From the earliest times down to the thirteenth century A.D., Kashmiri women enjoyed remarkable freedom, wielded ample powers and discharged their responsibilities. Among the women the members of the royal house-hold particularly those who got the opportunity to exercise the political authority demonstrated profound ability and skill in dealing with subjects of real-politik. In this context the names of Cidda, Suryamati Sughande and the last Hindu ruler, Kota Rani, during the early years 949 A. D. to 1200 A. D. are noteworthy. "Be it as queen or as an ordinary inmate of Harem or as a courtesan, women came frequently in the picture. This position of importance implies that women of at least upper classes received education in diplomacy and state craft.

1. The women of Kashmir "had emerged from domestic into the political stage, were free, owned landed and other immovable property, managed their own estates and even fought on the battle field as generals, and commanders at the head of troops." R. S. Bendit, River of Kings (translation of Kalhana's Rajatarangini with footnotes), Allahabad, 1935, p. XXXIII.


3. Education does not seem to have been common among women of Kashmir in ancient times except among females of upper classes who seem to have been taught by tutors at home. The Hindu scheme of education seems to have been formulated with references to the sons of India only; there seems to have been no place in that scheme for the daughters of India. See F. N. H. Frabhu, Hindu Social Organisation, Bombay, sixth Reprint, 1979, p. 137. However, the women were free to take part in economic activity, religious ceremonies and social festivities. The author of Nilamata Purana says that the women were encouraged to take part in these functions and festivities. Ved Kumar, Nilamata purana, Vol. 1, p. 90, WV 397, 407-408.
Bilhana, the poet laureate, in the last canto of his book *Vikramankadevcharita* says that women of Kashmir spoke Sanskrit and Prakrit fluently. However, the women of lower castes did not have this privilege and they had to content themselves with the vernacular speech but in the later periods Hindu society became less liberal and denied to women the liberties and privileges enjoyed hitherto by them. However, the horrible custom of *sati* and the institution of Devdasi were in vogue.

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4. *Vikramankadeva Charita*, XVII-6, quoted by P. N. K. Bamsal, *op. cit.*, p. 200; Radha Khumad Mukerjee, *Women in Ancient India* (in women of India), New Delhi, 1558, pp. 5-6; The women also participated in philosophical debates and discussions *Sastra* and *Upanisad-sutras* mention how the wife uttered Vedic *mantras* (prayers) as an equal with the husband at the religious ceremonies. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, London, 1954, p. 178; R. S. Pundit, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76.


7. Stein, *Rajaterangini*, V-266, A Hindu woman according to this custom was required to commit self immolation at the death of his husband. *Rajaterangini* gives a number of cases of widows burning themselves at the death of their husband. Ibid., VI-107, 195, VII-103, 461, 380, VIII, 363, V 226-27. "The custom of Sati had come to acquire such universal acceptability and moral sanction in Kashmir that even a great scholar Kalhana could not resist the temptation of praising this inhuman custom of Sati, when he eulogised the devotion of wife on becoming Sati, when her husband was still alive." Ibid., VIII 2334-35.
The advent of Muslim rule towards the middle of fourteenth century did not produce any immediate change in the position of women. Islam brought about a positive change in the system of introducing the right of women to property in her father’s estate. Islam introduced Juristic system which became a common practice among the upper classes in its earlier stages. The women’s right place was considered to be her home and her most sacred duty was obedience to her father, brother and husband. K. M. Paniker thinks that in the middle ages, at least in North India, the seclusion of women had become the rule among the higher classes. He is further of opinion that there is evidence to show that such seclusion at least among kings and nobles, had been practised even in early times. His views are corroborated by A. L. Basham who says that "Kings at any rate, kept their women-folk in seclusion." The detailed instructions of Arthasasthra make it clear that the antepura, or royal harem was closely guarded, and its inmates were not allowed to leave it freely. In Somadeva's Katha-sarasara, (ocean of story) there

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8. The concession of this right gave to Muslim women the feeling of Economic security.


is a remarkable observation by a princess, Ratna Prabha, which reflects the public opinion of the times. She says, "I consider that the strict seclusion of women is a mere custom, or rather a folly, produced by jealousy. It is of no use whatever. Women of good family are guarded by their own virtue as by their only chamberlain. Even God himself can scarcely guard the unchaste;"

Nevertheless it may be admitted that with the establishment and consolidation of Muslim rule in the Valley, women were gradually and increasingly deprived of those rights which they had enjoyed for many centuries. But it could not be denied that Islam conferred great blessing on them. It was the humanistic element in the philosophy of new faith and the liberal outlook of certain Sultans, which saved the women from the horrors of the inhuman practices upheld by the Hindu society. Though, Muslims particularly of

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upper classes has also fallen a prey to the evil custom of Sati.  

