

## CONTEXTS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S STUDIES IN KASHMIR

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the problems of women's education in Kashmir. It outlines the school system in Jammu and Kashmir at the background of the political context and the state of literacy. Social changes and seeing education, particularly the education of women, as a remedy to improve the individual and collective life generates a need to increase awareness in reducing the scale of social and cultural deprivation of women. One way of forming such awareness is to introduce aspects of Gender and Women's Studies to teacher training programs.

**Keywords:** gender literacy, school system, women's studies

### Introduction: geographical, historical and political context

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the 29 states of the Republic of India, which is called the Heaven of India. It is the northernmost state in the foothills of the Himalayas. It occupies an area of 222.236 sq. km, which represents less than 7% of the total area of India, and it is the fifth largest state of this country. The population of this state in the number of 12 548 926 is less than 10% of the total population of the country, which puts this state at the 19 position in India. Pursuant to Article 370 of the Constitution of India, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communication, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has autonomy in internal rights issues.

It is the only state with the dominant religion being Islam, and where particular attention should be paid to ethnic and religious diversity. Jammu and Kashmir consists of three regions of different cultures and religions: a) Jammu, with Hinduism as the dominant religion (over 90% of the population are devotees of Hinduism, who speak the languages of Urdu, Punjabi and Dogri), b) of Kashmir, which is dominated by Muslim religion (95% of the population are followers of this religion), and the inhabitants

speak, outside the official language of Urdu, also Kashmiri, and c) Ladakh, which is dominated by the followers of Tibetan Buddhism, and where the official language is Ladakhi Tibetan Urdu Balti. Apart from the common English, this implies the existence of many local cultures and languages in the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. The official languages throughout the state are English and Urdu. These are also the languages used at schools of all levels, from kindergarten to university. In addition, the residents speak the local languages listed above. In this situation, the school is a place, where communication is done in three languages, which are called as follows: a) mother tongue, which is the language that students and teachers speak in the family home (e.g. Kashmiri, Dogri, Punjabi, Ladakhi Tibetan), b) native language, spoken in offices throughout the state (Urdu) and c) state language, spoken throughout the Republic of India (English). Each of these languages has its own alphabet and specific phonetics, which is emphasized in order to stress communication difficulties in the educational process.

To show an entanglement of women's education I have collected data from different sources. My own reflections are formulated on the basis of effort of understanding of this phenomenon in the new (for me) culture. From the perspective

of critical pedagogy, I tried to get to know the facts in their multidimensional contexts. I have used complex of different methods of collecting data as: observation, spontaneous unstructured interviews in schools and universities as well as study of scientific literature of subject. This list reflects the order of application of the method used, from observation by asking students and teachers to analyze the scientific literature. In the structure of the paper collected data are use for the same purpose, namely: description and interpretation of given subject.

### Literacy and its determinants

Constitution of 2002 provides that compulsory education throughout India must be pursued by children aged 6-14. 86th amendment to the Constitution provides that *"the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine"*. Caring for universal education, however, dates back to earlier times. This is evidenced by, inter alia, initiatives such as the program "Operation Blackboard"<sup>1</sup> introduced in 1987. Its purpose is to provide basic necessary conditions for primary education, namely: ensuring that every school has at least two large rooms for conducting lessons regardless of the weather, equipped with necessary resources and teaching materials (books, maps, toys, etc.), blackboard and at least two qualified teachers, one of whom is a woman. This program has also been introduced in Jammu and Kashmir; however, its implementation still leaves much to be desired. In the light of data from studies conducted by the staff of the University of Kashmir (Department of Education, University of Kashmir) in 2012, in one of the districts of Kashmir, in Pulwama, 17 out of 51 schools did not have their own buildings and teaching materials used by teachers were below standards and even contained mistakes<sup>2</sup>. These are not the only examples of the difficulties in the process of improving the living conditions,

reducing poverty and exclusion areas through education.

