



The Formation of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir: An Overview

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Abstract

The State of Jammu and Kashmir or the erstwhile Princely state or Dogra state consists of three broad regions each having distinct geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and socio-psychological characteristics. The state of Jammu and Kashmir in its present form came into being on March 16, 1846, when the British government handed over the state to Raja Gulab Singh through the Treaty of Amritsar. According to the treaty, the British after the defeat of the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh war at the battle of Sobraon transferred the hilly areas eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravi to the Dogra Rajput Raja of Jammu, Gulab Singh. He, in turn, paid a sum of Rs 75 lakh (Nanak Shahi) to the East India Company. Prior to this treaty, its three regions (Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh Plateau) were governed separately by different rulers. The Treaty of Amritsar brought these distinct regions under one administrative unit to be ruled by Dogra elites. The Jurisdiction of the Dogra rulers in the treaty lasted exactly a century, until the moment of decolonization and partition in 1947. On October 26, 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh signed an Instrument of Accession with Union of India and this accession made Jammu and Kashmir an integral part of India. Accession of J&K state to the Union of India took place in 1947 in the wake of a tribal attack from Pakistan. The present paper explains the general overview of the formation of Princely States of Jammu and Kashmir. This paper analyze that the formation of Princely States of Jammu and Kashmir was necessary to consolidate it and how the task of consolidation was carried over by the successive rulers.

Key Words: Dogra, Treaty of Amritsar, Princely State, Instrument of Accession, Jammu and Kashmir.

Introduction

The Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by the Dogra dynasty. The ruling family of Jammu and Kashmir was ethnic Dogras, upper-caste Hindus from the Jammu region. The founder of the lineage was a man called Gulab Singh. The State was under the Muslim rule from 14th century to 1819 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Sikh State of the Punjab, took it over from the Afghans. It was during this time Gulab Singh, had entered into the military service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh rewarded the Gulab Singh, by conferring upon him the title of Jagir for Jammu and the hill territories of Poonch, and gave the Kingdom of Mirpur and Bhimber to his brother, Dhyan Singh. The Lahore Durbar retained the pattern of suzerain-vassal patronage inherited from the Mughals (Behera, 2000). Due to his own abilities in 1820s and 1830s, Gulab Singh gradually expanded his own dominion from his base in the southern reaches of the Jammu region, first over mountainous areas in the Jammu interior and then over the even more remote Himalayan regions of Ladakh and Baltistan. The ascendancy of the new dynasty was consolidated with Gulab Singh's acquisition of the Valley of Kashmir from British control in 1846, under a British-Dogra pact signed in Amritsar (Bose, 2003). The "Treaty of Amritsar" was signed on 16 March, 1846 between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the East Indian Company governing at that time. Under this treaty, an area of 84,471 sq miles was given to the Maharaja against an amount of seventy five lakhs of rupees. This amount was the compensation which the Maharaja paid to the British government as a part of penalty imposed on the Punjab government, headed by Maharaja Daleep Singh for having lost the battle to the Britishers (Anand, 1994).

There are several reasons for signing the treaty. Firstly, the Maharaja was to pay rupees seventy five lakhs as war indemnity. Secondly, the Britishers wanted to curb the west-ward expansion of the Sikh empire which extended from Multan to Gilgit (Mishra, 1979). Thus according to the treaty, the British after the defeat of the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh war at the battle of Sabraon transferred the hilly areas eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravi (including Chamba and excluding Lahual and Spiti and was ceded to the British) to the Gulab Singh (Verma, 1994). State, under the erstwhile Dogra dynasty, consisted 84,471 sq miles and spread into five distinct regions such as firstly, it was Kashmir valley with its Capital at Srinagar. Secondly, there was the province of Jammu. Thirdly, the district of Poonch and fourthly, the very extensive tract of Ladakh and Baltistan. Fifthly, in the North-West it was the Gilgit region comprising Gilgit, Gilgit

wazarat, Gilgit agency, Chilas, Yasin, Ishkuman, Hunza and Nagar. The areas of Chilas, Yasin, Hunza and Nagar were annexed by Maharaja Ranbir Singh around 1870 (Bose, 1997, p. 10).

