Chapter – 2

Jammu and Kashmir:
A Historical Overview
**Jammu and Kashmir : A Historical Overview**

**Jammu and Kashmir** is the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent. At the time of partition of the subcontinent this territory became disputed among India and Pakistan. It consists of the areas that includes the Indian-administered state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani-administered/occupied Gilgit-Baltistan and the western Jammu and the Chinese-administered/in its possession the regions of Aksai Chin and Trans-Karakoram Tract. Pakistan has about a $\frac{1}{3}$rd of it. India administers about $\frac{2}{3}$ of it. The LOC (Line of Control) divides the area administered by India from that of Pakistan's administered area. China occupies a part of Ladakh.

The area which is the subject of this study is one of the states of Indian Union. It is officially called as the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Geographically it has many barriers and it covers plains, Glaciers, mountains and lakes, foot hills and high ranges such as Himalaya’s and Korakoram, stretching up to K2, the second highest peak in the world. It is home to several valleys such as the Kashmir Valley, Tawi Valley, Chenab Valley, Poonch Valley, Sind Valley and Lidder Valley. The main Kashmir valley is 100 km (62 mi) wide and 15,520.3 km² (5,992.4 sq mi) in area. The Himalayas divide the Kashmir valley from Ladakh while the Pir Panjal range, which encloses the valley from the west and the south, separates it from the Great Plains of northern India. The region of Kashmir situated at the apex of the Indian subcontinent is of great strategic importance owing to the fact that to its east
lies Tibet; to the north-east, Sinkiang, a province of China; to the north-west, Afghanistan and a few miles from Afghanistan lies Russian Turkestan. This makes the area important from strategic and military stand point and that of foreign affairs. This actual and potential importance of the region has caused the rulers of adjoining countries to cast covetous eyes on it.²

The area of state of Jammu and Kashmir consists of three regions: Jammu, the Kashmir valley and Ladakh. It shares border with the other Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to the south and internationally with the People’s Republic of China to the north and east and with Pakistan to the west and northwest respectively. It is the only state in India which enjoys special autonomy under Article 370 of the Constitution of India according to which, no
law enacted by the Parliament of India, except for those in the field of defence, communication and foreign policy, will be extendable in Jammu and Kashmir unless it is ratified by the state legislature of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir is also the only Indian state that has its own flag and constitution. Designed by the then ruling National Conference, the flag of Jammu and Kashmir features a plough on a red background symbolizing labour substituted the Maharaja's state flag. The three stripes represent the three distinct administrative divisions of the state, namely Jammu, Valley of Kashmir, and Ladakh.³

Jammu and Kashmir has a Muslim majority population. In totality, the Muslims constitute 67% of the population, the Hindus about 30%, the Buddhists 1%, and the Sikhs 2% of the population. In Jammu, Hindus constitute 65% of the population, Muslims 31% and Sikhs, 4%; In Ladakh, Buddhists constitute about 46% of the population, the remaining being Muslims⁴. The people of Ladakh are of Indo-Tibetan origin, while the southern area of Jammu includes many communities tracing their ancestry to the nearby Indian states of Haryana and Punjab, as well as the city of Delhi. For the purpose of study this region needs to be looked upon historically with the focus on Dogra period to analyze and understand the role of National Conference in the politics of state as its origin has roots in the politics of the said period.

The history of Kashmir is traceable as far back as 4000 years B.C. Kashmir is mentioned in the epic Mahabharata. Kalhana, the first Indian
history writer, gives a vivid account of the history of Kashmir before the 10th century AD in his writing "Rajatarangini," Local kingdoms both Hindus and Buddhist ruled extensively in this region until the 12th century AD when Muslims invaded the region. During this long period of history, many dynasties came to power one after the other. The quality of every Regime depended on the personal traits of Raja. Among them the most famous King of Kashmir was one Raja Lalitaditya who ruled from 715-752 A.D, and it was during his rule that Kashmir State saw maximum prosperity.

The greatest Muslim king of early medieval age in Kashmir was Zain-ul-Abidin, who ascended the throne in AD 1420 and ruled up to 1470 became extremely popular among all sections of the people including Hindus, because of his tolerance. His long rule contributed extensively to the spread of art, culture, music, and every other sphere in the life of Kashmir people. He also created a strong army and annexed many regions nearby Kashmir. These were the time of golden rule in Kashmir when peace and harmony prevailed. After the death of King, a period of destruction came calling to Kashmir and many raiders from outside looted the state and made the people and local rulers their captive. Islam gradually became the dominant religion in Kashmir. The Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir lived in relative harmony, since the Sufi-Islamic way of life that ordinary Muslims followed in Kashmir complemented the Rishi tradition of Kashmiri Pandits. This led to a syncretic culture where Hindus and Muslims revered the same local saints and prayed at the same shrines. The famous sufi saint Bulbul Shah was able to persuade the king of the
time Rinchan Shah from Ladakh to adopt the Islamic way of life, and the foundation of Sufiana composite culture was laid when Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists were co-existing.

