

“Socio-Economic Profile of Kashmir under the Dogra Rule”

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Abstract

The observation of the famous British Historian Prof. Seeley that, “*politics without history has no root and history without politics has no fruit*” proves to be absolutely true when applied to the problem of freedom movement in Kashmir. After the downfall of the Mughal rule in India, “Kashmir came under the direct control of Kabul and the days of the Afghan rule... turned out to be days of terror, suppression and gruesomeness”. The Sikhs ruled over Kashmir for twenty two years during which the region witnessed a “*total breakdown of the law and order*”. The atrocities of the Sikh rule came to an end in 1846 when it was replaced by the infamous Dogra rule. The present study explores the socio-economic profile of Kashmir under the Dogra Rule.

The study explored that a great area of land was taken by the jagirdars, chakdars and maufidars, where more than 12% of the total income of the State was fixed for Jagir and maufis. In Kashmir Valley alone an area of 2, 91,689 acres was under the various categories of landlords. The most unfortunate feature of landlordism that the leading majority of landlords were Hindus who had only 20% of total population of all Jammu and Kashmir State and not more than 5.5% of Kashmir Valley. The industrial labour in Kashmir State comprised Shawl-bafs (shawl-weavers), men working as labourers and artisans in the Silk Factory, carpet weavers, papier-mache workers, wood carvers, *Gubba* makers, etc. Economically, the shawl-bafs were the lowest-paid wage earners. The monthly income of a shawl-baf did not exceed seven or eight rupees. Out of this measly earning, he paid five rupees for tax, which left him with three or so to live on. Politically suppressed and economically downtrodden, the Muslims of the Jammu and Kashmir State were also educationally backward. In the rural areas where they constituted more than 80% of the total population, their illiteracy was almost 100%. The causes of their backwardness in education were diverse: their own unawareness, the traditional outlook of their religious leaders, the uncaring attitude of non-Muslims towards the Muslim students in the Government schools, and the biased policies of the Dogra administration.

Keywords: Agrarian Sector, Dogra Rule, Education, Industrial Labour and Kashmir.

1: Introduction

During the Dogra rule, the people of the state suffered miserably. There is no doubt that the British gave the State a semblance of peace and to some extent ameliorated the conditions of the people but actually their policies at best helped “In Hindus the upper classes particular to connect and broaden themselves at the expenses of the masses”. The masses remained in the poverty¹. The alien rulers established the economic system in the Kashmir was actually feudalistic ally oriented. Its feudalistic character was manifest in this claim of the Dogra ruler that the proprietary rights in all lands of Kashmir belonged to the ruling prince for the simple reason that the territories of Kashmir were purchased by Maharaja Gulab Singh². This claim was used as a justification to declare that all land in Kashmir belonged to the Maharaja. At the apex of the feudal order was the Maharaja himself. The whole State was divided into various sub-units headed by a local authority. In this kind of political system all powers emanated from the ruler. This kind of political system which prevailed in Kashmir was not peculiar to the Dogra rule but it had been there right from the Mughals, and had been designed to cater to the rulers' needs. The exigencies of time and situation made the alien ruler create a special class among the natives. The members of this class acted as the agent of the ruler. They helped the ruler not only in the establishment of his rule over the natives but also in his exploitation of the economic wealth and resources of the State. This policy was adopted by all the rulers of the state, whether Muslims or Non-Muslims. Thus, the Afghans choose Kashmiri Pandits as the official elite on whose advice they ruled over the State. In return they got estates and were also entrusted with important functions of administration.

The reasons for economic backwardness of the masses were due to the very character of the State, its institutions of the Jagirdari system and the system of revenue, taxation and corrupt administration. Jammu and Kashmir was a feudal State with some variations. The feudal character of the State was obvious in the claim of its ruler that all lands in Kashmir belonged to him. Thus, the Maharaja was the biggest Jagirdar at the apex of a chain of jagirdars subordinate to him. Most of the State was divided into jagirs (estates), which were granted by the Maharaja to the members of the 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 their loyalty to the ruler as well as to

his throne. The Maharaja also enjoyed undisputed authority to deprive any person of the jagir granted to him.³

2: Research Objectives

In the light of importance of the present study entitled “*Socio-Economic Profile of Kashmir under the Dogra Rule*” researcher has set the following objectives:

- To explore the conditions of Agriculture sector of Kashmir under the Dogra rule.
- To explore the conditions of Industrial labour of Kashmir under the Dogra rule.
- To explore the status of Education in Kashmir under the Dogra rule.

3: Research Methodology

The study is purely based on secondary data. The secondary data have been collected as per the requirements of the study from Paleography (study of historical handwriting), diplomatics, the study of documents, records and archives, chronology (establishing the dates of past events), genealogy (the study of individuals and families) and historical geography. Further various published research papers, books, periodicals, reports, magazines, newspapers, and websites have also been used for the study.