Prior to this treaty, its three regions (Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh Plateau) were governed separately by different rulers. The Treaty of Amritsar brought these distinct regions under one administrative unit to be ruled by Dogra elites. The history of Jammu goes back to the epic and Puranic periods. The Dogras as a people derived their name from the Sanskrit term 'Dogirath' meaning 'two lakes'. These lakes, the Mansar and the Suransar, lie to the east of the city of Jammu. The city going back to those ancient times is located on a hillock in the first range of hills rising from the plains. Bounded at its foot, the river Tawi meanders down from the foothills. Originally, the Jammu province was a collection of small Dogra fiefdoms of which Jammu was the most important (Bakhshi, 2009). The dynastic rule of the Dogras lasted about 105 years (1846-1951). And this long period witnessed four Dogra rulers namely Maharaja Gulab Singh (1846-57), Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-85), Maharaja Partap Singh (1885-1925), Maharaja Hari Singh (1925-49). During the autocratic Dogra rule, the Maharaja was placed at the apex of a chain of subordinate Jagirdars, Muafidars, and the like. After the formation of Jammu and Kashmir state, it was necessary to consolidate it. And the task of consolidation was carried over by the successor rulers.

Maharaja Gulab Singh Period (1846-56)

The founder of the dynasty, Gulab Singh, was an influential noble in the court of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore. He was appointed as the hereditary Raja of the Jammu principality and in 1822 was conferred with the title of Raja. By the time of death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, he established his supremacy over all the hill states surrounding the Kashmir Valley. With the help of his able General Zorawar Singh he had also annexed the far flung areas of Ladakh and Baltistan by 1841. Finally, after the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, under the terms of the Treaty of Amritsar, the British Indian government acquired Kashmir from the Sikh Empire and transferred it to Gulab Singh, recognising him as an independent Maharaja. Thus, Jammu and Kashmir was established as one of the largest princely states in British India to be ruled by Gulab Singh and his descendants till 1947.

The Maharaja established a centralised system of government. The basic structure of the political system, was, however, allowed to remain feudalistic in character. At top the

edifice was the ruler himself who had concentrated in his own person all the sources of power - legislative, executive and judicial. Maharaja Gulab Singh thus, laid the foundation of the modern State of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1846, a commercial transaction was concluded between the British, then preoccupied with bringing the entire subcontinent under their direct or indirect rule, and Gulab Singh, the Dogra King of Jammu, by the Treaty of Amritsar, the imperial authorities transferred, forever, the Kashmir Valley and its adjoining territories to 'Maharaja Gulab Singh and the heirs male of his body', in exchange for the payment of a large sum of money. The British themselves had come into possession of this territory because of the gradual collapse, under sustained imperialist pressure, of the Sikh empire established by the Lahore-based ruler Ranjit Singh in northern and north-western India in the early 19th century, and which, at its height, included Kashmir. Indeed, the reason Gulab Singh was chosen as the beneficiary was that despite formally being a leading member of the Lahore court, he had been conniving with the British against Ranjit Singh's successors (Bose, 1997, p. 21). In return, Gulab Singh promised the British military support in their expeditious against the yet unsubordinated and recalcitrant peoples of the subcontinent. He also 'acknowledged the supremacy of the British Government', and agreed to an annual token tribute to that government of 'one horse, twelve pairs of shawl goats of approved breed (six male and six female), and three pairs of Kashmirishawls'. Gulab Singh had already taken over the remote and sparsely-populated mountainous regions of Ladakh and Baltistan, so with the acquisition of the Valley, he became the master of practically all the distinct regions that came to comprise the historical territory of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (Bose, 1997, 21-22).

