

## GOVERNANCE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR UNDER THE DOGRA RAJ (1846-1932)

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### ABSTRACT

*The installation of Dogra rule by the British by virtue of 'Treaty of Amritsar' in 1846 marked the beginning of perhaps the most oppressive phase in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. The hundred years of Dogra rule under the auspices of British brutalized and destroyed every facet of the civil life in Kashmir. Everything was heavily taxed in the state. The people lived in a state of squalid poverty, and the country swarmed with beggars. The state created by Dogras remained feudal in character and they governed the state through undemocratic means. The policies adopted by the Dogra Maharaja's fully helped the upper class of the state in particular to consolidate and further themselves at the expenses of poor masses. The political freedom including the freedom of press and platform and forming of political associations was totally banned in the state. This paper is an attempt to understand the state of governance in Jammu and Kashmir under Dogra Raj with its nature of state, Socio-economic conditions, education and taxation, revenue and religious policies.*

*Key words: - British, Dogra Raj, Feudal, Governance, Swarmed, Feudal.*

### INTRODUCTION

Jammu & Kashmir is a strategically located politico-administrative entity located in the north most extremity of Indian subcontinent. The distinction of the state (more specifically the Kashmir valley) lays in its claim to be the only region in India which possesses an uninterrupted series of records of its historical background. The state can, perhaps also claim the distinction in relation to other regions of Indian in the number of invasions, the depth of anarchy and the cruel exploitation it has undergone during different periods of its history. It has a long and well recorded historical continuity of about 6000 years, intermittently ruled by outsiders. Kashmiri's as pointed out by Walter Lawrence (a noted English civil servant famous for his revenue settlement in

the state and his well-crafted gazetteer, *The Valley of Kashmir*) divided their history into four periods: the early period of *Hindu Kings* chronicled in *Rajtarangni*, written by Kalhana; the period of Kashmir Musalmans, Known as *Salatini Kashmir*, the period of Mughals Known as *Padshah-i- Chagatai* or *Shahan-i-Mughlia*, and the period of Pathans, known as *Shahan-i-Durani*. It was however only in 1819 when 67 years Afghan rule ended and Kashmir was passed in the hands of new masters-the Sikhs. The Sikhs ruled over Kashmir for 27 years (1819-1846) and it was Ranjit Singh who brought Kashmir under the Sikh rule in 1819. However, this rule did not last long as the Angora-Sikh war (10<sup>th</sup> February, 1846) led to the eclipse of Sikh Empire and the British took over the valley and its adjoining areas as part of the war indemnity inflicted of the defeated Sikhs, and immediately sold it to Gulab Singh, a Dogra warlord from Jammu and a prominent vassal of the Sikh Durbar, through an agreement known in the history of state as “*Treaty of Amritsar*”.

### **TREATY OF AMRITSAR: FORMATION OF JAMMU & KASHMIR STATE**

The state of Jammu and Kashmir with its present boundaries owes its origin to the Treaty of Amritsar concluded on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1846 between the British Government and the Gulab Singh, a Jammu based Dogra chieftain of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab. The Treaty was in itself a byproduct of a reasonably moderate treaty, known to history as the “*Treaty of Lahore*”, concluded on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1846 to brought an end to the first Angora-Sikh war, which left the state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (last ruler of Sikh Kingdom), only a shadow of its original one. By this treaty (treaty of Amritsar) Kashmir was sold to Gulab Singh for a cash payment of Rs seventy five lakh (*Nanakshahees*). The treaty gave Gulab Singh the title deed to Kashmir. Thus was founded the state of Jammu and Kashmir with its present shape, formed through inheritance, invasion, purchase and by the British blessings.

