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People's History and Resistance Activities against Dogra Administration During Freedom Movement in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt to explore peoples history in the newly created state of Jammu and Kashmir in an atmosphere where the common masses were ruled by two alien authorities i,e Dogras and British officers. The researcher will enquire into the economic and political initiatives of the Maharaja who had always been questioned by the British authorities as well as the common people. Further the nature of resistance activities of the people will be investigated along with the undue sympathy that the British gained among the masses.

Keywords: Dogra, Kashmir, resistance, British officer, muslim education, administration, freedom movement, imperial authority.

1. INTRODUCTION

Soon after the creation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 by the first Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh, the people in the state particularly the inhabitants of Kashmir valley had to face many challenges.¹ These challenges were both internal and external. On one hand they had to the face the brunt of dogra rulers and on the other hand the people had to bear the British officers. After the sale of Jammu and Kashmir state (which is quite debatable) by Britishers to the Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh, the dogra rulers considered it as their personal property and did whatever they like. They looked after their own interests and pay least attention towards the welfare of the common masses. The rulers looked at them as a huge labour force and concentrated only on tax and revenue collection. They extracted as much as they can from the labourers. The labourers were paid meager wages on which they hardly afford their meals.

¹ Hand Book of Jammu and Kashmir State, 2nd eds., Jammu, Samvat, 1945, p. 26.

The British government was concerned with the ethics of a large public good and of sound financial management to maintain peace and harmony in the state. But the fact cannot be ignored that in doing so, British also had their own apprehensions as the state was having a strategic position and any disturbance in this area might have been detrimental for the British sovereignty in India. The British knew the importance of peace and tranquility in the region and that is why they took immediate steps to control the state administration soon after receiving the complaints of maladministration in the state. They want an effective political supervision not only for the people of Kashmir but also for the people of other frontier tribes in order to check the foreign incursion.²

The people in the Dogra State faced discrimination in all walks of life ranging from state education to government services. During dogra period education was limited and it was a monopoly of the Hindus.³ So the First to avail this were Kashmiri Pandits. But due to the influx of Christian missionary, who although have been severely criticized and not allowed in the state have opened new pathways for the masses of the state. The contribution of Dr. Elmslie, J.H. Knowles and Tyndale Biscoe had been remarkable in the spread of modern education. It was during the reign of Pratap Singh that the people got aware about the things and moved towards modernity.⁴

The role of Christian Missionaries was noteworthy so far as the political awareness of Kashmiri masses is concerned. Such consciousness was very much earlier in Indian states. The infiltration of liberal ideas, mostly available in English language, the political movement of the country led by Indian National Congress, the political movements of Turkey, Ireland and Egypt and the part young men played in these movements made an impact on the political consciousness of the Kashmiris which later on was influenced continuously by the Punjab through the press and other media. The state administration checked all the sources of information which penetrated the state but despite all restrictions many old newspapers continued to foster the spirit of nationalism and a number of new monthly Magazines, Dailies and Weeklies made their appearance.⁵

The Hindus of the state were the first to take advantage of modern education long before the Muslims of Kashmir became politically conscious because of the fact that the whole state administration was dominated by the non-Muslim officials. It was these Hindus who fought for the modernization of administration. They were the first to demand free press, free platform and a legislature based on qualified franchise with powers of law making, certain limited powers of financial control and certain supervisory powers over the executive.⁶

On the other hand, the Muslims were striving for their basic rights and the significant character of Muslim demands was the demand for fundamental rights of the people of the state. This demand was important as it was in the line of famous resolution on the fundamental rights of the people of India passed

² Taseer, Rashid, *Tehreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir 1931-1939*, (Srinagar, repr. 1968), pp. 42-45.

³ Khushhal Chand Editor of Milap has quoted Bernier saying that Hindus are at a leading position in the state and are enjoying more rights than rest of the population. Although Muslims are a majority population and still suffers, all this is done through a conspiracy and such a conspiracy needs to be rooted out. See Malik Fazl Hussain, *Kashmir aur Doga Raj 1848-1931*, Srinagar, 1980, p. 29.

⁴ Bisco, Tyndale, *Kashmir and Its Inhabitants*, (Delhi, 1998), p. 263.

⁵ File No. 476 of 1907, Har Narain, Minister of Education to Maharaja, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, 1st. December 1909; Tyndale Biscoe, *An Autobiography*, (London, 1951), p. 211.

