

INCLUSIVITY OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF KASHMIR IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

In recent years, the increasing awareness of disasters has led to the change in the perception of threat to disasters manifoldly in Jammu & Kashmir particularly after 2014 floods and Covid 19 Pandemic. Disasters and its effect on public consciousness has become one of the most noticeable trends on a global level. Jammu and Kashmir has seen all types of disasters in past ranging from Earthquakes to floods, fires, Droughts, Pandemic etc. Despite of global community's unfulfilled promise of a society in which every woman enjoys complete gender equality, as well as the eradication of all legal, social, and economic obstacles to women empowerment, persists in Kashmir. Women comprise the largest proportion of the impoverished are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group but in this indigenous community of Dal Dwellers in Srinagar, it has been found that women were more involved in Disaster Response and relief ranging from providing food to providing shelters to the affected people. This community depends more on natural resources, but has less access to them. In fact, they often face a significant burden for procuring food, water, and fuel. These areas are mostly threatened by Floods. In Kashmir women is considered as agent beyond these disasters. Hence an attempt has been made to emphasize the role of Dal Lake and women inclusivity in Disaster Management..

Keywords: Gender inequality, Disaster Management, flood, Dal Dwellers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dal Lake in the heart of the Srinagar City described as “Jewel in the crown of Kashmir” or “Srinagar's Jewel”. This urban lake, is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir. The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting. Apart from tourism Dal Lake is a home to an important section of the Community, This indigenous Community is mainly Called as Hanji's and live in the interiors of the Dal Lake. The Main livelihood of this community is Fishing, and agriculture apart from tourism. Climate change has a greater impact on those sections of the population, in all countries, that are most reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods and/or who have the least capacity to respond to natural hazards, such as droughts, and floods. Women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of Disasters in situations of poverty, and the majority of the world's poor are women.

Inequality in Women's participation in decision-making processes and labor markets compound inequalities and often prevent women from fully contributing to Disaster Management, Disaster Risk reduction, Planning, policy-making and implementation. In spite of all hurdles and difficulties women can play a critical role in response to Disasters due to their local knowledge leading to sustainable management. At the local level, women's inclusion at the leadership level has led to improved outcomes of Disaster Management projects and policies. On the contrary, if policies or projects are implemented without women's meaningful participation it can increase existing inequalities and decrease effectiveness. The practical outcome of almost nil participation of women we are experiencing in our situation.

2. Women Inclusive Disaster Response

Disasters both Natural and Manmade always pose negative on any community including its resources like agriculture and food security, biodiversity and ecosystems, water resources, human health, human settlements, migratory patterns, and energy, transportation, and industry. People of Kashmir have felt it more during flood 2014 and Covid 19 pandemic. Women in Dal are more susceptible to the consequences of Disasters than males because they mainly rely on natural resources like agriculture etc. These Women also suffer social, economic, and political restrictions that hinder their ability to cope. Regardless of the situation that women in this community are responsible for securing water, food, and cooking fuel they don't have the equal access to the resources and to the decision-making process. Even after being the most vulnerable sections of the community these indigenous women are also effective actors or agents of change in terms of both response and relief. These indigenous Women often have a multitude of skills and knowledge that may be used to disaster relief, and response methods.

Women in the Dal have been pivotal in the response and relief to disaster particularly I Flood 2014 when whole Srinagar City was Inundated and all the essential resources were crumbled including shelter, food, clothing, drinking water, electricity, Tele-communication and even health setup. It has been seen, it was the women of this indigenous community who has given food and other basic amenities to the neighboring affected areas than the male. Women in this grouper well skilled with swimming and driving boats which has helped in rescue operations. The empathy that women in general possess has also led to the Psychosocial care to the victims The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment says that by the end of the century, climate change is likely to be the main reason for the loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity is important for climate change adaptation and mitigation. For instance, in places where deforestation is responsible for an average of 20% of human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, the conservation of natural habitats can decrease the level of Carbon Dioxide released into the atmosphere. Most majority of the people in Dal depend on biomass like wood, crops, waste, and water resources for their energy and income, and almost all of this work is done by women. Climate change, on the other side, makes it harder for women to get these essential resources. The decline in biodiversity does not just affect people's material well-being and livelihoods. Climate change & Disasters, on the other hand, makes it more difficult for women to get these vital resources.

