



**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: THE ROAD AHEAD  
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO URBAN AREAS OF DISTRICT BANDIPORA)**

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**Abstract**

Empowerment: May be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. One of the main goals of urban local government is to empower the women. In many parts of our state, the quality of life in urban areas is despondent and the inhabitants especially women lead a rigid life. To overcome this problem, a series of modifications/legislations have been introduced by the Indian government to boost the women empowerment. The main purpose of this working paper is to describe and define the major issues of governance at the local level and to identify some important challenges for urban local government institutions in India in the light of women empowerment. This work is based on data collected from three urban centers situated in northern district Bandipora of Kashmir valley. The findings of this study show that women in urban areas of district Bandipora continue to remain plagued by abundant problems, which affect their performance in the efficient discharge of their duties. And also problems relate to the extent of participation.

**Key Words : Women Empowerment, Towns, Bandipora, Sumbal, Hajin, Participation.**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Historical Background:**

Bandipora, with a unique location, on Srinagar – Gurez road in the North of Kashmir is deeply rooted in the annals of history of Kashmir. At a distance of about 60 kms from Srinagar, the town is surrounded by range of hills of Greater Himalayas from North to West and on South to East the famous lake of Wular forms the border.

The slanting surfaced town exists on foothills with inclination towards Wular which acts as main disposal for liquid waste. Though the town is Tehsil Headquarter for Bandipora Tehsil and a part of Administrative District of Baramulla but most of the trade links of people are with Srinagar city.

**Table: 1.1 POPULATION OF THE DISTRICT**

Population Total Persons	392232
Males	207680
Females	184552
Urban Persons	65361
Males	35417
Females	29944
Rural Persons	326871
Males	172263
Females	154608

SOURCE: Directorate of Census Operation Jammu & Kashmir 2011.

As of 2011 Indian census, Bandipora had a population of 392232. <sup>1</sup>Males (207680) constitute 52.94% of the population and females (184552) 47.05% and others constitute only 3 in number. Bandipora has an average literacy rate of 67.71%, higher than the national average of 59.5%; with 76.73% of the males, 57.76% of females literate and 7.93% of the population is under 6 years of age.<sup>2</sup> It has a Muslim majority though there are a few villages where Pandits also lived before their migration to the other parts of the country. The Pandit population was in large numbers at Ajar, Kalusa, Kharapora, Mantrigam etc. The Pandit families at Ajar did not migrate. They are living happily next to their Muslim neighbors.

Table: 1.2

Participation of women in Municipal elections- 2004-5.

Year	Total Number of voters	Voting % of Men	Voting % of Women	Total Number of Seats	Total Number of Women Contests	Total Number of Male Contests	Total Seats Won by Women Councillors	Total Seats Won by Men Councillors	% of Seats Won by Women Councillors
2004	58000	30000	26000	43	20	91	14	29	(32.55)

Source: DC Office Election Cell Bandipora.

Note: Figures in Parenthesis Indicates Percentage.

The percentage of seats won against the seats contested is showing a merge amount (only 20 numbers) of women contesting elections in the elections of local governance. The above table also display out of 58000 voters, women voters are 44.82%, and only 32.55% of seats won by the women Candidates.

A century after women getting the right to vote, women still find themselves besieged for a political voice, women consist half the citizenry and nearly 25 percent of the working (labor) force. Though their unique roles as mothers, homemakers and housekeepers, Although, India has passed a number of legislation to facilitating women participation in decision-making processes. However, access alone to the political process does not solve all the problems to women.

### Research Objectives

- To know the numerous challenges faced by the women in political participation.
- To know the participation of women in the urban local governance and decision making processes in local government.
- To access the social status of women from ordinary housewife to ward councilors /president through participation in the urban local governance will raise their status.

<sup>1</sup>Census of India, 2011.

<sup>2</sup>Source: Municipal Committee Bandipora.

**Area of study**  
**Map: 1.1**  
**Bandipora Town**



### **Historical Background:**

Bandipora (also spelled Bandipora, Bandipur, Bandipura) which was the area of our field work, is a new district in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Bandipora district is one of the 22 districts in Jammu and Kashmir State. Bandipora town is the administrative headquarters of the district. This district was carved out from the erstwhile Baramulla district in 2007. It is located on the northern banks of Wular Lake the biggest lake of clean water in Asia. Bandipora district has a Nishat Bagh similar to the one in Srinagar. In Kashmir there is a famous phrase about Bandipora or in other words Bandipora is famous for three A's - A'lim (knowledge), Adab (good habits or literature) and Aab (Pure-Water) @ (Traditional knowledge).

