and address the challenges faced by Kashmiri women, challenging the prevailing belief that they are resistant to change and discouraged from participating in the mainstream. We seek to understand and assess the extent of change in the socio-economic and political landscape for women in Kashmir. In a rapidly evolving society, women are increasingly willing to engage in the developmental process, pursuing education and employment opportunities for empowerment. Recognizing the need for adaptation in a changing world, Kashmiri women acknowledge the dual challenge of navigating internal societal frameworks and combating overarching patriarchal dominance.

Research Question

- How do historical, cultural, and political factors in Kashmir shape the current socio-economic status of women in the region?
- In what ways do educational opportunities, employment, and income levels affect the empowerment and socio-economic standing of women in Kashmir?
- How have Kashmiri women contributed to the region's socio-political movements across history, and what barriers have limited their representation and influence in modern politics?
- In what ways has the Kashmir conflict influenced the daily lives and mental health of women in the Kashmir Valley, compared to women in Jammu and Ladakh?
- How do social, political, and economic conditions shape the roles and autonomy of women in Kashmir?
- What impact has the ongoing violence and political instability in Pulwama district had on the education, healthcare, and overall well-being of women?
- To what extent do family structures and social norms influence women's access to education, career choices, and property rights in Pulwama?

These questions could guide an in-depth study of the evolving socio-political and economic status of women in the region, with a specific focus on both quantifiable outcomes and qualitative aspects like personal autonomy and social respect.

Importance of the Study

The combination of income, education, and occupation often serves as a gauge for one's socio-economic and political standing. It's commonly seen as the social class or position of an individual or a group. The empowerment of women, leading them towards freedom, is closely linked to their social, political, and economic independence. Education, as an empowering tool, can bring about positive changes in the attitudes of women, influencing their overall status. Education is a pivotal factor in enhancing economic, social, and political opportunities for women. The current study intends to investigate how women's standing in Kashmir has changed as a result of social, political, and economic freedom. It also aims to understand the present political, social, and economic circumstances that Kashmiri women find themselves in, since these factors affect not just the women themselves but also the larger community.

Objectives of the Study

This study will aid in our comprehension of women's conditions and the various issues they encounter in Kashmir. The outcomes of this study will likewise shed light on the several factors that are impeding women's advancement and empowerment in society. The following are the precise objectives of our investigation.: -

1. To trace out the Socio-economic Status of Women in Kashmir after 1947.
2. To examine the Political Situation of Jammu and Kashmir after 1947.
3. To examine the causes responsible for the low-level involvement of womenfolk in
4. the Politics of Jammu and Kashmir.
5. To examine the Impact of Militancy on Women's Emancipation in the Region.
6. To highlight the Social, Political and Economic status of Women in District Pulwama,
7. the most Volatile District as a Case Study.

Justification of Theme

The socio-political and economic status of women in District Pulwama is an area largely unexplored in existing literature, particularly concerning how prolonged conflict, instability, and socio-cultural norms shape women's lives in this highly volatile region. Although general studies on women's status in Kashmir exist, few provide detailed insights into specific districts

like Pulwama, where the impacts of violence, gender bias, and social marginalization are particularly pronounced. Current research often fails to address the unique experiences of women who face compounded challenges in education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, especially in conflict zones. Furthermore, there is a gap in understanding the multifaceted effects of traditional gender norms on women's autonomy, career prospects, and property rights. By examining these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of women's experiences in Pulwama and to contribute to strategies for their empowerment and socio-economic transformation within the broader Kashmiri context. This research will address critical gaps by integrating quantitative and qualitative data, offering a nuanced understanding of women's evolving roles amidst Kashmir's socio-political complexities.

Research Methodology

To delve into the socio-political and economic status of women in Kashmir, a mixed-methods approach was adopted for the study. This approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitatively, social surveys employing questionnaires was conducted to gather data. This comprehensive methodological blend aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject matter, offering insights into various dimensions. The study is relying on primary and secondary sources, including administrative records, books, scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, and other available resources, to enrich its findings.

Study Area

The Pulwama District of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which consists of 22 districts overall, served as the study's area. Internally, the district is partitioned into multiple mohallas, wards, constituencies, and administrative zones. According to the 2011 census, the district has 5.60 lacks of people, of whom 2.93 lack and 2.67 lacks are male and female, respectively. Therefore, the women of Pulwama District are included in the target group (population) to be researched in this research. District Pulwama was chosen on purpose since a higher percentage of women who are victims of political turmoil reside there. Additionally, the universe under investigation provides a diversified culture where individuals come from various socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds, which improves sampling accuracy.

The Pulwama region has been chosen as the main research focus for this investigation. The study focuses on women who live in the Pulwama District of the Kashmir region and are between the ages of 18 and 65. The district's villages are divided into eight tehsils: Aripal, Litter, Rajpora, Pulwama, Tral, Awantipora, Kakapora, Pampore, and Tral. Data from 11 CD blocks,

Tral, Aripal, Dadsara, Awantipora, Pampore, Kakapora, Pulwama, Shadimarg, Achgoze, Lassipora, and Newa—are also included in the study. Additionally, information from the following five municipal councils has been considered: Pampore, Tral, Awantipora, Khrew, and Pulwama.

Sample of the Study

The sample is a tiny subset of the total gathering of objects, events, or persons that make up our study's topic. The population is the entire set from which study participants are selected, either as individuals or as units. Outcomes from the sample are expected to be representative of the population as a whole, although this greatly depends on how the sample was chosen. The study's population or universe consisted of women from the Kashmir Valley's Pulwama area. Among the total population, a sample of 399 women respondents without children was selected through purposive sampling from different administrative zones, wards, constituencies, and several mohallas to represent the population to be studied. Purposive sampling is non-probability sampling employed at the time when we have the least information about the population. The universe under study is finite, and the researcher created a complete sample frame also referred to as the population's source list—based on data that was precise, reliable, appropriate, and thorough.

According to the 2011 census, the total population of the district of Pulwama is 560440, comprising 479978 rural and 80462 urban populations. The district has 232882 rural female populations and 35494 urban female populations. So, the total population size for the study is 268376. Hence, the total sample size of the study becomes 399. From the total of 399, 57 have been selected from the urban female population and 342 from the rural female population. This has been done based on the proportion of their population. The population proportions are in the ratio of 6:1. Therefore, six portions of the sample are taken from the urban female population.

Source of Data Collection

A methodical approach to addressing the research challenge is known as research methodology. Research methodology describes the approach a researcher takes to gather data. Primary and secondary sources have been the two main sources of data collected. The research has been completed by making full use of both of these sources. For the current study, primary data comprises responses gathered directly from participants in the field via interview schedules and questionnaires. Secondary sources encompass data extracted from various published materials

such as books, journals, research articles, and government documents, including information derived from censuses and other relevant sources.

A target of 399 women from District Pulwama, Kashmir, has been chosen, focusing on four variables of their socio-economic and political problems: education, empowerment, and economic and political independence. The majority of the literary research is text-based and relies on sources related to the historical period.

Drafting Questionnaire

The drafting of a well-focused questionnaire was done with the expertise of the people who are well aware and writing about the women of Kashmir. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were there in the questionnaire draft. Further methods of sampling were adopted after the pilot survey and accordingly, the final draft of the questionnaire was prepared.

Chapter Scheme

The study has been divided into Four chapters except introduction and Conclusion.

- Introduction.
- Review of Literature.
- Chapter-I Socio-Economic Status of Women in Kashmir After 1947.
- Chapter-II – History of Political Developments in Jammu and Kashmir After Indian Independence.
- Chapter-III - Impact of Militancy on Women Emancipation in Kashmir.
- Chapter-IV- Women of District Pulwama-The Most Volatile District: A Case Study.
- Conclusion

Review of Literature

Examining existing literature is crucial when conducting research. It is essential for researchers to acknowledge and delve into the work of knowledgeable authorities on the chosen theme. A literature review can uncover insights that the researcher may have overlooked. Even if a researcher believes their idea is groundbreaking, it's important to consider the contributions of other thinkers and demonstrate how the new research builds upon, advances, or corrects previous work. Analyzing the findings of past researchers helps clarify issues and guide the direction of one's own research. The review of literature serves as the fundamental basis for formulating hypotheses, drawing conclusions, or generalizing. Numerous books, reports, and studies critically and empirically evaluate concepts and theories. In this chapter, a modest attempt will be made to explore existing literature on political conflict in Kashmir and its social impacts on women.

- **Agarwal, U. (1995)**, in her book *Indian Women, Education, and Development*, discusses the challenges of women's development with a specific focus on India. The book emphasizes women's education; however, my research focuses on gender discrimination faced by women in various settings, including at home and in the workplace.
- **Ganguly (1997)**, in his work, *The Crisis of Kashmir: Patterns of War, Hopes of Peace*, perceives the insurgency in Kashmir as stemming from an inherent contradiction within Indian democracy. Drawing on Huntington's theory that heightened social mobilization, without concurrent robust political institutions, leads to political instability, Ganguly applies this framework to the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. He highlights the significant increase in literacy rates and the growing number of educated young people without jobs, whose aspirations to become politicians were hindered by the collapsing political system in the region. Ganguly claims that a major political tragedy in Kashmir is the long-standing inability of national and local leadership to permit the emergence of a legitimate political opposition. Furthermore, Ganguly links the insurgency to local ethno-religious mobilization, arguing that Pakistan encouraged and organized a loosely structured movement into a more organized endeavor to undermine Indian authority in the area, seeking to weaken India's sovereignty over Kashmir. Ganguly proposes a workable plan for the Indian government: holding talks with the rebels and providing a deadline-bound ceasefire agreement as a practical way to end the insurgency in the valley.

- **Mita Bhadra (1999)**, her work, *Girl Child in Indian Society*, is a comprehensive compilation of articles that delve into various aspects of the life of the Indian girl child. It primarily highlights the disparities and discriminatory practices faced by girls, shedding light on gender-based marginalization. The book emphasizes the girl child's experiences, exploring dimensions such as neglect and socialization within the family and society. Although my research encompasses various aspects of women's lives—whether as professionals, homemakers, or in other roles—the primary focus remains on understanding the intricacies of the girl child's life. This compilation serves as a valuable research source for studying gender roles.

- **Dabla Bashir Ahmad (2000)**, in his study, *Gender Discrimination in the Kashmir Valley: A Survey of Budgam and Baramulla Districts*, the author conducts a sociological analysis of gender discrimination in Kashmiri society, examining both its historical roots and contemporary manifestations. At a national conference in Srinagar in 1997, the author presented findings from an empirical study to a high-level expert group. Following a thorough discussion, the J&K administration was advised to implement these conclusions. Notably, this meeting played a significant role in establishing the J&K State Women's Commission. The book primarily aims to raise awareness of gender discrimination and related issues among governmental and non-governmental groups. Through a methodology that addresses issues crucial to women's lives, the study is both relevant and scientific.

- **Manchanda (2001)**, in *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, the author significantly contributes to our understanding of the often overlooked yet crucial role women play in both war and peace. The work underscores how women navigate survival and reconstruct their lives, challenging the dominant focus on men's experiences in conflict. The narratives illustrate the diverse ways women engage with and negotiate through conflicts, showcasing their potential as agents of social transformation. The article, "*Guns and Burqa—Women in the Kashmir Conflict*," moves beyond portraying women solely as victims, exploring their agency in both promoting peace and engaging in conflict. The author examines two narratives of women in the Kashmir conflict: one emphasizing their victimhood through direct and indirect violence, and the other rooted in the conventional patriarchal ideology of the struggle. She highlights women's innovative forms of resistance, particularly in the cultural sphere, such as the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), which brings private acts of mourning into the public space, challenging conventional notions of political activity.

- **WHO (2001)**, in discussing the mental health landscape during global armed conflicts, it was noted that 10 percent of individuals facing traumatic events develop severe mental health disorders, while another 10 percent exhibit behavior that impede their ability to function effectively. The report highlights prevalent issues such as depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic disorders, including insomnia, backaches, and stomachaches.
- **Batalia (2002)**, her study, *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*, skillfully conveys the range of perspectives from the various communities that make up the tumultuous state of Kashmir. This innovative work, possibly the first of its kind in the region, tells the stories of both ordinary and remarkable women. It highlights the complex difficulties women face in a situation where they are frequently targeted for abuse by the government, radicals, and, unfortunately, even members of their own community—often through no fault of their own. Batalia's research provides a valuable foundation for my own work, as it examines the intricate problems women encounter and how they navigate them. It also emphasizes how these problems are dynamic and evolve over time. The narrative presents the challenges of individuals who reluctantly adhere to social conventions, as well as the perspectives of Kashmiri women who reject the violent narratives imposed upon them through moral policing.
- **Aneesha Shafi (2002)**, in her work, *Working Women in Kashmir*, she explores the challenges and opportunities surrounding women's employment in Kashmir. A key finding is that women in the region are drawn to specific occupations, particularly in education, such as teaching in schools and colleges. Despite the title suggesting a focus on "working women," it is somewhat misleading, as it lacks clarity on the definition of a "working woman." Her primary focus is on women in the service sector, with limited attention to waged female workers and those in the informal economy.
- **Iqbal (2003)**, In "*Unrest in the State of Jammu and Kashmir*," the author contends that the political mindset of contemporary Kashmiris has been influenced by historical events, emphasizing their strong national identity. Traditionally, Kashmiri Muslims have not been inclined towards fundamentalism, with the Sufi order's distinctive tradition known for its tolerance and liberalism. The interplay of religion and geography contributes to the unique character of Kashmiri Muslims. Today, the Kashmiri community is considered one of the most safeguarded and nurtured in India.
- **Charu Walikhanna (2004)** in, *Women Silent Victims in Armed Conflict: An Area Study of Jammu and Kashmir*, the author emphasizes the respected role of women in a society deeply entrenched in armed conflict. They shed light on the challenges faced by women affected

by state actors in such scenarios, emphasizing that the cries of human rights violations cannot simply be ignored. The publication aims to bring attention to the issues faced by the often-overlooked victims of armed conflict—women. The study extensively explores historical gender imbalances and examines the influence of global conventions and laws on safeguarding women's rights during armed conflicts. Additionally, it delves into global case studies, with a particular focus on gender-based violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Rashid (2005)**, argues that since the onset of insurgency in Kashmir, many women have experienced the deaths of loved ones and, frequently, the loss of the family's primary breadwinner, often a father or husband. Each death within a family disrupts its stability as a functioning socio-economic unit, leading to immediate challenges regarding both financial support and emotional security for the remaining members. With the responsibility of sustaining the household falling on these vulnerable women, they face immense social and psychological challenges that, in the absence of professional counseling centers, become nearly impossible to manage. This, as several studies have shown, has led to a significant rise in suicides among women in the post-insurgency period.
- **Bazaz (2005)**, in his book, *Daughters of Vitasta*, the author offers a historical outlook on Kashmir, shedding light on the conditions of Kashmiri women across various time periods. It delves into the social context, unique challenges, and experiences of women in Kashmir, exploring their struggles, setbacks, and achievements throughout the region's history.
- **Manchanda (2005)**, in "*Women's Agency in Peacebuilding: Gender Relations in Post-Conflict Construction*," the author investigates the multifaceted and evolving roles that Kashmiri women have played since 1990, with the onset of broader political unrest. The world is accustomed to seeing images of Kashmiri women protesting and crying out during the insurgency. The author highlights how the males in the organizations they are part of have underestimated the women activists who have been active in Kashmir since 1990. Asia Andrabi is a minor participant in the Hurriyat and a guest member. Bhenji, the head of the Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) until 1996, departed the political arena unsatisfied and resentful due to a lack of competent decision-making. The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), led by Parveena Ahangar, is likewise undervalued since it lacks a distinct political vision for peace; being a hurting woman is insufficient on its own. Nonetheless, Kashmiri women are instrumentalized by the male leadership of the political struggle, which portrays them as rape victims and mothers of martyrs, uses them for propaganda, and ignores their role in the struggle while failing to provide opportunities for their empowerment.

- **Behera (2007)**, in *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*, the author argues that the Kashmir conflict is centered around numerous intricate and multifaceted challenges that stem from equally complex causes. A fuller understanding of these challenges is necessary if there is to be any chance of generating important political changes that will enable the parties to discuss how to achieve a fair, workable, and long-term resolution to the issue. While it made a mistake in straying from its core promise to grant the people of Jammu and Kashmir a federal, democratic, and secular model of self-governance, India has adopted a distinctly political strategy in the region.
- **Singh Jasbir and Vohra Anupama (2007)**, the authors of *Citizenship Rights of Women in Jammu and Kashmir: An Uncertain Future*, detail the passage of the Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill, 2004, commonly known as the Daughter's Bill, by the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on March 5, 2004, through a voice vote. This legislation aims to revoke the permanent resident status, along with associated rights and privileges, of daughters whose spouses are not state subjects. An examination of the Bill's historical background, legal discussions, and judicial perspectives reveals that the legislation establishes a gender-based hierarchy. It links women's citizenship to their marital status, rendering them reliant on it to preserve the distinctiveness of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Dabla (2007)**, his book, *Multi-dimensional Problems of Women in Kashmir*, explores five main issues that women confront: discrimination, social, economic, educational, and health issues. It aims to portray the actual socioeconomic conditions of working women in the unorganized handcraft industries of the Kashmir Valley while also making suggestions for immediate and long-term solutions. However, it does not go far enough in offering a thorough analysis of women's circumstances during the militancy in the valley, particularly considering the lack of men and the changes in social structures. Dabla downplays the complexities arising from the armed conflict in Kashmir and simplifies the representation of women's difficulties in the region. The book heavily relies on statistics, neglecting the human aspect of the narrative. Despite its extensive data spanning a considerable period, the book lacks the necessary depth for a critical theorization of "women's issues."
- **Kazi (2008)**, in her book *"Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir,"* the author delves into the armed transformation of a separatist movement that includes Kashmiri insurgents and Indian military units in the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir. Drawing from the firsthand accounts of individuals interviewed by Kazi, the narrative unfolds the political journey of Kashmiri women amidst militarization. It reveals

that the quest for independence heavily revolves around women's traditional roles as mothers, wives, and sisters.

- **Rao. A. (2008)**, in his work, *"In the Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite,"* the author explores the evolving and multifaceted roles adopted by Kashmiri women since 1990 amidst the broader political turmoil. While the prevailing global perception of the Kashmiri insurgency often fixates on women protesting and vociferously lamenting, the author underscores the significant involvement of female activists in Kashmir since 1990. Unfortunately, these women have been undervalued by the men with whom they share organizational affiliations. Asia Andrabi, despite her marginal presence and 'guest' membership in the Hurriyat, exemplifies this dynamic. As the leader of the Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) until 1996, known as 'Bhenji,' she exited the political arena with bitterness and disappointment due to a lack of effective decision-making. Similarly, Parveena Ahangar's Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is often underestimated, as the sole status of being suffering women is deemed insufficient without a clear political vision for peace. In contrast, the male leadership in the political conflict instrumentalizes Kashmiri women, casting them in roles such as martyrs' mothers and rape victims for propaganda purposes. However, they neglect to recognize the women's substantial contributions to the struggle and fail to provide them with opportunities for empowerment.
- **Chenoy and Chenoy (2010)**, in *"Maoist and Other Armed Conflicts,"* it is asserted that although women are considered inferior to men, they are playing increasingly significant roles as peacemakers, protestors, and fighters. Insurgent organizations and state leadership decision-making systems do not assign women to prominent positions. During times of armed conflict and insurgency, societies tend to view women primarily in roles predetermined by gender stereotypes.
- **Chowdhary Rekha (2010)**, her work, *"Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir,"* is essential for understanding the complex dynamics of identity politics in the region. Her writing explores Kashmir's social, cultural, and political environment and presents a range of viewpoints on the issue. A specific segment is devoted to scrutinizing the identity politics of women within the state, elucidating advancements in consciousness and addressing the diverse obstacles faced by women in the area.
- **Khan (2010)**, in her book, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir*, she explores how the issues in Kashmir can be linked to the shortcomings of the state and the democratic system in meeting the people's expectations. Additionally, the book examines the complex

connections between gender and militarization in the area, investigating how nationalist, militant, and religious influences contribute to a gender-based hierarchy. Through a thorough analysis of literature, history, and ethnography, the book sheds light on the development of the Kashmiri crises, with a particular focus on the role and status of women.

- **Kazi (2012)**, in *“Law, Governance, and Gender in Indian-Administered Kashmir,”* it is claimed that Kashmir's legal and civil processes have been seriously weakened by two decades of political unrest. Violence against women in Kashmir, based on their gender, is a stark example of how the state's apparatus of governance is more focused on maintaining the existing power disparity between the people and the government than on providing security and justice for all. According to Kazi, laws reflect human ambition, and if they become laws unto themselves, they can have disastrous consequences. States possess the authority to enact laws, but this power cannot and should never take precedence over the safety, respect, and advancement of their people. In other words, individuals, not power, are the reason laws exist. Legitimacy is lost when laws are exclusively meant to serve their own interests.
- **Jan Muzamil and Mohd Zaroo Younus (2014)**, their research, *“Women in Kashmir,”* sheds light on the psycho-social requirements of women in the region, addressing not only their survival needs but also aiming to facilitate their inclusion in society. The publication delves into contemporary issues surrounding the role of women in Kashmir and the evolving dynamics of their relationships with men. Additionally, it places special emphasis on tribal women, specifically the Gujjars and Hanjies. The book also pays careful attention to the status of disabled women in Kashmir. It underscores the aspirations of Kashmiri women for social freedom while also noting the prevalence of depression among them.
- **Lone Mehraj (2014)** in his paper, *“Problems of Women Panchayat Representatives in District Baramulla of Jammu and Kashmir,”* he delved into the intricacies of how women in Jammu and Kashmir are politically represented in panchayats. The research highlights a significant challenge—60% of women in this context are illiterate. This lack of literacy becomes a major hindrance to women's active involvement in panchayats. Illiteracy not only hampers their understanding of their roles and rights but also contributes to a lack of strong aspirations to participate actively. Many women perceive themselves as having an insignificant role in panchayats, and a notable factor is their lack of confidence, which prevents them from taking initiatives. Additionally, the burden of household responsibilities, livestock care, and other work pressures further limits the time women can dedicate to panchayat activities.

- **Khan Nyla Ali (2014)**, her book, *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*, offers firsthand insights into the Kashmiri landscape, delving into its historical context. A key highlight is the political awakening of Kashmiri women, which is a central focus of the narrative. It unveils the concealed voices of women endorsed by the rulers of that era. The women in Kashmir gained awareness of their political standing and rights, breaking free from the shackles of illiteracy and ignorance. This comprehensive work sheds light on the political consciousness of Kashmiri women, giving due significance to the often-overlooked "Quiet Kashmir."
- **Fayaz and Shazia (2015)**, in their research *"Falling Sex Ratio in Jammu and Kashmir: Trends, Determinants, and Consequences"* analyse the patterns, factors, and implications of the decreasing sex ratio in Jammu and Kashmir, offering possible solutions to restore a balanced male-female population in the region. The 2011 Census revealed some significant and concerning characteristics regarding the regional distribution of the sex ratio in Jammu and Kashmir, warranting further discussion. Since the start of this century, the sex ratio in the overall population has consistently remained low in Jammu and Kashmir. Provisional data from the 2011 Census indicated that the general sex ratio fell to 883 females per 1,000 males, down from 892 females per 1,000 males in 2001. The decline in the sex ratio across Jammu and Kashmir differs notably between regions. This rapid drop in the female-to-male ratio presents a pressing issue with serious socio-economic, demographic, and cultural repercussions, which, if left unaddressed, could become disastrous in the near future.
- **Sharma and Rana (2015)**, their paper, *"Social Evils Among Women in Jammu and Kashmir During Dogra Period and Colonialism and Reforms,"* focuses on specific societal issues prevalent among certain social groups. These problems seem deeply rooted in the societal structure and are justified based on customs and traditions. In the case of infanticide, female infants were routinely sacrificed as soon as they opened their eyes to the world due to a repulsive social custom. The region has a long history of prostitution, a societal scourge that began with the regular trade in women in the Middle Ages and has continued to grow in the present era. It was socially taboo for widows to remarry, and they were forced to follow a prescribed schedule of fasting, prayer, devotion, and charitable deeds. Due to this circumstance, traditions like female infanticide and sati were adopted. Over time, other social ills, such as the prohibition of widow remarriage, the trafficking of women, and prostitution, also became increasingly prevalent among the women of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Bodha and Sheikh (2017)**, the authors in their work *"Identity of Women: A Socio-Historical Study of Jammu and Kashmir"* aim to delve into the plight of Kashmiri women

during the Dogra rule, shedding light on their suffering and exploitation. The focus is on issues such as prostitution, women trafficking, female feticide, and the lack of widow remarriage, all contributing to the challenging circumstances for women in that era. The research takes an interpretative approach, concentrating exclusively on the female segment of society within the context of Dogra rule, exposing the brutality inflicted upon women in Kashmir. It underscores the historical discrimination and exploitation of women based on gender, with certain customs and traditions playing a crucial role in gender-based stereotyping and exploitation. The study indicates that societal perceptions of women as subordinate and incapable have led to their mental corruption and a degradation of their status. Emphasizing the contemporary reality that societies thrive when they strongly support gender equality, the study also highlights the historical burden and extensive physical exploitation faced by women. The myriad responsibilities of managing households, child-rearing, agriculture, and other family activities have contributed to the erosion of women's identity and value, prompting a reevaluation of their individuality. A shift in perception is advocated to afford women a significant status with honor and dignity.

- **Sarwer (2017)**, in his research titled *“Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir,”* the author draws attention to the mistreatment of women in Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting how social norms, armed conflict, militancy, and domestic abuse contribute to their victimization. In addition to enduring abuse and humiliation, women also suffer from traumatic events that lead to chronic depression and other mental illnesses. Due to the difficult conditions in the region, women have been denied their rights, and their struggles have been exacerbated; many have become widows who must now raise their children alone. Utilizing secondary data sources, the researcher concludes that women in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir continue to face issues related to education, health, politics, domestic abuse, sexism, state violence, dowry harassment, teasing, child labor, unequal pay, and female feticide and infanticide. For women's empowerment in the region, cooperation between the federal government, state governments, and non-governmental organizations is crucial in addressing these issues. The article describes current policies and highlights ongoing initiatives by the authorities to empower women in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Anzoo (2019)**, the researcher in *“Kashmiri Women Folk from Subservient to Striving Subjects During the Dogra Regime in Jammu and Kashmir”* focuses on social ills, including harlotry and women trafficking, as well as the role Kashmiri men have played in ending these abuses. To overthrow the despotic, dynastic, feudal, and religiously centered rule of the medieval ages, further research is needed to shed light on the educational status of

Kashmiri women and the role they played in the liberation struggle against oppressive rule, which began in Jammu and Kashmir in the 1930s.

- **Malik Roohul and Bhat Subzar (2022)**, the authors in *“Impact of Armed Conflict on Kashmiri Women”* focused on two major questions: *How does armed conflict impact the lives of Kashmiri women*” What kind of problems are these women facing? Armed conflicts have created problems everywhere in the world, and Kashmir is no exception. In Kashmir, women have suffered significantly more than men. The deteriorating situations of many families due to this conflict have increased the number of individuals experiencing trauma. In addition to humiliation and rape, women in Kashmir have also suffered psychologically.

Chapter-1

Socio-Economic Status of Women in Kashmir After 1947

The concept of "women's status" encompasses the degree of control and access women have to both social and material resources. Social resources include aspects such as knowledge, respect, and authority within families, communities, and society at large. Material resources pertain to essentials like food, income, and property ownership. The socio-economic status of women serves as a critical indicator of gender equality and overall societal development. In Kashmir, a region characterized by complex social and political dynamics, women's status reflects an intricate interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Addressing the challenges faced by women in Kashmir is essential for fostering inclusive development and long-term sustainability in the region.

The aim of the present research is to explore the socio-economic conditions of women in Kashmir, examining key dimensions such as education, employment, income, and empowerment. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover existing disparities, identify the primary obstacles impeding women's progress, and propose potential strategies for improving their socio-economic standing. Before delving into the specific socio-economic conditions of women in Kashmir, it is imperative to briefly examine the broader context of women's status in India. Historically, Indian society reveals a dynamic trajectory in the status of women. In ancient India, women held a position of high esteem and were treated with admiration. They enjoyed significant freedom in matters of education and marriage, and no religious ceremony was considered complete without their participation. Women epitomized qualities such as bravery, confidence, love, and affection, playing pivotal roles in societal and cultural spheres. However, over time, women's privileged status eroded due to a combination of social, economic, and political factors. This decline marked a dark age for women, with the emergence of oppressive practices such as female infanticide, sati, child marriage, the purdah system, and polygamy. These customs relegated women to a marginalized and subordinate position within society. They were denied freedom, subjected to untouchability and strict caste hierarchies, and reduced to a status of economic and social dependency. The *Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, encapsulated this regressive stance by asserting that women must remain under the guardianship of their fathers, husbands, or sons throughout their lives, highlighting their lack of autonomy.¹⁸

¹⁸ B. Rashid Manzoor, Rajeshwari R. (2022), Social Status of Women in Early Kashmir, *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, Vol 3, no 5, PP. 2788-2792

The colonial era witnessed significant strides toward gender equality, particularly in education, employment, and social rights. Reform movements led by organizations like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, spearheaded by visionary social reformers, played a pivotal role in challenging regressive practices and improving the status of women. Post-independence, the structural and cultural status of women in India underwent further transformation. Women began to enjoy enhanced rights and opportunities, reflected in their increasing participation in various spheres of life. Despite these advancements, achieving true gender equality remains a distant goal. Societal challenges such as illiteracy, financial dependency, and limited participation in decision-making continue to hinder women's progress. Addressing these barriers is essential for improving the socio-economic conditions of women, which, in turn, strengthens their decision-making power, self-confidence, and overall standing within families and society.

The socio-economic status of women is intricately linked to their rights, obligations, and access to resources within society. In particular, the status of tribal women offers an illuminating perspective. Although progress among some middle-class tribal women is often highlighted as a sign of improvement, the reality for most tribal women is markedly different. Residing primarily in rural and remote areas, tribal women frequently face exclusion and deprivation in social and economic development compared to women from other social groups. Deprivation, in this context, refers to the economic and social deficits that harm individuals, families, or entire communities. It reflects a lack of access to essential resources, opportunities, and support systems, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. For women, this deprivation not only limits their personal autonomy but also constrains their ability to contribute meaningfully to society.

To improve the socio-economic status of women, it is crucial to address systemic challenges such as financial dependence, illiteracy, and restricted decision-making power. Efforts must also focus on empowering women through education, equitable employment opportunities, and robust legal protections. By strengthening women's socio-economic foundations, societies can foster greater gender equality, enabling women to achieve self-sufficiency, assert their rights, and attain a more equitable position within their families and communities.

1.1: Status of Women in Kashmir (Historical Background)

In traditional Kashmiri society, women historically endured dependence, a lower social status, and significant hardship. They faced systemic discrimination and exploitation, primarily by male family members, and grappled with challenges such as widespread illiteracy, segregation, polygamy, mismatched marriages, and an absence of personal identity. Economically, women

were confined to heavy domestic responsibilities and denied access to career opportunities. Their economic contributions, though essential, went largely unrecognized and were often relegated to menial and degrading tasks. Socially, women experienced restricted freedoms, repression, and a subordinate status even within their own homes. This systemic marginalization perpetuated the belief that women were primarily child bearers and caregivers, reinforcing their dependence on male authority both within and outside their families. Despite some participation in social and cultural activities and their undeniable economic contributions, women were frequently secluded, denied fundamental rights, and confined to roles as homemakers and passive supporters of their more active male counterparts.¹⁹

In the historical context, women in traditional Kashmiri society faced a paradox: while their formal societal roles were minimal, they actively participated in various social, economic, and domestic activities. Urban areas, particularly among elite Sayyid and Hojja families, saw women confined to their homes, prohibited from engaging in manual labor. However, the broader occupational landscape revealed a significant degree of female involvement in sustenance-related tasks. Traditionally, Kashmiri women engaged in agriculture, spinning, weaving, and, later, the handicrafts industry. Yet, they remained excluded from formal education and leadership roles in a predominantly male-dominated society. Beyond domestic chores such as food preparation, women undertook labor-intensive activities like husking and grinding grain, which contributed to their robust physical development. In artisan families, women played indispensable roles by complementing their husbands' work, underscoring their economic importance within their households.²⁰

Rural Kashmiri women were equally active, contributing significantly to agricultural labor alongside their family members. Despite their multifaceted roles and contributions in both urban and rural settings, women lacked the agency to achieve full economic independence or elevated social status. Their labor, while pivotal, was undervalued and overshadowed by the systemic constraints of patriarchy. Overall, traditional Kashmiri society imposed a framework that limited women's potential, confining them to subordinate roles and denying them the recognition and opportunities they deserved. Their enduring contributions to the socio-economic fabric of society, though significant, remained largely invisible, reflecting the broader dynamics of gender inequality entrenched in the region's cultural and historical context.

¹⁹ Shafi, A. (2002), *Working Women in Kashmir*, A.P. H. New Delhi, P. 13.

²⁰ Sharma M. (2023), Critical Analysis of Women in Kashmir Under Dogra Rule, *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 6(2), PP. 188-194

In Kashmir, the status of women began to transform significantly in the early 20th century, particularly during the 1930s independence movement. Women in the valley actively participated in the struggle against the feudal control of the Maharaja dynasty, marking a pivotal moment in Kashmiri history. Remarkably, the men in their lives did not impose restrictions on their involvement. Many women left their families to join socio-political movements, underscoring the era's progressive shift in societal norms. Despite political or ideological differences, successive governments in Jammu and Kashmir worked to improve the status of women after 1947, when local political leadership assumed power. The government implemented measures to protect women's political, commercial, economic, and social rights. Historically, women in the Kashmir Valley faced systemic challenges, as documented by historians, missionaries, tourists, and travelers. Experts generally agree that the early 20th century marked a transformative period for Kashmiri women. This shift was driven by two primary factors. Locally, increased political awareness, the expansion of modern education, heightened cultural consciousness, deteriorating economic conditions, and widespread social awakening collectively led women to question their societal roles. They began asserting their rights within the broader social framework. Externally, the “*Neubremization*” process involving the influence of external developments on the valley's inhabitants played a significant role. Political, social, and economic changes across the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Punjab and Delhi, profoundly impacted the socio-political landscape of Kashmir.

These changes, while aimed at fostering women's growth and development, also introduced new challenges for women and their families. Issues such as dual roles in domestic and professional spheres, difficulties in child-rearing, post-marital conflicts, and instances of harassment and discrimination became prevalent. Traditional Kashmiri society imposed a unique set of constraints on women, characterized by dependency on men, a lower social status, confinement to household roles, and entrenched gender-specific beliefs and behaviors. As societal conditions evolved, women were burdened with additional responsibilities, including balancing their roles as wives and mothers alongside professional obligations. These challenges, compounded by marital discord and childcare issues, have become increasingly complex, exerting long-term adverse effects on women and society at large.²¹ Furthermore, women in Kashmir bear the dual burden of a patriarchal society and the ongoing political conflict. On one hand, the conflict has directly and indirectly victimized women; on the other, the patriarchal system has inflicted profound psychological harm on women and their children. Gender-based violence remains prevalent, often manifesting through male dominance that

²¹ Dabla, B. A (2010), *Sociological papers on Kashmir*, Vol. I and II Jay Kay, Srinagar.

relegates women to subordinate roles. Even educated and financially independent women are not immune, as evidenced by anecdotal reports from police records.²²

Traditionally, Kashmiri culture viewed women as unequal, inferior, and lacking both mental and physical strength. These perceptions were perpetuated by myths, doctrines, and entrenched belief systems, which many women internalized and reflected in their behavior. However, the practice of endogamy marriages within the community kept women closely connected to their parental families. This familial bond served as a crucial deterrent against mistreatment by husbands and in-laws. While Islamic Shariah grants Muslim women specific inheritance rights from their parents and husbands, these rights were often denied in practice. A customary law evolved, effectively preventing women from claiming their rightful share of parental property. Additionally, although the payment of Mehr (dower) is legally mandated before the finalization of marriage, it is frequently not fully honored. In traditional Kashmiri society, gender interactions were not strictly segregated. Men and women engaged with each other across various societal levels, professions, and domains. The institutionalization of occupational systems often necessitated male-female collaboration, both within and outside their immediate social circles. This integration underscored the inherent necessity of gender cooperation in the valley's socio-economic fabric.²³

1.2: Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Kashmir

Gender equality and women's empowerment are complex concepts that reveal various dimensions of gender disparities and disempowerment. These issues manifest through diverse interactions and functions of both women and men. In this investigation, we will explore indicators of gender equality and inequality to evaluate the circumstances of women and men, while empowerment indicators will assess the roles, aspirations, and rights of women, and occasionally, men. As fundamental human rights, these aspects are crucial for sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite some progress, troubling statistics indicate that women and girls comprise six out of ten of the world's poorest individuals and account for two-thirds of the global illiterate population. Currently, only 19% of the world's parliamentarians are women, and one in three women experience violence, whether during armed conflicts or within their homes. Furthermore, while

²² Sharma, Pallavi (Apr 12, 2010). *Violence against women on the rise in Jammu and Kashmir*, Hindustan times.

²³ Seema Kazi, (2022), *'Women, Gender Politics, and Resistance in Kashmir'*, 18(1) Socio-Legal Review 95.

women contribute nearly half of the world's food production and perform 66% of all work, they receive only 10% of global income and own just 1% of the world's property.²⁴

For generations, Kashmiri women have faced significant societal hardships. The historical context reveals that prevailing customs and traditions have perpetuated an environment in which women are often marginalized. Gender inequality is pronounced in Kashmir, where women encounter substantial disadvantages compared to men, even within their own families. This disparity is evident not only in educational and skill development opportunities but also in fundamental aspects such as nutrition, health, and overall survival. Despite the physiological tendency for women to live longer, societal preferences lean heavily toward sons, who are often viewed as better earners and caregivers for aging parents.²⁵ This cultural inclination positions sons as symbols of social power, pride, and honor, as they are expected to carry on the family name and retain ownership of family assets such as land and housing.²⁶ In rural communities, particularly those resisting urban influences, sons are regarded as valuable assets, with their roles as laborers in agricultural settings being especially crucial.²⁷

Kashmiri women confront an array of challenges that include health issues, economic hardships, educational barriers, and political underrepresentation. Specific concerns such as female feticide, domestic violence, delayed marriages, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, unequal wages, child marriage, child sexual abuse, child labor, acid attacks, and workplace sexual harassment illustrate the multifaceted nature of gender inequality in the region. Moreover, pervasive discrimination in nutrition is evident, with girls often receiving less breastfeeding time compared to boys in many Kashmiri households.²⁸ Studies indicate that boys are significantly more likely to access healthcare when ill, which further contributes to higher mortality rates among women.²⁹

To address these challenges and promote gender equality, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has initiated various welfare programs aimed at supporting women economically and socially. Since India's independence, these programs have played a crucial role in implementing legislative and constitutional amendments, fostering planned economic growth, and funding

²⁴Commission, Planning (2011), *India Human Development Report 2011: Towards Social Inclusion*.

²⁵ Sheth SS (2006), *Missing Female Births in India*. Lancet, London, England, 367(9506), PP. 185–186.

²⁶ Bandyopadhyay M. (2003), Missing Girls and Son Preference in Rural India: Looking Beyond Popular Myth, *Health care for women international*, 24(10), PP. 910-926.

²⁷ Arnold, et al. (2010), Son Preference, the Family-Building Process and Child Mortality in India, *Population Studies a Journal of Demography*, 52(3), PP. 301-315.

²⁸ Gupta, MD. (1987), Selective Discrimination Against Female Children in Rural Punjab, India, *Population and Development Review*, 13(1), PP. 77–100.

²⁹ Kundu A and Mahesh KS (1991), Variation in Sex Ratio: Development Implications, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26(41), PP. 2341-2342.

social welfare initiatives. One significant effort is the establishment of the Jammu and Kashmir Women's Development Corporation in 1994, which has been instrumental in implementing numerous states and federally authorized economic and social development initiatives targeting disadvantaged and minority women. The corporation's primary goal is to enhance women's economic conditions, enabling them to lead better lives and take control of their futures. National-level programs, such as the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation, the National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation, and the National Minority Development and Finance Corporation, have been established to facilitate economic development by providing low-interest loans to women from underprivileged backgrounds.³⁰

These programs also offer educational loans, highlighting the importance of education and skill development for women's empowerment. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has launched the Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Program, which provides educated, unemployed youth including young women with opportunities for self-employment. Although these loans often carry higher interest rates, they attract young women eager to establish their own businesses. Accessible and reasonably priced, these initiatives are supported by the Indian government, state governments, and the beneficiaries themselves, with repayment terms designed to promote self-sufficiency and economic progress among women in the region.

The Jammu and Kashmir Social Welfare Department plays an essential role in addressing the needs of marginalized groups, particularly women facing hardships such as marital disputes and domestic abuse. Programs like the Ladli Beti Social Assistance Scheme aim to improve the lives of girls from low-income families by providing financial support during their formative years. Despite these initiatives, Kashmiri women continue to confront unique challenges, including delayed marriages, dowry-related issues, limited property inheritance rights, and rising crimes against women. The region also grapples with educational disparities, necessitating enhanced efforts to ensure equal access to quality education for both genders. Healthcare concerns are particularly pronounced in rural areas, which often lack adequate infrastructure and awareness.³¹

1.3 Gender Differences in Education

³⁰ D. Shabir Ahmad, Muthukumar J., (2024), Women's Empowerment in Kashmir Through Welfare Programs and Schemes: Progress and Persisting Challenges, *Migration Letters*, Vol. 21, No. S5, P. 747.

³¹ Ibid., P. 148.

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering personal growth and advancing societal development. Addressing disparities in educational access and achievement between genders is essential for progressing toward gender equality and mitigating the marginalization of women. Education significantly impacts individual lives and serves as a dynamic force for holistic development. The link between illiteracy and poverty is profound, encompassing not only economic struggles but also a broader range of capability deprivation.³² The future of a nation is closely tied to female literacy, particularly because a mother's educational attainment is intricately connected to the health and well-being of her children.³³ Higher education, along with education in general, acts as a cornerstone for women's empowerment. It is a powerful tool that not only enhances literacy but also intersects with critical social factors such as population growth, healthcare, and children's education. Education enables women, particularly in rural areas, to acquire new skills and techniques necessary for improving their livelihoods across various fields.³⁴ It empowers them to seize new opportunities and navigate the challenges of an ever-evolving society. For instance, increased educational attainment among women is correlated with lower infant mortality rates and higher health standards, as educated mothers are more likely to provide better care for their children. Furthermore, education boosts women's economic productivity, enhancing their contribution to the economy. In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (UT of J&K), female literacy remains significantly lower than male literacy, despite the progress made over the past 70 years.

