



Educational Backwardness Of Women In Princely Kashmir; An Inferential Analysis Of The Legacy Of The Dogra Raj And Society

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Abstract

The paper attempts to show the relationship between Dogra state, society and women development in educational development in Kashmir. It examines the states and societal responsibility of educating the Kashmiri women. The paper exposed and enquires into the stereotype of women apathy to modern education due to their traditional conservatism. It shows that relative deprivation of women in different opportunities led to their illiteracy. Kashmir which was under the autocratic rule of the Dogra Maharajas was the most backward among princely states and education was no exception. Initially the Dogra Rajas utterly ignored the education of women. The vacuum was filled by the Christian Missionaries. The paper will mainly focus on the educational policy and the attitude of the Dogra state towards the development of girl's education in Kashmir. The first part of the paper studies the state's role in the development of women education in Kashmir. Second part examines the attitude of the society and women towards modern education. The paper concludes with the dismal educational condition of Kashmir in general and women in particular, which can be said is the legacy it inherited from the Dogra state.

Key words: Kashmir, Dogra's, Female Education, Illiteracy.

Introduction

Since education has been a source of empowerment for disadvantaged sections, in case of women education should have been of immense priority. But to our disappointment as per census 2011 female literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is only 58% which is one of the lowest in the world. Today female education may be widely advocated as a fundamental right, a matter of social justice and equality but it is regarded as consumption and welfare expenditure if not as a burden (Gyatri 2014, 90). However, female education occupies a special position in the history of modern Kashmir. In princely Kashmir, the agencies for the spread of education lay with two groups—the Christian Missionaries and women welfare trust.

In this essay we will discuss the educational backwardness of women in princely Kashmir. Kashmir occupies an important strategic position on the map of the Indian subcontinent. It became the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 (Bamzai, 2004, p-1). When the English East India Company signed a treaty with Raja Gulab Singh, the first Dogra ruler of Kashmir (Pannikar, 1930, 112). Modern education does not have existed in Kashmir until the advent of Christian missionaries when a changed outlook gradually came being. With the passage of time, the state also followed the suit and founded various schools. However, surprisingly, women remained illiterate and did not take the advantage of the new system of education.

What was the attitude of the state towards the development of modern education among women in Kashmir? Why women were kept aloof from the new system of education? Was it because they were attached to caring and rearing of children or was it because of the orthodox nature of society, which discouraged them to pursue education? These are some queries which are addressed in this paper.

Maharaja Gulab Singh, the founder of Jammu and Kashmir State spent most of his time in consolidating his territories. He did little for the field of education. Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who succeeded Gulab Singh, was the first one to take interest in education (Zutashi, 2003, p-172). The educational institutions classed as Maktabas and Pathshalas often provided only religious instructions of a very limited type. Strictly speaking be classed among institutions engaged in promoting general education (Report of educational reorganisation committee 1939-1940, p-10).

Akin to pre-colonial system of education in India, indigenous Kashmiri education in the early 19th century was firmly rooted in diverse traditions of communities, localities, castes and religious traditions. The indigenous schools of Kashmir have always been connected to the Masjids, where the boys are taught to read Arabic so that they may be able to recite the Holy Quran, but not necessarily to understand it. Similarly the Brahmins have their schools where Sanskrit was taught so the boys may be able to read the sacred Hindu books (Biscoe, 2006, p-184). In the traditional institutions there was little scope for girls education. Education in modern sense in Kashmir was only initiated by Christian missionaries during 1880's. On the other hand state did not take steps to spread the new type of education and also it made no stone unturned to oppose the attempts of the Christian Missionaries, the pioneer of modern education in Kashmir (Khan 2007, p- 138). Although Maharaja Ranbir Singh donated a handsome amount of rupees 62,500 in 1869 for the establishment of Punjab University, his donations were far in excess of those of Maharajas, chiefs and people of Punjab. The irony of the situation is that it was not until the early 20th century that the Dogra Maharajas would fund the establishment of institutions for higher education in their own state of Jammu and Kashmir (Rai Mirdu, 2003, p-35).

