



CULTURE DEVELOPMENT DURING THE DOGRA PERIOD AND IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS

SHUBHAM SINGH SAMBYAL

Department of History,

University of Jammu

The whole history of Dogra period in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir has been written either to eulogize the political triumphs of Maharaja Gulab Singh or the period of last Dogra ruler Maharaja Hari Singh and the subsequent accession of Jammu and Kashmir into union of India. Due to this, other aspects of historiography have been neglected such as economic, social, cultural etc. Maharaja Gulab Singh has been credited for the establishment of the biggest princely state in the Indian sub-continent following the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. In this treaty, Maharaja with his wit successfully carved out Jammu and Kashmir, an independent territory. He was also able to keep his empire safe from the British intrigues which can also be considered as one of his greatest achievements. The whole history of Dogra period has been reduced to only political narratives which resulted in sidelining the other achievements particularly the evolution of institutions and their significant contribution in the cultural development.

The evolution of institutions begins with the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh and these institutions further developed under subsequent Dogra rulers. It can be said that Maharaja Gulab Singh institutionalized the tradition of writing history. It was a thoughtful move by Maharaja as historiographic tradition materialized the history of the region and immortalized the Dogra rulers in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. The Institution of history writing not only brought pride to the Dogra rulers but also provided legitimacy to them. Due to the presence of *Rajatarangini* in Kashmir, there was always a reference point to study the history of Kashmir but no such historical discourse existed in Jammu. Since the inception of establishment of the Jammu and Kashmir state colonial authorities tended to disrupt the law and order and to dilute the legitimacy of the Maharaja Gulab Singh, they tried to tarnishing his image by producing historical narrative where Maharaja was shown as tyrant and an incapable ruler. It is here that Maharaja Gulab Singh showcased his genius and appointed Ganesh Das Badhera to compose and compile the history of ruling dynasty of Jammu.

Gasnesh Das Badhera was an ingenious when it came to writing history. He took clues from the *Rajatarangini* and exploited the omissions to create the respectful genealogy of the Dogra rulers to legitimize their rule. This legitimization also enabled the ruling Dogra family to claim their right over whole of the territories of Jammu and Kashmir. In this context, *Rajadarshini* was brought out. The process of historical reconstruction of the region was carried forward by the Maharaja as he commissioned the compilation of *Gulabnama*. This task could not be fulfilled during his lifetime but it was completed by Diwan Kirpa Ram under the Maharaja Ranbir Singh. This tradition of history writing continued even during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh, who patronized Kahn Singh Billawaria for the same task.

The other institutions were also developed that contributed to the development of culture. In this context, Maharaja Ranbir Singh played a significant role. His contribution in development of educational institutions and making education accessible to even lower caste remained unparalleled. He established *pathshalas* and *madarsas* to fulfil the task of imparting education and to promote a culture of inclusivity among the people. Maharaja Ranbir Singh also developed Sanskrit tradition to vary forward the intellectual institutionalization. Thousands of rare manuscripts were collected and preserved in the temple structures that were constructed during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, particularly the Raghunath Temple complex. It is testified by Bhuller that over 6000 manuscripts were preserved by him. Not only were these manuscripts procured and preserved by many of them were translated so that they could reach the masses. Many of the Persian and Arabic texts were translated into Sanskrit and epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana into Persian. Maharaja Ranbir Singh was truly responsible for creating a literary atmosphere and for the promotion of literary culture in the region. Maharaja Ranbir Singh was also responsible for establishing the Press in the region through *Vidya Vilas* Press and creating literary centers at Utterbeni, Purmandal, Jammu, Srinagar to promote classical literature and these centers were on the lines of Vikramasila and Nalanda in the sense that they allowed the scholars of the region to gather and indulge in literary and religious activities. He was certainly responsible for ushering in a era that was responsible in shaping the Dogra culture.

The Dharmarth Trust which was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh played an important role in the maintenance of Temple structures, preservation of the manuscripts and was used by Maharaja Ranbir Singh to give employment to people of learned background so that it ushered in a reign of cultural development and created a platform for the evolution of a rich Dogra culture.

These activities even more impetus with the reorganisation of Archaeological Survey under the guidance of Maharaja Pratap Singh. He realised that it was being used Colonial authorities as a tool to promote their propaganda so he took measures to reorganise it and separate archaeology and research by creating a new department.

It is with similar attitude that Maharaja Hari Singh also took certain measures to promote the cultural activities. He was himself well versed with western education and enlightened with the idea of welfare of his subjects, he took up the cause of promoting higher education and granting scholarships to the meritorious students. He was responsible for establishing a committee that would overlook the dissemination of scholarships to students who would be given an opportunity to go to Europe to learn various skills like architecture, administration,

horticulture, forestry, sericulture, etc. It was a novel idea as it would promote an intellectualism among the people and also give them an opportunity to explore. This also indicative of the fact that the Dogra rulers were much concerned about the educational institutions as they would play the most important role in shaping the cultural matrix of the region.

It is from these examples that one can gauge the active role of the Dogra rulers in the creation of various institutions which became instrumental in shaping the cultural landscape of the region. These institutions played a dominant role in transforming the newly craved out state and gave a unique character to the region which had multi-religious and multi-linguistic subjects. These institutions of literature, education, religion, press and printing and language created a politically homogenized state which can boast of being a culturally rich region.

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