As of 2011 Indian census, Bandipora had a population of 35397.<sup>3</sup> Males (18565) constitute 54% of the population and females (16829) 46% and others 3 in number. Bandipora has an average literacy rate of 67.71%, higher than the national average of 59.5%; with 76.73% of the males, 57.76% of females literate and 7.93% of the population is under 6 years of age.<sup>4</sup> It has a Muslim majority though there are a few villages where Pandits also lived before their migration to the other parts of the country. The Pandit population was in large numbers at Ajar, Kalusa, Kharapora, Mantrigam etc. The Pandit families at Ajar did not migrate. They are living happily next to their Muslim neighbours.

<sup>3</sup>census of India, 2011.

<sup>4</sup>Source Municipal Committee Bandipora.

**Map: 1.2**  
**Sumbal Town**



**Historical Background of Sumbal Town:**

Territorially, known Inderkote, on the name of ancient Hindu ruler “Raja Inder”, the town with an area of about 5 Sq. kms exists on the left basin of river Jhelum at a distance of 27 Kms from Srinagar city in the North – West quadrant on Srinagar – Hajin and Srinagar – Bandipora roads.

**Map: 1.3**  
**Hajin Town**



**Historical Background of Town Hajin:**

In the North – West of Kashmir, with a population of 12000, a low-lying bowl shaped town exists in the left basin of river Jhelum at a distance of 37 Kms from Srinagar. Hajin is an alternative Tehsil in Bandipora district; it is newly carved Tehsil from erstwhile Sonawari Tehsil. In its east the town of Sumbal at a distance of 8 Kms, in the North – West the lake of Wular and in the South town Sopore at a distance of 15 Kms make a dummy border. The town with a rural look is surrounded by dimensioned and dense plain forests containing Popular and Willow trees besides huge grasslands usually called Rakhs.

**Materials & Methodology**

As the approach followed in most social science research, present study is built on the both primary as well as secondary source of the data collection.

**Universe & Selection of Sample:**

The selected district is constituted of three towns with almost equal populace. From each town 20 respondents were selected for the collection of research data in relation to the demographic composition of the Bandipora Town, Sumbal Town and Hajin town. In this way, 60 respondents were selected in total from the concerned universe. Before interviewing the respondents of the urban areas, a thorough study was conducted in the area to collect the necessary information regarding the urban dwellers and ULBs in the district. After that with the help of random sampling, 20 respondents from each town are selected for the collection of research data. There are many research designs to carry out the research or fieldwork on a particular type of research problem such as experimental research design, descriptive research design and exploratory research design. As far as our research is concerned, exploratory research, design has been used in the present work. The data available to us revealed that our problem can be studied further for more research work as it has been suggested by exploratory research design.

**Table: 1.3**  
**Profile of Respondents**

Town	Gender		Marital Status		Educational Status	
	M	F	Ma	Um	Lit.	Ilit.
Bandipora	09	11	18	02	15	05
Sumbal	10	10	15	05	14	06
Hajin	07	13	19	01	16	04

From Towns of Bandipora district, we have taken 60 respondents in which 26 are male and 34 are female respondents. On the basis of marital status among 60respondents, 52 are married and 08 are unmarried and by the educational wise distribution 45 are literates and 15 are illiterates.

**Analysis**

**Table: 1.4**

Q.1 Do you agree that there is inadequate Participation of women in urban local governance?

Response	Bandipora		Sumbal		Hajin		Total	
	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Respondents	%
Yes	09	(45.00)	12	(60.00)	13	(65.00)	34	(57.00)
No	11	(55.00)	08	(40.00)	07	(35.00)	26	(43.00)
Total								100.00

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates Percentage.

In general, women's are not present in local urban governments. it is studies that there is meagre amount of women members in municipalities. The women's who are elected councillors in urban local bodies are not present in municipal meetings because most of them are illiterate, and even they send their husbands/ relatives to the meeting. It has been founded from the above table that 57.00% respondents are agreed to yes and 43.00% are not agreed.

**Table: 1.5**

Q.2 which of the following factors responsible for non-participation woman in decision-making processes?

