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# From Madrasas To Modernity: Education, State And Society In Kashmir (1850-1950)

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## Abstract:

Education occupies a pivotal role in both the reproduction of social hierarchies and the organization of material production, rendering it one of the most ideologically charged and institutionally contested arenas of modern life. It functions not merely as a mechanism for sustaining societal equilibrium or enabling economic utility, but also as a critical site where the epistemic contours of 'knowledge' and the normative frameworks of 'truth' are continually constructed and contested. This paper investigates the historical transformation of the educational landscape in Kashmir between the 1850s and 1950—a period marked by intensified colonial entanglements, internal reforms, and shifting social imaginaries. It explores how traditional systems of learning—rooted in religious, oral, and manuscript-based pedagogies—were gradually displaced, restructured, or hybridized under the pressures of modern educational models introduced by Dogra state without and with colonial intervention/ interlocutors. The study foregrounds the tensions between continuity and rupture, examining the challenges posed to the established educational systems and the multifaceted responses they provoked—from resistance and adaptation to assimilation and reform. Drawing upon a wide range of archival records, official reports, personal memoirs, and contemporary writings, the paper seeks to understand this transformation of education in Kashmir and trace how it became a key site through which broader questions of authority, cultural legitimacy, and socio-political transformation were negotiated in modern Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Madrassas, Education, Curriculum, Colonial intervention, Kashmir

## Introduction:

Education, like all forms of production, carries with it not only a politics but also a distinct technology—a set of tools, strategies, and philosophies that shape its everyday practices and long-term objectives. This technology includes the teacher, the space of instruction, the curriculum, pedagogical techniques, and the rituals that govern classroom life. These elements are never neutral; they are always embedded within a broader worldview or philosophy—explicit or tacit—that informs how knowledge is defined, transmitted, and institutionalized. Every historical moment and social formation carries its own philosophy and technology of education, and these are central not only to understanding the past but also to any meaningful project of educational reform. In Kashmir, as in many other parts of the world during the nineteenth century, the growing authority of the colonial and 'modernizing' state began to challenge older, pluralistic structures of educational authority. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, decisions regarding what constituted valid knowledge, how it should be disseminated, and what role education ought to play in shaping the child and reproducing society were not monopolized by any single institution. Instead, they emerged through dispersed

networks of religious, cultural, and local epistemic authority.<sup>1</sup> The intrusion of the modern state into this domain marked a significant rupture, one that this paper seeks to examine in historical depth.

One of the most defining features of the pre-modern educational system in Kashmir was its deep entrenchment within elite social structures and its overwhelmingly patriarchal orientation. Education was not conceived as a universal entitlement but as a privilege circumscribed by class, caste, gender, and religious affiliation. It remained largely the preserve of upper-caste males, sustained by a pedagogy that was steeped in religious orthodoxy and reverence for textual antiquity<sup>2</sup>. As in many traditional societies, the educational set up in Kashmir was embedded in a web of socio-religious authority, where epistemological legitimacy was conferred not through rational critique or scientific scrutiny, but through theological validation and ancestral continuity. This resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's formulation of **cultural capital** and **symbolic power**, wherein education reproduces existing class hierarchies by valorizing elite knowledge systems and marginalizing subaltern ways of knowing<sup>3</sup>.

The disruption of this order was not a uniquely Kashmiri phenomenon but part of a broader global transition, as the rise of modern nation-states and colonial regimes redefined the production and control of knowledge. Across much of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, education became a central apparatus of statecraft. As Michel Foucault, has argued, the modern state deployed a range of disciplinary mechanisms—schools, surveys, censuses—to standardize populations and render them governable<sup>4</sup>. In France, for instance, the state's centralization of education, especially in the decades before 1914, brought about what Max Weber described as a civilizational rupture—a transition not merely from one historical period to another, but to an entirely new mode of being, a reconfiguration of the social order itself<sup>5</sup>

Colonial regimes replicated and radicalized this transformation. The British colonial state in India, including in Kashmir, positioned itself as the sole arbiter of legitimate knowledge, marginalizing indigenous epistemologies and replacing them with standardized curricula designed to produce loyal and administratively useful subjects. This process of epistemic domination aligns with Gayatri Spivak's notion of **epistemic violence**, whereby colonial discourse actively silenced subaltern knowledge systems<sup>6</sup>. As the colonial state displaced the plural and locally rooted philosophies of education, it initiated not just a pedagogical shift but a profound ontological and political reordering of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Shamla Mufti, Myeān Kath: *A Kashmiri Womens's Struggle for Empowerment*(1925-2008),translated , Shafi Shauq, Srinagar, K.P.H, p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Nita Kumar, *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras* , New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000, for a detailed discussion of this perspective, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, as cited in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 485