Emperor Akbar conquered Kashmir in 1586. Governors appointed by the Mughal Emperors from time to time governed it. The Mughal rule of the State was marked by the prevalence of peace and happiness. But as soon as the Mughal Empire started crumbling, after the death of Aurangzeb, conditions became unsettled again. In 1752 Ahmed Shah Durrani invaded and conquered Kashmir. The State thus passed into the hands of the Afghans, who established a brutally oppressive rule over the passive Kashmiri until 1820. The tales of religious persecution devastation etc are still engraved in the minds of Kashmiris.

In 1819, the Kashmir valley passed from the control of the Durrani Empire of Afghanistan, and four centuries of Muslim rule under the Mughals and the Afghans, to the conquering armies of the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh of Lahore. As the Kashmiris had suffered under the Afghans, they initially welcomed the new Sikh rulers. However, the Sikh governors turned out to be hard taskmasters, and Sikh rule was generally considered oppressive, protected perhaps by the remoteness of Kashmir from the capital of the Sikh empire in Lahore. The Sikhs enacted a number of anti-Muslim laws which included handing out death sentences for cow slaughter closing down the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar and banning the azaan, the public Muslim call to prayer. Kashmir
had also now begun to attract European visitors, several of whom wrote of the abject poverty of the vast Muslim peasantry and of the exorbitant taxes under the Sikhs. High taxes, according to some contemporary accounts, had depopulated large tracts of the countryside, allowing only one-sixteenth of the cultivable land to be cultivated. However, after a famine in 1832, the Sikhs reduced the land tax to half the produce of the land and also began to offer interest-free loans to farmers; Kashmir became the second highest revenue earner for the Sikh empire.

In 1845, the First Anglo-Sikh War broke out. After the defeat of Sikhs by British, the Sikhs were ordered to relinquish Kashmir. Gulab Singh, a warlord of the Dogra family in Jammu, (After the death of Ranjit Deo, the Raja of Jammu, the kingdom of Jammu was captured in 1780 by the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh of Lahore and afterwards, until 1846, became a tributary to the Sikh power. Ranjit Deo's grandnephew, Gulab Singh, subsequently sought service at the court of Ranjit Singh; distinguished himself in later campaigns, especially the annexation of the Kashmir valley by the Sikhs army in 1819, and, for his services, was created Raja of Jammu in 1820. With the help of his officer, Zorawar Singh, Gulab Singh soon captured Ladakh and Baltistan, regions to the east and north-east of Jammu, turned as a useful mediator and the trusted advisor of Sir Henry Lawrence. Two treaties were concluded. By the first the State of Lahore (i.e. West Punjab) handed over to the British, as equivalent for (rupees) one crore of indemnity, the hill countries between Beas and Indus; by the second the British made over to Gulab Singh for (Rupees) 75
lakhs all the hilly or mountainous country situated to the east of Indus and west of Ravi" (i.e. the Vale of Kashmir). In 1846, upon the purchase of the region from the British under the Treaty of Amritsar\(^4\), the Dogras—under Gulab Singh—became the new rulers. Dogra Rule, under the *paramountcy* (or tutelage) of the British Crown, lasted until 1947, when the former princely state became a disputed territory, now administered by three countries: India, Pakistan, and the People's Republic of China. The Dogra rule needs to be studied in some detail to understand the socio-political environment in which the people of the region opposed the Dogra rule and became the cause of many political movements.

