Introduction

Statement of the Thesis

An impressive structural transformation accompanied the monumental alteration in the economic composition of the Valley of Kashmir in particular, and the state of Jammu and Kashmir in general in 1846, after the emergence of a new ruling structure through the Treaty of Amritsar. This new structure was fundamentally rooted in a desire to exploit the purchased territories economically and was, therefore, reserved in respect of developing anything beneficial for the masses. It was a structure with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression where even ideas were suppressed and civil and political rights denied to the vast majority of people.

The national awakening of Kashmir was an outcome of the character and policies of the Dogra rule which brought its whole spectrum of life and culture to the brink of devastation. Since the main thrust of the regime was on economic exploitation, it became the most formidable cause for national uprising. It not only brought about the consciousness but also became instrumental in shaping and styling the movement. The programs and agenda of the Muslim Conference unmistakably reveal the deep impact of economic factor.

Kashmir became a part of the newly created state of Jammu and Kashmir ostensibly through a sale deed which deprived it of even having the status of a conquered territory. The whole valley was commoditized and sold like property. As a result it was treated more as an economic asset rather than a political possession. To add to this psychological trauma was the religious, linguistic and cultural divide between the rulers’ own territories and Kashmir. Thus bereft of any bond with the people, the Dogra regime backed by the mighty British Empire reduced Kashmir to a serfdom. Starting with agriculture the regime gradually took over industry, trade and commerce, lakes, forests, and other natural resources for back-breaking taxation. Not satisfied, the naked and semi-starved human beings themselves were forced to act as beasts of burden for government forces and officials without any remuneration. In fact the oppression pursued even after death when the grave diggers were also subjected to tax.
There was such callous disregard for human misery that the famine enquiry report of 1878 showed that large number of deaths could have been avoided if only the cultivators would have been permitted to cut their crops before the start of rains that destroyed the autumn harvest of 1877. The rigid adherence to the revenue system in which assessments were made on the standing crops delayed the reaping operation.

The manpower required to man the official machinery were picked up from minority community, thus adding a communal dimension to the mechanism of exaction. The religious divide between the rulers and the ruled made class and community identical. The seemingly communal character which the resistance movement of the Muslims took was in consequence to the state policy which had communalized the political and economic fabric of the society to such an extent that the interests of the two communities became mutually exclusive: one the tenant, other the land holder; one the tax payer, other the collector; one the oppressed, other the oppressor; and one the subject, other the master. The bulldozing impact of this wanton oppression, exploitation and discrimination was that the social differences and class distinctions within Muslim society got obliterated to such an extent that progressive secular Muslims and traditional religious people made a common cause.

The people suffering under such a system for ages together need a complete shakeup to awake up to the high ideals of freedom and emancipation. Centuries of subjugation not only breed pessimism and make subordination a habit, but more importantly make man a matter of course. When occupation of a people is accompanied by an intentional campaign of dehumanization and mere biological survival becomes the sole motto, it needs a shake to the core which simultaneously threatens all the main purpose of life and an urge for revival is born. When the two times’ meals to keep the soul and body together are difficult to come by, even after long days of toil and hard work, a rebellion is born.

It is not that economic factor is solely responsible for any revolution particularly when fatalism has become the norm. It takes collective working of social, political, cultural, religious and economic forces to rekindle elements of vitality in a society. But economic factor plays the dominant role as it touches every soul with equal intensity. The
generalization made here, like the generalization in social and human sciences, is meant to indicate the dominant trend, fully conscious of the fact what E.H. Carr puts as ‘history is a process, and you can’t isolate a bit of the process and throw it on its own…everything is completely interconnected.’

The division within the territories of maharaja was known for their own specialization. Jammu was a sign of power centre where activities mostly of political nature were carried out. The territory of Kashmir was multi-dimensional in nature. It was in focus both in the eyes of the maharaja as well as in the British imperial power. It was a place within the territorial expansion of the maharaja which was paramount both in respect of economic as well political dimensions. To him it was more significant economically than politically; for the British, it was the other way round. Gulab Singh became the master of the province which during the preceding period was just next to Multan in respect of revenue generation.

Since a new ruling structure was brought about, this led to certain changes in the administration. But it was precisely under the aegis of the colonial rule that the new regime put a permanent siege over the interests and rights of the vast majority of its Muslim subjects. Peasants in a small holding structure with as yet limited differentiation lived under common yet individually fragmented conditions of social and economic existence. Religious communitarian identity under these circumstances imparted the social base of solidarity to articulate class based political demands. In addition, the decisive undermining of the artisanal economy threw many weavers—who formed the most important component in the non-agrarian system—into the ranks of agricultural labour and forged a potential link between weaver and peasants discontents.