According to the census of 1981, literacy rate of the state stood only 26.67 percent against national average of 41.43 percent. During 1981 to 2011, the literacy rate increased by 42.07 against 31.57 percent at national level shown the table below. As per census of 2011, the literacy rate of the state is 68.74 percent against 74.04 percent at national level. Male and female literacy rate accounts 78.26 percent and 58.01 percent against the national average of 82.14 percent and 65.46 percent. The district-wise pattern of literacy rate indicates high rate for Jammu, Samba and Leh district, while low literacy rates for Ramban, Bandipora and Badgam districts in the State. Female literacy rate is low in all districts. This reflects a poor social awareness for female education due to existing socio-cultural beliefs.

³² The EFA Global Monitoring Report, (2006), Literacy for Life, *UNESCO Global Education and Monitoring Report*.

³³ *Institute of Applied Manpower Research and Planning Commission Government of India (2011)*, India Human Development Report 2011(Towards Social Inclusion), New Delhi, Oxford.

³⁴ Chitkara, M. G. (2001), *Women & Social Transformation India*, New Delhi, A.P.H.

Table I: District-Wise Literacy Rate of Jammu & Kashmir State (1981, 2001, 2011)

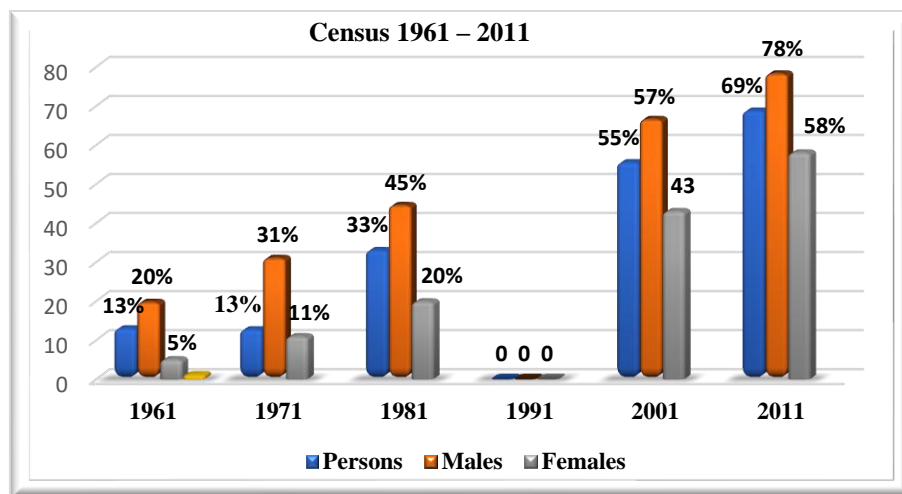
District	1981	2001	2011
Anantnag	22.93 %	51.27 %	64.32 %
Pulwama	20.47 %	54.62 %	65.00 %
Srinagar	33.90 %	50.57 %	71.21 %
Budgam	17.86 %	47.60 %	57.98 %
Baramulla	20.62 %	51.12 %	66.93 %
Kupwara	16.82 %	51.36 %	66.92 %
Leh	25.17 %	68.84 %	80.48 %
Kargil	18.86 %	68.35 %	74.49 %
Jammu	42.86 %	77.87 %	83.98 %
Udhampur	23.50 %	66.97 %	69.90 %
Doda	18.50 %	63.74 %	65.97 %
Kathua	31.90 %	71.68 %	73.50 %
Rajouri	24.73 %	71.02 %	68.54 %
Poonch	23.39 %	68.62 %	68.69 %
J&K State	26.67 %	54.46 %	68.74 %

Source: *Census 1981, 2001, 2011*

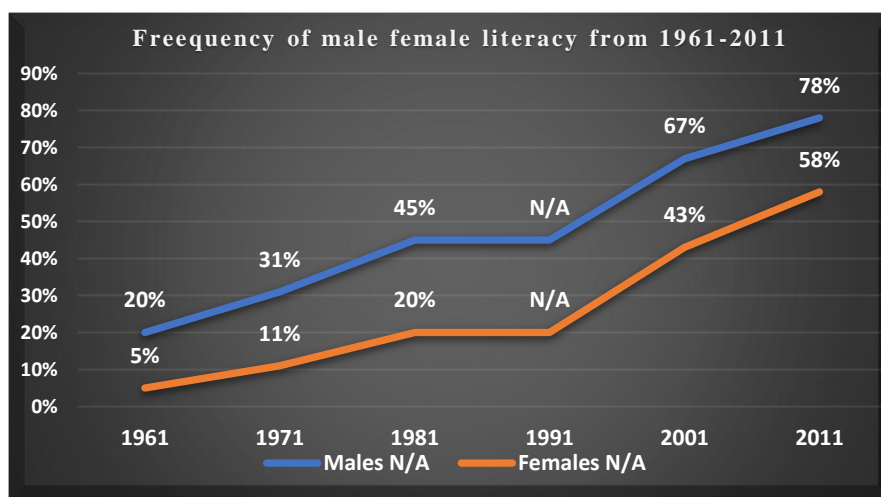
In 2006 new eight (8) districts were created in the Azad-led government, Kishtwar (58.54%), Samba (82.48%), Reasi (59.42%) and Ramban (56.90%) new districts in the Jammu division and Bandipore (57.82%), Kulgam (60.35%), Ganderbal (59.99%) and Shopian (62.49%) in the Kashmir valley according to census 2011.

Social norms and fears of violence continue to restrict educational opportunities for women and girls, contributing to this disparity. Census data indicates that literacy levels for women in Kashmir, similar to trends across India, lag behind those of men. However, since 1961, there has been some progress: women's literacy rates rose from 20% in 1981 to 58% in 2011, marking an increase of 28%. It is important to note that the erstwhile J&K was the only state in India that missed the national census twice, first in 1951 and again in 1991, due to political instability (Table I). Despite these challenges, the growth rate in female literacy from 1981 to 2011 was only 10%, indicating that much work remains to be done.

Figure III: Literacy Rate of Jammu and Kashmir 1961 – 2011



Source; 2011 Census of India, J&K,



Despite historically low literacy rates in Jammu and Kashmir, there has been a significant increase in literacy levels over the decades. Between 1961 and 2011, the state experienced a remarkable 56-point rise in literacy rates, compared to a 46-point increase nationwide. While both male and female literacy rates in the region have improved, the female literacy rate remains notably lower than that of males. Specifically, in the 2011 census, the male literacy rate reached 78%, while the female literacy rate lagged behind at 68.0%. However, further analysis indicates a positive trend in female literacy rates, largely due to the regional government's implementation of various programs and schemes aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for women. Recognizing that addressing gender imbalances in education is fundamental to women's holistic development, the government has initiated numerous measures to narrow the gap and reduce disparities in educational attainment. The central government of India has also introduced a range of initiatives to promote women's education, which have been effectively implemented in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): Launched to promote universal education and reduce gender gaps, the SSA aims to provide equitable educational opportunities. Due to specific regional challenges such as militancy and the unique topography of Jammu and Kashmir, the state joined the SSA later than expected, in 2003. By the academic year 2006–07, significant advancements were made, including the transformation of 148 primary schools into upper primary schools. The initiative also facilitated the enrollment of 108,560 students through non-residential bridge courses, with female enrollment reaching approximately 46.62% of total enrollments.³⁵

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): This program specifically targets the "hardest to reach" girls, particularly those who are out of school. Launched in 2003-2004, NPEGEL aims to establish "model schools" in each cluster, focusing on community involvement to boost female enrollment. In Jammu and Kashmir, NPEGEL has been implemented in 12 districts and currently involves the development of around 302 Model Cluster Schools.³⁶

“The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): This program, initiated in July 2004, aims to establish upper primary residential schools for girls, primarily from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minority groups. The objective, as outlined by the Department of Elementary School and Literacy (MHRD, GOI), is to enhance the enrollment of girls in upper primary education. The Project Approval Board of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission sanctioned the KGBV plan for 14 blocks in Jammu and Kashmir during its 64th meeting on February 22, 2005 (according to SSA's 2007–08 Annual Works Plan and Budget for Jammu and Kashmir). Each block designated for the establishment of 13 KGBVs is officially recognized as an educationally backward block (EBB). As of January 31, 2008, the enrollment statistics in these 13 operational KGBVs indicate that females comprised 16.65 percent from Scheduled Castes, 10.63 percent from Scheduled Tribes, 2.30 percent from Other Backward Classes, 65.94 percent Muslims, and 4.48 percent from households below the poverty line.³⁷

Educated women are better equipped to engage actively in society, pursue further educational and career opportunities, and challenge gender-based discrimination. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 further reinforces this commitment by guaranteeing free and mandatory education for all children aged 6 to 14, including in Jammu and Kashmir. The promotion of free and compulsory education is crucial in addressing

³⁵ GOJK, Social Sectors (2008), *Department of Education, Government of Jammu and Kashmir*, India.

³⁶ Ibid.,

³⁷ Government of India (2007), *Guidelines for Implementation of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs)*.

historical and cultural challenges while empowering women through education. In summary, ensuring free and compulsory education for women in Kashmir not only contributes to higher literacy rates but also enhances skills and creates increased opportunities for women. This, in turn, has a profound positive impact on the overall development of the region, fostering a more equitable and progressive society.

The 2002 Constitution mandates that all Indian children aged six to fourteen must attend school. It specifies that "the State shall ensure free and compulsory education for all children aged six to fourteen years as determined by law" under the 86th Amendment. Universal education in India has been ongoing for decades, exemplified by initiatives like "Operation Blackboard," launched in 1987. This program aimed to establish essential prerequisites for primary education, ensuring that each school has two spacious rooms with a blackboard, at least two qualified teachers (including one female), and necessary instructional materials (books, maps, toys, etc.) for conducting classes in all weather conditions. Jammu and Kashmir have embraced this initiative; however, significant challenges remain. Research conducted by the Department of Education at the University of Kashmir in 2012 revealed that 17 out of 51 schools in Pulwama district lacked proper buildings, and the instructional materials used by teachers were often inadequate and contained errors.³⁸ These issues reflect broader challenges in enhancing educational standards, reducing poverty, and eliminating exclusion through education, especially in the context of escalating social and political tensions that have persisted since 1989. According to the 2009 census, Jammu and Kashmir had a literacy rate of 59 percent, which improved to 68.74 percent by 2014. Gender disparities are stark, with a literacy rate of 76.75 percent for men compared to only 49.12 percent for women in 2011. Over the decade from 2001 to 2011, literacy rates increased by 10.15 percent for men and 6.9 percent for women, partially due to the Mass Literacy Program targeting individuals aged 15 to 35.³⁹ Despite these efforts, over half of the women and one in four men in the state remain illiterate, placing Jammu and Kashmir fifth among India's states and union territories in terms of literacy.⁴⁰

The three languages spoken in the region Kashmiri, Urdu, and English also influence social isolation, particularly among women. While Kashmiri is the mother tongue and rarely taught in schools, Urdu and English are subjects in formal education. Additionally, there are significant disparities in literacy rates based on geographic location, with 34 percent of Jammu and

³⁸ Ganie et al., (2012), Implementation of Operational Blackboard at Zone Pulwama in Kashmir Division; "World Rural Observations" 4(1), PP. 68-73.

³⁹ Bhat Fayaz et al., (July 2011), Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion: A Case Study of Women's Education in Jammu and Kashmir, "Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce" Vol. II, Issue 3, PP. 135-150.

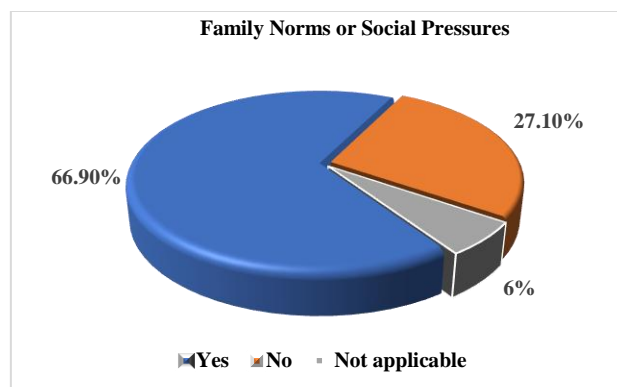
⁴⁰ Jammu and Kashmir Population, Sex Ratio, Literacy (2011), *Census 2011*.

Kashmir's population living in rural areas, often in remote locations. Although literacy rates for rural women improved more than those for urban women from 2001 to 2011, rural women still face substantially higher illiteracy rates. Access to education remains stratified by gender, despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights. For many children, the curriculum feels disconnected from their everyday lives. Numerous studies emphasize the importance of educating women, highlighting benefits such as improved family dynamics, healthcare (including declines in child mortality), and overall quality of life. This is not merely an Indian concern but a global imperative. Advocacy for women's education seeks to reduce gender disparities in access to opportunities while addressing significant social and economic considerations. However, promoting women's education in Kashmir faces formidable challenges. Deeply ingrained cultural norms often regard women's education as a luxury rather than a necessity. The lack of female teachers, especially in higher education, further exacerbates the issue. Cultural apprehensions related to Muslim traditions and the accumulated deprivation of girls and women contribute to the prevailing situation. According to a report from the Aligarh Muslim University's Department of Education, these cultural concerns include fears that education may disrupt traditional socialization processes or cause girls to question cultural values and traditions.⁴¹

In my study on the impact of family norms and social pressures on women's autonomy in education, career choices, and social interactions, 66.9% of participants (267 women) reported facing restrictions in these areas due to family expectations and societal norms. This indicates a significant influence of traditional constraints on women's freedom in the valley. In contrast, 27.1% (108 respondents) stated they had not encountered such limitations, suggesting a degree of autonomy within their families. Additionally, 6% (24 respondents) selected "Not applicable," likely reflecting individual circumstances where these issues were less relevant.

Figure 1.1: Have You or Any Women in Your Family Faced Restrictions Regarding Education, Career Choices, Or Social Interactions Due to Family Norms or Social Pressures?

⁴¹Bilal A. et al., (2014), Assessment and Understanding of Gender Equity in Education in Jammu and Kashmir, *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, 1(1), PP. 115-123.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Educated women are better equipped to participate fully in society, pursue further education and professional opportunities, and combat gender-based prejudice. Promoting this right in the region intersects with various societal issues, such as gender equality, education, and regional dynamics. It reflects a commitment to empowering women through education and addressing historical and cultural challenges. From an educational standpoint, ensuring free and compulsory education for women in Kashmir can enhance literacy rates, improve skill sets, and increase opportunities for women. Such improvements can positively impact the overall development of the region. Historically, Kashmir and other regions of India have experienced gender inequalities in education, with access for women and girls hampered by cultural norms, poverty, and security concerns. Despite these challenges, there have been initiatives aimed at reducing disparities and promoting gender equality in education. Women, though currently at a disadvantage, are gradually overcoming obstacles to claim their fundamental human rights. With an increasing growth rate in literacy that is expected to surpass that of men, the goal of achieving gender parity in education seems attainable. Enhancing women's access to education in Kashmir requires a multifaceted strategy that addresses the various factors influencing the educational landscape, with a particular focus on providing high-quality education.

1.4: Gender Preference in Kashmir: Preference for Male Babies over Female Babies

In Kashmir, women have faced systemic discrimination across all facets of society, leading to a pervasive perception that such inequality is inherent. The norms and traditions in the region are structured in a way that privileges men over women, resulting in a stark disparity between the sexes. Women generally encounter more discrimination and hardships than men, a trend observable within households and across key areas such as education, health, and opportunities for personal development. Despite the fact that women are physically predisposed to live longer than men, which theoretically could lead to a more favourable sex ratio for women, the reality

is quite different. Many families still prioritize having sons over daughters, operating under the belief that men are better earners and more capable of supporting the family, especially as parents age.⁴² The issue of unequal sex ratios persists because sons are associated with status and authority in society. Through sons, a family can carry on its lineage and preserve the family surname. Additionally, any property passed down to a son is likely to remain within the family.⁴³

In agricultural societies, male children are favored as laborers for farm work, and rural communities view sons as valuable assets in resisting the expansion of urban culture.⁴⁴ Additionally, numerous couples rely on a male child to support them in their later years and contribute to the financial security of the household.⁴⁵ The reality is that women's roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers in caring for family members, especially in today's society, cannot be overlooked. However, it is unfortunate that their contributions are not acknowledged in the same way as those of their male counterparts.⁴⁶ The analysis of data from NFHS-3 in Jammu and Kashmir supports these arguments. The proportion of ever-married women aged 15-49 who favor having more sons than daughters is 29.0 percent, compared to 3.6 percent who favor having more daughters than sons. Similarly, the percentage of ever-married women who desire to have at least one son is 83.5 percent, as opposed to 78.7 percent who wish to have at least one daughter.⁴⁷ This suggests that patriarchal ideology is deeply ingrained in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, as the preference for sons continues to outweigh that for daughters. This has led to consequences, reflected in the declining number of female children.

Excess mortality among female children is particularly pronounced for those with older sisters, while it remains minimal or nonexistent for first-born girls.⁴⁸ This phenomenon is supported by the data presented in the DLHS report for Jammu and Kashmir, which indicates a prevailing preference for male children. This preference intensifies with the number of living children; for

⁴² Sheth SS. (2006), *Missing Female Births in India*, Lancet 367(9506), PP. 185-186

⁴³ Bandyopadhyay M (2003), "Missing Girls and Son Preference in Rural India: Looking beyond Popular Myth" *Health Care for Women International*, 24(10), PP. 910, 927.

⁴⁴ Khanna SK (1997), "Traditions and Reproductive Technology in an Urbanizing North Indian Village" *Social Science and Medicine*, 44(2), PP. 171, 180.

⁴⁵ Sheth SS. (2006), *Missing Female Births in India*, Lancet 367(9506), PP. 185-186.

⁴⁶ Abbott P., Wallace C., Tyler M. (2005), *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives*, London, Routledge, PP. 171, 197.

⁴⁷ International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International (IIPSb), (2009), *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3b)*, India, 2005–06, Jammu and Kashmir, Mumbai, IIPS, P. 46.

⁴⁸ Das Gupta M (1987), "Selective Discrimination against Female Children in Rural Punjab" *Population and Development Review*, 13(1), PP. 77, 100.

instance, the desire for an additional son stands at 13.3 percent when a woman has no children, escalating to 71.1 percent in families with four or more children. In contrast, the preference for a daughter is as low as 2.3 percent among women with no children. Although there is a slight increase in the preference for daughters among women with one (12.9 percent) or two children (14.2 percent), this trend diminishes in families with more than four children, where the preference drops to 6.2 percent. Moreover, the proportion of women indifferent to the gender of their newborns those who leave the decision "up to God is highest when they have no children and declines as family size increases.⁴⁹ This observation aligns with the principle of "First by Chance and Second by Choice," which suggests that if a woman has a female fetus in her second pregnancy, especially after already having a daughter, the likelihood of that fetus reaching full term is significantly reduced. Consequently, female infants born in such circumstances face very low survival prospects. The stronger the preference for sons, the more severe the discrimination against daughters becomes, potentially leading to extreme outcomes such as foeticide (abortion of female fetuses) or infanticide through neglect. In recent times, infanticide has evolved into female foeticide, which refers to the termination of a baby within the womb, more commonly known as feticide. The declining sex ratio has been attributed to an increase in sex-selective abortions of female fetuses. Due to advanced technology and the medicalization of childbirth, it becomes easier for parents to dispose of their "undesired girl child," as it is the girl child who bears the weight of gender discrimination and deeply ingrained biases as the "weaker sex." This underscores the influence of distorted social and cultural factors related to marriage customs and dowry, as well as the role of women in household-level decision-making.⁵⁰

In contemporary contexts, infanticide has evolved into female foeticide, facilitated by advances in medical technology that allow for the identification of a fetus's sex. The decline in the sex ratio has been notably attributed to an increase in sex-selective abortions of female fetuses.⁵¹ The advent of technologies like amniocentesis in the 1980s and subsequent ultrasound screenings has enabled parents to make decisions regarding the sex of their child, often leading to the termination of female pregnancies. Despite the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994, which aimed to prohibit prenatal sex determination, the act has not effectively curbed the misuse of medical technology. Reports suggest that the illegal practice of sex-selective abortion

⁴⁹ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPSc) (2010), *District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS-3)*, 2007-08, India, Jammu & Kashmir, Mumbai, IIPS, P. 59.

⁵⁰ Government of Jammu and Kashmir (GoJK) (2008), *Below Poverty Line Survey, Directorate of Economics and Statistics Srinagar*, P. 65.

⁵¹ Goswami S. (2007), *Female Infanticide and Child Marriage*, Jaipur, Rawat, P. 335.

persists, particularly in rural areas, with estimates indicating that around 10 million female fetuses may have been aborted over the last two decades. This selective pre-birth process has resulted in the loss of approximately 50,000 female fetuses each year, exacerbating the gender imbalance. Given that these practices are deemed illegal, reliable data on the prevalence of clinics involved in this malpractice or the specific numbers of female foeticide cases remain elusive.⁵²

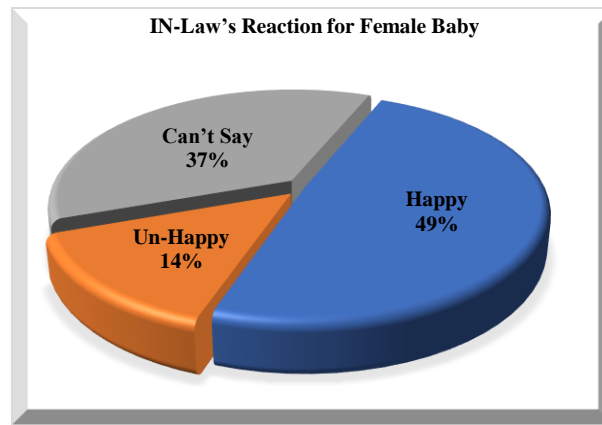
The overwhelming preference for male children has led to restrictions on girls' survival and reproductive opportunities. According to the 2011 census, the sex ratio for children aged 0 to 6 in Jammu and Kashmir dramatically declined from 892 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001 to 883 girls per 1,000 boys in 2011. This gradual reduction in the sex ratio among under-seven children can be attributed to several factors: a decline in the sex ratio at birth due to the use of sex-selection technologies; an increase in mortality rates for female children compared to their male counterparts, reflecting entrenched discrimination; and systematic underreporting of female children under seven relative to male children.⁵³ The erosion of the under-seven sex ratios is largely a consequence of strong male preference and the disadvantaged status of women in society. In many communities, having a son is a source of pride and social power, with the belief that sons carry on the family name into future generations. This cultural context reinforces the systemic biases against female children and underscores the urgent need for societal change.

Table 1.2 shows the distribution of a sample of 399 individuals based on their reactions to the birth of a girl child. Of the total sample, 57 individuals, or 14%, expressed an unhappy reaction; 196 individuals, or 49.16%, expressed a happy reaction; and the remaining 146 individuals, or 36.6%, did not provide information about their in-law's reactions or chose not to disclose this information. Table 1.2 suggests that the majority of individuals in the sample expressed a positive reaction to the birth of a girl child. However, a significant proportion of individuals expressed a negative reaction. It is important to note that such negative reactions may be influenced by cultural and societal norms that favor male children over female children.

Fig 1.2: Frequency distribution of Respondents about In-law's reaction to a female baby.

⁵² Aravamudan G. (2007), *Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide*, Delhi: Penguin, P. 47.

⁵³ Thomas, P., (1982), "The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India" Barbara D. Miller. Cornell, Ithaca, New York 201 P., Child Abuse & Neglect 6(3): PP. 369-370.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

To foster a more equitable society, it is essential that girls are raised as a top priority by their parents. This involves not only providing them with the love and support they deserve but also ensuring they receive quality education and opportunities. Equally important is the education of boys, who should be taught to treat women with respect and dignity, both at home and in broader society. By instilling these values early on, we can prevent harmful behaviors and attitudes towards girls and women. A profound shift in the mindset of men is crucial for promoting respect for the opposite gender. Addressing this societal issue is imperative, as it has far-reaching implications for the future stewards of our human race. Despite ongoing efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, deeply ingrained discrimination against women continues to hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Our aim should be to eliminate the core sources of this discrimination by reshaping societal perspectives toward women. We must strive to cultivate an environment where every woman is empowered to advocate for herself, where female children are cherished equally to their male counterparts, and where every woman can carry herself with pride and respect. In doing so, we not only uplift women but also work towards a more just and equitable society for all.

1.5: Health and Nutrition

India's low sex ratio stands as a stark indicator of female subjugation, highlighting deeply rooted gender biases that impact women's health and nutrition,⁵⁴ Elevated mortality rates among women can be traced to inadequate nourishment and medical attention for girls, which reflect a pervasive "bias against females" that restricts their access to essential resources.⁵⁵ This

⁵⁴ Omvedt G. (1978), "Women and Rural Revolt in India," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 5(3), Pp-382.

⁵⁵ Srinivasan K (1994), "Sex Ratios: What they Hide and What they Reveal," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(51/52), P. 3233.

systemic inequity is particularly visible in the nourishment provided to women and children, with a significant proportion about half of the population suffering from malnutrition, and a quarter experiencing severe malnutrition. Women and children, the most vulnerable groups, bear the brunt of these nutritional disparities. Gender-based nutritional inequalities manifest from infancy through adulthood.⁵⁶

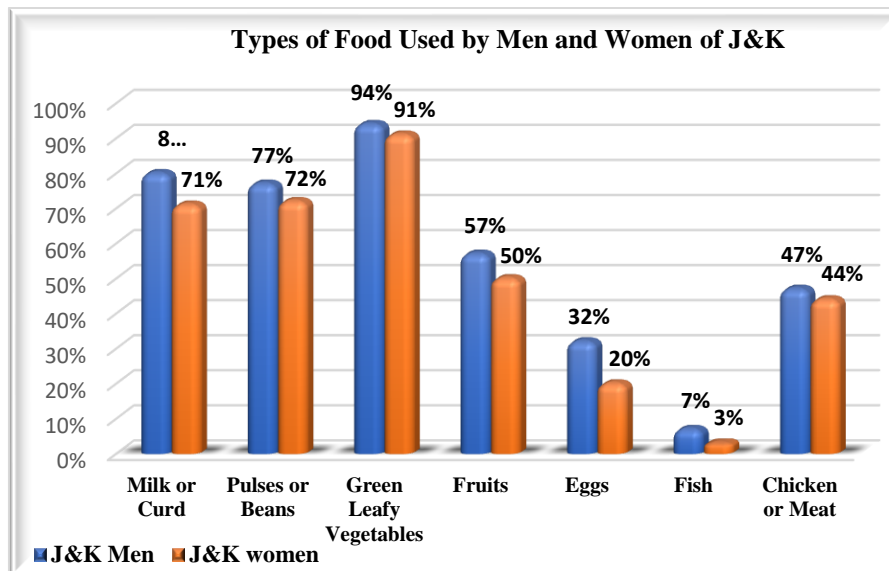
Girls are breastfed less frequently and for shorter durations compared to boys, and, as they grow, males are often prioritized in receiving higher-quality food. As adults, women consume fewer calories than men, which is evident in their limited intake of nutrient-dense foods. For example, the proportions of women consuming food items such as milk or curd (70.7%), pulses or beans (71.6%), dark green leafy vegetables (90.5%), fruits (49.6%), eggs (20.4%), fish (3.0%), chicken or meat (44.0%), and fish (44.4%) are lower compared to men, who consume these items at rates of 79.8%, 77.0%, 94.5%, 57.4%, 31.7%, 7.0%, 46.9%, and 48.1%, respectively (Figure IV).⁵⁷ This data underscores that, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, women's intake of protein-rich foods like fish, eggs, dairy, and legumes is consistently lower than that of men. The repercussions of this nutritional deficiency are severe. Two significant effects include the inability of women to reach their full growth potential and a high prevalence of anaemia. These conditions contribute to complications during childbirth, which in turn lead to maternal and infant mortality, maternal exhaustion, and low birth weight in babies. Moreover, malnutrition impairs women's productivity and overall quality of life. The impact is cyclical: children of mothers suffering from chronic energy deficiency especially daughters are at greater risk of malnutrition, perpetuating this cycle of poor health and limited opportunities.⁵⁸

Figure IV: Types of Food Used by Men and Women of J&K

⁵⁶ Kundu A, Sahu MK (1991), "Variation in the Sex Ratio: Development Implications" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26(41), PP. 2341-42.

⁵⁷ International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International (IIPSa) (2007), *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3a), 2005–06*, India, Volume I, Mumbai, IIPS, PP. 302-303.

⁵⁸ Radhakrishna R, Ravi C (2004), "Malnutrition in India: Trends and Determinants", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(7), P. 675.



Source (IIPS and Macro international, 2007).

Women's height is a critical indicator of health risks associated with childbirth, as shorter stature often correlates with a smaller pelvic size, which can lead to delivery complications. In extreme cases, this may increase the risk of maternal mortality. Additionally, shorter mothers are more likely to give birth to low-weight infants. In Jammu and Kashmir, 4.8 percent of women are shorter than 145 cm, highlighting their nutritional vulnerability. Another widely used indicator of malnutrition is Body Mass Index (BMI), calculated as $BMI = \text{Weight}/\text{Height}^2$. A BMI below 18.4 indicates underweight, while a BMI above 24.9 signifies overweight or obesity. In Jammu and Kashmir, the prevalence of underweight among women is significant: 24.6 percent are underweight ($BMI < 18.5$), with 15.5 percent being slightly underweight ($BMI 17.0-18.4$) and 9.1 percent moderately to severely underweight ($BMI < 17.0$). Conversely, 16.7 percent of women are classified as overweight or obese ($BMI \geq 25.0$), with 13.4 percent overweight ($BMI 25.0-29.9$) and 3.3 percent obese ($BMI \geq 30.0$). These figures reveal a dual burden of malnutrition among women in the region, with nearly half experiencing either undernutrition or obesity.⁵⁹

Anaemia is another critical diet-related health issue among women in Jammu and Kashmir, marked by a deficiency in red blood cell count below standard levels for age and gender.⁶⁰ Anemia can lead to severe health complications, including maternal mortality, fatigue, weakened physical and cognitive capacity, heightened susceptibility to infections, preterm

⁵⁹ International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International (IIPSa) (2007), *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3a)*, 2005–06, India, Volume I, Mumbai, IIPS, P. 308.

⁶⁰ Kumar NA, Devi DR (2010), *Health of Women in Kerala: Current Status and Emerging Issues*, Kochi Kerala, Centre for Socio-economic and Environmental Studies, Working Paper Series No. 23, P. 15.

birth, low birth weight, and, in children, impaired intellectual and motor development.⁶¹ Among women aged 15-49 in the region, 52.1 percent are anemic, with 37.3 percent having mild anemia, 13.1 percent moderate anemia, and 1.6 percent severe anemia. Anemia in mothers often results in an increased likelihood of anemia in their children.⁶² Women in Jammu and Kashmir also face health challenges such as asthma (897 cases), diabetes (540 cases), and goiter (237 cases). These health risks, exacerbated by malnutrition and disease prevalence, contribute to female mortality and potentially impact the region's gender ratio.⁶³ Consequently, it can be accurately asserted that female mortality, either resulting from malnutrition or due to the prevalence of diseases, may be a factor contributing to the decrease in the female population in the state.

Maternal mortality rates in India have declined from 540 per 100,000 live births in 1998-1999 to approximately 450 per 100,000. However, maternal health remains a critical issue in Jammu and Kashmir, where annually, an estimated 6,000 mothers die from pregnancy-related complications. A study by Dr. Meenakshi Jha, conducted in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, examined maternal mortality across four districts in the region. The study recorded 357 deaths among reproductive-age women (15-49), with 154 directly related to pregnancy. The maternal mortality rates varied significantly, from 418 in Kupwara and 774 in Anantnag to alarmingly high rates of 2,182 in Baramulla and 6,507 in Bandipora. Between 1998 and 2003, Baramulla district alone accounted for over half of these deaths, marking it as an exceptionally high-risk area. The study identified both direct and indirect causes of maternal death. Direct causes included pregnancy-induced hypertension, hemorrhage, cardiomyopathy, sepsis, and obstetric embolism, while indirect causes involved diseases like malaria, obstetric tetanus, and tuberculosis. The lack of healthcare access plays a considerable role, with 60 percent of Kashmir's population lacking basic healthcare services and only 20 percent of pregnant women having access to specialized care. This healthcare deficit, along with high maternal mortality, underscores the limited prioritization of women's health, contributing significantly to female mortality rates in Jammu and Kashmir.⁶⁴

Figure 1.3 provides an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding the availability of adequate health facilities for women in the study area. According to the survey data, only 14.1% of respondents believe that proper health services are available for women, while 39.1%

⁶¹ International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International (IIPSb), (2009). *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3b), India, 2005–06, Jammu and Kashmir*, Mumbai, IIPS, P. 20.

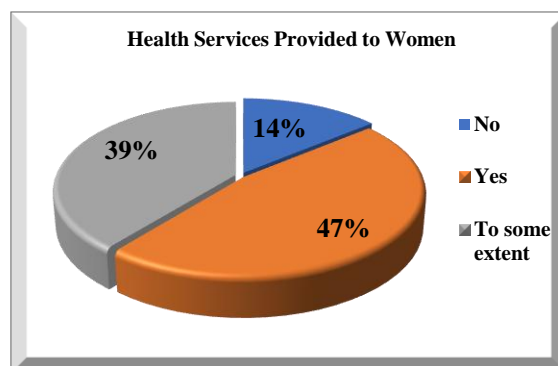
⁶² Ibid., P. 89.

⁶³ Ibid., P. 99.

⁶⁴ *Where Women Die Giving Birth* (2010), *Greater Kashmir*.

explicitly agree that such services are not adequately provided. The largest group, representing 46.8% of respondents, indicated that health services are available only to some extent, highlighting significant gaps in access and quality.

Fig 1.3: Frequency Distribution of Responses Whether Proper Health Services Are provided to women:



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

These findings underscore the need to address health service deficiencies, especially regarding nutritional support for women. Both macro- and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly among pregnant women, can lead to various diseases and disabilities, underscoring the critical importance of improving healthcare services in this region.

A balanced diet is essential for maintaining a strong immune system and overall good health.⁶⁵ The politics of food distribution, rather than any global food scarcity, are to blame for the nutritional deficiencies that cause sickness and health issues.⁶⁶ Proper nutrition not only supports individual health but also contributes to the well-being of families, especially when mothers are in good physical and mental condition. A mother's diet has a direct impact on her child's development; as the saying goes, a child learns from their mother's lap, highlighting the importance of ensuring mothers receive balanced, adequate nutrition for both quantity and quality. In Kashmir, however, women's lower social status often restricts their access to sufficient and nutritious food. This nutritional gap leads to several health risks, including increased difficulty during labor, higher rates of maternal and infant mortality, a greater likelihood of low-birth-weight infants, and reduced productivity. These issues reinforce a cycle of poor health that impacts not only individual women but also the community as a whole. To improve health outcomes for women and girls, comprehensive health interventions are needed

⁶⁵ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, (2007), *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06*, India, Volume I. Mumbai, IIPS.

⁶⁶ White, K. (2006), *The SAGE Dictionary of Health and Society*, United Kingdom, SAGE, PP. 133, 157.

ones that provide equal access to nutrition and health services. It is crucial to address the nutritional needs of women at every stage of life: infancy and childhood, adolescence, and the reproductive years. Women face a higher risk of malnutrition throughout these stages, so focused attention on their dietary and health requirements across the life cycle is essential for breaking this cycle of disadvantage. The strong connection between the health of women and that of their children further emphasizes the need for action. Despite this, government health services in Kashmir continue to fall short, particularly in their support for female patients. Pregnant women, especially, lack access to adequate facilities and resources in government hospitals. Addressing these deficiencies in healthcare is vital for improving maternal and child health outcomes and supporting a healthier, more productive society.

1.6: Authority of Choosing the Husband

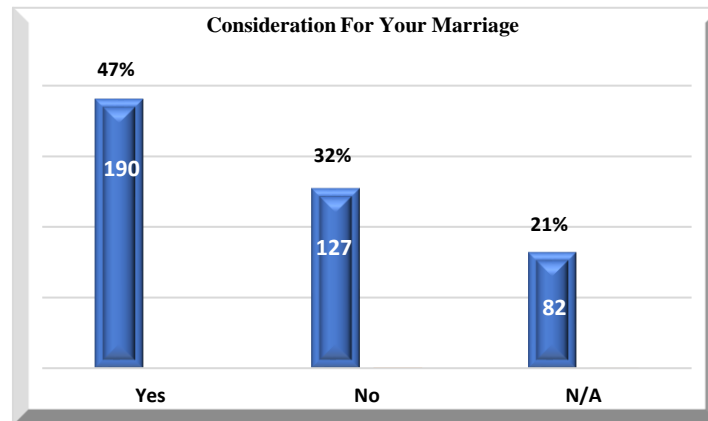
In discussing freedom of choice within Indian marriages, William J. Goode points out that such freedom implies a system of courtship, where individuals have opportunities to meet and interact with various potential spouses before deciding.⁶⁷ However, in the cultural context of Kashmir—a region marked by a diverse cultural and religious landscape—the dynamics of marriage choices can vary significantly across different communities. In many parts of Kashmir, arranged marriages have historically been the norm, with families, particularly parents, playing an active role in selecting a suitable match. Families typically consider factors such as caste, social status, family background, and compatibility to ensure a harmonious union. While arranged marriages are still prevalent, individual experiences, preferences, and the degree of family involvement can differ widely across the region.

In my field study, the "Frequency Distribution of Respondents Regarding Parental Consideration of Their Choice in Marriage" provides insight into how respondents perceive their parents' consideration of their personal preferences in marriage arrangements (Fig 1.4). Among the 399 individuals surveyed, 190 respondents (47.6%) reported that their parents took their preferences into account. This nearly half of the sample suggests a level of parental openness to individual choice in marriage decisions. However, 127 respondents (31.8%) indicated that their parents did not consider their preferences, reflecting a substantial portion of individuals who experience limitations in exercising autonomy in marriage matters. The remaining 82 respondents (20.6%) are unmarried, making this question inapplicable to them. These findings highlight that while a significant proportion of families are willing to consider individual preferences in marriage, a considerable segment still adheres to traditional norms

⁶⁷ Goode W. J. (1963), *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, New York, Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan.

where parental authority prevails. This distribution reflects a gradual but uneven shift toward greater individual autonomy in marriage decisions.

Fig 1.4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Regarding Parental Consideration of Their Choice in Marriage



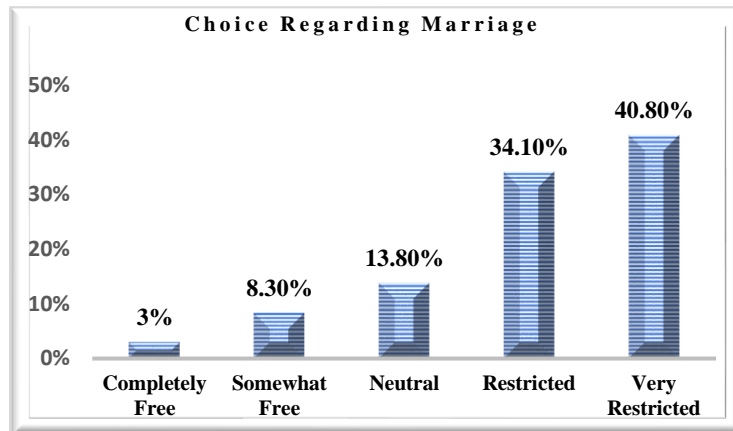
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

The legal system in India, including Jammu and Kashmir, upholds principles of gender equality and individual rights as outlined in the Indian Constitution. Every citizen is entitled to freedom of choice, including the right to select their spouse. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 supports this right, enabling individuals of various religious backgrounds to marry and register their union in Jammu and Kashmir without the need to convert to each other's religion. In addition to legal protections, several women's rights organizations and advocacy groups in Kashmir work actively to promote gender equality and support women's empowerment. These groups focus on raising awareness about women's rights, challenging regressive cultural norms, and promoting education. Their efforts aim to empower women to make autonomous decisions, including those related to marriage. While these legal rights and advocacy efforts have brought progress, it is essential to recognize that social change is gradual, and not all Kashmiri women may fully experience the freedom to choose their life partners. Factors such as societal expectations, cultural norms, and family pressures can still influence marriage decisions, impacting women's autonomy.

In my study, a significant majority of respondents report considerable restrictions regarding their autonomy in marriage choices within the family (Fig 1.5). Specifically, 136 individuals (34.1%) feel "Restricted," and 163 individuals (40.8%) feel "Very Restricted" in expressing their preferences for marriage, together representing over three-quarters of the sample. This suggests that most individuals experience limited freedom in making such a significant life decision. On the other end, only a small portion of respondents—12 individuals (3%)—feel

"Completely Free" to choose their marriage partners without family influence. An additional 33 respondents (8.3%) feel "Somewhat Free," indicating they experience limited autonomy. Meanwhile, 55 respondents (13.8%) selected "Neutral," which may reflect ambivalence or varied levels of freedom depending on specific circumstances or family expectations.

Fig 1.5: To what extent do you feel free to express your choice regarding marriage in your family?



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

These findings underscore that a substantial portion of respondents still face restrictions in expressing personal choices regarding marriage, reflecting the persistence of traditional family dynamics and cultural expectations within the district. This limited autonomy highlights the complex balance between familial authority and individual choice in marriage decisions. While some gradual shifts toward greater autonomy may be observed, these changes appear slow and limited, suggesting that cultural expectations around family involvement in marriage remain strong.

1.7: Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women is a serious issue and a pervasive form of gender-based violence, undermining a woman's identity and sense of self. Rooted in societal power imbalances, traditional gender roles, and a lack of awareness, domestic violence goes beyond physical harm to create emotional and psychological distress. Abusers often employ strategies like isolation, humiliation, and verbal abuse, all intended to erode a woman's self-worth and instill fear, trapping her in a cycle of dependence and disempowerment. Spousal violence, a common form of domestic abuse, is one of the most widespread and globally recognized manifestations of gender-based violence. Its consequences are not only personal but also economic, as it disrupts women's working hours, imposes additional healthcare costs, and

affects society at large.⁶⁸ Research highlights both immediate and long-term impacts on women's and their children's well-being, including chronic mental health issues like depression. Thus, domestic violence significantly threatens the physical, mental, and economic health of women, hindering their full participation in society.⁶⁹

In the past 20 years, the incidence of domestic violence has risen dramatically. According to Shameema Firdous, Chairperson of the State Women's Commission, of the 2,000 reported cases, only 500 were resolved, with over 1,500 still ongoing. In the Jammu and Kashmir divisions, 700 and 800 cases of marital disputes, respectively, were reported, underscoring the prevalence of such abuse. Alongside physical violence, many women also endure subtle forms of humiliation and harassment, leading to severe psychological distress.⁷⁰ Despite legal frameworks designed to protect women, domestic violence remains widespread, underscoring the need for a multifaceted approach to address this issue. Physical abuse, psychological coercion, and sexual harassment contribute to a culture of violence against women, harming their physical, emotional, and mental health. Society must promote legislative change, public education, and awareness campaigns to combat these trends. Support networks for survivors, accessible mental health services, and efforts to challenge harmful gender stereotypes are essential to building a safer environment for women.