<sup>6</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

In pre-modern Kashmir, education was deeply embedded in the religious and cultural fabric of society, with both Hindu and Muslim communities aspiring to transmit their respective traditions to future generations. Educational institutions—pathshalas for Hindus and madrasas for Muslims—functioned as vehicles for religious socialization, seeking to cultivate moral discipline and spiritual inheritance rather than critical literacy or civic participation. The goals, curricula, and pedagogical practices of these institutions were overwhelmingly shaped by religious imperatives. Instruction was primarily directed at producing pious individuals grounded in the moral codes and ritual practices of their communities. This moral orientation was reflected in the texts prescribed for study—works such as Karima Nama-i-Haq, Pand Nama, and Sa‘dī’s Gulistān and Būstān were standard, imparting ethical instruction through parables and poetry<sup>7</sup>. In Hindu pathshalas, the curriculum included the four Vedas, Vyakarana (grammar), Mimamsa (philosophy), Nyaya (logic), Dharmashastra, and Mantrashastra, emphasizing scriptural learning and ritual purity<sup>8</sup>. Education, thus, was conceived as a process of moral cultivation within a theologically sanctioned worldview, rather than as a preparation for civic life or social mobility. This historical landscape sets the stage for understanding the disruptions and reconfigurations wrought by modern educational reforms under the pressures of colonial state formation and indigenous critique.

Teaching was considered a specialized activity. It was somewhat different from what was considered as a means of employment or ‘service’ in the middle of nineteenth century. The teacher was not what Krishna Kumar calls ‘meek subordinate of administrative officers’ of the colonial times<sup>9</sup>. He had the sole authority over the selection of the knowledge, and shaped the curriculum on his own. He decided on his own or on the basis of convention what to teach and how to teach. Often, the teacher was just the most religious and knowledgeable person in the community who was allowed to do religious tasks. Some of these jobs were to lead prayers, oversee weddings, circumcisions, funerals, trials, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Education by and large discussed religion, morality, and language. Many of the myths and superstitions that made up the intellectual world were taught to students by the less experienced teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the teacher dominated the whole process of learning, with memory preceding understanding. Quite similar to the report of William D. Arnold- Director of Public instruction Punjab, 1858- that pupils in indigenous schools of Punjab were capable of reading but unable to derive any meaning out of it,<sup>12</sup> a common educated Kashmiri was at best able to read religious texts without grasping their precise contents.<sup>13</sup> In the predominately illiterate society, a small educated section belonging to the religious elite monopolized its system of education. This ecclesiastical elite viewed education primarily

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<sup>7</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *The blazing Chinar: Autobiography*, Tr. M. Amin, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, 2016, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Amar Singh Chohan, *Development of Education in Jammu and Kashmir State: 1846-1947*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1998, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas*, Sage publication, 2005. New Delhi, p.76.

<sup>10</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *The blazing Chinar Autobiography*, p.28.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Roper Lawrence, *The valley of Kashmir*, Srinagar, Chinar Publications, 1992, pp,286,293-294.

<sup>12</sup> Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas*, Sage publication, 2005 New delhi, p.53.

<sup>13</sup> C.E .Tyandale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, London, Seeley Service & Co Limited, 1925, p253

as a means to an end— making money and maintaining their hereditary social distinctions and gentility—while the common folk looked on it as ach gash (light of the eyes). Though the term ach gash signifies the ability to discriminate between right and wrong; however, in local parlance it means the ability to read and write especially for keeping domestic accounts, reading and writing of applications or letters and monitoring the frauds committed by various intermediaries against the illiterate masses.<sup>14</sup>

