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## Odyssey of Education in Kashmir and the Emergence of English Language

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The valley of Kashmir has its ancient history and civilization. As Biscoe (2005: 67) confessed “Kashmir fortunately possesses an ancient history and a civilization more ancient than our own”. The land of the valley is very fertile and was known as seat of learning in the past. In fact, scholars came from different parts of the world in order to acquire knowledge from the ancient Kashmiri teachers and scholars.

The history of the valley is divided into different periods – the first period was of Hindu rulers, the second was of Buddhism, the third was of Muslim rulers, the fourth was of Mughal rulers, the fifth was of Pathans and the sixth was of Dogra rulers. From the very first period, the valley was known for its Sanskrit learning. Sanskrit was the then court language and flourished in the valley like anything. Students and scholars of this language came from different parts of India to the valley to study under the great Sanskrit- scholars.

Kashmir has been the home of Sanskrit learning and from this small valley have issued masterpieces of history, poetry, romance, fable and philosophy. Kashmiris are proud and justly proud of the literary glories of their land. For centuries it (Kashmir) was the home of the greatest Sanskrit Scholars and at least one great Indian religion, Saivism, has found some of its most eloquent teachers on the banks of the Vitasta. Some of the greatest Sanskrit poets were born and wrote in the valley, and from it has issued in the Sanskrit language a world – famous collections of folk- lore.

(Grierson, vol-II, part 2, 21)

The Sanskrit period of Kashmir has produced a number of dramatists and poets who were the masters of this ancient language. They wrote anthologies, mythological poems, essays, fiction, epics and dramas in Sanskrit. About a famous poet of the eighth century, A.D. Sankuka, Bamzai writes:

Sankuka who composed a historical poem called *Bhuvanabhyudaya* depicting the fierce battle for ascendancy between the brothers Mamma and Utpala, the maternal uncles of Cipattajayapida, in which the flow of the Vitasta was held up by the floating corpses of the warriors falling in the battle-field.

(Bamzai 1962: 254)

Abhinavagupta, a great scholar of Sanskrit of the tenth century A.D, was well versed in metaphysics, poetry and aesthetics. He was known for his famous work, *Tantraloka* and besides, he wrote *Abhinavabharati* and *Locana* on aesthetics. Kalhana, the world famous historian of Kashmir wrote, *Rajatarangini* about which Bamzai writes, “Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini* occupies a unique position as the only work on history in Sanskrit with a scientific approach of modern historians” (Bamzai 1965: 259).

During Asoka’s age, Buddhism flourished in the valley. In fact, it was through Kashmir that Buddhism spread to Ladakh and Tibet. Smrityakara Siddha, one of the eight main scholars of famous Buddhist Vihara, Vikramshila, was a Kashmiri. Dharmottaracaraya, a great Kashmiri scholar and Buddhist logician of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D., composed four works on logic and wrote two commentaries on the two works of *Darmakriti*. The *Sarvastivad* school of Buddhism not only flourished in Kashmir but also became the principal seat where its doctrine was taught in its

purity and developed into an elaborate system known as *vaibhasikas*. The composition of *vaibhasikas sastras* in Kashmir indicates that Kashmir grew up to be an academic centre attracting scholars and pilgrims from distant lands who studied the Buddhist texts at the feet of the learned scholars of the valley. *Mihirkula* (Mihirula), a cruel king of Kashmir in the sixth century A. D. destroyed Buddhist *Viharas*, *Chaityas*, *Mathas* etc, and killed Buddhists mercilessly. Thereafter Buddhism in Kashmir started decaying.

Buddhism was replaced by Islam. Many historians believed that Islam came to Kashmir in 1305 with the Tatar invasion. But there are historians who state that Islam came to Kashmir with the advent of Bulbul Shah in the second decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The first Muslim ruler of Kashmir was Sultan Sadr-ud-Din (originally Renchan Shah a Hindu ruler) a contemporary of Edward III of England. The Muslim period is believed to be a glorious period in the field of education. During this period Persian language flourished in the valley due to the presence of Sadatas and Sayedds who came to Kashmir from Central Asia for the purpose of proselytization. With the result Persian language became the language of court. New *maktabs* (Arabic word for elementary school) and *patshals* (Hindi word for elementary school) were opened where Persian and Sanskrit were taught. Islam came with the message that seeking knowledge is the obligation upon every single Muslim. This message created a desire of learning among the followers of this new universal faith. In this regard, a college was built by Sultan Qutub-Ud- Din at Qutubdinpora near Aali Kadal, Srinagar and it was running till the establishment of the Sikh rule. This college produced great scholars and poets like, Mulla Tahir Ghani Ashai (Ghani Kashmiri) a very famous Persian poet, Mohammad Zaman Nafi, a historian and the younger brother of Ghani, Qasim Tirmazi and Mulla Muhammad Kaosa.