According to figures released by a police helpline center in Srinagar, there has been a noticeable rise in distress calls from women reporting domestic violence. In 2019, the helpline recorded 55 calls, a number that more than tripled in 2020 with 177 calls received. Alarming, this upward trend has continued, with over 120 distress calls registered in just the past three months. Despite these rising numbers, activists emphasize that these figures represent only a fraction of the actual cases, as many incidents go unreported. Victims often hesitate to approach authorities due to fear, social stigma, and the complex socio-political situation in the region. Ezabir Ali, a prominent social activist based in Srinagar, underscored the gravity of the situation, stating: "The cases are alarming. Women can't approach police all the time because of the situation here. Women need some other approach in a dignified way and there needs to be strict domestic violence laws and a quick justice system. Every woman in Kashmir has a story to tell, but her lips are sealed due to family pressure and social stigma." She further noted the absence of

⁶⁸ United Nations, (2006), *Ending Violence Against women: From words to action*, Study of the Secretary-General.

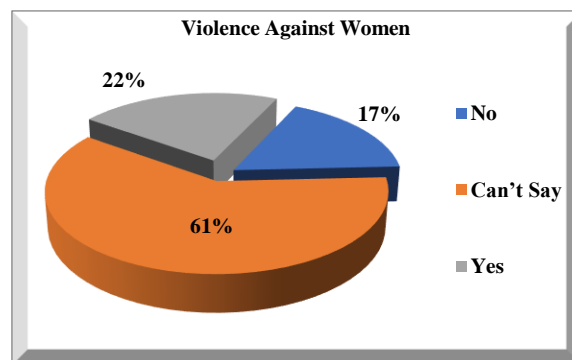
⁶⁹ Garcia-Moreno, C., Jansen, H. A., Ellsberg, M., Heise, L., Watts, C. H., & WHO *Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* Study Team (2006), Prevalence of intimate partner violence: findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence, *Lancet*, London England, 368(9543), PP. 1260–1269.

⁷⁰ DNA, India (2010, April 4), *Jammu And Kashmir Women's Commission Chief Bats for Introduction of Women's Reservation Bill*.

essential support systems for survivors of domestic abuse. There are no functional shelters for women fleeing violent households, and institutions like the Women’s Commission have remained inactive for years.⁷¹

In such an environment, many women find themselves with nowhere to turn for safety or assistance. Field observations reinforce these concerns. A significant number of women are unwilling to disclose the violence they endure, often out of fear, shame, or concern about societal judgment. This reluctance is further evidenced by survey data presented in Figure 1.6. When asked about their experiences with domestic violence, 60.6% of respondents selected the “Can’t Say” option, while only 17.3% responded affirmatively and 22.1% negatively. This overwhelming ambiguity suggests deep-rooted societal and familial pressures that silence victims and hinder open discussion. The data points to an urgent need for institutional reform, community-based support mechanisms, and awareness programs to empower women to speak out and seek justice without fear.

Fig 1.6: Frequency Distribution of the Responses “Whether Respondents have faced Violence at Their Houses



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

For comprehensive prevention of domestic violence, society must develop institutions and mechanisms to address all forms of violence against women, including workplace harassment and dowry-related abuse. These institutions should work to prevent violence, rehabilitate survivors, and take legal action against perpetrators. Only by addressing the root causes of domestic violence can we move toward a future where women live free from fear, prejudice, and trauma.

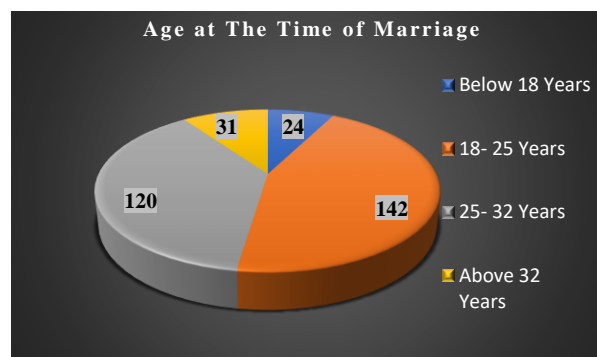
1.8 Age at Marriage

⁷¹ Fareed, R. (2021, April 20), *Kashmir: The Link Between Conflict and Domestic Violence*, DW.

Despite legal restrictions, child marriages remain prevalent across India, with particularly high rates in certain states. For instance, child marriage rates in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and West Bengal are alarmingly high, with percentages ranging from 14.8% to 17.6%. In contrast, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir is notably better. Only 0.2% of total marriages in Kashmir involve minors, and while 35.2% of marriages occur before the bride turns 18, some districts, including Anantnag, Budgam, Baramulla, Kupwara, and Pulwama, report no cases of child marriages. Notably, Kupwara and Pulwama have recorded zero marriages under the age of 18. Additionally, 50% of marriages in Jammu and Kashmir occur when individuals are over 20 years old, suggesting a trend toward marrying later.⁷²

To further understand marriage age trends, Figure 1.7 presents the distribution of ages at the time of marriage within a sample of 399 individuals. The age groups are as follows: below 18 years, 18–25 years, 25–32 years, and above 32 years. The findings indicate that: 6.0% (24 individuals) married below the age of 18. The majority, or 35.6% (142 individuals), married between the ages of 18 and 25. A significant proportion, 30.1% (120 individuals), married between the ages of 25 and 32. 7.7% (31 individuals) married after the age of 32. In total, over two-thirds of respondents (66.7%) married between the ages of 18 and 32, while a smaller percentage either married before 18 or after 32. Additionally, 20.6% (82 individuals) reported being unmarried or marked their marital status as "N/A," indicating that a segment of the population is choosing to marry later or remains unmarried.

Table 1.7: Frequency distribution of respondents by age at the time of marriage.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

In recent years, Kashmir has witnessed a quiet but significant social shift: the growing trend of late marriages. Once characterized by early unions in the late teens or early twenties, Kashmiri society is now experiencing rising marriage ages across both rural and urban areas. This change

⁷² K Kamal., Misra, L. J. Huber, Kamal K. M., and Janet H. L. (Eds.) (2007), *Recent Studies on Indian Women*, Rawat, PP. 109-122.

is driven by multiple factors educational aspirations, prolonged conflict, economic instability, evolving gender roles, and exposure to global norms through the diaspora. Higher education, especially among women, has played a central role, promoting independence and informed decision-making, but also delaying marriage. Economic hardship, exacerbated by years of conflict, has made traditional, elaborate weddings and dowry customs financially burdensome, causing further delays. Additionally, Western influences and migration have introduced alternative views on marriage, prioritizing personal growth and financial stability. While late marriages bring benefits such as emotional maturity and career stability, they also come with challenges: reduced reproductive windows, social stigma especially for women and demographic concerns like declining birth rates and workforce shortages. Societal pressure intensifies with age, often leading to psychological distress. Critics argue that excessive societal expectations and outdated customs place unnecessary weight on marriage. There's a growing need to redefine marriage as a balanced, personal choice rather than a compulsory milestone. Ultimately, the trend toward late marriages signals a society in transition one attempting to reconcile tradition with modern realities.⁷³

This trend toward postponed marriages is becoming increasingly common in Kashmir, with researchers attributing it to socioeconomic challenges and high unemployment rates that delay the establishment of independent households. The socioeconomic difficulties and rising unemployment in Kashmir are reflected in the late marriages since they prohibit people from starting their own independent homes.

1.9: Practice of Dowry:

Anthropological studies on marriage and kinship dynamics, particularly in northern India, reveal that hypergamous marriage practices often reinforce unequal exchanges between families, where the flow of gifts or assets primarily moves from the bride's family to the groom's family. This pattern effectively positions the bride as a form of chattel, belonging to her husband and his family. In this context, dowry is viewed as a transfer of property with varying stakes and authority held by different family members, irrespective of gender.⁷⁴ Legally, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and its amendments define dowry as any transfer of property or valuable assets given directly or indirectly by one party to a marriage, or by the parents of either party, or any other individual, in connection with the marriage, whether before, during, or after

⁷³ Bazaz, N. (2024, February 5), *Late Marriages in Kashmir: A Social Trend with Complex Implications*, Rising Kashmir.

⁷⁴ S. Ursula (1984), *Dowry in North India: Its Consequences for Women*; Edited by R. Hirschon (ed.) *Women and Poverty Women as Property*, London, Croom Helm, PP 62-64.

the marriage. Notably, under Muslim personal law, the definition excludes Mahar, or dower (Shariat). In Jammu and Kashmir, the Dowry Restraint Act of 1960 reinforces this prohibition, aligning with the national legislation.⁷⁵

The practice of dowry among Muslims in Kashmir was essentially nonexistent. The dowry system among the Muslims of Srinagar, according to Khan, dates back to the time of Bakshi G. M., a previous P. M. of the J&K state. During this time, families received a staggering amount of cash and favors from the dominant party and were provided dowry to advance in the social order. The dowry practice had practically reached legal status among pundits.⁷⁶ A man who did well in college was a very wanted bridegroom, and the value tended to climb as gradually as demand, notwithstanding the increasing progression of Western education amongst the pandits. The tradition of dowry, according to Dabla, is unquestionably popular in the Kashmir valley. Estimates show that dowry predominated in 62.08 percent of weddings occurring in Kashmir.⁷⁷ Unlike the rest of the country, Jammu and Kashmir sees a widespread prevalence of dowry, serving as a common thread between urban and rural regions in terms of income disparity. While not exclusive to the higher income bracket, the urban areas of the state and the lower income groups exhibit a higher incidence of this practice. Dowries, both in monetary and in-kind forms, are exchanged, with the latter consisting of items like gold, silverware, furniture, electronics, and cash being the preferred choice. These in-kind dowries are presented to the bride's in-laws during her wedding. As per the researcher's survey findings, the dowry system has led to delayed marriages for girls and women, impacting their marital prospects. Consequently, the negative consequences of the dowry tradition extend to the status of girls and their reproductive age period.

1.1.1: Economic Status of Women in Kashmir

In India, women constitute 48.04% of the population, with men making up 51.96%, while in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), women account for 47% of the total population. This demonstrates their significant role in the region's socio-economic fabric and contribution to its development. Across sectors like healthcare, engineering, politics, and defense, women are achieving new heights, marking their presence in the nation's progress. The constitutional commitment to gender equality emphasizes the state's responsibility to address the socio-economic and political challenges faced by women, guaranteeing equal rights, protection under the law, and fostering an environment where women's dignity is respected and upheld. Empowering women

⁷⁵ Wani Afzal (1996), *Kashmir University Law Review*, PP. 72-82.

⁷⁶ Khan M. I., (1999), *History of Srinagar*, Cosmos, Srinagar, P-114.

⁷⁷ Dabla, Bashir Ahmad, (2007), *Multi-dimensional Problems of Women in Kashmir*, Gyan, PP. 70-73.

in Kashmir is a multifaceted endeavor, seeking to provide them with equal opportunities and enabling them to fully realize their potential through freedom of choice and active societal engagement. True empowerment is rooted in a process where women analyze and articulate their needs, challenging existing gender norms to become active agents of social change and development.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) highlights persistent challenges for women in J&K, including declining nutritional indicators and significant gender disparities in employment. Only 21.9% of women aged 15 to 49 are employed, in contrast to 68.2% of men, making J&K the fourth-lowest in Northern India for women's employment. Nonetheless, there are positive trends; married women's participation in household decision-making has increased to 81.6% in 2019–2020, particularly in health and family matters. Property ownership among women has also risen, from 33.1% in NFHS-4 to 57.3% in NFHS-5, with notable growth in rural areas. Moreover, women in cash-paying jobs increased from 12.3% in NFHS-4 to 18.4% in NFHS-5, indicating gradual progress in women's economic involvement.⁷⁸

Women's economic autonomy is essential for their overall well-being, yet they often work in low-paying, informal sectors due to limited resources, skills, and opportunities. Consequently, women's lower income diminishes their standard of living and quality of life. Employment among women in J&K generally falls into two categories:

- Roles requiring minimal technical skills,
- Labor-intensive work.

Although women significantly contribute to the state's economy, their labor remains undervalued, with limited access to resources and restricted recognition for their efforts. Prevailing social norms often view women as supplementary income earners, minimizing their substantial economic contributions. Furthermore, limited bureaucratic knowledge hinders women's ability to navigate complex systems, encapsulating their struggle as “playing by the rules but losing the game.” Historically, women in Kashmir played an active role in social and economic activities, though they often lacked formal recognition. In Sayyid and Hojja families, urban women were restricted to domestic roles, while rural women contributed labor in agriculture and handicrafts. Women in artisan families supported their husbands' work, and those in rural areas worked alongside family in fields. Despite their significant involvement, women rarely achieved economic independence or a higher social status.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Press Trust of India, (2022, June 9), Only 21.9% Women Currently Employed In J&K: Survey, *Kashmir Observer LLP*.

⁷⁹ Bilkees Shafia, (2018), Role and Changing Status of Women in Kashmir, *International Journal of Academic Research and Development, IJAR* Vol. 3, Issue 5, PP. 76-78

The 2011 Census reveals a decrease in women's proportion of the J&K population, down from 47.15% in 2001 to 46.88% in 2011, and a decline in the sex ratio from 892 to 883 females per 1,000 males. In 2001, the labor force comprised 37.54 lakh workers, with 22.45% being women, mostly engaged as cultivators or in domestic work.⁸⁰ The rising economy of Kashmir greatly benefits from the contributions of women. In 2001, the total workforce in Jammu and Kashmir comprises 4.323 million individuals, with main workers making up 2.644 million (61.77%) and marginal workers 1.679 million (38.83%). Among them, female workers represent only 26.09% of the workforce, with women accounting for merely 12.8% of main workers in Jammu and Kashmir, compared to 47.02% of marginal workers.⁸¹

Based on data compiled from various issues of the Census of India, the occupational structure in Jammu and Kashmir has undergone significant transformation over the decades. In 1961, the primary sector (including agriculture and allied activities) overwhelmingly dominated the workforce, engaging 78.62% of the population. However, by 2011, this share had declined sharply to 43.10%, indicating a substantial shift away from agrarian-based employment. Conversely, the tertiary sector (services) witnessed a marked increase, rising from 12.35% in 1961 to 48.5% in 2011, reflecting the growing importance of education, health, transport, administration, and other services in the region's economy. The secondary sector (industry and manufacturing) saw fluctuations starting at 9.03% in 1961, peaking at 14.27% in 1981, and then dropping to 6.2% in 2001 before rising slightly to 8.4% in 2011. This sectoral shift highlights the broader structural transformation of the economy in Jammu and Kashmir, moving from a predominantly agrarian economy to one increasingly driven by services. The number of cultivators shows the consistent decline from 1961-2011 and the direct labor absorption capacity of agriculture during the five decades of planning is reduced by one half. It is interesting to note that from 1961 to 2011, the sharp fall from 78.62 percent to 43.10 percent in primary sector took place which has been compensated by a sharp and unprecedented increase in the tertiary sector by 12.35 percent to 48.5 percent. The agriculture can be attributed to sharp decline in the size of holdings during 60s as compared to 50s and absence of industrialization during the said decade.⁸² Jammu and Kashmir witnessed rapid rate of population. Work force

⁸⁰ S. Kavita (2013), Enhancing Women's Empowerment Through Capacity Building Programs: Reflections from Jammu And Kashmir, *International Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR)*, Vol. 2, No.4, P. 82.

⁸¹ Sarwer Ghulam (2017), Women empowerment: Issues and challenges in Jammu and Kashmir, *International Journal of Social Relevance & Concern*, VOL. 5, Issue. 5, P. 10.

⁸² Khan, B. A. (2018). Demography of Jammu and Kashmir in Historical Perspective, *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 7(3). ISSN: 2249-6319, P. 151

increases with the increase of population; however, the pace of workforce is very low than population between the periods of 1981 to 2011.

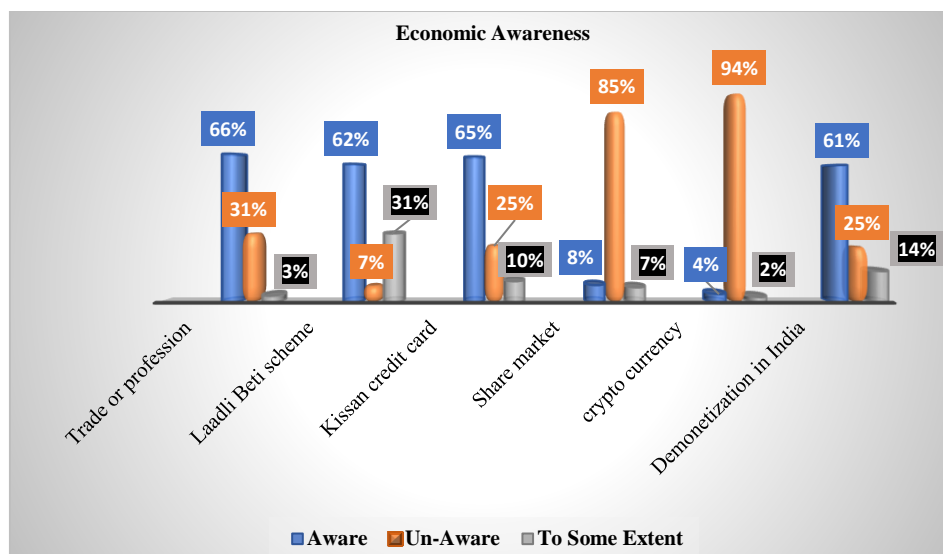
There has been a striking rise in the number of women working beyond the four walls of the home in both urban and rural areas. Men face fierce competition in the “employment market” from this group. The number of women working in numerous areas is rising steadily. For instance, women work as educationalists, telephone operators, nurses, medical professionals, advocates, bank personnel, clerks, typists, receptionists, and so forth. Since 1991, women have been enlisted in the armed forces, air force, and navy, but in fewer numbers.⁸³ To protect women's economic interests and rights, the government has enacted a variety of socioeconomic laws that address problems such as property rights or inheritance, equivalent pay, working environments, maternity benefits, and job safety. Without a doubt, all governments have included women's development in their development plans. The standing of women in numerous fields has greatly improved because of these initiatives, although there is still an imbalance. Women are now almost aware of the programs and policies that the government is providing, as is evident according to the below data from my study.

1.1.2: Economic Awareness Among Women

Figure 1.8 shows the frequency distribution of economic awareness among women. Regarding awareness of their right to follow any trade or profession, out of the total sample of 399 respondents, 265 (66.4%) reported being aware, 122 (30.6%) were unaware, and 12 (3.0%) were somewhat aware. Concerning the Laadli Beti scheme, 247 respondents (61.9%) reported being aware of the scheme, while 29 (7.3%) were unaware, and 132 (30.8%) were somewhat aware. Regarding awareness of the benefits of a Kissan credit card, 260 respondents (65.2%) were aware, 101 (25.3%) were unaware, and 38 (9.5%) were somewhat aware. In relation to awareness about the share market, only 31 respondents (7.8%) were aware, 341 (85.5%) were unaware, and 27 (6.8%) were somewhat aware. When asked about awareness of cryptocurrency, 15 respondents (3.8%) were aware, 374 (93.7%) were unaware, and 10 (2.5%) were somewhat aware. Finally, regarding awareness of demonetization in India, 245 (61.4%) respondents were aware, 98 (24.6%) were unaware, and 56 (14.0%) were somewhat aware.

Fig 1.8: Frequency distribution of economic awareness among women

⁸³Sharma, Y.K. (2007), *Indian Society: Issues and Problems*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, Agra.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Jammu & Kashmir, a border state in the Himalayas, has been embroiled in a protracted conflict that has profoundly affected the lives of its residents, particularly women and children. The indiscriminate violence associated with this ongoing strife has resulted in the destruction of countless homes, leaving many women to grapple with the loss of husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers—individuals who traditionally served as the primary providers and caretakers within their families. As the conflict has escalated, a significant number of men have lost their lives, leading to an increase in female-headed households. These women are now forced to assume new responsibilities, often engaging in labor to sustain themselves and nurture their children amidst dire circumstances.⁸⁴ The long-standing violence has transformed many married women into widows, while others have become “half widows,” a term used to describe those whose husbands have disappeared under mysterious circumstances, leaving them in a state of uncertainty regarding their spouses' fates. Widows and half-widows face considerable challenges due to insufficient support systems. Many of them are compelled to work in informal and unstructured sectors, where they often encounter barriers such as illiteracy, limited knowledge, and a lack of skills and resources. As a result, they receive meager wages, which not only undermines their overall quality of life but also significantly diminishes their standards of living.⁸⁵

1.1.3 Non-Payment of Maher:

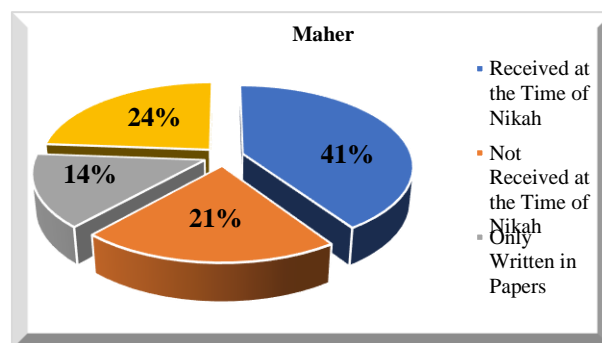
⁸⁴ W. Charu, (2004), *Women: Silent Victims in the Armed conflict*, Serial, P. 12.

⁸⁵ S. Kavita (2013), Enhancing Women's Empowerment Through Capacity Building Programs: Reflections from Jammu And Kashmir, *International Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR)* Vol. 2, No. 4, P. 83.

Maher, a customary Islamic dower, is a crucial element of Muslim marriages, providing social and financial stability for women. It is categorized into two forms: instant Maher and deferred Maher. Instant Maher is determined at the time of Nikah, and the husband is obligated to provide it immediately during the marriage ceremony. In contrast, deferred Maher specifies an amount either in money or in kind that is agreed upon during the wedding, with the husband responsible for fulfilling this obligation at a later date. Despite the importance of Maher in safeguarding a woman's social and economic security, many women face challenges related to its non-payment. Research indicates that non-compliance with Maher agreements is particularly prevalent among women from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A survey conducted across various societal groups reveals significant discrepancies in the fulfilment of Maher obligations.

As illustrated in Figure 1.9, which details the status of Maher provided by husbands, the findings from 399 cases demonstrate diverse outcomes regarding Maher payments. Specifically, 162 individuals (40.6%) reported receiving their Maher at the time of Nikah, indicating a fulfillment of this marital obligation. Conversely, 84 cases (21.1%) did not receive Maher during the ceremony, reflecting unfulfilled agreements. Additionally, 58 instances (14.5%) noted that Maher was documented only in writing, suggesting a commitment that lacked immediate monetary exchange. Furthermore, 95 cases (23.8%) remained uncertain or undisclosed about their Maher status, highlighting the ambiguity surrounding these arrangements. These statistics underscore the varying circumstances and challenges associated with the fulfillment and documentation of Maher within marital agreements, particularly in regions where economic and social factors may hinder compliance.

Fig No.1.9: Statement Showing Status of Maher



Source: Field work by Researcher

1.1.4 Inequity in Inheritance Rights

The preservation of women's homes and land is intrinsically linked to inheritance rights, which play a significant role in the distribution of wealth within society. This issue highlights some of the structural causes behind the disproportionately high rates of homelessness and poverty experienced by women globally. In Jammu and Kashmir, a woman's right to inheritance is systematically disregarded. Upon marriage, she typically receives a few jewelry sets, some outfits, and a bridal dress, but these items are often inadequate for her economic security. Consequently, she faces considerable challenges and hardships imposed by her in-laws. Customarily, a woman must reside with her in-laws, where she is subject to their authority alongside that of her husband. This arrangement strips her of independence, autonomy, and the ability to make choices. Women who attempt to assert their rights may find themselves forced to return to their families, while those with supportive husbands often face inadequate housing options either renting an apartment or being allocated a room in the in-law's home, without any property rights to ancestral property. Such circumstances can lead to feelings of embarrassment and devaluation. Although laws exist to protect women's rights, they often lack the strength necessary to challenge the entrenched societal norms that men exploit to elevate their social standing. The deeply rooted traditions in Kashmiri society contribute to widespread gender discrimination against women.⁸⁶

The legal framework surrounding inheritance in Kashmir has historically reflected these gender biases, particularly through the application of Sharia law, which governs personal status matters, including inheritance.⁸⁷ However, the legal landscape has evolved, notably with the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Succession Act in 2005, which introduced significant changes to inheritance laws. This act applies to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains, while Muslim women remain subject to Islamic Personal Law. Traditionally, under these laws, daughters were entitled to only half the share of their brothers in inheritance. Efforts to challenge and reform these laws have been made, with the Jammu and Kashmir High Court emphasizing the need for a gender-just interpretation of Islamic inheritance principles, upholding constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider the broader socio-cultural context in Kashmir, where traditional customs and practices often influence the practical application of these laws. As a result, despite legal reforms, customary practices frequently hinder the inheritance rights of women.

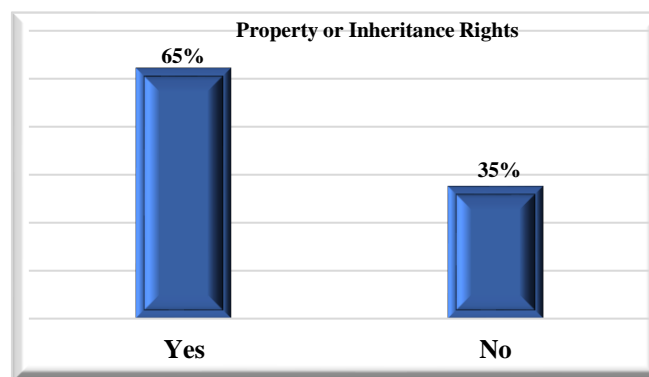
⁸⁶ Dabla B. A., Sandeep. K. N., Khurshid-ul-Islam (2000), *Gender Discrimination in the Kashmir Valley; A Survey of Budgam and Baramulla Districts*, Gyan, Delhi, P. 91.

⁸⁷ Dabla B. A. (2010), *Sociological Papers on Kashmir*, Vol.1, JAY KAY, Srinagar, P. 206.

In summary, while significant changes have been made to inheritance laws in Jammu and Kashmir particularly for non-Muslim communities the situation for Muslim women remains complex, balancing religious and constitutional principles. Legal reforms strive to promote gender equality; however, social and cultural factors continue to shape inheritance practices in the region. Historically, women in Kashmir have faced significant challenges concerning inheritance rights, particularly regarding property and asset inheritance. Traditional customs and religious doctrines often grant women a smaller share of property than men, creating a gender disparity that adversely affects women's economic freedom and financial security in the region.

Figure 1.10 illustrates this disparity in inheritance rights and presents the results of a survey question regarding, traditional norms and family expectations affect their access to property or inheritance rights. This data reveals that family expectations strongly influence women's access to property and inheritance rights. A substantial 261 respondents (65.4%) indicated that traditional norms restrict their access to these rights, while only 138 (34.6%) reported no such impact. This data underscores the need for increased awareness and advocacy around inheritance rights and property ownership for women in Kashmir.

Fig 1.10: Do Traditional Norms and Family Expectations Affect Your Access to Property or Inheritance Rights?



1.10: Challenges to Empowerment of Women in Kashmir

The empowerment of women in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir faces numerous challenges that hinder progress toward gender equality. Despite ongoing efforts by both union and state governments to improve the status of women, significant barriers persist. Key obstacles include:

- Illiteracy and ignorance, a high rate of illiteracy among women limits their awareness of rights and opportunities, preventing them from participating fully in societal and economic activities.
- Early marriage, the prevalence of early marriage curtails educational and professional opportunities for young women, reinforcing cycles of dependency and limiting their autonomy.
- Lack of decision-making authority, women often have minimal influence over personal and familial decisions, which undermines their agency and reinforces traditional gender roles.
- Violence against women, domestic and societal violence remains a critical issue, creating an environment of fear that inhibits women from asserting their rights and seeking empowerment.
- Customs and cultural practices, deep-rooted customs and cultural norms often prioritize male preferences and roles, perpetuating discrimination and marginalization of women in various aspects of life.
- Lack of political participation, women are underrepresented in political spheres, which limits their ability to advocate for policies that address their needs and rights.
- Low status of women, the overall perception of women's roles in society contributes to their marginalization, affecting their self-esteem and potential.
- Inadequate healthcare delivery systems, limited access to healthcare, particularly reproductive health services, poses significant risks to women's physical and mental well-being.

These challenges collectively serve as significant barriers to women's empowerment in Kashmir, perpetuating their low status in society. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to secure equal opportunities and rights for women across all sectors. Only through comprehensive and sustained interventions can the barriers to women's empowerment be dismantled, fostering a more equitable society.

Chapter-2

History of Political Developments in Jammu and Kashmir after Indian Independence

Women in Kashmir have played significant roles across various societal domains, including political, social, and cultural spheres. However, their contributions, particularly in politics, have often been overlooked. Throughout the freedom struggle and continuing into the present day, representations of women in literature predominantly portray them as sufferers' daughters, mothers, or wives. While this portrayal captures a part of their reality, it fails to acknowledge the full spectrum of their contributions. Many women bravely left their homes to join the movement against Dogra rule, standing alongside men as equal partners in the fight for Kashmir's liberation. This spirit of commitment continues today as they resist current state oppression. In addition to their active participation in the liberation movement, women have also engaged in politics as public servants. Following the incorporation of the princely state into India in 1947, women's organizations played a pivotal role in supporting local and regional efforts aimed at promoting peace during the turmoil of partition.⁸⁸

Despite the lack of prominent female political leaders in contemporary Kashmir, women contribute daily acts of courage and sacrifice that are integral to the region's history. Their stories, often written during moments of adversity such as during cordon and search operations, locally referred to as crackdowns are frequently overlooked by the media. Kashmiri women have played a vital role in leading processions, organizing protest rallies, and demonstrating against various forms of oppression. In fact, their contributions to recent history may even surpass those of their male counterparts. Unfortunately, historians have not adequately recognized the significance of women's involvement in the freedom struggle; the names of female political volunteers from the 1930s and 1940s remain absent from our historical narrative.⁸⁹ Today, women are beginning to assert their rights and presence in politics more than ever before. This shift in traditional dynamics presents new opportunities for the advancement of democracy and regional harmony. Women engaged in civic groups and government roles possess the potential to guide the region towards a peaceful and diverse democracy, contributing to broader international efforts for lasting peace.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Seema Kazi (2022), Women, Gender Politics, and Resistance in Kashmir, 18(1) *Socio-Legal Review* P. 95, PP. 102-116.

⁸⁹ G. Muhammad, Z. (2007), *Kashmir in War and Diplomacy*, Gulshan, P. 56.

⁹⁰ Khan Nyla Ali, (2015), How Women Activists can Help Jammu and Kashmir Make Progress in Democracy and peace, *The Milli Gazette*.

Historically, however, women in Kashmir have faced diminished roles in political and decision-making positions. This has resulted in a tolerance for policies and practices that fail to address their needs. Prominent figures in Kashmiri politics, such as Begum Sheikh Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, have carved out space primarily due to their familial political backgrounds. Begum Sheikh Abdullah, the wife of Sheikh Abdullah, served as a member of parliament twice, while Mehbooba Mufti, the president of the People's Democratic Party and daughter of former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mufti Sayeed, has also emerged in politics.⁹¹ The roots of contemporary communal fears regarding the preservation of Kashmiri identity can be traced back to historical events, notably to 1586 when Mughal Emperor Akbar eliminated the semi-autonomous Kashmiri domain as part of his efforts to impose direct Mughal rule.⁹² However, structured political conflict in Kashmir only began in earnest in 1989, significantly impacting women's political participation, which remains much lower than in other Indian states. This disparity in participation can be traced across three significant historical periods. The first period spans from 1846, with the formation of the geopolitical entity of Jammu and Kashmir through the Treaty of Amritsar, to 1947, marked by growing dissatisfaction among the people of the Kashmir Valley with the rule of a monarch from the plains of Jammu. The second phase extends from 1947 to 1987, and the third chronicles events from 1987 to the present, highlighting an organized political crisis that affects both men and, more significantly, women. In the absence of female politicians, the concerns and aspirations of women remain subordinated to a male-dominated Kashmiri polity and a patriarchal militant leadership that often marginalizes gender considerations. To understand the environment and the reasons for the low involvement of Kashmiri women in politics, it is essential to examine the region's political history, particularly after 1947.

2.1 Position of Kashmir on the Eve of Partition 1947

Prior to independence in 1947, the Indian subcontinent comprised regions directly governed by Britain, including 11 provinces and tribal areas, along with approximately 562 princely states (though some sources cite figures like 565 or 584). These princely states were dispersed across the subcontinent, collectively accounting for 45.3% of its land area and housing an estimated population of 99 million. The influence of these princely rulers varied greatly; some wielded considerable authority, such as the Nizam of Hyderabad, whose domain had nearly 17 million

⁹¹ Sidhu, et al (2007), *Kashmir: New Voices New Approaches*, New Delhi, Viva, P. 89.

⁹² W. G. Mohammad, (2012), *Political Assertion of Kashmiri Identity: In the Parchment of Kashmir*, History Society and Polity, ed., Nyla Ali Khan, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, P. 126.

residents and was comparable in size to Germany. In contrast, other princely states were relatively small in both territory and population. The vast majority of these states were ruled by Hindu monarchs, with only about six being governed by Muslim rulers.⁹³ The princely states were generally governed under British paramountcy agreements, which allowed the Indian princes to manage their territories autonomously while adhering to British directives. Once British paramountcy ended, the rulers of these states effectively gained independence.⁹⁴ They had the option to join either of the two newly formed dominions or remain independent as a sovereign state.⁹⁵ The Indian Independence Act, which led to the partition of the nation, neglected to define the future relationship between the princely states and the two newly created dominions.⁹⁶ There were 562 princely states in total, some of which existed in name only, as they were extremely small, covering just a few acres of land, with populations of only a few hundred people and annual revenues as low as 500 rupees. For example, in Kathiawar later known as Saurashtra there were 222 states and estates, or 449 units when counted based on the number of shareholders. Among the 562 states, 140 were relatively significant in size, and their rulers were classified as fully sovereign. The largest of these states were Hyderabad and Kashmir, each spanning over 80,000 square miles, which is larger than England and only slightly smaller than the entire United Kingdom.⁹⁷ In most instances, their decision was influenced by their geographical location, and the process of accession was relatively straightforward. Naturally, states with a Muslim majority became part of Pakistan, while those with a non-Muslim majority aligned with India.

The accession of most princely states to India and Pakistan proceeded without major issues, with the exceptions of Jammu and Kashmir in the north, Hyderabad in the south, and Junagadh in Kathiawar in the west. These three states, which did not immediately accede to either of the two dominions, shared a common characteristic: in each case, the ruler belonged to a different community than the majority of the population. In Junagadh, the ruler was Muslim, while the majority of the population was Hindu, and they wished to join Pakistan. Similarly, the Nizam of Hyderabad, where the majority of the population was non-Muslim, sought to maintain independence for the state, though both states ultimately acceded to India. Jammu and Kashmir, the largest of the states that did not immediately join either dominion, was of significant

⁹³ Korbelt Josef (1954), *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton: Princeton University, P. 56.

⁹⁴ Gupta, M. M., (2007), *Troubled Kashmir*, Srinagar: Gulshan, P. 34.

⁹⁵ Nath, Birbal (1998), *Kashmir the Nuclear Flashpoint*, New Delhi: Manas, P. 44.

⁹⁶ Gupta, M. M., (2007), *Troubled Kashmir*, Srinagar: Gulshan, P. 34.

⁹⁷ Birbal Nath, *Op. Cit.*, P. 57.

strategic importance to both India and Pakistan due to its location.⁹⁸ The situation in Jammu and Kashmir was entirely different from that of Junagadh and Hyderabad, where the rulers were Hindu but the populations were predominantly Muslim. In contrast to Junagadh and Hyderabad, where the majority Hindus clearly favored joining India, there was no clear agreement among the people of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the future of their state.

At this pivotal moment, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was plagued by indecision. With 80% of the state's population being Muslim, there was a strong desire to join Pakistan due to its geographical proximity and the trade and communication routes that connected the region to Pakistan. This likely contributed to the raising of the Pakistani green flag at Kashmir's post and telegraph offices on 14 August 1947. Given these important factors, Maharaja Hari Singh opted for independence, as, despite being a Hindu, he did not wish to align with India. At this critical point, Lord Mountbatten visited Kashmir to persuade the Maharaja to join India, followed by Mahatma Gandhi, who arrived on 1 August 1947 and held a meeting with Hari Singh and his wife, Tara Devi, at the palace. Gandhi's visit led to several internal administrative changes, including the dismissal of Ram Chand Kak from his position as Prime Minister on 11 August 1947, with Thakur Janak Singh appointed in his place. Ram Chand Kak was a strong advocate for an independent Kashmir and had been urging the Maharaja to pursue this path.⁹⁹ By August 15, 1947, the Maharaja had not reached any conclusion. The geographical location of Jammu and Kashmir, along with the prevailing circumstances of the Partition, complicated this decision. The Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, faced a daunting choice and was understandably reluctant to accede to either India or Pakistan. He was apprehensive about the potential tensions and communal passions that either decision might incite. In this context, he tasked his newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister, B.L. Batra, with communicating his approach to the press in New Delhi. Sheikh Abdullah, a prominent political figure in the state, envisioned a neutral, independent status for Jammu and Kashmir, drawing inspiration from Switzerland. Upon his release from prison, he expressed a willingness to collaborate with the Maharaja to establish this independent status.¹⁰⁰

However, a fundamental disagreement emerged between them regarding whether the final decision about the state's future should rest with an elected government or remain in the hands of the Maharaja. This divergence led to a rift between Abdullah and Hari Singh. As tensions escalated, the Maharaja struggled to grasp the gravity of the situation and delayed addressing

⁹⁸ Ibid., P. 47.

⁹⁹ Bhat, Sanaullah (1998), *Kashmir Testament*, Delhi: Bright, PP. 49-50.

¹⁰⁰ Team Frontline, (2022, August 10), 1947: Maharaja Hari Singh signs Instrument of Accession, *The Hindu Frontline*.

the critical issue of accession. He proposed a standstill agreement with both India and Pakistan to maintain the status quo. However, shortly after signing the agreement, Pakistan's posture shifted, leading to an economic blockade against Jammu and Kashmir, which was soon followed by a tribal invasion. Key routes, including Srinagar-Rawalpindi and Jammu-Sialkot, were effectively closed off. By early September, incursions from Pakistan had begun, prompting the Maharaja to recognize the imminent danger. In response, he dismissed Pandit Ram Chandra Kak and appointed Mehar Chand Mahajan, a judge from the Punjab High Court, as his new Prime Minister. Sheikh Abdullah assured the people of Kashmir that he would not compromise their interests in light of Pakistan's enmity and India's friendship with leaders such as Nehru and Gandhi. Despite his personal opinions about Pakistan, he acknowledged that the country had become a reality that could not be ignored.¹⁰¹

Once Jammu and Kashmir was incorporated into India, the Indian government assumed responsibility for essential governance aspects, including communications, defense, and external affairs. The power to legislate on these matters was transferred to the Union Parliament, while the Maharaja retained control over the state's internal administration. An emergency administration was established under Sheikh Abdullah's leadership. Initially, the Maharaja intended for this administration to operate under a council of ministers accountable to him; however, this arrangement proved to be unworkable. Over time, Sheikh Abdullah consolidated both administrative and political authority, gaining control over the National Conference and the political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir. He advocated for a monarchical system with self-rule, supporting limited accession to India and asserting that the people of Kashmir should have the final say in defining the state's political future.¹⁰² Abdullah argued that the unique, diverse nature of Jammu and Kashmir characterized by its various regions, languages, cultures, and ethnicities would be better safeguarded within the framework of India, a secular, democratic, and socialist republic. In contrast, he believed that a theocratic Pakistan would not afford the same protections. Moreover, he deemed independence impractical, citing a lack of reliable guarantees to safeguard the region's unique identity and interests.¹⁰³

2.2: Nehru's Kashmir

Initially, Sardar Patel, the first Home Minister of independent India, was not particularly enthusiastic about integrating Kashmir with India. Conversely, Prime Minister Nehru displayed

¹⁰¹ Schofield V. (2004), *Kashmir in Conflict: India Pakistan and the Unending War* (1st Indian), Viva, P. 22.

¹⁰² Mohan Krishen, & Krishen Kaul (1999), *Kashmir Constitutional History and Documents*, (2nd rev. edi, Vol. 2), Jammu, Jay Kay, P. 174.

¹⁰³ Wani G. M. (1993), *Kashmir Politics: Problems and Prospects*, Ashish, PP. 35-36.

a deep interest in Kashmir, possibly due to his ancestral roots his forebear Raj Kaul was a Kashmiri Pandit, reflecting longstanding familial ties to the region. During the Cold War period, Britain and the United States exerted significant effort to ensure Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. However, a resolute diplomat like Pandit Nehru stood firmly against global powers, advocating for Kashmir's integration with India based on moral principles. Kashmir's strategic location, bordering Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan, and its proximity to the Soviet Union, made it geopolitically critical. Nehru was acutely aware that losing Kashmir could result in American dominance over Pakistan, potentially leading to a military intervention in Kashmir to counter the Soviet Union. While Nehru remained steadfast in his determination to keep Kashmir within India, there was a period when Patel reportedly believed that Kashmir's merger with Pakistan might be a viable solution. This assertion has been attributed to P. Shankar, Patel's personal secretary.¹⁰⁴

Patel altered his stance on Kashmir as early as 13th September 1947, following Pakistan's acceptance of the decision regarding Junagadh's accession. Patel argued that Pakistan could not shape its policies based on convenience. In Junagadh, where Hindus were the majority under a Muslim ruler, Pakistan supported the Nawab's decision, whereas in Kashmir, with a Muslim majority under a Hindu ruler, they advocated for a merger based on demographic majority. He stated that this contradictory approach was unacceptable. Meanwhile, Nehru received intelligence suggesting that Pakistan might attempt similar tactics to gain control of Kashmir. On 27th September 1947, Nehru wrote a letter to Patel, stating, "There is information that Pakistan plans to send a large number of infiltrators into Kashmir. I believe that the Jammu and Kashmir Army, along with the Maharaja and his administration, would struggle to withstand this threat. In such circumstances, it is crucial for Maharaja Hari Singh to forge an alliance with the National Conference to garner popular support against Pakistan. Releasing Sheikh Abdullah and backing his party could facilitate Kashmir's accession to India." In 1946, Sheikh Abdullah had initiated the "Quit Kashmir" movement against the Dogra dynasty led by Maharaja Hari Singh in Jammu and Kashmir. He demanded that the king transfer power to the people. The movement escalated into violence, resulting in the deaths of 20 individuals. In response, Maharaja Hari Singh sentenced Sheikh Abdullah to three years' imprisonment on charges of treason. Following Nehru's intervention, Abdullah, who had been incarcerated since 1946 for

¹⁰⁴ S. S. Shekhar (2024), The Unsolved Dispute of Kashmir: From Nehru to Patel with Maharaja to Sheikh and Betrayal at UN, *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* Volume 4, Issue 1. PP. 857, 858.

his uprising against the Maharaja, was released on 29th September 1947.¹⁰⁵ Despite numerous efforts, Nehru and Patel were unable to persuade Raja Hari Singh that Pakistan was attempting to invade Kashmir by dispatching covert operatives and infiltrators. Hari Singh, however, continued to harbor aspirations of an independent Kashmir.

