



## Research Article

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## British Interference in the Political Matters of Princely State of Kashmir

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**Abstract:** The state of Jammu and Kashmir was created according to the Treaty of Amritsar signed between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the British. The establishment of Residency was in discussion since the Dogra dynasty took over Kashmir and was later established during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh. So, the main aim of the paper is to analyse the establishment of British residency in Kashmir and the reforms carried out by the British.

**Keywords:** British, Kashmir, Jammu, Princely State, Residency, Treaty of Amritsar.

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## INTRODUCTION

The State of Jammu and Kashmir was created by the British on the close of the first Anglo Sikh War of 1845-46 (Cunningham, 1853). It was formally done through the two treaties dictated by them within a week. They were the treaties of Lahore and Amritsar. According to the Treaty of Lahore the British defeated Lahore State and stipulated that Maharaja Dalip Singh "hereby agrees to recognize the independent sovereignty of Gulab Singh, in such territories and districts as may be made over to the said Raja Gulab Singh by separate agreement between himself and the British Government with the dependencies thereof which may have been in Raja's possession since the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Later on 16 March 1846 a separate agreement was made with Gulab Singh and some territories were transferred to him, including the territories they had forced the Lahore State to cede according to the provision of Article 4 of the treaty of Lahore, dated 9 March 1846. The additional territory given to Gulab Singh consisted of all the hilly mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of river Indus, and west ward of the river Ravi. The Dogra State that came into existence by the treaties of Lahore and Amritsar was to yield annual revenue of more than twenty-five Lakhs of rupees from land alone. It touched Kangra in the North-East and Peshawar in the North-West. It was made to counter the Sikh state in the neighbor its and to defend the Afghan frontier (Bal, 1967).

Kashmir, the 'Sentry State' of the British Indian Empire, the meeting place of the three empires in the east—the British, the Russian and the Chinese was allegorically gifted away to Gulab Singh by the British.

The first reference of the transfer of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Hazara occurs in the clause 12 of the Treaty of Lahore, signed on March 9, 1846, after the termination of the first Anglo-Sikh war. The clause 12 stated that this territory shall be transferred by the British to Maharaja Gulab Singh, ironically, for the "loyalty of the Raja towards the Lahore Darbar", through a separate treaty. This clause was inserted against the clear wishes of Rani Jindan and her advisers, which is evident from the fact that she protested vigorously against it. The separate treaty condemned as the "Sale-deed" of Kashmir, signed at Amritsar on March 16, 1846, by Mr. F. Currie and Brevet—Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence on behalf of Lord Hardinge and Gulab Singh in person. After the sale deed of Kashmir was over, Maharaja Gulab Singh expressed his gratitude to the British Viceroy in the words that he was indeed his 'Zur Khureed' or 'gold-boughton slave' (Yaseen, 1984).

Soon after the signing of Treaty of Amritsar (16th March 1846), Lord Hardinge had a visit to Kashmir and on his return to Shimla, he sent a cryptic note to Gulab Singh that some doubts had arose in the British Government and company now decided to interfere in the matters of Maharaja Gulab Singh by the appointment of a Resident. Regarding to this there was no provision made in the Treaty of Amritsar (Bamzai, 1962). Maharaja Ranbir Singh after his accession to the throne sent a large force to Gilgit under General Devi Singh. The Dogra forces under General Devi Singh captured Yasin and Punial and made Uzmat Shah and Isa Bahadur Governors of the two regions respectively and also conquered Gilgit. The British government changed their strategies due to the backdrop of Russian expansion in Central Asia in mid 1860s. In this context, the Gilgit

Agency was set up in 1877. Its purpose was to counter the Russian military activities and intrigue in Central Asia.

Maharaja Gulab Singh was succeeded by Maharaja Ranbir Singh who ruled from 1857 to 1885. During his time there was proper rule of law in the state. The civil and criminal laws introduced by the British in India, were with some modifications made applicable to the state also. The various departments were organized on the British pattern and an attempt of land revenue reformation was made. Maharaja Pratap Singh was the successor of Ranbir Singh and ascended the throne in 1885 and his reign lasted for a period of 40 years. It is in the time of this Maharaja that the modernization of the state took place by several progressive reforms. The first assessment of land revenue system in state was made by Sir Walter Lawrence which was based on scientific lines. Even before Lawrence's appointment British had sent another settlement officer, A. Wingate, to conduct a preliminary survey between 1887 and 1888 (Lawrence, 1895). In order to link the princely state of Kashmir with the rest of India, Jhelum valley road and Banihal Cart road were built. Large numbers of educational institutions were also found and the administrative machinery was completely overhauled. The means of communication were developed and the isolation of Kashmir from the rest of the country was now a thing of the far past. Because of the increased quality of the road communication and large number of people, mostly Europeans began to visit the valley (Bamzai, 1962).