Increasing social conflicts and political tensions in this part of the country, especially those lasting since 1989, imprint their mark on education. According to data from the last census report (of 2009), the literacy rate in the state of Jammu and Kashmir was 59%, but according to data from the 2014, it was 68.74%. However, it is differentiated by gender and in 2011 it was 76.75% for men and 49.12% for women. It is worth noting that over ten years (2001-2011) these indicators grew by 10.15% and 6.9% respectively<sup>3</sup>. This is to some extent a result of the Mass Literacy Programme addressed to people aged 15-35. In spite of this programme, in the entire state still one in four men and more than half of women are illiterates<sup>4</sup>. This places the state of Jammu and Kashmir at the fifth lowest place among states of Indian and union territories<sup>5</sup>. In conjunction with the coexistence of the three languages (Kashmiri, Urdu and English), the first of which is the "family"/mother tongue and is taught only in some of the schools, while the last two are the subject of formal school education, this situation of access to education has its impact on the scale social exclusion, especially of women.

Differentiation of the literacy rate is even more visible in terms of the place of residence. It should be added that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the state population is living in rural areas, often in difficult to reach areas. However, in the years 2001-2011 literacy of rural women has increased more than in case of urban residents, however, the scale of illiteracy among rural women is still much higher. This also refers to men – rural residents. Although the constitution guarantees equal rights, there is still stratification in access of men and women to education. It should be

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/page72.html> (accessed on, 15.09.2014)

<sup>2</sup> M.Y. Ganie, Aqueel Ahmad Pandith, Muddasir Hamid Malik: *Implementation of Operational Blackboard at zone Pulwama in Kashmir Division*, "World Rural Observations" 2012;4(1), pp. 68-73

<sup>3</sup> Fayaz Ahmad Bhat, Fouzia Khurshid, Nazmul Hussain: *Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion: A Case Study of Women's Education In Jammu and Kashmir*, "Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce" Vol.- II, Issue -3, July 2011 pp. 135-150.

<sup>4</sup> *Jammu and Kashmir Population Census data 2011*, <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/jammu+and+kashmir.html>, accessed on 29.09.2014).

<sup>5</sup> Showkeen Bilal Ahmad Gul, Zebun Nisa Khan: *Assessment and Understanding of Gender Equity in Education in Jammu and Kashmir*, "Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce" Vol. V, Issue 1(1), Jan. 2014, pp. 115-123.

noted that for many students the content of school education are distant from their everyday lives.

Numerous studies and analysis indicate the importance of female education for all walks of life, from family life and health (including reducing child mortality), through the increase in the quality of life, to the development of political culture. This applies not only to India but to the whole world. Thus, the concern for the education of women results not only from the desire to reduce inequality between the sexes in access to goods, but to a large extent, also from the social and economic reasons. However, treating the education of women as a luxury, which is deeply rooted in the tradition, still existing gender disparity in access to education and the shortage of female teachers, especially at the higher levels of education, makes this concern a serious challenge. Girls and women in Kashmir are experiencing the cumulative deprivation: due to the gender and models of Muslim culture. As written by the above researchers from the Department of Education, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh<sup>6</sup>, the sources of this phenomenon may indicate concern that education can corrupt the processes of socialization, raise doubts in girls, and even aversion to native values and traditions. There is still a strong attachment to the stereotypical roles of women, especially concerning household chores and taking care of siblings. Moreover, as stated by these authors, there are also educational barriers, which limit education of women. They point out, inter alia, inadequate content and methods of education, teachers' lack of sensitivity to the educational needs of girls and their interests, as well as the lack of sanitation facilities in schools. However, among the major inhibitors of the education of girls and women these writers highlight: poverty (mainly boys attend school in families with low economic status, while their sisters do housework), illiteracy of parents, large families, which is closely related to religiosity in this state, early marriage of girls and the traditional system of *purdah*, which is isolation of gender. Consequently, the education of women and girls in Jammu and Kashmir remains below the average of the whole India. As written by Dr. Kavita Suri, the highest percentage of women – illiterates is in Kupwara district and it is almost three-quarters (71, 3%), while the lowest is in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Jammu district - 31.5%. In the entire state there are 9 districts where the literacy of women in rural areas does not reach 30%<sup>7</sup>.

