

The Development of Soviet Education in Kazakh SSR (1917-1991)

Zubeer A. Rather* & Darakhshan Abdullah**

Abstract

Experimentation of the Soviet Model of Education in Central Asia has contributed in an enormous way to the development of socio-economic life of Central Asian States in general and Kazakhstan in particular. Why Kazakhstan is particular because its relationship with Russia had been the longest and all-pervading, leading to long-lasting imprints on the Kazakh socio-economic and cultural institutions. Russian rule changed the demographic profile of Kazakh SSR, but along with the task of changing demography, the transformation of socio-economic and cultural fabric through the experimentation of the Soviet model of education cannot be altogether ignored.

The present study intends to investigate the educational development of Kazakhstan throughout the Russian rule along with its underlying causes. The study argues that the educational development in Kazakh SSR was motivated not only to produce favorable conditions for inculcating new values among the younger generation, but to obtain a class of literates or professionals who could help the Union or Republic in economic gains.

Keywords

Nomads, Soviet Education, Russians, Creches, Kindergartens, Technicums

Introduction

In the social sphere, the role of education has always been reckoned. The social up-gradation of a society always comes through new ideas and thoughts which in turn are carried through the channel of education. The case of Central Asia and Kazakhstan as such was not different. Both Czars and Soviets at their level tried best to monopolize education for developing and strengthening their institutions in the region. Though Czars were little interested in the socio-economic improvement, yet they are credited with the introduction of modern education in Kazakhstan. Even though, Central Asia had inherited a rich tradition of education from Arabs and has become famous in the world for its well-developed educational centres. (Mobin Shorish, 1986, p. 340). Kazakhs however could not reap the benefits of Islamic education, particularly in northern parts due to their nomadic character. The semi-nomadic tribes such as Kazakhs and Kirgiz continued to live nomadic life even when the Russians were, literary speaking, ruling them. At first, Czars were reluctant to spread education in Kazakhstan, however, later on they started to develop education and made different experiments in this particular field. Under the Soviets, the development of education viz-à-viz Kazakhstan took new heights.

*Ph.D. Scholar (History), Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, J&K, India. E-mail: ratherzubair@gmail.com

**Associate Professor (History), Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, J&K, India. E-mail: darakhshanabdullah@yahoo.co.in

Development of Education under Czars

Though Czars were reluctant¹ about introducing changes in the socio-cultural set up of Kazakhstan, yet they were convinced that these nomads could be educated by Muslim education rather than by any other form of secular education. So they first introduced Islamic education and Tatars were entrusted to civilize the nomads of the steppe. (Elizabeth E. Bacon, 1966, p. 100). However, later on when Kazakhstan became a full-fledged colony of Russia, this Tatar influence was smelled as a threat to the colonial regime, and as such Tatar influence was abolished.

So for establishing a strong base and to facilitate smooth administrative functioning, an educational policy was formulated by which Russian schools were established in which Christianity was taught along with modern education. Since these schools failed to attract commoners and only a few merchants and nobles sent their children to these institutions, thus, a network of Russo-Native schools that were new for the land was introduced. (Darakhshan Abdullah, 2014, p. 66). In these schools, the Russian language and culture were taught along with Islamic education. These schools developed pro-Russian elite who later on advocated for the adoption of Russian policies. The growth and development of these schools were quite significant in some oblasts like Turgay and Syr-Darya. The following table reflects the growth of these schools in the Syr-Darya oblast.

Table 1: Growth of Russo-Native Schools in Syr-Darya Oblast: From 1884 to 1915

Year	Number of Schools	Number of students
1884	12	254
1900	23	722
1908	34	1354
1911	54	2658
1915	65	3410

Source: Richard A. Pierce. (1960). Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: a study in colonial rule. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 219.

In addition to Russo-Native schools, Kazakh Teachers Training College in 1887 was established (Elizabeth E. Bacon, 1966, pp. 95-101). and steps were also taken for women's education. As a result of colonial initiatives, at least 267 Aul Schools and 157 Russian-Kazakh Schools were established in the Steppe and Semirechie oblast which benefited some 2,000 Kazakhs by 1913. (Gavin Hambly, 1969, p. 222)

The reason for this limited education was the lack of interest shown and the non-availability of extensive funds in spreading modern education.² This limited colonial education policy failed to make much impact in Central Asia and Kazakhstan and one could see that the literacy rate remained very low. In the whole territory of Central Asia,

only 4.2 percent of native men and 0.5 of women were literate. By 1917 only 3 percent of Kazakhs were literate though the general literacy rate was even higher than those of natives which shows that Russian migrants had a comparatively much higher literacy rate. (A. K. Patnaik, 2005, pp. 549-50).