The treaty of Amritsar was by all its standards, a sale deed –albeit conducted under shadow of politics and to secure purely political interests of the parties concerned. For the people of Kashmir who had not been consulted in any way, the treaty meant another century of slavery by the alien masters. While undertaking the sale the Britishers in India did not so much as to ascertain the views of the people of Kashmir valley on the subject. Even their leaders were not consulted. This treaty is unique in the sense that people were sold like sheep and cattle to an alien master and the whole transaction was made behind their back. This treaty consists of ten articles and makes no mention whatsoever of rights, interests and future of the people. Unlimited powers were granted to Dogra Maharaja to rule over predominantly Muslim state. This treaty was by all standards highly contemptible. The famous Urdu-Persian philosophic poet, Dr. Mohammed Iqbal, who was of Kashmiri descent and the early

mentor of the nationalist leadership of Kashmir, while expressing the grief on the Treaty, through the mouth of a renowned Persian poet of Kashmir, Ganni Kashmiri, wrote the following:

*Their fields, their crops, their streams  
Even the peasants in the Vale  
They sold all  
Alas, how cheap was the sale.*

Dr, Iqbal also narrates;

*“Oh breeze if you pass by Geneva sometimes, carry this said and gloomy message to the League of Nations, each hill each garden, each field, each farmer they sold; they sold a nation for a price that makes my blood ice cold”*

Also the famous Urdu-Persian poet, Hafiz Jallendhuri, whose poems were frequently quoted and which moved the spirits of the Kashmiri people during the national movement, wrote an elegy, lamenting the Treaty, which reads:

*The fate of Human beings was sold for Rs seventy-five lakhs  
Kashmir’s paradise was sold for Rs seventy-five lakhs*

## **NATURE OF STATE**

State under Dogra’s remained feudalistic in both form and spirit. The feudal character of the Dogra state is evident in the claim of its ruler that all the land in the state belonged to him, over which he had exclusive jurisdiction. The Maharaja regarded the whole state his personal purchased property, invested with himself all the sources of power-legislative, executive and the judicial, and ruled over the subjects as the master rules over his slaves. Principles of good governance were unknown to them and the state which they created remained personal, sectarian and feudal in character. The model of governance followed by Dogras was characterized by authoritarianism and absolutism, significantly lacking democratic and representative character. The Dogra rulers were following a highly discriminative attitude towards Kashmir, as they have always considered Jammu as their home land and Kashmir as the occupied territory. The Dogra state which produced regionalism followed, however, more discriminatory policy in respect of the Muslim community of Kashmir, in every facet of life, a fact which is attested by all the contemporary sources. P. L. Lakhanpal summarized the communal stance of Dogra

rulers by saying, “the sale-dead of 1846 (treaty of Amritsar) put a largely populated Muslim state under the Dogra rule which had been characterized as feudal, despotic, tyrannical and sectarian”.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS UNDER DOGRAS**

During the Dogra regime in the State of Jammu and Kashmir the people in general and non-Dogras in particular suffered miserably. The poor and vulnerable people of the state remained in abject poverty. The policies adopted by the Dogra Maharaja’s fully helped the upper class of the state in particular to consolidate and further themselves at the expenses of poor masses. The economic conditions of masses throughout the period remain deplorable. The reason behind economic backwardness of masses was due to the very character of state, its institution of Jagirdarism and the system of revenue, taxation and corrupt administration. At the top of Jagirdars remained the Maharaja himself and other being subordinate to him. Most of the state was divided into Jagirs (estates) and these Jagirs were granted by Maharaja to the members of royal family, to their relatives, to the persons who belonged to the same caste and religion as professed by the ruler himself, and to those persons who had proved, by services or otherwise, their loyalty to the person of ruler as well as his throne. However, Maharaja has retained with himself absolute powers to deprive at any time any person of the estate granted to him. The proprietary rights were granted only to the peasants of Jammu region and the peasants belonging to Kashmir valley have been deprived off these rights. The peasants were treated nothing more than procured slaves. Below the jagirdars were Chakdars, who were temporarily land holders. The chakdar like Jagirdar treated the cultivators in his chak with great severity. Jagirdar was titled to one half of the produce of the chak. The peasants had been virtually reduced to the state of serfs, signifying the very feudalistic character of state.

Maharaja declared himself the owner of all lands, forests and mountains and the people were deprived of their hereditary ownership and occupancy rights on their land. The right to sell, mortgage, ownership or transfer their land was terminated and they lived as his subjects in capacity of tenants, for which they have paid revenue to him. The resentment of people to such stroppy measures was exuberantly suppressed by the rulers.