The ‘feudal’ regulations hampered growth of production. There was a class whose main aim was not consumption but accumulation; there was the other who could not retain beyond what was required for subsistence. With the result the condition of the peasantry and urban working classes went out of gear, and none of these classes got a moment of thought for a long period of time; consequently these classes sunk low, passing through the worsening stages of poverty and degradation, reaching a stage where society almost refused to confer on them the status of human beings. To escape from such
a situation was an uphill task but once these downtrodden classes realized their potential and significance for the society as a whole, they preferred not to lose any chance of the redress of their grievances.

The corpus of works available on the Kashmir’s struggle for independence has been written from different perspectives. However, no work has been conducted exclusively from an economic angle although it was the most dominant factor responsible for the growth of national consciousness among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The present work attempts to explore the economic dimension, with some focus on other aspects too, in order to have a fuller understanding of the whole dynamics of the rise of the national movement. The previous studies have only given a surface treatment to the economic aspect; therefore, a need was felt to have a thorough understanding of this facet. The present study is an attempt to analyze the economic trajectory of Kashmir since 1846 to 1947, and its contribution to the growth of political consciousness in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The studies carried out so far on the theme of the ‘struggle for freedom in Kashmir’ are numerous and to review them all is beyond the scope of this work. Some significant works which have a paramount importance and relevance with regard to the study of the freedom struggle in Kashmir include Prem Nath Bazaz’s *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir* (1954), G.H. Khan’s *Freedom Movement in Kashmir* (1987), M.Y. Saraf’s *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom* (1977), F.M. Hassnain’s *Freedom Struggle in Kashmir* (1988), U.K. Zutshi’s *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir* (1986), and M.Y. Ganai’s *Kashmir’s Struggle for Independence* (2003). The said writers have used a wide range of sources and a study of these works gives a basic outline of facts to the reader and enables a new researcher to explore the various dimensions left out by these writers and scholars. Each work is qualified in its own way.

Prem Nath Bazaz’s work may be taken more as a source and account of the facts than a complete history of the struggle for freedom in Kashmir. The author being personally witness to the developments has an immense contribution in recording, collecting and presenting the various facets pertaining to the struggle for freedom in Kashmir. His book despite giving a clear outline of the nature and character of the Dogra
regime has nonetheless undermined the role of various important characteristics that were hallmarks of the freedom movement. According to E.H. Carr, ‘in the first place the facts of history never come to us “pure”, since they do not and can’t exist in a pure form; they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder. It follows that when we take up the work of history, our first concern should not be with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it.’ Bazaz, despite being the champion of highlighting the sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, has offered a minimum space to the historical facts and reality which otherwise form the bedrock of the freedom movement. He has overlooked the role and nature of the Muslim Conference, the first-ever political organization of the state. The author has not highlighted the role of the Muslim conference and the policies and programs formulated by it regarding the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The book has been written more with a pre-determined notion of facts rather than with an open mind.

The author has showed an open bias against the National Conference, especially after 1940’s onwards when he himself left the Conference; the author gives clear impression of a political rival rather than of a historian. Being a non-professional history writer he has not followed any proper methodology about the subject. Despite these drawbacks the book makes an important source for writing the history of the struggle for freedom in Jammu and Kashmir.

G.H. Khan’s Freedom Movement in Kashmir is more a summary of facts than a historical account. Though the study has covered a wide range of sources, it has been written under the official patronage of the post-1947 National Conference which to a large extent undermines the importance of the work. The work being from professor of political science lacks the depth required for a historical work. Each event and fact has been discussed under a separate sub heading which not only affects the essence of continuity but also creates problems in assessing the causes and effects of the various incidents in a cohesive manner.

M.Y. Saraf’s Kashmiris Fight for Freedom study is more like a collection and narration of facts than a thematic work. Volume first, which deals with the pre-1947 Kashmir doesn’t have any specific introduction and conclusion, which leaves the reader
in wilderness without any concrete opinion and view of the history of the said subject. Like Khan, the author was also not the student of history and has, in several cases, failed to assess the value and impact of the facts and events in historical perspective.

F.M. Hassnain’s *Freedom Struggle in Kashmir* has given a superficial treatment to facts. The book seems to be more a dedication to the role played by the National Conference and does not offer a holistic view of the role of other organizations, individuals and circumstances. The author doesn’t provide any specific view and conclusion to his facts, which leaves the reader without any pragmatic view of the phenomena of the struggle for freedom in Kashmir.

