CHAPTER - III

SOCIAL FACTORS IN THE MODERNISATION OF KASHMIR.
Kashmiri society till the opening of Jhelum valley cart road and advent of Christian missionaries, showed a traditional picture.

As late as 1890, Kashmir was like a medieval country. Its old institutions still existed and its economy was still based on its old crafts. But it could not remain a medieval state for ever; two decades after the opening of the Jhelum valley road in 1890, it felt the impact of outside forces and great social and cultural changes began to take place, which contributed to the modernisation of Kashmiri society.

The opening of the Jhelum valley road is a landmark in the history of Kashmir. It ended the isolation of the valley by connecting it with outside forces and influences, and thus the habits and customs of people began to change slowly.

Economic exploitation of peasants and artisans, the impact of western education introduced by Christian missionaries and the Muslim educational movement, started by Moulavi Rasool Shah as a safeguard against the Muslims not being taken to Christianity, also contributed to the modernisation of the masses, especially Kashmiri Muslims,
and thus helped to transit the society from medievalism to modernisation.

**Economic exploitation of peasants and artisans**

In fact the vilification of Kashmir started right from its annexation with Mughals. The Mughal annexation opened the gateway of un-ending political oppression, social exploitation and economic distress and disparity accompanied by natural calamities. The Mughals ruled through governors, who were very harsh and imposed heavy taxes on the articles, including those not found in Kashmir.

After the Mughals, the Afghans ruled the valley for 67 years. Their rule reduced the people of the valley to the lowest ebb of penury and degradation. The whole economic structure was destroyed due to negligence and heavy taxation. Peasants did not tilt their land, and

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The reign of Muhammad Shah was hot bed of intrigues. A naib-subedar of his reign namely "Agar Khan" left no stone un-turned in levying heavy taxes on the people. He was reported to have imposed tax on an elephant, which never existed in the valley. This is also witnessed by the folk saying of Kashmir as "Agar Khan un Hous", 
shawl weavers left their looms unattended due to fear of heavy taxation. The Afghan rule was regarded as one of the cruelest and tyrannical in the world.\(^2\)

The Afghans were followed by the Sikhs, who ruled the valley for about twentyseven years (1819-1946). Moorecraft had witnessed the miserable condition of people during the Sikh period.\(^3\)

The condition of peasantry under the Dogras was miserable and unhappy, due to a number of causes. Firstly, during the Sikh period they were reduced to abject poverty by their harsh treatment. Secondly, the negligent attitude of the government brought miseries to the

and depicts the illegal taxes and exactions imposed by Mughals on the innocent people of Kashmir, J.H. Knowles, A Dictionary of proverbs and Sayings.

2. According to Lawrence, the Afghan rule was a time of "brutal tyrannical unrelieved by good works, chivalry or honour."

3. Moorcraft says, "Everywhere the people were in most abject condition, exorbitantly taxed by the Sikh government and subject to every kind of exortion and oppression by its officers.... not one sixteenth of the cultivable surface is in cultivation and the inhabitants, starving at home, are driven in great numbers to the plains of the Hindustan". He further remarked that "the little better than the cattle...the murder of a native by a sikh is punished with a fine to the Government from sixteen to seventy rupees of which four rupees are paid to the family of the deceased if a Hindu and two rupees if a Mohammadan". Moorcraft Travels in the Himalayan Province of Hindustan and the Punjab in Ladakh and Kashmir, Vol.II, PP.293-294.
villagers, and, thirdly, the villagers had to pay all kinds of taxes, and at the same time, they were supposed to go for "Begar" for their Dogra masters. 4

The people under the Dogras were heavily taxed. Everything was brought under the government control. 5

The pulse and pain experienced by common masses at the hands of revenue officials of different categories, has been expressed by so many travellers, who visited the valley during the Dogra rule. The crops, when cut by the cultivators, were collected in stacks. One half was taken as a regular government share, and additional amounts were taken as perquisites of various kinds, leaving one-third or even only a quarter with the cultivator, of this some was taken in cash and some in kind. The whole system of assessment and collection was exceedingly complicated, and workable only in the interest of corrupt officials. 6

6. Francis Young Husband, Op. cit., PP. 174-177, Peasants showed little interest to bring large portion of land under cultivation. A cultivator would only produce, as much as would, after payment of his revenue provide for the actual wants of himself and his family. Because he knew by experience any surplus would be absorbed by rapacious undertaking officials.
This clearly shows that even 1/4th of their produce was not left to the peasants. Little wonder then that a great majority of peasants subsisted on fruits and vegetables. Thus the heavy system of taxation brought starvation, poverty and misery to a large body of peasants in the valley.

Between 1888 and 1894 the demand for land-revenue increased from Rs. 29,56,222 to Rs. 35,75,413 respectively. Almost every item of peasants' subsistence was brought under heavy taxation policy over and above the usual land-revenue. Peasants had to pay thirty kinds of taxes and ceases to the government.