Education was not the part of the State responsibility but it endowed few land grants to those who imparted education to the children.<sup>15</sup> Majority of the teachers were supported by local community, though some also charged fee to the students. Being entirely a private affair, both the lower schools (maktabas) and higher schools (madrassas) were attached to the mosques and Khanqahas.<sup>16</sup> The social composition of the schools, particularly of the madrasas, was the function of both location and wealth. Families who lived in the cities could easily afford the luxury of education than the agrarian population.<sup>17</sup> This Education as a whole, favoured the male gender and the girls were educationally a disadvantaged group. There were few maktabas or madrasa for girls and a few ulema taught their daughters to read the Quran.<sup>18</sup> Within this broader matrix of epistemic and social control, the traditional educational system in Kashmir offered a curriculum that was profoundly shaped by religious imperatives and moral instruction. At its foundational level, education—particularly through the maktab—was primarily concerned with the spiritual formation of the individual rather than the cultivation of secular or literate competencies. Instruction focused on the rudiments of Islamic faith: students were taught to recite the Qur'an and were given basic training in religious rituals, including how to lead congregational prayers in local mosques. However, this religious training often remained compartmentalized and was not necessarily connected to broader domains of knowledge or social practice. Literacy itself was not always the goal; the emphasis lay in ritual competence and moral discipline<sup>19</sup>.

At the higher level of the madrasa, a more elaborate and codified curriculum was followed, centering on the classical Islamic sciences. Students engaged with tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), hadith (sayings and traditions of the Prophet), fiqh (jurisprudence), and linguistic disciplines such as sarf and nahv (morphology and syntax), primarily in Arabic and Persian. Logic (mantiq), viewed as part of the 'ulum al-aqliyya (rational sciences), was also integrated into the curriculum, reflecting the influence of medieval scholastic traditions in the Islamic world. Texts such as Sa'di's Gulistan and Bustan were widely read for their ethical content, as were the masnavis of Rumi and the lyrical poetry

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<sup>14</sup> Shirin Bakshi, *Social Change in Kashmir with Special Reference to the European Impact(1846-1947)*, unpublished thesis, Department of history, University of Kashmir, p.128.

<sup>15</sup> During the period of the Muslims such grants were known as madad-i-ma'ash grants, the Sikhs and the Dogras named them as Dharmath. For details about Dharmath grants on the eve of foundation of the Jammu and Kashmir State see, *Dastur- ul-Amal- Kashmir*, (Anonymous), pp.189-208.

<sup>16</sup> G.M.D Sufi, *Kashir: A History of Kashmir*, II, Lahore, University of Punjab, 1949 p. 349. C. E. Tyandale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p.253.

<sup>17</sup> The madrasas, it should be noted were mainly located in Srinagar. For instance, in 1872, there were five madrasas and all of them were located in Srinagar, For Details see, Muhammad Yusuf Ganai, *Kashmiris Struggle for Independence(1931-1939)*, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, 2003, p.66.

<sup>18</sup> Matin- Uz-Zaman Khan, *Census of India, 1911, Vol. XX, Kashmir Part-I*, Lucknow : Nuwul Kishore Press, 1912, p.213.

<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *The blazing Chinar: Autobiography*, Tr. M. Amin, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, 2016, p.28.

of Hafiz, Sa'dī, and Jami. These works, rich in allegory and spiritual introspection, underscored a moral worldview grounded in justice, compassion, and humanism.

This system, though limited in scope by contemporary standards, transmitted a deeply ethical and cosmologically integrated view of the world. It aimed to cultivate not only piety but a sense of social obligation and moral rectitude. Nevertheless, as modernity and colonial rule introduced new criteria of knowledge, utility, and institutional organization, this model increasingly came to be seen—especially by reformist and state actors—as insufficient for the emerging needs of society. The disjuncture between traditional moral pedagogy and the demands of a modernizing state would become one of the most contested terrains in Kashmir's educational transformation.

### **State and Education: The Pre-Residency Era**

In contrast to the princely states of Mysore and Baroda, where significant state-led reforms were initiated in the realms of education and public health, the early Dogra rulers of Jammu and Kashmir demonstrated a conspicuous indifference toward educational development<sup>20</sup>. Maharaja Gulab Singh (r. 1846–1857), the founder of the Dogra dynasty, was primarily preoccupied with consolidating his territorial acquisitions in the political aftermath of the Treaty of Amritsar. As a result, little advancement in the field of education can be attributed to his reign<sup>21</sup>. It was under Maharaja Ranbir Singh (r. 1857–1885) that the Dogra state witnessed a more concerted effort toward institutionalizing education, albeit within a traditionalist framework. Ranbir Singh's patronage of education was guided not by a modernizing impulse, but by a desire to reinforce classical Hindu learning and the Brahmanical order. His investments extended beyond the state's borders—for instance, he endowed Sanskrit institutions in Banaras and established a Pathshala at Kashi, reflecting his broader vision of promoting Sanskritic scholarship<sup>22</sup>.