### **The system of education in Kashmir; public and government education**

Although the British system of education was strange to Indian values and culture and did not respond to the needs of the masses, it has been adapted to educational practice. As a result, there are still discrepancies between school experiences and experiences of everyday life of both students and teachers. Although already in the 50s of the twentieth century, almost immediately after regaining of independence, actions were undertaken to develop the education system, still, that is, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the British model of organizing education, and even the British school readings are used in everyday practices in schools of Kashmir. Although the concept of “curriculum” has a very broad meaning, namely, it includes not only traditional subjects of school education, but the whole student experience shaped by participation in various forms of school activity, that is, in the classroom, library, school yard and sports facilities and, above all, in a wide spectrum of social interactions of teachers and students, which are conducive to the development of an integrated personality, there is still a dominance of the frontal teaching with the dominant role of the teacher, who organizes and supervises the behaviour of students.

More than half a century of experience in reforming education in India indicates the search for optimal models, which include local specificity and global changes. In 2005 the National Council of Educational Research and Training NCERT in India published the National Curriculum Framework – NCF, which is a response to the rapidly changing demands and conditions of education. This curriculum puts the emphasis on adapting training programs and curriculum to the stages of education, taking into account the social environment and students' everyday experiences, as well as the nature and source of

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<sup>7</sup> Kavita Suri: *Overcoming Barriers to Learning: Women and Distance Education in Jammu and Kashmir*, “Golden Research Thoughts”, Vol. 2, May, 2013.

modern knowledge and information<sup>8</sup>. This curriculum promotes five guiding principles, namely:

- a) Combining the school knowledge with life outside the classroom,
- b) Enriching the curriculum with contents beyond school textbooks,
- c) Introducing methods for increasing activity,
- d) Making exams more flexible by integrating them with the school experience of students,
- e) Respecting the identity of the participants in the educational process under a democratic policy of the country<sup>9</sup>.

The authors of the Report emphasize the importance of female education. Experience in the organization of education for girls in the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, dates back to the early twentieth century. It was associated with missionary activity. The first school was Mallison School founded in 1912, and the next was the Presentation Convent School founded in 1936 by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Much younger are schools established by foundations, including Islamic religious groups (e.g. the Iqbal Memorial Trust and the Green Valley Educational Institute).

### Teaching profession in Kashmir; organization of teacher training

Teaching profession in Jammu and Kashmir is an opportunity for women. They can work alongside men, which does not mean that they are equal partners. As written above, according to the "Operation Blackboard" programme, every state school must employ women. Currently, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir they are almost two-thirds of the total number of employees. However, much more frequently they work at lower positions in education. They are also much more frequent unqualified teachers, who constitute almost half of the teachers in primary school (47%), 40% in secondary school and 35% in high school. And the majority of them are women<sup>10</sup>.

The increase in the number of students and teachers leads to the growing interest in Women's and Gender Studies. Education is the basis of social and economic development and the growth of multi-dimensional and high-quality individual and collective life. And its critical aspect is education of teachers.

The system of teacher training in the state of Jammu and Kashmir includes a first degree programme (Bachelor of Education), which provides a general preparation for the teaching profession, and second degree programme (Diploma or Master), which prepares for the specific tasks of teaching.

According to data from the report "Joint Review Mission On Teacher Education"<sup>11</sup>, there are now two government teacher training colleges offering full-time programmes for teachers. One of them is a teacher training college in Srinagar (Govt. College of Education, Kashmir), the second is college in Jammu. Teacher training is also offered by the state and central universities in Srinagar and Jammu. In addition, the places for the professional preparation and development of teachers are 22 regional institutes of education (District Institute of Education and Training) and numerous private colleges. According to data from the above report, there are 585 colleges of that type, including 146 with the authority to grant diplomas in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). All colleges offer both professional training of candidates, as well as retraining and improvement courses.

In the process of preparing for the profession and in the process of professional training, great importance is paid to the development of self-awareness of female teachers and their experience of the sense of security. Care for women, their safety and living conditions not only includes actions aimed at providing them with access to jobs and offices, hygiene and sanitation facilities, but also at safe studying, without compromising on solicitation and other forms of male violence. At the library of the University of Kashmir (Allama Iqbal Library) there is a place marked "Women's Only". It is a

<sup>8</sup> *Final Report on Quality in School Education*, ISID, New Delhi, no publication date, <http://www.isid.org.in/repo.html>, accessed on 15.09.2014

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 20

<sup>10</sup> Arun K. Gupta, D.R. Kapoor, *Teacher Education In Jammu and Kashmir*, "Journal of All India

Association for Educational Research" 2007, 19, 3/4, pp. 100-107,

<sup>11</sup> *Joint Review Mission On Teacher Education*, Jammu & Kashmir April 2013, p.5, [http://www.teindia.nic.in/Files/jrm/JRM\\_Reports/FI\\_NAL\\_JRM\\_28-4-2013-J&K.pdf](http://www.teindia.nic.in/Files/jrm/JRM_Reports/FI_NAL_JRM_28-4-2013-J&K.pdf) accessed on 15.09.2014

place of access to the Internet, which was separated due to the concern for the safety of female students, so that no one interferes their use of network resources.