In times of crop failure, bad harvest, floods and famines, the Dogras did not provide any kind of relief or remissions to the people. In 1894 and 1852, untimely rains damaged the crops heavily. In 1856, earthquakes devasted the valley; in 1877, there was again crop failure and famine. In 1885, earthquakes again took heavy toll of human life. In 1893, the whole valley was flooded and 35,428 acres of crops

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7. These figures are in correspondance with Majmuo reports of J K Tibet.

8. Some of them include, khidmatgaree, Shagdara etc.
land were inundated and 2,225 houses were damaged.\textsuperscript{9} Officials, like Pattadars, Chakdars, Maufidars, Jagirdars and even small officials of the revenue department like Sazawalls, Kardars, Muqadams and Patwaris contributed towards the degraded condition of then peasantry.\textsuperscript{10} In the words of Francis Young Husband, the revenue officials were worshippers of bygone, ignorant and destructive age.\textsuperscript{11} Thus extortion and oppression at the hands of rapacious officials resulted in extreme wretchedness and abject conditions of the peasantry. It was due to these atrocities that the peasants of the time resorted to migration.

The revenue officials who owned large holdings also employed villagers to cultivate the land with free labour and considered them nothing more than the bonded slaves. They filled their purses through these ill-practices.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} Lawrence, \textit{Op.cit.}, P.205.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Mirza, \textit{Akhbarat}, Vol.I, P.36.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Francis Young Husband, PP. 157-158.
\item \textsuperscript{12} S.N.Koul, \textit{Kashmir Economics}, P.63.
\end{itemize}
The Waddari System in the villages also reduced the peasantry to the level of acute poverty and pauperism. These Waddars were considered respected presence in the society and enjoyed their lives at the cost of others, sucking the blood of poor and ignorant villagers. 13

Apart from the burden of heavy taxation, the worst feature of the village life was forced labour or "Begar" which the peasants were forced to do for transport purposes from Kashmir to Gilgit. 14 The institution of "Begar" though prevalent from the earliest times in Kashmir, became rigorous during the Dogra rule. It had become a routine that each house in each village had to provide a quota of men for the purpose. They were paid from 4-7 chilkies for the double journey. In 1866 A.D. the peasants, boatmen and tradesmen were forced to carry the supplies and luggage of the troops from Kashmir to Gilgit. They were given nothing except one


14. This system reduced the poor villagers to the lowest ebb of social degradation. They are considered nothing, but bend slaves by their masters. P.N. Bazaz, Op.cit, pp.63-65.
seer of rice a day as their food. It is believed that a good number of them died on their way to Gilgit.

In the autumn of the same year, another group was sent, with the supplies on their backs; many of them died due to hunger and cold. But the authorities did not relent but continued sending men through the dangerous, snow-bound road. Eventually, they died due to lack of arrangements on the part of the Government. The Government was very strict in getting people to do this irresponsible job of Kar-i-Bagar. The peasants were usually taken from their fields in summer, when they were needed in their fields, with the result that many people migrated from Kashmir to other parts in search of their living.


16. The people could hardly escape the clutches of the revenue officials. The Begar System encouraged corruption. The officials could obtain wood, grass, milk and other thing from the peasants. Lawrence, Op. cit., P. 414, some officials built houses in the city with the unpaid labour of peasants under the pretext of Begar, E.F. knights, Where the three empires meet, PP. 69-70.
In 1848, one of the Dogra officials took 2,520 persons for the Begar. This oppressive practice led to the depopulation of some of the villages, which also had been witnessed by Pratap Singh Dogra, in one of his diaries. In order to escape from the Begar, some villages were reported to have been sold to the governor of Kashmir by the villagers, 40 rupees per village.

The begar was also demanded for other public works like digging of canals, construction of wooden culverts and so on. As such Begar played its role in deteriorating the condition of peasantry from bad to worse.

The condition of workmen and artisans during the Sikh period was miserable. So was the condition of shawl weavers. They could not maintain their families due to low wages they earned. Each shawl weaver earned four annas, of which he had to pay two annas to the Sikh governor of Kashmir.


18. One of the Diary of Maharaja Pratab Singh gives a detailed information about the depopulation of various villages due to forced labour. Maharaja Pratab Singh, Diary of an Inspection Tour to Gilgit, 1896, Jammu Repository.

19. Lawrence, Op.cit., P.414. Once the peasant was landless, he could easily escape from the Begar.

20. Shawl Weaver lived in acute poverty.
At the advent of the Dogra rule in 1846, the condition of shawl-weavers again showed a miserable picture. Various kinds of taxes were imposed upon them. An annual tax imposed upon each shawl weaver was Rs. 47.8. In addition to it, officials also charged illegal taxes, which amounted to 25 per cent of the value.

The most unfortunate thing about the shawl weavers was that they could neither change their profession nor leave the valley. Wilson Andrews, Richard Temple and Dr. Elmhie had witnessed the wretched condition of shawl weavers.

