



Forging Paths: Strides And Barriers To Women's Education In Twentieth-Century Kashmir

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Abstract

Education has the potential to fundamentally alter society and lay the basis for the creation of a gender-balanced society. Education liberated people's minds from the constraints of deeply ingrained beliefs and ingrained cultural conventions, catalyzing societal change. Modern education is an important tool to ameliorate the status of women in society and their capacity to advance up the social ladder. The present study is primarily concerned with the journey of modern education of women in twentieth-century Kashmir. The first section deals with the growth of women's education in the first half of the twentieth century under Dogra Maharajas. The second part points out the development of women's education after 1947 under a democratic government formed under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Attempts are made to examine the obstacles created by the patriarchal society of Kashmir to women's education. Efforts have been made to comprehend why girls are taken out or kept away from school altogether?

Keywords: Women, Kashmir, Education, Strides, Barriers.

Introduction

Education has the competence to change the social fabric and create a society based on gender parity. Education is essential for transforming the overall status of individuals, including women, and the process of social mobility.¹ Education is crucial for empowering women and allowing them to make decisions about their lives, health, and well-being.² Education gives women critical thinking abilities to question societal conventions and prejudices, confront discrimination, and seek equal rights.³ Education is a tool that alters gender preconceptions and breaks down gender-based inequality and violence. As education

¹ *Towards Equality*: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), Chapter 6.

² MENA Development Report, *Gender and development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the public sphere*. (Washington: The World Bank, 2004), pp.15-19.

³ N. Visvanathan, L. Duggan, L. Nisonoff, & N. Wieggersma, *The Women. Gender and Development Reader*, (London: Zed Books 1997), pp. 362-65.

is a powerful weapon that can change gender preconceptions and breaks down gender-based inequality and violence. As educated women assume leadership positions and participate in decision-making processes, they transform into agents of change and push for legislation supporting gender equality. Their capacity to analyze problems, adjust to shifting conditions, and positively impact societal advancement is improved by education.⁴ So the improvement in their social status generally accompanies advancement in the education of women.⁵ This substantiates the rationale behind why ‘the movement for improving women’s status prioritized education as the paramount instrument for reshaping women’s subordinate roles.’⁶ Moreover, it serves as the primary mechanism for enhancing the societal stature of women.⁷

In the Indian subcontinent, the beginning of the modern education of women can be attributed to the time of British colonial rule.⁸ It is obvious that the colonial authority, along with other forces, such as Christian missionaries and many enlightened Indians, were notable behind the dissemination of modern education in the subcontinent.⁹ The East Indian Company (EIC) initially did not take any direct responsibility for educating the native masses. Missionaries were the first to take the initiative and establish the first girls’ schools in the subcontinent.¹⁰ Several ideological influences and forces in the metropole, such as Utilitarians, Evangelicalism, free trade, etc, pressured the EIC, to provide education to the natives.¹¹ However, these ideologies had their motives in imparting modern education to natives of India. As missionaries believed that modern education could erode the indigenous peoples’ adherence to their indigenous religions, resulting in their possible conversion to

⁴ J. Jha, N. Ghatak, N. Menon, P. Dutta, and S. Mahendiran. *Women’s Education and Empowerment in Rural India*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 248-49.

⁵ A.R. Kamat, Women's education and social change in India. *Social Scientist*, (1976), 3-27.

⁶ Indian Council of Social Science Research, Status of Women in India: A Synopsis the Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women, Allied, New 1975, p 88.

⁷ *Towards Equality*: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), Chapter 6.

⁸ The British colonial authorities introduced a novel secular educational framework in order to advance their administrative, economic, and sociocultural objectives. This scholastic system contrasted with the prevalent traditional educational model in India, which was primarily based on religious principles. The colonial education paradigm prioritized Western knowledge and academic disciplines including the English language, scientific inquiry, mathematics, and history. At both the primary and secondary levels, the English language was the medium of instruction in the majority of colonial educational institutions.

⁹ Bipan Chandra, *History of Modern India*, (New Delhi: Orient Black swan, 2009), p.122; see also Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 37.

¹⁰ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 33.

¹¹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, (New Delhi: Orient Black Swam, 2009), p. 139.

Christianity.¹² The EIC hoped to bring the cost of the various administrative posts in India down to a more manageable level by appointing Indians to subordinate positions.¹³ Similarly, for utilitarians, disseminating modern education will finally accomplish their imperial objective of the authoritarian reform of Indian society.

