

EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF JAMA'AT-I-ISLAMI IN KASHMIR

Shahid Maqbool

Research Scholar,
Department of History and Culture
Jamia Millia Islamia,
New Delhi, India

Abstract

Education is the backbone for the progress of any community. In the context of Kashmir, modern education was started by Christian Missionaries. However, their schools were mainly established in urban areas. Brahmins were the first to give positive nod to modern education. Muslims predominantly showed initial reluctance due to poverty, propaganda of clergy and cold shoulder of Dogra rulers pertaining to spread of modern education in Muslims. Pirs, however, were the first among Kashmiri Muslims to show positive response to Modern education. For rural poor folk it seemed a farfetched dream till the arrival of Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) on the scene. It goes to the credit of JIJK to furnish modern education along with religious education to the rural and far flung areas, thus, ending the elite monopoly on modern education in Kashmir. The present paper will elaborate and substantiate the very thing with relevant facts.

Key words: Jama'at-i-Islami, Modern Education, Christian Missionaries, Maktabas.

Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) is a living reform cum revivalist organization in Kashmir. Right from its inception in 1945, it is continuing to play its part in the socio-political realms of Kashmir. However, this paper will only focus on its educational role.

It is a well established fact that Kashmir has been the seat of Sanskrit learning and this small valley has "issued master pieces of history, poetry, romance, fable and philosophy." (George Grierson, 241). 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 collection of folklore" (Grierson, 251). Similarly, with the advent of Islam, there was promotion of learning, both Persian and Sanskrit. Under Muslim rule, *Madradas* and *Maktabas* were founded. Sultan Zain ul Abidin founded a University at his capital, *Nau-Shahr*. The Mughal rulers encouraged vocational training in carpet, shawl-making, *paper- mache* and other handicrafts (Ishaq Khan, 160).

However, modern education was started only with the advent of Christian missionaries. The *maktabas* of Srinagar and of other parts of the Valley were generally affiliated to the mosques, where the boys were taught to read Arabic so that they might be able to read the

Quran. Likewise, the Kashmiri Pandits had their schools called *patshalas* where Sanskrit was taught to enable them to read the sacred books (Khan, 161).

The founder of modern schools in Srinagar was J.H. Knowles (Bascoe, 260). However, they were only established in city or towns and didn't cover the rural areas. Besides, majority of the students were from Brahmins only (Khan, 165). Poverty and reactionary clergy and indifferent attitude of state discouraged modern education among the Muslims (Khan, 171). *Pirs*, upper castes in Kashmiri Muslims, were the first to receive the modern education. However, education was beyond the affordable reach of common and poor people residing in rural areas of Kashmir. The situation remained the same till the arrival of Jama'at-i- Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK) on the scene.

Jama'at Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JIJK), is one of the living Islamic Reformist organization operating in the valley since its inception in 1945. Among all of its social work, the most outstanding role has been in the educational sphere. The JIJK felt that it was only through the spread of education and literacy that its message could reach out to the general public, for published literature was its principal means of communication (Kashmiri, 101)

JIJK made private education which so far had been under Christian missionaries completely, affordable even for lower-middle class. Prior to it, two types of schools existed i.e., Government Schools (where quality education was not imparted) and Christian Missionary Schools (who were quite less in number and mainly confined to cities and towns and not in villages, where fee scale was also expensive). Secondly, JIJK helped in spreading quality modern education even to villages. Initially they got devoted teachers. JIJK schools including their *Sabhahi* (morning) and *Shabeenah* (evening) *Darasghas*, where Quranic education was imparted made Quranic education accessible to common masses which so far had been the monopoly of a particular religious group (Kashmiri, 101).

The first Jama'at school was set up at Nawab Bazar in the heart of Srinagar, where the Jama'at's headquarters were then located. At the outset, it just had five students and one teacher (Kashmiri, 101). Text-books developed by the Jama'at-i-Islami Hind were used in the classes. From the First standard itself, the students were taught Arabic, English, Urdu, Mathematics and Islamic Studies (Kashmiri, 101).