4: Socio-Economic Profile of Kashmir under the Dogra Rule

The observation of the famous British Historian Prof. Seeley that, “*politics without history has no root and history without politics has no fruit*” proves to be absolutely true when applied to the problem of freedom movement in Kashmir. The Society of Jammu and Kashmir is a multiracial society; speaking multiple languages, having different religions and following different traditions in dress, manners, and customs. After the downfall of the Mughal rule in India, “Kashmir came under the direct control of Kabul and the days of the Afghan rule...turned out to be days of terror, suppression and gruesomeness”.⁴ Although Afghans ruled over Kashmir for about sixty seven years, but after the battle of Balakot, between the Sikhs and the Ghazis (freedom fighters) of Shah Ismail, a Wahabi leader, the Sikhs who had won the battle turned to Kashmir and conquered it. They annexed Kashmir to their Sikh state in 1819.

The Sikhs ruled over Kashmir for twenty two years during which the region witnessed a “*total breakdown of the law and order*”. The atrocities of the Sikh rule came to

an end in 1846 when it was replaced by the infamous Dogra rule.⁵ As per the requirements of the study, the study explored the conditions of Agriculture sector, Industrial labour and status of Education in Kashmir under the Dogra rule.

4.1: Conditions of Agricultural Sector

The agrarian sector formed the backbone of the State's economy. As is the case throughout the Indian subcontinent, Kashmir too is a land of villages with almost 85% of its population living in rural areas and working as peasants and artisans. The State's agrarian sector had generally remained in a state of utter ruination due to unsound revenue system under the supervision and direction of corrupt and inefficient officials.⁶ Though each corner of the Muslim Section was agitating with discontentment owing to the ruthlessness Kashmir was witnessing, specifically the peasant community, and the largest part of the masses of Kashmir. The causes of their discontentment were many, but the most crucial were the confiscation of proprietary rights in land and oppression they were subjected to by the State and its supporting structure - Jagirdars, chakdars, and manufidars.⁷

A great area of land was taken by the jagirdars, chakdars and maufidars, where more than 12% of the total income of the State was fixed for Jagir and maufis. In Kashmir Valley alone an area of 2,91,689 acres was under the various categories of landlords.⁸ The fact that large areas of land was under the control of the different classes of landlords can be inferred from the fact that immediately after the end of Dogra rule, 55 lakh kanals were transferred to the tillers by the famous, Abolition of Big landed Estates Act, in 1950.⁹ It may be noted that by virtue of this Act only that land was transferred from the landlords who exceeded 182 kanals and the orchard and maufi lands were exempted from it. With the implementation of this act 396 big Jagirs were revoked and 2 lakh and 50 thousand tillers become direct owners of the Land.¹⁰

The most unfortunate feature of landlordism that the leading majority of landlords were Hindus who had only 20% of total population of all Jammu and Kashmir State and not more than 5.5% of Kashmir Valley.¹¹ The statistical information about the creed-wise proportion of landlords is not available. However, all the contemporary sources are unanimous that the landed aristocracy mainly belonged to Hindu community.¹² Besides;

there are some stray references which support this argument. For instance, we have some statistical information about the land held as jagir by 30 jagirdars in 1890-91. Out of total 326 villages valuing Rs. 2,85,358 as revenue, held as jagir by these 30 jagirdars, 259 villages valuing Rs. 2,25,816 were held by Hindu jagirdars whose number was 17, whereas the remainder 13 Muslim jagirdars held 67 villages valuing only Rs. 59,542. It may also be noted, in this context, that after 1890 many Muslim jagirdars were deprived of their jagirs.¹³ No wonder then that the abolition of landlordism became one of the main slogans of Muslims conference and it is also understandable as to why the Abolition of Big landed Estates Act (1950) evoked stiff resentment among the Kashmiri pundits and their sympathizers like Sardar Patel?¹⁴ On the eve of the formation of the Muslim Conference in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the magnitude of land revenue in the Valley was on the higher side even when compared to the Jammu division of the state. It was charged at the rate of 1/3 of the gross produce in the Valley and strangely enough, it was lighter in Jammu and was charged at 1/4 of the total produce. A complaint submitted by a Peasant from Mirpur amply describes the high pitch of land revenue demand borne by the Kashmiri peasants even though he was charged lightly in comparison to his Kashmiri counterparts. According to him he had to pay Rs. 51 for 85 *bighas* situated within the boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir State, whereas for the same area of land located within the jurisdiction of Punjab, he had to pay only 10 rupees and 8 annas.¹⁵