## **REVENUE SYSTEM**

The most repulsive feature of Dogra regine in the state was the hackneyed and fallacious system of land revenue. The revenue department which was throughout hogged by non-Muslims (mostly pundits) and had most of its dealings with Muslim masses remained the most corrupted branch of autocratic state machinery This system was run by a host of officials whose corrupt practices had not only brought upon the peasants moral degradation

but it also had a more momentous effect on the character and development of the people that it had in any other native state. Right from patwari to *Dewan-i-Daftari* they formed a powerful corrupt ring inside which the village revenue payer lay captivated. This corrupt and inefficient administration of the state's revenue department had paralysed the entire peasant population of the state. The agriculture sector of the state on whose subsistence 85% population of the state stand dependent directly or indirectly, remained in a state of utter perdition, because of the absence of any well planned and well established revenue system. The state had been following one system after another and every new system were proven more clumsy and muddled than its previous one, with the result the state as well as masses suffered a lot. All the methods of collecting state revenue were devices by which corrupt and rapacious revenue officials from the highest to the lowest level combined to rob the master (the state) and ransack the people. The state revenue was collected with such severity and harshness that the peasants in order to meet the expenses of revenue often felt the need of selling their cattles and sheep. Majority of the cultivators with meager income sources were not in a position to pay revenue in full and they were, forced to, under the fear of third degree tortures, to leave their homes. They often migrated to other villages where they took services as farm labourers with some privileged land holders. The corrupt officials of state revenue department deprived the peasants even of their legitimate rights. The cultivators were also forced to join the conspiracy to rob the state. Those who denied to act as per the wishes of corrupt revenue officials had to suffer at their hands. The peasants were not even immune from physical torture. At the time of collecting revenue the use of nettle scourge in summer and of plugging recusant tax-payer into cold water in winter were popular devices of physical tortures carried out against the cultivators. Through these repressive methods and corrupt practices carried out by revenue officials the cultivators who formed the sheer majority of population suffered unspeakable injustice and oppression.

## TAXATION POLICY

The taxation policy adopted by Dogra Maharaja's in the state left the working class half-fed and starving. Dogra's had forcibly executed their taxation policies, which filled the masses with antipathy towards rulers. Everything was squeezed under the clutch of taxation save water and air. Even the office of the grave digger was taxed. The Muslims were forced to pay taxes for the maintenance of temples and support of Hindu priests. These obnoxious taxes were to be paid only by penurious masses and privileged sections of the society were exempted from paying these taxes. Almost all types of produce and all classes attached with production process were brought under heavy taxation as had been stated by *Sir Francis* in the following words, "on the manufacture of shawls, parallel restriction were placed, wool was taxed as it entered Kashmir; the manufacture was taxed for every workman he employed, and also at various stages of the process according to the value of fabric. There was

the enormous duty of 85% *ad valor am*. Butchers, Bakers, Carpenters, boatmen and even prostitutes were taxed. Poor coolies, who were affianced to shoulder load for travellers, were forced to give up half of their earnings". Peasants were made to pay two kinds of taxes, *Koul* and *Rasum*. *Kaul* was a legal tax the latter being illegal. Both these taxes were levied from the people at the same time. The *kaul* went to state treasury; the latter was collected by corrupt state officials to fill their own packets.

## INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

The industrial sector was in shambles. The industrial labour in the state particularly in the Kashmir valley were consisting of shawl weavers, men working as labourers and artisans in the silk factory, carpet weavers, *paper-machie* workers, wood carvers, *gabba makers* etc. However, the worth mentioning industries from the perspective of number of people engaged as workers were the shawl weaving and silk weaning industries. Despite the fact that the shawl and silk weavers in the state consists of the lowest wage earners, they were simantaneously cuddled through direct taxes. Like peasants, the shawl and silk weavers throughout the period remained the victims of the official tyranny of *Dagshali*. The monthly income of a shawl weaver did not exceed seven or at the most eight rupees. Out of this measly earning, he had to pay five rupees as tax, which left him with three rupees so to live on. Many taboos were placed on shawl weavers. The most pitiable part of a shawl weaver's life was that he could not change his profession for the purpose of bettering his economic conditions and finding out a more lucrative job other than shawl weaving, for the fear on the part of government that it will reduce Maharaja's revenue. They were therefore deliberately forced to remain both physically emaciated as well as economically pathetic and this uncared approach towards shawl and silk wears compelled them to remain half-blind as many of them do from the nature of work, they may contract other diseases which the sedentary life and the foetid atmosphere of low-rooms engender and ripen. Because of these harsh conditions imposed by Dogra's, shawl weavers of the state had been left with no alternative but to leave their job and if allowed immigrate to the plains of Punjab.