U.K. Zutshi’s *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir*, is based on a wide range of sources and has raised many queries and questions with regard to the emergence of mass awakening in Kashmir. Zutshi has presented various facts and has scrutinized the views of various authors professionally. But the author has not put the views and facts of his own work in a proper context and historical setting. The author has various views with regard to various historical events but most of the time they seem vague in nature. The greatest contradiction, perhaps, in his work is his viewpoint about the upsurge of 1931 which goes as: ‘the interaction between the all-pervading compulsions of British imperialism, the forces it generated and the changes it wrought in Kashmir seems to have resulted in the upsurge of 1931.’ Despite this argument the author squarely dismisses that the political consciousness among the people of Kashmir was at all responsible for the political upsurge; instead, he claims, the events were caused by the policy employed in Kashmir by the colonial government! Indeed one cannot ignore the role played by the British agency in the mass outburst of 1931, as has also been pointed out by authors like N.N. Raina; at the same time, it is nebulous to sideline the Maharaja’s policies in every sphere of life in Kashmir which were, undoubtedly, primarily responsible for the accumulation of the mass discontent. Also, the British imperial power made changes in the nature and arrangement of power in the administrative domain of Dogra regime according to the imperial exigencies but these changes, as aptly argued by Christopher

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Snedden, ‘did little to reduce Hari Singh’s overall power and internal control. Indeed, the British allowed Hari Singh to engage in practices that kept the majority of his subjects politically un-empowered and with no effective role in determining the fate of their lives or the lands on which they lived.’

Again, as has been remarked by Mridu Rai, ‘it is significant that the State of Jammu and Kashmir, formed in 1846, did not have Resident imposed on it until as late as 1885. And even then, although the Resident did indeed become an instrument of colonial interference within the State, there was always a significant lag between the colonial state’s ‘orders’ and their interpretation by the Dogra rulers. Indirect rule, in other words, still provided princely states with substantial leeway to determine their relations with their subjects.’

M.Y. Ganai’s *Kashmir’s Struggle for Independence (1931-39)* in the recent academic genre is a good addition to the existing corpus which deals with explaining the nature and character of the Dogra regime. The book, having used a wide range of sources, has more or less projected a perspective in it—that Dogra regime was not only autocratic but also ‘communal’. According to Ganaie, the freedom movement despite being primarily driven by economic factors assumed ‘communal’ colour, especially when the non-Muslims refused to become a part of the mainstream. However, in spite of admitting that the freedom struggle was a derivative of ‘economic nationalism’, the said author does not keep focused on that very theme. Moreover, the work suffers from the paradox that the political struggle of the Muslims assumed ‘communal’ colour even when the author himself cites at many places the instances which refute his very argument.

Each work has made an indubitable contribution in exploring the various facets of the freedom struggle but among the aforesaid works no work has studied the economic factor in its totality; the economic factor has been treated as a product rather than a cause. The present study attempts to study the economic factor in an evolutionary, comparative, chronological and thematic framework. By the turn of the twentieth century the Kashmiris were hit hard by rising prices, diminishing employment opportunities in

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government services or professions and restrictions on sale and mortgage of their landed assets. This helped to create a curious amalgam of radicalism and social inhibitions which is crucial to the understanding of nationalism in Kashmir. The struggle for freedom was basically the result of a fundamental contradiction between the interests of the people and that of the Dogra autocratic regime. In time an economic ideology developed which was to dominate the post 1930’s Kashmir.

The people of Kashmir marched from the ‘realm of necessity to the realm of freedom’ and the year 1931 was the culmination of that. The thesis raises the question why did the uprising of 1931 break out as and when it broke out? The study identifies both the underlying and the triggering causes of the uprising.

Most of the studies have largely put the role of National Conference leadership as the harbinger of the nationalist consciousness among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Of course, it played an important role but its role should not be treated as the national movement itself; national movement was much larger than the National Conference. It was a people’s effort to assert themselves. Besides, one cannot simply ignore the social and economic forces. Historical events are sometimes determined not by the conscious actions of individuals, but by some extraneous and all powerful forces guiding their unconscious will.

The present study is based on a wide range of sources. Among the conventional sources the focus is on primary sources which include the archival material from the Jammu and Kashmir State Archives (Srinagar and Jammu) and the National Archives of India (New Delhi). The departments of the National Archives from which records have been procured include the Foreign Department, Foreign and Political Department, and Home Department. The available records have been thoroughly used with a very critical examination of the literal and real meaning of the text.