It was only after the charter act of 1813 that the real beginning of modern education started in India, which allocated one lakh rupees towards promoting education among the masses. However, a controversy arose among Orientalists and Occidentalists over the type and medium of education to be imparted to the people. As a result, the provision of education could not be implemented. Finally, the coming of Babington Macaulay as the law member in the govern generals council resolved the controversy. He discussed the controversy in what is known as Maculays minutes, which became the basis for introducing modern education in the Indian subcontinent. According to Macaulay's Minute, "A single shelf of a good European library was worth the entire native literature of India and Arabia." Macaulay believed that English education would produce a class of loyal people who would be Indian only by blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, morals, and intelligence."¹⁴ Within Macaulay's minutes, the notion emerged that education would be disseminated through the downward filtration theory, a concept introduced by the British to allow education to diffuse from the upper echelons of society to the general populace. This would entail an educated middle class serving as educators, thereby facilitating the dissemination of education in regional languages to the masses. Women benefitted from this Indian intelligentsia, who tried to respond to the critique of Indian civilisation by Western observers¹⁵ by advocating reforms to ameliorate the overall position of women in society. They played a indispensable role in promoting women's education. They were instrumental in improving and expanding the educational opportunities for women.¹⁶ With time and space, different acts and commissions were passed, enhancing education's growth. The social reformers of the nineteenth century played a key role in promoting women's education. The nineteenth century's social

¹² Shenila Khoja-Moolji, *Forging the Ideal Muslim Girl: Education and the production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia*, (California: university of California Press, 2017), pp. 86-88.

¹³ Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, pp. 139-142.

¹⁴ Quoted in S. C. Ghosh, *The History of Education in Modern India, 1757-1986*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995), pp. 31-33.

¹⁵ James Mill in his *History of British India* (1817) claimed that a society's position on the "ladder of civilization" could be determined by the status of its women. India ranked very low on this scale. He criticized the Indian civilisation as backward, because the women in Indian society according to him is oppressed, timid, and confined to their domestic realm.

¹⁶ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 33-35.

reformers were instrumental in advancing women’s education.¹⁷ It was largely due to their efforts that women were given greater access to educational possibilities.

Women’s Education in Kashmir (1885-1947)

This was not the case within all regions across the Indian subcontinent. The states under princely rule lack the educational development and welfare measures for the masses, as seen in the regions under direct British rule. Most of the princely states’ social, cultural, and educational advances have not received the attention they deserve from their respective princely rulers. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) came into being through a sale deed treaty known as the Treaty of Amritsar.¹⁸ It may have been just the political deal that resulted in establishing a pro-British Dogra dynasty from Jammu within a collaborative apparatus, intending to revitalize a check and balanced system.¹⁹ By this treaty, the British colonial masters put the Muslim-majority valley under the dire rule of Dora Maharajas.²⁰ The Kashmir valley remained largely unaltered. In addition, most Kashmiris lived in great poverty and were completely deprived of their rights.²¹ In the Kashmir valley, the path towards modernization, education, reform, emancipation, and socio-economic transformation were far from being the state priorities. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Dogra Maharajas did not originally take any responsibility for the education of the masses, particularly the education of girls. They were the least contributors to the educational process. Most of the population in the state was illiterate, and most people lived in a state of profound ignorance. The following table provides an overview of the educational scenario in the state of J&K.

Table 1: The total number of students from J&K State who appeared and passed in the University examinations held in Punjab

S. No.	Institutions	Entrance Examination in Punjab		Middle School Examination	
		No. of Pupils sent	No. Passed	No. Sent	No. Passed

¹⁷ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 33-35.

¹⁸ The state of Jammu and Kashmir was established in 1846 CE with the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the British on March 16, 1846. The Maharaja was obligated to pay the British 75 lakh Nanak Shahi rupees for the state. Following the signing of this treaty, the three separate reions__ Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh were unified into one single state.

¹⁹ Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, pp. 63-65.

²⁰ F. M. Hassnain, *Freesom Struggle in Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Rima Publishing House, 1988), p. 16.

