

Higher Education and Women Participation in Kashmir: A Trend Towards Change

Lubna Yousuf¹, Ouffee Maqbool²

¹Ph.D in Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Email: Yousuf.Lubna@gmail.com

²Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Kashmir University, 190006, Email: Naikouffee@gmail.com

Abstract: Education is the key yardstick by which the growth and development of a country can be measured and as such it has occupied an important place in the society. There is no denying the fact that education has a vital role in the life of an individual as well as society. In the case of individual, education helps to discipline the mind, sharpen the intellect and refine the spirit. Education is the nourishment of the mind with knowledge and as such it helps in the formation of an integrated personality of an individual. Theoretically the need of higher education for both males and females is the same. But practically it could be said that female education is more important than that of male. Women education has two aspects- individual aspect and social aspect. It is education which increases women's abilities to deal with the problems of her life, her family, her society and nation. Our past experience shows that higher education was restricted only to men. Women did not have any entry in the domain of higher education. Now a day this facility has been widened and women have equal opportunities in higher education. In this paper I will try to delineate the present picture of higher education in Kashmir and women participation in it. I shall also mention the necessity and factors responsible for women participation in higher education. Finally effort will be made to give some suggestions which can accelerate women participation in higher education in Kashmir

Keywords: Education, Higher Education, Women, Women Education, Kashmir.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education means all round development, this all round development means intellectual, social and emotional development. It is only education that molds the behavior of an individual. Education plays an important role in socio-economic development of a country. Moreover women education has immense importance in this regard. Educated women are not only raising their own socio-economic status but they are enhancing intellectual horizon of their children, uplifting socio-economic condition of their family and playing a significant role in raising their family status. There is a strong linkage between education of women and the development of a nation. In fact, women education has come to be considered more important than that of men. Dr. Karve, a pioneer for the cause of women education, once said, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, if you educate a woman, you educate the whole family." The University Education Commission (1949) has also rightly remarked: "There cannot be an educated man without an educated woman. If general education is to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would more surely be passed on to the next generations". On the other hand, education also makes the women strong, empowered, creates self-reliance and brings determination in life. It has a central role in the struggle to achieve women's equality and empowerment both in the family as well as in the community. Lack of education, information and low level of literacy aggravate the situation of deprivation in all sector of life. Education helps in generating awareness among women about their legal, social, political and economic rights, provisions and privileges to fight against all sorts of social discrimination. It enables them to realize their potentialities, developing skills, seeking employment and improving their nutritional and health conditions. Education helps women in lightening the burden of tradition of ignorance and strict seclusion within the home, in equipping them with the expertise and knowledge required to play modern roles, in widening their horizons and in raising their general status in society. Therefore, educating women encourages not only their political participation and economic independence but also improves their quality of life and through them of the whole family and then whole nation in broader sense.

Education is the birth right of every human being, so this means we cannot educate only boys. It is necessary to educate women, when women are educated that means every family is educated and educated

women can face all challenges in her life. Education plays an important role to bring harmonious development. Any desired change in society can be done with the help of education which is accepted throughout the world. Such changes can be done only if schools become real of learning centers. Education not only helps the development of human being but also determines his future. It is only education that solves all type of problems. We can promote good habits, values and awareness towards corruption through education. Education helps in communication of one known person to other unknown persons through mass media and technology. Education gives power and strength to the human being. It is education which helps an individual to discriminate what is good and what is bad. We define the values in readers and students through education. Geographically both male and female have same space in society, yet male and female are not treated equally in the society. Women are unequally access to education, physical, health care and financial resources opportunities in the economic, social, political and cultural field. Female have a lower status than male almost everywhere of the world. Women and men are just like the two sides of the same coin, so they should work together in life. There should be given equality in each and every step of life. Education is the responsibility of both men and women. In rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir, women work inside the houses, but completely depend upon men. In urban areas women work in various government as well as private organization. The women have power to take decisions regarding to purchases household things or go outside alone. But in present time the movement of women has locked in the society because of having low educational status.

Z. Ullah *et al.* stated that the importance of education for woman has been accepted worldwide, making decision about their family size, delay marriages, use family planning methods for small family and play an important role in society. It is education by which women are allowed to go out of their houses and work in different organization of the country. The couple mutually takes the decision about the family size if women are educated. E. Bbaale *et. al.* discusses about the positive impact of women's education on their late marriages, autonomy and lower fertility. This study also shows female education making women more autonomous and giving more control about various dimensions in their life. Acharya said that the major instrument for empowering women is only education. It is education by which woman helps to gain her rights and make her confident about her possibilities, including decisions of her family and personal affairs within the family. In case the female is educated, her family members and husband may consult her before make any major decisions. According to Rustogi *et. al* (2004) women's status can be measured with the help of a diverse set of indicators. Some broad indicators namely health and education in public/private decision making to can be used to measure the women's status in the society.