These colonial efforts, though limited, inspired a native group of intellectuals who stood for radical changes in the socio-cultural set up of the people of Central Asia and propagated a movement known as the "Jadid movement."³ The founder of the movement Ismail Bay Gasprinskii (1851-1914) was a Crimean Tatar, who pioneered the idea in the Crimea region in the 1880s. Most of the reformers of this movement came from sedentary areas (like Mahmud Khoja Behbudi from Samarkand, Shaq Khan Tora from Farghana, and Abdul Qadir Shakhuri from Tashkent). The ideas and teachings of these reformers made a profound impact on the whole Central Asian Society including Kazakh intellectuals who got educated from Russian cities.⁴ Taking advantage of western scientific progress along with making religion the basis of indigenous socio-cultural setup, the movement was an attempt to modernize Islamic society as a whole. (A. K. Patnaik, 2005, p. 556). They started a campaign against some of the existing customs of society like dowry, child marriage, polygamy, kalym, etc. (Adeeb Khalid, 1998, p. 98). The most important contribution of the Jadid Movement was witnessed in the development of modern education in Central Asia. They opened up new schools where education was given on modern lines. (Z. R. Vaiduanath, 1967, p. 55). Kazakh intellectuals like Shokan Valikhanov who wrote several scholarly works in Russian and Ibraj Altynsarian played an active role in the development of education and Kazakh language. Abay Kunanbayev who played a vital role in the development of Kazakh literature was generally called its father. (Shirin Akiner, 2002, p. 200). Apart from highlighting social inequalities, the movement advocated women's education to liberate them from old bogus traditions. (Adeeb Khalid, 2006, p. 241). They considered women as the torchbearers for prosperity, and as a result advocated for their moral, educational and intellectual progress. (Adeeb Khalid, 1998, p. 225). The reformers of this movement built several New Method schools,⁵ which instigated traditional institutions like Maktab and Madrasas to reassert the importance of religious education.⁶ Even in nomadic areas, where formal education had not spread earlier, religious schools proliferated along with secular ones. By the first decade of the 20th century, officials recorded 121 Madrasas with 1,800 Kazakh students in the Steppe oblast. (A.K. Patnaik, 2005, pp. 550-551). Besides substantial contribution to the development of the school network, the presence of Russian intellectuals instigated the Kazakh elite to setup local vernaculars like "Qazaqstan," "Ishim-dalasi," "Ayqap" and "Qazakh" in the region. (Adeeb Khalid, 1994, pp. 187-200). Devoting attention first to economic problems, these newspapers gradually turned to political aspects. It criticized the government for its Russification policies and displacement of Kazakhs by Russian colonists. On the other hand, these papers attacked conservative circles of Pan-Islamism, urged military services for Kirghiz and Kazakhs, demanded more schools and transition of nomads to a settled life. (Gavin Hambly, 1969, p. 224). Despite the combined efforts of Russian and Kazakh intellectuals, the literacy rate before October Revolution did not exceed more than 5.8% for men and that of women as 0.8%. (Vishvanath Thakur, 1992, p. 49).

Education under Soviets

The October Revolution and the establishment of Soviet rule ushered a new era in the development of education in Union Republics including Kazakhstan. The Soviet policy of education which was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology regarded education as an essential component of socio-political and economic mobilization. Emphasizing the role of education Lenin wrote, "Our object in the field of school is the same struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, we openly declare that a school outside life, outside politics, is a lie and hypocrisy." (Javid Ashraf, 1978, p. 64). The foundation of the new educational policy was laid between 1917 and 1919 and called for socially non-discriminatory irrespective of caste, class, and sex, free and compulsory education up to the age of 17 years.⁷ The new policy advocated that education should be administered in a decentralized manner under a central authority; provide a pre-school keeping of infants, provide adult literacy and cultural programs and teach materialistic scientific education. Schools for literacy known as ABC Schools, where the medium of instruction was mother tongue, were opened to educate people in general and women in particular. Besides ABC Schools, various establishments like special Women's Clubs, Red Yurts and Red Corners, etc, were established which served as centers of teaching and preaching of Soviet ideology. At first ethnic Russians including communist officials were engaged in organizing the "Red Yurts" expedition who migrated with Kazakh Auls, and used to spread Marxist ideology besides education.

