

School Education in Jammu and Kashmir: Issues and Concerns

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ABSTRACT

Education should remain always in a constant flux. However, the change should come at gross root level rather at surface level. Knowledge market demands that educational issues need deliberations intellectually and publicly rather to put it simply at common sense approach. School education in Jammu and Kashmir has many issues and challenges at gross root level. In this conceptual paper, we have attempted to map out those problems along with suggestions from structural perspective.

Keywords: Social capital, language, text books, administrative loopholes, teacher education

Michael Apple (1995) has beautifully said, "Education is deeply implicated in the culture of politics". Since the formation of new government by PDP-BJP collation in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the education department has invited constant media attention for a varied number of reasons including political ones. It is good to have discussions and deliberations on educational issues but very immoral if the issues and concerns are not dealt professionally. Knowledge market demands that educational issues need deliberations intellectually and publicly rather in simple terms at common sense approach. This paper attempts to map out the issues and problems of school education from structural perspective in order to be acquainted with its gross root position in the state.

Who goes to Govt. Schools?

Schools are powerful institutions in the lives of young people which have tremendous impact on their present and future development (Fieore, 2013; McLaughlin, 2015). The incumbent government seems very much serious about the reformation of Govt. schools but central question that needs to be asked is who goes to these schools? What is their social context? What is their cultural capital? It is the subaltern group of the society whose language, culture and identity is not respected

by the state, forms the main chunk of intake of these schools. Jammu and Kashmir is a sensitive zone, where economic conditions of common people are not robust (Parkas, 2000). Majority of the poor people live in rural arrears and majority of the children enrolled in government schools come from these subaltern groups (Zaidi, 2012). Their home conditions are so worsened that they struggle to get sufficient parental attention and support to boost their academics. A study conducted by UNICEF in 2014 reports that poor children suffer more academically in developing and under developing countries like in India. This report reminds us that children from economically humble backgrounds perform lower than their peers from more advantageous backgrounds in terms of educational outcomes. In other words, report speaks about cultural capital which children of govt. schools have less than their counterparts in private schools. Same is the story about the children of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, the burning issue before the present government is how to make these schools more inclusive. Due to the present mushrooming of private schools on the educational landscape of the state, government schools should provide that type of schooling which will boost the philosophy of social inclusion and equality. But the present scenario is completely different. These

schools have become hub of social inequalities and injustice. This is the primary problem with the public school system which demands immediate attention.

Issue of Medium of Instruction

The long run colonization of India under Britshers has resulted into the colonization of Indian psyche in multiple ways with Jammu and Kashmir remaining no exceptions to it. The colonial rule brought with it the concept of a modern state, a modern economy and a modern education system. However their basic agenda which was germination of ideas still remains elusive to our education system. Their goal was to restrict our education system only for circulation of ideas generated in Europe and West. This made them thrust their medium of instruction on Indians as a result of which India lagged far behind in terms of innovations, creative ideas and novelty. Same holds true for Jammu and Kashmir. The major dilemma within the education system is the medium of instruction. The state also has adopted a colonial medium of instruction at the cost of our own languages and identity. Let me cite an example, in a far flung area of border district Kupwara, many schools are located in *Gujar* and *Phari* speaking areas, the medium of instruction for these schools is obviously English and they are forced to read Kashmir language also at the cost of their own language. A famous Russian psychologist Vgotsky (1978) theorized that the construction of mind takes place in one's mother language. But here story is entirely different. Home language is deferent, official language is different and language of instruction is different thereby presenting an open paradox. This what *Joint Review Mission on Teacher Education in the state of Jammu and Kashmir* (A policy document of MHRD, 2013) has also acknowledged. Our present system evaluates their performance level in a language which has been thrust on them by a power structure like state and obviously the assessment of these children at this level in a foreign language is an academic crime. Now the counter argument for my claim can be simply what about English Medium Schools? Here the explanation is simple. Who goes to these private schools? What is their cultural capital? What is their home environment? Let us be honest, it is not these schools that teach knowledge to children