Education has been the main instrument of human development and its importance has been emphasized through fundamental rights, principles and statutes in a number of countries. The progress and prosperity of a nation and of community is determined by the level of education. This remarkable potential of education needs to be realized by every individual or social community (Ahmad, 1987). At the international level, attempts have been made at various congregations to focus on aspects of education as a part of fundamental human right. According to the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) *"everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory... Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26). The part four of the National Policy on Education (1986) clearly promised equality in education with respect to women, scheduled caste, Scheduled tribes, minorities and handicapped. The constitution of India makes provision for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen years. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 made education in India a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing 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"*. In fact, education of women has come to be considered as more important than that of men. The University Education Commission (1949) has rightly remarked *"there cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for them it would more surely be passed on to the next generations"*.

Education helps in generating awareness among women about their legal, social, political and economic rights, provisions and privileges to fight against all sorts of social discrimination. It enables them to realize their potentialities, developing skills, seeking employment and improving their nutritional and health conditions. Therefore, educating women encourages not only their political participation and economic independence but also improves their quality of life and through them of the whole family and then of whole nation in a broader sense. Various studies (Roy: 1979; Agrawal: 1986; Hassan and Menon: 2004) have shown that education has made a significant contribution in improving the status of women. Education of women is the most effective channel for reducing the inequalities between men and women and ensuring the maximum participation of women in the developmental process. Recent research suggests that female schooling is more important than male schooling for social outcomes such as fertility, child health, and infant mortality (Subbarao

and Raney: 1995; Dreze and Murthi: 2001). Thus there is need for removing the barriers in the women's education which will consequently help in bringing them in the mainstream of society.

BACKGROUND OF POSITION

The educational status of women in Kashmir like their counterpart elsewhere in the country was also depressing and quite dismal. Women in the traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination, inequality and oppression. The role of women remained confined to domestic affairs and they were debarred from education (Dabla, 2007). People were highly conservative and the realization that women need to be educated was totally lacking. The first effort to educate Kashmiri women came from the missionaries. It was between 1893 and 1895 that a missionary school for girls was started by the Church Missionary Society. There was a strong opposition to this school as it aroused suspicion in the minds of people who were conservative in their outlook. They feared that in the school the minds of their women would be polluted by the impure ideas from foreign lands which would lead them astray (Bazaz, 1959). Only a few girls attended the school and their parents were somewhat on the shake, as the public opinion was very much against them (Biscoe, 1998). The dedication and personal efforts of the missionary ladies who laid the foundation of this school, encouraged parents to enroll their daughters in this school (Khan, 2005).

Keeping into consideration the people's attitudes and the mode of their thinking, the State Council adopted a very cautious policy and did not take any step towards the opening of schools for the education of girls. However, it favored helping private efforts. In 1904, for the first time the State Council provided funds for the establishment of two girls schools at Srinagar. It was in 1912, that the first attempt was witnessed at imparting secondary education to women.

In 1926, Women's Welfare Trust came into existence and it made a significant contribution in the promotion of women's education. Within a period of four years the Trust was running ten schools with an enrolment of 575 girls. The Education Reorganization Committee (1938-39) with regard to promotion of girl's education recommended the opening of more primary and middle schools and provision of incentives in the form of increase in scholarships and distribution of free books (Khan, 2005). With the partition of country, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference formed the first elected government in the State. The Party prepared the Draft of the future constitution of the State which was given the name of 'Naya Kashmir' in which education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir was a major and important demand. The Draft provides special arrangements for women's education in accordance with the provision of the Women's Charter (Khan, 1973). A breakthrough in women's education came in the year 1950, which saw the establishment of first women's college, on Maulana Azad Road, Srinagar and the higher education among Kashmiri women started to gain popularity with the establishment of this college. In 1961, another college (Nawa Kadal College) for women was established. With the establishment of institutions of higher education exclusively for women, there was change in the attitude of women and their consciousness rose. As a result of steadily changing attitudes of the community towards girl's education, the number of Muslim women in schools and colleges has gradually improved and their participation in modern education has increased though at a sluggish pace (Khan, 2005).