Appreciating the competence and professionalism of educated women is expressed, inter alia, in the situations, when women employed in institutes and university faculties hold managerial functions. Deans and heads in University of Kashmir that I had a pleasure to meet in person include i.a. Dr. Nighat Basu - Dean of the Faculty of Education (the first woman in that position), Dr. Naheed Vaidia - Head of the Institute of Home Sciences, and Professor Nilofer Khan, who is a head of Women's Studies Centre. Head of the Government Teacher Training College, which exists since 1948, is also a woman - Professor Parveen Pandit.

Holding managerial positions by women has positive influence on the development of women's education, including the training of female teachers. This is not a process separated from the broader context of changes in the politics and economics of the country. As written by Nandini Manjrekar, head of the Centre for Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, the neo-liberal reforms, which also include the sphere of education, affect the re-evaluation of the life and work of female teachers. This generates the need to adopt a feminist perspective of perception and understanding of the changing working conditions, especially searching for new rules to integrate personal lives and work of women in the context of social change<sup>12</sup>. This implies the necessity to introduce women's issues into teacher education programs.

### **Problems of Women's Studies and their determinants**

Political tension and religious fundamentalism lead to unrest and personal and collective tragedies in the state of Jammu and Kashmir that affected the whole groups of people. In the final years of the twentieth century, increasing separatist movements led to the repression and mass expulsions of indigenous people of this state (*Pandits*, who are members of the Brahmin community). In October 2014, the

people of the state are experiencing intensifying acts of Muslim separatist. A group particularly vulnerable to the consequences of armed clashes and cultural restrictions are women. Victim of these actions is also their education. The importance of this issue is the fact that the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to a Muslim from neighbouring Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai, the girl especially experienced by discriminatory policies against women and their education.

Initiatives and projects for equality, aimed at empowering disfavoured groups, which are experiencing multi-dimensional and multi-source deprivation, start with education. It is in fact considered to be a key factor in changing the individual and the collective situation. In India, which is so diversified in terms of culture, religion and society, egalitarian tasks and activities are undertaken by government and state agencies and organizations, as well as by a wide range of non-governmental organizations of a global, domestic, state and local reach. Despite the efforts and commitment of individuals and groups, sixty-six years of existence of an independent country, torn by many dramatic experiences, is too short to overcome the problems accrued and established by its long tradition. In India, there are still strong traces of colonialism, as well as great social and economic stratification having its roots in tradition and religion. This is shown in the scale, intensity and repertoire of means of violence against people and groups facing barriers in access to tangible and/or intangible goods. These two groups of goods are separated, as they do not need to be connected. And this situation can be observed in India. Possession of tangible goods does not guarantee access to intangible goods (e.g. freedom and violence), just as the low property census does not limit, e.g. the use of civil rights. Group experiencing particular deprivation in access to goods are women. And it is particularly clear in Jammu and Kashmir. Although women constitute the majority part of population (sex ratio in Kashmir is 883/1000), however, the patriarchal model of the family and the society makes them a group, which experiences restrictions and violence. One of the local Kashmir examples is the attempt to establish the law of depriving a woman the status of permanent resident of the state, who marry a man outside the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. And this has been attempted for 25

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<sup>12</sup> Nandini Manjrekar *Women School Teachers in New Times: Some Preliminary Reflections*, „Indian Journal of Gender Studies”, Vol 20, June 2013, (2).

years. Pursuant to this law, women would lose the right to own property, occupy positions in public administration, as well as to vote, and even adopt children. This attempt was ended with the judgment of the Supreme Court of Jammu and Kashmir. At the same time, those of the women who make aware decisions in the use of acquired rights and fields of freedoms take a lot of effort to change this situation. An important measure in reducing deprivation is education, its discoveries and consequences.

