



Transformative Forces: Exploring the Role of Christian Missionaries in the Development Women's Education in Kashmir

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Abstract

The education of women is an essential component of the growth and development of societies. It is an essential component in achieving gender equality and fostering the general advancement of society. In the course of human history, women have consistently been subjected to a greater number of obstacles, including societal norms, economic restraints, and a general lack of chances. In the context of Kashmir, this study investigates the essential role that Christian missionaries have played in the progression of women's education over the course of history. It explores the historical contributions, obstacles, and techniques adopted by these missionaries in building and developing educational institutions for women. The study is carried out against the backdrop of the cultural and socio-religious complications that exist. By conducting a detailed analysis of primary sources, historical records, and scholarly narratives it provides a nuanced picture of how Christian missionaries managed cultural sensitivities. Additionally, it demonstrates the ongoing impact that Christian missionaries have had on women's education in Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmir valley, Christian Missionaries, Women's Education, cultural norms, empowerment

Introduction

Education is the path to enlightenment since it increases one's knowledge, abilities, and the possibilities to realize their potential in various aspects of life and to gain the skills necessary to participate in the process of income generation.¹ Education helps a person become more civilized, as well as a responsible human being towards his family and the larger society. Education is a critical factor in constructing a social order founded

on the values of freedom, social justice, and equality of opportunities and for avoiding social wrongs and taboos within society.² As the Holy Prophet Mohammad (blessings and peace be upon him) said:

It is obligatory for all Muslims, to acquire education

² Lucy E. Bailey, and Karen Graves, Gender and education, in *Review of Research in Education* 40, no. 1 (2016): 682-722.

¹ Latika Gupta, *Education, Poverty and Gender: Schooling Muslim Girls in India*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015), p. 91.



(Including men and women, regardless of gender).³

The growth of education as a catalyst for the transformation of society is frequently intertwined with the efforts of devoted individuals and groups. In many different parts of the world, throughout the course of history, Christian missionaries have played a vital part in directing the path that education for women has taken.⁴ Their relentless efforts, driven by a passion to empower underprivileged communities, have played a key role in eliminating barriers, developing enlightenment, and championing the cause of gender equality. Their efforts have played a pivotal role in deconstructing barriers, fostering enlightenment, and championing the cause. This essay dives into the tremendous impact that Christian missionaries had on the development of women's education, demonstrating how their activities have crossed cultural and religious boundaries to shape the course of history.⁵ These individuals, through the pursuit of their educational missions, have planted the seeds of knowledge, fostering growth and transformation in the lives of countless women, while simultaneously leaving a

³ An-Nasa'i, *Narrated by Ibn Maja in al-Sunan*, vol.1:81224.

⁴ Aparna Basu, (1991). Women's history in India: An historiographical survey. *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, (1991), 193

⁵J. Butler, & E. Weed, (Eds.), *The question of gender: Joan W. Scott's critical feminism* (Vol. 4), (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 105-107.

permanent impression on the larger social fabric.

In the valley of Kashmir, the Christian missionaries deserve the most credit for introducing modern education. These individuals, while facing a variety of challenges, persisted in their work and made substantial contributions to the movement for the education of women. The Christian Missionaries were pioneers for initiating a campaign that aimed at rehabilitating women in Kashmir, introducing them to various aspects of civilization, and reigniting a sense of purpose in their life.⁶ The propagation of western thought across the entirety of the subcontinent started to have an effect on the social structure and political system of Kashmir. Reforms were implemented throughout the entire administration as a result of the appointment of a British resident, including educational and economic reforms.⁷ It was during the rule of Maharaja Pratap Singh that a British resident assumed control of the administration of the state.⁸ As a result, significant administrative, educational, and economic reforms were implemented throughout the state during this time. In the annals of this land's history, a new era of progress began, which resulted in the

⁶ P. N. Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta: A History of Kashmiri Women from early times to the Present Day*, (New Delhi: Pamposh Publications, 1959), p.19.