With his control of Jammu it confirmed that the Gulab Singh proceeded to extend his new power into heart of Kashmir. In the 1830s he brought Ladakh under control and in 1840 he captured Skardu, extending his claims over all Baltistan and in 1842 he turned towards Gilgit. In 1839 Ranjit Singh died and this was followed by a mutiny of the Sikh garrison in Kashmir, accompanied by violence. Ranjit Singh's son Sher Singh, entered the state with an army in 1841 to restore authority; but in fact it was Gulab Singh who took control quelling the revolt with ruthless efficiency and thereby further consolidating his position as the ruler of a country which was still nominally under the Sikh Government in Lahore (Birdwood, 2005). After occupying Kashmir Maharaja Gulab Singh reorganised the administration of the state and also took various measures to improve economic conditions of his subjects, reformed revenue administration so that revenue reached

treasury. The Maharaja entrusted the civil administration of the state to a council of ministers called Dewans. He divided the state into three provinces viz. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Each province was sub-divided into districts, Kashmir had districts of Kamaraz and Maraz, and Jammu had four districts viz. Jammu, Khupal, Kishtwar and Jasrota. Ladakh and Gilgit were two frontier districts. During his rule Gulab Singh paid maximum attention on the consolidation and formation of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Maharaja Ranbir Singh Period (1857-85)

Maharaja Ranbir Singh plays an important role in the formation of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. He introduced a number of reforms in the administration of the state. He set up three main departments first one is the revenue, the civil and the military. New subdivision were created for both civil and revenue administration. The judicial system was reorganized and Ranbir Penal Code (RPC) was drawn up. Appeal courts were set up both in Jammu and Srinagar. Educational institutions were also established. Maharaja Ranbir Singh laid Telegraphic lines in the valley and Ladakh. The postal service was also started. Telephone connection between Jammu and Srinagar was also setup. The introduction and development of means of communication and transport helped the people to come close and have direct contact with the people living outside the state. It brought economic activity and facilitated and increased the follow of trade. Modern Medicare system saw its emergence during his rule. It was the advent of Christian Missionaries in Kashmir that helped in the development of health care measures. The Christian Missionaries had to start in tented rooms. However, in 1874 Maharaja Ranbir Singh granted a site to the Mission Hospital. The Hospital building was constructed by the state government. It came to be known as Drugjan hospital. Another hospital exclusively for women was established at Rainawari by the Church of England. The devotion and skill of the medical missionaries brought about a great change in the outlook of the people. It was during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign that the state Government first paid attention in the real sense towards education. In 1868, the Maharaja gave a lakh of rupees as an aid for the establishment of Punjab University and himself became its fellow. He established a few regular schools and Pathshalas. In one of his proclamations, he records that Madrasas and Pathshalas have been established by the Government in all cities and towns. The first state school is said to have started in 1868, in which instructions in Arabic were given. The state also provided aid to the Arabic school run by the Christian missionaries in Kashmir.

Maharaja Pratap Singh Period (1885-1925)

After the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, Maharaja Pratap Singh carried out several progressive reforms. The new departments of accounts, public works, police, forests and revenue were established. A food control department was established to supply rice to the people. During his rule Jhelum Valley Cart Road and Banihal Cart roads were constructed. The construction of these roads greatly helped in the development of means of communication. The Jammu-Srinagar highway was thrown open for public transport in 1922. A railway link was also opened between Jammu and Sialkote in 1890. During his reign stress was laid on the growth of education. First of all Maharaja Pratap Singh opened one school which was based on western education after immediate his reign in 1885 and that was Ranbir high school in Jammu. In 1905 and 1907, the first college called Sri Pratap College and Prince of Wales College (now GGM Science College) was established and the number of state schools rose to 133. In 1891, the State established the Forest Department to exploit the forest resources on the scientific lines. By 1911, work on Ranbir canal was completed for the irrigation purposes. In 1907, hydro-electric power station Mohara was established for lighting and industrial purpose. Maharaja Pratap Singh tried to improve upon the lives of his subjects in every sphere.

