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EDUCATION IN KASHMIR: SCENARIO WITHIN DOUBLE LOCKDOWN—COVID-19 & CONFLICT

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Abstract

Jammu and Kashmir being a restive region in Indian union has seen enormous upheavals since 1846 and in particular after 1947. Despite the fact that the States various constituents have been dented, Education has seen and been an area which has been hit the worst and at the same time is an area which has received less attention from State as well as local populace and civil Society. This paper is an attempt to analyse the education Scenario in valley and affects due to conflict which it has suffered. Further and in particular the situation after watering-down of Article 370 and COVID-19 scenario. The situation is peculiar because everywhere else the populace suffered a single blow of COVID-19 but the effects of lockdown by State after 5th August 2019 was unprecedented. The schools remained shut and lifeless for months to come. The examination pattern and school routine got disrupted due to State action which was a shock to the concept of State as provider of basic goods and services and securing Right to Education to millions of children. In order to gauge the impact of States decision in 2019 and the impact of COVID-19 in year 2020, this paper shall highlight and try to give proper understanding of impact of this 'double-lockdown' on Education in Kashmir.

Introduction

Education is the first casualty in Kashmir during unrest and conflict environment be it 2008 uprising or 2010 after the killing of young boy in srinagar. The situation wasn't quite reassuring even during 90's and after that. But the decade to 2000's was much better as politically Kashmir was more peaceful than the earlier decade due to thaw in Indo-Pakistan relations due to humanitarian view of Kashmir by Vajpayee. This shows that political stability of region surely percolates down with better dividends. Educational investments make and breaks the nations. Education along with data is the currency of 21st century. Conflicts aggravate the Good Governance scenario of nations be it in west or war-torn regions of Africa. The need of the hour is to have political stability in these regions and try to ensure that education indicators improve to at least acceptable levels. The world is now a better connected and technologically prudent world than what we witnessed in 19th century. The same is true with Kashmir, a South Asian region ravaged due to conflict between India and Pakistan. The two nations have fought four wars over the region whose annexation is contested by both parties.

Objectives

This paper is rooted in theme around Education in Kashmir particularly after watering down of Article 370 and simultaneously witnessed unleashing of Coronavirus pandemic over it. Education sector witnessed double whammy which was hitherto in a tottering and ailing condition. The main objectives are:

- To gauge the impact of double lockdown on Education in Kashmir after watering down of Article 370 and COVID-19.
- To suggest ways through which state can continue to provide quality education even during conflicts and crises events.

Kashmir Education: Perspective and contextuality

The current educational scenario in Jammu and Kashmir can be better contextualized and understood if we try to glance at the history of conflict in Kashmir. India and Pakistan both have claimed the lands on Jammu and Kashmir in entirety. After the war of 1947-48 large swathes of land have been left with Pakistan which is present day Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir or famously referred to as PoK (Lyon, 2008). The political developments since signing of Instrument of Accession between Government of India and Maharaja of Kashmir was against this backdrop that Pakistan tried to launch guerilla war in order to capture Kashmir (Swami, 2006). The Instrument of Accession gave shape to protection of Kashmiri sovereignty in Indian Constitution in the form of Article 370—which protected larger Autonomy for the region and no changes except few were to be incorporated directly by Union of India. Take over of Sheikh Abdullah as the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir was a short legacy as Nehru didn't feel it good for the larger interests of nation to have two prime Ministers. Hence in 1953, Sheikh Abdullah was jailed till 1964. Bakshi Gh Muhammad took over from Sheikh Abdullah but was soon to be reduced to Chief Ministership after 1964. The gradual ruination and degradation of Article 370 ensured that larger Autonomy which Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed in Indian union withered away with the passage of time. Successive governments played good enough role both in centre and in the erstwhile State. The erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir witnessed huge insurgency backed by Pakistan militias in 1989-1990 which was a dark phase in history of J&K (Jones, 2008). Kashmiri Pandits which formed a sizable chunk of Kashmiri population were forced to leave for Jammu leaving behind their belongings and lands. It is well documented that the rigging of 1989 elections was the main trigger behind insurgency and unraveling of Kashmir in 1990 (Evans, 2000). The phase of 2000-2007 was quite peaceful in Kashmiri history because of thaw in relations after Kargil-war in 1999. Musharaff-Vajpayee personal chemistry worked well in order to ensure peace in valley. The derailment of talks due to fall of Musharaff Government in Pakistan brought the talks to naught. It was again back to zero after Manmohan Singh lost thread of talks and there was no one to talk to in Pakistan. Kashmir again rose up in 2008 and 2010. Hundreds of youth died in protests in 2010. The major crises erupted in 2016 after killing of militant leader Burhan Wani—who was the poster boy of Hizbul Mujahidden and used social media well enough to swell militant recruitment. 2016 again was bloodiest year in Kashmir history due to unprecedented protests (Dhamija, 2017). The 2019 was watershed movement when on 5th August BJP government at centre due to brute majority it enjoyed bulldozed two bills which abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and also for the first time in Indian history transformed a State into Union Territory. 5th August, 2019 move bought the State to standstill. Schools and colleges were closed for year after that. Students lost their academic session and lost track of their studies. The motivation for the government was that after the move Kashmir will be back to normal after a small loss. Idea being that let small loss take place in exchange for stability and order. But the unexpected Coronavirus which first hit Wuhan spread like fire. Indian Government was

