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HISTORICAL STUDY OF KASHMIRI PANDITS IN THE POLITICS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR (1846-1947)

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Abstract

The initial period of Dogra regime under Gulab Singh (1846-56) and Ranbir Singh (1853-85) was eager to cultivate the loyalty of the Hindu clerical caste of Kashmir Pandit, and few prominent Kashmir Muslim Sayyid and Pir families to ensure Kashmir's smooth transition to a Dogra kingdom, in much the same way as British did in India. Gulab Singh was acquainted that the Kashmiri Pandits were highly advanced in education and wielding monopoly of Persian language; they succeeded in getting important jobs in the Lahore court as well as in other States. In the field of art, philosophy and literature, they had produced a galaxy of authors, savants and saints. The socio-economic condition of the Kashmir's was highly deplorable when Gulab Singh took over the control of Kashmir. The province of Kashmir signified many problems of administrative reconstruction and consolidation. Gulab Singh was utmost busy in settling the affairs of the State due to anarchy prevailed by the Sikh rulers. During the Gulab Singh regime, Kashmiri Pandits watched the ruler's projects of economic rebuilding and political consolidation of the State like resumed all the land grants, re imposed state control on the industries of the State, wrested away the monopolies in trade and commerce, introduced rationing system in food and reorganized shawl department.

Keywords: Politics, Kashmir, Dogra, Pandits, Maharajas.

INTRODUCTION

The Brahmin Kashmiri Pandits of Indian claim to have lived in the north Indian mountainous region of Kashmir for over 5000 years. The Brahmin Kashmiri Pandits consider themselves to be devout Hindus. Their favourite goddess is Kheer Bhawani. The first political spark that emerged in the state was due to actions of Pandit Hargopal and his brother. Pt. Hargopal later became a victim of court intrigues which was dynamic during those days. His outspoken and critical nature added fuel to the fire and he along with his brother Salig Ram Salik was subjected to imprisonment in Bahufort for three years. During their confinement in the fort both the brothers prayed, studied and pampered in actions asserting deliberate defiance of the imperial authority. During his confinement in prison Hargopal wrote his famous Masnavi 'Gopal Nama' in which he versified the condition of Kashmir and exposed the court intrigues. He also composed a poem entitled 'Narsingh Autar' which is a satire on the political system. The brief period of Gulab Singh was managed in adjusting and maintaining the State with his priority. Next ruler was Maharaja Ranbir Singh who ascended the throne in 1856 giving the State unity, peace and smooth-moving wheels of a well-organized and stable government. His period was one of the enlightenment and he established schools, pathshala, makhtabs, Department of Research and Publications, architectural arts and many industries. While Kashmir's were able to negotiate within the Dogra economic system and new outlooks, but in 1877-78, Kashmir was hit by a famine linked to the Great Famine of British India that spread from South to North India in the year 1876-78. Many officers, taking advantage of the abnormal situation began to fleece and left the helpless Kashmir's but Pandit Hargopal couldn't stand with such a situation. He was the patriot of the highest order and an ardent well-wisher of the ruler. He placed the true picture before him. As a result many corrupt officers were removed from the services. The ruler was anxious to provide relief to his subjects and alleviate their hardships due to famine. Food grains from lakhs of rupees were procured from outside and distributed amongst its people. When the wounds of the famine began to heal and many corrupt officers were shown the door, some big guns in the administration starting conspiracy against Pt. Hargopal whom they held responsible for the ruler's wrath on the corrupt officers. In early 1889 AD, the new resident Colonel Parrey S. Nisbet, decided to get the Maharaja removed on the basis of charges of disloyalty to the British government. The charges included some treasonable letters to the Tsar of Russia, 34 in number were reported to have been recovered, the deposed Sikh Monarch, Duleep Singh and of his political favourites in the state and outside. He was deprived of all effective authority and almost deposed by the government of India, and in his place, a council was constituted to carry on the government of the State. The council consisted of Maharaja's two brothers, namely Ram Singh and Amar Singh, two of his ministers i.e., Pandit R.B. Suraj Koul and Rai Bahadur Bhag Ram and a British Officer nominated by the Government of India. The report of the virtual deposition of Maharaja Pratap Singh and consequent annexation of the whole of the Jammu and Kashmir State by the British spread like wild fire throughout the length and breadth of India. The entire conspiracy was however exposed by the Amrita Bazar Patrika of Calcutta, and the entire episode became famous as the "Kashmir Imbroglio".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of the present paper is to study the Historical Study of Kashmiri Pandits in the Politics of Jammu and Kashmir (1846-1947)

PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present work which is actually the Historical Study of Kashmiri Pandits in the Politics of Jammu and Kashmir (1846-1947). The present work is based on secondary source of data which was collected from the periodic tables, books, journals, research articles, encyclopaedia, government records, and websites and so on. The study is conducted by Descriptive Survey method. The researcher has visited for libraries and other concerned departments for the secondary information to the related problem. Pandits Struggle For State Subject Law:- The deposition of Pratap Singh and direct intervention in the affairs of the state aroused severe resentment from official as well as nonofficial sources in India and in the State. Inside the state also, the British action created consternation particularly among the Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir, who feared that the British action was a prelude to the eventual overthrow the Hindu ruler of the State. One of the first steps taken by the State Council after its institution in 1889 was to replace Persian with Urdu as the language of administration, the language being imported alongside numerous administrative servants from neighbouring British Punjab. The Dogra Durbar cited several reasons for the recruitment of outsiders instead of native Kashmir's to the service, including lack of modern education and their incompetence in the recently instituted language of administration, Urdu. This change had affected the incompetent and corrupt officials who were thrown out of jobs. With this change the Pandits who with their mastery of Persian dominated the administrative services, were thrown out of their jobs and these jobs were soon occupied by the Punjabis people from the neighbouring province of the Punjab, waves of office hunters from outsiders moved towards Kashmir. The exclusive struggle of Kashmiri Pandits continued unabated for achieving the basic civil rights, for the people of Kashmir. Its main plank was "Kashmir for Kashmir's". A talented Kashmiri, Shankarlal Kaul was the first Kashmiri to raise and plead for this slogan publicly and openly at All India Subjects Conference held at Kanpur in 1923. By 1925, hundreds of Pandit graduates beset disappointment with the policy and attitude of the government which endorses the outsiders against the natives of the land. Pandit Gwashlal Koul written an editorial in 1925 under the appellation "Unemployment in Kashmir" in the Akhbar-i-Aam a famous newspaper of Lahore and appealed to the educated Kashmir's to organize themselves into an association for their rights. Similarly, Pandit Pyare Mohan Dattatreya, a Kashmiri Pandit from Delhi who was then on the Chief editorial staff of "The Tribune" of Lahore organized a colossal conference at Lahore in which Pt. Jialal Kilam, Pt. Kashyap Bandhu and a number of Kashmiri Pandits participated.

The Kashmiri Pandit intellectual movement pressurized the Kashmiri Durbar to place restrictions on employment of the outsiders from purchasing immovable property in the State. He then Revenue Minister of the State, R.K. Kaul, a Kashmiri Pandit from Allahabad, supported them and accepted their proposal. Ultimately the problem was settled by Maharaja Hari Singh who constituted a committee which represented

all sections of the people under the chairmanship of Major General Janak Singh, the then Revenue minister. The committee submitted its report in 1927 defining the term State Subject. The State Subject Definition Notification No. 1-L/84 dated 20 April, 1927 was issued. This definition divided the subjects into three categories i.e., Class First State Subjects, Class Second and Class Third. The whole movement was peaceful and intellectual in character. The Kashmiri Pandits who strived to create awareness among the people and educated them about their basic rights in order to partake of public affairs and administration on the basis of merit and efficiency. The State Subject movement was a prolific first in its kind in the State led by Dogra Sabha and Kashmiri Pandits of Kashmir bestowing rooms to other demands like freedom of Press, freedom to form associations and modernization of the administration. The Dogra Sabha presumably satisfied with the fresh concession; withdrew from this specific arena of debate. However for the Kashmiri Pandits, the menace of Punjabis had been alleviated considerably but they got new arch rival the Kashmiri Muslims, which constitutes the majority populace who begun to mobilize for their own rights and from a standpoint as legitimate as that of Kashmiri Pandits in their being equally “sons of the soil”.