The letter written by Nehru on 27th September proved prophetic nearly a month later when an "unknown" group attacked Kashmir on 22nd October 1947. These attackers were Pakistani tribesmen who arrived in 200 to 300 trucks and launched an assault on Jammu and Kashmir. By 23rd October 1947, they had bombed the power station that supplied electricity to Kashmir. The tribesmen looted several areas, committing atrocities that defied humanity. They murdered hospital patients and set houses ablaze indiscriminately. When the power station was destroyed on 23rd October, and Maharaja Hari Singh's palace lost electricity on 24th October, he sought assistance from India. Until then, India had refrained from directly intervening in Kashmir. Maharaja Hari Singh was under immense pressure as the flag of Pakistan had already been hoisted in Gilgit-Baltistan. The Maharaja's appointed governor in Gilgit had been detained, and a provisional government had been established with the involvement of Pakistani political agents. Fearing that Srinagar would soon fall to Pakistan in a similar manner, Maharaja Hari Singh promptly wrote to India, requesting immediate support. VP Menon, the Constitutional Adviser to Lord Mountbatten, was dispatched from India to meet the Maharaja. By then, the Maharaja had taken refuge in Jammu. He discussed the situation with VP Menon, who returned to Delhi on 25th October. A high-level meeting was convened, attended by Nehru, Patel, and Lord Mountbatten. Mountbatten advised that India should intervene militarily only after Kashmir formally acceded to India. It was decided that Menon would return to Jammu to secure the Maharaja's signature on the Instrument of Accession. On 26th October, VP Menon went back to Jammu and obtained Maharaja Hari Singh's signature, finalizing Kashmir's accession to India.¹⁰⁶ On the same day, Hari Singh wrote a letter to the Indian Government stating, "You are aware of the dire circumstances my state is currently facing. I have no choice but to request assistance from the Dominion of India. I am attaching the Instrument of Accession for your government's approval. The alternative would be to surrender my kingdom to opportunistic marauders." After obtaining the Instrument of Accession, Patel convened a meeting of the Defense Committee. On the following day, October 27th, India deployed troops to Kashmir via

¹⁰⁵ Supreme Court of India. (2019). *Dr. Shah Faesal and Ors. v. Union of India and Anr.*, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 1099 of 2019, P. 78 Para 119 and P. 162 Para 232)

¹⁰⁶ Whitehead, A. (2007), *A mission in Kashmir*, Penguin, P. 225

an airlift from Delhi through Gurdaspur. Gradually, Indian forces reclaimed several areas from Pakistan's control.¹⁰⁷

Shortly after the Indian Army entered Kashmir, a letter arrived from Pakistan proposing that the Prime Ministers and Governor Generals of both nations should convene to address the issue. The meeting was scheduled to take place in Pakistan. Nehru, however, insisted that if Pakistan sought dialogue, their representatives should visit India instead. This did not materialize, and ultimately, Lord Mountbatten travelled alone to Lahore on November 1, 1947. During the meeting, there was a discussion about organizing a plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir. Jinnah argued that the presence of the Indian Army in Kashmir would intimidate people from voting in favour of Pakistan, whereas Nehru was resolute in not relinquishing Kashmir under any circumstances. The meeting concluded without any agreement. Much has been speculated about Nehru's stance on a referendum in Kashmir, but many of these allegations are baseless. Nehru shared a deep connection with the people of Kashmir, and despite the region's Muslim majority, it was Jinnah, not Nehru, who was apprehensive about a referendum. Jinnah understood that if a referendum were held, India would likely prevail. Lord Mountbatten subsequently proposed to Jinnah that a referendum could be conducted under United Nations supervision. By December 1947, with the mountains covered in snow, Srinagar was deserted, yet Kashmir remained under the control of tribal invaders. On December 1, 1947, Pandit Nehru wrote a letter to Maharaja Hari Singh. Nehru stated, "We are not afraid of war, but our primary concern is to minimize the suffering of the Kashmiri people. I believe this is an opportune moment for a compromise, as our difficulties are mounting during the winter season. It is challenging for our forces to drive out the invaders." He further added, "Had it been summer, expelling them would have been easier. However, waiting longer means enduring another four months of hardship, during which they will continue to torment the Kashmiri people. In this scenario, small-scale battles should persist while efforts for a compromise continue." From this correspondence, it became evident that Nehru was even prepared to approach the United Nations regarding the Kashmir issue. Lord Mountbatten, realizing that neither Nehru nor Pakistan was willing to cede Kashmir, foresaw the likelihood of war between the two nations. Determined to avoid such a conflict, Mountbatten suggested that both countries take the matter to the United Nations. Although Nehru was initially reluctant, he agreed at Mountbatten's urging. Nehru consented to an UN-supervised referendum, citing the precedent of Junagadh, where a referendum had been conducted successfully without UN involvement because Junagadh did not share a border with

¹⁰⁷ S. S. Shekhar (2024), The Unsolved Dispute of Kashmir: From Nehru to Patel with Maharaja to Sheikh and Betrayal at UN, *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* Volume 4, Issue 1. P. 860.

Pakistan. On December 31, 1947, the Government of India officially appealed to the United Nations to intervene in the Kashmir dispute.¹⁰⁸

2.3: Kashmir Conflict

At the time of India's partition in 1947, the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, including Aksai Chin, spanned approximately 222,236 square kilometres. This landlocked region, nestled amid the majestic Himalayas, shares borders with Pakistan, India, China, and Afghanistan, and is often referred to as "Paradise on Earth" due to its stunning natural beauty. Historically part of a princely state, Kashmir has since become a focal point of contention. Following the war in 1948, Pakistan gained control of the Northern Areas and Azad Kashmir, while India and China took possession of 45% and 20% of the territory, respectively.¹⁰⁹

Since gaining independence, the political landscape of Kashmir has been complex and tumultuous, marked by persistent instability and unresolved tensions. The region is characterized by a confluence of ethnic, religious, and territorial factors, with both India and Pakistan holding strong legal and moral claims to the territory. As a result, Kashmir has largely accepted the status quo, diminishing its initial aspirations for self-governance. For nearly 70 years, the people of Jammu and Kashmir have fought for their right to autonomy, a struggle that traces back to the very formation of India and Pakistan. Kashmir was one of 565 princely states in British India at the time of independence. The conflict in Kashmir primarily arose from the indecision of Maharaja Hari Singh, the region's last independent ruler, regarding its future after British withdrawal. Facing an invasion by Pakistani tribal raiders, the Maharaja sought assistance from India's Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. In exchange for military aid, he executed the controversial "Instrument of Accession" to India, thereby aligning Kashmir with the Indian dominion. This accession, however, was limited; it ceded control over only three subjects foreign affairs, defense, and communications while maintaining complete autonomy over all other matters. Notably, this decision was made without the consent of the Kashmiri populace, who were still influenced by the ongoing Quit Kashmir Movement, with their leaders imprisoned. The necessity of popular consent for such an accession was emphasized by Sheikh Abdullah, a prominent leader who warned that any decision lacking the approval of Jammu and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., PP. 860-861.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch (2006, September) India-Pakistan dispute. "Everyone Lives in Fear" Patterns of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir, *Human Rights Watch*, Volume 18, No.11(C) P. 14.

Kashmir's citizens approximately forty lakhs, would face resistance and incite further conflict.¹¹⁰

2.4 Provisional Government:

On October 26, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh formally requested military assistance from Governor Mountbatten of India to expel the invaders. In this communication, he also expressed his intent to establish a provisional government, appointing Mehar Chand Mahajan as Prime Minister and Sheikh Mohd Abdullah as his associate. Recognizing that halting the invasion required the full support of the populace, as represented by their political entity, the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, this decision proved pivotal. Events unfolded rapidly; on the night of October 26, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh and his entire council of ministers fled to Jammu, leaving the valley without a functioning government. By October 30, Sheikh Abdullah was appointed by the Maharaja, at the behest of the Indian government, to lead the emergency administration in collaboration with Mahajan, who retained his role as Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.¹¹¹ The dynamics between Mahajan and Sheikh Abdullah were complex, lacking clearly defined boundaries.¹¹²

This emergency government operated until March 5, 1948, when it was replaced by an interim or provisional government intended to remain in place until a constituent assembly could be elected. Sheikh Abdullah assumed the role of Prime Minister, succeeding Mahajan, with Bakshi Gulam Mohammad appointed as Deputy Prime Minister. Other key appointments included S.L. Sarraf for civil supplies and local government, Mirza Afzal Beigh for revenue, Pir Mohammad Madan Khan for education, and G.L. Dogra for finance.¹¹³

2.5 Historical and Political Developments Till 1965

The Dogra rulers-maintained control over Jammu and Kashmir until 1947. On October 26, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh endorsed the Instrument of Accession, formally aligning the state with the Indian Union. Following this accession, Sheikh Abdullah was appointed as the Prime Minister of Indian Jammu and Kashmir on October 31, marking a significant shift in governance. With this transition, India assumed theoretical authority over the entire erstwhile

¹¹⁰ Rai, M. (2004), *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir*, Princeton, PP. 284-285.

¹¹¹ Birdwood, Lord (2005), *Two Nations & Kashmir*, Gulshan, Kashmir, P. 176.

¹¹² Lamb, A. (1992), *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (3rd, reprint ed.), Oxford, P. 184.

¹¹³ Nehru, J. (1973) *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Series 1, Vol. 4, January 1929 - March 1931, R. R., Delhi.

princely state, with the Maharaja operating under the guidance of India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.¹¹⁴ In November 1947, India and Pakistan entered into a major conflict over Kashmir, which lasted until December 20 of that year when the matter was referred to the UN Security Council.¹¹⁵ A truce was established on January 1, 1949, halting hostilities between Indian and Pakistani forces. To oversee the ceasefire line, the United Nations Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was established. The ceasefire line, which would later be referred to as the Line of Control (LOC) in 1972, resulted in India retaining approximately 63% of Jammu and Kashmir's territory, or 139,000 of the 223,000 square kilometers.¹¹⁶

In October 1949, the Constituent Assembly introduced a unique provision, initially labeled Article 306A, which later became Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. This article granted special autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, explicitly stating that the arrangement was temporary and contingent upon a future plebiscite.¹¹⁷ The Indian Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, and it came into effect on January 26, 1950. On that same day, the President of India issued the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1950, under Article 370.¹¹⁸ Between August and September 1951, Jammu and Kashmir conducted its first post-independence elections, resulting in the National Conference winning all forty-five legislative assembly seats. In June 1952, the state established the position of *Sadar-i-Riyasat* as its constitutional head, thus ending the long-standing Dogra rule. A candidate for this position would be elected by the legislative assembly and serve a five-year term. The relationship between the Indian government and Jammu and Kashmir, led by Sheikh Abdullah, was formalized in the Delhi Agreement, signed on July 24, 1952. Despite its accession to India, the state retained significant autonomy under this agreement. Following Karan Singh's inauguration, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, then Deputy Prime Minister, became the Prime Minister on August 9, 1953.¹¹⁹ The Assembly, under Bakshi's leadership, voted to pursue full integration of Kashmir into India.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Sneddon C. (2015), *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris*, Hurst, P. 170.

¹¹⁵ Anne N. D. (2007), *Military Intervention and Secession in South Asia: The Cases of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, and Punjab*, Praeger Security International Westport, Connecticut London, P. 69.

¹¹⁶ J. Happymon (2017), *Ceasefire Violations in Jammu And Kashmir a Line on Fire*, United States Institute of Peace.

¹¹⁷ M. Faizan (August 6, 2019), Explained: What are Articles 370 and 35A, *The Indian Express*.

¹¹⁸ Grover V. (1995), *The Story of Kashmir: Yesterday and Today, Political History and Development with Chronology of Major Political Events*, (Vol. 1) India, Deep & Deep, P. 173.

¹¹⁹ Verma, P. S. (1994), *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, Vikas, Delhi, P. 48.

¹²⁰ Weekes, Richard V. (2004), *Pakistan: Birth and Growth of a Muslim Nation*. Pakistan, Royal, P. 234.

On January 23, 1954, the democratically elected Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir formally accepted the region's accession to India. Subsequently, the Indian President issued a constitutional order (Application to Jammu and Kashmir), extending the legislative powers of the Indian government to include all items on the union list, such as defense, foreign policy, and communication. This move effectively reversed the 1952 Nehru-Abdullah agreement and curtailed discussions of a referendum. By the early 1960s, widespread corruption and nepotism within Bakshi's government became increasingly apparent. Prime Minister Nehru employed the Kamaraj Plan, leading to Bakshi's resignation on October 11, 1963, and the appointment of Khwaja Shamsuddin, a former Revenue Minister, as his successor. Prior to his retirement, Bakshi proposed several recommendations aimed at further integrating Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union. His successors, including Shamsuddin, G. M. Sadiq, and Mir Qasim, continued to implement these recommendations alongside additional policies to promote integration.¹²¹

2.6 Historical and Political Developments till 1987

Following the 1965 war, Sheikh Abdullah shifted his focus from advocating for a referendum to proposing a roundtable conference that would include representatives from India, Pakistan, and Kashmir.¹²² The political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir underwent a significant transformation after the 1971 War, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. The decisive defeat of Pakistan during this conflict had a demoralizing effect on the Plebiscite Front and other separatist leaders in the state, compelling them to adopt a policy of reconciliation with New Delhi.¹²³ Recognizing India's strengthened position in regional power dynamics, Sheikh Abdullah realized he had little choice but to pursue negotiations with the Indian government. This led to discussions between the Central Government and Sheikh Abdullah, which began in 1972 and lasted nearly three years, culminating in the signing of the Kashmir Accord on February 24, 1975. Additionally, on July 2, 1972, India and Pakistan had entered into the Shimla Agreement, committing to resolving disputes through bilateral dialogue. The Kashmir Accord facilitated Sheikh Abdullah's return to power, with Sayeed Mir Qasim resigning as Chief Minister on February 25, 1975, in his favor.¹²⁴ Under the terms of the Accord, Sheikh Abdullah acknowledged Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of the Union of India and was informed

¹²¹Wirsing, R. (1998), *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination and a Just Peace*, By Sumantra Bose, New Delhi, Sage, 1997. P. 211; *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(4), PP. 1188-1189.

¹²² Chadha B., N. (2006), *Demystifying Kashmir*, Brookings, Washington, D.C., PP. 33-35.

¹²³ Bhattacharjea A. (1994), *Kashmir the Wounded Valley*, UBS, P. 234.

¹²⁴Verma, P. S. (1994), *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, Vikas, Delhi: P. 59.

that Article 370 could not be reinstated to its original form. His alliance with the Congress Party through the Kashmir Accord drew significant criticism from both local and external factions. Many Kashmiris perceived Abdullah's actions as a betrayal of their right to self-determination, viewing his collaboration with Indira Gandhi as a sacrifice of Kashmir's autonomy for the sake of political power.¹²⁵ This perception of compromise lingered throughout his life.

Abdullah resigned on March 27, 1977, after losing the Congress Party's support in the legislature, which led to the dissolution of the legislature and the imposition of governor's rule. Despite declining popularity, Abdullah faced no significant opposition during the 1977 elections, held under governor's rule on June 30. The National Conference (N.C.) party won 47 of the 76 seats. Abdullah returned to power on July 9, 1977, albeit amid concerns regarding nepotism, corruption, and authoritarianism. In November 1977, the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Ordinance was enacted, granting the state government the authority to detain individuals for up to two years without the right to appeal. This was later codified in the Public Safety Bill of March 1978. By the late 1970s, Abdullah faced substantial public protests across Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh. This upheaval indicated a shift in Kashmiri politics from being elite-led to being driven by the populace, as a new generation of educated and politically conscious individuals emerged. Sheikh Abdullah, often referred to as "the Lion," was in the twilight of his life by this point. Sumantra Bose remarked that he was fundamentally a defeated man. Abdullah passed away on September 8, 1982, due to heart trouble, leading to the appointment of his son, Farooq Abdullah, as Chief Minister.¹²⁶

Eager to solidify his position within the party, Farooq Abdullah dissolved the state assembly, prompting the State Assembly Elections of 1983. The National Conference secured a majority, allowing Farooq to assume the Chief Minister's role. Following this, Jagmohan Malhotra, the then-Delhi L.G., was reaffirmed as governor on April 26, 1984. G. M. Shah, who became the new Chief Minister, imposed the longest curfew in Kashmir, earning his government the nickname "curfew sarkar." On March 7, 1986, Jagmohan dismissed Shah for incompetence and imposed Governor's Rule. This political vacuum was exploited by extremist groups, including Jamat-e-Islami (JeI), which sought to move from the political periphery to a central political position.¹²⁷ Following the end of Governor's Rule on September 7, 1986, the state transitioned

¹²⁵ Bazaz, P.N., (1954), *Daughters of Vitasta*: Pamposh, New Delhi, P. 68.

¹²⁶ Akbar, M. J. (1985), *India: The Siege Within: Challenges to a Nation's Unity*, United Kingdom: Penguin, P. 276.

¹²⁷ Singh T. (1995), *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors*, Viking. P. 30

into a period of President's Rule.¹²⁸ However, over two years, reconciliation efforts between Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah culminated in the Rajiv-Farooq Accord, which led to the termination of President's Rule on November 6, 1986. Subsequently, an alliance government comprising the National Conference and Congress (I) was formed under Farooq Abdullah's leadership on November 7, 1986. This accord marked the third significant agreement between the Jammu and Kashmir governments and the Central government, following the accords of 1952 and 1975. The assembly was dissolved, and new elections were called, with the National Conference and Congress participating jointly in the March 1987 elections.¹²⁹

2.7 1987 Elections and Aftermath

The political landscape of Kashmir underwent a profound transformation following the 1987 elections, which left the populace disenchanted and united in their pursuit of freedom. This discontent catalyzed many young Kashmiris to seek weapons training across the Line of Control, returning armed to support their cause. Initially, protests arose over exorbitant electricity costs and unreliable supply, but these escalated tragically when police opened fire on demonstrators, resulting in numerous fatalities. By 1989, a wave of revolutionary sentiment surged through the Valley, manifesting as a robust resistance against Indian rule, predominantly led by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which garnered substantial public support and targeted Indian politicians, particularly those affiliated with the National Conference (N.C). The parliamentary elections of 1989 were met with a complete boycott, leading to the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah's government in 1990. This triggered massive demonstrations throughout Kashmir, with demands for "Azaadi," or freedom, echoing widely. The protests were emotionally charged and garnered hundreds of thousands of participants, overwhelming local police forces and necessitating the deployment of primarily non-Muslim members of the Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). This marked a significant escalation in violence, resulting in hundreds of unarmed protestors being killed in just a few days, thus igniting a serious human rights crisis and fundamentally altering the relationship between the Indian state and the Kashmiri populace.¹³⁰

By August 1989, the increase in killings and kidnappings, particularly targeting the ruling elite, led to the cessation of the political process by early 1990. This suspension culminated in Farooq

¹²⁸ Akhtar, N., Dunham, F., & Dunham, P. J. (1991). Directive Interactions and Early Vocabulary Development: The Role of Joint Attentional Focus, *Journal of child language*, 18(1), PP. 41–49.

¹²⁹ K. Verghese, (2004), *Crafting Peace in Kashmir: Through a Realist Lens*, New Delhi, SAGE, P. 62.

¹³⁰ B. Sumantra. (2003), *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict- Paths to Peace*, Cambridge, Harvard, PP. 109-162.

Abdullah's resignation and the suspension of the legislative assembly. Political parties, facing an untenable situation, halted their activities, allowing insurgencies to effectively stifle political engagement for the following six years. The 1990s ushered in an intensified political conflict, marked by violent confrontations between Indian security forces and various militant factions, each with differing ideological perspectives.¹³¹ Srinagar, once a vibrant city, fell into a state of decline by September 1991. The bustling hotels and houseboats were replaced by the sounds of gunfire and chaos, as violence severely impacted tourism.¹³²

The influx of stringent security measures, including the Disturbed Areas Act, the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), saw the deployment of extensive military and paramilitary forces, further exacerbating tensions.¹³³ The presence of these forces remains a contentious issue, with claims of approximately 6.7 million personnel in the Valley disputed by Indian authorities as a gross exaggeration. A critical event during this period was the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, which began on March 1, 1990. This migration stemmed from various factors, including the escalating fears instigated by the Muslim majority's protests and general disorder. Political assassinations created an atmosphere of insecurity, particularly affecting prominent Pandits. As unrest spread, approximately 100,000 Pandits fled to Jammu and Delhi within weeks, marking a contentious episode in Kashmir's history. While some narratives suggest a campaign of ethnic cleansing aimed at the Pandit community, others propose that the migration was exacerbated by the actions of Governor Jagmohan, potentially seeking to frame the movement as sectarian.¹³⁴

This led to the formation of the All-Groups Hurriyat Conference on March 9, 1993, uniting 26 political, social, and religious groups to advance the separatist movement, although it refrained from participating in elections.¹³⁵ The organization comprised leaders from various factions, including Jamaat-e-Islami and the People's Conference. In contrast, militant groups like Hizbul Mujahideen viewed the conflict through a lens of religious obligation, aspiring to integrate Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan.¹³⁶ As the situation evolved, many separatist and militant factions emerged, with Hizbul Mujahideen becoming the most powerful force in the region. The JKLF, initially supported by Pakistan, experienced a decline, paving the way for the emergence of pro-Pakistani groups like Hizbul Mujahideen. The period saw a brutal

¹³¹ Khan N. A. (2010), *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, P. 98.

¹³² S. Tavleen, (1995), *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors*, New Delhi, Viking, P. 178.

¹³³ B. Sumantra. (2003), *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict- Paths to Peace*, Cambridge: Harvard, P. 112.

¹³⁴ Ibid., P. 121.

¹³⁵ Koithara, V. (2004), *Crafting Peace in Kashmir: Through a Realist Lens*, New Delhi, SAGE, P. 64.

¹³⁶ Verma, P. S. (1994), *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, Vikas, Delhi, P. 13.

response from Indian authorities, with the deployment of approximately 800,000 military and paramilitary personnel aimed at suppressing unrest, yet violence persisted unabated.

The 1996 elections heralded a return to electoral politics in the Valley after a prolonged absence, despite low voter turnout. The subsequent years witnessed a resurgence of insurgency, characterized by radical Islamist ideologies and an influx of Pakistan-based militant groups utilizing fedayeen tactics. Despite attempts at stabilizing the situation, violence continued to define the landscape of Kashmir, leading to significant loss of life and ongoing conflict.¹³⁷ The decade saw the emergence of a more refined form of resistance, transitioning from armed insurgency to mass protests led predominantly by youth utilizing social media to mobilize discontent. The protests reflected deep-seated frustrations with governmental policies, the complexities of local politics, and the enduring impact of external influences, particularly from Pakistan.¹³⁸

2.1.1: Participation of Women in Jammu and Kashmir politics

Women in Kashmir have made significant contributions across various societal domains, including political, social, and cultural spheres. Despite their vital roles, these contributions, particularly in politics, have often been overlooked. Throughout the freedom struggle and into the present day, the narrative surrounding women has predominantly depicted them as victims—daughters, mothers, and wives. While this portrayal reflects a genuine aspect of their experiences, it represents only a partial view of their story. Many women bravely stepped out of their homes to join the movement against Dogra rule, actively participating alongside men in the fight for Kashmir's liberation. Their commitment has persisted, manifesting in ongoing resistance against contemporary state oppression. Beyond their involvement in the liberation movement, women have also engaged in politics as public servants. Following the accession of the princely state to India in 1947, women's organizations played a crucial role in promoting peace and stability amid the turmoil of partition.¹³⁹

In contemporary Kashmir, while there is a noticeable absence of prominent female political leaders, everyday Kashmiri women continue to demonstrate remarkable acts of courage and resilience. Their contributions often go unrecognized, emerging in the shadows of historical events such as cordon and search operations, known locally as crackdowns. Whether leading

¹³⁷ B. Sumantra (2003), *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict- Paths to Peace*. Cambridge, Harvard, PP. 141-44.

¹³⁸ Clary Christopher (Feb, 2024), *The 2021 India-Pakistan Ceasefire: Origins, Prospects, and Lessons Learned*, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report No., 527, P. 8.

¹³⁹ Neogi, Devina (2022), Women's Struggles in the Kashmir Militancy War, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue. 6, Article 4.

processions, protest rallies, or demonstrations against various forms of oppression, women in Kashmir have played roles in recent history that often surpass those of their male counterparts. Unfortunately, historians have yet to adequately acknowledge the significant contributions of women to the freedom struggle; many names of female political volunteers from the 1930s and 1940s remain absent from historical records.¹⁴⁰ Despite facing substantial challenges, women are increasingly asserting their rights and presence in politics, signaling a shift in traditional dynamics. This change offers new opportunities for advancing democracy and regional harmony. Women involved in civic groups and government have the potential to guide the region toward a more peaceful and inclusive democracy, contributing to broader efforts for lasting peace.¹⁴¹

The political landscape began to change significantly in 1934 when the people of Jammu and Kashmir were granted voting rights; however, women faced restrictions based on educational criteria. The Franchise Commission justified this limitation, citing administrative challenges. It was not until the efforts of S. M. Abdullah's government that the 1951 state elections embraced universal suffrage, ensuring equal voting rights for all, including women. Part X of the J&K Constitution emphasizes gender equality in institutions, granting women both voting and candidacy rights, and Section 47 allows the Governor to recommend the appointment of up to two female members to the assembly if needed to address underrepresentation.¹⁴²

The inaugural state election in 1952 saw only one female candidate, who ultimately faced defeat. Progress remained slow in subsequent elections, with limited participation and success for women. However, a notable breakthrough occurred during the 1972 assembly elections when women were first elected to the Jammu and Kashmir assemblies. Of the ten women who nominated themselves, six contested, and four won, resulting in a historic representation of 5.33% in the legislature. Unfortunately, this milestone has not been surpassed in the following decades. Since 1972, women's representation in the assembly has stagnated, failing to exceed 3%, despite an increasing number of female candidates. From 1972 to 1996, women's visibility in state politics diminished significantly, often attributed to traditional and religious constraints. The 1977 elections featured only a single female contestant who secured a victory in a reserved seat. In 1983, despite a high female voter turnout of 70.48%, only seven women contested, and none were successful. The elections of 1987 and 1996 saw slight increases in female candidates,

¹⁴⁰ Z. G. Muhammad (2007), *Kashmir in War and Diplomacy*, Gulshan, P. 56

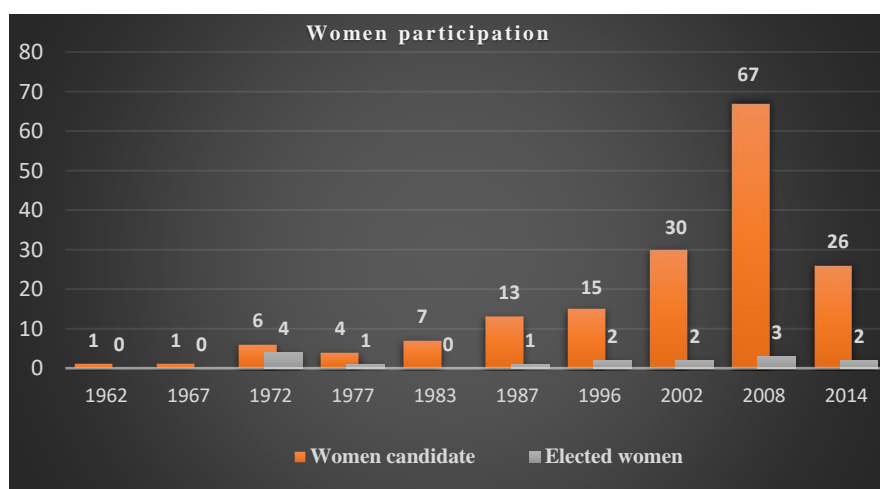
¹⁴¹ Khan, N. Ali (2015), How women Activists Can Help Jammu and Kashmir Make Progress in Democracy and Peace. *The Milli Gazette*.

¹⁴² Khurshid, S. (2015), Political Participation and Representation of Women in Jammu and Kashmir Politics. *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRSSH)*, 2(1), P. 69.

with thirteen and fifteen candidates respectively, yet only one woman won in 1987 and two in 1996. The elections of 2002 reflected a similar trend, with only 13 out of 709 candidates being women, two of whom won. The 2008 elections saw a significant rise in female competitors, with 67 women out of 1354 candidates; however, only three emerged victorious. The 2014 elections yielded only two successful female candidates.

Since 1962, The no. of women representative is zero in the legislative assembly of J and K in 1962 & 1967, 4 women members in 1972 out of 75 seats. The four members were Zainab Begum (INC, Amira Kadal), Hajra Begum (INC, Banihal), Nirmala Devi (INC, Tikri) and Shanta Bharti (INC, Jandrah Garota). One women in 1977 (Gurbachan Kumari, JNP, Bari Brahmana), zero in 1983, one in 1987 (Swaran Lata, INC, Bari Brahmana), two women were member of legislative assembly of J&K in 1996 (Sakina Akhter, INC Noor Abad & Mehbooba Mufti, INC, Bijbehara), again two women in 2002 (Mehbooba Mufti ,PDP Pahalgam & Suman Lata Baghat, INC, RS Pura) out of 87 seats , 3 women in 2008 out of 87 seats (Shameema Firdous, NC, Habba Kadal, Mehbooba Mufti, PDP, Wachi & Sakina Ittoo, NC, Noor Abad) and again 3 women were member of legislative assembly in 2014 (Asiea, PDP, Hazratbal, Shameema Firdous NC, Habba Kadal and Mehbooba Mufti ,PDP, Anantnag).¹⁴³ Despite these challenges, the Indian Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments, which reserve 33% of seats for women in local self-government, particularly in panchayat raj institutions (PRIs), have created a promising avenue for women's political empowerment.¹⁴⁴

Figure V: Participation of Women in the Lok Sabha Elections



¹⁴³ DR. N. Yogendra (Dec 2003), Women Members of Rajya Sabha, *Secretary-General, Rajya Sabha, Jainco Art India, New Delhi*.

¹⁴⁴ Khurshid, S. (2015), Political Participation and Representation of Women in Jammu and Kashmir Politics. *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRSSH)*, 2(1), P. 68.

The low level of women's participation in politics in Jammu and Kashmir can be attributed to a range of interrelated factors. Among these, the ongoing insurgency and a prevalent lack of faith in political leaders play significant roles. Understanding the dynamics of women's voting behavior requires examining several key aspects, including voter registration, participation in elections, and the reasons behind voting decisions.

2.1.2: Women's Participation in Panchayat Raj in Jammu and Kashmir

The foundations of the Panchayati Raj system in Jammu and Kashmir were laid in 1935 when Maharaja Hari Singh enacted the J&K Village Panchayat Regulation No. 1. This legislation facilitated local governance under the direction of the Panchayats and Rural Development Department, established in 1936. In 1951, the 1935 regulation was replaced by Act V of Samvat 2008, which later gave way to the Village Panchayat Act of 1958. This new legislation was the state's response to recommendations from the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, leading to a two-tier Panchayati Raj structure: Block Boards at the block level and Halqa Panchayats at the village level. Additionally, Panchayat Adalats, or courts, were introduced to decentralize judicial administration.¹⁴⁵ A significant shift occurred on April 21, 1988, when the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 was introduced and later enacted. This act established a three-tier system consisting of the District Planning and Development Board, the Block Development Council, and the Halqa Panchayat. At the village level, each Halqa Panchayat was composed of seven to eleven elected panchs and one sarpanch. A naib sarpanch could be appointed if the sarpanch was absent, with a Village Level Worker (VLW) acting as the Panchayat Secretary. The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Rules, instituted in 1996 under Section 80 of the 1989 Act, further clarified the functioning of these bodies.¹⁴⁶

Initially, these acts contained a notable limitation no provisions for women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In response, the 1996 Rules were introduced to better align with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Although Jammu and Kashmir's unique status under Article 370 limited the direct application of the 73rd Amendment, key provisions were incorporated, including the reservation of seats for women.¹⁴⁷ Later, the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act of 2013 extended these reservations to the role of Block

¹⁴⁵ Thaker, A., & Rana, N. (2018), Women's Marginal Role in Political Life in Jammu and Kashmir: An Analytical Study, *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 6(2), P. 744.

¹⁴⁶ Panchayati Raj Act, 1989, (n.d.), *Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 (Act No. IX of 1989)*.

¹⁴⁷ W. Gul and Y. Effat (2015), *Democratic Decentralization in J&K: Gender and Political Change*, Mainstream Weekly, LIV (1).

Development Council chairman, marking an essential step in boosting female representation.¹⁴⁸ Despite the pioneering move to reserve 33% of PRI seats for women and marginalized groups, local politics in Jammu and Kashmir saw limited female representation for years due to factors like low societal status and political instability in the valley.¹⁴⁹

Table II Total Number of Woman Elected as Sarpanches and Panches in J&K, 2001.

Kashmir Division	Number of Women Elected	
	Sarpanch	Panch
Srinagar	0	1
Kupwara	0	2
Baramulla	0	4
Leh	0	36
Kargil	0	2
Budgam	0	2
Anantnag	2	24
Pulwama	0	24
Total	02	71
Jammu division)	Sarpanch	Panch
Jammu	1	42
Kathua	1	23
Poonch	1	13
Udhampur	3	38
Doda	1	26
Rajauri	1	24
Total (Jammu division)	7	166
Total (J&K)	9	237

Source: Directorate of Rural Development Srinagar/ Jammu

An analysis of the data presented in **Table: II** reveal that in the Jammu division, women's representation ranged from 0.5% among Sarpanches to 1.70% among Panches, while in the

¹⁴⁸ Kumar, Ashwani (2014), Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu And Kashmir: A Critical Analysis, *Journal of Rural Development*, Vol. 33, No. 1, PP. 74,75.

¹⁴⁹ Lone, M. (2014), Problems of Women Panchayat Representatives in District Baramulla of J&K, *Indian Streams Research Journal*, IV(I), P. 6.

Kashmir division, it ranged from a mere 0.19% among Sarpanches to 1.37% among Panches. Despite the low overall percentages, the five-year period under review witnessed several developmental initiatives in which women emerged as active participants at the grassroots level. However, the political climate in the Kashmir region remained volatile, with persistent threats and insecurity leading to the resignation of many elected Panches and Sarpanches, particularly in rural areas. Recognizing the need to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure inclusive governance, the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Bill was passed on 17th December 2003. This legislative move aimed to enhance the effective participation of women and other marginalized sections of society in the local self-governance framework. Subsequently, on 18th June 2004, SRO 181 was issued, mandating the reservation of Panch seats for women and members of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in every Halaqa Panchayat. Importantly, this provision introduced a system of rotation to be implemented after every general election, thereby institutionalizing equitable representation in rural governance structures.

The involvement of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) has sparked considerable attention in the current state scenario. In 2014, the noteworthy statistic of female voters reached an impressive 60%. State elections in Kashmir have served as a forum for women to express their concerns regarding their societal status. Nevertheless, there is disagreement about whether these elections genuinely empowered women to transform their experiences of conflict into policies for improved governance. As a result of the introduction of a 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), a significant number of female candidates actively participated in the 2011 PR elections. In Jammu and Kashmir, there were a total of 33,750 Panchayat Raj Functionaries (PRFs), with female representatives filling 9,453 of those positions. In the Kashmir division, only three sarpanches and 4,672 panchs out of 18,144 PRFs were women. Similarly, in the Jammu division, out of a total of 15,606 PRFs, there were 25 female sarpanches and 4,752 female panchs recorded.¹⁵⁰

Table III No. of Woman Elected Panch's and Sarpanches in J&K (2011)

Jammu division			Kashmir Division		
District	Elected sarpanches	Elected Panches	District	Elected sarpanches	Elected Panches
Jammu	02	746	Kupwara	-	937

¹⁵⁰ Chauhan Abha (2022), Negotiating Space for Empowerment: Women and Panchayati Raj in Jammu and Kashmir, *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, VOL. 11, Issue. 6, P. 982

Kathua	04	562	Baramulla	02	712
Poonch	04	524	Budgam	-	686
Udhampur	05	548	Srinagar	-	25
Doda	01	489	Leh	-	199
Rajouri	05	690	Kargil	-	204
Samba	01	260	Anantnag	-	673
Ramban	01	292	Pulwama	-	218
Kishtiwar	-	287	Bandipora	-	288
Reasi	02	254	Ganderbal	-	277
TOTAL	25	4752	Shopian	01	177
			Kulgam	-	324
			TOTAL	03	4672

Source: Directorate of Rural Development Srinagar/ Jammu

An analysis of Table III reveals a significant gender disparity in the representation of women at different levels of the Panchayati Raj system across the 22 districts of Jammu and Kashmir. Out of a total of 4,128 Sarpanch positions, only 28 were secured by women, reflecting a dismally low success rate of just 0.70%. In contrast, women's participation at the Panch level was relatively more encouraging. Out of 20,559 Panch posts, 9,071 were won by women candidates, indicating a comparatively higher success rate of 44.12%. This stark contrast highlights that while women are gradually gaining ground at the grassroots level, their presence in higher leadership positions within the rural governance structure remains severely limited, pointing toward persistent structural and socio-political barriers.

The ongoing discussion often revolves around the tendency of women to steer clear of politics in times of conflict. However, in Kashmir, women defied this trend by actively participating in Panchayati Raj elections despite facing threats from militants and separatist calls for boycotts. While some received familial support, others initially lacked it but eventually won over their family's support after succeeding in the elections. Interestingly, most elected women held positions as panchs, with only a few as sarpanchs. Establishing themselves and asserting their presence in the panchayat posed a significant challenge for many women. The introduction of political reservations for women has played a vital role in enhancing representation and diversity, offering various governance advantages.¹⁵¹ About 80% of the eligible voters took part in the 2011 PR election in Jammu and Kashmir, held in several phases from April 13 to June

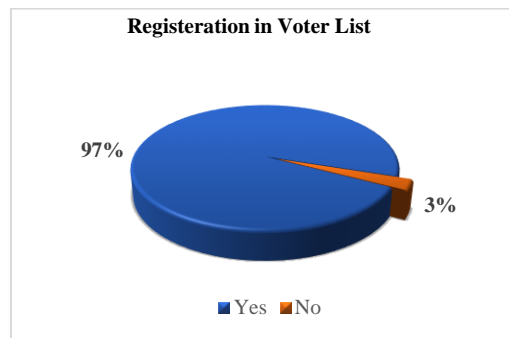
¹⁵¹ Afridi, F. (2013), Political Empowerment of Women and Learning by Doing, *THE MINT*.

27. Before this, the state had its last PR election in 1977-78. The 2001 PR election had little practical significance, and the 2006 elections were called off due to security issues.¹⁵²

Registration of Respondents in the Electoral Voter List

A crucial first step in political participation is voter registration. In my study, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, by analyzing a sample of 399 individuals regarding their registration status on the electoral voter list. The findings reveal that 388 individuals, or 97.2%, confirmed their registration, while only 11 individuals, accounting for 2.8%, reported they were not registered. This high registration rate indicates a foundational willingness among women to participate in the electoral process.

Table 2.1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Voter Registration Status



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

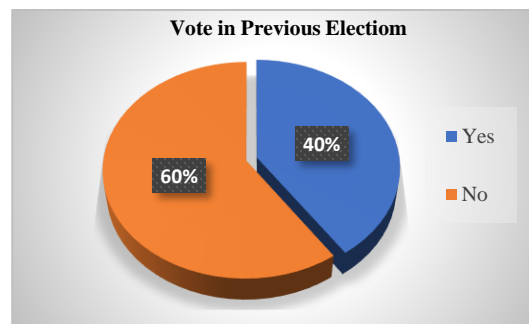
Voting Participation in Recent Local Body Elections

The 2011 Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir, held after a thirty-year hiatus, marked a significant milestone in the restoration of grassroots democracy amidst persistent conflict and instability. Despite the volatile security situation, voter turnout was remarkably high, reflecting the public's strong aspiration for political participation and local governance. These elections served as a crucial step toward reviving democratic institutions at the local level, even as many elected representatives later faced threats, intimidation, and violence—underscoring the profound challenges of sustaining democratic processes in a conflict-ridden region. Nevertheless, successful local body elections have the potential to catalyze grassroots development and empower communities by fostering accountability, responsiveness, and localized decision-making. Notably, women played an active role as voters in these elections,

¹⁵² Kawoosa, V. M. (2020, Dec, 24), The Number Theory: Understanding the DDC Election Results in Jammu and Kashmir, *The Hindustan Times*.

and one-third of the seats were reserved for female candidates under a policy designed to promote gender inclusion in governance. This reservation initiative aimed not only to enhance women's numerical representation in local institutions but also to strengthen their participation in the democratic and developmental processes of the region.¹⁵³ Despite the significant number of registered voters, actual voting participation presents a stark contrast. My study shows that out of the 399 respondents, only 161 individuals, or 40.4%, cast their votes in the last local body elections, while a considerable 238 individuals, or 59.6%, did not participate (Fig 2.2). This disparity highlights a major barrier to political engagement among women, suggesting that registration alone does not guarantee active participation.

Fig 2.2: Frequency distribution of respondent's Voting in the last local body election.