### **Appointment of the British Resident**

It was on the cards of the British Government of India for a long time for posting a Resident in Kashmir. But earlier the treaty concluded with Gulab Singh caused some hindrance in the appointment of a resident as there was no provision for installing a Resident in the State. So, in 1885, the British Residency was established in Kashmir, which was against the soul and the spirit of the Treaty of Amritsar (Aitchison, 1909). Moreover the British government was afraid of the personality of Maharaja Ranbir Singh. They take the opportunity when the Maharajas health condition worsened. The idea was old to establish British Residency in Kashmir. The post of officer on special duty was added in 1851, without any political duty. Later he took the charge of as a political agent. Upto 1872, no European visitors without the permission of the Maharaja was allowed to stay beyond the middle of October in Kashmir. There was a severe agitation from Maharaja of Kashmir and finally it was revoked by Lord Northbrook. Upto 1877 the affairs of Kashmir were conducted through Government of Punjab and in the same year the Government of India took over the direct charge of administration of Kashmir.

The British hardly concerned about the welfare of the people. Their main aim was to construct imperial roadways to link the frontier areas of the state to mainland India and to reorganize State military force to

use it for the defence of their empire. It was all done at the expenses of the State exchequer rather than by the British (Kashmir life, 2014). It is evident from the world War-I, when they recruited near about 51000 wartime soldiers from Jammu Province and also drained off money amounting to about 10 million rupees from State treasury for their war effort. (Khan, 2002). Moreover Imperial Service Troops were also called to take part in their military campaigns against Hunza, Nagar, Chilas, and Chitral during 1890s. The Resident controlled Administration spent heavily on reorganization and maintenance of State Army. The strength of army was reduced from 22000 to 7500 troops. They were divided into two categories, Regular Troops and Imperial Service Troops. Some roads such as Rawalpindi to Srinagar to Gilgit and to Ladakh; on Sialkot-Jammu Rail Link, were constructed (Khan, 2002).

On the other side, less attention was paid towards the education, transport, public health and hygiene and irrigation works. Common people especially the majority community of the Valley became the victims of jagirdars, *chakdars*, and Government officials due to forced labour and indebtedness. So, their condition worsened day by day. The British did not lend support to Settlement Commissioner Andrew Wingate who recommended in 1887 that proprietary rights on land should be granted in favour of the tillers. He left the state when he faced opposition from the Jagirdars. Later Colonel Parry Nisbet was made given the charge and he did not care about what will happen to the common people and he cared about the British interests only and he did not grant any proprietary rights to the tillers (Khan, 2002; & Lawrence, 1895).

The resident allowed Punjabis to join the services of the state which was resented by the pundits and Jamwals of Kashmir and Jammu division respectively. The resentment was on the grounds that the people from outside will hit the livelihood opportunities of native people.

The resident appointed by the English was the real power of Dogra Empire and council came into being in 1905 when the Russian threat was mitigated by Russia's crushing defeat at the hands of Japan in 1904 in the Pacific Ocean. After this Maharaja Pratap Singh's authority was restored partially. Despite the restoration of power partially the Maharaja was still to seek consent from the British before taking any decision. So, Maharaja was suspect in eyes of the British. In order to increase the role in running the government, state council was established in 1922, with Hari Singh and state council helped to keep in check the Maharaja's authority. The majority community was suppressed and was considered as the beasts of burden. In July 1924, Silk Factory Workers protested against the working conditions and less wages given to them. Mainly the people from the majority community were employed in the silk factory

and were under the control of Pandits. Largest quantity and finest quality of silk yarn was produced in Kashmir.

### **Appointment of the British Resident after Maharaja's Death**

Earlier during Maharaja Gulab Singh's reign, the British had forced him to initiate some reforms in the administration and same was the case with other descendants of Dogra Dynasty. After the death of founder of Dogra Dynasty-Maharaja Gulab, beginning of modern governance and political and social advancement of the people of the state started. The British Resident began to advise Maharaja to replace the old system of administration on the lines of the new administrative machinery in British India. Feeling danger Maharaja made some reforms in the administration. Large number of taxes was abolished. Various steps were taken to abolish vexatious duties on manufacturers and traders (Bamzai, 1962; Khan, 2002).