**The Dogra Rule: An Appraisal**

In 1846, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, as it exists today, was created by the British. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the Sikh state fell into internecine strife and the British, who had been waiting for an opportunity to strike the Sikhs, clutched at the chance and on the pretext that Sikhs had crossed Sutlej to occupy the British territory, declared war on the Sikh states on 12\(^{th}\) December, 1845. Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and few others sided with the British\(^5\) and the Sikh got defeated. The British Government imposed humiliating terms on the Sikhs as a result of their victory in the war. They demanded from the Sikhs, the surrender of the entire territory of Jullandhar Doab between the river Sutlej and river Bias with complete control over the two rivers, the reduction by the Sikh army and a war indemnity
of one and a half crore of rupees. The British Government knew that the Sikh
Darbar was not in a position to pay so much and was not disposed to enforce
payment, the object was to weaken the Sikh Darbar which was a constant
menace and with the result Sikhs agreed to accept the terms laid down by
British, but expressed their inability to pay the war indemnity and offered to
cede to British, the Sikh provinces of Jammu, Kashmir, Hazara, with the
districts of Chamba and the frontier regions of Ladakh and Baltistan. The
British refused to accept the offer, but entered a deal with the Sikh by virtue of
which it was agreed that the territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and the
small provinces of Hazara would be transferred to Raja Gulab Singh in
independent possession who would pay rupees one crore to the British in part
fulfillment of the indemnity the British imposed on the Sikhs. The dubious
deal was formalized by the treaty of Lahore on 9 March 1846 and a separate
treaty called as Amritsar treaty was signed on 16 March 1846 by which the
Sikh territories were transferred to Gulab Singh. The Gulab Singh the ruler of
the new state of Jammu and Kashmir accepted the British supremacy and found
himself to the Suzerainty of the British Empire in India. Under the treaty of
Lahore it was provided that Maharaja Dhuleep Singh of Lahore cedes to ‘The
Honourable Company, in perpetual sovereignty, all his forts, territories, and
rights in the Doab and country, hill or plain, situated between river Beas and
Sutlej’. It was also provided in this treaty that “in consideration of the services
rendered by Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu to Lahore State towards procuring the
restoration of the relations of amity between the Lahore and British
Government, the Maharaja (Dhuleep Singh) hereby agrees to recognize the independent sovereignty of Raja Gulab Singh in such territories and districts in the hills as may be made over to the Gulab Singh by separate agreement between himself and the British Government. Another treaty was concluded between Gulab Singh and the British Government on 16 March 1846 at Amritsar. By this treaty of Amritsar – notoriously referred to in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as the “Sale deed of Kashmir – the British Government made over to Raja Gulab Singh, the state of Jammu and Kashmir. By Article. 1, of the treaty, Kashmir was made over “for ever and in independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh”. Art. III of the treaty read: “in consideration of the transfer made to him and his heirs by the provisions of the foregoing Articles, Maharaja Gulab Singh will pay to the British Government the sum of Rupees (Nanukshahee) fifty lakhs to be paid on ratification of this treaty and twenty five lakhs on or before the first October of the current year, AD. 1846. At the time of sale of Kashmir no consideration was given to the moral effects of the deed. Millions of people were sold like sheep and cattle and the whole transaction was made behind their backs. The treaty of Amritsar consisting of ten Articles made no mention whatsoever, of the rights, interests or the future of the people of the state. Thus began the modern history of Kashmir, united with Jammu under the rule of the Dogra dynasty.

Under such circumstances the State of Jammu and Kashmir was created and brought under the control of one ruler. However the state was not unified. The mountainous character of the country and the paucity of communications
prevented the growth of any thing like a common sentiment of nationality....

The different communities continued to live a separate existence till the freedom struggle in India inspired the National Conference to unite the Kashmiri people. However the credit for opening much of this far flung mountainous territory of snow covered peaks, extensive valley and allied Himalayan Plateaus to modern civilization and social and political influence goes to its Dogra rulers. The Dogra rule which lasted for exactly one hundred and one years from Nov. 1846 to 1947 was one of the most progressive periods in the long history of the Kashmir valley and other constituent parts of Jammu And Kashmir State. Their rule remained unpopular right up to the time that Maharaja Hari Singh acceded the state to Indian union in 1947. Dogra rule was hated because Muslims, who constituted the majority of the population, were discriminated against in every way. Forced and unpaid labor, illiteracy, poverty and exploitation of all kinds stalked the lives of the masses. The socio-economic and political conditions during the Dogra rule are analyzed here under separate headings.

Socio-Economic conditions:

The freedom movement was actually a struggle against the oppressive rule of the Dogras. The general uprising of the Muslims against the Dogra in 1931 was the culmination of a number of early political struggles and trends towards social, political and economic reforms. During the period of the Dogras the people of the state suffered miserably. No doubt the British gave the
state a semblance of peace and to some extent ameliorated the conditions of the people but actually their policies at best helped “the upper classes of the Hindus in particular to consolidate and fatten themselves at the expense of the masses. The masses remained in abject poverty. The economic backwardness of the masses was due to the very character of the state, its institutions of Jagirdari system and the system of revenue, taxation and corrupt administration. Jammu and Kashmir was a feudal state with some variation. Most of the state was divided into a number of jagirs (estates), and these estates were granted by the Maharaja to the members of the royal family, to their relatives, to the persons who belonged to the same caste and religion as professed by the ruler himself, and to those persons who had proved, by service, or otherwise, their loyalty to the person of the ruler as well as his Throne.