The position of women deteriorated further during the Afghan rule. It is said that the custom of early marriage among girls became common during the Afghan rule. "An Afghan would not molest married women, however pretty." So the only remedy to save the person and honour of women was to marry her young.

During the period under review the condition of women was at its low ebb. It was believed that a woman was no more than a sex object designed to give pleasure to men and bear children. She was considered fit only to do domestic chores. A woman could not ask to be educated and as a human being with a distinct individuality she had no place in her family or society. Bereft of all the rights she was just like a dumb driven cattle head.

15. C.H. O. Suri, op. cit., pp. 262-63. The number of Muslim girls buried at one time was no fewer than 4,000 in Rajuri and Bhimber. The Muslim women were buried alive along with their dead husband, Aziz-ul-Jahangiri, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 181.


17. The Afghans used to molest virgins, Fir Ghulam Hasan Khuiheme, Farikh-i-Kashmir, Vol. II, pp. 683-718; Pandit Anand Koul, op. cit., p. 33; Census of India, Kashmir, 1931, p. 294; National Archives of India/Foreign Sec. F. March, 1883, Nos. 86, 12, 977.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid., "It is women who have to give way to men in the streets, it is women who have to fetch and carry water in their heavy earthen pots; it is women who are down continually because they are only women and even the poor madwomen are misused by the filthy bipeds after dark," Biscoo, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 269.
Most strange that the Dogra rulers not only protected but also encouraged the institutions of prostitution. There were two ill-famed centres of prostitution in Kashmir, one at Kashwan and the other was at Maismu in the Srinagar district. The women performing prostitution could not marry to live the life of a respectable person. In 1831, Victor Jacquemont observed that all little girls in Kashmir who showed promise of being pretty were sold and exported to India. According to Robert Chorp, the licence fee for purchase of a girl for this purpose during Ranbir Singh's


22. Ibid.


time was 100 chilkee rupees. The government derived a considerable amount of money from these institutions. Here one could easily infer the sad plight of Kashmiri women. But the Pandit women never formed the ring of prostitutes. Nevertheless the Hindu women too were backward like their Muslim sisters.

The Christian missionaries, no doubt, took up the cause of women emancipation in Kashmir but they received no willing sympathy and welcome from the people. Same was the fate of the Arya Samajists in Kashmir.

Had the Hindu Janga rulers been endowed with intelligence, they would have learnt from the Christian missionaries the ways of uplifting the fallen women over whom destiny had brought them to rule. The government would have formulated plans to provide avenues for the improvement of public health, spreading education and reviving healthy cultural pursuits for women. It could have opened a net work of schools and dispensaries for the moral and physical welfare of the women.


27. See Chapter on Christian Missionaries.

By 1920 there were three Mission schools, a government High School, one Muslim School, three Hindu Middle schools and two Primary Schools for women. But this was like a drop in the sea. In these schools the education imparted was not based on modern lines. By and large the people of Kashmir were not interested in the emancipation of women. Some enlightened patriots realized that without self help there would be no satisfactory progress in the education of women. They made several attempts to open private schools but were not successful. Their work was not easy. Abuses were their common lot and even attempts were made on their lives by fanatical and orthodox Hindus. But the reformers did not run away from the field of social reform and social service.

In 1917, Annie Besant was made the first women President of the Indian National Congress. In the same year she founded the Indian Women's Association in Madras with the help of Margaret Cousins. The aim and the purpose of these patriots was to ameliorate the condition of women.

30. Interview with Mohan Krishen Tikoo on September 15, 1985, at Srinagar.
32. Ibid.
Annie Besant had been keeping herself in constant touch with the developments in the Kashmir Valley, and from time to time advising the local reformers to do something for the emancipation of local women. The local theosophists (the followers of Annie Besant) also received the guidance of Dr. Margaret E. Cousins and her husband Dr. Cousins, who were engaged in tasks of cultural resurgence in India.

