

Impact of the Colonial Intervention in Kashmir: An Attempt for Reforms: (1885-1925)

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Abstract: This paper attempts to draw out the intricacies of the correlation between the British Residency and the ruling house of the Dogras in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It highlights the impact of the colonial intervention in Kashmir and the substantial birth of multitude of reforms that shaped the social system of the state and subsequent establishment of stable and efficient government in Kashmir during Maharaja's reign. These reforms compelled Britishers to depute an experienced and competent Settlement Officer. A. D 1887 Andrew Wingate, who was entrusted with the job of introducing regular settlement in the state.

Key words: Kashmir · Dogra's · Britishers · Maharaja Pratap Singh

INTRODUCTION

The accession of Maharaja Pratap Singh to the throne in A.D 1885 marks the beginning of modern governance and political and social advancement of the people of the state. The British Resident immediately appeared on the scene and began to advise him to replace the old system of administration with a modern one on the lines of the administrative machinery in British India [1]. Sensing danger to his own position as the Maharaja, he came to forward with introducing substantial reforms in the different fields of administration. Soon after his accession, Pratap announced a number of reforms. He abolished the taxes called 'ravangi' [2], thanapatti, [3] and Hakara [4] The custom of "leri" This was a system of paying sepoy and others by remission of rent, instead of in coin and, for some reason not easily explained, is much disliked. The tax on the sale of horses in Kashmir, called "Zari-nakas", which at one time amounted to 50 percent of the purchase money, was also abolished [5]. The practice of collecting custom duties on the import of rice in the Srinagar was also discontinued [6]. The practice of requiring every ten houses in the Jammu province to provide one sepoy, forced enlistment and the practice of forcing the families of deserters to provide substitute, were done away with. The tax on "Ekhas" playing for hire to Saikot, which amounted to Re. 1-11 on a total of Rs. 2-10 annas was abolished and some other minor dues were remitted. The customs duty on rice and other provisions brought into Srinagar for sale is reduced from two annas

in the rupee to half an anna, in other words from 12 1/2 to 3 1/8 per cent. The custom of "khodkasht" this was a system by which the State farms a part of the village lands itself [7]. The accumulation of arrears was avoided by making monthly payment of salaries to all civil and military soldiers [8]. Numerous duties on manufactures and traders were abolished and steps were taken to encourage trade between the State and British India [9]. The state monopolies on the paper and lime were removed and steps were taken to check the corruption among the civil and military officials and bribe taking was declared illegal and liable to severe punishment [10]. Municipal constitution was also established to these towns. Leave code, education code and other rules calculated to promote public interest were provided [11]. Attention was paid towards the development of means of communication. The construction of Jhelum Valley Road made considerable progress.

The Government of British India was not satisfied with these reforms and asked for more reforms. The political condition on the northern borders was weakening. The Britisher's they keenly desired some drastic changes in the state administration, but in spite of all his promises, it was beyond the power of Maharaja to reform the state administration, for he had hardly the resource to depend upon. The feeble efforts made by him were hardly expected to change the situation materially. In fact there were many glaring defects, the administration of Dogra suffered from. Most officials of the State Government were incompetent, corrupt and devoid of any

administration acumen. The Maharaja did not possess a strong character and believed, like his father, that the British would ultimately annex the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Taking advantage of the fresh succession British were able to post a political Resident in Jammu and Kashmir. In latter dated April 7, 1884 to the secretary of State for India, the Government of India stated that the establishment of a Residency in Kashmir On September 14, 1885, shortly after the new Maharaja's accession to the throne, the viceroy sent a dispatch emphasizing that it was essentially in the interesting of good government that the Maharaja introduced certain reforms in his administration and accepted a British Resident in Srinagar. Maharaja, jealous of encroachment on his power, wrote in protest:

“I do not hesitate to admit that the existing state of affairs in Kashmir urgently requires the introduction of substantial reforms in the administration of the country, but I beg to assure you that nothing shall be spared on my part to prove beyond my possibility of doubt that it is my ambition to make my country a well governed state in alliance with the Government of India.”

But the new Maharaja's vigorous protests were of no avail, for the appointment of British Resident on Ranbir Singh's death had been decided upon much earlier. In this report to the secretary of state in A.D 1884. Lord Ripon had made a definite assertion of this decision. “The British” he wrote “did not take the action earlier conceiving that a favourable opportunity would present itself on the occurrence of a fresh accession-an event which seemed unlikely to be long postponed. When that event takes place we consider that it will be our duty to impress upon the Kashmir Government its obligations to its own subjects and to see that the reforms which were so urgently needed are no longer postponed.”