²¹ P.N. Bazaz, *History of Freedom Struggle in Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Kashmir Publishing House: 1954), pp. 140-41

1	Jammu High School	3	2	9	4
2	Srinagar School	-	-	12	11
3	Mirpore School	-	-	3	3
4	Udhampur	-	-	1	1
5	Akhnoor	-	-	3	2
	Total	3	2	28	21

Source: Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1892-93.

The above table 1 shows that in the Jammu region, out of three male candidates sent for the Punjab University entrance examination, two passed, and four were successful out of nine sent for the Middle School examination. While in Srinagar, out of twelve male candidates sent for middle school examination, eleven passed. One thing that should be mentioned here is that there was no High School even for boys at this stage. The village schools in Akhnoor, Udhampur, and Mirpore are vernacular Middle schools that sent up seven candidates for the Middle school examination.²² This picture shows that female education had not yet received any attention from the government.

In a similar vein as in India, it is possible to trace the origins of modern education in the J&K princely state back to the schools established by missionaries towards the end of the nineteenth century. So far as female education in this princely state is concerned, it did not appear to have existed prior to the arrival of Christian Missionaries. The Dogra rulers gave the least priority to the growth of girls' education in the state. Exceptions notwithstanding, women's access to formal education was generally restricted. It is little wonder that at the dawn of the modern era, when the British formally intervened in Kashmir by imposing Residents, traditional schools attached to temples and mosques continued to impart education and functioned without financial assistance from the government.²³ In these traditional institutions, there was little scope for girls' education. Education in the modern sense in Kashmir was only initiated by Christian Missionaries during the 1880's. Later on, State Council²⁴ also brought some measures to improve education by providing grant-in-aid to the existing schools in the valley.²⁵

²² Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1892-93.

²³ Sir Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1895), p. 198.

²⁴ Maharaja Pratap Singh, in 1889, was deposed from the throne due to some allegations against him. Consequently, State Council was formed to look into the administration under the control of British Resident. Initially they support and assist the Missionaries in campaigning for the education of girls in the state.

²⁵ P. N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, (Srinagar: The Kashmir Publishing Co., 1941), p. 80.

During the period spanning from 1893 to 1895, the Zenana Missionary Society of the Church of England set up the first girl's school in Fateh Kadal Srinagar. Shocked at the opening of a girls' school, people began to mutter and murmur in the streets of Srinagar. The populace held the belief that the missionaries had a specific objective to instruct immoral concepts to young girls and pollute their minds.²⁶ The school was briefly closed but resumed operations a few weeks later and subsequently observed a significant increase in enrollment of female students. This remarkable success encouraged the missionaries to set up one more girls' school, which was attached to the existing boys' school in the Srinagar city at Fateh Kadal. The Christian Missionaries displayed a courageous attitude in their endeavors, exhibited unparalleled determination and tenacity, and consistently and meticulously tackled each obstacle until all hindrances were expeditiously eradicated. The educational institutions for girls had a remarkable impact on its students' physical well-being and mental demeanor.²⁷ As a result, this considerably contributes to the overall growth of female students who attended educational institutions.

The missionaries successfully imparted the importance of girl education among people, increasing their understanding. In the realm of those who worked tirelessly in the valley for the women's education were Miss Churchill, Taylor, Miss Robinson, Miss Fitze, and Miss Mallinson. The narrative of the struggles that missionaries put up against entrenched masculine norms and structures remains a significant aspect of Kashmir's history of cultural renaissance.²⁸ The statistical data shows that in the year 1920, for girls, there were three missionary schools, one Muslim school, two Hindu Primary schools, one Muslim Middle School and one government girl's high school.²⁹ In 1926, the Women's Welfare Trust was formed for the welfare of Kashmiri women and started primary schools for girls and opened a high school for Hindu and Muslim girls in 1934.³⁰ Maharaja Hari Sing seems more interested in the development of girls' education and took many initiatives and set up a separate education department for girls' education.³¹ To promote the education of women, free studentships and scholarships were provided.³² The amount of Rs 22,798 was approved for scholarships to attract girls to education.³³

²⁶ Khan; *History of Srinagar (1846-1947)*, pp. 151-153.

²⁷ P. N. Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta: A History of Kashmiri Women from early times to the Present Day*, (New Delhi: Pamposh Publications, 1959), pp. 211-213.

²⁸ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 217.

²⁹ *Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1920-21*.

³⁰ G. Rasool & Minakshi Chopra, *Education in Jammu and Kashmir Issues and Documents*, (JAYKAY Book House Jammu 1998), p. 82.