in contemporary days but it is parental attention which is at back of these students at home. Despite enrolled in private schools, separate coaching is arranged by their parents. They have enough exposure to English language at home in terms of TV, Internet, and Newspapers etc.? But this parental attention, home environment and such type of strong cultural capital is missing to the students from government schools. While parents remain busy toiling hard for the day's bread and butter in economically challenged situations, the academic attention that their children need remains of least concern. In order to bring education back on track, the time has come to advocate for the promotion of education in the mother tongue irrespective of government or private schools but we know it is not practically possible in a country like India. Because we live in time where we are fully dependent on American Knowledge Resources. We are not like German or Chinese whose maximum instruction and research publications are carried on in their mother tongues. Long back a video became viral on social media in Kashmir wherein some school children in Kashmir Valley have dramatized the theme education and role of mother in their own language sonically that I got a new insight from the same after its back to back viewing. This video to me reveals hidden aspects regarding the beauty of mother tongue, how germination of ideas and creativity take place in one's mother tongue. We cannot express such a talent in a foreign language. Therefore, more debate is needed on this issue if our concern for the student's community is genuine.

Development of Text Books

It is a big debate in contemporary era that whose knowledge becomes official and whose knowledge is being ignored (Apple, 1993). In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, this area is of least concern to the government. On one side private schools have enough autonomy in the selection of text books, on other side, government schools are thrust with a curriculum which is prepared by a national body keeping in view national needs and requirements. The irony is that these text books with slight modifications become the base for education in government Schools. Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education (JK BoSE) has been given the task of arranging and

preparing the text books for Govt. Schools up to 12th class. Sorry to say, there is a small division in JK BoSE with limited manpower and mandate which looks after this crucial assignment. This so called “academic section” has always remained a victim of politics. People are usually placed-in on deputation basis who enjoy as academic officers whereas the associated staff within the section are kept busy with other administrative activities of the Board giving them the unnecessary burden to share with which effectively relegates the sections basic ‘academic’ engagement to a lower priority. On other side, State Institute of Education (SIE) which is also stakeholder in state’s school education system has no active role in development of curriculum as BoSE and SIE lack coordination in carrying their activities. Board arranges text books and later SIEs prepare syllabi, but there is practically no coordination. In the past, Jammu and Kashmir used to have separate Text Book Beauru a long ago for the preparation and selection of text books. What were the reasons that led to it’s abolishment is unclear. Perhaps politics not more that. On one side you have Cambridge/Oxford Series to children studying in private schools and on other side an ordinary text books in Govt. Schools? Obviously, there would be differences in the achievement? We cannot equate gold with steel on same lines. Text book issue need serious thought on part of present government. Its preparation is not done in a week’s workshop and that too when academic officers of science discipline are asked to coordinate the preparation of text of social sciences and vice versa. Text book preparation is highly academic process and certainly needs seriously roping in highly acclaimed scholars of the disciplines as every other person are not well versed with it.

Rationalization of Teaching Staff

In the year (2016) the concept of rationalization of teaching staff was introduced in school education department in pursuance to governments New Transfer Policy issued vide order no 622 of Edudated22/12/2015. It is a welcome step but the approach authorities had opted to implement it seems-irrational. Except in few government schools that too of urban areas, there is a dearth of teaching staff especially subject teachers. One will find two to three teachers in a Primary School

which have at least 5 classes with enrollment more than 150 on average. In other words, 25-30 periods per day; so we may think whether 2-3 teachers can do justice with their profession while as in a low paid private school, the situation is entirely different. We were surprised to see the method of rationalization which only takes enrollment aspect in view. Let us cite an example to prove how much the process of rationalization is rational in nature. The appointment of teaching staff in the schools should not be on the basis of enrollment only but first criteria should to know how many classes are functional in a school. For example if we have a school ‘A’ is having 30 students in five different classes as:

School “A” having Enrollment = 30

Sl. No.	Class	Students
1	1 st	5
2	2 nd	7
3	3 rd	8
4	4 th	5
5	5 th	5

Here in every class, if we have at least five subjects and total 25 subjects. By using our common sense, we can figure out how many teachers should be there? Is a single or two teachers sufficient to meet the teaching requirements of this type of school? Now another, example, a school “B” with 50 students having 3 classes.