The Impact Of Indian National Movement:

The impact of Indian National Movement had deeper political implications on the State and Kashmiri Pandits endorses the movement in the State. During Non-Cooperation segment (1920- 22) India presented a unique phenomenon of Hindu-Muslim cooperation and this phenomenon had positive repercussion on the people of the Jammu and Kashmir also. The educated young men of the State got inspiration from the Congress movement in India. These young men were thoroughly permeated with the ideas of freedom and self –rule. The Khilafat movement created deep resentment among the people of the State. The newly educated among them both Hindu and Muslim availed of this occasion to foster both the communities on a common platform. Kashmiri Pandits played a vigorous role, responded to the call of the Congress to support the Khilafat agitation. Khilafat meetings continued to be held in Srinagar .Societies propagating boycott of foreign cloth were formed in Kashmir Province at Baramulla, Anantnag and Sopore, where membership was open to all castes and creeds without distinction consequently, organisations like Arya Samaj, Ram Krishna Ashram, Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Khilafat committee and the Ahmediyas joined hands. But instead of adopting the Non-cooperation programme in letter and spirit, their leaders took up the local issues. In the Kashmir province another issue got mixed up with the Khilafat agitation and helped in the intensification of the movement in the province. In the Kashmir Province prices had been rising for quite some time and as the winter of 1920, approached, most of the essential commodities disappeared from the markets. Thus they launched the Meat Strike Agitation to bring down the prices of meat in Kashmir. They also accentuated the necessity for Hindu-Muslim accord, cow protection and fraternization among the Kashmiri population. Instead they were chiefly organized by Kashmir Pandits who had recently returned from .The agitation was however finally brought to an end by fully employing the seditious meetings Act passed in 1915 to ban the Khilafat meetings. After the Congress withdrew the movement, the movement in the State immediately collapsed. It had its deep impact on the evolution of the freedom struggle in Jammu and Kashmir State.

Various Reform Movements Initiated By Kashmiri Pandits

The Sabha advocated reforms of the Pandit community which beset with social evils and religious dogmas. The reforms included like stoppage of dowry system, expenditure on marriage ceremonies, illiteracy, established reading rooms for education and widow remarriage. As a result of the import of Punjabis into the state administration, there was a lack of urgency in the state's efforts at promoting education among local Kashmir. The Council also took steps to encourage private enterprise to promote education. By 1905 Annie Besant started a Hindu college in Srinagar, which was taken over by the government in 1911 and renamed Sri Pratap College. The Darbar also constituted a number of college scholarships for Kashmir's to study in Lahore. With the opening of college, Kashmiri Pandits were the first to join in large number and took the opportunity. Kashmiri Pandits entered the government services but the elevated positions were occupied by the outsiders who had been created great hindrances for the natives to get higher promotions and merit. Punjabis officials who ran the state saw no need for educated Kashmir's threatening their hold on the meticulously controlled bureaucracy. This approach of the outsiders had stimulated strong feelings of antagonism among the Pandits. The spread of English education helped in the assimilation of the liberalist and reformist ideals among the people of the state. Many young Kashmiri Pandits entered State services and cast in a new context assumed new social status. However the educated Kashmiri Pandits who could not enter the State services exercised the greater influence in moulding the public mind in the State. The fact was that, the administrative organization of the State offered a limited margin of employment to the educated young men. The State administration was infested with the British Officers or the officers of other Indian State. The British officials who considered the Government in the State as their own preserve and managed to assume positions and roles for their personal benefit or utilized the distribution of employments as an effective instrument or patronage, paid little attention to the difficulties the educated youth faced. It is here that the first seeds of mass distrust were sown against the Dogras, the British and their retainers in the State. The educational status of Kashmiri Muslims remained at a low level throughout this period, especially when compared to that of Kashmiri Pandits. The educated young men commenced a number of movements, which ostensibly were aimed to achieve social and educational objectives, but which were actually motivated by a wide range of political ends.

Kashmiri Pandits in the Integration of Freedom Struggle:

Kashmiri Pandits played a notable role in the integration of freedom struggle against the British in the States and that of in British India. The British government permitted hundreds of Indian princely states to exist where the rulers were totally subservient to them. The people of the princely states were also influenced by the national movement. In 1927 the All India States Peoples Conference was formed to coordinate political activities in the princely states. Popular struggles were organized in many states including Kashmir, Rajkot, Hyderabad and Travancore. Praja mandals were organized in several states with the development of democratic and national consciousness. Most of the Princely States were autocratically ruled. The economic burden on the people was heavy with high taxation, education and social services were backward and civil rights were restricted. State revenues were expended on the luxurious life-styles of the rulers and since the