Under the glorious reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1422-74) there was a tremendous progress in the field of education in the valley. He established a university at Nowshera, which was the symbol of his love for learning. Regarding the contribution rendered by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin in the field of education, Sufi writes:

Zain-ul-Abidin spent huge sums on the collection of a library for his University. He sent out agents to different parts of the world to secure books and manuscripts for his library which is said to have vied with the leading libraries of the time in central Asia and Persia and existed for about a century till the days of Sultan Fateh Shah.

(Sufi 1930: 181)

He also established colleges at Zainagir and Islamabad (Anantnag). Bamzai writes:

Zain-ul-Abidin's love for letters is well known in Kashmir. He realized that learning, for which Kashmir was noted from the earliest times, needed to be encouraged so that the land of Sarda might again shine forth as the fountain of knowledge and learning. For this purpose he established numerous schools, colleges and a residential university. His interest in the intellectual growth and development of his subjects was keen and unflagging and he extended his patronage to scholars in as unstinted a measure as he did to artisans and craftsmen.

(Bamzai 1962: 328)

The Mughal King Akbar conquered Kashmir in 1587. With it the Mughal era started which lasted for almost 166 years (1586-1752). The development in the field of education in the valley gained pace during this rule. During the reign of Jahangir, Darasgah-i-Mulla was established at Gojwara near the Poet's Gardens (Shair Wari) and the institution produced a good number of

scholars. In the reign of Shah Jahan, Madrassa-i- Khwajagan-i-Naqshband was established by Khwaja Khawand Muhammad Naqshbandi at Khwaja Bazar near Jamma Masjid, Srinagar. Prince Dara Shikoh established a school for spiritual learning at Chashma-i-Shahi. In this regard Sufi writes:

Prince Dara Shikoh will be remembered for having established the residential 'School of Sufism' (for kasmah) at the instance of his spiritual tutor Akhund Mulla Muhammad Shah Badakhshani on a spur of the Zebarwan Mountain higher up the Chashma-I Shahi. The building is in now in ruins and is called Pari Mahal (the Fairies' Palace).

(Sufi 1930: 184)

Another educational institution, Madrassa-i-Syed Mansoor came into existence in 1713, under the patronage of Nawab Inayat Khan, Nazim of Kashmir. By and large, the Mughal period proved very fruitful in the field of education. Sheikh Ismail Chisti, Baba Nasib-ud-Din Ghazi and Qazi Abdul Qasim were some great scholars of that period.

The Mughal rule was followed by the Afghan rule (1752-1819). It was an era of obscurity; no significant development was seen in the field of education in the valley. After the decline of Afghan rule, Sikhs conquered the valley in 1819. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first Sikh ruler of Kashmir and like the Afghan era this period too was not good for education.

In early 1846, a war broke-out between the Sikhs and the Britishers in the Punjab. In this battle the British achieved a significant victory and soon they imposed an indemnity on the Sikh government. However, the Sikh rulers were not in a position to pay the sum demanded. Instead, they promised to let the British take over Jammu and Kashmir. Raja Gulab Singh stepped in and agreed to pay the indemnity. Soon after the Britishers became the masters of Kashmir, they sold it to Maharaja Gulab Singh. In this way the creation of Jammu and Kashmir State happened under the Treaty of Amritsar which was signed on 16 March 1846, between the British and Maharaja Gulab Singh. For that Maharaja was asked to pay Rs 75 lakhs, which he did. Poor, helpless and downtrodden Kashmiri people had been sold like slaves by the aliens!

Maharaja Gulab Singh became the first Dogra ruler of Kashmir. He was a warrior and was inclined towards money and land, resulting in great set-back to education. After his death in 1857, his son Maharaja Ranbir Singh became the ruler of Kashmir. His period of rule proved very significant in the field of education. He established a college at Jammu, with a magnificent library and a translation bureau in order to translate vast treasures which were found in various languages at that time. In this regard Bamzai writes:

Maharaja Ranbir Singh was a patron of learning and art. His court attracted learned men from all over India. He gave a donation of one lakh of rupees when the idea of establishing the Punjab University at Lahore was first mooted, and when the university came into existence, he became its first Fellow. He also donated liberally to Sanskrit institutions at Banaras and made provisions from the state for students who studied there. He established several schools, Makhtabs and Patshalas in Jammu and Srinagar and some of the towns in the state. He took personal interest in the progress of education.