bracing for another unprecedented situation not only in Kashmir but whole of India. Kashmir was set in another loss for academics. Students had to face a situation where they never went to school for months. We were witnessing this in an environment bereft of technological makeover in educational system. Kashmir has educational institutions which are not tech-enabled hence suffered huge loss both in terms of finances as well as academics & education.

The ‘double Lock-down’—COVID & Conflict

United Nations documents that due to COVID-19 there have been unprecedented disruptions to education system ever seen in history. It estimates that 1.6 billion students have been impacted in more than 190 countries across the world. The impact has been more in low and lower middle-income countries, disrupting up to 99 % of the population (learners). The document further estimates that some 23.8 million students may drop out due to the impact on economies due to pandemic. Correspondingly, beyond education, the deterioration in education has had and will strive to have profound consequences. Educational facility closures hinder the availability of vital services to families and children, particularly access to healthy food, impair the capacity of several families to work, and raise the risk of abuse targeting girls and women (UN, 2020). The problem exacerbates pre-established inequalities in education by reducing the opportunity for many of the most disadvantaged children, young people and adults to pursue their schooling, such as those living in remote or rural areas, girls, migrants, people with disabilities and forcibly displaced people. Learning declines often continue to spread beyond this century and reverse decades of success, not least in encouraging access to and quality of education for girls and young people. As budgetary tensions escalate and development aid falls under threat, education financing may also pose significant obstacles, exacerbating substantial differences in support for pre-COVID-19 schooling. It is \$148 billion-dollar difference for low and lower middle-income countries. Advancement within the education sector has been stimulated by this crisis. We have seen innovative approaches to promoting consistency of training and education—from radio and TV to take-home packages. Distance learning options have been approaches have been developed to fast feedback from policymakers and stakeholders around the world to encourage consistency of education.

Education and State: The Promises of RTE (Right to Education) and non-traditional Security dimension

The influence of confrontation on the schooling of students is frequently ignored. In these circumstances, schooling can be a durable instrument for achieving post-disaster peace and providing the country with security and normalcy. It is also a way to instill optimism and positive energy, as well as to give young people surrounded by abuse a chance. The deformations it produces are one of the main obstacles in schooling in contexts in conflict. This influenced the academic achievement of students as well as their psycho-social indicators.

Before COVID-19 hit Kashmir was grappling with unprecedented glitches in education sector. Conflict has had a serious impact on education in Kashmir. The COVID-19 attack has reached India and presents a huge threat to its nation's people. When the maiden case was registered in Kerala, India met the jolt of COVID-19 for the very first time on January 31. In the coming months, the numbers rose slowly. The infection was acquired in the initial phases by patients with a history of international travel. As the figures surged, however, local transmitting events still came to the fore. Various instructions to restrict the dissemination of the virus were provided by the government. It included the closure and the cancellation of visas for schools, colleges, and universities.

Although the incidents showed no signs of subsiding, the remainder showed no signs of abating. As a big precautionary measure against the increasing virus, the state-wide lockdown was declared for 21 days on March 24. Though the world continues to tackle the pandemic of coronavirus and the potential economic downturn due to it, Jammu and Kashmir's newly created union territory (UT) has been placed under another lockdown, this time due to the disease. There's really one bright spot in the gloomy cloud this time, nevertheless. Beforehand, the administration was aggressive. Before the occurrence of the pandemic in the UT, it had improved its preparedness efforts (Mohd Saleem et al, 2020). During the initial days the administration started the campaigns under Rashtrya Bal Swasthya Karykram (RBSK) to provide necessary equipment's to schools for sanitization. Students were given necessary skills and training to ensure hygiene and used sanitizers frequently. But all this ended when schools were closed in an unprecedented situation and also because virus was too deadly. The overall infrastructure and preparedness was not cutting edge and should have protected students from virus. Due to lag of enough finances and more a less developed state, COVID-19 was going to impact the lives much faster and deaths could have increased.