Within Jammu and Kashmir, Ranbir Singh revived and reorganized traditional institutions of learning, particularly those modelled on mathas, ashrams, madrasas, and pathshalas. Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic formed the linguistic pillars of his educational vision, with an emphasis on religious and philosophical instruction<sup>23</sup>. The Raghunath Temple in Jammu, consecrated to Lord Rama, became the nucleus of classical Sanskrit learning under his reign. Notably, the temple complex housed a translation bureau in which a team of pandits and moulvis collaborated to translate a range of philosophical and religious texts across Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Dogri, and Hindi. This initiative reflected both the plural intellectual culture of the time and Ranbir Singh's commitment to textual preservation and dissemination<sup>24</sup>.

Ranbir Singh's flagship institution, the Ranbir Raghunath Pathshala, established in 1857 within the Raghunath Temple premises, was emblematic of this orientation. It attracted scholars and students not only from within the state but also from Punjab, the trans-Sutlej region, and other parts of northern India<sup>25</sup>. The curriculum was expansive by traditional

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<sup>20</sup> For details regarding the nature of Dogra State, See Muhammad Yusuf. Ganai, *Kashmir's Struggle for Independence*, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, Pp.7-19.

<sup>21</sup> Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2003, p.172.

<sup>22</sup> Sukhdev Singh Charak, *Life and times of Maharaja Ranbir Singh*, Jammu, Jay Kay book House, p.240.

<sup>23</sup> Sufi, *Kashir*, vol. II, p.791.

<sup>24</sup> Sufi, *Kashir*, vol. II, p.790

<sup>25</sup> Amar Singh Chohan, *Development of Education in Jammu and Kashmir State: 1846-1947*, New Delhi,

standards: it included the four Vedas, vyākaraṇa (grammar), mīmāṃsā and vedānta (philosophical systems), nyāya (logic), dharmashāstra, mantrashāstra, jyotiṣa (astrology), cikitsā (medicine), and even disciplines such as mathematics and occult sciences. These pathshalas were residential as well as day institutions, sustained through state patronage and donations from the elite, and education was made free, with stipends, books, and boarding facilities provided<sup>26</sup>.

Two institutions of higher learning—one in Jammu and another in Srinagar—were also established during his reign, enrolling 400 and 500 students respectively. These were affiliated with the newly founded University of Punjab, and their syllabi included a blend of classical and modern subjects such as English, law, Persian, Sanskrit, vernaculars, and both Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine<sup>27</sup>. The establishment of the Vidya Vilas Press in Jammu and a Translation Bureau further underlined Ranbir Singh's commitment to providing printed materials for students in their preferred languages.<sup>28</sup> Works on geography, geology, and history were translated into Hindi, Sanskrit, and Persian, while Sanskrit texts in the Sharada script were transcribed into Devanagari<sup>29</sup>.

Despite the institutional expansion and infrastructural investments, Ranbir Singh's educational policy remained narrowly framed by elite, sectarian, and traditionalist priorities. Education under his regime was conceived primarily as a tool for reproducing the cultural capital of the ruling and religious classes. The emphasis on classical Hindu learning, the centrality of Brahmanical institutions, and the neglect of English education and scientific rationalism reveal a conservative orientation that privileged continuity over reform. There is little evidence of modern education—understood as secular, state-administered, and geared toward new professions—emerging in Kashmir during this period. That shift would only begin with the arrival of Christian missionaries and the subsequent entry of colonial pedagogical models into the Valley<sup>30</sup>.

### **Christian Missionary and the Advent of Modern Education in Kashmir**

The reorganization of Kashmir's educational landscape along modern, Western lines began not through state initiative but largely through the interventions of Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. In a region where pre-modern education remained deeply embedded in religious tradition and caste hierarchy, the missionary project represented a significant rupture. The missionaries' initial efforts met with considerable resistance—both from conservative sections of the population and from the Dogra state, which viewed their activities with suspicion<sup>31</sup>. However, this hostility gradually diminished due to the medical and humanitarian services rendered by missionaries in a land frequently ravaged by pestilence, poverty, and inadequate healthcare<sup>32</sup>. Their hospitals, notably those associated with the Church Missionary

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Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1998, p2.