Sir Olivier St. John was designated as the first British Resident in Kashmir, succeeded in March, A.D. 1888, by C. Plowden. Who started the proceedings which ultimately led to the deposition of the Maharaja Pratap Singh. The new Resident, who arrived in March A.D. 1888, allied himself with one of the Maharajah's brother and reported the viceroy that the Maharaja was incompetent and incapable of implementing any administrative reforms. More than two years has passed since his accession; but not only has he achieved nothing, but he has been opposed beneficial measures

proposed by others. He has never of his own free will to establish a capable and honest administration. In addition, forged letters were circulated misrepresented the Maharaja's domestic and foreign policies. At this juncture, however, India-owned newspapers in India came to the support of the Maharaja and created sufficient public interest in the matter to prevent the British from attempting to dispose the Maharaja and to annex Kashmir. The Maharaja of Kashmir has been required to withdraw for a time from active participation in the government of his state, not in consequence of allegations of crime and misconduct, but because the reforms urgently required in the interest of the people of Kashmir cannot be carried out without his so doing. Mr. Plowden was removed from Kashmir on the occasion of his promotion and Mr. Nisbet, who was a personal friend of the Maharaja and in whom he had implicit confidence, was sent in his place.

With the purpose of establishing a stable and efficient government in Kashmir, the Government of India asked the Maharaja to refrain from all interference in the state administration. While the Maharaja was allowed to retain his rank and dignity as chief of the state, but full powers of the government were vested in a council consisting of the Maharaja's brother and other three or four officials selected by the Government of India.

The council was established in April A.D.1889, on the pattern of the post-Mutiny Governor-General's council in India and portfolio system was also adapted on the same pattern, through lesser member were appointed. The council consists of five members Raja Amar Singh, Raja Ram Singh and experienced European officers, Rai Bahadur Pandit Suraj Kaul and Rai Bahadur Pandit Bhag. Raja Amar Singh became the president of the council and the Prime Minister of the state. Raja Amar Singh played a important role in the administration till his death in A.D 1907. He was keenly interested in the development of the country resources and in the expansion of trade. Raja Ram singh was given the charge of the Military Department, Pandit Suraj Kaul. Pandit Bhag Ram of the Judicial and Ghulam Mohiuddin Khan of the ‘General Department’ Diwan Luchhman Das usually acted under the guidance of Raja Amar Singh, “a man of energy, ambition and intrigues commenced. And although the Council was given full powers of the administration, it was expected to exercise these powers under the guidance of the British Resident. The council was take no step of importance without consulting him; they were fallow his advice whenever it may be offered.

The first task of the council was the reorganization of the administrative set-up. On closer examination it was found that the system as a whole and not the monopoly of jobs by one community was responsible for the ills that the state suffered from, hence the need for a drastic change. To bring the administrative system at par with one working in British India, it was thought essential to adopt English and Urdu as official language.

In A.D.1891 the state council was reconstituted and the Maharaja was offered its president ship which he readily accepted. Raja Amar Singh was appointed the Chief Minister. The reconstitution of the council, however, gave to the Maharaja little substantial authority which continued to be exercised by the council under close supervision of the British Resident. Then, in A.D 1893, the queen conferred on him the title of the Grand Commander of the state of India. During the investiture ceremony, the Resident generously complimented the Maharaja on his "loyalty" and "present good government." However, in spite of all this the Maharaja remained merely a figurehead and though he continued to appeal to the British Government, full restoration of power was denied to him. In A.D. 1896, a minor change in the rules of business of the council was effected by which he could review the council's work and refer any decision back to it. If he did not concur. It was not until next decade that the Maharaja was able to make further progress in regaining his sovereignty.

In A.D 1887 Maharaja Pratap Singh requested Government of India to depute an experienced and competent Settlement Officer. A.D. 1887 Andrew Wingate was entrusted with the job of introducing regular settlement in the state. But the real credit goes to Sir Walter Lawrence, who was appointed Settlement Commissioner in A.D 1889 and who brought great sympathy and understanding to bear, on his task. The first settlement was completed in seven. Sir Walter Lawrence's work was followed after him by a succession of settlement officers. By A.D. 1912, practically every Tehsil and District directly administered by the government was settled either for the first time or in revision. The state share of revenue was fixed at 30 per cent of the gross produce [12].