Gradually, the number of JIJK schools increased, with units being set up in various parts of Kashmir. Local people joined in the work, often even aiding JIJK to set up the school buildings. According to JIJK official source, "people now started demanding that there should be at least one Jama'at school in every locality, although this dream could not be realized owing to shortage of qualified staff. Instead, efforts were made to set up one such school in every important place" (Kashmiri, 101). In places where it proved difficult to establish regular day schools, the JIJK started *Shabeenah* (evening) and *Sabha* (morning) Schools. The expenses for the schools, including teachers' salaries, were met entirely from the fees collected from the students. Although the teachers were not well-paid, their enthusiasm for the cause for which they were working kept them going. These schools also maintained public libraries, which inculcated reading habits among people. Both modern and Islamic education was imparted (Kashmiri, 101-102; Monthly Azan, 1959). Even some non-Muslim parents, impressed by the high moral standards of these schools, enrolled their children in them rather than sending them to government or other schools (Kashmiri, 102)

Over time, many of the primary schools that the JJK set up grew into middle and higher schools. Separate schools were set up for boys and girls. The girls were taught broadly the same mix of modern and Islamic disciplines as the boys, although they were also made to study Home Science. The staff at the girls' schools was women. To streamline its rapidly expanding educational system, the JJK set up the Islamic Educational and Research Centre at Soura, Srinagar, on a plot of land donated to it by one of its members (Saifuddin, 80).

Official historian of JJK gives a list of some of the schools of JJK, whose students had participated in the three year Conference of JJK held in 1973. Even though the list does not comprise of all schools then established by JJK, but the list surely helps in getting the educational reach of JJK in villages and far flung areas. The list comprises the JJK schools run at different places, like for example at Dewar Inderbud, Lalapora, Sohpora, Takipora at Lolab; Batirgam, Goshi, Trehgam, Shamnag at Kupwara; Darssu at Kralpora; Damah at Veilgam; Chogal, Hanjipat, Wahipora, Magam, Hamahpora, Dangiwachha, Braripora at Handwara; Yaru, Kahru at Langeat; Zalura, Bahrapora, Bommi, Batangu, Dangarpora, Dooru, Sehkak, Doaabgah, Muslimpir, Nichipora, Waag at Sopore; Watrahgam at Rafiabad; Tawheed Ganj, Safapora, Hajan, Ajas at Baramullah; Aarwani, Bijbehara; Bannihal; Panjurah; Aarwani, Shopian; Nawgam, Nawab Bazar, Barbarshah, Tarahbal, Batamatoo, Shaheed Ganj, Barzulla, Kralapora, Rishi Mahala, Nawgam, Safah Kadal, Soura at Srinagar; Chrari Sharief at Budgam; Hanjura, Saalurah, Diyaltham, Salura, Shangas at Islamabad (Anantnag); at Kulgam, etc. (Kashmiri, 104).

The JJK made several representations to the state government to recognize its schools, but the latter repeatedly turned down these requests, apparently because of the ruling National Conference's hostility towards the Jama'at, although educational officers had commended their high standards (Kashmiri, 103-104). Clearly, as the rapid expansion of the Jamaat's schools in Kashmir from the early 1950s suggests, through its provision of formal education, the JJK was responding to an important felt need of the Kashmiri Muslim middle classes, as well as building up a cadre of youth who were expected to go on to carry on the work of the organization in the years to come. By 1975, the Jama'at had succeeded in preparing its own text-books for the schools, now no longer having to depend on books written by others (Kashmiri, 105).

However, in 1975, the government of India under Indira Gandhi, imposed a state of Emergency in the entire country. Among the many organizations to be banned were the Jama'at-i-Islami Hind and the JJK. As a result of the ban, the 125 schools of the JJK, with over 550 teachers (500 male and 50 female) and 21,000 students, were forcibly closed down, being accused of allegedly spreading communal hatred, a charge that JJK leaders strongly denied (313). In addition, the estimated 1000 evening schools of the JJK, in which some 50,000 girls and boys received education, were also banned (Alifuddin Turabi, 72).

With the lifting of the Emergency in 1977, the JJK decided to put the administration of its schools under the control of a separate body, formally independent of it. Thus, it set up the Falah-i-Aam Trust (F.A.T) to co-ordinate the functioning of its schools, to prepare their syllabi and appoint their teachers (Saifuddin, 14). To carry its message to a broader audience, it also now began setting up a number of study circles and libraries in various parts of the state. In 1979 it was reported that the JJK was operating almost two hundred study circles and libraries, with a total stock of books estimated to be above 30,000. Besides, each activist of the JJK had his own stock of books, which were lent out to others (Saifuddin, 65).