Soviet government encountered strong resistance in the 1920s and 1930s when compulsory and co-education was introduced in Central Asian Republics, where the tradition of segregation of sexes and early marriages prevailed strongly. To emancipate and attract more girls towards education, the decree of 1936 replaced the co-education system, and boys and girls were educated separately and more than 12,000 teachers and literary volunteers were sent to work among the Kazakh population and their main task was the education of women in particular. Such types of extraordinary policies served as a cornerstone for the development of education. As such by 1970, the literacy rate in Kazakhstan reached to climax of 99% from a mere 25.2% in 1926 (Table 2).

Table 2: Literacy Rate in RSFSR and Kazakh SSR (1926-1970)

Year	RSFSR	Kazakh SSR		
		Men	Women	Total
1926	60.9	35.9	14.5	25.2
1939	89.9	91.4	75.8	83.6
1959	98.5	98.8	95.1	96.9
1970	NA	NA	NA	99
% Change 1926-70				292.85

Source: David Fidlon. (1968). A Leap through the centuries. Moscow: Progress Publishers. p. 58; Viktor Kozlov, (1988). The peoples of the Soviet Union. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 155-160.

For the further development of education, besides the infrastructural facilities, the Soviet government provided tuition fees; other facilities like free books, free uni-forms,

and free transportation for attending schools in a nearby town or city⁸.

From 1930 onwards the Soviet Union passed through a new phase of communism based on coercion and oppression. The era was marked by the emergence of Stalin on the political scene. This period was marked by the use of force to lead people to adopt and follow what communism and socialism were meant for. In 1934 efforts were made by the Soviet government to expand and improve the quality of education.⁹ To achieve a rapid increase in the number of schools and students in Kazakhstan and to improve the quality of education, over 13,000 new teachers with middle and higher education were employed in schools, among whom half were Kazakhs. (Martha Brill Olcott, 1995, p. 195). The main motive was not only to produce favorable conditions for inculcating new values among the younger generation but also to gain a much broader base for imparting education to eradicate illiteracy and to obtain a class of literates or professionals who could help the Union or Republic in economic gains.

Structure of Education

The comprehensive and well-implemented Soviet system of education which contributed significantly towards the socio-economic development of Kazakhstan comprised of following stages.

Pre-School

Pre-School education was in the form of Creches (age group of 0-3 years) and Kindergartens (age group of 3-7 years). It was not completely free but parents were required to meet its expenses up to a certain level. (Bejoy Kumar Sinha, 1971, p. 11). The primary goal of Pre-School education was to provide child care to working parents and guaranteeing women's right to work and equality in socio-economic and political spheres which was possible only after letting them free from the responsibility of taking care of children. (Maurrice Bobb, 1943, p. 95). Moreover, the communist regime believed that children must be removed from the influence of family and should be grown under the healthy influence of Communist nurseries and schools. (Saud Joseph, 2003, p. 168).

The growth of pre-school institutions showed a tremendous increase. The total number of Pre-School institutions in Kazakhstan during 1966 was 4,143 attended by 360,167 children which increased to 551,800 in 1970. The number of Kindergartens increased to 8,743 in 1990 and more than half were located in rural areas. (Bejoy K. Sinha, 1971, p. 229; Martha B. Olcott, 1995, p. 315; A. K. Patnaik, 2005, p. 553.)