The Jammu and Kashmir Government records accessible in the Jammu repository and the Srinagar repository of the Jammu and Kashmir State Archives have been used in this study extensively. The records which have been explored are: official documents, reports, memoranda, and press cuttings from the records of the Political Department,
General Department, Education Department, Vernacular Department, Old English Records and Publicity Department. Moreover, some of the rare books and manuscripts available in the Government of Jammu and Kashmir Research and Publication Department Srinagar pertaining to our period of study have also been used with an adequate scrutiny to eliminate all possible errors and generalizations.

Besides this, to minimize the limitations of the official documents and reports non-conventional sources have also been relied upon. The Kashmiri poetic literature available in the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (Srinagar) proved an immense help in the probing and understanding of the undersigned theme. In the present study, a thorough investigation of census reports, official documents, private diaries, newspapers, and pamphlets has been made with the aim to build this historical mansion on the sound foundation of facts, with the objective of shedding new light on the past, which involves both the addition of new explored facts and the (re)interpretation of the known facts. Some of these have been accessed from the Archives while others from persons having a sense of recollecting the past records. Also, a few reliable online sites, such as, the ProQuest, Forgottenbooks.com, Archives.org, Jstor.org and the Digital Library of India, have been of immense help. The newspapers mostly used in this study are the Times of India (Bombay), the Muslim Outlook (Lahore), Siyasat (Lahore), the Tribune (Lahore), Al-Fazal (Qadian) and Hamdard (Srinagar).

Moreover, there is a scarcity of statistical data. Furthermore, the fragility of the data together with a lack of adequate archival material which is not made available to the researchers in the National Archives of India beyond the year 1929, poses a serious limitation; but to transcend this limitation the present study has attempted to make use of non-conventional sources such as folk narratives, oral histories and poetic literature. Regarding the general economic conditions of the people and their standard of living like entitlements and purchasing power, information has been drawn from various Government Gazetteers, Administrative Reports, and official proceedings.

The study comprises of five chapters. Chapter one starts with a theoretical discussion attempting to analyze the primary factors that led to the creation of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir in the backdrop of the changing geo-political
scenario of the Sikh empire after the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 and the results of the first Anglo Sikh War in 1845-46. The chapter also brings into focus the nature of the Treaty of Amritsar through which Kashmir was sold to Maharaja Gulab Singh. In this chapter an attempt has been made to cross-check the opinion of various historians and writers on the Treaty of Amritsar with an alternative framework. The chapter concludes with the opinion that the Treaty of Amritsar was more a ‘Sale Deed’ than a reward for the services of Maharaja Gulab Singh.

Chapter two develops the theme further with total concentration on the Treaty of Amritsar delineating the results and the impact of the Treaty on the mass psyche of Kashmir. The chapter discusses the structural change brought about by the Treaty and the way people of Jammu and Kashmir were treated by the Dogra Maharaja. The treaty consisting of ten articles was carved out at the complete alienation of Kashmiris. The region of Kashmir was occupied with its people at a psychologically most disadvantageous position, that is, as a bought-up commodity, while Ladakh joined as a conquered territory. This varied background had deep impact on the future psyche of the inhabitants of the three constituents. While Jammu had a sense of contentment as the power centre, Kashmiris who were left unrepresented and unprotected suffered from a sense of humiliation, dispossession and deprivation. By virtue of the Treaty began a process that enabled the overlooking, if not the outright exclusion, of the elementary rights of the people of Kashmir.

Chapter third examines the pattern of new agrarian relations that began to emerge in Kashmir from 1846 onwards. A drastic change took place in the agrarian composition of Kashmir. The ownership of the land with the king during the Dogra period was the new dimension which they added to land management problem of Kashmir. This new type of proprietorship meant as a sort of partible inheritance where the state is having the ownership rights and the cultivator acts as the primary laborer on the land he cultivates. This also gave rise to a pervasive system of exactions—both perennial and incidental—by the state machinery, the result of which was that the nineteenth century Kashmir got dominated by rural elite, with rich landlords exploiting the landless peasantry.
An attempt has also been made in the chapter to evaluate the impact of land revenue settlement, carried out by Walter Lawrence, on the socio-economic structure of Kashmir. The chapter endeavours to bring to fore the results of the agricultural policy which threw up the society into a situation in which a microscopic population lived a life of luxury, while the toiling masses were reduced to a pauperized lot who battled for barest survival. The peasant population remained stagnant and didn’t register much progress and the agricultural structure received a great setback as the peasantry lost interest in cultivation. The system of revenue collection proved a great boon for the revenue machinery as it provided considerable source of peculation to them. The merciless extraction of the maximum revenue from the cultivators, without providing them any incentive for necessary expansion, prevented any further large scale agricultural expansion. There was an absolute absence of peasant welfare measures. The main motto of the ruling elite had been, to quote Arthur Cotton (the outstanding authority on the on the modern irrigation works in India), ‘Do nothing, have nothing done, let nobody do anything. Bear any loss, let the people die of famine, let hundreds of lakhs be lost in revenue for want of water, or roads, rather than to do nothing.’ The chapter aims to analyze the various methods practised by the state of which peasant was the direct focus. The main theme of the chapter is to examine the taxation system, peasant surplus, government monopoly on the distribution of rice; the impact of the forced labour on the agrarian structure, the social relations maintained by the Dogras which compel the overburdening, condemn the mass of cultivators to lives of increasing harassment and semi-starvation, the consequences of all these methods over the peasant consciousness and the role played by the emerging leadership in relation to the peasants’ cause.