(Bamzai 1962: 668-669)

During the reign of Dogras, a foreign language (English) was introduced by the British missionaries in the valley. They established an English-medium School and a hospital at Srinagar, the summer capital of the State. The hospital brought the much needed medical relief to

the people of Kashmir and the school imparted modern education through the new medium - English. The most significant contribution of Christian missionaries in Kashmir was the introduction of English. In the beginning, they faced severe criticism from different quarters of the society for their alleged involvement in spreading Christianity in the valley under the garb of modern education. However, they continued their schools under stiff opposition and, with the passage of time, won the confidence of people which resulted in the large enrollment of children belonging to the elite class of the society. In fact, they did a thorough study of the Kashmiri people which revealed to them that superstition, exploitation, corruption and oppression had robbed the natives of their true nature. Missionaries were determined to give English education to these oppressed people which would rejuvenate their true nature and help them to compete with the rest of the world.

Earlier in 1874, Maharaja Ranbir Singh had established a state school in the valley, where the medium was Sanskrit and Persian. In 1886, the same school became the first government school in the valley where English was taught. The school was affiliated to the Punjab University. In support of the above argument Bamzai (1962: 702), writes that “in 1886 Dr. A. Mitra raised the status of this institution to a regular school introducing English teaching and imparting education according to the University curriculum”.

During the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh, many government schools were established. These schools were affiliated to the University of Punjab and followed the curriculum of this University. Early in 1905, a Hindu college was established at Srinagar by Mrs. Annie Besant. Later this college was handed over to the State Government and named as Sri Pratap College. Another technical college was established in 1913 at Srinagar namely Amar Singh Technical College.

From time to time, the State Government took steps towards the implementation of quality education. In 1915-16 a conference of Education Officers and Headmasters of secondary schools was held under the chairmanship of the then Education Minister. The conference recommended that vernaculars should be the medium of instruction up to class VII and for History and Geography up to Class VIII. However, nothing was said about the English language teaching.

From the very beginning of English education, Muslims did not show a very keen interest in it. There were so many factors responsible for this. Their clergymen made them believe that by studying English they would become Christians (*Kirtani* common parlance). Besides, most of the Muslim population was of artisans who were not much enthusiastic towards the modern education. Another factor was poverty and, above all, the fact is that the State Government was very indifferent towards the education of the Muslim community. However, from the second decade of the nineteenth century, Muslims became conscious about their backwardness. In the meanwhile, many petitions were made by the Muslim representatives to the British and the State Government alleging that the State authorities were indifferent towards the education of Muslims. Further, the Muslim pupils received ill treatment at the hands of Hindu teachers which would keep them away from schools. It is worth mentioning that the question of education of Muslims in the valley caught the attention of other Muslims in India. In this connection an association was formed in the Punjab known as the Muslim Kashmiri Conference. Several schools were established in the valley by this association. In this way the Muslims of the valley became more conscious of their backwardness and started urging the State Government to facilitate them in the field of education. Thus it was under the pressure from the Muslim community that Maharaja Pratap Singh invited Sir. Henry Sharp, the then Educational Commissioner, Government of India in 1916 to suggest some remedies regarding the grievances

of Muslims of the valley. Sir Henry Sharp thoroughly analyzed the grievances of the Muslims of Kashmir and recommended certain measures to facilitate the entry of Muslims in the field of education in the valley. He recommended some scholarships for Muslim students and suggested that the State High School of Srinagar should be entrusted to the care of a Muslim Headmaster. Further, he recommended the establishing of mechanical, electrical, agricultural and medical schools in the valley. However, neither he said anything about the English language teaching nor about the medium of instruction through which education would be imparted.

In 1932, a commission was appointed by Maharaja Hari Singh under the chairmanship of Mr. H. Glancy. The committee suggested literacy of masses to be the main objective of primary course. It also favoured an increase by one year of the secondary course in vernacular schools and at the same time suggested a decrease by one year in the secondary course in Anglo-vernacular schools. Further, the committee suggested that priority should be given to the claims of girls' education in every scheme of expansion. A few higher secondary schools for girls should be established in well-selected areas. However, the Glancy Commission too kept mum regarding the English language teaching.

Another committee was formed by the State Government in 1938, namely the Educational Reorganization Committee, under the chairmanship of K.G.Saiyidain, secretary to education department of Jammu and Kashmir. The Committee recommended that Urdu either in Devanagiri script or in Persian script should be the medium of instruction. Again, nothing was mentioned about the English language teaching in the valley.