Maharaja Hari Singh Period (1925-49)

The last ruler of Jammu and Kashmir was Maharaja Hari Singh, who ascended the throne in 1925. His reign was marked by complex political events, conspiracies, and widespread changes which had the power to completely overtake any mere mortal. Despite his inner turmoil he stood tall and stoic for his kingdom, while taking some of the toughest decisions no other king had to before him. A Hindu King who ruled over a Muslim majority is how he is often described, but it is only right in contexts of current events to see how he rose above the communal stereotyping and stood by his words "Justice is my Religion" his first statement after taking over reigns of Jammu and Kashmir. He made primary education as free and compulsory in the State and introduced laws prohibiting child marriage and threw open places of worship for the low castes, introduced Panchayati Raj system, paid special attention to tourism and handicraft industry. He introduced State Subject (now permanent resident) law for the benefit of permanent residents of the State. Maharaja Hari Singh adopted the policy of moderation and he granted concession to the people and entertained their claim for representation in the legislature and the executive. He also constituted an administrative council to assist him in administering the state. A legislature called the

Prajasabha having 75 members was constituted and elections were held to elect its members. The Maharaja was first ruler of the state to take such a bold step. He also introduced reserved seats for depressed classes in government jobs. He paid special attention for the promotion of agriculture in the state. For this purpose, special acts were passed. Some of these were Agriculturist's Relief Act, Land Alienation Act 1928, and Consolidation of Holdings Act 1940. J&K Bank was established with its head office at Srinagar in 1938. Maharaja Hari Singh enacted the J&K High Court Constitution in 1928 which provided for a High Court with one chief Justice and two other judges.

The Maharaja's of the Jammu and Kashmir have contributed in the political, economic, cultural, administrative and educational developments of the state. However, it is alleged that the rulers took little interest in the people's welfare. In their regimes the condition of the muslim population of the valley not at par with the Dogras of the Jammu region, in 1941 Prem Nath Bazaz, a prominent Kashmiri Pandit journalist and political activist, reported: "The poverty of the Muslim masses is appalling. Dressed in rags and barefoot, a Muslim peasant presents the appearance of a starving beggar. Most are landless labourers, working as serfs for absentee (Hindu) landlords. Almost the whole brunt of official corruption is borne by the Muslim masses. Rural indebtedness (to Hindu landlords and moneylenders) is staggering." (Birdwood, 2005, p.34).

Between 1916 and 1925, a number of petitions were submitted at all levels, alleging discriminatory policy of Maharaja against them and ensuring that the "Hindus are not allowed to oppress" them. The Muslim press in the Punjab and the Kashmiri Muslims aired the new policy (Post 1916) had been formulated to suit Hindu interests alone. In 1918, All-India Mohammadan Educational Conference again, vide its Resolution No.10, regretted that the resolutions passed in previous years on the subject of education had received scant attention. In 1931, a major revolt took place in the valley against Maharaja rule in the context of feudal bondage. Following this revolt Maharaja Hari Singh appointed Glancy Commission to look into the grievances. The Glancy Commission recommended a series of reforms, such as reforms of an administrative structure and education, the representation of Muslims in the services and minimum freedom of press and public expression (Bose, 1997, p.19). The Dogra rulers aroused Muslim political consciousness and awareness of their majority status. This impelled the early construction of identities along ethno-religious alignments: Dogras versus Kashmiris and Muslims versus Hindus.ⁱ Maharaja Hari Singh plays an important role in the social, economic and educational reforms of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion

In 1947, when India became independent, around 562 princely states were given an option of joining either India or Pakistan as per the Instrument of Accession. The choice before Jammu and Kashmir State was, however, a difficult one because partition of British India made Kashmir State geographically contiguous to both India and Pakistan. At that time Maharaja could not immediately decide the question of accession and entered into standstill agreement with Pakistan to get more time before taking any substantial decision (Kaul, 1999). However, invasion of the tribesman from the Pakistan's northwest frontier province on October 22, 1947 changed Maharaja stands to remain independent. Moreover, Maharaja was forced to accede to India when Pakistan changed its idea about the relationship with Jammu and Kashmir, which led to economic blockade against the state (Lamb, 1966). In this panic situation, the Maharaja appealed for India's help but India presented condition of signing of the Instrument of Accession before any kind of help, under such circumstances Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession and India sent its forces to overcome such a panic situation.

Finally on 26 October 1947, after the signing of 'Instrument of Accession' Jammu and Kashmir state became part of the Union of India. In 1949, Dr. Karan Singh at the age of eighteen was appointed as the regent of the state after his father stepped down as the ruler, following the state's accession to India. He served successively as regent, the first and last Sadr-i-Riyasat, and Governor of Jammu and Kashmir State from 1965 to 1967.

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