³¹ Begum Zafar Ali, *Mere Shab-o-Roz*, pp. 92-93.

³² *Annual Administrative Report of the Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1923-24*.

³³ *Annual Administrative Report of the Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1936-37*.

The following table 2 shows the progress in the no. of institutions and enrolment of students in the year 1923-24 and 1936-37:

Table 2: Progress of institutions and enrolment of students during the year 1923-24 and 1936-37

Institutions					Enrollment			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
Year	1923-24	1936-37	1923-24	1936-37	1923-24	1936-37	1923-24	1936-37
Maktabs /Patshalas	64	169	2	8	1989	4714	11	278
Primary schools (Govt./aided/unaided)	413	907	27	160	22315	43680	1657	8649
Middle schools (Govt./aided/unaided)	35	90	6	34	7806	18315	950	4977
High schools (govt./aided/unaided)	11	22	-	2	4255	10547	-	545
Colleges	2	2		-	550	1728		-
Total	525	1190	35	204	36915	78,984	2618	14452

Source: Annual Administrative Report of Education Department of J&K State 1923-24; 1936-37.

The above table shows the progress of women's education during 1934-24 and 1936-37. Institutions of both boys and girls increased, but girls institutions were less as compared to boys. Besides, there was no High school for girls in the State of J&K during 1923-24, which

shows government indifference towards girls' education. Those girls who wished to continue their education had to enroll in boys' High schools. For the first time, during the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh that two girls High schools were set up, one in Jammu city and another in Srinagar city. Besides this, there was no college for girls during the Dogra rule.³⁴ It was only after the end of the Dogra regime in 1950 the first women's college was set up in Srinagar. The enrollment of both boys and girls increased, but girls lag behind at all levels.

Women's Education in Kashmir after 1947

After independence, new vistas were opened for the emancipation and empowerment of womenfolk. Women were encouraged to look ahead to the future as equal partners in reconstructing the socio-economic matrix in the new political and institutional setting. Many initiatives have been launched to improve the well-being and education of girls. There appears to be a rapid increase in the female education in independent India. The statistical data shows that in all educational institutions female enrollment increased from 64 million in 1950-51 to almost 400 million in 1980-81.³⁵ In the year 1950-51, there were 33 girls for every 100 boys, while by 1980-1981, that ratio had increased to 55 girls for every 100 boys. This growth was seen at all different levels of education. Likely women education in Jammu and Kashmir state after 1947 progressed at an increased pace. As nowhere else, education in Jammu and Kashmir from primary up to university level was provided free, which was a unique feature for the advancement of women's education in the state.³⁶ Tuition fees in all government educational institutions have been abolished.³⁷ Under the constitution,³⁸ all children from 6 to 14³⁹ years of age were to receive compulsory education, and this goal of universalization of education was to be achieved within ten years of adopting the constitution. At the policy-making level, it was recognized that education was the greatest investment for enabling women to compete with men in various sectors of life on an equal

³⁴ Annual Administrative Report of Education Department of J&K State 1923-24 and 1936-37.

³⁵ R.K. Bhandari, *Educational Development of Women in India*, (New Delhi: Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India, 1982), p. 33.

³⁶ Extracts from the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir State, Government Free Press, Srinagar (1973); p. 23. See also, Newspaper, *The Times of India*, 15-Sep-1958, see also, P. N. Bazaz, *Kashmir in Crucible*, (New Delhi: Pamposh Publications, 1967), p. 46, For further see also, State Archives Jammu, Government Report of 1953, Accession No. 15879, p. 97.

³⁷ State Archives Jammu, Government Report of 1954, p. 11.

³⁸ Extract from the Constitution, p. 23.