### **English Education in Kashmir since 1947**

Under certain unfortunate circumstances, Maharaja Hari Singh signed an accession deal with India on the 26 October 1947 and in this way Jammu and Kashmir became part of India since 1947:

It was on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1947, that the Maharaja Hari Singh signed the instrument of Accession. This instrument gave the 'domain legislature' (later, the Parliament of India) the power to 'make laws for this state' only with respect to matters concerning defence, external affairs, communications and some ancillary matters. There was a proviso that the final disposition of the state of Jammu and Kashmir would be made by the free will of the people, as soon as law and order was restored.

(Deewan, 2004: 96)

The State of Jammu and Kashmir adopted the same pattern of education as that of the rest of India. As mentioned earlier, soon after Independence of India, language controversies arose in non-Hindi speaking areas of India. However, the State of Jammu and Kashmir did not witness any language controversy as Urdu was used as a link language across its three regions --Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

The first Commission after the accession with India was the Educational Reorganization Committee of 1950. It was the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir who appointed the Committee under the chairmanship of A. Kazemi, the then Director of Education in the valley. The recommendations of the Committee regarding the medium of instruction at various levels of education were as under:

- a) At the primary level the medium should be the mother- tongue.
- b) At the secondary level the medium should be the regional language.

- c) And at the university level, English should be the medium and besides that the federal language should be one of the compulsory subjects.

In 1955, the Prime Minister of the State made a policy statement on education. The policy laid emphasis on Kashmiri to be the medium of instruction in the valley and Dogri in Jammu, respectively, for lower primary classes. And, from the higher primary onwards, Urdu was made the medium of instruction either in Devanagiri or in Persian script. Further, the policy suggested that the mother-tongue should be a compulsory subject. However, the policy did not say anything about the teaching of English in the valley.

For the implementation of the Kothari Commission (1966) recommendations, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir appointed an Education Commission under the chairmanship of Bhagwan Sahay in 1972. The Commission laid emphasis on female education. Further, the Commission suggested to initiate the three-year Honors courses at the undergraduate level. It also laid emphasis on programmes of vocationalization and diversification at the secondary and higher secondary levels. It also recommended the teaching of mathematics, science and English.

In the early 1970's, educational institutions were closed due to the mass student agitation in the state. In this regard, in 1974, Bhagwan Sahay, the then Governor of the State, organized a conference in order to tackle the student unrest in the state. For the reformation of the educational system, the conference suggested several measures. Some of the measures are:

- 1) The legacy of English as a medium of instruction should be replaced by the regional language. Simultaneously, with the promotion of mother-tongue.
- 2) Education at the higher level should be selective as per the basis of merit, aptitude and needs of the society. Primary education should be mandatory for all, secondary for those desiring it and higher for the deserving only.
- 3) Examination system should be reformed in order to check the irregular working habits of the students.

However, the conference was hostile regarding the English language when it states that the English as a medium should be given up immediately and, in its place, a regional language should be used.

In 1976, the state Government organized a State-Level Conference under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The Conference was mainly organized in order to implement the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (1968). At the different levels of education, the Conference recommended the adoption of the Three-Language Formula. At the Primary and Secondary stage, the Conference recommended the teaching of Hindi and Urdu. At Secondary stage the conference recommended that English should be taught as a separate subject. Further, the Conference recommended that Urdu should be the medium of instruction at all stages of school education. Moreover, the text books prescribed by the NCERT, whether in Hindi or in English, should be translated into Urdu.

In 1978, a committee was appointed by the State Government under the chairmanship of L. K. Jha, the then Governor of the State. The Committee was formed for the improvement of quality education in the state. The Committee recommended restructuring of college courses. The Committee also recommended introduction of applied courses at the undergraduate level. The Committee recommended job-oriented diploma courses. However, the Committee did not say anything about the teaching of English. In the same year, another Committee was appointed by the State Government under the chairmanship of Badru-din Tayabji. The Committee was

known as Kashmir University Committee. The Committee was mainly constituted to look into the activities of the university. At the undergraduate level, the Committee recommended the introduction of General English course, which would enable the students to use English as a library language. Today, in Jammu and Kashmir, English is a compulsory subject not only at the undergraduate level but also +2.

From time to time committees were constituted by the state Government for the development of education, but nothing was clearly said regarding the English language teaching. However, it is a fact that English which was decades back introduced by the missionaries, today, enjoys a very prestigious position and place in the valley. Further, it is the language of administration, commerce, court and even it continues as the medium of instruction in the educational institutions at all levels except the primary level. Thus, it has essentially become an integral component of education in the State.

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