School “B” having Enrollment = 50

Sl. No.	Class	Students
1	1 st	25
2	2 nd	10
3	3 rd	0
4	4 th	0
5	5 th	15

Here enrollment is more than school “A” but classes are only three it means total 15 subjects have to teach per day as per present practice. Therefore less number of teachers is required as compare to school “A”. So the rationalization of the teaching staff should be done on principle of number of periods, subjects as well as on the principle of enrollment.

This process should be seen more from inclusive approach rather than administrative one.

Dual Policy of the State: Why Quality Parameters only for Private institutions?

Dual policy of the state is another basic structural as well as legal problem which has created problems in the state's school education department. Let us cite a concrete example to substantiate my argument. The state government has notified Jammu and Kashmir School Education Rules, 2010 vide SRO 123 dated 18/3/2010 which has paved way for state to use its education system as vote bank and create mess in the system. Clause 3 of the SRO reads like "for the enlargement of access to elementary education, state shall open primary and upper primary schools within a reasonable distance from each other". Now see the double standard of the state, rest of SRO deals with the conditions and parameters for establishing the private schools. Only one clause of the SRO that too with few flexible and ambiguous lines deals about opening and functioning of Govt. schools while the rest of the clause deals with the standards and norms required for private schools. The parameters are so sound that any one after reading this SRO can envisage who is the responsible for mess in the Govt. Schools? A number of questions arise here? Why are not same norms and standards applied for Govt. Schools? Why has government given free hand to MLAs (Members of Legislative Assembly) or officer even at ground level to establish a school effortlessly? Why has state kept flexible options and given legally free hand to authorities as and when they wish to establish schools? Why is state not intending to have same quality in its own schools? Why has state been bothered about the quality of private Schools only? Why state wants to have good infrastructure, good library, good staff strength NOCs (No Objection Certificates) from different department, high quality furniture and other quality bench marks for private schools only? Why state is so flexible in running its own schools from cow sheds and open air classes without having basic infrastructure? Why has state kept its own schools legally free from these bench marks? These questions are sufficient to argue that it is the state that creates mess in the education system. Government needs to change this dual policy forthwith to relieve government schools

from suffering incessantly. One Education Minister cannot change the system overnight. Authorities have to bring the structural changes in the system by making new laws and rules which will be inclusive rather exclusive.

Right to Education: Still a Dream

As discussed above, the acts and SRO of the state which pertains to education are means of inequality and social exclusion in this sector. The height of sluggishness is that Jammu and Kashmir is yet to pass its Right to Education Act as central RTE 2009 is not directly applicable to state due to states' own constitutional requirements. The current education act is in no way an alternative or substitute of the RTE 2009. Why state is silent on this act? In previous regime, under the chairpersonship of Prof. Faridah Abdullah Kahn, Department of Education, Jammia Millia Islami, New Delhi, few committees were constituted but nothing has materialized practically on ground. Thus, time demands that state should enact its own RTE act on the lines of RTE 2009 so that right to education is guaranteed legally even though there is a provision for free and compulsory education in the present education act (2002) as RTE 2009 is more than that. State has a chance to prepare a sound RTE Act on the ground experiences of RTE 2009 during its implemented period.

Administrative Loopholes

The school education is undoubtedly one of the largest departments under J&K government but the same is administratively so poor that one can take it as nothing more than a transfer industry and GP fund office. There are various loopholes in the administrative setup of this department for which government is least bothered about. Let us first talk about Director School Education's office. This office has turned into a post office which works to just circulate the orders of civil secretariat to Chief Education Officers (CEOs). On other side, in the age of e-governance, this office has become second Account General's office of the state where hundreds of GP fund cases on routine basis are unnecessary to get signed by Director, the work that can be otherwise delegated to a CEO at district level. Director by designation is *Director* but practically his office seems directionless. She/he lacks powers to issue directions in any case including academic ones