<sup>26</sup> Chohan, *Development of Education in Jammu and Kashmir State: 1846-1947*, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> Report Majmui (Urdu), Government of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1882-83.

<sup>28</sup> S.I Seru, *History and Growth of Education in (Jammu and Kashmir) 1872 A.D to 1973 A.D*, Srinagar, Ali Mohammad & Sons, p.33.

<sup>29</sup> Stein quoted in S. L. Seru, *History and Growth of Education in (Jammu and Kashmir) 1872 A.D to 1973 A.D*, p.33.

<sup>30</sup> Brain Holmes edited, *Education Policy and The Mission Schools: Case Studies of the British Empire*, London, Routledge, 1967, p.152.

<sup>31</sup> Brain Holmes, *Education Policy and The Mission Schools: Case Studies of the British Empire*, p 158

<sup>32</sup> E.D. Tyndale Biscoe, *Fifty Years Against the Stream: The Story of School in Kashmir 1880-1930*, Mysore,

Society (CMS), became key institutions for public welfare, earning trust and goodwill among sections of the local population<sup>33</sup>.

The Church Missionary Society in London sanctioned the establishment of educational institutions in Kashmir in the late 1870s. The turning point came with the arrival of Reverend J. Hinton Knowles in 1880, who initiated a school within the CMS hospital premises in Srinagar<sup>34</sup>. From 1880 to 1883, the school was managed by Reverend J. S. Doxey, and from 1883 to 1894 by Knowles himself, who laid the institutional and pedagogical foundations of Western-style schooling in the Valley<sup>35</sup>. A pivotal moment in the history of Kashmiri education occurred in 1890 when Knowles was joined by C. E. Tyndale Biscoe, whose educational philosophy and leadership would leave a profound and lasting imprint on modern education in Kashmir<sup>36</sup>.

Biscoe's approach diverged sharply from the rote-based, moralistic tradition of indigenous learning. He emphasized physical activity, civic duty, manual labour, and public responsibility as core educational values. His pedagogical method, influenced by Arnoldian muscular Christianity, sought to instill discipline and moral courage rather than mere textual proficiency<sup>37</sup>. Upon taking charge as principal in 1894, Biscoe expanded the CMS school system and remained at its helm for the next five decades. His emphasis on character-building over examination success marked a novel educational ethic in Kashmir, which would produce an emergent generation of young men with a secular and rationalist worldview. As historian Prem Nath Bazaz observed, "an intellectual revolution born in the classrooms of the CMS was slowly and gradually travelling in diverse directions and was imperceptibly bringing the whole society into its vortex."<sup>38</sup>

By the early twentieth century, CMS schools had become key nodes in the production of a new public sphere in Kashmir. The graduates of these institutions went on to serve as teachers, clerks, traders, and civil servants, gradually displacing older forms of elite cultural capital with new norms of knowledge, comportment, and civic identity. In doing so, missionary education not only challenged the pedagogical monopoly of the Brahmanical and Islamic ecclesiastical elites, but also laid the groundwork for the emergence of modern political consciousness in the princely state.

### **Colonial Intervention, Dogra State, and the Institutionalization of Modern Education in Kashmir**

The role of the Dogra state in promoting education during the nineteenth century was, for the most part, characterized by inertia and strategic avoidance. While a few madrasas

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Wesleyan Mission Press, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Rai, Mridu. *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir*. Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> C.E. Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p. 260.

<sup>35</sup> E.D. Tyndale Biscoe, *Fifty Years Against the Stream*, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Knowles, J. Hinton. *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1888.

<sup>37</sup> Biscoe, Tyndale. *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade: A Description of the Beauties of the Country, the Life of the People, and the History of the Mission of the CMS*. London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1922.

<sup>38</sup> Bazaz, Prem Nath. *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2009 [Reprint]. E.D. Tyndale Biscoe, *Fifty Years Against the Stream*, p. 1.

and pathshalas were patronized under state authority, substantive state-led intervention in education was negligible until the late 1880s. The existence of only one state-run middle school as late as 1890 is indicative of the low priority assigned to education<sup>39</sup>. Though this institution had been established in 1874, it was not brought under the modern educational framework until 1885, when the Punjab University curriculum was formally adopted in state schools<sup>40</sup>

