



Feudal Character of Jammu and Kashmir under Dogra Rule

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Abstract

The Kashmir valley is often described as India's crown treasure. It was ruled by a number of other groups before the arrival of Dogras. These were Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs, and all of whom had a significant influence on Jammu and Kashmir. However, Dogra era is regarded as the pinnacle of social modernity. The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir with its current limits was established by Maharaja Gulab Singh through an agreement which was signed by Maharaja with East India Company at Amritsar on 16th of March 1846. This is prominently known as the treaty of Amritsar. By this settlement Kashmir was given to Gulab Singh for money installment of 75 lakh of rupees. A similar agreement perceived Gulab Singh as the maharaja of the Jammu and Kashmir. Along these lines was established the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Dogra, treasure, society, condition, Kashmir

Introduction:

Social condition under the Dogra rule: During the Dogra period the people of state suffered miserably. There is no doubt British gave the state a semblance of peace and to some extent tried to reform the society but the reality is that their policies at best helped the upper classes to consolidate and build up themselves at the expenses of the masses. The general masses remain in abject poverty, due to possession of all the dominant traits of the feudal character Kashmiri society can be divided into three major categories 1) upper class 2) middle class and 3) lower class. The highest layer of society enjoyed the aristocracy and associated luxury. The next social hierarchy possessed by the landed elite, like urban Karkhandars, Sikhs and Dogra people. The lowest category of Kashmiri society was formed by the peasantry, artisans and other categories of skilled labour.

During the Dogra period the social exploitation attained the highest reach due to people were heavily taxed as well as the condition of the peasantry was miserable and unhappy. The chief feature of oppression during this period was transfer of land from peasants to Dogra aristocracy. Due to excessive taxation and oppression by the Dogra rule were resorted to migration.

Economic condition under the Dogra rule: The history of Kashmir is associated with a very repressive economic exploitation and misery. This sustained scenario was characterized by the ruthless taxation, inhuman collection machinery, unfair taxation and corrupt administration. Jammu and Kashmir was feudal state with some variations. The feudal character of the state was evident in the claim of its ruler that all land in Jammu and Kashmir belongs to him. Throughout the Dogra period the feature of the agrarian structure were marked by the mounting pressure on land, the increased fragmentation of holdings, forced labour (beggar). The methods of agricultural farming practiced during the Dogra period offered no ground for optimism in regard to the increase in the yield of various crops. The farmers bounded themselves to the ancient methods of agriculture and as such the way of manuring were unscientific and the use of labour was uneconomical. Hence, they were failing to introduce the crops that would fill up the gap during off seasons, which made his dependence on the seasoned crops very pronounced as well as scientific rotation and artificial manuring were also practically unknown.

As Arthur Brinkman observed that “the crops of the villages were stored in the open air granaries, strictly guarded for weeks and months for regular or otherwise taxation.” (1868, pp. 48-50). Therefore, by duly calculating and valuing the whole produce of the country the grain was dispensed in just sufficient qualities to keep the life and soul together. Although some improvements were made during the 1870's, yet the taxation remained high. He also observed that still much wasteland existed in which people were unwilling to pursue cultivation as the system of land revenue administration could not provide certainty that they would ever receive the outcomes of their labour.

Administration: In order to have a loyal group of people Dogra rulers filled the state administration with the Punjabis, Dogra also Kashmiri pandits but not Kashmiri Muslims. Though Muslims constituted the majority of the state population and the major tax payers of the state but they were not considered fit for the state business or government jobs. In 1930 in the bureaucracy Hindu and Sikhs held 78% of the gazetted appointments compared to the administrative jobs. It gave them political power.

In 1930, a civil service recruitment board was formed for the recruitment of the candidates in the state. It recruited only those who belonged to notable family. It was against Muslims because majority of them came from poor or middle-class families. On other hand in place of Persian and Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit with which Muslims were not familiar was introduced as optional language.

Education: Politically suppressed and economically downtrodden, the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir were also educationally backward. The education system in Jammu and Kashmir was informal and indigenous. In rural areas where Muslims constituted more than 80% of the total population, their illiteracy was almost 100%. The cause of their backwardness in education was manifold, their own ignorance, the conservative outlook of their religious leaders their elders and unsympathetic attitude of non-Muslim toward Muslim. Even when western education was introduced in Jammu and Kashmir the Muslims did not respond to it. The Hindu teachers did not take sufficient interest in the education of Muslim masses. Due to the unsympathetic attitude of the Hindu teachers a sufficient number of Muslim teachers was thought necessary to be appointed, so that Muslim children were encouraged and drawn in bulk to these government schools. There were 718 Muslim teachers out of the total number of 2201 and out of 49 headmasters of middle schools only 3 were Muslim, one out of 14 headmasters of high schools was a Muslim. Another reason for Muslim backwardness was financial conditions. The indifference of the maharaja's organization /government towards Muslim instruction had persuaded his Muslim subjects that nothing could spare them aside from their own endeavours. Since the start of the current century the Muslims had been squeezing their entitlement to training. They had additionally settled, in 1905 their own very school under the aegis of the Anjuman-i-Nusrat -ul-Islam which following a couple of years was raised to secondary school.

Conclusion: Although under the predecessors of the Dogra the people were suffering from social and economic disempowerment, yet it was the Dogra who took this exploitation to unprecedented levels. The entire Dogra regime was considered as extremely greedy and cruel. The economic liberation of the people of Jammu and Kashmir particularly Kashmir was the most fundamental feature of the programme and activities of the Muslim conference later known as National conference. With the help of British intervention and Muslim conference continues pressure the maharaja started working for the social upliftment of people. The cause of their backwardness in education were manifold, their own unawareness, the traditional outlook of people and the unsympathetic approach of the non-Muslims towards the Muslim students in the government schools and the prejudiced policies of the Dogra management.

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