The method of revenue collection and mode of payment was also oppressive. It may be remembered that the State realized its share both in cash as well as in kind. While 2/3 of the evaluated revenue was to be paid in cash and the rest 1/3 of it was to be given kind.¹⁶ The rates fixed for paddy and other crops were very high, which made the Kashmiri peasants, who always suffered for want of money, depend upon money-Landers commonly known as *waddars* in Kashmir and who always mercilessly exploited the helpless peasantry, loaned them money on high interest rates and purchased their grains at very low rates.¹⁷ This was not all. The peasants were subjected to a number of other legal and illegal taxes. Apart from land revenue the peasants had to pay 12 annas as chowkidari and a *cess* of 6 paise per rupee for the repairs of Jamia Masjid.¹⁸ In addition to this the peasants had to pay *kahcharai* (grazing tax) and tax on Walnut trees and all kinds of orchards.¹⁹ These conditions reduced the position of a peasant to a mere 'food gatherer' who often crossed the difficult mountain passes in search of it somewhere in the plains. The Kashmiri Muslim

students studying in different universities of India were deeply moved by the pathetic conditions of the migratory Kashmiri peasantry.²⁰ Though the peasant was the backbone of the society and a source of strength and prosperity for the country, the Government paid no attention towards providing him basic necessities of life. While different facilities were provided to the city dwellers, the villager was even deprived of primary school facilities. He did not have even those minimum medical facilities which, to quote a political leader of the time, “*were available to the animals of cities*”.²¹

4.2: Conditions of industrial Labour

The industrial labour in Kashmir State comprised Shawl-bafs (shawl-weavers), men working as labourers and artisans in the Silk Factory, carpet weavers, papier-mache workers, wood carvers, *Gubba* makers, etc. but the important industries from the point of view of numerical strength of the workers were the shawl weaving and the silk weaving. But the tragedy with the industry was that it had never cared to better the conditions of the weavers and the craftsman of the commodity. In fact the shawl-weavers belonged to an extremely suppressed class in Kashmir. Like the peasants they were also victims of official tyranny of *Dagshali*.²²

Economically, the shawl-bafs were the lowest-paid wage earners. The monthly income of a shawl-baf did not exceed seven or eight rupees. Out of this measly earning, he paid five rupees for tax, which left him with three or so to live on. The shawl weavers, when over-oppressed, had no alternative but to leave their job and migrate to the plains of the Punjab. Besides, the shawl weavers were always under the debt of the owners of the shawl-factory and when a fugitive shawl-baf did not return to his job for some days, the sepoys of the *Dagshali* would bring his wife or mother or father or probably all of them to the *Dagshali* and were either fined or imprisoned, in case they failed to pay the debt to the factory-owner.

Like shawl bafs, thousands of Muslims in villages, towns and in the city of Srinagar were engaged in the production of silk. By 1921, the factory had “over fifty thousand rearers of silk worms in the villages and five thousand labourers in the factory at Srinagar...” The plight of the labourers was equally pitiable. They were low paid, mostly under paid. The treatment of the officials towards the labourers had always been one of

insult and disgrace.²³ By 1924, the shooting hike in prices, the high cost of living and the corruption of the officialdom had almost annihilated them. They found it impossible to live on a daily wage of four and a half annas out of which they had to oil the palm of their corrupt Pandit officials. When things reached an extreme point, in 1924, they began to protest against this oppression. The army and police often silenced them at the point of bayonets but their revolt continued till the State shook off the bonds of autocracy.²⁴ In 1924, the Labourers in the silk-factory, for the first time rose against the tyrannical behavior of the officials and protested against the working conditions in the factory.²⁵

4.3: Education under the Dogras

Politically suppressed and economically downtrodden, the Muslims of the Jammu and Kashmir State were also educationally backward. In the rural areas where they constituted more than 80% of the total population, their illiteracy was almost 100%. The causes of their backwardness in education were diverse: their own unawareness, the traditional outlook of their religious leaders, the uncaring attitude of non-Muslims towards the Muslim students in the Government schools, and the biased policies of the Dogra administration.²⁶

During the eighties of the nineteenth century, when the western system of education was introduced in the State, the Muslims did not respond to it. In those days, they were under the influence of their orthodox religious leaders who acted as a great hindrance to the spread of all other fields of education except religious education. They urged their co-religionists that so long as they do not truly follow the Quran and the *Hadis*, the Muslim community cannot make great progress. Adoption of western system of education and western life-style would turn them in apostates. Thus they would not be able to distinguish between right and wrong. The learning of things western would destroy their minds.²⁷