Chapter four deals with the non-agrarian economic structure of the state. The chapter discusses in detail the historical evolution of both the shawl and silk industry and the role of the state in respect to their development. The chapter makes a case study of the interventionist role of the state into these industries and its consequences. It has been argued that the state-of-affairs in both the shawl and the silk industry has had a deep bearing on the growth of the national awakening in Kashmir. Both industries met with

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crisis, and hence the shawl-baf revolt in 1865 and the silk factory revolt in 1924. The chapter highlights the importance of these industries to the state economy and deliberates upon the main problems faced by the people associated with these industries and their role in the mass awakening of Kashmir. The decline of shawl industry and shawl trade proved decisive in changing the course of the history of Kashmir. The shawl merchants who were a powerful class in the Kashmir valley mostly residing in the city of Srinagar, were trading in a commodity that brought Darbar lakhs of rupees as revenue; they also determined the Darbar’s relationship with the outside world. The decline of the powerful class of shawl merchants had far-reaching significance for the evolution of the social and political setting of late ninetieth and early twentieth century Kashmir.

Chapter five probes into the emergence of various forces and their role in highlighting conditions of the people of Kashmir. The chapter has placed the role of various socio-religious reform movements in historical context, as the twentieth century social milieu of Kashmir corresponded to similar movements in the ninetieth century British India. The chief objective of their mission was to secure self-identity for the people of Kashmir so that they could obtain for themselves an honourable status in social, economic and political spheres, which was almost denied to them. The chapter has examined the role of external factors like the Punjab press, the Khilafat movement, and the Civil Disobedience movement, since these factors significantly influenced the political consciousness of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The chapter has also highlighted the emergence of the middle class of Kashmir during early 1930s and their role in establishing an organized leadership to put an end to the Dogra rule. The pre-1931 economic scenario, which played the primary role in the outburst of 1931 uprising in Jammu and Kashmir, has been discussed in detail in the chapter. The events of 1931 culminated in the formation of the first political organization of the state in 1932—All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference—under the leadership of Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah. The leadership intended to present the Conference as an organization of the down trodden classes. Its flag, for instance, was red in color with a white plough in center, representing socialist revolution for the Kashmiri peasantry. One of the central arguments that the chapter carries is the extent to which the leadership was
able to create a mass base with an open economic orientation of their policies rooted in the antiquated social ethos of twentieth century Kashmir. In the end, the nature of the movement, the influence of the Indian National Congress upon the leadership of Kashmir and the formulation by the National Conference leadership of an alternative framework—the Naya Kashmir Manifesto—for the economic reconstruction of Jammu and Kashmir have been analyzed and discussed in the chapter.

To sum up, the principal theme which the study delves into is the nature of the political mobilization which it argues was rooted in the economic exploitation and deprivation. The study dissects the potential of the economic root as a rallying point behind the national awakening of Jammu and Kashmir.

It is important to note here that the terms used in the present study like ‘national awakening’ or ‘nationalism’, or even ‘nation’ for that matter, are not meant to be taken in the strict sense as is usually used by scholars within a particular methodological space; delving deeper into such terminology has been deliberately avoided in this study in order to not to deviate from the actual subject that this study aims to address. It can be safely presumed that here ‘nationalism’ or ‘national awakening’ correspond jointly to the community attempts towards amelioration from the exploitation and deprivation and were later joined by the other communities for the common good of all. The terms used are more a representative of the territorial conceptions of the leadership and the people and their yearning for rescuing the oppressed from the oppressors through nationalism than a theorization of the idealistic concepts like what constitutes a nation or what nationalism is.