Though the Shawl industry was the major source of income to the government, nothing was done for their improvement. It was in 1865, when oppression

21. Shawl weavers had to pay taxes like Baj and Nazrans, also.


26. The Franco-German War of 1870 and the famine of 1877-1879 gave a death blow to this industry,
and heavy taxation touched its heights and their grievances were not listened to, they revolted against the government. But the revolt was put down with strong hand, and nothing was done for their improvement.

The labour problem in the silk factory had worsened. It was, therefore, in 1924 that the workers in the silk factory had grown sick of the extortion demanded from them by the officials. They began to show signs of unrest. The result was that twentyfive leaders were arrested in July 1924, and the situation became critical and acute. They refused to work and did not carry out the orders of the Director and other officials of the factory. About 200 workers assembled from which it never revived again. With the result people died of starvation and they had no alternative, but to leave the valley in search of food and living.

27. F.M. Hussain, Article published in Sheeraza (Eng.). Threads of Life - The shawl bauf Agitation 1865.
and attempted to enter Shargarhi Police Station by force. But the situation was put down by the Maharaja's cavalry and infantry.\textsuperscript{31}

The emergence of these protests and strikes showed that the people were getting conscious of their rights. It was actually the oppression of rulers, which awakened the people from their deep slumber and taught them that they were not born to submit to that oppression, but should stand against it.

\textbf{Missionaries, impact and modernisation}

As has been already noted, the Kashmiri society till the advent of missionaries presented a traditional picture. But it was only after their coming to the valley that the changes began to take place in almost every aspect of Kashmiri life. They introduced a new system of education, first in India and then in Kashmir, which brought about a great change and thus heralded the dawn of modern era in the history of Kashmir.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{flushleft}
31. Ibid.
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Western education gave a death blow to the traditional educational institutions, like Madrasas, Maktabs and Pathshala, respectively run by Moulavis and Pandits, and gave birth to the state schools in Kashmir. The mission schools also worked for the emancipation of Kashmiri women and left no stone unturned in attracting the Kashmiri girls to their schools. The Girls Mission School was the fore-runner of women education and with the passage of time some other private institutions also came into existence. The curriculum of mission schools introduced a sense of manliness among the students and gave them self-awareness. They realised that there was nothing bad in learning swimming for self-production and saving others' lives. They learnt to help the needy and poor and at the same time they also learnt that honest work was a kind of worship. They became conscious about their hygiene and turn out.

34. Ibid.
36. Tyndale Biscoe, Fifty Years Against the Stream, Mysore, 1930, P.78.
The most superstitious and bigoted strata of Kashmiri society, the Pandits, also felt the impact of modernisation, due to efforts of missionaries. They began to realise the disadvantages of social evils prevalent in their society and began to think on modern and rational lines.37

The medical services rendered by the missionaries contributed in making people conscious that diseases were caused due to germs. So they should adopt clean and tidy habits to get rid of the diseases, "as an indirect result of the activities of the missionaries, the government started the first dispensary in Srinagar in 1870, which proved to be the fore-runner of the present medical service.38 The mission hospitals and girls' schools also made their contribution in changing the physical appearance and mental outlook of Kashmiri women. Previously they were unorderly, apprehensive and distressed. But now of them began to look self-confident, neat and tidy. At the same time, they also learnt how to make their life happy and how to be helpful to society.

37. Dermot Norris, Kashmir the Switzerland of India, P.9.
Apart from their educational and medical work, the missionaries also worked for social uplift of Kashmiri society. They worked for widow remarriage and made many widows remarried. They wrote many publications and brought out the ills afflicting the Kashmiri society. This criticism gave people an awareness and they felt a need for change and reform. The result was that Shabas and associations came into existence, which stood against social evils like education to girls, child marriage, high dowry, denying remarriage and etc. and thus missionary activities also contributed to social reform of Kashmiri society.

Kashmiri cultural life also felt the western impact. People began to wear coats and pants instead of Pharan. The school going boys began to give up their


old fashion and adopted the new ones. And thus slowly, almost every aspect of Kashmiri life began to feel the western impact and the signs of modernisation became more and more visible.

It is relevant to note here that Muslims of Kashmir for long were distrustful of and un-interested in modern education, which most of the Kashmiri Pandits received as an opportunity to better their future. The Muslims continued to educate themselves with traditional education. They still believed in their age-old customs, beliefs and superstitions, and were still under the complete control of their religious heads, who taught them that the adoption of western education would make them infidels so that they could not differentiate between right and wrong. Western education they said, would spoil their brain.

It was at this juncture that Moulavi Rasool Shah decided to lead his community, and he launched the Muslim educational movement. He had two-fold task before himself; on the one hand, he had to check that the Muslims were not converted to Christianity and, on the other hand,

he had to introduce modern education along with the Islamic education among the Muslims for their better future. Keeping this idea into consideration, he laid the foundation of a primary school at Rajouri Kadal in 1899 and it was in 1905 that he established the Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam for the same purpose. It was under his presidency that the Anjuman worked for educational and social modernisation of Kashmiri Muslims, which, with the passage of time, also contributed to their political consciousness.46