³⁹ This provision corresponds to the provision of Indian Constitution, which under Article 45 lays the emphasis on the same.

footing.⁴⁰ This was accomplished by ensuring women had access to the same opportunities as men. It was believed that literacy and dissemination of knowledge had the potential to generate the greatest social and economic returns at the time.⁴¹

By 1947, there were 2,158 educational institutes, and the educational budget was 7% of the state's revenue just a year after partitioning the Indian subcontinent.⁴² Even though the number of primary-level institutions from 1940-1971 increased from 182 to 1593. However, the number of middle and secondary schools was not very high. The number of middle schools for girls rose from 39 to 321. The number of secondary schools for girls increased from 5 to 126. Besides, the percentage of girls who were enrolled in secondary schools was just 10.2% in 1971.⁴³ Hitherto there were only two colleges in higher education for women up to the year 1961, one at Srinagar and one at Jammu. However, there were seven-degree colleges in 1980-81, two of which were run privately with the grant-in-aid from the state government. Educational institutions have undoubtedly been expanded at all levels but in fewer numbers than educational institutions for boys.⁴⁴ The enrolment of girls at all levels of education increased from 1951 to 1971 at all educational levels. The enrolment of girls at the primary level in 1951 was 6776, which increased to 70000 in 1971. At the middle level, the enrolment of girls in 5449 rose to 41000 in 1971. So far as enrolment at secondary institutions is concerned, it was 2448 in 1951, which increased to 55000 in 1971.⁴⁵

Table 3: The Jammu and Kashmir Literacy rate from year 1961 to 2001

S.No.	Year	Literacy Rate %		
		Total	Males	Females
1	1961	12.95	19.75	5.05
2	1971	18.30	26.41	9.10
3	1981	36.23	46.89	24.82

⁴⁰ K. Misri, Kashmiri women down the ages: A gendered Perspective in, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* Vol.6 Nos.3-4, July-Dec. 2002.

⁴¹ K. Misri, Kashmiri women down the ages: A gendered Perspective in, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* Vol.6 Nos.3-4, July-Dec. 2002.

⁴² Jammu and Kashmir State 1947-1950, An account of the activities of first three years of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's Government Acc. no. 848.

⁴³ Development of Education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 1973, Acc. no.18242, p 79

⁴⁴ Rasool & Chopra, *Education in Jammu and Kashmir Issues and Documents*, pp. 82-89; see also, Report of the Committee on Development of Education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

⁴⁵ Report of the Committee on Development of Education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir; see also, Census of India (1961), Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar.

4	2001	54.46	65.75	41.82
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Source: (i) Census of India, 1961, vol VI, Jammu and Kashmir, part IX, Census Atlas.
(ii) Census of India 1971, series 8, Jammu and Kashmir, paper 1.
(iii) Census of India 1981, A hand book of population statistics.

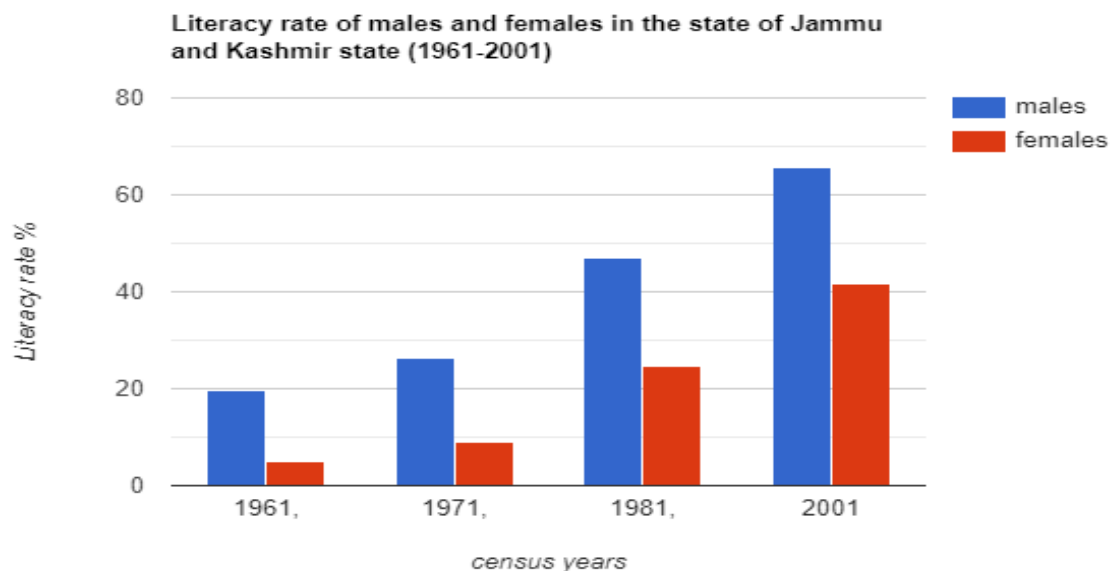


Figure 1: Literacy Rate of Males and Females in Jammu and Kashmir (1961-2001).