British provided immunity from domestic and external aggression, they felt free to ignore the interests of their people. The first ever held Conference of the Indian States People, convened in 1927, was presided over by a firebrand Kashmiri Pandit, Shankar Lal Kaul, who had left Kashmir after having been removed from the State services on the advice of the British Resident. He demanded the right of the States People to repudiate the princely order and called for a united struggle of the people in the Indian States and the British Provinces against the British rule. Shanker Lal Koul's address was a pioneering declaration. In his presidential address Shankar Lal Koul called for liberation of the peoples of the States from the princely rule as well as the British paramountcy. Integration of the National Movement in the Indian States and the British India was formally proposed by another Kashmiri Pandit, Dwarika Nath Kachroo, who was the Secretary General of All India State Peoples' Conference.

Grievances of the Kashmiri Pandits:

The communal holocaust of 13 July, 1931 was a rude shock to the Kashmiri Pandits. The progressive Pandits felt deeply pained and grieved to see that contrary to the tradition and culture of Kashmir, the movement was conducted on narrow communal basis. Kashmiri Pandits realized that their previous movements were for general welfare of all sections of Kashmir's whereas the Muslims totally bypassed and ignored Hindus and high lightened the downtrodden of Muslims. They asked for more concessions and share for Muslims in all spheres than the ratio of education or merit warranted. The arch point they advanced was that the ratio of population and not the ratio of education or entitlement otherwise, was basis instigating and promoting Muslim fundamentalism and fanaticism. In July 1931, it assumed the shape of violent and massive anti Hindu outburst and caused their holocaust. The genuineness of Kashmiri Pandits can be drawn from the resolution of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha of Srinagar, passed 15 days previous to the rebellion, would convinced any fair-minded man that the Hindus were friendly to the Muslims, loyal to the ruler and modest in the matter of their demands. The resolution said, "Resolved that as the Government of Kashmir intends to receive a deputation of the representatives of our Muslim brethren to submit their communal viewpoint with regard to their alleged rights, claims and grievances, Shri Sanatan Dharma Sabha, the only representative body of Kashmiri Hindus, draws the attention of the Government that no opinion be expressed with regard to the Muslims claims, so long as the Hindus of Kashmir have not submitted their case for the consideration of the government, which they would be doing at an early date. "Resolved that the Sri Sanatan Dharma Sabha in all humility maintains that the historical importance of the Kashmir Hindus and their past services coupled with their unique educational advancement in the State, entitle them to a special protection, as the most cultured minority in the State, although the Kashmiri Pandits would be prepared to forego the privileges of a minority, if the body politics of the State is kept free from the canker of communalism. "Resolved that the Shri Sanatan Dharma Sabha,

Demand Of Minority Safeguards:- In the narratives of modern Kashmir under the Dogras, Kashmiri Pandits began to feel safe and protected as the ruler belonged to the same religion. But this reflection was soon shattered by the communal disturbances of 1931 and they began to feel doubtful against the majority population. The Sanatan Dharma Sabha Yuvak Sabha, a Kashmiri Pandit Political organization was the

most trenchant critic of the Muslim Conference during this period. According to Yuvak Sabha, the Muslim Conference, notwithstanding its claims to the contrary did not represent Kashmiri Pandits interests. The rhetoric of the Yuvak Sabha indicates the extent to which the concepts of majority and minority communities had penetrated the political thought of the Kashmir valley: “Denied the privileges of the majority on account of the smallness of our numbers, we are at the same time denied the protection due to a minority and doubly due to a minority community with our history, services and educational attainments. The compendium of P.N. Bazaz letter to Gandhiji on May 5, 1934 mentions, “The Kashmiri Pandits are the highly educated community in the state and form the intellectual class .Their chief occupation is Government service. They are depressed in the sense that highly educated though they are; they have never risen to high posts in the state and have filled the lower ranks of employment, mostly clerks. It was therefore the Kashmiri Pandits who had so far carried on a campaign in the press against the autocratic form of Government and the high-handedness of the non-Kashmiri officials in the State. But being in a microscopic minority-Kashmiri Pandits are only 1.6 percent in the State- the Kashmiri Pandits could not carry on the propaganda with any appreciable success”. Further he said, “The Kashmiri Mussalman forms the bulk of the population here. Being in an overwhelming majority- 78 percent in the State and 93 percent in Kashmir proper- they are the masses, agriculturists, labourers and others, true, their condition compares favourably with their brother agriculturists in British India.

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