The political condition on the northern borders was worsening rapidly for the British and they enthusiastically desired some comprehensive changes in the state administration, but in spite of all his promises, it was beyond the power of Maharaja to reform the state administration, for he had hardly the resource to depend upon. The meager efforts made by him were hardly expected to change the situation materially. In fact, there were many administrative defects the Dogras suffered from and one main reason was the incompetent and corrupt bureaucracy. So, taking its advantage the British were able to post a political Resident in Jammu and Kashmir in order to have a proper watch on the events beyond the northern western frontiers of Kashmir (Bamzai, 1962).

Sir Oliver St. John was designated as the first British Resident in Kashmir, succeeded in March, A.D. 1888, by C. Plowden, who started the proceedings which ultimately led to the deposition of the Maharaja Pratap Singh. According to the proceedings of C. Plowden the Maharaja was incompetent and was not capable of implementing any reforms. Moreover a fake letters were circulated that misrepresented the Maharaja's domestic and foreign policies (Digby, 1890). So, the British Government had a purpose of establishing a stable and efficient government in Kashmir and asked the Maharaja to refrain from all interference in the state administration. Meanwhile the Maharaja was allowed to retain his rank and dignity as chief of the state, full powers of the government were vested in a council composed of Maharaja's brother and other three or four officials selected by the Government of India.

The council was established in 1889; on the pattern of the post 1857 Mutiny Governor-General's council in India and portfolios was also adapted on the same pattern. Lesser number of members was appointed. The council was comprised of five members Raja Amar Singh, Raja Ram Singh, and some experienced European

officers like Rai Bahadur Pandit Suraj Kaul and Rai Bahadur Pandit Bhag. Raja Amar Singh was appointed as the president of the council as well as Prime Minister of the state. He acted as an important channel of communication between state council and the Resident. Although the Council was given full powers of the administration and these powers were to be exercised under the guidance of the British Resident. In 1891 the state council was reconstituted and Maharaja was offered its president ship and he readily accepted it (Digby, 1890).

*Beggar* or the system of forced labour remained one of the most noticeable systems of the Kashmir administration under Maharaja Pratap Singh. The first reliable reference to *Beggar* is found in the Kalhanas Rajatarangni, when king Samkaravarman (883-902 AD) employed villagers to carry the baggage and supplies for his armies. It was later continued by other dynasties also like Chaks, Sultans, Mughals, Dogras and was finally abolished before 1947. It was a grave economic exploitation by despots (Bose, 2003).

The sufferings of the villagers of Kashmir were much greater in the late in the 19th century, mainly due to the construction of the Jhelum Valley Road and the Gilgit Road. Thousands of them were forced to work for the successful completion of these roads since their construction was considered to be of vital importance for the interests of British imperialism. The conditions of the people who worked as laborers were very pathetic mainly during winter months due to heavy snowfall. No arrangements were made for the feeding or housing of the coolies and with the result many of them died on the way due to the exposure and disease. Human portage to remote regions of the state to which animal transport was impossible had long been a necessity.

The abuses of beggar system increased from time to time as there were often so many villagers engaged with forced labour. Previous attempts by Maharaja Gulab Singh to control *Beggar* bore little fruit. But the state government at the persistent request of the Resident finally decided to abolish the *Beggar* system. To prevent the total collapse of the transport system, however, *Beggar* in modified form was allowed to continue until a viable state transport system developed. Under Sir Walter Lawrence's direction, requisitions of forced labour for government officials were immediately abolished and unpaid portage to Gilgit was ended. The Maharaja again approached to British for full restoration of sovereignty and after the credible performance of the Jammu and Kashmir forces with the British army in overseas operation during World War-I. When. In 1920, Maharaja Pratap Singh approached the Viceroy for full restoration of power; the British insisted that the Maharaja continue to consult with the Resident on all frontier matters and administrative changes. Later Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India, visited the state in March A.D. 1921 and formally announced the restoration

of full administrative powers to the Maharaja. After he restoration of full powers to Maharaja, the state Council was abolished and the Executive Council was formed in 1922 that was consisted of four ministries; revenue, Home and Law, and Commerce and Industries. During 1846- 1847, the British authorities wanted to demarcate the boundaries of Gulab Singh's territory. The first assignment regarding to boundary was completed in 1847 which fixed the boundaries between Ladakh and the British occupied the territories of Lahol and Spiti to the South. The two commissions failed to set the boundary of the whole Dogra state due to Sheikh Imam-Ud- Din's interfere (Khan, 2002; Kashmir life, 2014). So, this was the main reason that the frontiers of the state were not demarcated properly. Maharaja undertook the reforms against the social evils like *Sati* and female infanticide which were prevalent when he took over the charge of Kashmir.

## CONCLUSION

British residency has a profound impact on the princely state of Kashmir. The residency system deposed the real ruler of Kashmir on the pretext of administrative failure and the British started to run the administration on their own lines.

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