The people suffered mal-administration, corruption of officials, illiteracy, hunger, taxation etc. Jammu and Kashmir being an agricultural state, about 85 percent of the total population lived in rural areas, forming as it were, the backbone of the entire economic structure of the state. The most majority of the peasants suffered miserably due to the chronic, deterioration in agriculture and its consequent impact on the life of peasants, the unsound revenue system accompanied with corrupt officialdom and the nature of relations among the cultivators, the jagirdars or landlords and the state. Under this system there was also a class of intermediaries who exploited the labour and the tiller of the land. The jagirdari system had rendered the peasant utterly destitute. Under this
system the peasants had virtually been reduced to the state of serfs which is characteristic of a feudal state. Almost the entire land revenue establishment in the province was composed of Pandits which was “a cause and misfortune to the Musalmans of the Kashmir.” The first fifty years of the Dogra in Kashmir were responsible for disseminating in the minds of its subjects the seed of resentment against it. The reason was the tyranny exercised by a host of revenue officials on peasants for the collection of land revenue. The deteriorating economic conditions had virtually reduced the villagers to pauperism. More than 80 percent of the people living in villages were often under debt.

Another curse introduced by Sikhs but taken to its extreme by the Dogras, was the system of Begar which has been defined as forced labour but it was something worse than that; it was free forced labour. The main cause of beggar was the absence of any special laboring class in Kashmir and the demand for beggar fell naturally, on the villagers, All non Muslims stood exempted on account of being co-religionists of the ruling family. The system assumed extremely dreadful proportions in Kashmir valley under the Dogras mainly because of the frontier wars for conquest and the consequent necessity of providing the troops on the move as well as the huge military establishments in the conquered territories with adequate supplies. Under their system many thousand Muslims had been driven off every year to toil as carriers of burden on the most dangerous and risky Gilgit road. The roads that lead to Gilgit, Leh, and Askardu have to pass through lofty mountains, some as high as seventeen
thousand feet.\textsuperscript{27} No care was taken by the authorities of those unfortunate wretches “laden with grain toiling along the desert crags, between Austor and Gilgit on burning summer’s day, urged on by a sepoy guard, is perhaps as pitiable as spectacle as any to be seen on the roads of Siberia.\textsuperscript{28} Beggar was so harshly enforced that the very word was a constant terror in Kashmir. When there was a call for beggar, the villagers would reluctantly leave their homes long with the prospect of death from cold or starvation. No mercy was shown to those men of burden who were Muslim farmers; harmless subjects of Maharaja\textsuperscript{29} but were treated worse than convicts and criminals. The exploitative character of beggar also manifested itself when the high officials of the state regarded forced labor as an incident of serfdom which entitled them to take things like milk, poultry, grain, blankets, ponies, cows and sheep free of cost from the villagers. Apart from this, the villagers were required to render to the officials their services in building their houses in city or in cultivating their waste land. For such services they were paid no wages.\textsuperscript{30} It was at the persistent pressure of British Resident Mr. Plowden that the Dogra government abolished beggar, though only partially, by a State Council Resolution dated 18.4.1891 and instead levied an additional tax on the land revenue to meet the cost of newly created transport Department.\textsuperscript{31}

The condition of the industrial labor which consisted of shawl weavers, men working as laborers and artisans in the silk factory, carpet weavers, papier-mâché workers, wood carvers, Gubba makers etc was as well not much different. The industry was one of the main sources of income to the state. The
labors like peasants were also victims of official tyranny. The most pitiable part of a shawl weaver’s life was that he could not change his profession for fear on the part of the government that “it would reduce the Maharaja’s revenue.” The plight of workers in silk industry was equally pitiable. They were low paid, mostly under paid. It was for the first time in 1924; the silk factory laborers rose against the oppressive behavior of the officials and protested against the working conditions of the factory.

Politically suppressed and economically backward, the Muslims of Jammu And Kashmir State were also educationally backward. The spread of English Education was another factor which deepened the Muslim distrust against the Dogras and the Hindus. The cause of their backwardness on education was many folded: 1. Their own ignorance, 2. The conservative approach of their religious leaders, 3. Unsympathetic attitude of non-Muslims towards the Muslim students in the government schools, 4. Discriminatory policies of the Dogra administration. Moreover their share in services of the state was also disappointing.