on his own least of even a study leave to any of his/her subordinates. For every matter, he has to refer files to his Commissioner Secretary's office. His/her role just seems to adjudicate the transfers of lecturers and masters that too on the recommendations of politicians. Question is what role a Director has for the academic growth of the department? System is so defective that he/she always has to say "Yes Boss" and lacks powers to put his/her innovations and novelty in this improve the department. This type of administrative setup works as an obstacle towards the reforming the education department. Therefore, government should decentralize the power structure and delegate more powers to Chief Education Officers (CEOs) at district level so that a Director's time is not wasted in signing needless files. On one side, Government advocates for de-centralization of powers while on the other we want to keep everything in the hand of *babus*. This is a big paradox. Similarly at secretariat level, the picture is not so good as well. Even there it takes much time for a file even to move from one table to another due to various reasons including shortage of human resource and space for carrying out the official business. Only files with high voltage become priority for official business. Commissioner Secretary too has to send a larger number of files to the Minister for approval even if it is just a matter of transfer also. Therefore this type of rigid administration will never bring education back on track. It is an all time consuming process. In the present government also, there are a number of educational zones without Zonal Education Officers (ZEOs) and various higher secondary schools without Principals with some people delegated additional charges delegated to run the system. The department lacks an institutionalized mechanism for simple file tracing work. Even in secretariat if a file goes missing, one has to work ourselves to locate the same. Our suggestion to government is to make at least a commissioner's office e-governance enabled so as to improve its functioning. Traditional system of official transactions needs reformation especially in school education which has a large chunk of human resource at its disposal. Until the government does not initiate administrative overhauling of this department, it will continue to a hub of General Provident fund cases and transfer matters. School education is the only department where dominance of *In charge culture system prevails*.

ZEOs/Principals/Lecturers/Non-Teaching staff runs through In Charge positions. The promotions and confirmations did happen on time. All is that state is itself confused. When department has such loop holes, surely the health of its schools can be imagined. Good administration will ensure smooth functioning of schools.

Dearth of Non-Teaching Staff

Since, the inception of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Jammu and Kashmir, there has been a steady increase of government schools. But the strength of non-teaching staff is same as it was before. No new educational zones were established. ZEO offices, as we have observed at a number of places, are so overburdened that teachers have been deputed to carry on the official business. Until a sufficient number of posts for non-teaching staff are created in the school education, there will be poor work culture and the smooth functioning of offices will remain elusive.

Conditions of SIEs/DIETs

The SIEs have important position in the school education of the state. But sorry to say the academic health of these institutions is also not optimum. These institutions have also become victim of politics. There is no specific teacher cadre or separate appointments for SIE. Anybody working as 10+2 Lecturer in the department can become a teacher educator in SIE despite what will be his/her basic discipline, subject he/she has a strong political push. SIE/DIETS lack good faculty. On other side, the Heads of these institutions are not so authoritative that can initiate any god practice on their own. For most of the things, they have to submit proposals to Director which unnecessarily wastes the time of institution. There is practically no coordination between SIEs and BoSE. Even in crucial assignments like curriculum development, the SIEs are being ignored. These institutions also face financial limitations as a result of which they are unable to widen their activities at micro level. The story of DIETs is not different from SIEs.

Status/Service Conditions of Teaching Staff

In every society, teachers have always enjoyed a good status. Unfortunately in Indian society, the status of teachers is downgrading day by day.

We need to respect our teachers irrespective of their backgrounds so that the teaching profession becomes more attractive for everyone. Instead of disappointing the teachers unnecessarily, state should create such service conditions that will attract the best of talents. The time demands to develop a system that will not make teachers suffer from stagnation. Why should teachers wait for a lecture or master grade (PGTT) post to get vacant for their promotions? Cannot a two tier system be adopted by school education department for promotions as is done in universities as one by career advancement and another by open competition? Cannot a mechanism be designed wherein a teacher becomes master grade and Lecturer by virtue of seniority and qualifications? Cannot the master grade and lecturers post be put for open competition for in-service teachers? In order to make our education system more robust, there is a need to improve the service conditions of teachers. We have to design mechanism for the creation of subject teachers that will also create promotion avenues. We should encourage teachers to improve their educational qualifications and organize orientation and refresher courses regularly for their academic and professional growth.