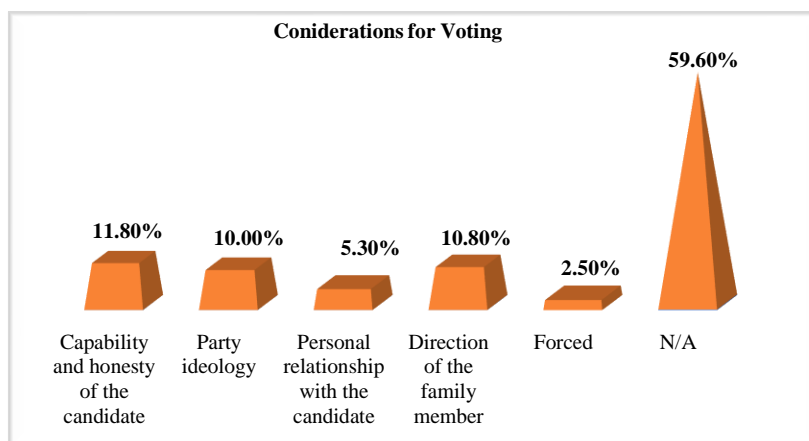
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Considerations for Voting Choices

When exploring the reasons behind voting decisions, my study indicates a variety of influencing factors. Among the 399 respondents, only 47 individuals (11.8%) voted based on the candidates' apparent capabilities and honesty. Another 40 respondents (10.0%) considered the political party's ideology, while 21 participants (5.3%) based their choices on personal relationships with candidates. Notably, 43 individuals (10.8%) reported voting in alignment with family directions, and 10 respondents (2.5%) indicated that external forces influenced their votes. However, the majority 238 participants (59.6%) stated that none of the provided reasons applied to their voting decisions (Figure 2.3). This suggests a disconnect between voters' perceptions of candidates and the motivations for their voting behaviors.

Figure 2.3 Frequency distribution of respondent's consideration for voting for a specific candidate.

¹⁵³ Gaur Bhup Singh (2024), *Elections in Jammu and Kashmir Since Independence: A Qualitative Review of Democratic Processes and Socio-Political Impacts*, International Journal of Applied Research, 10(9): P. 12

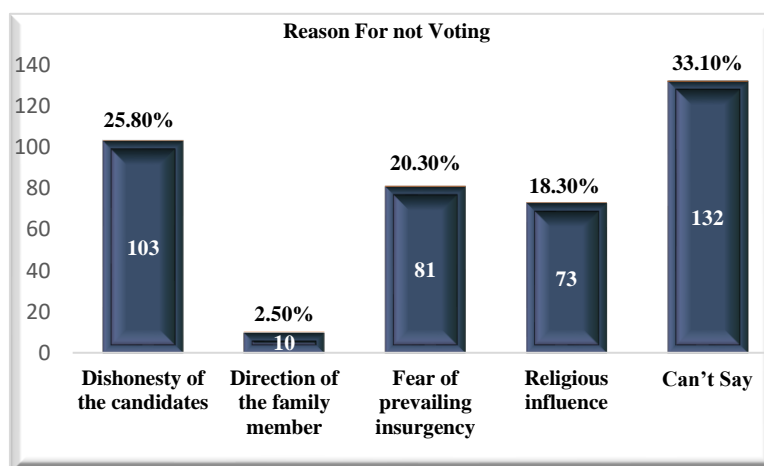


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Reasons for Not Voting

Understanding the reasons behind non-participation is equally important. In my field survey, a significant portion of respondents cited various factors for not voting. Specifically, 25.8% (103 respondents) indicated that the perceived dishonesty of candidates was a primary reason for their abstention. Additionally, 20.3% (81 respondents) cited fear of the prevailing insurgency, while 18.3% (73 individuals) attributed their decision to religious influences. Moreover, 33.1% (132 respondents) selected "Can't Say" in response to inquiries about their reasons for not voting, indicating uncertainty or ambivalence regarding their political engagement (Figure 2.4).

Table 2.4: Frequency distribution of respondent's consideration for not voting.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

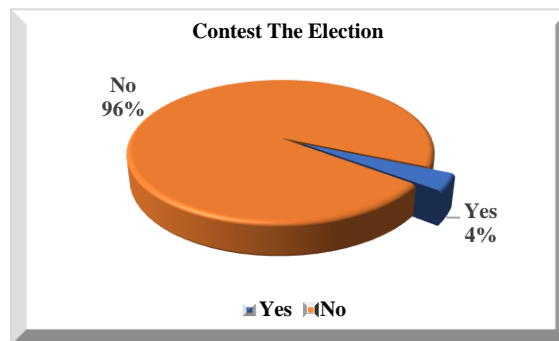
The data reveals that, despite high voter registration rates among women in the sample (97.2%), actual voting participation is significantly lower, with only 40.4% casting votes in the most recent local elections. This gap highlights barriers to active political engagement, suggesting that registration alone does not translate into electoral participation. Factors influencing voting

decisions vary, with a minority (11.8%) prioritizing candidates' capabilities and honesty, while others consider party ideology (10.0%), personal relationships (5.3%), family influence (10.8%), or external pressures (2.5%). However, a notable 59.6% reported no specific factors influencing their choice. Among non-voters, distrust in candidate integrity (25.8%) and fear of insurgency (20.3%) were common reasons for abstention, alongside religious influences (18.3%) and ambivalence, as indicated by 33.1% who selected "Can't Say." These findings suggest that while voter registration among women is high, socio-political issues such as concerns over candidate integrity, security risks, and religious influences contribute to low turnout and complex voting behaviors in Jammu and Kashmir.

Participation of Respondents in the Elections

In my study, out of a total sample of 399 respondents, 3.8 percent, which constitutes 15 respondents, answered "YES" to the question of whether they contest the election. The remaining 96.2 percent, comprising 384 respondents, answered "NO." Therefore, the majority of the total sample responded "NO" to the question regarding their participation in the election (Figure 2.5).

Fig 2.5: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Indicating Whether They Contest the Election

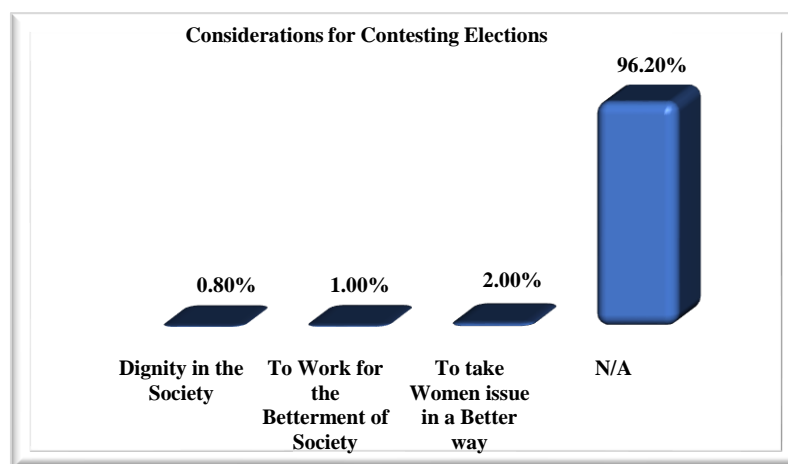


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Considerations of Women for Contesting the Election

According to my study, women's participation in elections is very low, and only a few of them contested the previous local body elections. I asked them a question: what considerations led you to contest the election? 0.8%, which constitutes 3 individuals, maintained that dignity in society was the main factor that motivated them to run. Subsequently, 0.1% contested solely to work for the betterment of society. Additionally, 2.0%, or 8 individuals, addressed the issue of women in a more constructive manner. Meanwhile, 96.2% responded with "N/A" (Figure 2.6).

Table 2.6: Frequency distribution of Respondents indicating why they contest the election

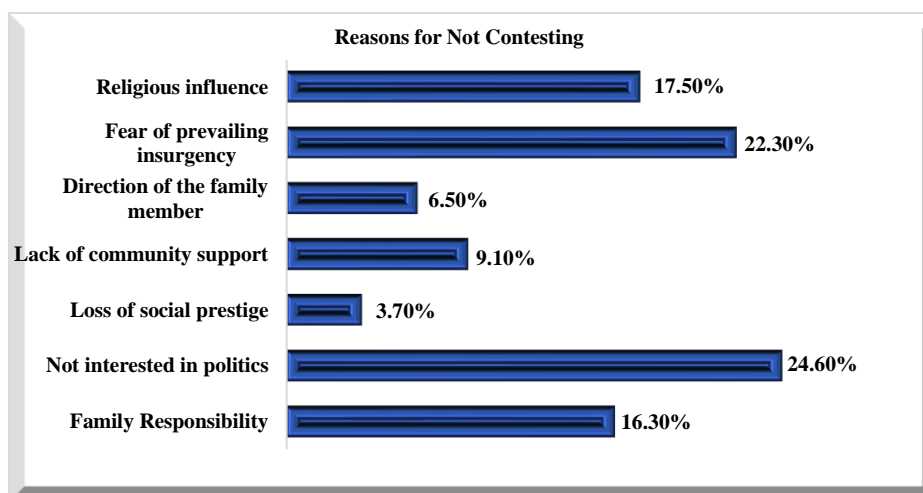


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Reason for Not Contesting the Elections

As is evident from the data above, the representation of women in local body elections is very low. To inquire into the matter, out of the total sample, 16.3 percent (65 individuals) considered family responsibility to be the main factor for not contesting the election. Similarly, 24.6 percent (98 respondents) maintained that they are not interested in politics. Additionally, 3.7 percent (15 respondents) indicated that the loss of social prestige is a significant factor, while 9.1 percent (36 respondents) cited a lack of community support as a significant factor, while 9.1 percent (36 respondents) cited a lack of community support as the main issue. Furthermore, 6.5 percent (26 respondents) considered the direction of family members as a key factor, 22.1 percent (89 respondents) attributed their reluctance to contest the election to fear of prevailing insurgency, and lastly, 17.5 percent (70 individuals) identified the influence of their religion as a major factor in their decision not to participate in the election (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Frequency distribution of Respondents about the reason for not contesting



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

The study presents findings on the participation of women in elections, revealing low levels of active engagement, with only 3.8% of the respondents indicating they had contested local elections, and 96.2% choosing not to participate. Among the few who did, factors such as dignity in society, a desire to improve societal conditions, and addressing women's issues motivated their decision. In contrast, the reasons for non-participation were varied. Family responsibility emerged as a significant barrier (16.3%), along with a general disinterest in politics (24.6%), and concerns over loss of social prestige (3.7%). Lack of community support (9.1%) and family direction (6.5%) also contributed to low participation. Additionally, fear of insurgency (22.3%) and religious influence (17.5%) were notable deterrents, highlighting the complex socio-political and cultural challenges that women face in pursuing electoral roles in the region.

2.1.2 Obstacles to Women's Participation in Jammu & Kashmir

The Women's fundamental rights and responsibilities are compromised by their limited role in political decision-making. Their perspectives are often overlooked at various levels of governance, from local councils like the Panchayat Samiti to broader national issues such as budget discussions. This marginalization prevents women's voices from being fully heard in political discourse, leading to decisions that lack a critical gender perspective. Historically, women have been excluded from political structures due to a variety of structural, functional, and personal factors, influenced by regional socio-cultural norms. Globally, liberal democracies increasingly emphasize women's political engagement; however, significant challenges remain, highlighting the gendered dynamics in democracy and development. These challenges reveal how democracy and development structures can, paradoxically, hinder women's full participation in politics.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the low political participation of women can be attributed to a combination of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Women in J&K represent a diverse group, varying in class, ethnicity, education, and cultural background, which shapes their experiences and opportunities in unique ways. A large percentage of women in the region face significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and a substantial number of widows or half-widows. For these women, financial independence is essential—not only for survival but also for dignity. Economic empowerment directly influences their ability to participate in political processes and decision-making. Despite these diverse and pressing issues, certain overarching obstacles impede the political empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir. These primary obstacles are as follows:

- Insufficient power to make decisions and Limited involvement in political matters.
- Women who are impoverished and disadvantaged in society.
- Inadequate knowledge and restricted consciousness
- Changing a lot of institutions to fit the political and social norms of men.
- Women consider politics to be a "dirty" game.
- The representation of women in the media.
- The absence of collaboration and assistance from women's groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Women's lack of confidence and self-esteem is reinforced by specific cultural norms that hinder their opportunities to pursue political careers.
- The insufficient focus from the media on women's accomplishments and capabilities leads to a corresponding absence of public support for women's causes.

Chapter-3

Impact of Militancy on Women Emancipation in Kashmir

Since India's independence in 1947 and the subsequent formation of Pakistan, the Kashmir conflict has persisted, deeply impacting the region's socio-political fabric and hindering progress toward women's emancipation. Initially a princely state, Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India, though many Kashmiris have continued to advocate for their UN-recognized right to self-determination. However, the promise made by India's first Prime Minister to hold a plebiscite allowing Kashmiris to decide their future remains unfulfilled. According to Article 1 of the 1949–50 Constitution, Jammu and Kashmir was classified as a 'B' state a designation later modified as it integrated into the Indian Union while retaining unique status under Article 370. Enacted as a temporary measure, Article 370 granted autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir until an elected Constituent Assembly could determine the state's final status. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah became its first Prime Minister, leading a popular government in response to Maharaja Hari Singh's accession agreement with India.¹⁵⁴ The Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, formed in 1951, officially confirmed the state's affiliation with India in 1954. Subsequently, the assembly handled internal matters according to the state constitution, finalized in 1957. Despite the Seventh Amendment of the Indian Constitution reclassifying Jammu and Kashmir as a state, Article 370 remained intact to safeguard its autonomy. The 1954 presidential order retained the provision for amendments as needed. Jammu and Kashmir consist of three geographical regions. Jammu has a primarily Hindu population, the Kashmir valley is predominantly Muslim, and the Ladakh division is mainly inhabited by Buddhists.¹⁵⁵

Kashmir, the focal point of one of the world's longest-standing and complex disputes, remains unresolved as an international issue involving both India and Pakistan. At its core, the conflict revolves around territorial claims and the demand for self-determination, a right many in Jammu and Kashmir have long sought to exercise.¹⁵⁶ Since 1947, and particularly after 1989, the Kashmir Valley has faced prolonged unrest. Human rights abuses by Indian security forces and militants and severe restrictions on civil and political freedoms have intensified grievances. Protestors' calls for self-determination are often met with lethal force, including bullets, pellet guns, blasts and *pava* shells. The high concentration of Indian military forces in Kashmir the

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch (1999), *Behind the Kashmir Conflict: Abuses by Indian Security Forces and Militant Groups Continue*.

¹⁵⁵ Mandala, S. (2006), *Politics of State Autonomy and Regional Identity: Jammu And Kashmir*, Kalpaz, Delhi, P. 41.

¹⁵⁶ Bhat, S. (2017). "The Cost of Conflict", *Greater Kashmir*, P. 8.

most militarized zone globally has exacerbated the situation, with frequent allegations of harassment and violence against civilians, including women. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act grants the military sweeping authority, often leading to abuses with limited accountability. The conflict has bred systemic issues in the region, including poverty, corruption, police violence, identity politics, and pervasive human rights violations.¹⁵⁷

Militant attacks on government establishments, including offices, Schools, bridges, and targeted killings of police informants and intelligence personnel, severely undermined the functionality of the administration. A key tactic employed by the militants was to instill fear among National Conference members, pressuring them to sever ties with the party, which eventually resulted in the collapse of the political framework. Symbolic events linked to India and the state government such as Republic Day, Independence Day, Nehru's birth anniversary, and Sheikh Abdullah's death anniversary were marked by widespread blackouts across the valley. Additionally, October 27, the date marking the arrival of Indian troops in Kashmir to counter tribal invasions in 1947, came to be observed as "Occupation Day." The militants' call to boycott the Lok Sabha by-elections in November 1989 further intensified the crisis, with a significant number of polling officials declining to fulfill their duties.¹⁵⁸ The abduction of prominent figures, including Rubiya Sayeed, the daughter of then Union Home Minister Mufti Sayeed, led to the release of incarcerated militant associates in exchange for her freedom. Additionally, several foreign tourists were taken hostage. Following these events, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah stepped down, and Jammu and Kashmir was placed under Governor's rule. The initial reaction of both the Central and State governments to the Kashmiri insurgency ranged from a state of profound confusion and indecision to outright inaction and apparent disregard.¹⁵⁹

The insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has inflicted significant suffering on all communities, with the human cost being particularly devastating. Estimates of fatalities vary widely depending on the source. According to Amnesty International, over 17,000 people had been killed by the end of 1995, a figure that has likely exceeded 20,000 in subsequent years. Recent reports suggest the death toll may have surpassed 34,000. The number of individuals injured during the conflict is considerably higher. Between 1989 and 2002, an estimated 40,000 (based on Indian sources) to 80,000 (according to Hurriyat figures) people lost their lives. This includes

¹⁵⁷ Mukherjee K. (2014), The Kashmir Conflict in South Asia: Voices from Srinagar, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 30(1), P. 44.

¹⁵⁸ Bose, Sumantra (2003), *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Hoover University, P. 108.

¹⁵⁹ Schofield, Victoria (2003), *Kashmir in conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*, New York: I.B. Tauris, P. 146.

civilians, separatist fighters, and Indian security personnel. During this time frame, more than 4,600 security forces, 13,500 civilians, and 15,937 militants of whom approximately 3,000 were foreign nationals, primarily from Pakistan and Afghanistan were killed. Additionally, 55,538 violent incidents were documented. Counter-insurgency operations by Indian forces led to the seizure of around 40,000 firearms, 15,000 explosive devices, and over 6 million rounds of various types of ammunition.¹⁶⁰ The ongoing conflict has also significantly impacted the other prominent community in the Kashmir Valley the Kashmiri Pandits. While their experiences and hardships differ from those of the Muslim population, they are arguably no less severe. Though their loss of life has been comparatively lower, the most conspicuous consequence for the Pandits has been their mass exodus. Nearly the entire community, numbering over 140,000 individuals, has now migrated out of Kashmir.¹⁶¹

The conflict's intensity escalated in the late 1980s, primarily following the widely disputed 1987 elections, which led to an armed insurgency. Initially, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) spearheaded this movement, advocating for an independent and secular Kashmir. However, this objective diverged among factions. In the early 1990s, Hizbul Mujahideen rose to prominence, diminishing the JKLF's influence. As militancy grew, so did the involvement of external players, with Pakistan-based groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba entering the conflict and shifting the focus toward establishing an Islamic state in Kashmir. Amid these shifts, local governance did little to address the root causes of discontent, and subsequent elections continued to lack credibility among Kashmiris.¹⁶² In 2000, Abdul Majid Dar of Hizbul Mujahideen declared a unilateral ceasefire and initiated talks with the Indian government, expressing the group's willingness to participate in a peace process. However, he was later killed in an internal power struggle within the organization. On the other hand, Lashkar-e-Taiba views Kashmir as a means to pursue its larger goal of imposing Islamic Sharia in the region, with a primary focus on pan-Islamic objectives.¹⁶³

Each of the major political parties in the state adopted distinct strategies: The National Conference (NC) sought greater autonomy, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) advocated for a "healing touch" policy, while the Congress party emphasized cross-Line of Control (LoC) engagement. The conflict in Kashmir, while not directly involving the two divisions, has

¹⁶⁰ Bose, Sumantra (2003), *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Hoover University, P. 4.

¹⁶¹ Victoria Schofield, *Op. Cit.*, P. 151.

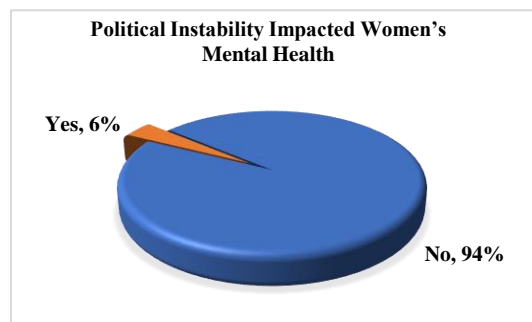
¹⁶² S. Kavita and D. Suba chandran, (2010), "*J&K: From Militancy to Jihad*" in D. Suba Chandran and P. R. Chari's (eds.) *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2009; Continuing Violence's, Failing Peace Processes*, New Delhi, Routledge.

¹⁶³ M. Roohul Amin and B. Subzar, (2022), *Impact of Armed Conflict on Kashmiri Women*, *Rajasthali Journal* Vol. 1, Issue 3, P. 111.

become one of the most contentious areas in India and globally. The well-being of women in Jammu and Ladakh is relatively better than in Kashmir, where they face direct involvement in the conflict and live in challenging conditions. Over the past 35 years, Kashmir has been engulfed in intense turmoil, with the issue persisting and never transitioning into a non-violent state. While the conflict has primarily affected Kashmir, women across the region have faced its harshest impacts. In the Kashmir Valley, where the violence is most acute, women are subjected to direct repercussions of the conflict. The heavy militarization has brought profound social and psychological trauma, disrupting not only community structures but also efforts toward women's empowerment and social justice.¹⁶⁴

Field study reveals that an overwhelming majority (94.5%) felt that political instability has negatively affected women's mental health, with no respondents reporting any positive impact. Figure 3.1 illustrates the perceptions of respondents on how political instability has impacted women's mental health in District Pulwama. The data reveals that a significant majority, 94.5% (377 respondents), feel that political instability has had a negative effect on women's mental well-being, indicating widespread awareness of the psychological toll of ongoing conflict. A smaller group, 5.5% (22 respondents), reported a neutral impact, while no respondents observed any positive effects. This strong skew towards a negative impact underscores the deep-seated and pervasive mental health challenges faced by women in the region as a result of prolonged instability and conflict.

Fig. 3.1: In your opinion, how has the political instability impacted women's mental health in your community?



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

3.1: Impact of Armed Conflicts in Kashmir

¹⁶⁴ Supreme Court Observer (2023, September 19), *Analysis: The Jammu & Kashmir Constituent Assembly: A Brief History*.

Kashmir is recognized as one of the most heavily militarized regions in the world, with an estimated 500,000 Indian troops stationed in the region. Since 1989, Kashmir has experienced a persistent insurgency, driven largely by the widespread demand for "Azadi" (freedom). By 2018, a human rights report documented an increase in military presence, estimating around 700,000 troops in the valley, which contrasts sharply with the local population of approximately 5.7 million. Allegations of human rights violations involving Indian soldiers and local informers are prevalent, further intensifying tensions in the region.¹⁶⁵ Chenoy & Chenoy argue that the roots of separatism in Kashmir extend beyond economic issues. They identify key factors such as the denial of rights, injustice, violence, and human rights abuses. They contend that narratives of repression become deeply embedded within society, fostering a collective sense of victimhood.¹⁶⁶ This communal experience of rights denial and injustice strengthens a shared consciousness among the affected group, often manifesting in a desire to separate from the state and, by extension, from the larger nation. Over time, the valley's population has experienced conflict fatigue, a state of exhaustion stemming from the persistence of violence. However, periodic escalations of violent incidents rekindle cycles of unrest and instability.¹⁶⁷

The decades-long armed conflict in Kashmir has exacted a heavy toll on its people. Nearly every family has experienced loss or hardship directly or indirectly due to the violence in the region. There is scarcely a village that has not faced destruction in one form or another. The conflict has also inflicted significant casualties on the Indian armed forces. Thousands of soldiers and paramilitary personnel have sustained injuries in the ongoing violence. Over 100,000 lives have been lost in the valley due to the conflict, and thousands more have gone missing. According to the Association of Disappeared Persons (APDP), a non-governmental organization representing the families of victims, the estimated number of involuntary disappearances is around 10,000 to date.¹⁶⁸ The decades-long armed conflict in Kashmir has exacted a heavy toll on its people. Nearly every family has experienced loss or hardship directly or indirectly due to the violence in the region. There is scarcely a village that has not faced destruction in one form or another. The conflict has also inflicted significant casualties on the Indian armed forces. Thousands of soldiers and paramilitary personnel have sustained injuries in the ongoing violence. Over 100,000 lives have been lost in the valley due to the conflict, and thousands more have gone missing. According to the Association of Disappeared Persons

¹⁶⁵ State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir (2005). *Compiled and Collated by Public Commission on Human Rights, & Imroz, P., on behalf of Coalition of Civil Society*. Srinagar, Hindustan, Shahdara Delhi, P. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Chenoy A. M. and. Chenoy, K. M. (2010), *Maoist and Other Armed conflicts*, Penguin, India, PP. 65, 66.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., P. 52.

¹⁶⁸ Zargar, Abdul, Majid, (2017), "Kashmir and Enforced Disappearances Day", *Kashmir Watch*,

(APDP), a non-governmental organization representing the families of victims, the estimated number of involuntary disappearances is around 10,000 to date.¹⁶⁹

In 2017, a series of violent incidents led to the tragic deaths of 20 civilian women in Jammu and Kashmir. This included the July 10 attack on a bus in Anantnag, where suspected militants targeted Amarnath pilgrims, resulting in the deaths of eight women. Other women perished in proximity to conflict zones; four lost their lives in cross-border shelling along the Line of Control (LOC), while a woman in Pulwama reportedly suffocated due to military tear gas bombardment. In September of the same year, a girl in Tral town succumbed to injuries from a grenade explosion, and another woman in Seer village, Pulwama district, was tragically killed by unknown gunmen.¹⁷⁰

Table: IV: Shows Killings in Kashmir from 2008 to 2018

Year	Armed forces and police	Militants	Civilians	Total
2008	<i>151</i>	<i>363</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>671</i>
2009	<i>117</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>460</i>
2010	<i>102</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>470</i>
2011	<i>71</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>228</i>
2012	<i>36</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>143</i>
2013	<i>82</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>203</i>
2014	<i>83</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>235</i>
2015	<i>58</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>219</i>
2016	<i>104</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>395</i>
2017	<i>125</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>449</i>
2018	<i>159</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>160</i>	<i>586</i>
Total	1088	1890	1081	4059

Source: Annual human rights review 2018

According to the information in the Table IV, 160 individuals lost their lives in 2018—18 of them were women. Furthermore, during the same period, at least 31 children died, accounting

¹⁶⁹ R. Sudha and M. Siddharat (2010), *Gender and Armed Conflict in Kashmir*, India: Rupa, PP. 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Annual Report (2017), *A Review of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir 2017*, JKCCS Annual Human Rights Review, P. 8.

for nearly 20% of civilian casualties an alarming rise over the previous ten years. This emphasizes the negative effects of ongoing violence against women, which have an influence on the community directly as well as indirectly on the nation as a whole.

3.2: Impact of Militancy on Women in Kashmir

Women and men experience armed conflicts differently, with women often bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. Conflicts disrupt entire societies in complex ways, but the effects on women are uniquely severe. In Kashmir, the prolonged violence has left lasting scars on the community, with women suffering especially deeply. This conflict has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities and imposed immense psychological, social, and economic burdens on women.¹⁷¹ The unrest has caused widespread devastation, often leading to the loss of husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers who are typically the main providers and caregivers. With the men gone, many women have found themselves as heads of households, forced to take on new roles and responsibilities. In facing desertion and abandonment, they have been compelled to find ways to support and nurture their families, often through laborious, underpaid work under extremely challenging circumstances.¹⁷²

Safeena Beigh, state president of the women's wing of the PDP, noted that cases of violence against women have surged. She observed that women's psychological and emotional distress, amplified by the conflict, often remains unaddressed. "Many incidents go unreported due to the shame associated with them. It is essential to bring these issues to the forefront to strengthen the institutions responsible for addressing them. Everyone, including the media, must play a role in raising awareness," she emphasized.¹⁷³ Research shows that despite the challenges, Kashmiri women have taken on distinct roles in decision-making during the conflict. Women are increasingly involved in community management, reconstruction efforts, and peacebuilding processes. They have actively participated in efforts to rebuild their lives, challenging the perception of women as merely passive victims. Even as violence has subsided since the 1990s, violations of humanitarian law persist, affecting the economy and essential social services. This violence directly impacts over 700,000 people in the Kashmir Valley and border areas, with ripple effects across the entire population of Jammu and Kashmir, which numbers approximately 10 million. While various social security programs exist, they fall short of addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including widows. Nearly 40 million widows across

¹⁷¹ W. Charu. (2004), *Silent Victims in Armed Conflict; an Area Study of Jammu and Kashmir*. Serial, P. 2.

¹⁷² Ibid., P. 12.

¹⁷³ Mohidin Rifat (September 14 2018), Crime Against Women on Rise, *The Tribune Srinagar*.

India, accounting for around 10% of the country's female population as of 2009, still face inadequate government action in securing fundamental rights for survival.

Table V: Showing Violence on Women in Jammu and Kashmir

Crime Head	2003	04	05	06	07	08	09	2010	2011
Rape	<i>211</i>	<i>218</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>219</i>	<i>237</i>	<i>245</i>	<i>277</i>
Kidnapping & abduction	<i>615</i>	<i>632</i>	<i>658</i>	<i>723</i>	<i>707</i>	<i>656</i>	<i>825</i>	<i>840</i>	<i>1023</i>
Dowry deaths	<i>10</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>11</i>
Stabbing on women with intending to outrage her modesty	<i>875</i>	<i>990</i>	<i>830</i>	<i>960</i>	<i>986</i>	<i>935</i>	<i>972</i>	<i>1038</i>	<i>1194</i>
Abuse of the modesty of women	<i>376</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>371</i>	<i>347</i>	<i>353</i>	<i>296</i>	<i>371</i>	<i>262</i>	<i>350</i>
Cruelty by husband or Relatives	<i>71</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>162</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>286</i>
Dowry prohibition act 1961	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Immoral Traffic Act	<i>2</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>
Total	2164	2208	2144	2432	2521	2295	2624	2611	3146

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India

In recent years, the incidence of crimes against women in Jammu and Kashmir has been on the rise. Official data from the J&K Police Department reveals that reported cases of violence against women increased from 2,929 in 2016 to 3,363 in 2017. Notably, the highest numbers of

these incidents were reported in the twin capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar. In Srinagar, 298 cases of violence against women were documented in 2016, which rose significantly to 417 cases in 2017. In Jammu, 373 cases were reported in 2017 alone. Additionally, in the districts of Baramulla, Budgam, and Anantnag, a total of 703 incidents were reported in 2017. Across the region, 2,119 cases of violence against women were recorded in Kashmir, while 1,244 were recorded in Jammu in the same year.

Particularly alarming has been the rise in incidents of rape, abduction, and molestation, which have prompted concern among civil society groups and women across the state. In one tragic case, the brutal rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl by her stepbrother and his friends in north Kashmir's Uri area sent shockwaves throughout the Valley. Police records show that 314 rape cases were reported in 2017, up from 262 in 2016. Abductions also saw a rise, from 775 reported cases in 2016 to 960 in 2017. Cases of molestation increased from 1,233 in 2016 to 1,422 in 2017. Domestic violence and marital conflicts remain pervasive issues, with 129 dowry deaths recorded in 2017 alone. Suicides in the state rose from 144 cases in 2016 to 153 in 2017, and instances of cruelty by husbands and in-laws also increased from 342 cases in 2016 to 375 in 2017. Authorities claim that steps have been taken to curb violence against women, including the establishment of six all-women police stations across the state. However, these measures have made limited impact on the ground, as incidents continue to rise.¹⁷⁴

The longstanding Kashmir conflict, unresolved for over seven decades, has created a severe plight for women, with both state and non-state actors contributing to their distress. This protracted turmoil has led to an increase in the number of "half-widows," half-orphans, and orphans in the Valley, while cases of rape, molestation, and enforced disappearances persist. The repercussions of violence against women extend beyond physical harm, affecting them psychologically, socially, politically, and economically. In addition to facing daily threats due to the ongoing conflict, women in Kashmir grapple with economic hardships, domestic abuse, severe treatment over minor disputes, negative social attitudes, and an escalating rate of crimes against them. The entangled dynamics of the Kashmir conflict, coupled with acts of widespread violence, have intensified the risks women face, particularly in terms of sexual violence perpetrated by both militants and security forces.¹⁷⁵

3.3: Sexual Violence in the Kashmir Conflict

¹⁷⁴ Behera, N. C. (2000), *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*. Manohar, New Delhi.

¹⁷⁵ Sharma, P. (2007), *Violence Against Women on the Rise in Jammu and Kashmir*, News Track India, New Delhi.

Both government forces and armed militants in Kashmir have systematically employed rape as a strategy to degrade, humiliate, punish, or coerce their adversaries throughout the decades of conflict.¹⁷⁶ In the 1990s, during security forces' crackdowns and cordon-and-search operations, numerous women faced violence, including beatings and sexual assault, as collective punishment for civilian resistance. Such incidents of sexual violence serve not only to shame the victims but also to tarnish the honor of the men associated with them.¹⁷⁷ Globally, sexual assault has increasingly become a weapon in conflicts. Ruth Seifert identifies three primary motivations for the occurrence of rape in war: first, women are treated as spoils of war, distributed among victorious men as rewards for conquest; second, raping women acts as a means of revenge against the defeated party, aiming to humiliate them by violating their women in the presence of their men; and third, victorious forces may engage in gang rape and systematic sexual violence to celebrate their triumph.¹⁷⁸

Nyla Khan notes that numerous reports have alleged incidents of rape perpetrated by Indian security forces during search operations. Many women have suffered humiliation at the hands of army personnel.¹⁷⁹ A notorious case occurred in 1991 when approximately 800 soldiers from the Fourth Rajput Regiment reportedly raped between 23 to 60 Kashmiri women in a single night in Kunan Poshpora, marking the beginning of prolonged suffering for the victims and their families. Another shocking incident involved an adolescent girl who was raped by an Indian army commander and his guard just before her wedding, while her fiancé was killed. Neither the Indian nor Pakistani governments acknowledged these crimes, leaving the perpetrators unpunished.¹⁸⁰ In 1996, during protests against military brutality in Sopora Bomai, army personnel abducted several girls and subjected them to rape in public fields.¹⁸¹ Security forces would frequently enter homes to sexually assault women, with incidents occurring in succession.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ Rita, M. (2001), *Guns and Burqa: Women in Kashmir Conflict*, Sage, New Delhi, P. 7.

¹⁷⁷ W. Charu. (2004), *Women Silent Victims in the Armed Conflict*, Serial, P. 103.

¹⁷⁸ Seifert, R. (1993), *War and Rape: Analytical Approaches*, *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, Pamphlet, PP. 1- 25.

¹⁷⁹ Khan, N. A. (2001), *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir*, Tulika, India.

¹⁸⁰ Muhammad R., (2016, March 2), Kunan Mass Rape: Army Fails to File Responses Before SC, Case Listed for 29 April, *Kashmir Life*.

¹⁸¹ Institute of Kashmir Studies, Srinagar, (March 1998), Rape and Molestation; A Weapon of War in Kashmir (A consolidated report on various Atrocities committed on women folk in Kashmir under the national conference government;) prepared by: *The Jammu and Kashmir Human Rights Awareness and Documentation Centre*, Srinagar, No. 32, P. 26.

¹⁸² Manchanda, R. (2005), Women's Agency in Peace Building; Gender Relations in Post-Conflict Construction, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(44), P. 14.

In one widely reported case, BSF soldiers arrested and sexually assaulted a young bride, Mubina Gani, in May 1990 as she traveled from her wedding to her husband's home. Her aunt was also raped during this incident, which resulted in gunfire from security forces, killing one man and injuring others. Authorities claimed the gathering was caught in "crossfire." Following extensive media coverage, the police were directed to investigate the case, which confirmed the sexual assaults, but the security forces were never held accountable.¹⁸³

In another case, a woman from Jamir Qadeem was admitted to Sopore's Subdistrict Hospital on June 26, 1990, suffering from vaginal bleeding after the BSF entered her neighborhood following gunfire between their forces and militants. Medical reports documented bite marks, scratches, and injuries to her genital area, yet a police report filed on July 5, 1990, accusing BSF members of rape remains uninvestigated.¹⁸⁴

Protests erupted in the Kashmir Valley during the summer of 2009 in response to the "Shopian rape and murder case," involving the alleged kidnapping, rape, and murder of two teenage girls in Bonham, Shopian District. The girls disappeared on May 29, 2009, and their bodies were discovered the following day. Locals blamed security forces for the atrocity, but police denied the allegations and claimed the girls drowned. Separatist leaders capitalized on the unrest, fueling months of public demonstrations.¹⁸⁵ Alarming, deeply troubling instances of rape involving security personnel in Jammu and Kashmir often went uninvestigated or were distorted to protect those implicated. In some cases, individuals were shielded from consequences and even rewarded or promoted despite their blatant human rights violations.

Since 1991, reports of rape by armed groups in Kashmir have increased, coinciding with a rise in other violent crimes such as murder, extortion, and kidnapping. Women have been abducted by rival militant organizations and held hostage to coerce male relatives, only to be raped and killed. In other instances, armed militants have threatened families, demanding women be handed over under the threat of violence. The local term "forced marriages" reflects the stigma and social exclusion faced by rape victims, perpetuated by a code of silence and terror that prevents public denunciation of atrocities committed by armed groups.¹⁸⁶

Allegations of being an informant, opposing militants, or supporting rival factions have fueled instances of militant rape. One of the earliest known cases involved Sarla Bhat, a 27-year-old staff nurse abducted on April 14, 1990. Her body was discovered four days later, accompanied

¹⁸³ Amnesty International, India (March, 1992): *Torture, Rape and Deaths in Custody*, London, P. 21.

¹⁸⁴ Goldston James (1991), *Human Rights in India: Kashmir Under Siege (Asia Watch Report)*, Human Rights Watch, P. 87.

¹⁸⁵ Press Trust of India. (2009, July 11), Protests After Alleged Rape, Murder in J&K, *NDTV*.

¹⁸⁶ Rape in Kashmir a Crime of War, *Asia Watch & Physicians for Human Rights*, Vol. 5, Issue. 9, P. 15.

by a note accusing her of informing security forces about injured militants. The JKLF claimed responsibility for her murder, with the post-mortem indicating she had been raped before being killed.¹⁸⁷

Another notable case from 1992 involved the rape and murder of a family in Nai Sadak, Kralkhud. Armed militants, seeking food and shelter, subsequently shot Sohanlal, a 60-year-old retired truck driver, and assaulted his daughter, Archana, who called for help. The autopsy confirmed both women had been sexually assaulted prior to their deaths. In response, approximately 5,000 women protested against the killings and rapes, highlighting the violation of non-combatant rights as outlined in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits mistreatment of civilians.¹⁸⁸

The impact of militancy in Kashmir on women has been profound and devastating, affecting their safety, mental health, social and economic stability, and overall quality of life. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive strategy that considers the unique needs and experiences of women in conflict zones. Over the past 34 years, Kashmiri women have endured suffering and punishment from both Indian forces and militants, facing violence, psychological trauma, and social upheaval. The insurgency has limited women's choices and opportunities, contributing to a cycle of domestic violence. Violence against women has escalated due to armed conflict and militant behavior, yet women in Kashmir have also taken a leading role in opposing injustices and crimes against humanity committed by both state and non-state actors.¹⁸⁹

3.4: Social Impact of Militancy on Women in Kashmir

Women in Kashmir are increasingly subjected to domestic violence, with male dominance manifesting in brutal forms. This violence persists even among educated and financially independent women, underscoring a pervasive culture of subjugation. Over the past three decades, incidents of violence against women have surged, exacerbated by armed conflict and militant actions. Domestic violence knows no boundaries; it transcends urban and rural divides, impacting women across various socioeconomic, educational, cultural, and age groups within the state. The militarization and militancy in the region have intensified these issues, resulting in a disturbing rise in crimes against women, including rape, kidnapping, dowry-related offenses, trafficking, and suicide, as highlighted in various statistics from Jammu and Kashmir.

¹⁸⁷ Yusuf Jameel, "Ex-Minister Shot Dead by J&K Militants," *Telegraph*, April 20, 1990.

¹⁸⁸ Rape in Kashmir a Crime of War, *Asia Watch & Physicians for Human Rights*, Vol. 5, Issue. 9, P. 16.

¹⁸⁹ Dabla B. A. (2010), *Sociological Papers on Kashmir*, Vol.1, JAY KAY, Srinagar, P. 206.

Notably, military and paramilitary groups, often armed with state-sponsored weapons, perpetrate heinous acts against women, which are frequently excused under strict laws such as the Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. This violence is compounded by actions from both pro-government and pro-freedom militants.¹⁹⁰ The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 regulates military operations in Jammu and Kashmir, granting officers the authority to fire upon individuals perceived to be interfering with public order. This Act allows for the use of necessary force to arrest without a warrant. Under various pretexts, militants have killed many Kashmiris, asserting that such actions are essential for their armed resistance. Consequently, family units have been shattered, leaving behind a growing number of widows and orphans. Women are then burdened with the responsibility of meeting basic needs, compelling many widows to enter the labor market, where they often face exploitation and ongoing abuse from employers. Notably, some studies suggest that the Kashmir conflict has significantly increased women's labor participation.¹⁹¹

Caught in a patriarchal society, women in Kashmir are simultaneously viewed as the builders of families, a narrative often echoed in media and academia. Numerous efforts have been made to explore the multifaceted issues of victimhood and empowerment amid prevailing circumstances of force and harassment. However, the overall situation of women remains complex and elusive. It is essential to recognize that the condition of women in Kashmir cannot be isolated from the political violence that permeates the valley. The quality of life for women, whether positive or negative, is profoundly influenced by the political landscape and society at large. To address the challenges faced by women in Kashmir, it is imperative to end the political violence that grips the region.¹⁹² Kashmiri women have actively contributed to society, with much of their involvement shaped by the benevolent patriarchal norms prevalent in Kashmiri culture.¹⁹³

For several decades, Kashmir has grappled with political turmoil and armed strife, leading to noteworthy shifts in its social fabric. The matter of militancy in the region has left a multifaceted impact on the social, cultural, and economic fabric, even extending to women's clothing choices. Kashmir's diversity, which encompasses various religious and cultural communities, influences people's attire based on their affiliations. In the context of the conflict, the increased presence of security forces and an atmosphere charged with tension have shaped the dressing

¹⁹⁰ Sarwer, G. (2017), Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir. *International Journal of Social Relevance & Concern*, 5(5), PP. 7-17.

¹⁹¹ Rashid, A. (2011), *Waiting for Justice: Half-widows*, Pharos Media, P. 10.

¹⁹² Mattu, A. M. (2010), *Kashmir Issue: A Historical Perspective*, Ali Mohammad, Srinagar.