Gradually through these means, the JJK managed to establish a firm presence for itself among lecturers and students in colleges in the Kashmir valley. In order to galvanize work among the growing Kashmiri Muslim intelligentsia, it set up the Student wing- *Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba* (The Islamic Union of Students) in 1977 to provide a space for students associated with the JJK to be involved in the affairs of the organization and to co-ordinate preaching and mobilization work among the wider student community. Of particular concern for Jamiat leaders was what was seen as the growing Westernization of the Kashmiri youth, and it sought to combat this with appeals to Islam. Under its first president, Shaikh Tajammul Islam, the Jamiat launched a students' agitation in 1979, inspired by the role of students in the Iranian revolution, demanding compulsory Islamic education for Muslim students of government schools in Kashmir, which the state refused to consider. Later that year, the *Jamiat* organized a large and well-attended convention in Srinagar, in which delegates from Islamic movements from other Muslim countries also participated. In seeking to link up with Islamic students' movements in the rest of the Muslim world, the Jamiat applied for and was granted membership of the Riyadh-based World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and its associate, the International Islamic Federation of Students' Organizations (IIFSO) in 1979 (Birbal Nath, 91).

The next year, the JJK, along with the Jamiat, organized a large international conference in Srinagar on the occasion of the advent of the 15th century of the Islamic calendar. Scores of important foreign delegates, including the *Imam-i-Ka'ba* namely Shaikh Abdullah bin Sabil, the *muezzin* (one who gives a call for prayers) of the Prophet's mosque at Madinah namely Shaikh Qari Khalil, and top government officials from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iran participated. The speakers emphasized the need to promote greater Islamic consciousness among the Muslims of the world, to strengthen the bonds of universal Muslim brotherhood and to struggle against what they called as conspiracies against Islam launched by 'enemies of the faith' (Kashmiri, 353-55).

For the JJK and the Jamiat-ut-Tulba, this seminar, particularly the presence of such key persons from abroad, was important in seeking to establish their claims to represent Islam in the face of other competing groups, such as the custodians of the Sufi shrines. Addressing a press conference at Srinagar in August that year, the president of the Jamiat declared the Indian forces stationed in Kashmir to be an 'army of occupation', stressing that the Kashmiris did not consider themselves Indian. He said that the Jamiat would work to 'create conditions' for an Islamic revolution as in Iran, calling for the establishment of an Islamic state. In 1981, the Jamiat chief was reported to have appealed to the Kashmiri youth to 'throw out' the Indian 'occupiers' and to establish Islamic rule in the state (Nath, 135). However, sensing ideological radicalization on the part of *Islami Jameit Tulba* (which was highly influenced by the success of Iranian revolution), JJK after failing in persuading them to tread a more moderate path, distanced itself from jameit in 1982 (Ghulam Muhammad Bhat).

However, Jama'at schools could not maintain its standards of quality education with the passage of time due to its continued lower fee scale it could not catch industrious, high qualified and dedicated teachers which it had earlier on because the pay scale continued to be low. In the words of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, "With the passage of time, it was the rejected lot from the other school who filled the posts of JJK schools on low pay scale and in the subsequent times Jama'at school felt a real paucity of such teachers who earlier on had been enthusiastic despite low pay" (Geelani).

In an interview with Suhail Ahmad Wani, an ex-student of Noor-ul-Islam, a Jama'at run school at Baramulla, he while speaking on the standard of JJK schools recapitulated his school days and in a disappointed expression recounted that, "despite being taught Arabic up to tenth standard, students of Jama'at schools including me could not get any command on Arabic except knowing few Arabic names of certain objects and JJK schools lagged behind in extra curriculum activities" (Suhail Ahmad Wani).

Further, JJKs' over politicization and Government's rigorous policies against JJK, especially for advocating political Islam, had bad impact on educational system of JJK. Even *Falah-i-Aam Trust* despite an independent organization could not practically maintain its independent character and continued under Jama'at's shadows. JJK could not extend its educational horizon beyond high school education and any concrete policy regarding it is also missing in their official literature.

However, in spite of the above mentioned limitations, we cannot downsize the role of JJK in educational field. No doubt, enormous Government and private schools have sprung in the valley in the present times and Jama'at run schools may not compete with them now. But, none of us can deny the fact that Jama'at schools hold the credit for being the guiding star for making modern cum religious education within the affordable reach of common rural people of Kashmir, thus, ending the elite monopoly on Modern education in Kashmir.

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