⁷ Mohd Mufti Sadat, *Tareekh-e-Kashmir Urdu*, (Kashmir Research Institute: 1951), p. 597.

⁸ Molvi Mohd Sadat, *Tareekh-e-Kashmir Urdu Maharaja Pratap Singh*, (Kashmir Research Institute: 1951), p. 597.



beginning of the age of modernity in the state.⁹

Missionaries of the Christian faith were the forerunners of the reform movement in the Kashmir valley, particularly with regard to the education of Kashmiri women. The advent of missionaries marked the beginning of a new period of progress in the history of this land, which ultimately resulted in the development of modernity inside the state. In spite of severe opposition not only from the superstitious elders of Hindu and Muslim communities but also from the Dogra Government, who were suspicious of the white men's intentions and reluctant to allow the Europeans to move throughout the valley and mingle with the oppressed people, they made strenuous efforts to educate teenaged girls. They did this despite the fact that the Dogras were unwilling to allow the Europeans to move throughout the valley and mingle with the oppressed people.

Missionaries of the Christian faith played a major role in the social reform movement in Kashmir, particularly with regard to the emancipation of women. Despite the fact that their goal appears to be to convert the people of Kashmir to Christianity, it appears that their motivation is to do so in the hope that Kashmir will one day become an important hub for Christianity and that its influence will spread throughout the surrounding areas.¹⁰ Therefore, in order to

⁹ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 19.

¹⁰ Robert Clark, *The Missions of the C.M.S & C.E.Z.M.S. in the Punjab and Sindh*, (London: C.M.S Salisbury Square, 1904), p.167.

win over converts, they focused on numerous failings of the culture that was already in place, such as a lack of education, early marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, and other similar practices. Before the 1880s, the state of Jammu and Kashmir did not have a single institution that provided educational opportunities to its natives. It was in the traditional institutions such as makhtabs and pathshalas, attached to the mosques and temples, run by Mullahs and Purohits, that the children of the top and middle classes received their education. These establishments did not receive any assistance from the Dogra authorities that were in place at the time. In fact, the state did not have any department that dealt with matters pertaining to welfare measures and public education.

In Kashmir, there was no question about girl's education or providing them any kind of intellectual knowledge. People in all classes and communities in general were illiterate and ignorant. In extremely unusual circumstances, a Hindu widow or a Muslim religious minded girl might be offered some basic or primary instructions in religious texts. In most circles, ignorance of women was considered a virtue, and the larger the extent of one's ignorance, the higher the value and admiration placed on it. There was opposition to teaching western education not only to males, but also there was intolerance for the notion that impure western ideas pollute the minds of young girls.¹¹ The work of missionaries made a positive impact on the lives of Kashmiri women. They emphasized how important it was to give the

¹¹ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 210.



people with a contemporary education and made strenuous efforts to educate teenage girls. In spite of strong opposition not only from superstitious and orthodox Hindu and Muslim people but also from the Dogra Government, who were suspicious of the Europeans' intentions and unwilling to allow the Europeans to move throughout the valley. They did this despite the fact that the Dogra Government was unwilling to allow the Europeans to move throughout the valley. It was after great difficulty, Christian missionaries successfully established a school in the city of Srinagar. There were rumors and hushed conversations being overheard in the streets, homes, and shops. In the year 1880, Reverend J. Knowles established the Christian Missionary School in Srinagar on the grounds of an existing hospital. In the year 1891, Reverend Tyndale Biscoe joined the school in order to assist Rev. Knowles. At that time, there were a total of 250 students enrolled at the institution.¹²

Christian Missionaries also took the cause of young widows. As a direct consequence of the severe treatment to the widows received from their in-laws, these young widows were forced to engage in the immoral behaviors.¹³ These child widows were in a pitiable state of anguish and did whatever they were told. Biscoe fought tirelessly for the cause of allowing Brahman widows to

remarry.¹⁴ Biscoe decided to help the unfortunate widows of Young Brahman by establishing a pension fund that would provide financial support and enable them to break free of their squalid lifestyles.¹⁵ A widow who received this pension was able to break free from the control that her late husband's family exerted over her life and live her life according to her own terms. Because of this pension, the widows were able to break free from the control that their deceased husband's family had over them and live the lifestyles that they had always dreamed of leading. Later with passage of time it was made legal by the authorities of the time.