Knowledge of the situation of women and the ways of dealing with problems is the subject of studies conducted in universities and colleges. In two universities in Kashmir (University of Kashmir and Central University of Kashmir), there are Women's Studies Centres. The women's issues are also addressed within the field of study conducted at the Institute of Home Sciences and Distance Education Centre. Institute of Home Science conducts research and education programs devoted to the development of the women's self-awareness, increase of their confidence, as well as issues concerning health and hygiene that are closely associated with the organization of everyday life. At this Institute students prepare doctoral dissertations in collaboration with the faculties of medicine, economics, education, law, and others. The teaching and research program and curriculum cover issues that relate to welfare of women and children, child development and early education, as well as promotion of the activity in the local environment and nutrition.

There is a large group of women, who study at the Distance Education Centre. This institute is a place of crossing barriers in access to education and reduction of inequalities of academic census, concerning not only women. The educational programs at the Institute (including B.Ed., M.Ed. programs and kindergarten teacher education programs) are focused on raising the level of education of women and using it to reduce the scale of illiteracy. Studies carried out in this centre are also a chance for many people to have a better life and increase social participation of these individuals and groups that have experienced or are experiencing marginalization and exclusion. And the vast majority of these individuals and groups are women.

A central role in raising awareness of women's rights plays Women's Studies Centre. This group of researchers and academic teachers focuses not only on the accumulation of

knowledge about contemporary and historical problems of women and propagating it, but above all on the creation of a university-friendly environment conducive to realizing the full potential of female students and workers by ensuring equal access to health care, education and places for work and study. Through its educational activities, research and extra activities, this Centre is an important agent of change and the place of work for the organization of Women Managers in Higher Education.

Women's Studies Centre existing at the Govt. College of Education, Srinagar focuses on exploring the phenomena of oppression and deprivation of women. The results of the studies are the basis for educating future and improving qualifications of working teachers. Research reports are prepared with the participation of students, who gather empirical data and write reports, which are then used as an important didactic material. They allow students to personally experience often previously unknown situations, to understand their nature and circumstances, and to arouse in them the readiness to react to acts of violence enslavement.

As written by Professor Parveen Pandit in the introduction to one of the reports, despite the glorious tradition of women in the ancient history of Kashmir, the role of women in the family and in society has radically changed as a result of invasions and colonization that began in the Middle Ages. Physical, sexual and psychological violence has become a source of suffering. Although the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir guarantees women equal rights in all social, political, legal and educational matters, empirical results demonstrate the scale of discrepancies between the statements and everyday life. The objective of the Centre founded in 2003 is the emancipation of women, development of their confidence, support of women in their struggle for economic, social, cultural, political and intellectual empowerment and development of women's awareness in terms of their rights, health and hygiene<sup>13</sup>. These objectives are realized through studies, documentation and publication of their results in books and during seminars, as well as through education.

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<sup>13</sup> Abdul Hameed Khan, Tahira Mejeed: *Violence against Women In Kashmir*, Women's Studies Centre, Govt. College of Education, Srinagar 2011

## Final conclusions

Due to the fact that more than half of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent is below 25 years of age, school becomes an important place for developing good practices in relationships with teachers sensitive to equality and justice, and prepared to take actions against violence.

Undertaking this issue was inspired by observations conducted in schools and universities in Kashmir. Educational separation of girls and boys in schools run by religious organizations and foundations, both Islamic and Christian, and students' time organization subordinate to the Muslim cultural patterns clearly differentiates the experience of both sexes. Co-education in student groups is not able to break the tradition and custom of subordination of girls and women. For many of

them traditional costumes, hijab, half or full face niqab, and even the burqa, is the way of emphasizing their identity. It should be noted that although in some schools the hijab is obligatory for both teachers and students, to my questions about the reasons for covering the face (niqab) I received the answer that is a personal choice, the desire to mark their identity. However, academic training programs and research projects are a major factor in raising awareness of the inequality and exploring the mechanisms governing social stratification. In the lecture rooms, women are not only students, but also lecturers; they lead groups and teams, and have functions in university authorities. They certify the power of women. However, they are still only the tip of the iceberg. Even they have to stand in separate queues at the airports, and even in the entrances to temples. Although this is not a sign of oppression, it reminds man of his place in the social order.

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