Kar-sarkar or forced labour remained one of the most pronounced of the Kashmir administration under Maharaja Pratap Singh. The sufferings of the villagers of Kashmir were much greater in the late in the 19th century, mainly due to the construction of the Jhelum Valley Road and the Gilgit Road. Thousands of them were forced to work for the successful completion of these roads since

their construction was considered to be of vital importance for the interests of British imperialism. The conditions of beggar labourers were very lethargic especially during winter months owing to heavy snowfall. No arrangements were made for the feeding or housing of the coolies in the course of their journey; with the result many of them died on the way owing to the exposure and disease. Human portage to remote regions of the state to which animal transport was impossible had long been a necessity but the system abuses increased until there were often so many villagers in forced labour that farms lay unattended for months on end with the prospect of death from cold or starvation the villagers maimed from frostbite or shriveled or paralyzed from exposure to cold and it is no marvel that the Kashmiri should loath the very name of Gilgit. But the state government at the persistent request of the Resident finally decided to abolish the Begar system. To prevent the total collapse of the transport system, however, Begar in modified form was allowed to continue until a viable state transport system developed. Under Sir Walter Lawrence's direction, requisitions of forced labour for government officials were immediately abolished and unpaid portage to Gilgit was ended. The state council then framed elaborate regulation for control of the labour required for portage of commodities within the state; and on 18th April A.D. 1892 [13].

Public Works under Maharaja Pratap Singh: The Public Department was reorganized The need for enforcing Begar for carriage purposes abated considerably with another revolutionary, namely the built of a first Jhelum valley cart road and was completed in A.D 189, with the help of the British. and thus Kashmir was connected with the British India. The part of it between Kohla and Baramulah (98 miles) had been opened in A.D.1889. The road connects Srinagar with Kohla. The Jammu Sialkot Railway was completed and was thrown open to the traffic in A.D. 1890. The construction of Banihal cart road is another achievement of the late Maharaja's reign. Its importance lies in the fact that it connects Srinagar, the summer capital of the state with Jammu, the winter capital. Dr Mitra worked out a plan to construct a cart road over the Banihal; work was begun in A.D. 1913. Banihal cart road as it was then called remained a private road of the Maharaja and special permit was required to travel over it. In July A.D. 1922, however, the Maharaja issued an order throwing open the road to the public. Both these roads were great feats of engineering skill and together they made 400 miles of hill road longest in the world.

The Sangam Bridge was built in A.D.1910. These public works are under the charge of a retired engineer from the Public Works Department of the India. The Sialkot-Jammu Railway was completed and was thrown open to traffic in A.D.1890 [14].

It will thus be seen that the construction of the two roads connecting the Punjab with Srinagar was no mean achievement. Lacs of rupees were spent on the packa bridge road to Gilgit. Another bridle road connected Srinagar with Leh in Ladakh. Considerable expenditure was incurred on the maintenance and repairs of these roads, all of which passed through difficult mountainous countries. As transportation and communication improved the numbers of annual visitors and tourists to the state increased. Attempts by Europeans to purchase land and settle in Kashmir were successfully opposed by the Maharajah and this led, strangely enough, to the development of houseboats, now a landmark in the state. Unable to find suitable accommodation in Kashmir, visitors delighted to live in indigenous doongas transformed into comfortable floating cottages. Telegraph lines originally erected during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign were extended throughout the valley and in to Gilgit and Ladakh. Later, telephone connections between Jammu and Srinagar were also established [15].

Measures to improve health and sanitation were also undertaken, especially after a series of Cholera epidemics which reigned the state between A.D. 1890 and A.D. 1910, vaccination against smallpox was first introduced in A.D. 1894. In 1904-05 the number of persons were successfully vaccinated in both provinces was 33,784, while in Gilgit 4200 vaccination were also carried out. A well-equipped Zenana hospital was established at Srinagar under the management of a qualified lady Doctors. Another hospital was established at Jammu. In 1904-5, the number of hospitals and dispensaries in the state established during the period under study was 64. While in Srinagar, efforts were seriously undertaken to control epidemics by providing piped water, widening and paving the streets, building latrines and organizing public sanitation works. The medical department was under the control of superintending surgeon. In 1905-6 the total number of patients treated was 4, 01, 120 of whom 4338 were in-patients and 11830 operations were formed. The expenditure was 1.5 Lakhs [16].

Crops in Kashmir usually depend upon snows and not upon monsoons as in the plains. Naturally the greater the number of irrigation canals, the less the apprehension of a famine. Maharaja Pratap Singh constructed a number of Canals, the most important canal are Lal Khul, Pratap

Canal, Ranbir Canal. The last being the longest and most important of them, with the total length, including its distributaries, of 200 miles and a command area of 1,35,450 acres. About 200 tanks were constructed in the Kandi Ilaqa of Jammu, in order to remove the acute distress of the resident of these arid tracts, who suffered from lack of adequate supply of drinking water. Basantpur Canal, Ujh Canal and upper Jhelum Canal. A flood spill channel for diverting the water of the Jhelum was constructed between Ram Munshi Bagh and Pandrethan. Dredging operations were conducted below the town of Baramulla for removal of silt etc. Both the Jammu and Kashmir hydro-electric installations have been erected for the purpose of lighting and the supply of power to factories and workshops, state-owned as well as private [17].