Women in Dal Lake have the empowered themselves by taking the responsibility of the agriculture and selling of fishes and vegetables. These women have developed an unwavering resilience towards the hardships and eventualities that the disasters may possess. Apart from taking the whole responsibilities of household chores to child care, these women have proven to be the financial supporters to their families. It was these women who had provided money to their male members during Floods and Covid 19. Though the women in Dal have showed a high level of Psychosocial resilience towards disasters, better coping mechanism and effective strategies of Building back better but their partnership and inclusivity in policy and plannings is the need of the hour. The lack of women inclusivity in Disaster management policy and planning is felt at every step. The participation of women in various training programes is almost nil particularly in Residential trainings that are aimed at fostering capacity building, building resilience and skill enhancement of the women. The gender inclusive training and sensitization programmes need to be carried out at the departmental level in order to foster a culture of awareness and prevention to disasters . the indigenous practices and skills these women possess will add the modern and scientific skills and knowledge and effective disaster management practices will be carried out.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the women of Dal Lake exemplify profound resilience and leadership amidst adversity, particularly evident during crises such as the devastating 2014 floods and the challenging Covid-19 pandemic. Despite grappling with various socio-economic and political constraints, these indigenous women have consistently demonstrated their indispensable roles in sustaining agriculture, fishing, and providing essential community support during times of disaster. Their intimate knowledge

of local ecosystems and practical skills have proven instrumental in fostering sustainable disaster management practices within their communities. The Dal Lake region, often referred to as the "Jewel in the crown of Kashmir," not only serves as a vital tourist attraction but also sustains a vibrant indigenous community known as the Hanjis. These women, primarily engaged in fishing and agriculture, play pivotal roles not only in economic activities but also in maintaining the cultural and ecological balance of the lake. However, their contributions and voices are often marginalized in decision-making processes concerning disaster management and policy formulation. This marginalization underscores the urgent need for inclusive approaches that recognize and amplify their expertise and experiences. During the catastrophic floods of 2014, which inundated Srinagar and disrupted essential services like shelter, food, and communication, it was the women of Dal Lake who emerged as unsung heroes. Despite facing personal hardships, these women mobilized quickly to provide food and basic amenities to affected communities, showcasing their resilience and resourcefulness in times of crisis. Their proficiency in swimming and boat navigation proved critical in conducting rescue operations and offering psychosocial support to fellow residents.

Moreover, the economic contributions of these women are substantial yet often overlooked. Many are primary providers for their families, contributing significantly to household incomes through agricultural and fishing activities. During disasters, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, they continued to sustain their households, often becoming the sole financial supporters when other resources faltered. Their ability to manage household responsibilities alongside community leadership roles highlights their adaptability and strength in adverse circumstances. Despite their pivotal roles, women in Dal Lake continue to face barriers in accessing resources and participating meaningfully in disaster management planning and policy formulation. This exclusion perpetuates gender inequalities and limits the effectiveness of disaster response efforts. Efforts to address these challenges must prioritize gender-inclusive approaches that empower women through capacity-building initiatives, leadership training, and policy advocacy.

Moving forward, integrating indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches in disaster management is essential. Gender-inclusive training programs and sensitization efforts can bridge the gap between local expertise and formal disaster management frameworks, ensuring more resilient and responsive communities. By enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes and equipping them with necessary skills, we can harness their full potential as agents of change in disaster preparedness and response. In essence, the women of Dal Lake represent a resilient community whose contributions to sustainable development and disaster resilience deserve recognition and support. Their experiences underscore the importance of gender inclusivity in shaping effective disaster management strategies worldwide. By amplifying their voices and integrating their knowledge into policy and practice, we can build more resilient societies capable of confronting the challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

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