Maharaja Pratap Singh, who succeeded Ranbir Singh due to the intervention of British (Rai, 2003, p-35) some steps were taken to spread education among the Kashmiris (Seru S L, 1973, P-58). Since the Dogras were social obscurantist and political reactionaries; particularly their ideas about women were no better than those of barbarian tribes. Their education policies were fraught with ambivalence towards mass education in general and women in particular. (Kapur, 2009, p-125)

Women in traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination, inequality and oppression. They were considered unequal and inferior to men both physically and mentally. Kashmiri women had no role in the decision making process and all decisions including decisions about her, were exclusively sanctioned by male members of the family. The role women remained to domestic affairs and so they were debarred from education. Kashmiri women like other South Asian counterparts were so secluded that they were totally ignorant of their own needs, so much so that they did not even have an identity and remained mere shadows of their men folk.

There was no definite policy of government so far as the female education is concerned. Keeping into consideration the very fact that even the advanced provinces and states of India were very backward in the education of females, it was but natural that the condition in this rather backward state was very discouraging.

The first effort to educate Kashmiri women came from the missionaries. The education of women was a very sensitive social question as such a thing was never heard of. It was sometime between 1893 and 1895 that a missionary school for girls was started by the church Missionary Society of London in Srinagar. But due to the conservative approach of people the school was closed. However, it was reopened later (Bazaz, 1959, p-211). Keeping into consideration the people's attitude and the mode of their thinking state council adopted a very cautious policy and did not take away step towards opening of the schools for the education of the girls. It favoured helping private efforts and a grant of rupees 1000 was sanctioned in 1901 for Kanya Pathshala at Jammu (Administrative Report, 1904). In 1904, the state council for the first time provided funds for establishing two girls' schools at Srinagar, one for Hindu girls and the other for Muslims girls, which were to be managed by separate committees of the leading men of the two communities under the guidance of state educational authorities.(Administrative report, 1905). Towards the end of 1906 a provision for female education in the towns of Srinagar and Jammu, on a scale proportion to the limited extent of the demand of the day, was made. However there was no initiative on the part of authorities to open girls schools in other towns and consequently those remained absolutely neglected.(Old English Records, 1906, f.no 237)

In 1916 Sharp committee headed by Mr. Henry Sharp, suggested a number of reforms in girls' education. Regarding the girl's education sharp report recommended an organised attempt to open girls primary schools at those places where boys high or middle schools existed. Secondly, it was suggested that a small capitation grant to be given to the girls be induced to accompany their small brothers to school. Besides, the Maharaja was asked to seek the services of Christian Mission Ladies and other private agencies. (Sharp committee report, 1916)

By the year 1920, women education had shown some progress. There were three mission schools, a high school run by the education department, one Muslim school, three Hindu Middle schools and two Hindu primary schools functioning in Kashmir. (Bazaz,1959, p-219). According to census report of 1921, on an average there was one literate female to over 15 literate males. The proportion of literate women to the total female population aged five and over, was three per thousand. In Kashmir 999 out of every 1000 females were illiterate.

Maharaja Hari Singh, the successor of Pratap Singh, brought a number of reforms in education system of Kashmir in general and women's education in particular. The first reform that Hari Singh introduced was the creation of separate department for the girls' education. The policy of giving advisory committees maximum powers for maintaining the girls education with minimum government supervision was abolished. (Bazaz, 1959,p-229)

In 1939, a committee known as educational reorganisation committee was appointed by Maharaja Hari Singh. Its aim was to give a new orientation to existing educational setup and to recognise existing education system in the state and to make recommendations for bringing into more vital touch with the needs of the people and the ideas of good life.(Educational reorganisation committee,1939) As regards the girls' education committee considered very carefully the position and problems of education of girls in the state in consultation with S.W Shaw, the then officiating chief Inspectress of girls schools who had been specially co-opted on the committee, for this purpose. The committee with regard to girls education made the following suggestions:

1. Twenty primary and four middle schools should be opened every year.
2. To attract girls to schools more scholarships should be provided.
3. To minimise wastage in schools fee books should be distributed to girls reading in 4th and 5th classes.
4. Syllabus needs to be reorganised. (Educational reorganisation committee, 1939, p-71).

After examining the recommendations of the committee, government accepted them but not all of them were implemented. A number of half-hearted steps were taken during 1940s. Mention may be made of the opening of primary and middle schools. No major change was brought in the curriculum, in fact science subjects were not introduced even up to 1947. The work of inspection and supervision was still handicapped on account of insufficiency of inspection staff but two new posts of inspectresses were sanctioned in the year 1940. The building infrastructure problems also remained there. Only one girls institution was housed in the government building while all other were accommodated in unsatisfactory buildings.