School Education

The general education in the whole USSR and republics of Central Asia including Kazakhstan was imparted in various types of schools run by the government. These schools consisted of primary schools, first cycle secondary or incomplete secondary (middle schools), and the second cycle secondary or complete secondary. The total number of school years changed from time to time.¹⁰ In 1934 for the first time a uniform system of general education was introduced which consisted of four years of primary education (grades 1-4), three years of incomplete secondary education (grades 5-7), and three years of complete secondary education (grades 8-10). (Aigerim Mynbayeva and

Victoria Pogolian, 2014, p. 150). It was required that all the children in the Soviet Union would get free primary education of the first four grades and were required to study compulsorily for the next three years up to grade seven. The further higher classes of three years were left to the will of children. This was however changed in 1977 when all grades were made compulsory. To improve the years of secondary education, in 1984 one more year was added from 10 to 11. (M. Y. Sharpe, 1978, pp. 35). The eight-year programme (incomplete secondary) provided full-time study while additional years required for complete secondary was achieved either by part-time or full-time study. Most schools provided a complete range of educational classes, but in some rural areas, primary schools existed as separate units. In such cases, children were transferred to the nearest secondary school to complete their education (Ann Sheehy, 1968, p. 147).

The Soviet government made strong efforts to spread education rapidly. Before Revolution, the number of Primary schools was 2,011 which increased to 3,944 by 1927-28 and was further developed during subsequent years. The growing number of primary and secondary schools over the years of Soviet rule is well reflected in table 3.

Table 3: Growth of Primary and Secondary schools (1914-1972)

Date	No. of Schools	No. of Pupil
1914-15	2,011	105,239
1920-21	2,410	144,000
1927-28	3,944	274,000
1932-33	6,869	576,000
1951-52	8,945	1,346,000
1959-60	NA	2,857,000
1971-72	10,101	3,296,000

Source: Ann Sheehy, (1968). Primary and secondary education in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: the current situation. Central Asian Review. 26(2). pp. 148-152; The Europa Year Book, Vol I, 1973, p. 1371.

In 1936, the government employed 12,000 teachers and literary voluntaries, who were sent to Kazakhstan to work among the Kazakh population. This was therefore the most striking feature of the development of education in Kazakhstan as a massive increase in school population was supported by a massive school building programme that was a prerequisite. For this purpose, a large sum from the republic budget was allocated to school construction. For example, in 1930, out of a million roubles, 80% of the sum was spent in Kazakhstan for eradicating illiteracy, (Martha B. Olcott, 1995, p. 196). The number of children attending schools increased enormously in all Republics.¹¹ Equally significant were increases in numbers of students attending universities and places of higher education and likewise in those studying in technical colleges.

Vocational-Technical Schools

One of the most important categories of schools in the Soviet Union were Specialized Secondary Schools commonly known as Technicums or Professional Technical Schools, which was an important feature of the Soviet educational system. (Kenneth R. Witing, 1962, p. 249). These types of schools served as a bridge between School education on one hand and Higher education on the other hand and provided a variety of courses that produced professional cadres in medicine, engineering, agronomy, and veterinary-specializations, etc. (Javid Ashraf, 1978, p. 121). These Vocational Technical institutes tried to encourage and develop the industrial creativity of students and to develop their ability to solve specific problems (C.N. Chakravarti and A. K. Basu, 1987, p. 72).

The technical schools were of two types, short cycle Vocational Schools and Technicums (Polytechnics) or Specialized Schools. After completing Grade 8, some of the students through a mode of entrance examination moved to Vocational or Technical schools, the duration of which was 2 to 4 years depending on the area of specialization. Seventy-five percent (75%) of full-time students of Technicums received stipends of 40 to 60 roubles per month and dormitory accommodation at a nominal fee (Vadin Madish, 1991, p. 231).

The primary objective of Vocational education was to enable children leaving schools to find their place in life by giving them a definite skill in some branch of industry and agriculture. (N. Dzhandid-din, 1959, p. 16). A large number of Vocational schools were set up in Kazakhstan, which was attracted by a huge number of students. For example, in 1950 there were 110 Vocational-Technical Schools which reached 217 by 1996. Moreover, there were 34 technical institutions attended by 6,300 students in 1940 which showed enormous growth like the Vocational schools. In 1969 there were 317 Technical Institutes that imparted education to almost 154,800 students (N. Rutkevich, 1969, p. 12).