As a direct impact of missionaries, the state policy also changed towards female education. In 1904, the state council provided funding, for the very first time, for two girls' schools in Srinagar; one of these institutions catered to Hindu girls, and the other served Muslim girls. Later on, as a result of the pressure from the public, the Maharaja was forced to contact Mr. Sharp, the Educational Commissioner for the Government of India. Mr. Sharp provided the Maharaja with many different ways and means to spread education among Muslims, with a particular emphasis on the education of women.¹⁶ At the turn of the century, Srinagar was home to just three female

¹² Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, JAY KAY, Books, Srinagar, 2005, pp. 260-263.

¹³ A Report on Administration of Jammu and Kashmir State, Ganga Nath Report, p. 289.

¹⁴ C. E. Tyndale Biscoe, *Tyndale Biscoe of Kashmir: An Autobiography*, (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd.), pp. 93-97.

¹⁵ Biscoe, *An Autobiography*, p. 97.

¹⁶ P. N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, (Srinagar: The Kashmir Publishing Co. 1941), p. 83.



educational institutions. The Fateh Kadal School in Srinagar was upgraded to the middle standard in 1918 with a subsidy of 700 rupees from the government, yet, the school's advancement was excruciatingly sluggish. In these educational institutions, there was not a single girl who completed matriculation, and the number of girls who passed the middle standard exams was low. The most common reason for girls' inability to complete their education was the practice of being married at an early age.¹⁷ Despite this, CMS (Christian missionary school) went through substantial transformations during Miss Mallinson's administration (1922–1961) because she was responsible for a large deal of scholastic and cultural progress throughout her time there. During this time, there were changes that were made to the policy that the government had towards the education of young women. Maharaja Hari Sing's primary establish a separate education department within the administrative structure for advancement of female education. To fill the vacant positions, educated women from places like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh were flown in and given appropriate training. For the purpose of encouraging girls to further their education, free studentships and scholarships were made available.¹⁸ The Glancy Commission report suggested the establishment of additional girls' schools inside the state as a solution to the situation

¹⁷ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 221.

¹⁸ Jammu and Kashmir State, Annual Administrative Report of the Education Department, 1923-24.

in this response.¹⁹ The state saw the opening of a number of new primary and middle schools for females, in addition to Srinagar being home to the state's first ever high school for female students.²⁰ The Maharaja contributed financially to private institutions that were dedicated to advancing the education of young women.

It was due to the efforts of Christian Missionaries, private educational enterprise got stimulated. As a direct result of these criticisms, the people of Kashmir have begun to develop a heightened consciousness regarding the need for change and reform. The formation of Anjumans and Sabhas was prompted by the need to respond to the religious propaganda spread by Christian Missionaries. In order to protect the interests of the specific community they speak for, a number of meetings were held, and a number of resolutions were voted on and approved. Social concerns were brought up for discussion, including widow remarriage, the education of girls, the age of marriage, and the amount of money spent on weddings and funerals. It was in this environment that socio-religious reform and political movements witnessed in the last decade of the 19th century, which brought about a revolution in the Kashmiri society. Separate reform efforts were carried out by both the Hindus and the Muslims in order for them to reform themselves. These reform movements prepared the ground for political

¹⁹ Glancy Commission Report, 1931, pp. 20-21.