There was no representation of girls in higher education up to 1932. It was in 1932 a Pandit Lady named Vimla Kaul got enrolled in Sri Pratap College.(Bamzai 2007, p-359). In 1947 only six Muslim women were studying in colleges.(Seru S L 1973, p-269). This shows the dismal representation of women in higher education. The non-existence of women's college deterred women's higher to a great extent.

Government from the very inception was not kind to female education in the matters of finance. It was not able to construct a single building for the female institutions. The other aspects of female education received least attention of the government. As for the budget is concerned government maintained the gender discrimination policies. In primary education there is a huge difference, for boys' education an amount of rupees 5,10,088 was allotted in 1937-38 while as for girls' primary education only rupees 1,29,499 were granted.(Seru S L 1973). Same disparity can be seen in the middle school. While in high school education the difference is even more than middle and primary education. Since there was no representation of girls in the technical and college education thus no amount was allotted for these items.

The disproportional educational budget consequently widened the gap between the number of boys and girls on roll. The number of boys in 1927 was 47, 201 and rose to 82,303 in 1937. While as the number of girls in 1927 was 4,763 which rose to 15,426 in 1937 (Seru S L 1973). Although there number had increased, but gap between the two widened as the time passed.

Response of women and society

Women in Traditional Kashmiri society have been characterised by dependency, inferior social status and suffering. They have faced systematic discrimination and institutional exploitation at the hands of male members. In the past, the women in the Traditional Kashmiri society were in a paradoxical situation while their social role was projected as menial, they participated actively in social economic and other activities.

The educational position of Kashmiri women was backward; the education imparted to them was largely of religious character. Education in the valley was restricted to the upper classes and was meant for boys only. In every 1000 of its female population only one was literate in 1901 and three in 1921(Kapur M L 2009). The overall position of education among Kashmiri women was not at all encouraging. There were in fact some special causes (social and economic) working against the quicker and greater progress of women education in Kashmir. Firstly the parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school. The reason for the reluctance of the parents was that the girls were required to work in the house and help their mothers especially if there was a large family to look after and also the parent's reluctance was seen when they took away their daughters from the schools as soon as the later reached a certain age. This tendency was encouraged by the custom of early marriage. Secondly, the most important factor was the conservative attitude of the people and their general indifference to the education of the females. It was the women who more than men, hindered progress on account of their ignorance and superstition. They were much more under the influence of the materialist and ignorant priests than the men (Seru S L, 1973, P-262). The economic reason in the way of women education included the poverty of parents. Parents could not afford to spend on their children's education and when they had to choose between the education of their sons and that of their daughters, they preferred to spend on the education of their sons rather than daughters which they considered more important from the economic point of view.

Parents were against education of girls and did not think that education was necessary for girls in order that they may fulfil their functions as wives and mothers as well. Such domestic education they were supposed to get at home from their mothers. It was due to this fact the difficulties in starting schools for girls in Kashmir and providing them with efficient staff was greater than those in the case schools for boys. The requisite number of female teachers was not forthcoming. During the year 1924 and 1925, the state government sanctioned 48 new primary schools for girls but 18 of these could not be opened owing to the dearth of female teachers and due to the conservative approach of the society (Annual Administrative report, 1924-1925).

Conclusion

The Dogra state was ambivalent to spread education among women in Kashmir. The development of girls' education in Kashmir faced number of problems due to indifferent attitude of government and conservative attitude of society. The state and representatives of community seemed more concerned with religious education of females. The authority of running the female schools were in the hands of religious leaders and community representatives as the state was apprehensive that communities would perceive state's interferences in girl's education as an attack on their religious sensibilities.

The legacy of princely Kashmir is still prevailing, the Kashmiri women's struggle for social rights continued in post-colonial period. Kashmiri women are still most backward in education. According to census 2001 their literacy rate is 41.82 which are much lower than national and state average. Moreover census 2011 put Jammu and Kashmir 30th in All India Literacy ranking of all the states and union territories.

The performance of different centrally sponsored schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Government of India Flagship Programme to achieve UEE (Universalisation of Elementary Education) in a time bound manner by 2012, shows flawed and sluggish implementation of programme. The fate of National Programme for education of girls at elementary level (NPEGEL), and KGVB Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya to enhance the rate of girl's education in the state are not up to the mark.

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