## EDUCATION

During the Dogra regime there was severe educational backwardness in the state particularly among the Muslim community. Although, during the Dogra rule modern education was introduced in the state, however its fruits could not reach to the common masses. The rate of illiteracy among the Muslims was highest in rural areas where they consist of nearly 85% of population. The reason behind their educational backwardness was manifold. It was because of their own ignorance, the conservative outlook of their religious leaders, un-sympathetic attitude of non-muslims towards Muslim students in government schools and more importantly because of the

discriminatory policies adopted Dogra administration. Another disincentive which renounced Muslims to become educated was their worse economic conditions. The Muslims in the state were not in a position to bear the expenses required to educate their siblings. The poverty of Muslim masses in the state was really a strong impediment in the way of their education. In 1909, Maharaja Pratap Singh (1885-1925) the successor of Maharaja Ranbir Singh had directed his Educational Minister to draw up a scheme for making primary education free and compulsory throughout the state, but the minister in-charge did not agree with the Maharaja. The Maharaja's concept of free and compulsory education throughout the state remained only on papers, as it was rejected by the Education Minister on the ground that such a measure would be looked upon by poor masses of the state as "zooloom" (act of tyranny) and would therefore, "be dreaded by the uneducated parents rather be welcomed as a boon". The Education Minister under Maharaja Pratap Singh sharply pleaded that "if the wage-earning children of the muslims were interfered with, their parents would not take it kindly, that in the absence of public spirited men the benefits of the scheme would not be understood by the people and the expenditure needed to implement the scheme in the state were not sufficient. An impartial evaluation of the arguments put forth by the Education Minister to prove the futility of the Maharaja's idea regarding free and compulsory education in the state were vague and meaningless.

## **PROBLEM OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

The Dogras deliberately followed an open policy of racial discrimination against the Muslims in particular and other non-Dogra communities in general. This discriminatory attitude towards Muslims was also followed in the area of granting government services. Muslims which constituted nearly 85% of the total population of the state had only a nominal share in government services and as per the report submitted by Riots Committee of Enquiry; the share of Muslims in the government service was not more than 15%. Between 1910 and 1930 the representation of Muslims in the state services did not exceed 10% both in gazette and non-gazette ranks. The reason for their low representation in state services was not so much due to their educational backwardness as due to lack of patronage and encouragement. The principal of efficiency and merit in the recruitment to state services was merely a smoke screen.

The military services in the state were reserved exclusively for Dogras, more specifically, Rajputs with more than 60% of gazetted appointments going to them. Every attempt was made to keep non-Dogras away from important and influential ranks including army ranks. The high positions of authority in the state were occupied by the Dogra Rajputs and the administration of the state were run by outsiders mostly Punjabis. However, few

Kashmiri pundits also enjoyed the fruits of administration. The issuance of armed license was limited to Dogra's and Rajputs.

### **BAN ON POLITICAL FREEDOM**

During the Dogra regime the political freedom including the freedom of press and platform and forming of political associations was totally banned in the state. The policy of curbing civil liberties including dissent voices was strictly followed by Dogra princes. In the absence of press and platform there remained hardly any public opinion in the state. As for the press, it was practically non-existent with the result that the government could not be benefited to the extent that it could be by the impact of healthy criticism. There existed hardly any rapport between the ruler and masses in general and Muslim subjects of the state in particular, who were made to live in abject poverty, squalor and ignorance. The state machinery running under the patronage of Dogra prices had little or no sympathy with the people's wants or grievances. The state imposed strict restriction even on the formation of religious and social organisation. The state council working under the primership of Raja Hari Singh (who accessed the throne after Raja Pratap Singh) strictly imposed ban on political freedom in the state. Many resolutions were undertaken from time to time curbing the political freedom of the people. It was made that without the prior permission and approval of the Maharaja no meeting or procession would be held at any public place in the state, and no new Sabha, society or association shall be established without the prior permission of his highness. By denying the people their basic rights and civil liberties, the council was cutting at the very root the entire corporate endeavor for all sorts of uplift work in the state. The Dogra rule has thus "decivilized and dehumanized the people to the extent of making them so barbarous as to value their native land nothing more than a hundred rupees"