Involvement of Civil Society

Education has not always been a baby of state(s). Missionaries and religious organizations have worked more for the betterment of education than states across the globe. In a country like India, many civil society groups and NGOs are working on voluntary basis for the betterment of education. But in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, this form of civic sense has not developed yet. We try to get everything from state. We all are aware about the miserable conditions of the government schools in terms of infrastructure and class room requirements. Teacher unions/organizations should think to donate at least one or two day's salary every year for the development of school infrastructure and teaching learning material on voluntary basis. We hope this huge amount of money if collected and utilized properly can reshape the scenario of these schools. There is a need for working together in such way that the subaltern groups that come to these schools in no way feel any inferiority complex. Education always needs support from civil society.

Let us not put education purely at the mercy of state because of the fact that in India, the state has been alarmingly making drastic cuts in the education budget regularly when it should have been doing exactly the opposite of it.

Concluding Remarks

The state should take educational issues very seriously and work professionally. Let there be a separate Jammu and Kashmir State Council for Educational Research and Training as advocated by JRM Report (2013) to work exclusively for school education in terms of curriculum development, text book preparation and human resource development. This council should work independently on the analogy of NCERT and NUEPA and should act as advisory council for the state on the affairs of school education. This council should have a learned faculty and sufficient budgetary provisions. Similarly, the infrastructure in government schools should get first priority. There should be separate funds for teaching learning material which is lacking since last two years. Creation of subject specific teaching positions is a long pending issue in the school education department of the state. The basic qualification for general line teacher is still an issue in the state which requires immediate attention. That is what Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), Government of India have also noticed in the 8th Teacher Education Appraisal Board (TEAB) meeting held on 28 March 2014 at New Delhi and the minutes of which were notified vide number No.F.43-3/2014-EE.9 dated 29 April 2014 which reads as:

“Minimum qualification (10+2) is still an issue in the matter of restructuring of teacher educator cadre, the state government was advised to follow the norms of NCTE, even though JK does not come under the purview of NCTE, or devise its own norms on similar lines.”

Jammu and Kashmir has a dearth of mathematics and science teachers. The pass percentage of mathematics at 10th and 12th level is itself alarming. Therefore state should reframe the appointment norms and create subject specific teachers without further delay.

Let there may be separate Director for *Academics* so that Academic side of school education gets

rebirth and a separate Director for *Administration* so that the system does not suffer on administrative lines. A single handed Director cannot run this large system smoothly. SIEs and DIETs need to be restructured in such a way that the manpower deputed in these institutions shall really work for the mandate for which these institutions were established. We should also bring structural change in education system by making government school education more attractive in terms of infrastructure and quality. This is only possible when we bring sound educational laws, acts and rules. We would like to suggest the authorities to study the education system of Finland which is a unique model in the world where teaching profession is highly respected and beauty of it is it has almost no private schooling. Can state dear to bring a bill in the legislature by banning the private schooling in the state to at least up to 8th level and provide a unique model of education to the entire India. If the government can do this, the entire system of education in the state will change. There will be equity as well as equality in the society. The school education will become a mirror of social inclusion. Not only this, the government can generate not less than 10000 job opportunities for the unemployed youth. By doing this the government can bring elite and subaltern groups together on the same table which I believe the state will never allow to happen.

So, let us work together in such a way where the government schools under circumstances lag behind the private schools in terms of infrastructure, educational outcomes and knowledge dissemination.

Sorry to say the current castles of government like model school concept, adoption of schools is not theoretically sound. We need to have a connected approach; one which understands children lives in the surrounding, which can connect schools and stakeholders professionally and can equally link children's lived experiences and professional knowledge. It is only possible when we have connected school as advocated by Colleen McLaughlin (2015).

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