In budget 2018-2019 as presented by then Jammu and Kashmir Finance Minister Haseeb Drabu, Rs 2411 Cr were allocated under SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). SSA saw an 11% surge than the revised estimates of 2017-18 (PRS Legislative, 2018). But if we look at the educational scenario in past the budgetary allocations have been very less. After the partition there were 2158 educational institutions in J&K. The budget allocation was 7% of total revenues. After 1948, Kashmir University was established along with an Textbook Advisory Board. The education has been completely free up to higher levels from pre-primary, since 1960's. It is estimated that during that phase there were 5133 primary schools, 559 secondary schools, 1354 middle schools and 19 technical institutes (Ganie & din, 2015). Security scenario should have been better if there is more investment in non-traditional security aspects in Kashmir. The provisions of Right to Education should be broadly interpreted and ensure that education is more than just a Fundamental Right but is given highest level of precedence in spiritual and personality development of human as person. According to Tammana Maqbool Shah (2020), Ethnic wars associated with terrorism pose a significant danger to the health and well-being of children all over the world. It is observed that children take up stones against the state of Jammu and Kashmir to join the controversial freedom movement. The author discusses the perspectives of young children and how in an armed struggle they create meaning for daily life. The development of meaning is a mutual mechanism between the family and the infant, in which children are active meaning builders and therefore active sense-makers. By storytelling and commemorative activities, which influence the minds of adolescents, families mitigate painful memories of military conflict. It advocates for the conceptual factors of the spiritual development of children with a specific emphasis on the current social problems associated with fighting participation.

Conflict, Education and good Stories

After the unprecedented uprising of 2016, it was observed that there were mass promotions in classes 8,9 and 11. This surely impacts the efficiency of students and their performance in competitions. This wasn't a one-off incident but was again reiterated in 2019 and is again in discussion in 2020 (Mannan, 2019). Thus, three bad seasons for education in Kashmir on trot, 2016, 2019 and 2020. This is the mixture of impact on education due to externalities and internal conflicts. One academic session destroyed by the pandemic and others by conflict. Yes, the COVID-19 crises was an 'act of God' but State can prepare in advance for others

and at least should ensure better preparedness because uprisings in Kashmir are quite common so education should have long been linked with technology, web and AI (Artificial Intelligence). Despite being worst hit area Kashmir has seen quite good stories in education as well. It was in 2010 when a young lad from Kashmir qualified and even topped the prestigious Indian Administrative Services. Since then and even before many have qualified in IIT's and went on to lead in various big MNC's of world including Google, Microsoft and Facebook. Even during double lockdown of 2020, Kashmiri students topped JEE exams with 99 percentiles. Still despite these good stories, Literacy levels in Kashmir remain quite low as compared to other States of Union. The competitive edge of students because of conflict has remained quite low among Kashmiri students. Learning has to be a child's overall progression that reaches beyond simple literacy. Even the aim of universal literacy for all cannot be reached in an atmosphere of confrontation. Research findings on the drop-in student success over long summer breaks clearly demonstrate socio-economic inequality (Haris Cooper et al, 1996). Compared with students from higher socio-economic strata, students from historically deprived parts of society do even poorer. These children are at a disadvantage, considering the budgetary limitations, as they are unable to shift money to new learning opportunities. They still may not have human resource resources to aid them in their learning process, in the form of trained parents, peers or other family members. Tuitions is a way to keep up with peers, but it is prohibitive for the weak for whom the opportunity costs of accessing tuitions are quite high (Mannan, 2019). Breaks due to conflict have serious academic performance of children. They induce fatigue, lack of interest and anxiety among children of different age groups.