The literacy rate in the J&K state has significantly improved positively. The literacy rate increased from 12.95 percent in 1961 to 54.46 percent in 2001, but it was still substantially lower than the national average of 65.38 percent, which was reported by the census in 2001. The comparison of men’s and women’s literacy rates shows that the male literacy rate has consistently been greater than the female literacy rate throughout these years. While the literacy rate of females rose from 5.05 percent in 1961 to 41.82 percent in 2001, in comparison, the literacy rate of males rose from 19.75 percent in 1961 to 65.75 percent in 2001. Since there was no census in 1991, data for that year are not accessible. However, the graph shows continuous progress in the literacy rate among womenfolk. However, even in 2001, it did not reach a percentage higher than fifty percent. Based on the numbers presented above, it is possible to conclude that the literacy rate of women has seen significant growth; nonetheless, a significant gap still remains between the literacy rates of men and women.

However, at all levels, while comparing the increase in the number of girls with those of boys, it indicates a huge gap in educational advancement between the two genders, with the girls lagging. However, there has been significant progress in the literacy rate of both sexes over the last several decades. Despite the rapid expansion of educational opportunities, women continued to lag behind males at all levels of education. The higher the educational ladder,

the lower the enrolment number of girls.⁴⁶ There has undoubtedly been progress in education, but in general, the education of girls was much below the average.⁴⁷

Barriers to Women's Education

Despite the remarkable educational advances after 1947, it is disheartening that most womenfolk in the region have not experienced the spirit of modernity. Only a small portion of the women lived in the city of Srinagar, and one or two big towns, such as Anantnag or Baramullah, have benefitted from the resurgent movement.⁴⁸ Most women in rural areas and towns continue to be uneducated, ignorant, and superstitious. The backbone of the society, the peasant women, must be awakened and guided toward improvement if the nation has to advance and prosper. However, several obstacles and barriers were on the way, hampering women's education in the valley.

The norms and societal customs made education difficult, if not possible. There was strong resistance to sending their daughters to mixed schools. Parents opposed the co-education system and supported the difference of curriculum for boys and girls. Girls were supposed to be taught in a sense so that they understand their responsibilities and duties from an early age.⁴⁹ Entrenched notions of gender segregation meant that girls should have female teachers and study in schools exclusively for them. Due to the shortage of female teachers, the parents were unwilling to send their daughters to those schools where male teachers taught.⁵⁰ This reflects the scarcity of women teachers in the state. So the lack of female teachers has also remained one of the obstacles to women's education in Kashmir. In addition, absenteeism and indifference on the part of teachers contributed to children dropping out of school even before they finished their primary-level education.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Report of the Committee on Development of Education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, SPS Library, Accession No. 18242; see also G. Rasool & Minakshi Chopra, *Education in Jammu and Kashmir Issues and Documents*, (Jammu: JAYKAY Book House, 1998), pp.84-85.

⁴⁷ Press Information Department, Srinagar, News, April 16, 1969

⁴⁸ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 271.

⁴⁹ Newspaper, *Jehan e Nov*, Feb 17, 1960

⁵⁰ Educational Reorganisation Committee Report, p.14, due to shortage of women teachers, middle standard was made required qualification of selection as teachers while in case of men, matriculation was minimum qualification of recruitment as teachers; State Archives of Jammu, Government report of 1953, Accession No. 15879, p. 95, see also Government Administrative Report of 1955-56. Accession No. 15882, p. 108; see also, Report of the Educational Reorganisation Committee, p.14, due to shortage of female teachers, middle standard was made the qualification required for selection as teachers, while in case of men matriculation was the minimum qualification of appointment as teachers.

⁵¹ Interview with Zeba Begum, A rural woman of District Anantnag, 19/10/2021.