The apparent apathy of the Dogra rulers toward modern education stemmed from a combination of political calculation and communal insecurity. As Arthur Brinckman observed in his critical tract *The Wrongs of Cashmere* (1875), the rulers were wary of allowing education that might foster political consciousness among the largely Muslim population:

“The rajah will not allow education there but to blind us sends a few thousand rupees occasionally to our Punjab schools. The Cashmeres are not allowed to improve in any way by the rajah. Keep them grinding for our benefit is the sole thought of their rulers.”<sup>41</sup>

Prem Nath Bazaz corroborated this observation by underlining the regime’s communal anxieties:

“The awareness that they [the rulers] were Hindus and the overwhelming majority of the Kashmiris professed Islam, constantly made them apprehensive; they disliked the idea of making their subjects politically conscious and thought that imparting of education was only an effective way of awakening the people to their political and human rights.”<sup>42</sup>

A discernible shift in the state’s educational outlook occurred after 1889 with the deposition of Maharaja Pratap Singh and the establishment of a British Residency and State Council<sup>43</sup>. Colonial intervention, driven by bureaucratic rationality and political expediency, brought the Kashmir administration increasingly in line with the governance structures of British India<sup>44</sup>. As education became a tool of state centralization, the Dogra regime—under indirect colonial oversight—initiated reforms aimed at standardizing and expanding the modern education system. These included the establishment of an educational bureaucracy, the adoption of the Punjab syllabus, and gradual expansion of schools across the state<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Annual Administration Report of J&K 1891, State archives Srinagar, p.85.

<sup>40</sup> Annual Administrative Report Jammu and Kashmir, 1889-90, State archives Srinagar, p.87.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Brinckman, *Wrongs of Cashmere: A Plea for The Deliverance of that Beautiful Country from the Slavery and Oppression Under Which it is Gone*, London, Thomas Bosworth, 1868, p.24.

<sup>42</sup> Bazaz, Prem Nath. *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2009 [Reprint], p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Annual Administrative Report Jammu and Kashmir, 1889-90, pp.23-26.

<sup>44</sup> Chitralakha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging” Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, p.173

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

By the early twentieth century, Kashmiri Muslim youth educated in Indian universities, especially Aligarh and Lahore, began exerting pressure on the state to democratize educational access<sup>46</sup>. Their advocacy coincided with the declining prestige of traditional systems. The economic basis of pre-modern education—community patronage and religious endowments—began to erode as modern education was increasingly tied to government employment. This transformation, as elsewhere in colonial India, brought education under state control. Teachers, once supported by local communities, became salaried state employees.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, once the State interest in running the schools was established, locally available financial support began to dry up, permitting the State to bring all aspects of School education under its control. Modern education with its codified procedures for the recruitment of the teachers, its elaborate machinery for inspection, and its norms of evaluation for the award of the scholarship and certificates, got entrenched in the State, and a new pedagogical culture emerged in Kashmir<sup>48</sup>

The basic norm of this culture was to treat the prescribed text book as the defacto curriculum, rather than as an aid.<sup>49</sup> The text books were prescribed by the State, and the teachers training institutions worked very hard to make the teacher familiar with it.<sup>50</sup> As Nita Kumar, argues in the context of Banaras that “as single agency colonial State, in progressive bureaucratic stages, wrote a government syllabus that all subjects of the empire were expected to learn”.<sup>51</sup>

In the similar manner in Kashmir too, textbook-based instruction, memorization, and examination-oriented learning became hallmarks of modern schooling. The textbook was no longer an aid to learning but the curriculum itself. They were seen as containing the only knowledge which mattered in the sense of having been approved by the government as the basis of examination.<sup>52</sup> All other forms of knowledge were invalidated by this text book culture. The homogenization of knowledge led to the marginalization of religious and traditional epistemologies. Folklore, oral traditions, crafts, and local histories were excluded from official curricula, rendering vast domains of indigenous knowledge irrelevant to formal education.

.....once the State became the agency for disseminating education, the knowledge that was being diffused became homogenised. It was no longer differentiated for each distinct social group, be it Muslims or Pandits. It also seems that the content of textbooks had no other meaning for the teacher and the student except as material to be mastered, which in the case of most subjects meant memorization for reproduction at the examination. What meaning the lessons in the textbooks could have had for the student was inextricably linked to the urgency to pass in the examination.<sup>53</sup> The text book, therefore, was the curriculum. They were seen as containing the only knowledge which mattered in

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<sup>46</sup> Mirza Shafiq Hussain, Kashmiri Muslamanu ki Siyasi judu jehad Dastawaizat Muntakhab Datawezaat , Srinagar, Sheikh Mohmmad Usmaan & sons, 2015, pp.430-433.