¹⁹³ Maqbool, O. (2007), Impact of Conflict on Women in Kashmir, *Int. J. Political. Sci. Development.*, 5(3) P. 115.

choices of some women. Factors such as personal safety and adherence to cultural norms play a significant role in these decisions. Due to security considerations, certain women opt for more conservative clothing, such as hijabs, headscarves, or traditional Kashmiri attire like the pheran, aiming to minimize attention and avoid potential harassment or targeting by security forces or militants. Since the late 1990s, militants have imposed mandates requiring women to fully cover themselves with a Burqa, deeming it an “essential aspect of Islam.” Women seen outside without appropriate clothing face targeting and threats, including acid and paint attacks, while others have suffered serious injuries, such as being shot in the legs for their attire.¹⁹⁴

Even female educators have faced intimidation from students for not conforming to these dress codes. For instance, Mehvish, 16, and Nausheen, 14, were shot by militants for wearing jeans.¹⁹⁵

Despite warnings aimed at urban girls, particularly those who are educated, many in rural areas defiantly embrace traditional clothing. The Qasaba, paired with a long phiran, was the customary attire, always leaving the face uncovered, in contrast to the Burqa, which was never part of traditional Kashmiri clothing.¹⁹⁶ Rather than providing protection, the burqa may expose women to greater vulnerability, as security personnel claim that one in three individuals wearing burqas is associated with militant activities. Disturbingly, women in burqas have experienced humiliation and sexual harassment from security personnel. While threats from militants and various factors lead many women in Kashmir to adopt the burqa or chador, instances of women appearing in public without these garments still occur. It is essential to recognize that the influence of militancy on women's attire is complex and varies among individuals and communities.¹⁹⁷ Not all women feel compelled to change their dress due to militancy; many continue to express diverse clothing styles, guided by personal preferences, cultural standards, and religious convictions.

My study assesses the impact of insurgency on the social status of women, based on a total of 399 respondents. The data reveals that 62.4% (249 individuals) acknowledge a noticeable impact on their social status due to insurgency. In contrast, 7.5% (30 individuals) report no discernible impact, while 30.1% (120 individuals) remain uncertain or choose not to disclose their experiences, stating, “I can't say.”

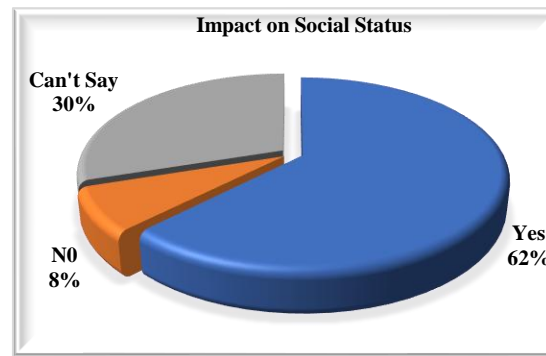
¹⁹⁴ M. Basharat Nabi (2021), Violence Against Women, *International Journal of Applied Research*, 7(4), P. 421.

¹⁹⁵ Suri, K. (2006), *Impact of Violence on Women's Education in Kashmir*, WISCOMP, New Delhi 110003, India, P. 21.

¹⁹⁶ Bhasin K. Menon R. Khan N. S. Kali for Women (Organization) Isis International & South Asian Women's Forum (1994), *Against all odds: essays on women religion and development from india and pakistan*. Published by Kali for Women in collaboration with Isis International and the South Asian Women's Forum, P. 128

¹⁹⁷ Manchanda, R. (2001), *Guns and Burqa: Women in Kashmir Conflict*. SAGE, New Delhi PP. 59,60

Fig. 3.2: Frequency distribution of the Respondents whether insurgency has impacted their social status



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

3.5: Impact on Education of Women

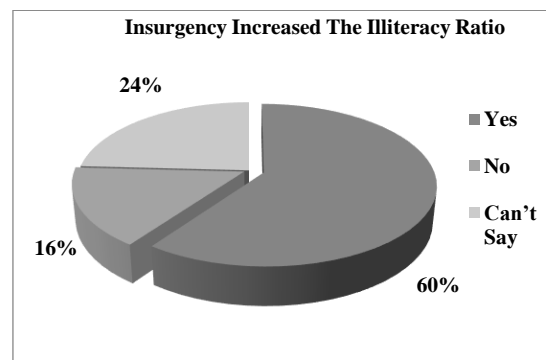
The aspiration to ensure education for all in the Kashmir Valley remains unrealized due to prolonged unrest. Data from the School Education Department reveals that a substantial number of children, totaling 43,153, are currently not part of the educational system in Jammu and Kashmir. This figure includes 19,426 boys and 23,727 girls, encompassing both dropouts and those who have never been enrolled. Alarming, 22,041 children comprising 9,296 boys and 12,745 girls—have discontinued their education. The state, already grappling with the highest illiteracy rate among northern states, faces additional concern as 10,982 girls aged 6 to 14 have never had the opportunity to attend school.¹⁹⁸ In 2001, the literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir stood at 55%, revealing a significant disparity between rural (48%) and urban areas (72%). This stark gap underscores the underdevelopment of Kashmir's rural regions, particularly in villages near the Line of Control, where educational opportunities are severely lacking. Historical neglect of the education of Muslims and women is evident, with literacy rates reported at 66% for men and only 42% for women in 2001. A 2003 report further highlights that Muslim-majority Kashmir has the lowest rural literacy rates, while Hindu-majority Jammu boasts the highest. The impact of militancy on education is profound; many districts afflicted by violence show poor literacy rates, with an estimated 650 schools destroyed by extremists. Furthermore, security personnel have taken control of numerous schools in remote areas, further hindering educational access. Consequently, the overall literacy rate in the state stands at 64.97%, in contrast to India's average of 74.04%.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Migrator, (2021), Education for All, *Greater Kashmir*.

¹⁹⁹ Geelani, Z. A. (2012), *Effect of Militancy on the Educational Standards in Jammu and Kashmir State*, The Communications, 21(2), P. 29.

Violent incidents in urban areas significantly affect girls' educational opportunities, leading parents to perceive greater dangers for their daughters in schools that are susceptible to attacks. According to the economic survey report from 2016–2017 presented in the legislative assembly, there is a declining trend in the number of out-of-school children. Specifically, the report indicates a decrease in the number of out-of-school girls from 46,218 in 2015–2016 to 31,856 in 2016–2017.²⁰⁰ However, the presence of military camps exacerbates the threats faced by girls, increasing their vulnerability to sexual violence, abuse, and harassment. As a result, dropout rates among girls attending these schools are on the rise as they seek to avoid such risks.²⁰¹ Figure 3.3 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents regarding the impact of the ongoing insurgency on the illiteracy rate of women in the state. The sample size for this study is 399 respondents. Of the total, the majority (59.9%) indicated that the ongoing insurgency has increased the illiteracy rate of women, while a smaller proportion (15.8%) disagreed. A significant minority (24.3%) stated that they could not determine the impact. These findings suggest that most respondents believe that the insurgency has contributed to the rising illiteracy rate among women.

Figure 3.3: Frequency distribution of respondents about ongoing insurgency has increased the illiteracy ratio of females in the region.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

3.6: Impact of Militancy on Women's Political Participation in Kashmir:

After addressing the social aspect, another crucial dimension emerges: politics. The progress of any nation is fundamentally linked to political engagement, which is particularly critical for the advancement of women. While political involvement serves as a key driver of overall national

²⁰⁰ Dar, P. A. (2022). "Gender Equality in Elementary Education: A Dream or Reality" *IARS' International Research Journal*, 12(01), P. 42.

²⁰¹ Ahmad, P. A and Balamurgan, S. (2021), The Impact of Armed Conflict on Education in Kashmir, *Vidya bharti International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 12(2), P. 618.

development, its significance is heightened in the context of promoting women's empowerment. Before the 1972 election, women in Jammu and Kashmir were not represented in the assembly. A turning point occurred during this election when four out of six female candidates secured victory, resulting in the highest percentage of women (5.33%) entering the assembly. Despite an upward trajectory in female participation in elections since then, the proportion of women in the assembly has not surpassed 3%, except for the elections in 1977 and 1983. Notably, despite the increasing number of women entering the political arena, many forfeited their deposits during assembly elections, a trend that persisted even in the 2002 elections. Consequently, the administration was constitutionally compelled to recommend two female candidates, and there was a prolonged absence of female ministers until 1996, when Sakina Itoo was appointed, breaking this pattern.²⁰²

In the troubled region of Kashmir, political engagement has notably decreased in the 21st century, contrasting sharply with the positive global trend of increased women's representation. The electoral dynamics in Jammu and Kashmir reveal a troubling pattern of diminishing female presence, both in the legislative assembly and local self-government. A significant gap is evident between the 2008 and 2014 elections, witnessing a substantial drop in the number of female members: from 67 women members in 2008 to only 26 in 2014. This decline in representation can be attributed to the persistent conflict and the boycott efforts led by separatist groups and militants, which disrupted the electoral landscape. Moreover, the local self-government experienced a reduction in women's representation in 2018 compared to 2011. In 2011, women comprised 29% of local self-government representatives, but this figure dwindled to 26% in 2018.²⁰³ Several factors contribute to this decline, including:

- Ongoing strife in Kashmir
- Limited awareness and comprehension
- Inadequate educational opportunities
- Scarce resources
- Decreased enthusiasm due to frequent casualties
- Continuous instances of violence, trauma, and mistreatment of women
- A lack of commitment from authorities to address conflicts
- Political parties' hesitance to empower female candidates
- Unfavorable conditions within households

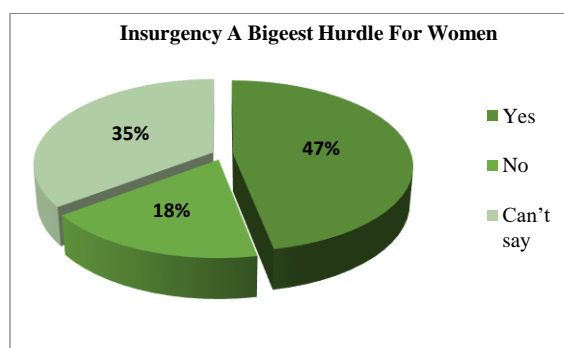
²⁰² Masoodi, A. (2016, April 4) Kudos to Mehbooba Mufti, But Where are Kashmir's Females, *The Mint*.

²⁰³ Shanker, R. (2014), *Measurement of Women's Political Participation at the Local Level: India Experience*, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, India.

- The impact of patriarchal family setups
- Women refraining from engaging in elections due to adherence to separatist and militant boycott calls

The presence of women in both the state legislature and local government is restricted by these various factors. The prolonged conflict, spanning seven decades, has left the populace emotionally unstable and confined to their homes. Life has become particularly challenging for women, given the constant and unpredictable presence of armed forces near rehabilitation centers. Consequently, many women are compelled to stay indoors due to the psychological fear instilled by the armed forces. The Indian Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) ensure that women are granted reserved seats in panchayats and municipalities. Regarding women's issues, there has been a noticeable shift from a welfare to a developmental strategy since the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974–1978).²⁰⁴ Women in the Kashmir Valley are eager to exercise their right to vote and engage in politics. However, persistent turmoil and numerous social and political challenges hinder their ability to adequately voice and promote their interests. The field survey data in Figure 3.4 illustrates that nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) believe insurgency is the primary barrier to women's political participation in Kashmir. In contrast, 17.8% disagree, suggesting they do not see insurgency as a significant obstacle, while 35.3% remain neutral, indicating uncertainty or lack of opinion on the issue. This distribution highlights the prevalent perception among respondents that political instability impacts women's ability to engage in politics, though a notable proportion is either skeptical or undecided. This data is further represented visually in Figure 3.3, underscoring the impact of insurgency on women's political roles in the region.

Figure 3.4: Frequency distribution of responses: whether the insurgency in state is a biggest hurdle in the way of political participation of women in Kashmir



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

²⁰⁴ Chakrapani, R. (2015, August 19), Women power? *The Hindu Frontline*.

3.7: Economic Impacts of Militancy on Women in Kashmir

Insurgency profoundly affects the economic landscape of societies, leading to immediate resource destruction and lasting consequences for local economies. The repercussions include physical devastation of urban infrastructure, human casualties, and injuries. Armed conflicts directly disrupt a state's economy, resulting in declines in handicraft industries, agricultural production, and the tourism sector. Furthermore, essential infrastructure components such as roads, power supply, communication systems, and access to clean drinking water often languish in disrepair as resources are diverted towards counter-terrorism efforts.²⁰⁵ Political reforms aimed at embedding democracy in Jammu and Kashmir sparked the 'Kashmir Insurgency' in 1989. This unrest resulted in widespread displacement, health crises, limited job opportunities, and high levels of corruption, as noted by the 'Transparency International Corruption Index.' Among the most severely impacted districts are Kupwara and Badgam, where the economic situation has deteriorated significantly. The India Water Treaty restricted dam construction, leading to inadequate power supply, which directly hampered industrial output; industrial production rose only slightly from Rs. 9,904 lakhs in 1981 to Rs. 1,38,208 lakhs in 2002. Additionally, political volatility and ongoing counter-insurgency efforts contributed to modest growth in the number of factories, which increased from 574 in 1982 to 964 in 2002 at an annual rate of just 2.7%. This bleak economic landscape has been exacerbated by the ideologically separatist jihadist movement, further widening the divide in the minds of Kashmiris. Human rights abuses and persistent killings have compounded issues such as 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,' leaving individuals trapped in a chaotic existence.²⁰⁶

Different types of violence, alongside social and traditional practices against women, impede their access to education and render them unemployed and dependent. Even educated women face these challenges, with the unemployment rate among women in Jammu and Kashmir reaching 20.2% significantly higher than in neighboring states like Punjab (5.6%), Haryana (4.8%), Delhi (4.3%), and Himachal Pradesh (2.2%). This figure also exceeds the national average of 3.7%. Moreover, women's unemployment is higher in urban areas compared to rural regions of the state, with urban women facing an unemployment rate of 25.6%, compared to 16.6% for rural women. According to the 2011 census, the total workforce in Jammu and Kashmir comprises 4.323 million individuals, with main workers making up 2.644 million

²⁰⁵ Islam, Ajaz Ul, (2014), Impact of Armed Conflict on Economy and Tourism: A Study of State of Jammu and Kashmir, *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, Volume 4, Issue 6., PP. 55-60.

²⁰⁶ V. Pattammal (2021), Economic Impact of Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir, *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue. 2, P. 264.

(61.77%) and marginal workers 1.679 million (38.83%). Among them, female workers represent only 26.09% of the workforce, with women accounting for merely 12.8% of main workers in Jammu and Kashmir, compared to 47.02% of marginal workers.²⁰⁷

Many women have lost loved ones since the onset of conflict in Kashmir, typically the primary earners in their families, such as spouses or parents. Each death, whether of a civilian or an armed individual, causes families to disintegrate as cohesive socioeconomic units, leading to challenges in emotional stability and subsistence. Vulnerable women bear a significant burden, resulting in serious psychological and social problems. Most find it difficult to cope with these challenging conditions without access to professional counseling services. Several studies indicate a notable rise in female suicides throughout the post-insurgency era, highlighting the dire consequences of the conflict.²⁰⁸ Widows, having lost their husbands, face severe economic challenges. They often endure significant hardships, working in fields or serving in households just to meet daily needs. Their children frequently have to sacrifice their education to support their mothers in improving their financial situations, striving to escape extreme poverty. However, finding a livelihood proves to be a formidable task for all widows. The Kashmiri community has become increasingly deprived as a result of the insurgency, experiencing capital depletion, declines in income and employment opportunities, the physical destruction of agricultural resources, and mass population displacement.²⁰⁹ The resurgence of insurgency in the region has exacerbated the disadvantages faced by Kashmiri society, leading to reduced capital, income, and employment, alongside the physical devastation of agricultural assets.²¹⁰ In my survey (Figure 3.5), 41.8% of respondents indicated that political turmoil and unrest are responsible for the higher unemployment rate among women in Kashmir. Additionally, 24.6% attributed this issue to the selfishness of politicians, while 20.8% pointed to a lack of natural resources. Finally, 12.8% of respondents cited other reasons. These responses suggest that the insurgency in the state has generated numerous problems, with women's unemployment being a primary concern that is escalating at an alarming rate. The lack of a robust industrial sector further exacerbates this issue.

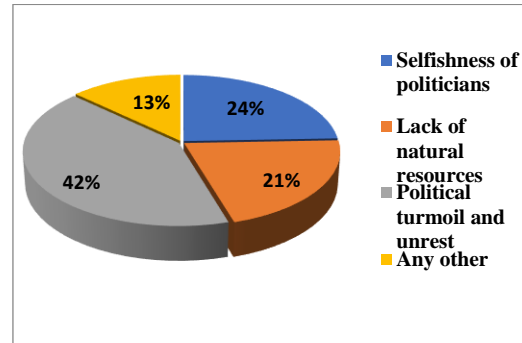
²⁰⁷ Sarwer Ghulam (2017), Women empowerment: Issues and challenges in Jammu and Kashmir, *International Journal of Social Relevance & Concern*, VOL. 5, Issue. 5, P. 10.

²⁰⁸ Rashid, A. (2005), *Kashmiri Women's Initiative for Peace and Disarmament: Women Suicide Rate in Valley Rising*, Voices Unheard, PP. 4-5.

²⁰⁹ Boyden, J., Berry, J. D., F. Thomas., & H. Jason (2002), 'Children Affected by Armed Conflict in South Asia: A Review of Trends and Issues Identified Through Secondary Research', Refugee Study Centre, London, PP, 36-40.

²¹⁰ Ibid.,

Figure 3.5: Frequency Distribution of Responses whether the unemployment rate of females in Kashmir is higher than the male Unemployment rate.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

The lives of women have suffered tremendously, and neither regional nor state governments have taken adequate action to improve their circumstances. If this trend continues, there is a risk of resorting to gender-based selective abortions. Women have been deeply affected by the conflict, either directly or through their familial connections, as family members become involved. The central and state governments bear the responsibility of addressing this conflict, enabling women to live free from recurring hardships. Initiating a dialogue with separatists and civil society is essential to finding a solution and preventing the perpetuation of such regrettable conditions for future generations.

3.8: Impact of Conflict on Widows and Half-Widows in Kashmir

The well-being of women in Kashmiri society has been significantly affected by the region's enduring conflict, especially compared to other aspects of life. Many women have endured abuse and punishment from both the Indian army and militant groups, resulting in over 32,000 women becoming widows and approximately 120,000 children being orphaned. Reports from the Sample Registration System highlight that societal restrictions on living arrangements, insecure property rights, limited opportunities for remarriage, scarce job prospects, and inadequate social support have all contributed to the severe deprivation among Indian widows. Notably, only 28% of widows in India are eligible for pensions, and among them, fewer than 11% actually receive the benefits they are entitled to.²¹¹ For widows, economic challenges are paramount. In war-affected countries worldwide, over 70% of children depend solely on their widowed mothers for support in the aftermath of conflict. Widows in Kashmir face a wide range of human rights violations, including severe poverty, various forms of violence, marginalization, social and cultural exclusion, neglect, and oppression. These women are often

²¹¹ CCH Incorporated (2009, March), *Social Security Explained*, Aspen Law & Business, India.

treated as objects or property and encounter significant barriers to accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and justice. Their lives are marked by extreme poverty, dependence on financial aid, prejudice, harassment, and exploitation. Female-headed households, particularly those led by widows, face notable challenges in securing adequate nutrition and healthcare, which contributes to an overall low standard of living. The state government has announced plans to conduct a new census to ascertain the true number of widows and orphans impacted by the prolonged violence. Independent investigations by local organizations suggest that the numbers are considerably higher than government estimates: approximately 32,000 widows and 120,000 orphans, compared to official figures of 25,000 widows and 60,000 orphans.²¹² Widows and orphans in Kashmir can be classified into four primary categories based on survey findings:

- Families of former Indian security forces (e.g., Army, BSF, CRPF, RR, ITBP)
- Families of former J&K Police and STF members
- Families of civilians killed by militants, security forces, or during crossfire
- Families of ex-militants

The families of military, security, and police personnel generally maintain a decent standard of living, largely due to structured support from their respective departments, especially in areas like education and employment. In contrast, widows and orphans linked to former militants or civilians killed in the conflict face acute economic challenges, often living in distressing and vulnerable circumstances. Tragically, both government and civil society tend to overlook their plight, leaving these individuals with little support or empathy.²¹³

The social dynamics of conflict reveal a significant increase in households led by women, particularly those who are partially or fully widowed, taking on full responsibility for their families' welfare.²¹⁴ Official records indicate that 693 individuals have disappeared and been reported to the state. Families of the missing are eligible for ex-gratia relief of ₹1 lakh, with approvals granted for 332 cases so far.²¹⁵ Many half-widows decline government compensation for two main reasons: uncertainty regarding their husbands' deaths and suspicion regarding their role in the husbands' disappearances. Furthermore, the decision to permit remarriage for Muslim

²¹² Aliya Bashir (March 18, 2017), *Impoverished, Harassed and Alone*, *International Women's Media Foundation*.

²¹³ Arfat S. (2015), *Rehabilitation of the Victims of Conflict in the State of Jammu and Kashmir: A Socio-legal Analysis*. *J Civil Legal Sci* 4:159.

²¹⁴ Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada. (1995), *Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir*, *Refworld*, P. 277.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch (2006), *"Everyone Lives in Fear" Patterns of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir*, 18(11).

half-widows has been a matter of theological debate, comparable to the waiting period for women whose husbands are missing. Under the Muslim Dissolution of Marriage Act of 1939, which has applied in Jammu and Kashmir since 1942, a woman whose husband has been missing for four years may seek divorce. However, opinions differ among religious scholars; some hold that if a half-widow remarries and her first husband returns, her original marriage is dissolved, while others maintain that her second marriage remains valid if children were born.²¹⁶ The abrupt disappearance of a family's primary breadwinner has profound psychological impacts, as these women are thrust into roles as sole caretakers and providers without closure on their husbands' fates. Many, without support from extended family, endure social ostracism and are vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual harassment from male relatives who take advantage of their vulnerable position.²¹⁷ According to Article 7(2)(I) of the ICC Statute, enforced disappearances occur when a state or political organization detains someone and refuses to acknowledge it or disclose information on their whereabouts, depriving them of legal protection for as long as possible. These disappearances generate complex social and economic problems for half-widows and their children, who often face a waiting period of seven years or more before accessing relief. Experts stress that this issue, which affects an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 young widows, demands urgent and sensitive intervention. Under customary international law, women and children who are victims of human rights violations are entitled to compensation and restitution.²¹⁸

Although the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 governed inheritance among Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir until the passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act in 2019, both statutes cover intestate succession. However, these laws recognize "widows" and not "half-widows." For Muslims, inheritance falls under Shariah law, which entitles a widow with children to one-eighth of her husband's estate and a childless widow to one-fourth, but makes no provision for half-widows. Consequently, these women have limited recourse but to establish "civil death," a legal presumption of death after seven years of unexplained absence. However, proving civil death is impractical and burdensome for most half-widows, who already bear the full weight of financial and caregiving responsibilities. Many of these women lack awareness of the law or

²¹⁶ Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada. (1995). *Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir*. Refworld, P. 277.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, (2006, September). *Everyone Lives in Fear" Patterns of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir*. VOL. 18, NO. 11 (C).

²¹⁸ Mehta, A. (2018, May 25), Economic Rights of Half-Widows in Kashmir, *The Leaflet*.

the steps required to establish civil death, and local police frequently mishandle these cases, failing to file formal complaints.²¹⁹

Widows and half-widows in Kashmir need systematic legal, social, and economic support. Compensation should encompass lost income, psychological trauma, and companionship. Under the ICC statute, reparation includes restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation. Restitution aims to restore victims to their pre-violation state by returning rights and property, while compensation provides for both tangible and intangible losses. Rehabilitation covers social, legal, and medical services to aid survivors' reintegration into society. International law obliges states to establish effective mechanisms for justice, ensuring that victims of conflict-related crimes have equal and timely access to justice. In practice, however, there is a critical lack of social policy to rehabilitate widows and orphans in Jammu and Kashmir, leaving the needs of these vulnerable groups unmet by the state government. Comprehensive rehabilitation efforts for conflict victims must include:

- Economic and psychological compensation
- Judicial recourse for victims
- Compliance with international human rights and humanitarian standards
- Prosecution of perpetrators
- Social services where needed
- Protection of individuals' rights as prescribed by regional and international legal frameworks
- Social, legal, medical, and psychological support in cases of severe human rights abuses

Rehabilitation, both a legal and social concept, seeks to restore individuals to a safe, fulfilling life and reintegrate them into productive societal roles. In Jammu and Kashmir, however, the gap between legal standards and practical implementation underscores the urgent need for effective, holistic rehabilitation measures.

3.9: A Comparative Analysis of Government and Non-Government Responses to the Gendered Impact of Conflict in Kashmir

The comparative analysis of government and non-government agencies in the context of the Kashmir conflict reveals significant disparities in their approaches, effectiveness, and public perception. Government agencies primarily the Indian military, police forces, and state

²¹⁹ Mishra, S. (2021, February 11), *Law and Other Things: A Blog About India's Law's and Legal System, Its Courts and Its Constitution*. Law and Other Things.

institutions have been deeply involved in counter-insurgency operations and governance, but their response to the humanitarian fallout, especially the plight of women, has often been criticized as inadequate and reactive. Measures such as the establishment of women-only police stations and sporadic welfare programs have made limited impact on the ground, with violence against women continuing to rise. Conversely, non-government organizations (NGOs) like the Association of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and international bodies such as Amnesty International have played a critical role in documenting human rights abuses, advocating for justice, and bringing global attention to the crisis. These organizations highlight state shortcomings, particularly in addressing enforced disappearances, sexual violence, and mental health issues. While the government focuses primarily on security and control, non-governmental actors emphasize humanitarian concerns, victim rehabilitation, and rights-based advocacy. However, both sectors have struggled to comprehensively address the deep-rooted and intersectional impacts of the conflict on Kashmiri society, especially on women, whose suffering remains largely unacknowledged or inadequately addressed in institutional policy frameworks.

The above data reveals a stark contrast between the roles, actions, and effectiveness of government and non-government agencies in addressing the impact of militancy and militarization on women in Kashmir. Government agencies, particularly security forces operating under broad legal protections like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), have been implicated in numerous, often unpunished, cases of sexual violence, including mass rapes (e.g., Kunan Poshpora) and targeted assaults, with investigations frequently stalled or manipulated to shield perpetrators. This impunity has fostered deep mistrust and trauma among the civilian population, especially women. Although some institutional steps such as setting up women's police stations have been taken, they have largely failed to mitigate the growing incidence of gender-based violence. In contrast, non-government agencies, including civil society organizations, human rights groups, and independent researchers, have played a crucial role in documenting these abuses, giving voice to survivors, and challenging both state and non-state actors for their roles in systemic violence. NGOs have highlighted not just the physical and psychological toll on women, but also the socio-economic fallout, including forced labor participation, exploitation, and cultural repression. Importantly, while government forces have used legal shields to evade accountability, non-state armed groups have similarly inflicted sexual violence and enforced dress codes to assert control, with neither side addressing the broader gendered impacts of the conflict. Thus, while non-governmental actors strive to expose and challenge these violations, government agencies are often seen as both enablers and

insufficient responders, leaving Kashmiri women trapped in a cycle of violence and neglect by both state and non-state systems.

The impact of militancy on women's education in Kashmir reveals a sharp contrast between the roles and effectiveness of government and non-government agencies. Government efforts to promote education are hindered by structural weaknesses, including underfunded schools, destroyed infrastructure, and the militarization of educational spaces, where security forces occupy school buildings in remote areas. Laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) further deter access by perpetuating a climate of fear, especially for girls, who are particularly vulnerable to harassment near military camps. Despite policies and programs aimed at increasing enrollment, government agencies have failed to address core issues such as safety, dropout rates, and cultural stigmas, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas. In contrast, non-government organizations and civil society actors have played a crucial role in documenting education-related violations, advocating for safer schooling environments, and mobilizing community awareness around girls' rights to education. However, their reach is limited by security restrictions, lack of state support, and political instability. While NGOs often focus on grassroots interventions, long-term systemic change is hampered without active and transparent government accountability. Thus, while both sectors aim to improve education, governmental failure to ensure safety and continuity in conflict zones contrasts with NGOs' more localized, rights-based efforts, resulting in persistent gendered educational inequality.

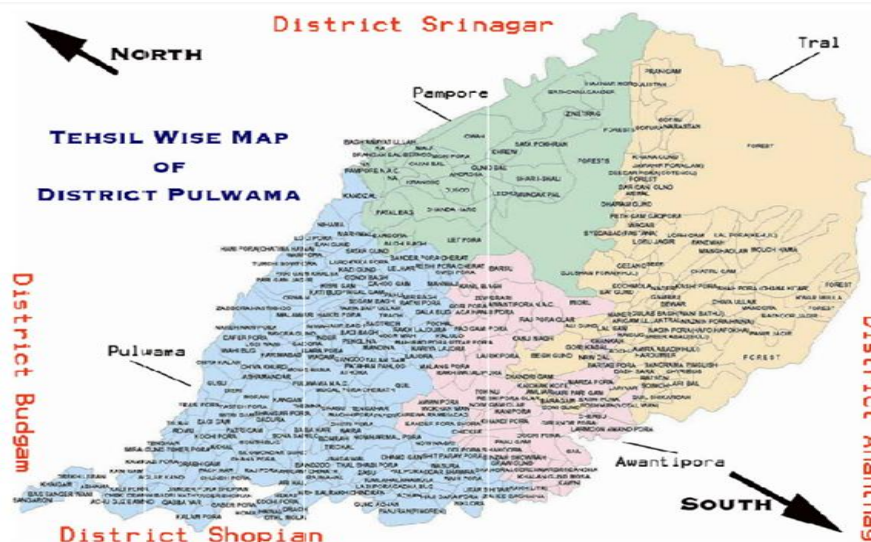
The response of government and non-government agencies to the plight of widows and half-widows in Kashmir reveals stark disparities in intent, execution, and impact. Government interventions have been largely inadequate, limited to insufficient compensation schemes, inconsistent census data, and a lack of legal recognition for half-widows, who remain trapped in bureaucratic and legal limbo without closure or access to inheritance. Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the Muslim Dissolution of Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, and provisions for ex-gratia relief their practical implementation is weak due to administrative apathy, poor legal literacy among victims, and frequent police mishandling of cases. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local civil society groups have played a more proactive role by conducting independent investigations, highlighting discrepancies in official figures, advocating for the rights of conflict-affected women, and providing limited but crucial psychosocial and legal support. However, NGOs are constrained by limited resources and political restrictions, preventing them from delivering large-scale systemic relief. While the state has the constitutional and international legal obligation to provide restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation, it has failed to establish effective mechanisms, whereas non-

state actors, though well-meaning, lack the authority and capacity to implement long-term structural solutions. As a result, widows and half-widows in Kashmir remain socially marginalized, economically deprived, and legally invisible, caught in a cycle of neglect where both government inaction and civil society limitations fall short of meaningful rehabilitation.

Chapter-4

Women of District Pulwama- The Most Volatile District: A Case Study

Located in the heart of the Kashmir Valley, the district primarily depends on agriculture, particularly known for its rice cultivation. Moreover, District Pulwama is distinguished by its high-quality saffron production. Additionally, the district is notable for its significant milk production, earning it the title of "Anand of Kashmir."



Source: Census of India 2011 Jammu & Kashmir Series-02 Part XII-B

According to the 2011 Census, the district accommodates a population of 5.60 million residents and is situated 31 kilometers from Srinagar, with the administrative headquarters located in Pulwama. The district covers a total area of 1,090 square kilometers, with 14.35% of its population living in urban regions and 85.65% in rural areas. Revered as one of the most picturesque destinations globally, Pulwama boasts a delightful climate, abundant springs, streams, waterfalls, fragrant blossoms, succulent fruits, and captivating natural vistas. Notably, Pulwama is recognized worldwide for its saffron cultivation, which flourishes primarily in the Karewa lands of Pampore, Kakapora, and other blocks within the district. Important religious landmarks include the Khankah Tral, established by Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, the esteemed Iranian scholar and saint, and the Jawala Mukhi Temple in Khrew. Additionally, the town of Awantipora showcases remnants of ancient edifices and sculptures from the reign of King Awantiwarman.²²⁰

District Pulwama, a pivotal district in the Kashmir region, was established in 1979. It comprises a total of 329 villages, including 319 inhabited villages and 10 uninhabited ones. The rural area

²²⁰ Demography (2023, December 27), *Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology*, Government of India.

of the district is home to 479,978 individuals, consisting of 248,096 males and 231,882 females, residing across the 319 inhabited villages. The population of children aged 0–6 years stands at 97,374, with 53,234 being male and 44,140 females. The sex ratio among children in this age group is 829 females per 1,000 males. Additionally, the district accommodates 98,306 main workers, 90,114 marginal workers, and 196,885 non-workers.²²¹

Population of the District

<i>Population</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Persons</i>	560440
		<i>Males</i>	293064
		<i>Females</i>	267376
	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Persons</i>	80462
		<i>Males</i>	44968
		<i>Females</i>	35494
	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Persons</i>	479978
		<i>Males</i>	248096
		<i>Females</i>	231882

Sources: District Census Handbook: Pulwama, 2011

This study's primary goal is to investigate the socio-political and economic status of women in the Pulwama district. The secondary goal is to analyze how women participate in and make decisions in the social, political, and economic spheres of their lives.

Section A: Demographic Information

To provide a better visualization of the findings, we have presented 3-D pie charts, Graphs along with the frequency distributions for each demographic variable as follows:

4.1 Locality

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of a sample of 399 Respondents based on their locality, either rural or urban. Out of a total of 399 Respondents, 333 (83.5%) live in rural areas, while 66 (16.5%) live in urban areas. This suggests that the majority of individuals are from rural localities, while the percentage of individuals living in urban areas is comparatively lower.

Fig. 4.1: Respondents frequency distribution by locality

²²¹ Source Census of India 2011, Jammu & Kashmir series-02 Part XII-B.

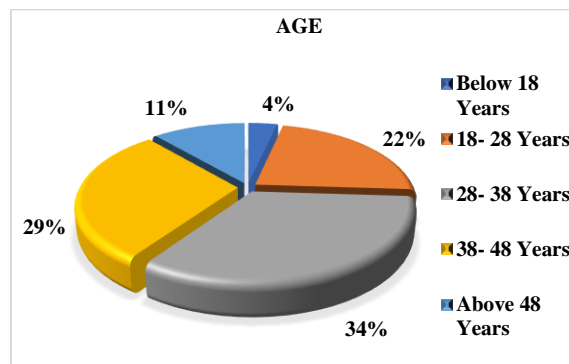


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.2 Age

Figure 4.2 illustrates the age groups, which are divided into five categories: below 18 years, 18–28 years, 28–38 years, 38–48 years, and above 48 years. Of the total sample, only 14 respondents, or 3.5%, were below 18 years of age. The second-largest age group was 18–28 years, which consisted of 90 respondents, or 22.5% of the sample. The largest age group was 28–38 years, which included 134 respondents, or 33.6% of the sample. The other age groups, 38–48 years and above, comprised 116 respondents (29.1%) and 45 respondents (11.3%), respectively. Overall, Table 4.2 suggests that the majority of individuals in the sample were between 18 and 38 years old, with the largest group being in the 28–38-year age range.

Fig. 4.2: Frequency Distribution of age categories of respondents



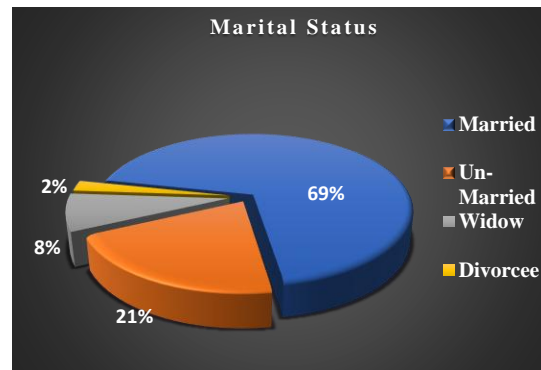
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.3: Marital Status

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of a sample of 399 individuals based on their marital status. The marital status categories are married, unmarried, widowed, and divorced. Of the total sample, 276 respondents, or 69.2%, were married, while 82 respondents, or 20.6%, were unmarried. The remaining respondents were either widows (32 respondents, or 8.0%) or divorcees (9 respondents, or 2.3%). Table 4.3 suggests that the majority of respondents in the

sample were married, with more than half of the sample falling into this category. The percentage of unmarried respondents was around 20.6%. The percentage of individuals who were widows or divorcees was comparatively smaller.

Fig.4.3: Frequency Distribution of the Categories of Marital Status of the Respondents

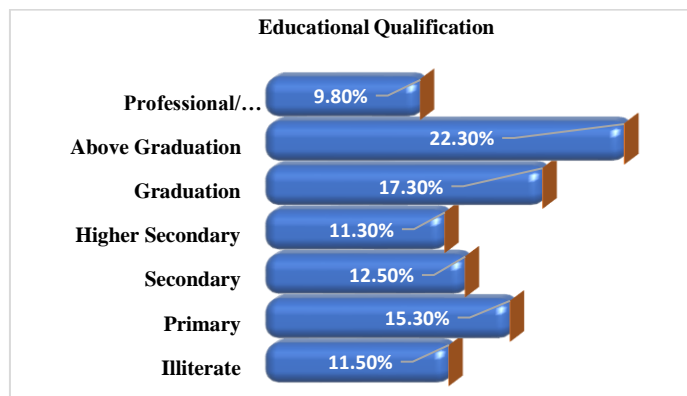


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.4: Education Qualification

Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of a sample of 399 respondents based on their qualifications. Of the total sample, 46 respondents, or 11.5%, were illiterate; 61 respondents, or 15.3%, had a primary education; 50 respondents, or 12.5%, had a secondary education; 45 respondents, or 11.3%, had a higher secondary education; 69 respondents, or 17.3%, held a graduation degree; 89 respondents, or 22.3%, had a degree above graduation; and 39 respondents, or 9.8%, had a professional or technical degree. Table 4.4 indicates that the maximum number of respondents in the sample had either a higher secondary degree or a graduation degree, suggesting a relatively moderate level of education among the respondents. The proportion of respondents with a degree above graduation or a professional or technical degree was relatively lower.

Fig. 4.4: Distribution of Frequencies by Respondents Educational Qualification

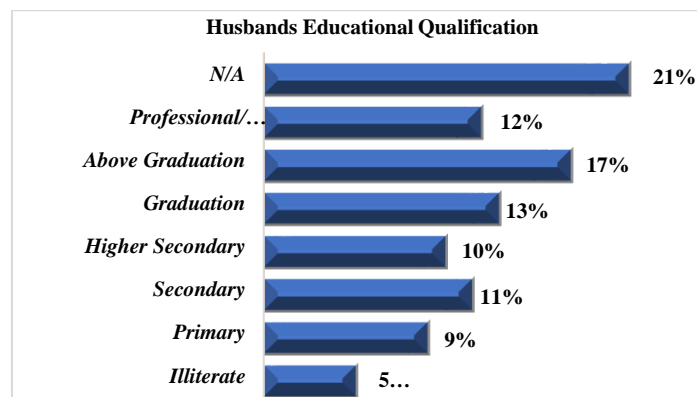


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.5: Husband's Educational Qualification

Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of a sample of 399 respondents based on the educational qualifications of their husbands. It reveals that 5.3% (21 respondents) of husbands are illiterate, while 9.3% (37 respondents) completed primary education. Furthermore, 11.7% (47 respondents) have a secondary education, and 10.3% (41 respondents) completed higher secondary education. A significant portion, constituting 13.3% (53 respondents), holds a graduation degree, and 17.2% (69 respondents) have an education beyond graduation. Additionally, 12.3% (49 respondents) possess professional or technical degrees. Notably, 20.6% (82 respondents) marked "N/A," suggesting that a segment of the surveyed population either did not provide information about their husband's educational qualifications or chose not to disclose this information.

Fig. 4.5: Frequencies Distribution of Respondents about their Husband's Educational Qualification

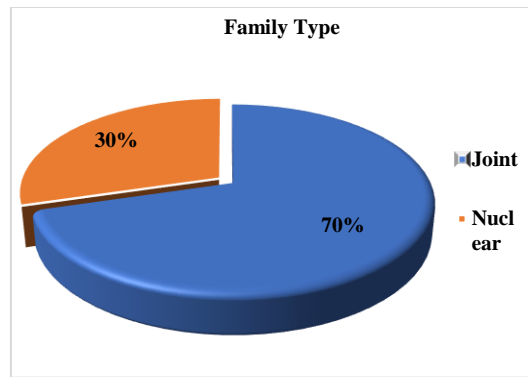


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.6: Type of Family

Figure 4.6 provides information about the family type of respondents in a sample of 399. The sample includes two types of families: joint families and nuclear families. The table shows the frequency and percentage distribution of each type among female respondents. The results indicate that 70.4% of female respondents belong to joint families, while 29.6% belong to nuclear families. This suggests that there is a relatively unequal distribution of female respondents among joint and nuclear families.

Fig. 4.6: Distribution of Frequencies by Respondents Type of Family

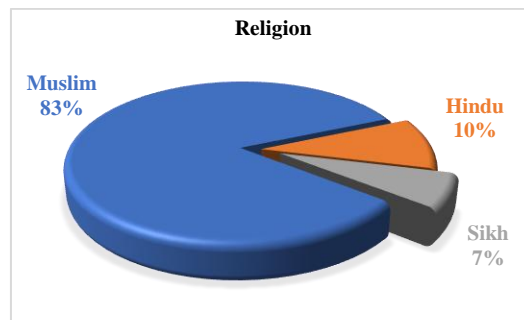


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

4.7 Religion

Since 1981, there have been notable variations in the religious composition of Jammu and Kashmir. The state continues to hold a Muslim majority, followed by Hindus, with other religious communities present in smaller proportions. According to the 2011 Census of India, approximately 68.31% of the population in Jammu and Kashmir identified as Muslims, making it the only Muslim-majority state in the country at the time. Hinduism was the second most followed religion, accounting for around 28.44% of the population. Other religious groups included Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.9%), Christians (0.3%), Jains (0.01%), and followers of other religions (0.01%).²²² Findings from the current field survey further reflect this demographic pattern. Among the total respondents, a significant majority (83.0%) identified as Muslims, while 10.3% identified as Hindus and 6.8% as Sikhs. These results reaffirm the predominance of the Muslim community within the region. In comparison, Hindu and Sikh communities appear in smaller proportions within the sampled population, suggesting limited but important religious diversity. This demographic distribution is crucial in understanding the region's social, cultural, and political dynamics.

Figure 4.7: Distribution of Frequencies by Respondents Religion.



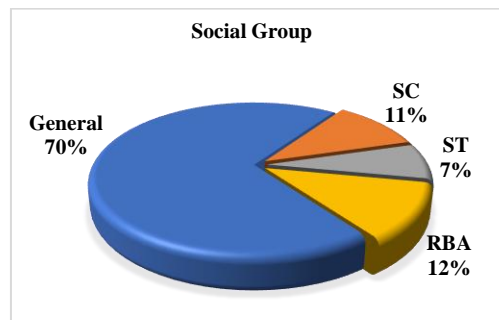
Source: Field Work by the Researcher.