They expressed themselves against those Muslims who favoured modernism. The impact of this theory on the Muslim masses kept them from sending their children to modern schools for about two decades. The Hindus, during this period, made remarkable progress by providing their children modern and scientific knowledge. They entered Government services and obtained monopoly in different departments of the State. This

proved an eye-opener for men of wisdom and foresight among a section of the Muslim community. Having realized the advantages of western learning these men began to approach “the Government to grant them some facilities enabling them to make rapid advance in the sphere of education”.²⁸ But they received no help from the officials. Moreover, the atmosphere in the Government schools was not conducive for them as they found that the “educational advance of their community was impossible in the Government schools, staffed entirely by the Hindu teachers and officers”.²⁹

Another cause of Muslims backwardness in education was their adverse economic conditions. The Muslim parents were not in a position to pay the school fees for educating their boys.³⁰ This step-motherly treatment meted out to the Muslims enthused in them a deep sense of grievance. For years they complained and protested unavailingly. In course of time they began to feel outraged against the tyrannies of the officials. This was bound to give them ideas of agitation and revolt against the rule of injustice.

5: Conclusion

During the Dogra rule, the people of the state suffered miserably. The masses remained in the poverty. The whole State was divided into various sub-units headed by a local authority. In this kind of political system all powers emanated from the ruler. The reasons for economic backwardness of the masses were due to the very character of the State, its institutions of the Jagirdari system and the system of revenue, taxation and corrupt administration. Jammu and Kashmir was a feudal State with some variations. The feudal character of the State was obvious in the claim of its ruler that all lands in Kashmir belonged to him. Thus, the Maharaja was the biggest Jagirdar at the apex of a chain of jagirdars subordinate to him. The present paper investigated the socio-economic profile of Kashmir under the Dogra rule. The study explored that the agrarian sector formed the backbone of the State's economy. The State's agrarian sector had generally remained in a state of utter ruination due to unsound revenue system under the supervision and direction of corrupt and inefficient officials. A great area of land was taken by the jagirdars, chakdars and maufidars, where more than 12% of the total income of the State was fixed for Jagir and maufis. In Kashmir Valley alone an area of 2,91,689 acres was under the various categories of landlords. The most unfortunate feature of landlordism that the leading

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2. Jammu and Kashmir Archives, *Letter from Maharaja Pratap Singh to His Prime Minister* Dated December 14, 1918, File No.191/H-75.
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6. Koul P.N., *The History of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co., 1973, pp.563-577.
7. Ganai M. Y. *Kashmir's Struggle for Independence 1931-1939*, Srinagar: Mohsin Publication, 2003, pp. 37-39.

8. It is pertinent to mention that Jammu province the area of land held by different kinds of landlords was 3, 62,276 acres and in Frontier 46, 145 acres. For details see BazazPremNath, *inside Kashmir*, p.230.
9. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Atish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar: Ali Mohammad & Sons, 1985, pp.489-490.
10. Census of India, 1931, Vol. I, pp.73-74.
11. Lawrence Walter, *The valley of Kashmir*, p.414.
12. Ganai M. Y. *Kashmir's Struggle for Independence 1931-1939*, Srinagar: Mohsin Publication, 2003, pp. 37-39.
13. To quote Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah: "Our agrarian reforms did not suit to the vested interests of the State and their supporters at the centre. Sardar Patel particularly opposed these reforms. The main cause behind his opposition was that the Hindu jagirdars of the State had told him that we were introducing these reforms under the religious bias, because most of the jagirdars coming under the Land Reform Act belonged to non-Muslim community". See Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Atish-i-Chinar*, p.493.
14. Ganai M. Y. *op. Cit.*, p. 40.
15. Lawrence Walter, *op. Cit.*, pp. 435-436.
16. For details about waddars see Walter Lawrence, *The valley of Kashmir*, p. 5. In order to check the exploitation of the wadders (money-lenders), the State passed a law in 1928 by which the interest rate was fixed, however, the law remained only a dead letter. See Glancy Commission Report (1932) vide *Dastawaizat*, pp. 137-138.
17. Ganai, *op. Cit.*, pp. 44-47.
18. Glancy Commission Report (1932) vide *Dastawaizat*, pp. 125 and 132.
19. Ganai, *op. Cit.*, p. 48.
20. Thorp Robert, *Cashmere Misgovernment*, London: Longmans, 1870, p. 45.
21. Lucullus, *Kashmir Raj*, p.97.
22. Khan G.H., *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, *op. Cit.*, p.21.
23. Khan G.H., *Ideological Foundations of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir (1931-1947)*, *op. Cit.*, p.60.
24. For the poor and late response of Kashmiri Muslims towards the modern education see Ernest Neve, *Beyond the PirPanjal*, p.256.

25. The credit for introducing the modern education in the State goes to Rev. J.S. Doxy who established the First Mission School in 1881
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27. There were 718 Muslim teachers out of the total number of 2201 and out of 49 Headmasters of High Schools only 3 were Muslims; 1 out of 14 Headmasters of High Schools was a Muslim. Galancy Commission Report, 1932.
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