<sup>47</sup> Kumar, Nita. *The Politics of Gender, Community, and Modernities: Essays on Education in India*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Political Department 101/P-102/1907, Jammu State Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Old English Records, F. No. 73/P-49/1911, Jammu State Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Annual Administrative Report, Jammu and Kashmir, 1918-19.

<sup>51</sup> Nita Kumar, *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras*, p.72

<sup>52</sup> Old English Records, F. No. 73/P-49/1911, Jammu State Archives.

<sup>53</sup> C.E. Tyandale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p.256.

the sense of having been approved by the government as the basis of examination.<sup>54</sup> All other forms of knowledge were invalidated by this text book culture.

This transformation also entailed a disciplinary logic rooted in bureaucratic modernity. Teacher recruitment was governed by codified rules; inspection regimes were instituted; scholarship distribution was regularized; and teacher training became formalized. The modern school functioned as a miniature state institution, embedded within the apparatus of colonial governance<sup>55</sup>.

Education now became a ladder to state employment and social mobility. Lord Curzon had observed that in British India, modern education was viewed not as an instrument of cultural refinement but as “the key to employment...the sole stepping stone for every class of the community to higher things.”<sup>56</sup> In Kashmir, too, this perception became entrenched as the modernizing Dogra administration expanded its bureaucracy. English, mathematics, geography, and general knowledge gradually displaced religious instruction. By the 1930s, the content and form of education bore little resemblance to the earlier traditions.

The Dogra state, however, did not fully abandon traditional education in its early phases of reform. Maktabs, madrasas, and pathshalas continued to receive limited patronage, largely to avoid alienating conservative constituencies. Maulvis and Pandits were employed to teach Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit.<sup>57</sup> Yet by the 1930s, under the pressure of modernization and shifting state priorities, this patronage began to wane<sup>58</sup>.

Two educational commissions—the Sharp Commission (1916) and Saiyidain Commission (1938)—were tasked with examining systemic issues such as teacher training, pay disparity, inspection protocols, and communal disparities in education<sup>59</sup>. However, the recommendations of these bodies were seldom implemented<sup>60</sup>.

With the accession of Maharaja Hari Singh in 1925, the state began taking more assertive steps in expanding educational access. New schools were opened in rural areas; existing ones were upgraded; and efforts were made to recruit Muslim teachers in majority-Muslim localities<sup>61</sup>. Within a year of his rule, the number of government and aided institutions in State increased from 782 in 1925 to 961 in 1926 and the number of pupils enrolled in these institutions rose from 47,792 in 1925 to 54,829 in 1926.<sup>65</sup> This was

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<sup>54</sup> Old English Records, F. No. 73/P-49/1911, Jammu State Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898–1920*, Delhi Also, see Curzon, Lord. *Speeches Delivered in India 1898–1900*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.

<sup>57</sup> Bahadur Chandhri Munshi Mohammad Khan, *Census of India, 1921*, Vol. XXII, Kashmir Part-I Report, Lahore: Mufid-i-Am Press, 1922, p. 110. During the period of Mr. Glancy the total number of Arabic teachers was 97, Glancy Commission Report, p10<sup>SEP</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> To quote the *Census of India, 1931*, pp. 261, 262, “The number of these indigenous institutions is on the decline as the people realise the futility of sending their children to such institutions and prefer to send them to state schools where education on modern lines is imparted. In harmony with the public sentiment His Highness Government has sanctioned a new set of rules refusing grant-in-aid to such Maktabs and Pathshalas as lie within a radius of two miles of a Government school”

<sup>59</sup> Glancy Commission Report (1932), Government of Jammu and Kashmir Archives.

<sup>60</sup> See , Mirza Shafiq Hussain, *Kashmiri Muslimanu ki Siyasi Judujehad kay Muntakhab Datawezaat*, pp.90-101.

<sup>61</sup> General Department 1190/Misc 35/1930, Jammu State Archives.

obviously the result of the growing consciousness among the Muslims of Kashmir from the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>62</sup>.