²²² Census of India 2011, Jammu & Kashmir, Series -02, Part XII-B, Primary Census Abstract

4.8 Social Group

Figure 4.8 shows the distribution of social groups among a sample of 399 respondents. The social groups include General, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Residential Backward Area (RBA), and Others. Out of the total sample, 278 people (69.7%) belonged to the General category, while 43 people (10.8%) belonged to the Scheduled Caste, 30 people (7.5%) belonged to the Scheduled Tribe, and 48 people (12.0%) belonged to the RBA. These results indicate that the majority of the sample belonged to the General category, while the Scheduled Tribe and RBA categories were represented to a similar extent. The Scheduled Caste and Other categories had relatively smaller numbers.

Fig. 4.8: Frequency distribution of respondents by social group.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Section B: Social Conditions and Family Influence

As discussed earlier, the status of women in Kashmir is best understood through the dual lens of continuity and change. The pre-1947 freedom movement played a pivotal role in initiating a trend of women's emancipation through conscious and organized socio-political efforts. In the post-independence era, state-sponsored initiatives by successive political leaderships further promoted the empowerment of women, laying the groundwork for significant advancements in various domains. These developments provided a strong foundation for women's progress in Kashmir. However, this transformation remains sociologically incomplete. While substantial progress has been made in educational attainment, economic participation, and access to healthcare, other dimensions particularly those related to entrenched social and cultural norms have shown far less change. Consequently, Kashmiri women today navigate a complex reality: they benefit from increased opportunities and rights in some areas, yet continue to face persistent challenges rooted in traditional gender roles, social expectations, and cultural

constraints. This coexistence of progress and limitation accurately reflects a broader pattern of continuity and change in the gender dynamics of Kashmiri society.²²³

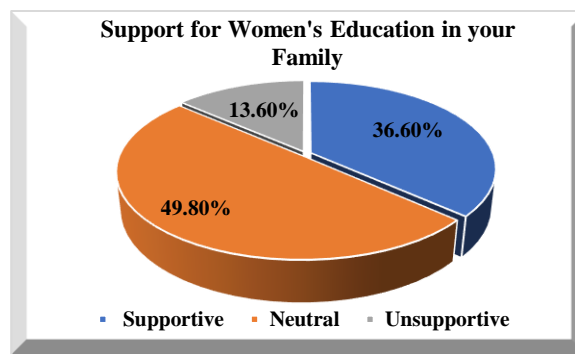
5.1 Advancements in Literacy and Familial Influence on Women's Education in Jammu and Kashmir:

Jammu and Kashmir have witnessed significant progress in the field of literacy over the decades, largely due to sustained governmental efforts and the implementation of targeted educational interventions. The literacy rate has increased manifold from a mere 12.95% in the 1961 Census to 68.74% in the 2011 Census. Female literacy, in particular, has seen remarkable growth, rising from just 5.05% in 1961 to 58.01% in 2011. This progress reflects the cumulative impact of planned policies and continuous commitment to educational development. Breaking down the historical progression: the literacy rate improved from 12.95% in 1961 to 21.71% in 1971, reaching 30.64% in 1981. Due to the absence of a full census in 1991, the literacy rate was estimated at 45%. Between 2001 and 2011, the state's literacy rate rose from 55.50% to 68.74%, while the national average increased from 64.84% to 74.04%. According to the 2011 Census, male literacy in Jammu and Kashmir stood at 78.26%, and female literacy at 58.01%. Compared to the 2001 Census, the overall literacy rate in the state improved by 13.22 percentage points. Notably, female literacy grew at a faster pace by 15.01 percentage points compared to an 11.66 percentage point increase for males. Concurrently, the gender gap in literacy narrowed from 23.60% in 2001 to 20.25% in 2011, indicating a positive trend toward educational gender equity.²²⁴ In addition to census data, a survey was conducted to assess familial support for women's education. Figure 5.1 presents the findings from 399 respondents: 146 (36.6%) reported supportive family attitudes, 199 (49.8%) remained neutral, and 54 (13.6%) expressed unsupportive views. The notably high percentage of neutral responses suggests a widespread ambivalence family may not be overtly discouraging women's education, but they also may not be offering active encouragement. This underscores the importance of fostering not only access to education but also a supportive socio-cultural environment that champions women's educational advancement.

Fig. 5.1: How Would You Describe the Support for Women's Education in Your Family?

²²³ Chitkara, M. G. (2001), *Women & Social Transformation*, India: A.P.H.

²²⁴ Suri, K., & Sharma, A. (2024), History and status of women's education in Jammu and Kashmir, *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR)*, 11(1), PP. 856-857



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

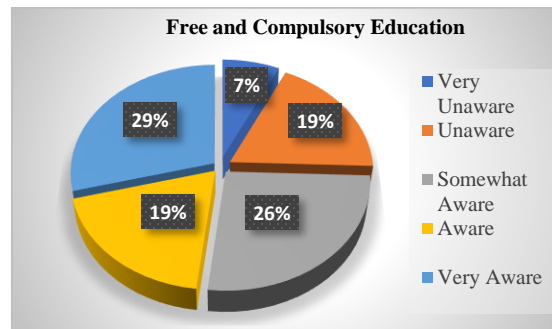
5.2: Government Initiatives and Public Awareness of Women's Right to Education in Jammu and Kashmir

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir, in collaboration with the central government, has undertaken several initiatives to promote women's education as part of its commitment to constitutional mandates and national development goals. Although these efforts have yielded progress, they remain insufficient in fully addressing the structural barriers to female education, particularly in conflict-affected and socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Among the key initiatives introduced in the state are Operation Blackboard, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme. These programs are designed to improve access to education, enhance retention rates, and elevate the quality of schooling for girls, especially those from marginalized communities. In addition, various scholarship schemes, infrastructure development projects, awareness campaigns, and vocational training initiatives have been implemented to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for women. Education plays a transformative role in empowering women and enabling their active participation in the social, political, and economic spheres. Educated women are better equipped to challenge gender-based discrimination, pursue higher education and career opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to community development and decision-making processes. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 a landmark legislation guarantees free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14 years across India, including Jammu and Kashmir, thereby laying a robust legal foundation for promoting educational equity and inclusiveness.

As part of this study, a survey was conducted among 399 respondents to assess awareness regarding free and compulsory education for women (Figure 5.2). The results indicate that a significant majority 73.9% were at least somewhat aware of such provisions. Specifically, 29.1% reported being *very aware*, while 26.3% indicated they were *somewhat aware*. An

additional 19.1% of respondents reported being *aware* in general terms, whereas 7% admitted to being *very unaware*. These findings suggest that while a large proportion of the population possesses a basic understanding of educational entitlements for women, there is still considerable scope for improvement in awareness levels. The presence of a significant minority who remain unaware points to the need for more targeted outreach and information dissemination to bridge knowledge gaps and enhance public engagement with educational rights and opportunities for women.

Fig. 5.2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents About Awareness of Free and Compulsory Education for Women



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

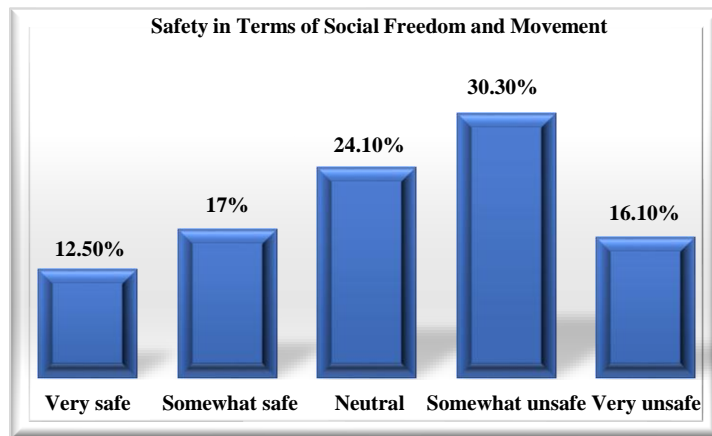
Despite the existence of legal safeguards and targeted educational interventions, gender disparities in education remain a persistent and deeply rooted challenge in Kashmir. A complex interplay of cultural norms, economic constraints, and ongoing security concerns has historically hindered girls' access to schooling. While measurable progress has been achieved in recent decades, these structural barriers continue to undermine the full impact of government schemes and policies aimed at promoting educational equity. Traditional gender roles, early marriages, domestic responsibilities, and limited mobility for girls further exacerbate the situation, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Nevertheless, increasing public awareness, evolving social attitudes, and sustained policy interventions provide a promising foundation for narrowing the gender gap in education. Continued efforts to address these systemic challenges are essential to creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that empowers girls and ensures equal educational opportunities for all.

5.3 Safety Perceptions Within the Community:

The care and protection of women in distress remains a key area of focus in Jammu and Kashmir's broader gender justice framework. To promote the security, development, and overall well-being of women across all spheres of life and to address gender-based

discrimination the State Commission for Women was established as a statutory body in March 2000 under the State Commission for Women Act, 1999. Its core mandate is to safeguard women's rights as enshrined in the Constitution, while also recommending new legislation and amendments to existing laws to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. At the national level, the National Commission for Women (NCW) serves a similar function, with a broader mandate to protect and promote the rights and interests of women across India. Legal mechanisms such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which came into force on October 26, 2006, play a vital role in providing immediate relief and legal recourse to women subjected to violence within the household. In parallel, the Ujjawala Scheme a comprehensive program launched to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation focuses on five critical components: prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation of victims. Together, these initiatives reflect a multi-pronged approach to protecting women from both domestic and systemic forms of violence and exploitation. Despite these legal and institutional safeguards, ground realities reveal persistent challenges in ensuring women's safety and freedom of movement within their communities. A survey conducted as part of this study sheds light on prevailing perceptions of safety. Out of 399 respondents, a significant proportion of women reported feeling unsafe in their own communities: 30.3% (121 women) stated they feel somewhat unsafe, while 27.3% (109 women) reported feeling very unsafe. In stark contrast, only 12.5% (50 women) expressed that they feel very safe. These findings underscore the continued anxieties surrounding personal security, social mobility, and autonomy for women, indicating that legislative and institutional efforts must be supplemented by broader societal change to foster a truly safe and equitable environment.

Fig. 5.3: How Safe do You Feel Within Your Community in Terms of Social Freedom and Movement?



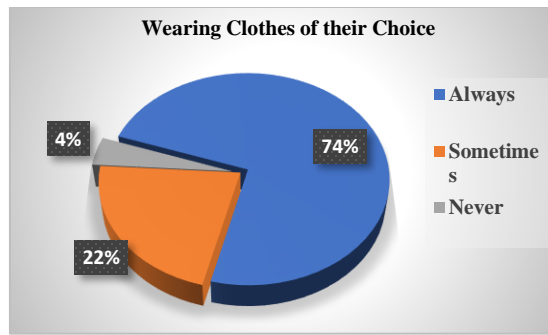
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

5.4 Consideration of Women for Wearing Clothes of their Choice.

Until the 19th century, traditional attire in Kashmir was largely uniform across genders, consisting of a long, loose wrapper known as the *pheran* paired with trousers. This garment, deeply embedded in Kashmiri cultural identity, began to face criticism in the early 20th century due to changing perceptions of masculinity and modernity. In the 1930s, a social movement emerged spearheaded by figures such as Pandit Kashyap Bandhu opposing the *pheran* as male attire, labeling it as effeminate and incompatible with the new ideals of masculinity. For young girls, the standard headwear was a simple skull cap. Upon marriage, Muslim women traditionally transitioned to wearing a more elaborate headgear known as the *qasaba* a turban-like red cap adorned with numerous pins and covered with a piece of coarse cloth called *pooch*, which functioned both as a veil and as a covering for the back. Among Pandit women, the traditional headgear was the *taranga*. However, increased interactions with women from the Indian plains, especially during the Dogra and post-Dogra periods, brought significant changes to Kashmiri women's dress codes. The *qasaba* and *taranga* gradually fell out of fashion, replaced by North Indian attire such as the *shalwar*, *churidar pyjama*, and *frock*. Among upper-class Pandit women, the *saree* also gained popularity as a fashionable garment. The ordinary veil worn by Kashmiri Muslim women, known as the *burqa*, consisted of a long piece of cotton cloth draped over the head and left to hang down the back. Its use was largely confined to Muslim women and was generally absent among working-class Muslim women like the *Hanjis* (fishing community) and *Watalis* (a marginalized caste group), who refrained from wearing the *burqa* due to the nature of their work and socio-economic status. Traditionally, clothing choices especially for women were heavily influenced by familial expectations, with the husband often playing a dominant role in enforcing dress norms. However, contemporary attitudes show a shift toward autonomy in clothing preferences.²²⁵ Data from the current study (Figure 5.4), based on a sample of 399 respondents, reveals that a significant majority (73.7%) of women reported always wearing clothes of their own choosing. A smaller segment (22.1%) indicated that they sometimes do, while only 4.3% stated that they never wear clothing of their own choice. These findings suggest a notable trend toward personal agency in dress decisions among women, although familial and cultural influences may still persist in certain contexts.

Fig. 5.4: Frequency distribution of the Respondents, whether they wear clothes of their own choice.

²²⁵ Malik, S. (2014), *Women's Development Amid Conflicts in Kashmir: A Socio-Cultural Study*, Partridge India, PP. 76–77

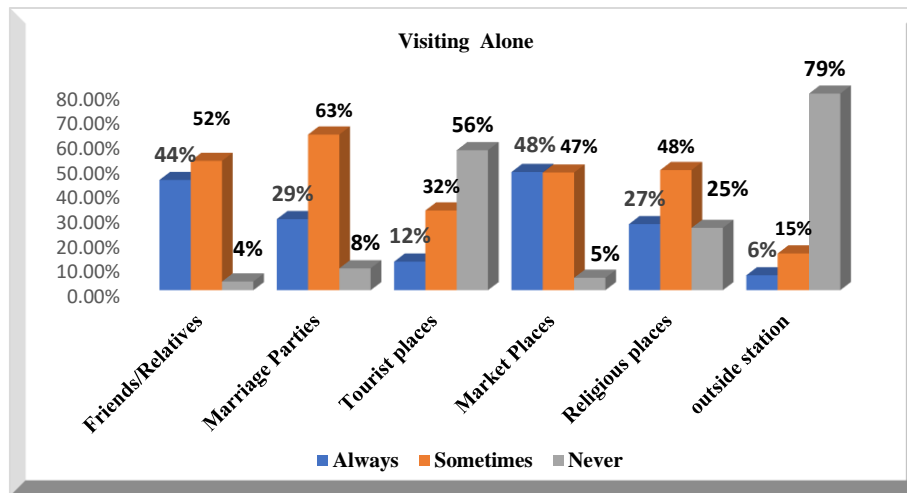


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

5.5 Freedom of Women to Visit these Places or Events Alone, i.e., Without a Male Family Member

Of the total 399 respondents, a high level of freedom of movement was found among those who always visit friends or relatives (44.4%) and marketplaces (47.6%) alone. A majority reported “sometimes” visiting friends or relatives alone (52.1%) and marketplaces (14.3%), respectively. A minority of respondents reported never visiting friends, relatives (3.5%), and marriage parties (14.3%) alone. These findings suggest that visiting friends, relatives, and marriage parties alone is a common practice for many respondents, with over half reporting that they always do so. In contrast, the findings indicate that visiting outside stations alone is not a common practice for many respondents, with tourist places at 56.4% (225) and outside stations at 79.2% (316), as a majority reported that they never do so. However, it is noteworthy that a sizable minority of respondents reported visiting tourist places sometimes (32.1%, or 128 respondents) and outside stations sometimes (14.8%, or 59 respondents). Additionally, nearly 6% (24 respondents) and 11.5% (46 respondents) reported always visiting outside stations and tourist places, respectively. Overall, the data indicates a high level of freedom of movement for visiting friends or relatives, marketplaces, marriage parties, and religious places. In contrast, most respondents faced restrictions when traveling outside stations and visiting tourist places.

Fig. 5.5: Frequency Distribution of the Respondent’s Independence in Visiting Place Without Male Family Members



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Social Awareness

Social awareness denotes the capability to understand and empathize with the perspectives and experiences of others, as well as being conscious of the social dynamics and issues in a community or society. It involves recognizing and navigating social norms, values, and expectations, as well as understanding the impact of one's actions on others. Developing social awareness includes cultivating skills such as active listening, empathy, perspective-taking, and cultural sensitivity. It is an important component of emotional intelligence and can help individuals build positive relationships, resolve conflicts, and contribute to social change. In today's multifaceted and interconnected world, social awareness is becoming increasingly significant as individuals and organizations navigate issues such as diversity and inclusion, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Developing social awareness can help individuals become more effective leaders, collaborators, and change agents, contributing to a more just and equitable society.

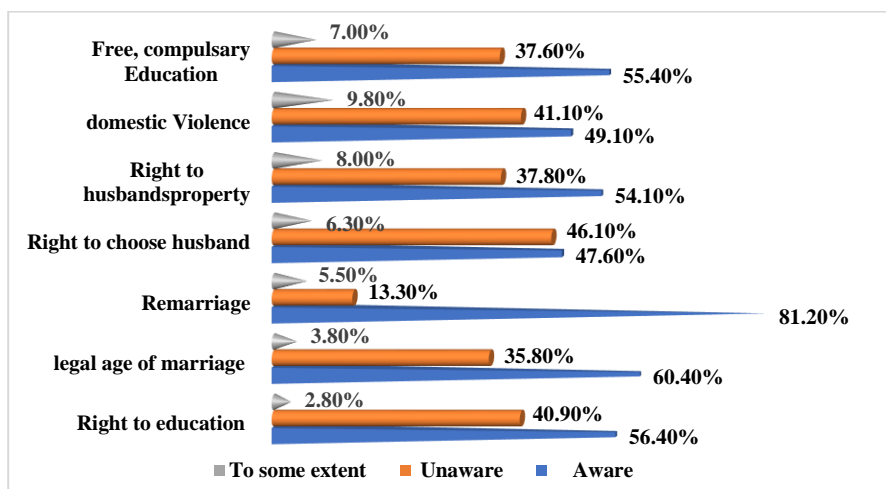
5.6: Social Awareness Among Women in the Study Area

In recent years, Kashmir has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the socio-political landscape concerning women's empowerment a change that can aptly be described as a quiet revolution. From marginalization to active participation, from systemic injustice to the assertion of rights, Kashmiri women are increasingly emerging from the shadows of conflict and conservatism to claim their rightful place in society. This shift has been significantly supported by women-centric policies implemented by the present government, which include provisions for reservations, legal rights, scholarships, and various empowerment schemes. These measures

have enabled women not only to access opportunities but also to actively contribute to the region's social and developmental progress.

Empirical findings from this study (Figure 5.6) further affirm this positive shift. Respondents reported relatively high levels of awareness regarding key legal and social rights: 56.4% were aware that education is a fundamental human right, 60.4% knew the legal age of marriage, 81.2% supported the remarriage of women, 47.6% acknowledged the right of women to choose their husbands, 54.1% were aware of women's legal share in their husbands' property, 49.1% recognized the right to protection from domestic violence, and 55.4% were aware of free and compulsory education for women. These figures indicate that a significant portion of women possess a basic or advanced understanding of their rights, suggesting the growing impact of education, policy outreach, and grassroots awareness programs. However, the data also reveals that a notable minority of respondents remain unaware of these rights, particularly in relation to domestic violence and property entitlements. This underscores the continued need for widespread education and targeted awareness campaigns, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, to bridge the knowledge gap. Furthermore, while legal provisions exist, effective implementation and enforcement remain critical. Enhancing institutional responsiveness and strengthening community-level support systems are essential steps toward ensuring that the rights of women are not only known but also protected and exercised in practice.

Fig. 5.6: Frequency Distribution of the Respondents Based on Their Level of Social Awareness.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

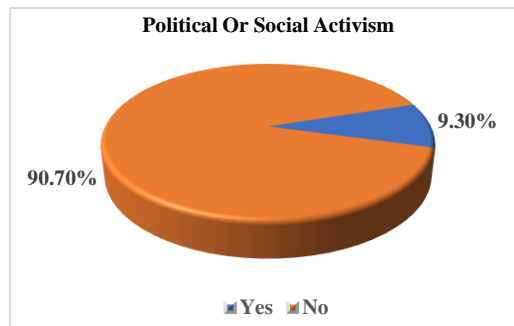
Section C: Political Conditions and Women's Participation

6.1 Participation in Political or Social Activism:

In the broader global discourse on the political and social empowerment of women, Indian society continues to grapple with persistent structural challenges, many of which are deeply embedded in patriarchal traditions and cultural norms. These challenges are even more pronounced in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where traditional, rural, and often conservative socio-cultural frameworks significantly constrain women's participation in public life. Within this context, Kashmiri society remains particularly vulnerable to gender-based marginalization, despite the implementation of numerous progressive policies and legal frameworks by successive Indian governments since independence. One of the most telling indicators of this marginalization is the consistently low representation of women in India's national legislative bodies. Between 1952 and 2014, women constituted only 6.91% of members in the Lok Sabha and 9.62% in the Rajya Sabha, reflecting a substantial gender gap in political representation. This underrepresentation not only limits women's influence in policymaking but also serves as a broader reflection of societal barriers that restrict women's entry into political and civic life.

Findings from the present study further reinforce this national trend. As detailed in Figure 6.1, respondents were asked whether any women in their families had participated in political or social activism. Out of 399 respondents, only 37 (9.3%) reported involvement in such activities, while a striking 362 (90.7%) indicated no participation. This overwhelming lack of engagement underscores the limited presence of women in political and social movements in the region. The data highlights the persistent barriers that inhibit women's public participation, including restrictive gender norms, limited awareness of political rights, insufficient institutional support, societal stigma, and lack of access to leadership platforms. These findings call for urgent and comprehensive interventions aimed at creating enabling environments that foster women's political and social engagement. Such efforts must prioritize education, grassroots awareness, leadership training, legal empowerment, and institutional reforms especially in conflict-affected and socio-culturally conservative regions like Kashmir. Only through sustained and inclusive efforts can the gender gap in political and civic life be meaningfully addressed.

Figure 6.1: Have You or Any Women in Your Family Participated in Any Political or Social Activism?

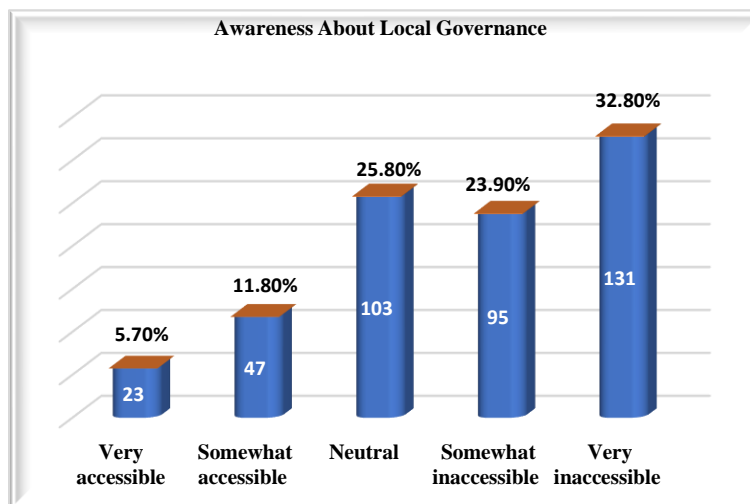


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

6.2 Accessibility of Information on Governance and Women's Rights:

Figure 6.2 present respondents' perceptions regarding the accessibility of political information and awareness about local governance and women's rights in their area. The data indicates a significant portion (32.8%) of respondents feel that information on these topics is very inaccessible, while another 23.9% find it somewhat inaccessible. Only 5.7% of participants consider political information and awareness on local governance and women's rights to be very accessible, and 11.8% find it somewhat accessible. Notably, 25.8% of respondents remain neutral, suggesting a general perception of limited accessibility to political information and awareness, with more respondents leaning toward inaccessibility.

Figure 6.2: In Your View, How Accessible is Political Information or Awareness About Local Governance and Women's Rights in Your Area?

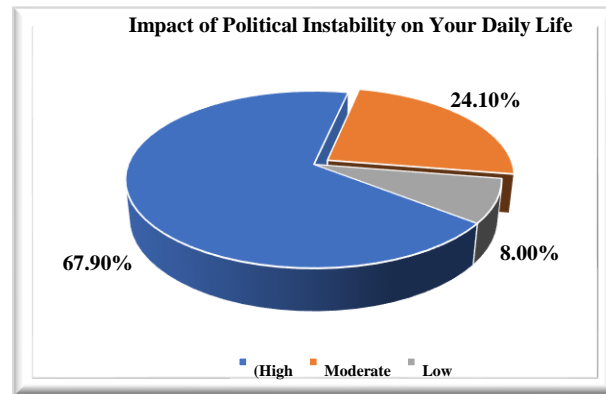


6.3 Impact of Political Instability on Daily Life:

Figure 6.3 presents the respondents' ratings of the impact of political instability on their daily lives in District Pulwama. A significant majority, 67.9%, reported a high impact, indicating that political instability substantially affects most individuals' everyday experiences. Meanwhile,

24.1% rated the impact as moderate, and only 8.0% perceived it as low. This data highlights the pervasive influence of political instability on the daily lives of Pulwama's residents, with a clear majority experiencing considerable disruption.

Fig. 6.3: How would you rate the Impact of Political Instability on Your Daily Life?

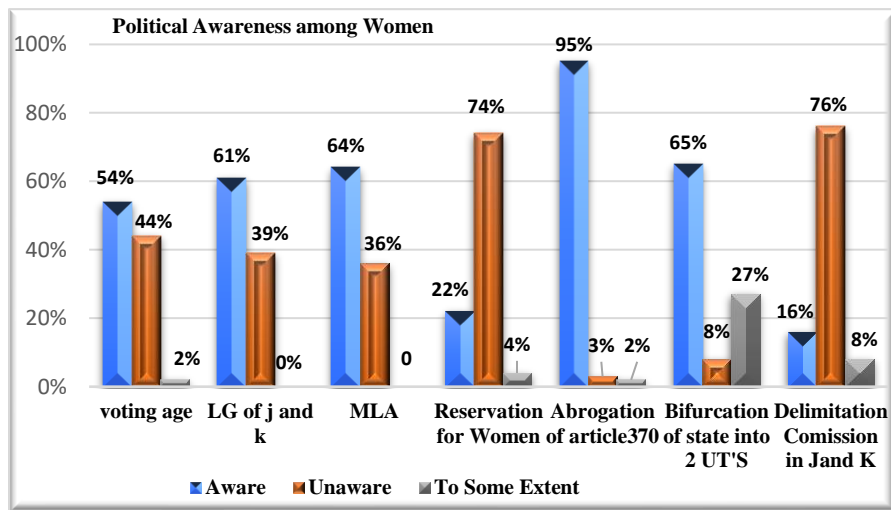


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

6.4 Political Awareness Among Women in the Study Area:

Figure 6.4 illustrates the frequency distribution of respondents regarding their political awareness across various aspects. Out of the total sample of 399, 215 (53.9%) respondents are aware of the voting age, while 176 (44.1%) are unaware, and a small percentage of respondents, 2%, are aware to some extent. Similarly, 243 (60.9%) respondents are aware of the LG of Jammu and Kashmir, and 156 (39.1%) individuals are unaware. To the question of knowing their local former MLA, a significant proportion of respondents—254 (63.7%)—are aware of their local former MLA, while 143 (35.8%) respondents are unaware, and a small percentage of 2 (0.5%) individuals are partially aware. Regarding awareness about reservations for women in local bodies, 88 (22.1%) respondents are aware of this issue, while 296 (74.2%) respondents are unaware, and 15 (3.8%) respondents are aware to some extent. To the question of whether they know that Article 370 of the Constitution was abrogated, 379 (95.0%) respondents indicated that they are aware of it, while 11 (2.8%) respondents are unaware, and a small majority of 9 (2.3%) respondents are aware to some extent. Moreover, regarding whether they know that the state of J&K was bifurcated into two UTs, 260 (65.2%) respondents reported that they are aware of it, while 30 (7.5%) respondents are unaware of the state being divided into two union territories, and 109 (27.3%) respondents were unaware. Finally, concerning awareness of the Delimitation Commission in J&K, 65 (16.3%) respondents maintained that they are aware of the Delimitation Commission, while a majority of 304 (76.2%) individuals were unaware, and 30 (7.5%) individuals were aware to some extent.

Fig. 6.4: Distribution of Frequency Regarding Respondent's Political Awareness



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

Section D: Women Economic Empowerment and Property Rights of Women in Jammu and Kashmir

Economic security for women is closely tied to their access to salaried employment and ownership of property. However, in Jammu and Kashmir, both indicators remain dismally low for women. According to a statistical report published by the Indian Ministry of Statistics (2018), workforce participation among women in the organized sector stands at just 14.5% in urban areas, compared to 52.68% for men. In rural areas, female workforce participation is 20.8%, as opposed to 46.3% for males. These statistics clearly indicate that only a minority of women in the region are salaried or economically independent. The issue of property ownership reveals a similar gender gap. A news report cited by Shah highlights that only 33% of women aged 15–49 in Jammu and Kashmir own a house, and a mere 23% have land registered in their names, compared to 73% of men.²²⁶ Discussions around women's property ownership only gained public attention when a government order passed under the leadership of the first woman head of the state—waived stamp duty on properties purchased by women. This progressive move was, however, short-lived. The policy was reversed in January 2019 by SRO 82, issued under Governor's Rule after the elected government was dissolved. The Kashmir Women's Collective (KWC) was the only civil society group that actively opposed this reversal, organizing public meetings and protests to highlight the importance of incentivizing property ownership for women as a means of empowerment.²²⁷

²²⁶ Shah, S. (2019), *How Zero Stamp Duty on Property Empowered 'J&K Women*, Greater Kashmir.

²²⁷ Mir, Arshid (2021), *Labor force participation in India: Insights from Jammu and Kashmir*.

Findings from fieldwork conducted for this study further reveal the precarious nature of women's economic security in the region. Interviews with women and intervention in individual cases established that, for most, gold received at the time of marriage typically gifted by the parental family and, to a lesser extent, the in-laws remain the sole form of personal wealth. Alarming, in cases of marital dispute or abuse, this gold is often retained by the husband or his family, sometimes sold without the woman's consent. Cultural expectations frequently pressure women to relinquish their ownership of this jewelry to preserve marital harmony. Field interviews revealed that in most cases where women reported domestic violence or abuse, they no longer had possession of this gold. These findings are corroborated by the State Women's Commission (SWC) Annual Report of 2018, which documents at least 35 cases of violence against women during that year. In over 25 of these cases, the women's gold jewelry was found to be in the possession of their husbands or in-laws. Instead of initiating legal proceedings, the Commission often settled these matters by obtaining written promises or bonds from the men to return the gold or its monetary equivalent within two to three years. However, these informal agreements lack legal standing, and violations are widespread, with little to no consequences for defaulters. This points to systemic shortcomings in the enforcement of women's property and legal rights, further undermining their financial autonomy.

In response to these longstanding challenges, the government has introduced numerous welfare schemes aimed at improving women's financial and professional prospects. Since independence, these initiatives have played a crucial role in promoting planned economic development, enacting legal reforms, and launching social welfare projects to combat poverty and advance gender equity. One of the most prominent efforts in Jammu and Kashmir is the Jammu and Kashmir Women's Development Corporation (JKWDC), established in 1994 (originally in 1991 as the State Channelizing Agency). The Corporation has been instrumental in implementing both central and state-sponsored programs targeted at economic and social upliftment, with a special focus on women from marginalized, minority, and disadvantaged backgrounds. Its primary objective is to enhance women's economic status, thereby enabling them to exercise greater control over their lives and improve their overall standard of living. In addition, several national-level financial institutions such as the National Minority Development and Finance Corporation, the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation, and the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation offer low-interest loans and educational support to women from vulnerable groups. These programs are designed to promote self-reliance, skill development, and entrepreneurship among women. The Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme has also been

launched by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to provide self-employment opportunities to educated but unemployed youth, including young women. Despite relatively higher interest rates on loans under this program, it has gained traction among aspiring women entrepreneurs seeking financial independence.²²⁸

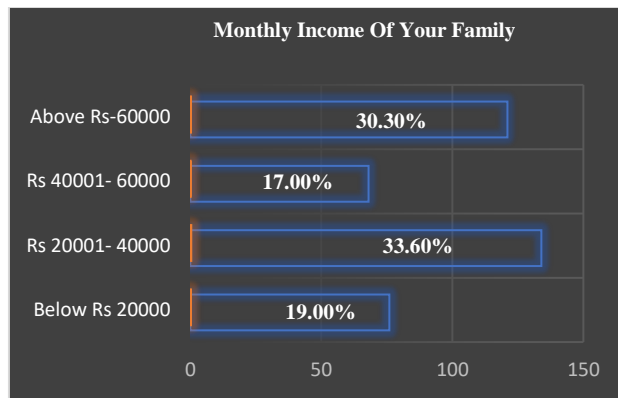
These schemes are co-financed by the Government of India, the state government, and beneficiaries themselves, making them both accessible and affordable. Loan repayment terms are designed to be flexible and favorable, thereby encouraging economic growth and long-term self-sufficiency among women. The Social Welfare Department of Jammu and Kashmir also plays a vital role in addressing the diverse needs of marginalized groups, especially women facing socio-economic adversity. Through various schemes, the department extends support to women affected by domestic violence, marital disputes, and economic insecurity. Initiatives like the Ladli Beti Social Assistance Scheme specifically aim to improve the life chances of girls from financially weak families by providing regular financial assistance during their formative years. Despite these government efforts, Kashmiri women continue to face a unique set of socio-cultural and economic challenges. Issues such as delayed marriages, dowry-related disputes, limited access to property inheritance, and increased crimes against women remain pervasive. Gender disparities in education continue to persist, further compounded by inadequate healthcare infrastructure and limited access to services in rural areas. These overlapping barriers highlight the urgent need for more holistic and sustained interventions ones that not only provide legal and financial support but also work to dismantle the deep-rooted patriarchal norms that continue to constrain women's agency in Kashmir.

7.1: Monthly Income of Respondents Family

Figure 7.1: This section shows the frequency distribution of respondents regarding their family income. Out of the total sample of 399, 76 (19.0%) respondents reported that their monthly family income is below 20,000 rupees, 134 (33.6%) respondents reported a monthly family income of 20,001–40,000 rupees, 68 (17.0%) respondents reported a monthly family income of 40,001–60,000 rupees, and 121 (30.3%) respondents reported a monthly family income above 60,000 rupees.

Fig. 7.1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents About their Family Income

²²⁸ Press Information Bureau (2025, March 8), *Empowered Women Empower the World* (Ministry of Women and Child Development), Government of India.

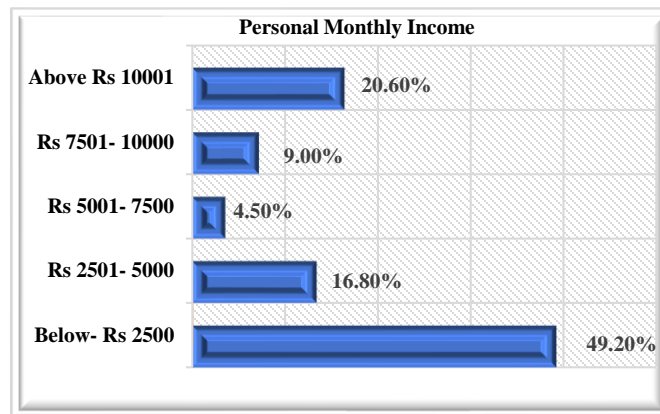


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.2: Personal Monthly Income of Respondents

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of frequencies of respondents regarding their family income. Out of the total sample of 399, 196 (49.2%) respondents reported that their family income is below 2,500 rupees; 67 (16.8%) respondents reported an income ranging from 2,501 to 5,000 rupees; 18 (4.5%) respondents reported a family income between 5,001 and 7,400 rupees; 36 (9.0%) respondents reported an income between 7,501 and 10,000 rupees; and 82 (20.6%) respondents reported a personal family income above 10,000 rupees.

Fig. 7.2: Frequency distribution of respondents regarding personal family income

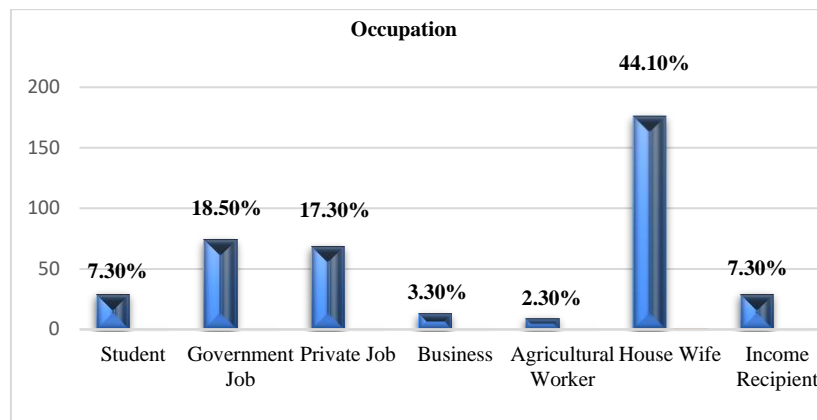


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.3: Occupation of Respondents

Figure 7.3 shows that out of the total sample, 29 respondents (7.3%) were students, 74 respondents (18.5%) were employed in government jobs, 69 respondents (17.3%) were engaged in private jobs, 13 respondents (3.3%) were businessmen, 9 respondents (2.3%) were agricultural workers, 176 respondents (44.1%) were housewives, and 29 respondents (7.3%) were income recipients.

Fig. 7.3: Frequency Distribution of Respondent's Occupation.

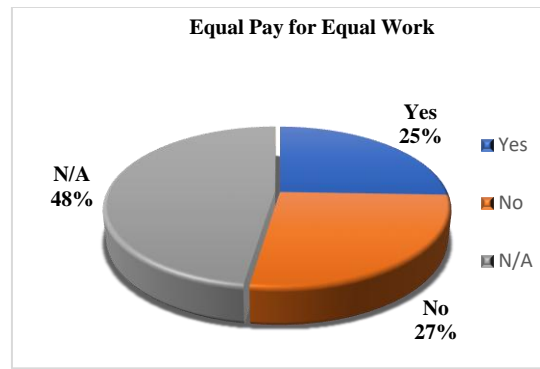


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.4: Equal Pay for Equal Work

The principle of “equal pay for equal work” finds its foundational basis in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. Specifically, Article 23 of the Declaration affirms that “everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.” This principle has since become a cornerstone of international labor standards and has been progressively integrated into national constitutions, legal frameworks, judicial interpretations, and employment policies across the globe. In the Indian context, the Supreme Court has upheld and reinforced this principle through various landmark judgments, emphasizing that individuals performing similar duties must be compensated equally, irrespective of their gender, employment status, or classification. Empirical data from the present study reflect a mixed perception among women respondents regarding the implementation of this principle. Out of a total sample of 399 participants, only 102 respondents (25.6%) affirmed that they receive equal pay for equal work, while 107 respondents (26.8%) reported not receiving equal remuneration for equivalent tasks. Notably, a significant proportion 190 respondents (47.6%) chose not to express a definitive opinion on the matter, suggesting either uncertainty, reluctance to disclose, or lack of awareness regarding wage equality. These findings highlight the continued ambiguity and possible disparities surrounding the implementation of equal pay in practice, despite its strong legal and normative backing.

Fig. 7.4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents on Equal Pay for Equal Work.



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.5: Consideration of Respondents Based on Childcare Arrangements While at the Workplace.

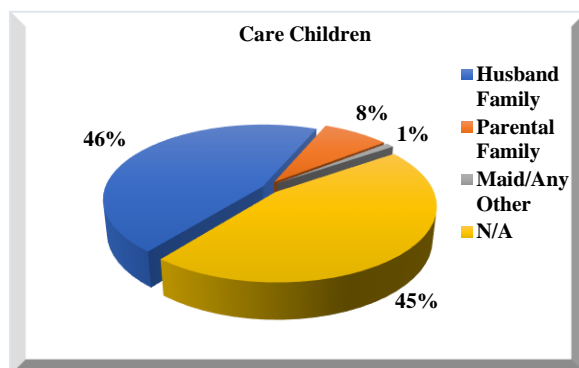
One of the most pressing challenges faced by women in Kashmir today, particularly working women, is the issue of childcare. Women are burdened with dual responsibilities managing household duties while simultaneously engaging in professional work outside the home. During the course of my fieldwork and while administering the interview schedule, several women shared their experiences of bringing their children along to their workplaces due to the lack of alternative care options. Others reported that their natal (maiden) families assumed childcare responsibilities during their working hours. It has increasingly become a common trend and in some cases, an unspoken obligation for a woman's parental family to take care of her children, especially when other support systems are absent. In certain households, the paternal (in-laws') family also assumes the responsibility of rearing children until they reach school-going age. However, only a small proportion of respondents reported utilizing formal childcare facilities such as crèches or play schools. The situation is particularly difficult in rural areas, where such facilities are often non-existent, thereby exacerbating the burden on working mothers.²²⁹

Empirical data from my study further illustrates the distribution of childcare responsibilities. Out of the total respondents, 182 (45.6%) stated that the husband's family is primarily responsible for childcare, while 32 respondents (8.0%) indicated that their parental family provides this support. Only 4 respondents (1.0%) reported relying on domestic help or maids for childcare. Notably, a significant number of respondents 181 (45.4%) marked "Not Applicable," suggesting either the absence of children or a lack of structured childcare support altogether. These findings highlight the critical need for enhanced childcare infrastructure, especially in rural Kashmir, and underscore the importance of institutional support mechanisms,

²²⁹ Contributor. (2023, December 28), *Balancing the unbalanced: The unfair burden women carry in dual-working-parent households*, Kashmir Observer.

such as subsidized day-care centres, that can alleviate the burden on working women and enable greater participation in the workforce.

Figure 7.5: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Childcare Arrangements While at the Workplace.

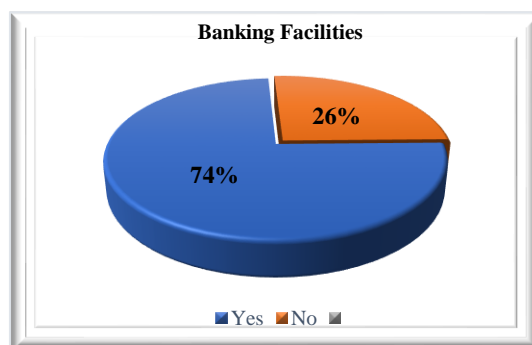


Source: Field Work by the Researcher.

7.6: Banking Facilities of Women.