Governmental Policies/Programmes for Promoting Gender Equality in Education:

State government realized that for bringing the holistic development of women, elimination of gender disparity in education is a prerequisite and therefore launched various schemes/programmes to improve the educational conditions of women. These include Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). In order to bridge the gender gap and remove or minimize the disparities in educational attainment, various policies and programmes that have been initiated by the central government for education of women and implemented in Jammu and Kashmir are given below:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) promotes girls education through equalization of educational opportunities and elimination gender disparities. The State of Jammu and Kashmir joined Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan a little late in 2003 owing to its circumstances particularly disturbance due to militancy and typical topography-(sparsely populated habitations). During 2006-07, 148 primary schools were upgraded to upper primary schools. There were 108560 out of school children, out of which 20702 children have been provided educational opportunity through Non-Residential Bridge Courses (NRBC). The gender gap appears to be closed as 804837 girls get enrolled against 930476 boys therefore constituting about 46.62 per cent of the total enrolment (J&K State Report, 2008).

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL): The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) is a focused intervention of Government of India to reach the 'Hardest to Reach' girls, especially those not in school through the development of a 'model school' in every cluster with more intense community mobilization and supervision of girls enrolment in schools. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was sanctioned for the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 2003-04. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level had been initiated in 104 blocks in the 12 districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The State has about 302 Model Cluster

Schools (MCS) in operation. Further 261 Model Cluster Schools have also been sanctioned during 2007-08 which are yet to be operationalized (J&K State Report: 2008)

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme was launched in July 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the Schedule castes, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minority communities. It was designed to encourage greater participation of girls in education at the upper primary level (Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, MoHRD, GoI). The Project Approval Board of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission in its 64th meeting on 22nd February, 2005 approved the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya plan for 14 blocks of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. All the blocks where the establishment of 13 KGBVs has been proposed have been genuinely declared as educationally backward blocks (EBBs) (Annual Works Plan and Budget 2007-08, SSA for Jammu and Kashmir). On 31 January, 2008, percentage of girls enrolled in these 13 operational KGBVs include 16.65 per cent of Schedule Caste, 10.63 per cent of Schedule Tribe, 2.30 per cent of Other Backward Class, 65.94 per cent of Muslims and 4.48 per cent of Below Poverty Line category.

Besides these programmes, there are other centrally sponsored schemes such as Integrated Education of Disabled Children, Vocationalization of Education at 12th Level and Teacher Education etc. for over all development of education in the state.

The objective of education is to acquire knowledge. The education raises the status of women. Higher education acts to enhance social mobility and status for themselves and their families. Several reasons for women entering higher education ranged from personal interest, career aspirations, financial stability, personal independence and choices when thinking about marriage. More and more women are found to carry out higher education and become employed. People support higher education aspirations of their daughters. They play an instrumental role in encouraging their daughters to succeed both academically and professionally. Some are even sending their daughters not only to co-educational schools but also to far-off places to get professional or higher education. It is evident that women in Kashmir are playing active role in construction and reconstruction of their social and personal identities. The study also depicts that women in Kashmir are highly motivated towards higher education and also reveals significant relation between the education of girls and their parents and husbands. Significant variations in the effect of levels of education on the marriage of women are apparent. Education of the girls has a significantly positive effect on the age at first marriage. Each additional level of education is found to lower the probability of first marriage at an early age significantly. The effect is found to be greater for the younger women, indicating increased postponement of marriage. The results provide empirical evidence that a woman's educational attainment is an important determinant of a woman's age at first marriage in Kashmir. This implies that in the younger age groups, a married woman will have less education than an unmarried woman of the same age. The attitude of the women towards the early marriage has changed and a greater proportion of them are in favour of late marriage for girls. It is found that as the educational level increases, the girls are being increasingly consulted in the choice of their husbands. The educated women have some say in whom and when they will marry. The educated young women have definite ideas about the qualities of the spouse they wish to have and have more freedom in the selection. With the increase in education the marriages of women in Kashmir are being increasingly settled with their consent and also there is preference for self-decided marriages. As the education of the women increases, payment of dowry also decreases. With regards to the familial matters educated women in the family did enjoy some liberty with regard to various issues in the family and more equalitarian families were found where both husband and wife were educated. The highly educated women and those in gainful employment had enjoyed greater authority in decision making. A tiny minority was not consulted in decision making but with growing education among women authority of women in decision-making in the matters of family economy and children's schooling, career and marriage increases with the level of education and employment. The greater the educational attainment, the stronger was the empowerment process.

No doubt women's education in Kashmir has made considerable progress and even parents are showing interest to educate their daughters along with their sons. Still their progress is slow because of their low levels of literacy. Our laws, development policies and other strategies have enabled the women towards advancement in different spheres. There has been perceptible shift in approach to women's issues from welfare to development orientation and further to empowerment of women-economically, socially, politically and legally. Despite all these measures, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enshrined in the Constitution and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women on the other. There is still a lot required to be done in this sphere. There is also a need to take more strict measures for improvement in education of women in Kashmir because education plays a significant role in raising the status of women. The planners, administrators and implementers involved must pay greater attention to guide the process of bridging the gender inequalities in education. Hence the greatest need of the hour is to raise social status of women. To bring about such a change, they have to be informed of what legal and administrative provisions are available in the country which is possible only through their education.