Then after pondering over the problem for months, a non-official organisation known as Women’s Welfare Trust was formed. Pandit Shri Kantha Toskhanl, in order to make it a recognised body applied for permission on August 4, 1926, to the government. The association was absolutely non-political and non-sectarian. The government granted permission and in this way Women’s Welfare Trust was organised.

33. Tyndale Biscoe, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, New Delhi, 1971, p. 110; Daughters of the Viteria, op. cit., p. 222. Mrs. Annie Besant was the President of the Theosophical Society. In 1905 she came to Kashmir and founded a Hindu College with the help of Pandit Bala Koul of the Sahib family, in Srinagar. The college was later taken over by state authorities and christened in 1906 as Sri Pratap College.

34. Daughters of the Viteria, op. cit., p. 22. Interview with Mohan Krishen Tikoo, op. cit.

35. Ibid.


37. Ibid.
The object of the Trust was to advance the welfare of the Kashmiri women by imparting to them knowledge, by stimulating home industry among them and by promoting their physical health and well being.

The founding members of the Trust were Shri Kantha Toshkhanl, Aftab Koul Nizamut, Shridhar Koul Dulloo, Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, and Mrs. L. D. Van Gheel Gildemeester. Shri Kantha Toshkhanl was the President of the Trust, Aftab Koul, the soul of the Trust, was its Secretary while Mrs. L. D. Van Gheel was the treasurer of the Trust. After some time other members also joined the Trust. Among them were Travati Mehta (wife of Mr. V. N. Mehta Revenue Minister of the State 1932-1937), Mrs. L. Purbi, (wife of A. N. Purbi, Inspector-General of Customs), R. C. Kek, (who became the Prime Minister of Kashmir in late fforties), Tarachand Hosier (Director Sericulture). Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins could not personally attend

38. Ibid., Daughters of the Vitasta, op. cit., p. 222; S. L. Seru, op. cit., p. 263.
to the work of the Trust because she had been busy with the work of All India Women's Association. However, she was always available for giving advice and timely guidance to the members of the Trust.

Most of the plans formulated by the trustees for the advancement of Kashmiri women related to the education of girls and adult females. It fell to the lot of the Toshakhani and Aftab Koul Nisamet to make the mission of Trust a success.

The Trust made a humble beginning with starting a girl's primary school called Vasanta Girls School, at Kral Khud in Srinagar. The school enrolled five girl students and a teacher to instruct them was appointed. In the same year, i.e., 1926, the Trust opened another school, Kashyapa Girls School, at Karanagar. Both the schools at present have the status of High Schools. The attitude of the parents towards the Trust schools was different than what their attitude was towards the Mission schools and the schools opened

42. Ibid., p. 222.
43. Nagin Bazes, op. cit., p. 33.
44. Interview with P. N. Thassoo, op. cit.
45. Ibid.
by the Arya Samajists. The clarion-call of the Trustees had a deep effect on the people, and in view of conservatism of the people and strictness of purdah observed in Kashmiri houses it was a daring step.

Some educated Pandits like Mohan Krishen Tickoo, Damodhar Bhat, Dina Nath Hanjura and Dina Nath Basan served the cause of women's education. They worked as voluntary teachers in the trust schools.

The Trustees were equally worried about the pitiable condition of the Muslim women, who received attention neither from the government nor from the local Muslim reformers. In 1929 the Trust founded a school exclusively for Muslim girls, at Kralkhun, Habba Kadal and the School was named as Jawahar Middle School. The very idea to have a male teacher for imparting instruction to Muslim girls was startling. There was no dearth of the opponents who poisoned the minds of parents. But the Trustees

46. It seems that the people opposed the Education and programmes of the Mission and the Arya Samajist schools because of the fear that people came to have against these institutions with had come to the Valley from outside.

47. Interview with Mohan Krishen Tickoo, p. Cit.


49. Interview with Rattani Khan, Teachers Kashyapa Girls School on July 6, 1986, at Srinagar, Habba Kadal, Srinagar.
took the bold step and, to the astonishment of many, the Muslim school was no less a success than the Hindu schools. The school enrolled a good number of students on its rolls.