Education: The main causality and behaviour of children

According to Anton Parlow (2011), who has focused on first phase of insurgency between 1990-1996. He found that in Kashmir, Boys and girls who school going were negatively impacted by insurgency. In Urban areas, during 1990's, girls had 3.5 years less schooling. Quite interestingly, he found out that Secondary education was less impacted. This contradicts the basic logic that if primary education is impacted, secondary education impact is but natural. It is a well-known fact that economic condition of people is negatively impacted in conflicts. Various studies show that if economic condition of people is impacted this has a direct impact on education in those areas/regions (Shemyakina, 2011; Swee, 2009). The number of days lost in a year of actual working impacts the educational hours of children. Jammu and Kashmir has lost a major chunk of working time to strikes and largely to conflicts. According to data compiled by IndiaSpend, J&K has lost 207 working days in 1990; in 2010, 112 days were lost. Again in 2016, 130 days were lost. Prima Facie, 2019 year was lost to conflict and crises management and 2020 was lost to COVID-19 pandemic. This is an unprecedented loss which needs to be utilized through proper channelizing of efforts in the direction of educational attainment for children. The function of schools and government departments was disrupted shortly after the start of the violence in Kashmir. After preliminary glitches due to sporadic strikes, the running of the schools came to a standstill when personnel of all academic institutions, in tandem with employees of all government agencies, went on strike for 73 consecutive days from 14 September to 28 November 1990 to protest human rights abuses. As many as 125 strike calls were given by separatist groups in the year 1990 alone, per the data collected by the J&K Police Crime Department. Between 2016 and 2017, reports show that educational institutions have remained open only for 80 days out of 197 working days (Athar Parvaiz, 2017). It is not always true that because of violence by non – state actors, Educational institutions have been closed, in 2017 it was seen that because of

threat of protest flaring up, District administration would order closure of educational institutions as 'precautionary measure'. Thus, there is an inverse relationship between violence and educational performance in Kashmir. In order to ensure that educational institutions work for sufficient hours/days, peace and stability is must.

Performance of Educational Institutions α 1/ disruption

During the present study, two students responded as saying that after staying away from school for so many years it is better to start and invest in business rather than wait to complete the education. A few responded by saying that it is better to enroll in distance education mode rather than for regular admissions (Interview).

Conclusion

James Wolfenson, President of the World Bank, once noted that 'real' advancements could be differentiated from false innovations by 'a smile on the face of a child.' The value of this very human and profound discovery should not be overlooked. The well-being of children is seen as an integral indicator of both growth and peace work. The well-being of children, rather than quantitative and nuanced metrics, is the most immediate and straightforward indication of the well-being of children for the whole society. Conflicts impact education badly. Like conflicts in Peru, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, Kashmir conflict has also taken a serious toll on education of children and their psychology and preferences in life. The situation was bad before COVID-19 hit Kashmir, Kashmir was grappling with achievement of SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals) and the matters became worse after that. The need of the hour is to increase the spending on Education which should be in double digits of overall GDP of the economy. There is a need to introduce cutting edge technologies and take help from AI (Artificial Intelligence) in order to ensure that students don't lose their academic session because of pandemics or strikes. The Jammu and Kashmir Government along with all stakeholders to the issue should make it a poll promise that educational institutions and management thereof should not be held hostage to political bickering and score-settling. Because the socio-political environment in the Jammu and Kashmir is highly complex, imaginative and inventive strategies must be created by the government to ensure that no child is left behind. However, these ideas will have to adjust to the region's inherent challenges and rapidly shifting complexities. These options may involve a mix of traditional and non-formal teaching methods and collaborating with NGOs to enter local communities, reducing the burden of long-distance commuting by recruiting teachers to teach in their community from within the localities and building satellite schools within walking distance from home. Any of these measures have been successful. portable camel library lends books to nomads in Kenya's North East Province, an insecure and uninhabitable terrain, thereby providing access to information to the most isolated youth. Foregoing is an economic and innovative means of addressing children's needs in tough circumstances and areas. Creativity and innovation are crucial if the children of Kashmir are to have access to continuous education. This needs logistical and financial assistance, new solutions, teacher preparation and above all political will to achieve the targets. It is necessary to reinforce that the history of abuse and mistrust can be disrupted by education concerns and its successful usage. Educational deformations are antithetical to the children's psycho-social, mental and cognitive growth and learning. The effect of violence on schooling and learning should be of critical importance as we struggle to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in schooling. In any situation, especially during times of tension, we need to find ways to give our children a healthy and stable educational experience. Community-building curriculum as part peace education

should involve facts and figures linked to recent militarized aggression. And that will involve implementing methods of crisis mediation and practical communication skills and promoting ethnic awareness and non-violence values. Training for peace-building must be deeply rooted in immediate facts, not in abstract concepts or myths. This suggests that the classroom studies should not be reduced during crises or other pandemic like situations

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