### **BEGGAR (FORCED LABOUR)**

The Dogra state met the people of Kashmir with another inhuman practice called *Beggar* (Forced Labour), resulting in untold miseries both to the individual taken out for such practice, as well as to their family. Although the institution of *Beggar* was framed and introduced by Afghans, revived by the Sikhs, but it was only during Dogra rule that it took alarming shape. In theory Beggar had been abolished in 1893 (after British intervention) but in practice it continued, particularly in remote districts of state, right upto 1947 in one way or the other. Under this system the villagers were dragged out of their homes and were asked to carry military provisions to the frontier and mountains places like Gilgit, Askardo and Ladhak without any remuneration. The beggar was chosen simply due to absence of any special privileged labouring class in Kashmir and the demand for beggar fell naturally, on the villagers. However, many people including Sikhs, Pirzadas, Gojars were exempted from such

dangerous and inhuman practice. Every year thousands of helpless poor subjects of the valley were called by police using sheer brute force, compelled at a point of bayonet to carry military supplies on their backs to most dangerous and risky road to *Gilgit* and Askardo. The word *Gilgit* had created terror among the people of valley. Many poor villagers used to leave their home, when there was a call for it for two or three months with the prospect death from cold and starvation. In most of cases the persons forced to undertake beggar could not endure the harsh weather and hardships, as the way was through *Gilgit*, the precarious mountainous, so die unknown, unwept and unsung in far off places.

While leaving their home to undergo such inhuman trafficking and life costing duty the person were hanged by his wife and children, weeping, taking it almost far granted that they will never see him again. The most shameless part of beggar was that when these peasant- labourers who had survived, reached *Gilgit* “they were sold as slaves to the wild inhabitants of that inhospitable region”. Many times they were exchanged with animals. People who by their good luck survived and managed to return back to their homes after such a terrible journey where physically and mentally wrecks. The element of corruption in administration was also seen in the practice of beggar as mentioned by Walter Lawrence “the officials have regarded the system of beggar as on peculiarly device to fulfill their purse”. In order to get exemption from such inhuman practice (*Beggar*) the villagers were forced to pay Rs 70 to 90 rupees per head.

The institution of beggar was detrimental both on humanitarian grounds and also from economic point of view. On humanitarian grounds, the system was an outrage against the dignity of vulnerable peasants as a human being, as beggar for masses was nothing but another name of demoralization and from economic prospective this system had kept villagers out of their agricultural lands and because of this the agricultural land remained mostly uncultivated, results in worsening the economy of the masses as well as of state.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude state under Dogra’s remained feudalistic in both form and spirit. Dogra’s by taking the advantage of Sale Deed declared Jammu & Kashmir as their purchased property and rule over it accordingly. Principles of good governance remained unknown to them and the state which they created remained personal, sectarian and feudal in character. They always discriminated Kashmir considering it a conquered land and preferred Jammu, their home land. The people of Kashmir were laboring under many disadvantages. The Muslim, who constituted the sheer majority of the total population of the state, were lagging behind in every area due to discriminative polices adopted by rulers and were governed like drum driven cattle. Exclusion from state services,

high taxation, lack of political freedom, religious and legal disabilities were the common known features of Dogra policies adopted towards Muslims subjects. In political, economic and social conditions such as like these created by the Dogra's, it was no wonder for a leader to stir the nationalistic and religious sentiments of the whole community against the dictatorial and oppressive rule and to challenge its legal validity to rule over its subject population, majority of which was discriminated for on the simple ground that they adhere the faith different to his/her rulers. It required, however, some intellectual and well educated people with boilig patriotic zeal and good civic sense to carry forward their message to the masses but there was none available in the absence of a modern education system, which developed in the Jammu and Kashmir only after the Britishers intervene during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore not surprising that the political movement launched by Kashmiris in 1930's under the banner of Muslim Conference headed by Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah took the religious colour and mosques and shrines were used as platforms.

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