In A.D.1905-06, the machinery required for the hydro-electric generating plant at Mohara and the dredgers for deepening of the bed of the river at Baramulla were ordered from America. The Mohara power house was completed at the end of A.D.1907. It was the second hydro-electric project then in India, the first one being in Mysore. In 1905-6 the utilization of the Jhelum River for a great electric power scheme was taken in hand and 4.6 Lakhs was spent on it [18].

Agriculture was not neglected. Extensive swamps were reclaimed for agriculture purpose by building dams on rivers. Zamindari kols, small streamlets were improved, waste lands were offered to cultivate on favorable terms. Dredging operations began in A.D.1908 and by A.D.1912 an area of 6,100 acres was reclaimed from round the Wular Lake. It was allotted to cultivators for paddy cultivation. An agriculture department was established for instructing the agriculture in modern method of agriculture, use of chemical fertilizers and introduction of improved seeds and acclimatization of new varieties of crops. The co-operative movement was started in the state when the late Revenue Minister Khan Bahadur Sheikh Maqbul personal interest taken by him, several co-operative banks was established. A model farm, known as the Pratap Model Farm, was established near the Shalimar Garden, to improve the existing staple (rice and maize) crops and to introduce new ones likely to prove production in the country [19].

Sericulture, viticulture and horticulture were given great encouragement and these made much progress going onto become flourishing state industries. Sericulture was started on modern lines at Srinagar and Jammu. Ten filatures have been built; containing 1800 basins for reeling cocoons, fitted with Italian machinery and gave employment to over 5000 number of workers in

Srinagar. This brought the state large revenue. The rural population engaged in the silk-worm rearing in their homes during their spare time and the urban population engaged in factories. During the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh, some serious efforts were made to set up the industry and run it on a commercial scale and in a scientific manner. Mulberry seeds were imported from Italy and France and distributed among the peasants for rearing cocoons. A factory was opened in A.D.1907. By A.D.1921 over 55,000 Kashmiri's were involved in the silk industry, producing more than one lac kilograms of raw silk annually.

The beginning of Municipal Government took place in A.D. 1886 when the first Municipal Act was promulgated. Changes were effected in this Act in A.D. 1890 and A.D. 1913. Until A.D.1905 the administration of justice was vested in a member of the state councils. In this year the judge of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court was appointed to decide all judicial cases. The Criminal Procedure Code was introduced in Urdu in A.D. 1912, under its old Dogri title, the Ranbir Dand-bidhi, after having been passed by the council in June A.D. 1892. Other legal enactments were consolidated and published in a handy volume [20].

During the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh, elementary education has been provided in all parts of this state. Two first grade Arts Collages were established one in Kashmir in A.D 1905 and another in Jammu in A.D 1908 through the efforts of Annie Besant, both collages are affiliated to the Punjab University. 47 secondary schools, over 650 primary schools were established. A highly equipped technical institute in Srinagar and a smaller one in Jammu were established. In the technical institutes, instruction is given in mechanics, basket making, weaving, painting, modeling and decoration. The Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on Maharaja Pratap Singh by the University of the Punjab at the convocation of A.D. 1917. He was also a fellow of the university and took interest in university affairs.

The most important improvement was noticed in the Military Department. The state army was divided into two main branches, namely Regular troops and imperial service troops. Pratap Singh had some trouble on his frontier also. In his time, conquest of Hunza was affected and Chitral War was brought. The Dogra soldiers resisted attacks, offered counter attack and finally won whatever they wanted.

Central Jails were established at Jammu and Srinagar Municipal departments was established in Jammu and Kashmir, the resident of the cities were granted on voice in the management of their local affairs and other matters

pertaining to the sanitation, water supply and general welfare of the cities. Customs and excise departments were re-modeled. Forests were improved. The exploitation of Deodar was effectively controlled. This was achieved through the organization of the forest department in A.D. 1891 under an officer J.C. Donell lent by the Government of In dia. Forest department was re-organized in A.D. 1923-24.