In 1930, the State passed the Compulsory Primary Education Act which emphasized free and compulsory primary education.<sup>63</sup> In 1932, the Act was also applied to the girls of Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramulla, and Sopore.<sup>64</sup> As a result of this act the number of educational institutions witnessed a significant increase. As per the Glancy Commission report (1932), there were 842 Primary schools (inclusive of 35 aided schools) and 59 Middle schools (inclusive of 6 private schools), 76 High schools and two colleges in the whole of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>65</sup> According to the same report in the whole of J& K State, there were 144 girl's schools, of which two were high schools, fourteen middle schools and 128 primary schools.<sup>66</sup>

By 1941, the educational infrastructure had grown to include 1,888 institutions—of which 1,143 were primary schools, 311 middle, 89 secondary, and 3 colleges<sup>67</sup>. Women's education also progressed, albeit slowly: the number of girls' schools rose from 140 in 1931 to 241 in 1941, including 5 high schools, 41 middle schools, and 190 primary schools.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these quantitative improvements, Kashmir remained educationally underdeveloped at the time of independence. Literacy rates hovered around 5%, and much of the rural population remained untouched by formal education. Budgetary allocations for education—though rising from ₹58,610 in 1872–73 to ₹37,52,500 in 1947—remained below 7% of total state revenue<sup>69</sup>. Teachers were often untrained, classes were conducted under trees or in rented structures, and higher education was restricted to a narrow elite<sup>70</sup>. In memoirs and autobiographical accounts of the period, Dogra rule is frequently recalled as one marked by widespread illiteracy and intellectual stagnation<sup>71</sup>.

## Conclusion

A longue durée perspective on the transformation of education in Kashmir reveals a gradual yet profound shift from localized, religiously anchored modes of instruction to a more systematized, state-mediated, and modern educational apparatus. The trajectory, spanning over a century, encapsulates a complex interplay between indigenous traditions, princely priorities, and external interventions. In the early decades under Dogra rule, particularly during the reign of Gulab Singh and his successor Ranbir Singh, education remained marginal to the concerns of the state. The prevailing pedagogical

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<sup>62</sup> For the demands persistently made by the Muslims of Kashmir for their educational advancement See Memorandum submitted by Anjuman-i-Nasratu' l-Islam in 1923, G. H. Khan Freedom Movement in Kashmir 1931-1940, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, p. 106<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Annual Administration Report of J&K, 1940-41, pp.42-43.

<sup>64</sup> File NO: 39/18, Year 1931, Jammu Archives.

<sup>65</sup> See Glancy Commission Report, p. 9

<sup>66</sup> See Glancy Commission Report, p.10.

<sup>67</sup> Ganganath Report (1944), Department of Education, Jammu & Kashmir State.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Education Department Annual Budget Reports (1872–1947), Jammu and Kashmir State Archives.

<sup>70</sup> File no, 141-HR-27-05-1937, His Highness records, State Archives Srinagar.

<sup>71</sup> See autobiographies such as Bazaz's *Inside Kashmir*, and accounts by Sufi, G. M. D. *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir*.

institutions—madrasas and patshalas—functioned within a narrow religious and functional framework, largely insulated from the broader currents of educational reform taking root elsewhere in British India. While Ranbir Singh displayed some interest in promoting Hindu religious learning, such efforts remained limited in scope and intent, underpinned more by sectarian preference than any comprehensive educational vision.

However, the turn of the 20th century marked a decisive departure from this earlier pattern. The confluence of British indirect influence, the persistent engagement of Christian missionaries, and the mobilization of pan-Islamic educational initiatives catalyzed a structural reconfiguration of Kashmir's educational landscape. These agents of change—often working through competing and contradictory logics—undermined the legitimacy of traditional institutions and introduced curricular innovations, pedagogical technologies, and bureaucratic models aligned with the modern state's requirements. In this transitional process, the indigenous systems were not simply displaced but were gradually rendered obsolete, losing their functional and symbolic authority within a new epistemic order.

Thus, the emergence of a modern education system in Kashmir was not the product of a singular reformist agenda but the outcome of layered pressures—colonial, missionary, communal, and administrative. The state's eventual involvement in education, although initially reluctant and minimal, grew in response to these changing dynamics. This culminated in the consolidation of a homogenized educational structure that, while seemingly inevitable in retrospect, was forged through negotiations, resistances, and recalibrations across social and political registers. The educational transformation in Kashmir, therefore, must be understood not merely as a tale of progress or modernization, but as a historically situated process shaped by the interplay of power, identity, and institutional reform.