The medium of instruction was Kashmiri in the early classes. Devnagri script was also introduced in Hindu schools. The girls on the school-roll were taught Hindi and Arabic too. The Trust had made a provision for at least one purohit in Hindu schools to teach Hindi. Similar arrangement was made for a Mullah to teach Arabic in Muslim schools. But in the State Schools the medium of instruction was Hindi or Urdu.

With the passage of time the number of Trust schools increased. By 1930-31 there were as many as six primary schools, three middle schools and one High school. Among these, three schools were exclusively for Muslim girls. In 1930, Prem Nath Basas was appointed as Supervisor of the Girls schools. But his association with the Trust did not remain long because he was suspended for making some objectionable speeches. The aim of Basas was to start

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51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p.
53. Ibid., p. 226.
54. Letter from Shri Toshakhami the President of the Sabha to the Prime Minister, *Jammu and Kashmir Archives*, File NO: 121/13 of 1931, Political Department.
a school where both Hindu and Muslim girls could read together so as to encourage a secular ethos. But Basas could not work on the Trust for more than a year, nevertheless, in 1934 such a school was started by the Trust. Gradually as education spread in the community, the Hindu and Muslim affiliations attached with earlier schools were dropped. All schools became Trust schools open to the girls of both the communities.

The Trust next turned its attention to adult education. In summer 1930 a school for adults was opened in the house of Aftab Kaul Nisamet. The school started with three women students, Siddha Lakshmi, Posha Kuji and Radha Mal. Prem Nath Basas was allotted the task of teaching Arithmetic and Domestic sciences to the adults. At first the three ladies were greatly harassed and starded. But they showed courage and carried on patiently. Within four months the roll of the school rose to fifteen and within one year the school had thirty two women on its rolls. In 1931 the school was shifted to a rented house and was named as Jyoti Jadan.

56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
With the passage of time Seva Sadan became an important institution. Qualified and experienced public workers were elected to conduct the affairs of Seva Sadan. Besides, a committee was formed. Mrs. Rameshweri Nehru, a distinguished Congress leader, functioned as the President of the Committee. It served the Kashmiri women in all respects and became a centre for lifting the poor and destitute women from the very low level of existence, by providing them education and training in skills with which they could become self-supporting. So far as their education was concerned they were taught reading, writing and arithmetic in the hope that they could replace the teachers in the trust schools. But this purpose remained unfulfilled. However, many of its products were recruited in government schools and other private teaching institutions. In the Seva Sadan women were also taught handicrafts and tailoring so that they could earn their living themselves.

The Women's Welfare Trust also sponsored a women's League. Where the women held discussions and debates on social evils which existed in the Pandit community. Ranim Dadi Razdan was elected as the President of the League and Devi Koul, wife of Aftab Koul Nizamat

61. Daughters of the Vitasara. op. cit., p. 228.

61a. The first Kashmiri lady who had the honour to give lessons to girls was Jehri. She faced a lot of difficulties but her earnest desire to serve the cause of education she volunteered herself in the school. She was nicknamed as Nekri Master.

62. Ibid.
as its Secretary. Meetings were held which were attended by hundreds of women. This League also arranged dramatic performances and lanternslide shows in pursuit of the aforementioned aims. As a result, of the activities of the League, new ideas and new thinking was planted in the minds of women. This explains why the women in large number responded to the call of Kashyap Bendi in 1931, without any demur.

With the establishment of Maharaja Hari Singh's rule a new era started in the sphere of female education. The first reform which Hari Singh introduced for the welfare of the women was the creation of a separate department in the administration for their education. He also appointed Miss Chawner, an English lady, as the chief inspectress of girls schools to ensure smooth functioning of the schools. Besides, opening of various girls schools, the Maharaja granted liberal grants-in-aid to private institutions where

63. In a meeting held in Srinagar about 800 women attended. Most of the women who managed the Conference were illiterate. Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1931, p. 13.

64. Daughters of the Vitasta, op. cit., p. 228.

65. See Chapter "Yuvak Sabha."


education was imparted to girls. For the Srinagar Girls High School, His Highness sanctioned the post of a Principal.