From the very beginning of their rule, the Dogra rulers had been appointing men from outside the state, usually Punjabis, in every branch of administration. As a result of these developments, the non-Muslim natives had been appointed to various senior and lower grade clerical posts. By the year 1909 an appreciable number of Kashmiri non-Muslim had entered Government services. But the high posts were still held by the outsiders who had been
creating great difficulties for the natives to get higher promotions on the basis of their work and merit. Thus the Pandits started the struggle for the rights of the people living in the state against outsiders.  

This dominance of the outsiders was broken by Hari Singh who ascended the throne in 1925. With his pro-dogra policy, the people of Jammu, particularly the Rajputs, got most of the big jobs while Pandits were recruited as clerks in offices vacated by Punjabis. Need less to say the Muslims were as yet out of the picture. Aside from the fact that Muslims were denied their due share in the services of the state, the better-qualified among them were placed in inferior positions to equally qualified non Muslims. An educated young Muslim had, therefore to face three potential rivals, viz, the outsiders, the Dogra Rajputs and the Kashmir Pandits, all receiving patronage, influence and encouragement.

Politically, the people were deprived of all basic rights and civil liberties. There existed no public opinion in the state. The right to freedom of speech, press and platform and freedom of association were made unlawful. Even the holding of a private meeting or religious meeting was prohibited. The people were forced to be silent which made them perturbed and restive. Hari Singh on the assumption of the Throne announced a number of concessions for the Muslims, but the concessions proved of partial advantage to the Muslims and mostly benefited the land owners among them. In 1930, the Educated Muslim young men presented a memorial to the state Government demanding reservation of state Services according to their population, relaxation of qualifications in favour of Muslim aspirants for state services in view of their
general educational and economic backwardness. The grant of Scholarships to Muslim students and the appointment of Muslim teachers in the government schools to protect the educational interests of the Muslim children. These were the genuine demands of the Muslims which were obviously turned down. It was in 1920s that marked the political awakening among the masses. This agitation for increase in wages developed communal overtones and was then directed mainly against the Kashmiri Pandit management. This also became a platform for presentation of various grievances of Kashmiri Muslims; increase in representation in government services, improvement in education, land reforms, abolition of forced labor, and protection of Muslim shrines, and demand for a legislative assembly with high representation of Muslims etc.

The first tangible evidence was a proclamation in 1927, made in response to the protests of a small group of professional and white collar workers, which theoretically opened the way for the participation of Muslims in government military service.

The valley at this stage was experiencing various agitations against the Dogra rule. In 1930 the communal tension rose following the demolition of a mosque in Jammu and discretion of Holy Quran. In this agitation nearly about twenty two Muslims were killed by the police firing. To commemorate this event, 13 July 1931 was named as Martyrs Day in the valley. In early 1930’s the waves of the non-violence movement were sweeping India, and patriots in Kashmir, inspired by this spirit of revolt, renewed their claims for the admission of Muslims to the administrative and military services of country.
They formed first a “Reading Room Party”, seeking to educate them politically, then the agitation was carried beyond the “Reading Room” to open meetings, until in1931 the Maharaja gave his blessings to the foundation of three political parties in Kashmir. These were the Kashmiri Pandits Conference, the Hindu Sabha in Jammu, and Sikhs Sharomani Khalsa Darbar. This was obviously only a gesture on the part of Maharaja because it included political representation only for the non-Muslim groups. As a consequence, the overwhelming majority of population remained without any organized political party.  

It was in 1931 that the growing dissatisfaction of the Kashmiri people burst into flames. So historically the 13 July, 1931 is a landmark in the annals of modern Kashmir. It was on that day that open demonstrations against the despotic rule of the Maharaja took place. However, there had been demonstrations in Kashmir earlier against the Maharajas particularly by the shawl weavers, and often by the peasants. But never before had the entire Muslim population risen against the Dogra rule. Under this prevailing environment and circumstances that the Muslim Conference, later National Conference was born. Its birth, development, aims and objectives are analyzed in the second chapter.
References:


5. S.N. Kaul, op.cit p. 88.


9. Ibid.


15. Introduction: Kashmir Papers. P. XIV.


17. K.M. Panikkhar: Founding of the Kashmir state, p. 104.


23. The Proprietary rights in all lands of Kashmir belongs to the ruling chief exclusively, for the simple reason that the territories of Kashmir were purchased by my late lamented grandfather, (Gulab Singh,” Letter from Maharaja Pratap Singh to his Prime Minister, December 14, 1918, File No. 191/H-75, Kashmir Government Records, (Jammu and Kashmir Archives.)


29. E.F. Knight, op.cit., p. 68.


32. G.H. Khan, op.cit., p. 21.


35. Ibid.


37. Ibid, p. 139.


39. Ibid., p.17