Girls have also been deprived of education due to poverty, as parents prefer to provide education to their sons over their daughters.⁵² Many parents view their sons' education as an investment, as boys will eventually be responsible for the care of their old parents. The poverty of the people and the domestic and occupational help rendered by the girls because of the poverty of their parents was a serious hindrance in the way of girl education.⁵³ As low-income families are constrained not to educate their daughters. Besides poverty and gender discrimination, girls have been deprived of education due to early marriage. The institution of marriage remained central to the upbringing of girls in Kashmiri society. The early marriage system was widespread, girls were married early and became mothers at an early age which also hindered their education.⁵⁴

Moreover, unlike boys, girls were encouraged from an early age to take on domestic responsibilities. Girls were expected to do household work to spare their mothers for work in agricultural fields. Also, due to the agrarian society, people favored having larger extended families to share agricultural labour and thereby enhance the economy of the household. The joint family system was prevailed in the vale of Kashmiri.⁵⁵ Shamla Mufti elaborated in her autobiography that the tradition of joint family system was common in Kashmir, in which the education of women was considered something abhorring.⁵⁶ Even when education was provided at the early stage to girls, they were taken away once they reached puberty, primarily due to the traditional cultural beliefs held by the parents and the rural way of life. Responsibility for household work in families, especially in rural areas, girls play a second mother role in the family functioning, collecting water, collecting wood, cleaning, and cooking, etc., thus discouraging girls from going to school.⁵⁷ Girls were mostly involved in the household chores and the fields, as well as in the care of their younger siblings and ailing members of their families. The socialization that both boys and girls experience instills in them the expectation that the female gender should carry out domestic responsibilities. It was expected of girls to assist their mothers in all aspects of domestic chores.

People from rural Kashmir believe that more educated girls are likelier than their less educated peers to speak their minds and shed their inhibitions.⁵⁸ In Kashmiri society, girls were expected to behave appropriately and not to speak in front of elders and outsiders. Most people view education negatively by saying educated women do not respect their

⁵² Interview with Zeba Begum, 19/10/2021

⁵³ National committee on women education, p. 46

⁵⁴ Interview with Masooda Begum,

⁵⁵ Shamla Mufti, *Myean Kath: A Kashmiri Women's Struggle for Empowerment (1925-2008)*, translated from Kashmiri by Shafi Shauq, (Srinagar: K P H Publisher, 2021), p. 26

⁵⁶ Mufti, *Myean Kath*. p. 26.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mehmooda Banoo,

⁵⁸ Interview with Zaiba Begum, rural woman from village Sirhama, Anantnag district, 19/10/2021.

elders. Some people believed that education leads to employment, which attacked the joint family system. The joint families disintegrated into several units, and these units were separated from the original larger family.⁵⁹ The educated daughter-in-law stayed with the older members of the family just for a few days and then went away to her husband's place of work, where she also tried to find some avenue of employment. This led to the latest trend in society, which is nuclear families.⁶⁰ They say all this is the fault of modern education.⁶¹ While interviewing, most women said that educated daughters-in-law did not respect their elders, their in-laws, or husbands, do not look after guests' needs, and were not affectionate mothers.⁶² On the nuclear family system, Fazi Begum from Sopore narrates:⁶³

**“Ges matey, lal matey, maj hindey poteov
Anan valey, zenan valy, kulye hindey reteov”**

English translation: During his childhood, a man was raised and cared for by his mother. When he became a successful person and earned money, his only concern was for his wife.

Class and caste also act as a barrier to the path of women's education. The social inhibitions about sending girls to school and co-education school, or both, persisted in society. The upper caste people did not allow their daughters to attend co-education institutions. Among upper-caste people, social prejudices become more of a hindrance to sending girls without veils to co-educational schools. Besides, the schools were often located at a considerable distance from their locality.⁶⁴ Regarding school enrolment, it has been observed that girls from the lower primary school-age group did not go to school, while for those who join, seventy percent of girls drop out of school even at primary standard. The main reason for both (non-enrolment and dropouts) is the domestic and occupational help girls rendered, which has become necessary largely because of parents' poverty.⁶⁵ Due to these economic factors, education becomes the first burden on a family's insufficient finances. The housework and the care of younger children were both responsibilities that fell on the shoulders of young girls.

⁵⁹ Interview with Zarif Ahmad Zarif, A Kashmiri poet, writer and social activist of Kashmir, 15/09/2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with Zarif Ahmad Zarif, 15/09/2022.

⁶¹ Interview with Khati Begum, Fazi Begum, woman of district Anantnag, 19/03/2023.

⁶² Interview with Fazi Begum, rural woman from Anantnag district, 9/10/2023.

⁶³ Interview with Fazi Begum, Pattan Baramullah, 19 March, 2023.