²⁰ Jammu and Kashmir State, Annual Administrative Report of Education Department, 1935-36.



awakening and in some other way served as an additional driving force of modernization in the state. The Arya Samaj was the organization that initiated the socio-religious reform movement in the state much earlier than any other group. The majority of Arya Samajists originated in Punjab, either as officials of the state or as people who had relocated to Srinagar for commercial reasons.²¹ They exerted a great deal of effort in an effort to get rid of the limits that were imposed on Kashmiri Pandit women, who were reprimanded by the religious establishment. They advocated for widow remarriage and propagated negative effects of marrying young girls.²² The primary goals of the socio-religious reform movements that were initiated by Kashmiri Pandits at the beginning of the twentieth century were to combat the social evils that were prevalent among Kashmiri Pandits, to encourage widow remarriage, and to spread female education.²³ Besides, Muslims entered the arena of socio-religious reform activities at the beginning of the twentieth century. The goal of these activities was to familiarize the Muslim masses with the cause of their stagnation and to make them aware of the state of backwardness.²⁴ A

²¹ M. Ishaq Khan, *History of Srinagar, 1846-1947: A Study in Socio-Cultural Change* (Srinagar: Aamir Publications, 1978), p. 114.

²² Census of India, Jammu and Kashmir, 1911, Part 1, pp. 148, 211.

²³ G. H. Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir 1931-1940*, (New Delhi: Light & Life Publishers, 1980), pp. 52-53.

²⁴ Sadat, *Tareekh-e-Kashmir*, p. 625.

great number of other Anjumans were established in Kashmir by Muslims. These Anjumans advocated for the elimination of social ills that were widespread in the society, the proliferation of religious education among the people of Kashmir, familiarization of Muslims with the tenets of Islam, and a shift in the Muslims of Kashmir's way of thinking and outlook on life.

Even though, following the installation of a popular government after 1947, concrete steps have been taken to revamp the education system, there has been no drop in the social activism of missionaries and other socio-reform groups, particularly their enthusiasm to provide education to the general public. A great amount of the region's cultural resurgence can be attributed to the documenting of the arduous efforts taken by foreign missionaries to overcome masculine chauvinism in Kashmir.²⁵ As a result of the shifting political climate in the valley in 1947, the Christian Missionaries were unable to continue their tireless labor to the same extent as they had done previously. The rising political unrest and the partition of the territory, which was worsened by the intrusion of tribal people, led to the institution's activities coming to an abrupt halt. However, after a large amount of time had passed, the educational establishment was re-opened, which brought the total number of students enrolled to an impressive 800 by the year 1964. Regrettably, in the year 1965 once more, a cataclysmic fire took place, which led to the

²⁵ Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p. 253.



whole loss of the recently built structure, leaving nothing but ashes in its place.

Conclusion

The contribution of Christian missionaries to the advancement of women's education in Kashmir is evidence of the transformational power of education that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. In Kashmir, Christian missionaries made a vow to improve and empower the underprivileged groups of society, especially women, as well as to disseminate their faith. Their commitment to education served as a catalyst for change, progressively dismantling the old restrictions that had prevented women from accessing school. These missionaries gave women a way to obtain the knowledge, abilities, and resources necessary to successfully navigate a changing world by founding schools and other institutions, frequently in collaboration with local communities. The Christian missionaries introduced a new paradigm in a place where traditional attitudes and few possibilities had long hampered women's educational opportunities. Numerous Kashmiri women's perspectives were broadened by their initiatives, which promoted education as a path to self-awareness, personal development, and greater communal involvement. Women became better able to question ingrained gender conventions and fight for their rights both within their families and in society as a whole as they gained education and independence. In conclusion, the contribution made by Christian missionaries to the advancement of women's education in Kashmir serves as a powerful illustration of

the power of education to bridge gaps and spur beneficial social change. Their legacy serves as motivation for all those working to educate and empower women, highlighting the importance of education as a fundamental right that can dismantle obstacles, change people's lives, and advance an inclusive and equitable society. Through their commitment to educating women, they showed how education can serve as a bridge across different cultures and religions, promoting mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation. Generations are affected by their labor as educated women become change agents, influencing the future of their families, communities, and society as a whole.

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