In 1927, Maharaja Hari Singh founded women's welfare Association, for the achievement of the fourfold objectives: (a) to eradicate illiteracy and to spread education among the women by opening girls schools; (b) to conduct public meetings; (c) to exhibit pictures and to hold cinema shows; (d) to build a park and a gymnasium for recreation of women and children; to liquidate poverty among destitute widows and forlorn women by training them in handicrafts and other arts and to look after the health of women. The Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir started this society with a generous gift of Rs. 10,000 from his privy purse. Besides, the Srinagar Municipality was to pay an annual contribution of Rs. 6,000 towards the Association. Funds were being also raised.

68. Ibid.
69. File No: 1289/26 of 1929, General Department.
73. Ibid.
by means of subscriptions and donations to enable the Association, to meet its requirements. The Minister-in-charge of the Municipalities was to act as the Chairman of the Association. The following were the members of the Association:

- Pt. Som Nath Purohit — President;
- K. S. Mirza — Vice-President;
- Pandit Shanker Koul — Honorary Secretary;
- Pandit Janki Nath Koul — Honorary Treasurer;
- Dr. Miss Hartley — President Health Section;
- Miss Mallinson — President Recreation section;
- Mrs. Stokes — Girls Guide Section; and
- Dr. K. Bhushan.

Pt. Somnath was replaced by Mr. Wakefield as the President of the Association, but Wakefield was soon replaced by Lady Salal as the President of the Association.

The activities of the Association were divided into four sections, each section was controlled by a President, assisted by a Committee.

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74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
The Health Sections

Health section 78 functioned under the supervision of Mr. Miss Hartley. This section was to look after the health of women in all possible ways. Centres were provided for bathing and the washing of clothes at which hot water and soap were made available. The matter of providing trained midwives was taken up by this section. Besides, this section provided the women with other requirements.

The Recreation Section

This section 79 was presided over by Miss Mullinson. The section provided facilities for games and sports. It constructed a purdah garden in Srinagar for the relaxation of women. Maharaja Hari Singh contributed Rs. 30,000 towards this end. 80

The Industrial Section

Mrs. Stockoe was the President of this section. The purpose of this section 81 was to provide facilities to widows and women in indigent circumstances to earn an honest livelihood by doing an


79. Ibid.


honest day labour. Under this section four handicraft centres were opened in Srinagar, where women were trained in spinning, weaving, tailoring, embroidery and other handicrafts. Raw material for these centres was supplied free.

The Educational Section

This section was put under the charge of Professor Bashkhan. This section endeavoured to impart education in the matter of hygiene and sanitation, the care of children and the household. The Association opened a school where six students were admitted in the first instance and a teacher was appointed to teach them. With the passage of time the role of students increased. Consequently, by 1931, the Association had opened eight girls schools and one tutorial service school for adult women with nearly 500 students on the rolls. Besides free education, the girls were provided with stationary items whenever required. Attempts were also made to give vocational training to girls of the upper primary classes so that they might be able to support themselves. The Association also established normal schools for women teachers and a High School for girls.

82. **Ibid.**


There is no doubt in saying that the aims and the objects of women's welfare Trust and women's welfare Association were the same. But the two organizations worked separately. However, later on the women's welfare Association on the suggestion of Professor Hashakhanie utilised its energies in supporting the Trust schools. All the funds earmarked by women's welfare Association for educational purposes were regularly remitted to the trust to effect improvement in its existing schools, and to widen, as far as possible, the sphere of its activities. No doubt the women's welfare Trust received donations from the people but the Trust movement could not have been a success without the generous support of the women's welfare Association.

The work done by the two organizations brought about a healthy change among the women of Kashmir in general and landit women in particular. They realised the benefits of education and gradually came out of seclusion. So great was the impact of the Trust schools, that several private agencies were encouraged to start girls schools in Srinagar. The Trust activities were confined

86. Interview with P. N. Hussain, Op. cit.,
only to Srinagar but the influence of its activities penetrated into the towns and villages. At Anantnag also, the people organized programmes for the emancipation of women. The women’s welfare Association would have done good work in the course of time but the political disturbances which took place in 1931, gave a death blow to the Association. However, it is a matter of common knowledge that at least two schools among the many launched by the women’s Welfare Trust still survive and function in the city of Srinagar.

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88. Interview with Dhamodhar Bhat at Anantnag, on August 20, 1985.

89. One of these schools called Vasant girls high school which was originally situated at Kralkhud has lately been shifted to Shital Nath at Jathu Poon, Srinagar. While the other one named Kashyapa Girls High School continues to flourish at Karen Nagar, Srinagar.