Response	Bandipora		Sumbal		Hajin		Total	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Male dominance	12	(60.00)	11	(55.00)	12	(60.00)	35	(59.00)
illiteracy	04	(20.00)	05	(25.00)	05	(25.00)	14	(23.00)
Terrorism	05	(25.00)	06	(30.00)	05	(25.00)	11	(18.00)
Total								100.00

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates Percentage.

The success or failure of developmental plans at the gross-root level depends upon the active participation of local people for whom these plans are made. It is the local government which provides an opportunity to the local people to participate in the administration. If the goal of development has to be achieved, people's especially women participation is a pre-requisite for it. From above table 59.00% respondent are say that male dominance as a factor responsible for women's non- participation in the urban government and 23.00% think that illiteracy as a factor while 18.00% say that terrorism.

**Table: 1.6**

Q.3 Do you agree that women councillors are not intelligent as compared to male councillors?

Response	Bandipora		Sumbal		Hajin		Total	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	16	(80.00)	15	(75.00)	12	(60.00)	43	(72.00)
No	04	(20.00)	05	(25.00)	08	(40.00)	17	(28.00)
Total								100.00

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates Percentage.

In general, women are not present when the decision is taken on family matters. It is also observed from the feelings of respondents that women members are not present in the municipal meetings. And it is evident from the above table that 72.00% of respondents agreed on above mention question and 28.00% say 'NO' about the same.

**Table: 1.7**

Q.4 Do you think that the participation of women in local governance will rise their social status?

Response	Bandipora		Sumbal		Hajin		Total	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	11	(55.00)	10	(50.00)	10	(50.00)	31	(52.00)
No	09	(45.00)	10	(50.00)	10	(50.00)	29	(48.00)
Total								

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates Percentage.

The above table reveals that 52.00% of respondents think that the participation in local urban governance will raise the social prestige of women while 48.00% respondents think not so. Moreover, some of the respondents going to extent by saying that their (women) social status would be disbursed if they participate in the elections.

## **Suggestion & Conclusion**

### **Suggestion:**

- The government should hold uncertainties and demonstrations on the awareness of women empowerment at the gross-root level.
- The women empowerment requires a modification of existing political fabric, and rendering them more responsive to women.
- At least a 50% share should be reserved for women or
- Share should be given according to their population (proportional representation on the basis of gender).
- Nifty salaries should be given to them, so that they have keen interests in governance and family members also allow them to participate in local governance.
- More and more power and funds should be given them, so that they develop their wards.

### **CONCLUSION:**

At least one-third of the members associated with urban local governments belong to the women category. On the basis of opinions held with a select number of women members, it is learnt that this group is unable to make a meaningful input on municipal matters discussed in the meetings. In this regard, it is observed that illiteracy and terrorism cannot be accepted as valid explanations for the ineffective participation of women members. An evaluation of the educational status of elected municipal councilors by this study area reveals that women members are not much different from their male colleagues. A prominent reason reported by majority of the women councilors in this respect is the dominating role played by the male members.

Yet another reason for ineffective participation by the women members in the decision-making process is the presence of their spouses in municipal meetings. Although the Municipal Act provides for public participation in meetings of local governments, in the opinion of some members, the presence of husbands annuls the possibility of effective participation of women in local governance. In fact, non-member husbands' interference acts as a negative factor.

Several members hold the view that meetings are ineffective because the grievances of most members especially the women members (with respect to the development of their ward) are not being taken into contemplation.

The major issues of the states are to empower the women. The gross-root level government (ULB's) is an instrument through which women can be empowered. What is seen today in our society is total non-understanding of the issues and mass inaction. Only passing of legislations cannot modify the existing state of affairs. Most of the Acts are not opportunity to invoke them and Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act, 2000 is not an exception. For any act for its success, people's cooperation and awareness is vital. For the success of Municipal system or gross-root level governance the cooperation of the state government and union government, people's/women awareness about the new system and their active participation in taking responsibility is the need of the hour.

So in nutshell, the women empowerment is goal yet to be achieved. The tangible number of women as a representative is increases, but they were acts as dummies. In addition, women elected to local government often find it difficult to function in male conserve, and poor women in particular continue to be excluded from decisions making processes. Thus the goal women empowerment is still too far from away us, we have miles to go on this path of women empowerment. We hope that in coming years ahead, women empowerment will prove its worth. If this goal will not be achieved very soon, then the result will be otherwise.

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