Out of the total 399 respondents, 74.4%, or 297 individuals, agreed that they have access to banking facilities, while 25.6%, or 102 respondents, disagreed about having any access to banking facilities.

Fig. 7.6: Frequency Distribution of Respondents About Having Access to Banking Facilities

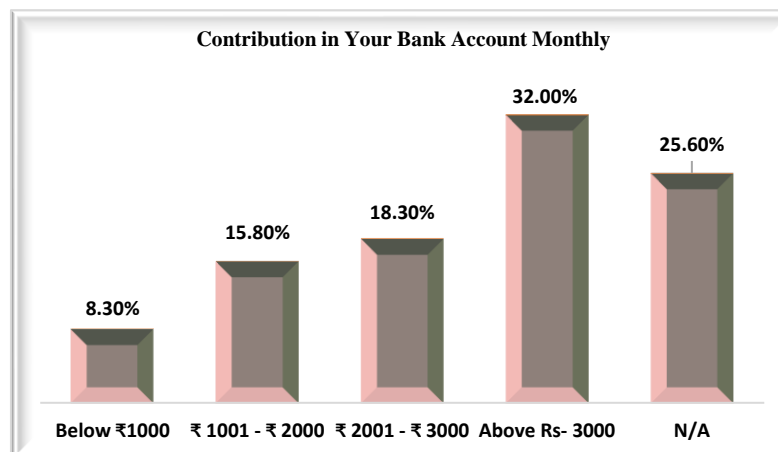


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.7: Contribution of Women to Bank Account Monthly

Out of a total sample of 399, 33 respondents (8.3%) contribute below 1,000 rupees monthly to their bank accounts. Sixty-three respondents (15.8%) contribute between 1,001 and 2,000 rupees monthly; 73 respondents (18.3%) contribute between 2,001 and 3,000 rupees monthly; 128 respondents (32.0%) contribute above 3,000 rupees monthly; and 102 respondents (25.6%) indicated their contribution as N/A.

Figure 7.7: Frequency Distribution of the Respondent's Monthly Contribution to their Bank Accounts.

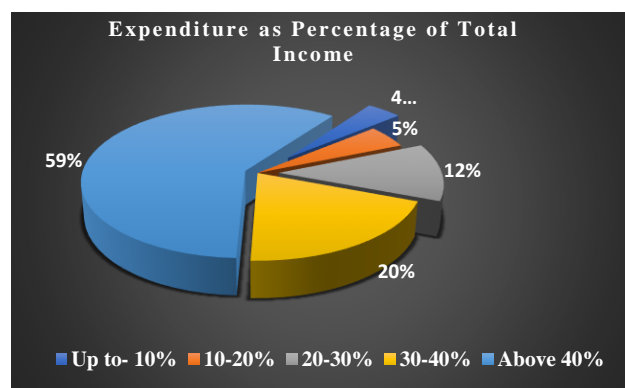


Source: Field Work by the Researcher

7.8: Expenditure as Percentage of Total Income

Out of a total sample of 399 respondents, 16 (4.0%) allocate up to 10% of their monthly income to expenditure. Nineteen (4.8%) respondents allocate 10-20% to expenditure, 48 (12.0%) allocate 20-30%, 79 (19.8%) allocate 30-40%, and 237 (59.4%) allocate more than 40% of their monthly income to expenditure.

Figure 7.8: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Regarding Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Income



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

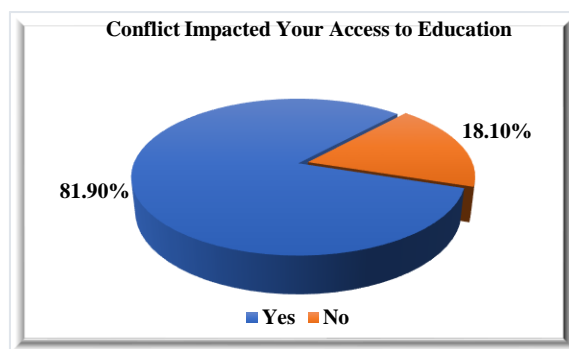
Section E: Overall Well-being and Safety

8.1: Impact of Ongoing Conflict on Education Access:

It is widely acknowledged that while women rarely instigate conflicts, they often bear the brunt of their consequences emotionally, socially, and economically alongside children. Nowhere is this reality more apparent than in Kashmir, where decades of protracted conflict have left

women as both direct and indirect victims. In District Pulwama, one of the most volatile regions in the valley, women have suffered profoundly across all dimensions of life be it social, economic, or educational. This study specifically evaluates how armed conflict has disrupted the lives of women in Pulwama, with a focus on access to education. Historically, even prior to the eruption of conflict, female education lagged behind male education due to entrenched patriarchal norms. However, the onset of insurgency and militarization has further compounded these disparities. The destruction of educational infrastructure by terrorists, prolonged school closures, and the occupation of school buildings by military forces have severely disrupted girls' education in particular. Moreover, persistent fears of sexual harassment, abuse, and general insecurity have further discouraged families from sending their daughters to school. The empirical data collected in this study reinforces these observations. As shown in Figure 8.1, a striking 327 respondents (81.9%) affirmed that the conflict has had a detrimental impact on their educational opportunities. In contrast, only 72 respondents (18.1%) reported that their education remained unaffected. These findings reflect a deeply entrenched crisis in female education within conflict-affected areas and underscore the urgent need for secure, inclusive, and accessible learning environments for women and girls in Pulwama and the broader Kashmir region.

Figure 8.1 Has the Ongoing Conflict Impacted Your Access to Education or Affected the Quality of Educational Services in Your Area?



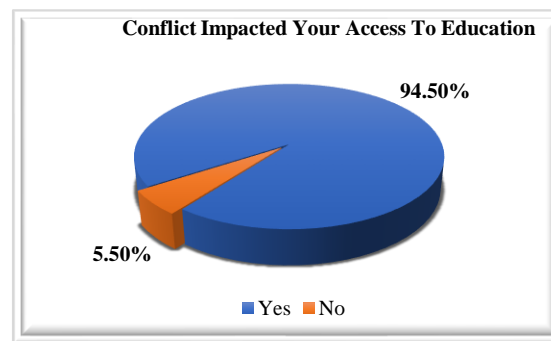
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

8.2. Disruptions in Healthcare Access Due to Conflict:

Women and children continue to be among the most vulnerable groups during times of conflict, often bearing a disproportionate share of the hardship. In crisis situations, their access to essential services particularly healthcare is severely compromised. There have been numerous instances reported where pregnant women and those with serious health conditions were unable

to reach hospitals due to prolonged curfews, roadblocks, and the overall breakdown of public infrastructure under conflict conditions. The findings of this study, as reflected in Figure 8.2, further underscore the grave impact of political instability on healthcare access in District Pulwama. An overwhelming majority of respondents 94.5% (377 individuals) reported that the ongoing conflict had significantly disrupted their ability to access healthcare services. In contrast, only 5.5% (22 respondents) indicated that they faced no such disruptions. These figures reveal the alarming extent to which conflict-induced instability has eroded basic health service delivery in the region, particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as women, children, the elderly, and the chronically ill. The data not only points to a humanitarian crisis but also calls for urgent intervention to ensure the continuity of healthcare services even in conflict-affected zones.

Figure 8.2: Have You or Your Family Experienced Disruptions in Accessing Healthcare Services Due to Political Instability or Conflict?



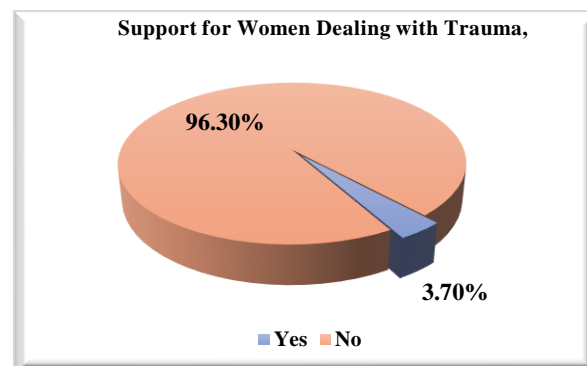
Source: Field Work by the Researcher

8.3 Support for Women Dealing with Mental Health Challenges Due to Conflict:

The Government of India launched the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) in 1999 as part of a broader initiative to decentralize and integrate mental health services across the country. However, the implementation of this program in Jammu and Kashmir began only in 2004–2005. An analysis of the DMHP revealed that by 2012, the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) remained only marginally operational in most districts of the region, highlighting significant implementation gaps. Recognizing the urgent need for psychosocial support in a conflict-ridden environment, Médecins Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders) intervened in 2012, offering community-based mental health services in five districts of Kashmir. Their involvement aimed to bridge the gap in mental health infrastructure by delivering culturally sensitive, accessible care to conflict-affected populations. Mental health is a socially and culturally constructed concept its understanding, diagnosis, and treatment are influenced by diverse sociocultural factors including class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Consequently,

effective mental health care must be context-specific and grounded in the lived realities of the communities it seeks to serve. In Kashmir, the delivery of mental health services currently operates at three levels: specialized mental hospitals, general hospitals, and primary health centers. While efforts have been made to decentralize care by integrating mental health services into general healthcare and primary health initiatives, the bulk of treatment continues to be institution-based, limiting access especially for women in rural and conflict-affected areas.²³⁰ Findings from the present study, as depicted in Figure 8.3, reveal a striking inadequacy in mental health and trauma support services for women in District Pulwama. An overwhelming 96.3% of respondents indicated that support for women experiencing psychological distress or trauma due to the ongoing conflict was insufficient, with only 3.7% acknowledging the presence of adequate services. This pronounced gap underscores the urgent need for comprehensive, gender-sensitive mental health infrastructure. There is a critical imperative to expand psychosocial support, community outreach, and trauma-informed care tailored to the unique challenges faced by women in conflict zones like Kashmir.

Figure 8.3: Do you feel there is adequate support for women dealing with trauma, mental health issues, or other psychological impacts of conflict?



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

8.4: Impact of Political Instability on Sense of Security and Movement:

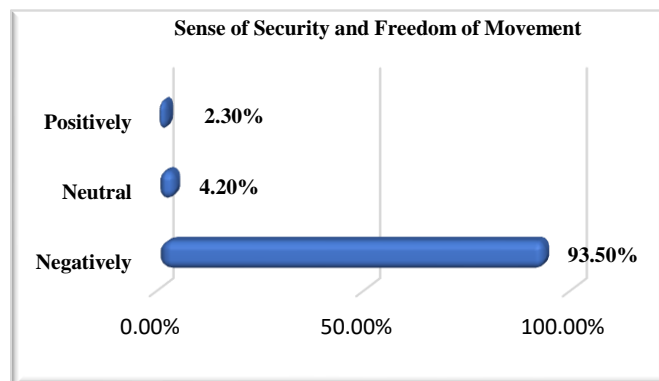
Despite Kashmir's rich secular and progressive legacy, the eruption of terrorism in the late 1980s marked a severe regression in the status and rights of women. This period witnessed a dramatic decline in women's participation in public life, with the conflict affecting them both directly as victims of violence and indirectly, through the erosion of institutional support and social freedoms. The influx of terrorism not only introduced widespread arms among civilians

²³⁰ Dar, D. R., Paul, F. A., & Ali, A. (2023). Mental health literacy in Kashmir: From conflict to post-abrogation of Article 370. *Taiwanese Journal of Psychiatry*, 37(2), P. 59.

but also severely curtailed women's liberties, reinforcing patriarchal norms and cultural constraints. Several interrelated factors contributed to this deterioration: shifting societal priorities, diminishing women-centric political movements, the collapse of support systems, underrepresentation in media, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Women who once enjoyed relative autonomy were suddenly thrust into an environment marked by fear and repression. Religious extremism in the early 1990s played a particularly oppressive role, with women subjected to rigid moral policing. Acid attacks emerged as a horrifying tactic, targeting young women who defied radical expectations, further pushing them into the shadows and reinforcing social seclusion. The conflict also destabilized Kashmir's educational and professional landscape. Educational institutions came under threat, and women professionals were either forced to withdraw or conform to restrictive norms. As a result, women became victims of systemic injustice, deprivation, political instability, gender bias, and cultural-religious oppression. Issues such as lack of political representation, limited economic independence, minimal awareness of rights, and pervasive security concerns further marginalized them.²³¹

Data from the present study (Figure 8.4) underscores the impact of political instability on women's mobility and sense of security. An overwhelming majority of respondents (93.5%) reported that political instability has negatively affected their freedom of movement and personal safety. Only 4.2% reported a neutral stance, while a mere 2.3% perceived any positive impact. These findings reflect the deep-seated climate of insecurity among women in conflict-ridden Kashmir, with significant implications for their participation in education, employment, and public life.

Figure 8.4: How has political instability affected your sense of security and freedom of movement within your area?



Source: Field Work by the Researcher

²³¹ Bhat, D. H. (2025, April 18), *The Political Empowerment of Kashmiri Women, Rising Kashmir*.

The ongoing conflict in Pulwama has had profound effects on women's overall well-being and access to essential services. In terms of education, a significant 81.9% of respondents reported that political unrest has hindered their educational access, underscoring the adverse impact on learning opportunities. Healthcare access has been similarly affected, with 94.5% experiencing disruptions in obtaining medical services due to instability. Mental health support is also severely lacking, as 96.3% noted inadequate resources for women dealing with trauma and psychological impacts from the conflict. Furthermore, political instability has created a pervasive sense of insecurity and restricted freedom of movement, with 93.5% of women feeling negatively impacted in terms of safety and mobility. This data highlights the pressing need for comprehensive support systems to address these multidimensional challenges faced by women in Pulwama.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The introduction of the study highlights the natural beauty, rich culture, and diverse demographics of the state, presenting the overall context in which the women of the region have faced challenges and achieved progress. It outlines various objectives leading to the central theme of the research and briefly explains the methodology employed to explore this theme. As mentioned in the introduction, women in the Kashmir Valley predominantly endured highly traditional living conditions until the early 20th century. Within this societal framework, their lives were marked by economic adversity, widespread ignorance, discrimination, harassment, inequality, and dependence. However, the early decades of the 20th century marked the formal beginning of a more comprehensive and profound process of change in addressing women's issues. The driving factors behind this transformation were both internal and external. Internal factors included the political, ideological, social, and religious influences at the national and global levels during that era, while external factors encompassed economic, cultural, educational, and other relevant influences. The Review of Literature offers an in-depth analysis of the available material related to the research problem. It covers a wide array of secondary sources, such as books, magazines, journals, newsletters, and both published and unpublished data and reports prepared by national and international organizations. This section highlights the diverse viewpoints of scholars regarding the nature of the political struggle in Jammu and Kashmir and its social implications, both for society at large and for women in particular.

First chapter: This chapter explores the socioeconomic status of women in Kashmir from 1947 to 2011, emphasizing their indispensable role in Kashmiri society across social, cultural, and political domains. Despite their significant contributions, women have received limited recognition, particularly in the political and economic spheres. As daughters, mothers, and wives, they have endured unparalleled suffering and victimization since the onset of the independence movement. Many women abandoned their lives of comfort to actively participate in the struggle against the oppressive Dogra regime, highlighting their resilience and commitment to societal change. The narrative of women in conflict-ridden Kashmir is one of relentless hardship, perseverance, and survival, underscored by their remarkable ability to adapt and contribute in adverse conditions. However, their identities continue to be shaped by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, which limit their opportunities and reinforce systemic discrimination.

Given the persistent challenges and adversities faced by women in Kashmir, their empowerment emerges as an urgent necessity for the broader development of the region.

Empowerment must address social, political, and economic dimensions, ensuring women's active participation and representation in all aspects of society. This study delves into the multifaceted challenges encountered by women in Jammu and Kashmir, ranging from restricted mobility outside their villages or districts to the cultural barriers that often force women to discontinue education after marriage. The protracted conflict, coupled with limited employment opportunities, exacerbates their dependence on male family members, despite the implementation of various upliftment programs. Key challenges include domestic abuse, a declining sex ratio, female feticide and infanticide, delayed marriages, state violence, dowry harassment, sexual harassment, unequal wages, and inadequate healthcare facilities. These issues collectively contribute to deteriorating health, financial insecurity, and a sense of social alienation. Women often feel excluded from familial and societal decision-making processes, which compounds their marginalization. Furthermore, policymakers have largely neglected the need for women-friendly infrastructure and healthcare systems, further deepening their plight.

In Kashmir, women face a broad spectrum of social, economic, educational, and political issues, including domestic violence, late marriages, child labor, child sexual abuse, and workplace harassment. Older women and widows face even greater adversities, compounded by mental health disorders, financial instability, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence. Institutional failures both public and private to address these crimes have left women at heightened risk. The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan has also inflicted profound psychological and physical tolls, with some women experiencing loss of fertility due to chronic stress and trauma. The alarming sex ratio of 883 females per 1,000 males, recorded in the 2011 census, underscores the urgency of addressing these systemic issues. Jammu and Kashmir, as an integral part of India, must not be neglected by the national government. A collaborative approach between central and local authorities is essential to address the challenges faced by women, ensuring justice and fostering nonviolent resolutions to their plight. Only through such concerted efforts can the deep-seated marginalization of women in Kashmir be effectively dismantled.

Chapter 2, The political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir reflects a complex interplay of historical events, socio-political changes, and enduring conflict. The region's political evolution from the accession of the state to India in 1947, through the establishment of Article 370, the Delhi Agreement, and subsequent shifts in governance has shaped its current volatile state. The roots of the ongoing political conflict are deep, tracing back over a century and evolving through significant historical phases. While the initial discord stemmed from regional and interstate disputes between India and Pakistan, the political turmoil post-1987 elections marked the

emergence of an indigenous militant movement, further intensifying the conflict. Economic stagnation, corruption, and unemployment exacerbated public disillusionment, particularly among Kashmiri youth, sparking cycles of protests and uprisings. In conclusion, the history of Jammu and Kashmir is a complex narrative shaped by its strategic significance, ethnic diversity, and the political aspirations of its leaders and populace. The events surrounding the partition of British India and the subsequent accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India laid the foundation for a prolonged conflict. The decisions of key figures like Nehru, Patel, and Sheikh Abdullah, coupled with international dynamics and local resistance, have left an indelible mark on the region's political trajectory. The establishment of a provisional government underscored the urgency of securing both governance and popular support in the wake of tribal invasions and political instability. While the Instrument of Accession provided a legal basis for Kashmir's integration into India, it also triggered decades of unrest and competing territorial claims. These developments illustrate the enduring struggle of the Kashmiri people for political representation, autonomy, and peace amidst external and internal pressures, making the region a focal point of historical and contemporary significance.

Historically marginalized in formal political structures, Kashmiri women have nevertheless emerged as resilient actors, redefining their roles and asserting agency in both public and private spheres. The decline in women's formal political representation, as seen in local self-government from 2011 to 2018, underscores the persistent structural barriers they face. However, this does not fully encapsulate the breadth of their contributions. Kashmiri women have actively resisted their portrayal as mere victims of conflict. Through informal networks, community service, and digital activism, they have become peacemakers, negotiators, and advocates for change. Utilizing ICT tools like social media, women have amplified their voices, shared experiences, and mobilized support for their causes. Their activism demonstrates a refusal to be relegated to traditional roles and highlights their determination to influence Kashmir's socio-political fabric.

The exploration of the roles of women in politics, the economy, and society reveals both the significant challenges they face and their remarkable resilience. While women's absence from formal decision-making structures remains a pressing issue, their contributions as activists, caregivers, and community leaders have been transformative. Recognizing and documenting these efforts is essential to understanding the broader socio-political dynamics of Kashmir and ensuring inclusive policies that address gender disparities. In conclusion, the political and social landscape of Jammu and Kashmir continues to evolve, and women's participation is a critical factor in shaping its future. While they are often overlooked in historical and contemporary

narratives, Kashmiri women's experiences and activism provide a lens through which to view resilience and agency amid conflict. It is imperative that future scholarship and policy-making prioritize their voices, ensuring that the rights, aspirations, and contributions of women are integral to the region's development and peace-building processes.

Chapter -3, The Kashmir conflict, rooted in unresolved territorial disputes and the unfulfilled promise of self-determination, has profoundly impacted the region's socio-political dynamics. Decades of insurgency, counter-insurgency operations, and political instability have resulted in significant loss of life, displacement, and widespread human rights violations. The conflict has deeply affected all communities in the region, including the Kashmiri Pandits' mass exodus and the ongoing struggles faced by the Muslim majority. The rise of militancy, compounded by external influences and ineffective governance, has further escalated tensions, undermining efforts toward peace and reconciliation. Addressing the core grievances, ensuring accountability, and fostering dialogue remain critical to resolving one of the world's most protracted conflicts.

Scholars like Chenoy and Chenoy argue that human rights violations, violence, and the denial of basic freedoms are far more significant drivers of separatism than economic factors. The prolonged period of violence in the valley has deeply affected the lives of its inhabitants, particularly women, who have borne the brunt of the suffering. Since the onset of the conflict, women have endured unimaginable hardships, with sexual violence being one of the most devastating forms of abuse. Rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence have been pervasive in the region, with sexual assault often used as a weapon to terrorize entire communities and humiliate their members. The conflict in Kashmir has had a devastating and multifaceted impact on women, who have borne the brunt of violence, sexual assault, psychological trauma, and social upheaval. Women have not only suffered from the atrocities committed by both Indian security forces and militant groups but have also been forced to take on new roles as heads of households in the absence of male family members. Despite these immense challenges, Kashmiri women have shown remarkable resilience, actively participating in peacebuilding and community efforts, challenging their portrayal as passive victims. However, the ongoing violence, including systematic sexual violence, continues to undermine their rights, safety, and well-being. Addressing the needs of these women requires urgent and comprehensive action that acknowledges their unique struggles and contributions to the region's future.

The conflict has also resulted in a significant increase in the number of widows and orphaned children. In the Kashmir Division alone, there are approximately 32,000 widows, many of

whom live in abject poverty, facing not only economic hardship but also social stigmatization, harassment, and exploitation. These women often struggle with basic survival needs, including access to nutrition and healthcare, which severely impacts their quality of life. While the official census reports 25,000 widows and 60,000 orphans, independent investigations by Valley-based organizations estimate that the actual numbers are much higher around 32,000 widows and 120,000 orphaned children. The impact of conflict on women's social lives is also profound. The ongoing conflict in Kashmir has had a profound and devastating impact on women, exacerbating their social, economic, and psychological struggles. Women, particularly widows and orphans, face extreme poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services, contributing to a low standard of living. Political instability, violence, and military presence have restricted women's educational and economic opportunities, with a significant rise in unemployment rates among women. Despite these challenges, many women have shown remarkable resilience, taking on new roles in their families and communities. However, the absence of adequate support systems, including counseling, legal protection, and financial aid, continues to hinder their ability to recover and thrive in the face of adversity.

Chapter -4 The fourth chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the socio-political and economic conditions of women in Pulwama district, Kashmir. The data collected from a sample of 399 respondents provides valuable insights into the region's socio-demographic characteristics. A significant proportion of the respondents (83.5%) reside in rural areas, highlighting the rural-urban divide that shapes the lives of women in the region. The age distribution reveals that the majority of women (33.6%) fall within the 28-38 age range, suggesting that the sample represents women in their prime working and reproductive years. In terms of marital status, most respondents (69.2%) are married, with a smaller proportion unmarried (20.6%) and widowed (8%). Educationally, while there is a moderate level of education among respondents, a notable proportion hold degrees above graduation (22.3%) or professional/technical qualifications (9.8%), indicating a moderate but growing level of educational attainment. Interestingly, the educational qualifications of respondents' husbands reflect a similar diversity, with many possessing higher education, although 20.6% did not provide this information.

Family structure plays a key role in shaping women's lives in the region, with 70.4% of respondents belonging to joint families, reflecting the traditional family setup that remains prevalent in Kashmir. The majority of respondents (83%) identify as Muslim, followed by Hindus (10.3%) and Sikhs (6.8%). In terms of social composition, most respondents belong to the General category (69.7%), with a smaller portion falling under the Residential Backward

Area (RBA) category (12%). These demographic characteristics highlight the socio-cultural diversity among women in the Kashmir Valley, with varying educational levels, marital statuses, and family structures contributing to their distinct experiences.

The study reveals that despite some progress, women in Pulwama continue to face significant socio-economic challenges, particularly in the context of ongoing insurgency. Education remains a key area of concern, as many families, although expressing support for women's education, fail to proactively encourage their daughters' learning. This lack of support is compounded by safety concerns, which severely hinder women's social mobility and participation in educational and economic activities. While awareness of free and compulsory education is relatively high, there is a need for greater efforts to address gaps in knowledge and to ensure that policies are effectively implemented.

The ongoing conflict has had a profound impact on women's freedom of movement and their sense of security. Although most respondents report some level of freedom in visiting places like markets and religious venues, many feel restricted when traveling outside the district due to safety concerns. These security issues, alongside societal constraints, continue to limit women's ability to fully engage in social and economic life. Despite these challenges, the survey indicates a significant level of social awareness among women, with many demonstrating an understanding of key issues such as education, marriage laws, and protection from domestic violence. However, the enforcement of laws protecting women remains inconsistent, suggesting the need for further improvements in both awareness and law enforcement.

Politically, women's participation remains limited, with only 9.3% engaging in political or social activism. A substantial proportion (32.8%) feel that political information and awareness, particularly regarding governance and women's rights, is inaccessible. While many are aware of major political events such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir, there is a lack of knowledge about local governance and women's rights, particularly regarding reservations in local bodies. This reflects the broader challenges in fostering political engagement and awareness among women in the region.

Economically, the data paints a mixed picture. While a significant portion of respondents (33.6%) report a monthly family income between Rs. 20,001-40,000, personal income levels for many women remain low, with 49.2% earning less than Rs. 2,500 per month. Employment opportunities are concentrated in government and private sector jobs, with a small fraction involved in business or agriculture. Despite having access to banking facilities (74.4%), many women contribute only modest amounts to their savings, with 32% contributing more than Rs. 3,000 monthly. A significant proportion (59.4%) of respondents allocate more than 40% of their

income to expenses, highlighting the financial pressures they face. The persistence of wage inequity, with 26.8% of respondents reporting unequal pay for equal work, underscores the economic barriers women continue to face.

The ongoing conflict in Pulwama has had severe consequences for women's access to essential services. A significant majority (81.9%) of respondents reported disruptions in education, while 94.5% experienced disruptions in healthcare access. These findings underscore the profound impact of political instability on basic services. Mental health support is also notably inadequate, with 96.3% of women expressing concerns about the lack of resources for dealing with trauma and psychological impacts of the conflict. The pervasive insecurity, with 93.5% of respondents feeling negatively impacted in terms of safety and freedom of movement, further exacerbates the challenges women face, limiting their participation in both social and economic activities. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems, policy interventions, and community engagement to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women in Pulwama. Enhanced awareness, greater political and social participation, improved economic opportunities, and better mental health support are critical to improving the status of women in the region and ensuring a more equitable future amidst the ongoing conflict.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The rate at which Kashmir's sex ratio is declining is concerning. The sex ratio was 936 females per 1,000 males in the 2001 census, and it is 883 females per 1,000 males in the 2011 census. Therefore, the J&K government should take this issue seriously because it is a matter of concern.
2. The dowry system is increasing day by day, causing some parents to struggle to marry off their daughters at the appropriate age. This is why early marriage is not prevalent in Kashmir. While this is a positive development, some girls have surpassed the age of marriage. In light of the dowry system, there is a need for general awareness programs and the implementation of strict laws.
3. So, keeping the above views under consideration Jammu and Kashmir, not only our state but all Govt's of India needs to take some measures with the help of local bodies, and NGOs for the betterment of women.
4. The remarriage of divorced women must be encouraged and supported. In this regard, formulating the necessary social legislation will be tremendously helpful. At the same time, widespread social approval and mobilization are also needed.
5. Women must be allowed to inherit all property due to them from all sources. Islam grants women a specific share in their parents' and husbands' property. It must be ensured that the existing customary laws in Kashmir are negated and that Muslim personal laws are applied. Violations of women's rights need to be fully addressed and stopped.
6. The problems related to marital adjustment must be taken seriously and resolved within a rational and realistic framework. The emergence of working women's co-role must be accepted wholeheartedly. Following that, an equitable and reciprocal relationship must be established between the wife and husband, as well as between women and all family members.
7. The problems related to the dual role of women and their crucial implications may be resolved within a rational-social framework. Within the home, husbands and other family members must provide supportive roles. They can help address issues related to daycare and the socialization of children, as well as deviance and control within the family. Outside the home, working women need to develop a new perspective on these problems, which will relieve them of many tensions.
8. The practice of wife-beating (and husband-beating, too) is one of the most inhumane practices. It must be stopped immediately. While the government can play a certain role in this regard, society at large must work to eradicate it.

9. The role of women in agriculture, handicrafts, small businesses, and household occupations must be highlighted, emphasized, and analysed. This portrayal of women's roles will reveal the importance of their contributions in various sectors of the economy. Ultimately, this will contribute to establishing gender equality.
10. The majority of women workers are employed in traditional sectors of the economy. Now, they should be introduced to new sectors such as services and small businesses. They should play a crucial role in the overall economy and economic reconstruction in the Kashmir Valley. Moreover, women's economic and occupational mobility must contribute to their psychological and social development as a whole.
11. Women must be paid for every work they perform except for household work. This will lead to the economic independence of women. As a result, women will earn their own income and spend it according to their preferences and priorities. They will also spend on their own needs and/or family needs as the situation demands.
12. The maximum exploitation of women occurs in the handicraft sector. This must be stopped completely or significantly reduced, urgently and immediately. The mass exploitation in the handicraft sector can be stopped or reduced by fixing standard rates for all handicraft items, seriously and sincerely enforcing these wages by the concerned agencies, regularly checking that women workers receive their full wages, maintaining the quality standards of items, and opening credible outlets for the products made by women workers. At the same time, a wider social consciousness must be raised against the ongoing exploitation.
13. The government, along with non-governmental organizations and agencies, must work systematically to establish independent centers and cooperatives for both educated and uneducated women. While these organizations and agencies will provide a financial base for women's centers and cooperatives, they will also assist in their maintenance and open outlets for the items produced. All educated, unemployed women who are desirous of financial assistance, both in rural and urban areas, must be supported by the government and non-government agencies to establish their independent units in various economic sectors.
14. Rural women deserve special attention from governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies. They also require specific measures to protect their rights in totality and to ensure equal treatment in all areas, especially in economic matters.
15. Since the women's literacy rate in the Kashmir Valley stands very low (as low as 40 percent), all government and non-governmental efforts must concentrate on improving the situation in this area. Target-oriented and time-bound programs must be initiated and

pursued seriously. Surprisingly, a state that has provided free education from primary to university could not attain desirable levels of literacy over the last fifty years.

16. It is important to establish a pro-literacy environment for the advancement of women's education. Social input in the process of educational advancement will prove to be tremendously helpful in this regard. The drop-out rate of children, especially females, must be addressed in both formal and informal ways. Formally, government and non-governmental efforts, especially those providing necessary financial support, will certainly help reduce the drop-out rate, particularly at the elementary stage. Informally, social consciousness should be raised against drop-outs at both the elementary and secondary stages.
17. The government schools must become centers of attention and excellence in primary and secondary education. These schools serve more children, charge lower fees and dues, employ qualified and trained staff, have more funds available, and offer maximum facilities. The government must provide all necessary educational facilities to everyone, especially to female children, at the primary and secondary levels. These facilities include school buildings, qualified teachers, libraries, laboratories, and so on. Financing for these facilities must be prioritized, even if it requires an increase in budgetary provisions. This financial allocation may prove to be a significant investment in future human resource development.
18. In the context of women's health problems, public health centers must be staffed with expert doctors, particularly female doctors, and provided with necessary medicines, equipment, and other crucial facilities. If these resources have already been provided, they must be utilized to the maximum extent possible to benefit the community.
19. It is very important that all hospitals and health centers at the district, tehsil, block, and village levels are provided with the medicines, services, and facilities required by women at the time of delivery. The priority must start from the towns in this regard. Moreover, necessary medicines, facilities, and services required for prenatal and postnatal care must be made available both day and night. The services of expert doctors and transportation must be available 24/7.
20. The establishment of private clinics and nursing homes in the valley must be appreciated. However, at the same time, the government must ensure that these health institutions provide standard services to the people. Special care must be taken regarding the financial aspect, including the wages of medical and paramedical staff and charges for the treatment of various diseases and operations. In brief, the proprietors of these health institutions must not be allowed to exploit the people. Specific measures must be taken to control mortality

rates, especially during or immediately after childbirth. While the necessary facilities and services can be provided in hospitals, women must be made aware of the relevant measures in this regard.

- 21.** A strong social campaign promoting family planning measures for women is already underway. It must be further expanded, strengthened, and intensified. Print and electronic media must continuously highlight the positive effects of adopting various family planning measures, especially in rural areas.
- 22.** The problem of discrimination can broadly be addressed at two levels. At the governmental level, all necessary legislation related to gender discrimination must be enacted and implemented. At the societal level, social awareness must be raised against various practices of gender discrimination, and a strong social movement must be initiated to safeguard women's rights and ensure equal treatment of women within and outside their families.
- 23.** Gender discrimination must be made a priority item on the social, political, economic, and other agendas of all political and social organizations. This ideal must be pursued irrespective of political and ideological differences between various parties.
- 24.** The ideal of gender equality can be achieved by empowering women at all levels and in all areas. This fundamental process of social transformation must start within the family and extend to the composition of members of parliament in the country. Without empowering women within the family, how can we empower them in broader society? The entire society must be engaged in this process.
- 25.** To eliminate the harassment of women in the workplace, it must be addressed formally and forcefully. All rules and laws should be enforced to punish those who attempt to harass women. Additionally, both formal and informal efforts should be undertaken to establish a social ethos, within and outside the workplace, where women are respected and not mistreated.
- 26.** Abortions should only be allowed in unavoidable cases on ethical grounds. The abortion of a female fetus to kill a female baby must be portrayed as a heinous crime against humanity. Although this practice is formally banned by law, it still continues. Women must be organized and prepared to oppose this practice.
- 27.** The Kashmiri community has become increasingly deprived due to the insurgency in the valley, which has taken many forms, including the depletion of capital, a decline in income and employment opportunities, the physical destruction of agricultural resources, reduced investments, and large-scale population displacement.

28. The central and state governments have a responsibility to resolve this disagreement so that women can live free from recurring problems. Starting a conversation with separatists and civil society is necessary to find a solution and prevent the same regrettable situation for future generations.

APPENDIX-A
Interview Schedule
Lovely Professional University Punjab
SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN KASHMIR
(1947-2011)

Researcher Mudasir Ahmad Wani:

Supervisor: Dr Tariq Ahmad Sheikh

Instructions: The purpose of this questioner is to collect the information about the socio-political and economic condition of women for research purpose. Here are questions. Read all the questions/Statements carefully and respond by making tick mark on any of the alternative e.g. 1, 2, 3.....Given against each statement. There is no right or wrong answer. Your response will be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of research. I will take your privacy seriously and will be committed to protecting your personal information.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN OF DISTRICT PULWAMA

Personal Information

Name: _____

Husbands/ Fathers Name: _____

District Name: _____

Block Name: _____

Village Name: _____

Contact NO: _____

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Locality

a) Rural

b) Urban

2. Age

a) Below 18 years

b) 18 – 28 years

c) 28 – 38 years

d) 38 – 48 years

e) Above 48 years

3. Marital status

a) Married

b) Un-Married

c) Widow

d) Divorcee

4. Have your parents taken your choice in consideration for your marriage?

a) Yes

b) No

c) N/A

5. How was your in-law's reaction for a female baby?

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| a) Strongly Happy. | b) Happy | c) Neutral |
| d) Unhappy | e) strongly unhappy | f) N/A |

6. Educational Qualification

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| a) Illiterate | b) Primary | c) Secondary |
| d) Higher Secondary | e) Graduation | f) Above Graduation |
| g) Professional / Technical Degree | | |

7. Husbands Educational Qualification

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| a) Illiterate | b) Primary | c) Secondary |
| d) Higher Secondary | e) Graduation | f) Above Graduation |
| g) Professional / Technical Degree | | h) N/A |

8. Type of Family

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| a) Joint | b) Nuclear |
|----------|------------|

9. Religion

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| a) Muslim | b) Hindu |
| c) Sikh | d) Other |

10. Social group

- | | | |
|------------|----------|-------|
| a) General | b) SC | c) ST |
| d) RBA | e) Other | |

Section B: Social Conditions and Family Influence

11. How Would You Describe the Support for Women's Education in Your Family?

- | | | |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|
| a) Supportive | b) Neutral | c) Unsupportive |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|

12. Have You or Any Women in Your Family Faced Restrictions Regarding Education, Career Choices, Or Social Interactions Due to Family Norms or Social Pressures?

- | | | |
|--------|-------|--------|
| a) Yes | b) No | c) N/A |
|--------|-------|--------|

13. How Safe do You Feel Within Your Community in Terms of Social Freedom and Movement?

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| a) Very safe | b) Somewhat Safe | c) Neutral |
| d) Somewhat Unsafe | e) Very Unsafe | |

14. Do you know women have share in husband's property?

- | | | |
|----------|------------|-------------------|
| a) Aware | b) Unaware | c) To Some Extent |
|----------|------------|-------------------|

15. To what extent do you feel free to express your choice regarding marriage in your family?

- [illegible]

16. Can you wear clothes on your own choice?

- [illegible]

17. Can you visit these places/events alone i.e. without the male family member?

Places	Always	Sometimes	Never
<i>Friends / Relatives</i>			
<i>Marriage parties</i>			
<i>Tourist places</i>			
<i>Market</i>			
<i>Religious places</i>			
<i>Outside station</i>			

18. Social awareness among Women in Pulwama District

Social Awareness	Aware	Unaware	To some extent
Do you know right to education is a fundamental human right?			
Are you aware about free and compulsory education for women?			
Do you know the legal age of marriage for women?			
Are you aware about remarriage of women			
Do you know Women have right to choose their husband			
Are you aware about protection of women from domestic violence?			

Section C: Political Conditions and Women's Participation

19. Have You or Any Women in Your Family Participated in Any Political or Social Activism

- a) Yes b) No

20. In Your View, How Accessible is Political Information or Awareness About Local Governance and Women's Rights in Your Area?

- a) Very accessible b) Somewhat accessible c) Neutral

- d) Somewhat inaccessible d) Very inaccessible

21. How would you rate the Impact of Political Instability on Your Daily Life?

- a) High b) Moderate c) Low

22. Are you registered in the electoral voter list?

- a) Yes b) No

23. Did you contest the election?

- a) Yes b) No

24. On what considerations did you contest the election?

- a) Party ideology b) Money power
c) Dignity in the society d) Direction of the family member
e) To work for the betterment of Society. f) To take the women issues better way.
g) N/A

25. If No, what is the reason for not contesting

- a) Family responsibility b) Not interested in politics
c) Loss of social prestige d) Lack of community support
e) Denied ticket by a political party f) Direction of the family member
g) Fear of prevailing insurgency h) Religious influence

26. Did you vote in the last local bodies election

- a) Yes b) No

27. If yes, on what considerations did you vote for particular candidate

- a) Capability and honesty of the candidate b) Party ideology
c) Personal relationship with the candidate d) Direction of the family member
e) Forced f) Any other
g) N/A

28. If No, what is the reason for not voting?

- a) Dishonesty of the candidates b) Direction of the family member
c) Fear of prevailing insurgency d) Religious influence
e) Can't say f) N/A

29. Political Awareness among Women in Pulwama District

Political Awareness	Aware	Unaware	To some extent
Do you know the voting age?			
LG of Jammu and Kashmir			
Do you know local MLA (former)?			

d) 30 – 40 %

e) Above 40 %

39. Have you received the Amount of Maher at the time of Nikah?

a) Received at the Time of Nikah

b) Not Received at the Time of Nikah

c) Only Written in Papers

d) Other

40. Do Traditional Norms and Family Expectations Affect Your Access to Property or Inheritance Rights?

a) Yes

b) No

41. Economic Awareness among Women in Pulwama District

Economic Awareness	Aware	Unaware	To some extent
Are you aware women have right to fallow any trade or profession?			
Are you aware about Laadli Beti scheme			
Are you aware about Benefits of Kissan credit card			
Are you aware about Share market			
Are you aware about crypto currency			
Are you aware about Demonetization in India			

Section E: Overall Well-being and Safety

42. Has the Ongoing Conflict Impacted Your Access to Education or Affected the Quality of Educational Services in Your Area?

a) Yes

b) No

43. Have You or Your Family Experienced Disruptions in Accessing Healthcare Services Due to Political Instability or Conflict?

a) Yes

b) No

44. In your opinion, how has the political instability impacted women's mental health in your community?

a) Negatively

b) Neutral

c) Somewhat Positively

45. Do you feel there is adequate support for women dealing with trauma, mental health issues, or other psychological impacts of conflict?

a) Yes

b) No

46. How has political instability affected your sense of security and freedom of movement within your area?

- a) Negatively b) Neutral c) Positively

47. Have you ever faced Violence at your House?

- a) Yes b) No

48. Do you think Insurgency has impacted your social status?

- a) Positive impact b) Negative impact
c) Neutral d) can't say

49. Has ongoing insurgency increased the illiteracy ratio of females in the region.

- a) Yes b) No

**50. Why the unemployment rate of females in Kashmir is higher than the male
Unemployment rate**

- a) Selfishness of Politicians b) Lack of Natural Resources
c) Political turmoil and unrest d) Any Other

APPENDIX-B

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(Arranged alphabetically according to the last name)

PRIMARY WORK

- Data collection includes field-study via framed questionnaire.

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Figure: Kashmir Accedes to India, Newspaper cutting (dated 28th October 1947)

A - RESTORATION OF PEACE AND ORDER

1. The Government of Pakistan should undertake to use its best endeavours:

(a) To secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purposes of fighting, and to prevent any intrusion into the State of such elements and any furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State;

(b) To make known to all concerned that the measures indicated in this and the following paragraphs provide full freedom to all subjects of the State, regardless of creed, caste, or party, to express their views and to vote on the question of the accession of the State, and that therefore they should co-operate in the maintenance of peace and order.

2. The Government of India should:

(a) When it is established to the satisfaction of the Commission set up in accordance with the Council's Resolution 39 (1948) that the tribesmen are withdrawing and that arrangements for the cessation of the fighting have become effective, put into operation in consultation with the Commission a plan for withdrawing their own forces from Jammu and Kashmir and reducing them progressively to the minimum strength required for the support of the civil power in the maintenance of law and order;

(b) Make known that the withdrawal is taking place in stages and announce the completion of each stage; When the Indian forces shall have been reduced to the minimum strength mentioned in (a) above, arrange in consultation with the Commission for the stationing of the remaining forces to be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

Figure: Resolution 47 (1948) Passed in UN Security Council