Another important fact about the Soviets was that they were much eager to produce technical labour who could add to their national income when employed in industries and mining as a result labourers were given a course of technical training before they were sent down to mines for work. All positions in mines were open to every worker, depending on their willingness to study in technical schools which were free of charge, and were meant to perfect their skill theoretically and practically as well. Under such conditions, they found no complexity in recruiting an essential labour force. (W.P. Coates and Z.K. Coates, 1951, pp. 125-126). After passing out of these institutes some of the students joined industries directly while some continued their studies through part-time means. Thus, the establishment of technical institutions proved to be a successful embodiment of the educational policy of Soviet Kazakhstan.

Higher Education

The Soviet system of higher education consisted of two types of institutions one the University and other Institutions. In a university, several faculties were further divided into Chairs (Departments). (Eric W. Slevers, 2003, p. 259). The curriculum of universities covered a wide range of subjects including mathematics, sciences, social and political

sciences, humanities, and jurisprudence (law schools). Institutions that were professional schools and had a specialization in the fields like electric engineering, civil engineering, medicine, agriculture and foreign studies, art academies, musical conservatories, and some military schools.

In higher educational institutions special care was taken to develop the individual creativity of students and their ability to solve specific problems. The duration of study in higher education varied from 4 to 6 years, where successful completion of 3 years was granted the degree of Aspiruna, which was equal to graduate research degree leading further to a Kandidati or Ph. D degree after a further stay of 2 to 3 years in the institution (Vadin Madish, 1991, pp. 220-232).

The development of higher education was a general policy of the Soviet Union to provide cultural enlightenment to a wide range of the population. Before October Revolution, there were no higher educational institutes in Soviet Kazakhstan, however, after the revolution, they quickly began to appear. In the 1940s, the number of higher educational institutes rose almost up to 20. (W.P. Coates and Z.K. Coates, 1951, p. 134). The progress in the field of higher education of Kazakhstan is clear from the fact that in the 1960s, the republic had 44 universities and higher institutes that included Kazakh State University, Kurmangazy Kazakh State Conservatory, 19 Technical Training Institutes, 5 Medical and 10 polytechnic institutions with a total number of 415,000 students. (Bejoy K. Sinha, 1971, p. 229; Martha B. Olcott, 1995, p. 315; A. K. Patnaik, 2005, p. 553). The development in the field of higher educational institutes is well depicted in table 4.

Table 4: Number of Higher Education Institutes in Kazakhstan (1940-1982)

Years	No. of Educational Institutes	No. of Students per 1,000
1940-41	20	10
1955-56	25	49
1958-59	27	60
1959-60	27	70
1960-61	28	77
1969-70	43	195
1981-82	55	267

Source: Bejoy K. Sinha. (1971). The new man in the Soviet Union. New Delhi: People's Publishing House. p. 229; Martha B. Olcott. (1995). The Kazakhs. California: Hoover Institution Press. p. 315; A. K. Patnaik. (2005). Education the press and public health. In Adle, C. History of civilizations of Central Asia, VI, Paris: UNESCO publishing. p. 553.

Though the efforts of the Soviet government, the education system of Kazakhstan was widened and elaborated much. Literacy rate and many other aspects related to education showed a positive trend in terms of the outcomes of education in Kazakhstan . Though the number of Kazakhs was initially very low but later on, they also attained larger proportions (Juldyz Smagulova, 2008, p. 171). This is substantiated by the fact that

in 1955-72, native occupancy in administrative positions was 6.7% and native occupancy in all leading jobs was 46.6%. The share of non-Russian scientific workers in 1960 was 21.4% and in 1973, this figure increased to 29.8%. However, Kazakhs did not attain equality viz-à-viz Russians in terms of placements which implies that Russians were more inclined to modern education as such fetched more placements. This assertion is supported by the facts given in the following table which shows the educational level of Russians and Kazakhs during 1959 and 1970.

Table 5: Educational Level of Russians and Kazakhs (1959-1970)

Ethnic Group	Year		Change (%)
	1959	1970	
%age of students in higher and secondary education (aged over 10 years)			
Russians	37.8	50.8	34.3
Kazakhs	26.8	39.0	32.2
%age of students in higher education to population (aged 16-24)			
Russians	10.02	14.61	4.58
Kazakhs	9.58	14.31	4.93
%age of Specialists with Higher and Secondary Education to population (aged 16 -59)			
Russians	7.28	13.49	8.53
Kazakhs	4.15	9.40	12.65

Source: Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland, Ralph S. Clem. (1975). *Modernization population change and nationality in Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Canadian Slavonic Papers*. 17(2/3). pp. 297-298.