⁶⁴ Interview with Jana Begum.

⁶⁵ *National committee on women education*, p. 46; Interview with Jana Begum, a rural woman of district Anantnag, 28/11/2022.

Additionally, they were used as laborers in agricultural fields and chores connected to the domestic sphere.⁶⁶ Besides the women of different castes, such as hanjis (boat women), gujjars were not getting education due to their itinerant life. While interviewing, women of the hanji community, they narrated that they lived in boats and their life spent at different places in the valley.⁶⁷ Girls who did not join the school stream are predominantly among the lowest and poorest sections of society. Those who drop out or have withdrawn mostly belong to the middle strata of society. This means that the social selection process begins from the very first level of education. Thus, girls who continue their education in high schools and colleges mainly belong to the urban middle and upper classes, principally to the top stratum of the socio-economic pyramid. The predominantly urban or semi-urban character of higher education also explains why the enrolment ratio of girls to boys does not fall precipitously after completing middle and secondary level education in high school and higher education.

There is a significant gap between the rhetoric of the government and actual achievements. At least in part, it was a matter of resources. It was partly a consequence of its sheer size and population growth, most of whom lived in rural areas and a considerable proportion of whom lived below the poverty line. Partly it was due to the bureaucratic controls in place and a lack of dedication and political will to implement the programs successfully. The lack of infrastructural facilities in schools was a major problem for developing women's education. The lack of adequate school facilities has been one of the obstacles to education. Many schools did not have enough classes available to accommodate all the school-age children. There were just not enough classes available at many schools to accommodate the large number of youngsters of school age. Due to the lack of women's toilet facilities in the school, the dropout rates has also increased.⁶⁸

Although social norms and patriarchal attitudes of the society continued, they had become a main blockage in the way of women's education. But there were other failures on the part of the government as well, as it remained confined to the political issues that arose during the period. The arrest of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah led to increased political tensions and a deteriorated situation in the Kashmir valley. Government policies provide ample opportunities, although the benefits have not been distributed fairly among all, but rather have benefited a select group, primarily the influential group of Kashmiri women.⁶⁹ The majority of ordinary people were affected by economic inequality and social segregation. A

⁶⁶ *National committee on women education*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Interview with Fazi Begum, a boatwoman of Habba Kadal Srinagar, 9/04/2023.

⁶⁸ Interview with G.N. Var, President of Private Schools Association Jammu and Kashmir, 03/09/2022.

⁶⁹ Hafsa Kanjwal, The New Kashmiri Woman: State-Led Feminism in Naya Kashmir, *Economic & Political Weekly* 53, no. 47 (2018): 36.

few segments of Kashmiri society saw an improvement in their standard of living.⁷⁰ Rural Kashmiris make up the majority of the population, have typically lived in abject poverty and have not shared equally in the benefits of Kashmir's modernization endeavour.⁷¹ Although the new state proudly proclaims equality for women, most women bear the burden of the state's failures. The patriarchal system and the complicated social dynamics between the genders also impact women's education. Despite all the noble sentiments, education hasn't yet lived up to its promise to the underprivileged, especially women, and has enhanced the elite's hegemonic power.

Conclusion

Although there has been significant progress in literacy rates for both sexes over the last several decades. Women's education in Kashmir Valley has crossed a long journey. It shows positive developments once it started with the coming of Christian Missionaries. Initially, only girls from educated or influential families responded to education. With time there was also an increase in educational institutions and enrollment of girls. But, despite the rapidly growing number of educational options, women were falling more and further behind men during twentieth-century Kashmir. A strong emphasis was placed on gender equality in the Naya Kashmir documents, which acted as a road map after establishing a democratic government in Kashmir. However, the old paradigm continues to influence perspectives regarding women's education. There is no doubt that the participation of women in higher education and the workforce has become more obvious, but most of the time, their new roles were merely an extension of their traditional roles. The traditional thinking and deeply ingrained notions that continued in society hampered women's education. In addition, the percentage of people in rural areas who can read and write was significantly lower than in urban areas, indicating the regional barriers and non-availability of an educational atmosphere in the villages. Besides, caste and class barriers also make education difficult for Kashmiri women.

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⁷⁰ Shahla Hussain, *Kashmir in the Aftermath of Partition*, (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p, 150.

⁷¹ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 271.

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