European interest in investment and ownership in Jammu and Kashmir continued to increase, especially in view of the British administration presence and the stability of the state. However, the Maharaja was chary (cautious) of granting concession to outsiders and when an English firm applied for mining and power rights, he discouraged it. He had published a set of complex mining rules and then proceeded to set up the Kashmir Department of Mining for survey and protecting the state.

While some progress was made in the expansion of the Jammu and Kashmir economy, social and educational development lagged. Punjabis still controlled most of the administrative positions. As late as A.D. 1912, attempts to define state subject at those who had obtained permission from the Maharaja's government to own land in Kashmir failed to protect the Kashmir because almost anyone could procure the permission. With the opening of a collage in Srinagar and in Jammu through the efforts of Dr. Annie Besant, many more qualified Kashmir's demanded position within their own state government. Finally in A.D. 1925, the Maharaja decreed that vacancies on the Executive Council would be filled only by Kashmir's recruitment, for other government posts would be only among subject of the state.

In A.D. 1901 the revised customs scheme was introduced and showed a rise in customs revenue from Rs. 6, 57,195 to A.D. 1901 to 8, 35,830 in 1902. This increase was due to better arrangements for the assessment of the customs duty, prevention of smuggling and the expansion of trade.

The chief head of the increased receipts were, in the regular revenue-paying departments, viz; Land Revenue, Forests, Customs and Stamps. The total financial results of the year A.D. 1897 summed up in round figure were receipts sixty-seven lacs against expenditure sixty lacs.

By 1901-1910 the total revenue had risen to Rs. 1,3,66,000 and expenditure to Rs. 1, 06, 13,000. They increased in expenditure was due to road building, electricity projects, expansion in education and medical aid. Financially, the condition of the state was prosperous, the annual revenue having risen from fifty lacs in A.D. 1891 to 89 lacs in A.D. 1903-04, while the trade with British India had greatly increased.

In October 1905 the council was abolished and its powers were conferred on the Maharaja himself by Lord Curzon. The Maharaja was to be assisted by a chief minister, namely, Minister of Revenue, Home and Judicial. All the ministers had to send the cases and their abstract of order and their disposal was to be sent to the Resident for his approval.

The constitution established under this system provided:

- That the “ advice” of the Resident be followed whenever offered,
- That the budget be prepared and passed in consultation with the Resident.
- That no Resolution of the late state council be cancelled or modified without consulting the Residency and
- That the appointment of all ministers and any other important officials be made with the concurrence of the Government of India.

In A.D.1909, Raja Amar Singh who had played a prominent part in the political drama of the state passed away. Raja Ram Singh the third brother had already died in A.D.1899. Maharaja Pratap Singh from then onwards wielded his powers with great authority.

In the state itself, there were four chief executive officers: the Governor of Jammu, the Governor of Kashmir, the Wazir Wazarat of Gilgit and Wazir Wazarat of Ladakh. In Jammu there were five districts each with a Wazir Wazarat whose monthly salary was Rs. 250, below him were tehsildars and Sub-divisional officers who exercised revenue, civil and criminal jurisdiction. The civil and judicial cases the appeal lies on the Chief Judge of Jammu. The seat of power, however, was in the tehsil.

The Maharaja continuously efforts to press for full restoration of sovereignty and after the credible performance of the Jammu and Kashmir forces with the British army in overseas operation during World War I, he had a substantial lever(force) on which to press. When, on 18 September A.D.1920, Maharaja Pratap Singh applied to the Viceroy for full restoration of power, the British insisted that the Maharaja continue to consult with the Resident on all frontier matters and administrative changes.

In March A.D 1921 when Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India, visited the state and he formally announced the restoration of full administrative powers to the Maharaja. Soon the Maharaja abolished the state Council and formed the Executive Council in January A.D.1922. The Executive Council consisted of four

members; revenue, Home and Law and Commerce and Industries. These portfolios were occupied by Raja Hari Singh, Janak Singh, A.D. Hakim and Nawab Maula Baksh respectively. In A.D 1923, the strength of the council was increased to six with the addition of two more members of Finance and Police. Ch. Khushi Mohammad and B.J. Glancy were appointed on these posts. The Maharaja retained the portfolio of the President of the Executive Council.

The members of the Executive Council enjoyed the same powers in their respective departments as were enjoyed previously by the Ministers in charge of them. The decision in the Council were taken by a majority of the members subject to the concurrence of the Maharaja who reserved the power to over rule any decision the council took if he deemed it necessary. The Executive Council was to pass the annual budget and could sanction pensions and other allowances for the whole life or for lesser period to the employees of the state, their heirs or others representatives. The council continued to function till the Maharaja’s death in September A.D. 1925

CONCLUSION

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