The past 20 years have witnessed significant but not sufficient enrolment of the female population in higher education. This progress has certainly been due in part due to specific strategies which have focused attention on the inequalities to be redressed. UN action has been effective in this regard as policy-makers have been sensitized to the rights of women and to the need to open all levels of education to their greater numbers. A closer analysis of higher education statistics reveals the different nature of the problem in different socio-cultural and economic contexts. In general, women's enrolments have improved and may even exceed those of men. Moreover, certain countries have clearly made a strong commitment to facilitating the access of women to higher education. As might be expected, the greatest disparities continue to be found in the developing world. (Thematic Debate: "Higher Education and Women: Issues and Perspectives" *Drafted by: UNESCO Secretariat*). In conclusion, what is now required is a common vision of social and human development shared by men and women alike. This vision is based on social justice and accords women their rightful place in decision-making: "The essential task of the 21st century may well be to forge a new partnership between men and women in dealing with the present and in shaping the future of our personal and public agendas." (*A Blueprint to Leadership: 19*). According to this vision, all leaders whether male or female become key agents of change for the creation of a new society. Therefore, they are no longer adversaries but full and equal partners in this important endeavor. The World Conference on Higher Education must clearly articulate the profound desire of women to forge this new social partnership.

II. STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

To promote advocacy concerning the access of women to higher education and their participation in this sector: UNESCO should establish an international observatory on women and Higher Education to monitor their access, participation, and presence in decision-making. International NGOs should undertake a critical review of legal instruments to ascertain effectiveness with regard to higher education. NGOs, specialized or interested in women and higher education, should pursue training to perfect their advocacy skills in the field of gender at international, regional, national and institutional levels. Via NGOs specialized in higher education (e.g. regional rectors' associations and conferences), a *Charter of Commitment to Gender Equality* should be drawn up for signature by institutional leaders. UNESCO should support initiatives to evaluate and follow-up the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995). These may include symposia and regional activities and a special meeting should be convened in 2000.

To promote the presence of women at the decision-making levels of higher education: Institutions should set up a senior committee to ensure that goals concerning gender equality are attained. Equal Employment Opportunity Offices should be established in universities and higher education institutions to monitor the progress of women academics and administrators (e.g. appointment to chairs, HOD posts, senior management posts etc.). Career orientation offices and graduate placement services should adopt special measures to ensure that women students are fully informed of opportunities and obstacles with regard to gender in different professions. Higher education institutions and NGOs (notably those representing women and students) should make optimal use of role models and pathfinders as a means to inform and advise women students concerning their career choices. Special attention should be given to fields where women are underrepresented (e.g. sciences, engineering)

To promote action research and training: The number of UNESCO Chairs which promote the gender dimension in areas of higher education should be increased. UNESCO and other agencies should set up mobile teams of gender experts able to encourage endogenous capacity building at national and institutional levels. In certain contexts and instances, quota systems may be considered desirable as a means of moving towards full gender equality. A Code of Good Practice in each region should be elaborated to illustrate the promotion of gender equality across different cultural contexts. NGOs specialized in higher education and women should run extensive training sessions for students and recent graduates, both men and women, on feminine leadership with a view to creating a more human society. The principle of Lifelong Learning for women should be strongly supported and appropriate measures adopted to permit them to continue their studies, to re-enter the workforce and to harmonize their professional and personal responsibilities. Country's enrolments in higher education (i.e. both post-secondary education for the 18-24 year old age groups and mature students) should reflect targeted maintenance or increase in the number of women enrolled: e.g. maintenance of 50% or more in countries where this is the case; a target of 20-30% increase in countries where the enrolment of women is low. University chairs, professorships and head of department posts should be filled by men and women on an equal basis. As many women now hold the required qualifications, targets to regularly increase their appointments until the 50% figure is reached should be established. This may involve the creation of new posts. Ideally, 50% of all rectors/vice-chancellors should be women. In reality, statistics show that, on average, only 5-7% of rector/VC posts are occupied by women. Institutions should set a policy to increase this figure by 25% per year till 50% is reached. A policy of alternation may be useful in this instance. 50% of the members of higher education governing bodies (e.g. university senates, national councils etc) should be women. Targets to increase their

presence on a regular basis till the 50% is reached should be set. In certain cultural contexts, stronger efforts are required to avoid the exclusion of women from acceding to and participating in higher education. Such exclusion denies women the right to contribute to sustainable social and human development.

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