Conclusion

The Soviet state took several steps for the development of education in Kazakh SSR. Though the development of education in Kazakhstan was motivated by the different pull and push factors created or in-creation from the metropole, however, these developments facilitated Kazakhs to get benefits out of the civilizing mission, the result being that literacy increased to a considerable extent. Moreover, Kazakhstan got several education institutions, both secondary and Higher, which could have been, however, established, but costs on state exchequer would have been enormous.

It is important to mention that once backward vast steppe land of nomads in dumps of poverty and ignorance during the Czarist period, made great strides in developing their educational standards within a short span of about 70 years of the Soviet era. There is no denying the fact that the Pre-Soviet period of Kazakhstan was predominantly illiterate.¹² However, by Soviet efforts, the literacy rate rose constantly from 83.6% in 1939 to 99% in

1970 and 1980. The literacy rate among women reached up to 75.1% in 1960 with a higher percentage of Kazakh women specialized or enrolled in higher education than women of any other Central Asian nationality. Despite government efforts, all this was made possible by the efforts of ethnic Russians also, who followed their masters and facilitated the process.

Notes

1. This reluctance is substantiated by the remarks of an unspecified dignitary, "I am not impressed by the wild dreams of philanthropists who want to civilize the Kirgiz (including Kazakhs) to educate them and raise them to the level of European nation-----" (H. Carrere and D. Encauss, 1963, p. 312).
2. The assertion is substantiated by the allotment of a meager amount of only 2.3% of the total budget on education and health together. (A.K. Patnaik, 2005, p. 549; Darakhshan Abdullah, 2014, p. 72).
3. The term "Jadid" is an Arabic word that means new, but Jadidism was a drive for cultural and social renewal among Muslims in Russian Empire in the early 20th century. Historians have taken the term "Jadidism" from *Usul-i-Jadid*, meaning a "new method" of teaching in schools, yet Jadidism's significance extended far beyond education. (Marine Kamp, 2008, p.27).
4. The prolific writer Abdurruauf Fitrat, the poet and Current affairs commentator Avalos, etc, were the other Jadidists in Central Asia. (N.A. Abdurakhimov, 2005, p. 151).
5. According to an assertion, in 1917 there were 18 New Method schools in Semirechie province alone. (Elizabeth E Bacon, 1966, p. 115).
6. According to some official Russian sources, the number of traditional Madrasas increased from 11 to 22 in Tashkent (1876-1910) and from 120 to 140 in Farghana (1892-1911). (Devendra Kaushik, 1976, p. 62).
7. The spread of mass education was given high priority in the Soviet Union because it was important for political, economic, and social reasons. (Shirin Akiner, 2002. p. 15; A. K. Patnaik, 2005, p.552).
8. Most of the population in the Kazakh Soviet Republic was involved in animal husbandry so to cater to the needs of these people boarding schools were created across the republic. These schools were meant to provide education to those children who were performing their duties in collective animal rearing areas which were far off in pastoral lands.
9. The Soviets were much concerned to establish a wide network of primary schools.
10. For example, in 1918 the People's Commissariat of education introduced a uniform labour school of nine years with five years of primary education and four years of secondary education. After the restoration from World War and civil war, a four-year primary and five-year secondary education was introduced. However, in July 1930, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party passed a resolution, "on all general compulsory education" which declared that from the academic year 1930-31 there would be free compulsory education up to the fourth grade and seven-year compulsory education in industrial cities and worker's settlements. (M. Y. Sharpe, 1978, pp. 23-31; Vishvanath Thakur, 1992, p. 56).
11. Thus during the second five-year plan (1932-37), the number of children at school (elementary, continuation, and secondary) increased from 103,000 to 184,000 in Turkmenistan, from 644,000 to 932,000 in Uzbekistan, from 125,000 to 221,000 in Tajikistan, from 576,000 to 1,022,000 in Kazakhstan and from 146,000 to 265,000 in Kirghizia. (W.P. Coates and Z.K. Coates, 1951, p. 113).
12. The general literacy rate was only 8.1% in 1987 under the Czarist period though the education level of natives was even much lower than these figures; moreover, the literacy rate among women was below 1%.

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