⁶ Khan, Hashmat-ul-Allah, *Mukhtesar-i-Tarikh Jammu-wa-Kashmir*, (Jammu Tawi, 1939), p. 57.

by Indian national Congress at its session held at Karachi on March 25, 1931.⁷ Like the congress resolution on fundamental rights, the demands contained in the memorial consisted of the right to freedom of religion as obtained in the British India, right to freedom of assemblage and association, right to freedom of speech and press, right to equality and equal treatment before the law for all subjects, without discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, creed and colour.⁸

Initiatives were taken at different levels of the country to get the demand of the muslim education fulfilled in the valley. An educational conference was held at Rangoon named All India Mohammadan Educational Conference in December 1909 in which a request was made to the Maharaja to increase the number of muslims in teaching and inspection staff and to provide special scholarship to the muslim students so that their number could be increased in the schools. Another conference was held at Lahore in Punjab known as Muslim Kashmiri Conference 1911 which focused itself to the spread of education among the muslims in the state. The Muslim Kashmiri Conference had also condemned the policy of preference given to the non-state subjects over state subjects by the Maharajas government. The Muslim Kashmiri Conference in its annual session of April 1920 regretted the paucity of muslims in judicial, forest and public works department services of the state. The congress further requested that if competent muslims are not available in the state itself, then a provision should be made in which competent muslims from outside be borrowed for state services. It has also stressed on the compulsory primary education in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.⁹

When Mr. Sharp came to the valley to review the educational system and suggest certain reforms for the development of education, the position of the education before that was like this,¹⁰

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Non-Muslims</i>
Head Master Government Middle School	3	49
Head Master Government High School	1	15
Professors	4	33
Demonstrators	1	8
Inspectors	3	14
Gazitted Officers	4	17
Total	2201	

Educationally the muslims of the state severely suffered. The opportunity for government jobs was also debarred to the Kashmiri muslims. So in this connection a petition was moved in which it was mentioned that since there were ninety five percent (95%) of muslims in the state who were loyal and law abiding, but the muslim interests were not only utterly ignored but their legitimate aspirations were cruelly suppressed.¹¹ Their manner of presenting the grievances is mentioned below;

- (a) That the interests of the muslims were not represented, as none of the ministers of Maharaja was a muslim and all the important revenue and judicial officers of the state were Hindus who had no sympathy with the interests of the muslims.

⁷ G H Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir (1931-1940)*, (New Delhi, 1980), pp. 232-233.

⁸ *Ibid.*, All India, Kashmir Committee, Memorial containing Demands of Muslims, Lahore, 1931, pp.7-9; see also Khan, Hashmat-ul-allah, *Mukhtesar-i- Tarikh Jammu-wa- Kashmir*, p. 57.

⁹ File No. 70/P-37, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, Year 1911.; Ravinderjit Kaur, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, (New Delhi, 1996), p. 47.

¹⁰ *Tebreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir 1931-1939*, p. 214.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214, see also Sir Walter Lawrence, *Jammu and Kashmir*, Jammu, 1985, p. 30.

- (b) The ministerial as well as other offices of the state were filled with the Hindus, and the muslims were cautiously kept out. These include all judicial offices, all wazarat and Tehsil offices with very solitary exceptions and provincial governors.
- (c) In the public works department, the peons and even coolies whose duties did not require any educational qualification were all Hindus.
- (d) The state authorities have shown Discrimination and apathy in every sphere of the administration and among them one prominent was education of the muslims. All-important posts like inspector and headmasters etc. were occupied by the Hindus with the exception of few.¹²

<i>Religion</i>	<i>1891</i>	<i>1892</i>
Hindus	2,101	2,861
Sikhs	66	72
Muslims	494	839
Others	4	4
Total	2,665	3,776

The table shows number of students in every religion during 1891-92

It was not only that the Kashmiri muslims were lacking educational opportunities but in other fields well as their number was very less. They could not find government jobs. They were not recruited even as coolies and peons. There were some low posts which require urdu and Persian as basic educational qualification which some muslim students possess but still the dogra administrators preffer an uneducated pandit over there. It has been mentioned that in 1907 some students were studying outside the state who tried to bring the repression and cruelty of the people of Jammu and Kashmir into limelight but strict action was taken against them and even they were expelled from the college. The Maharaja issued an order that any person “found to have any dealing, directly or indirectly, with any disloyal or seditious or indirectly or to have taken an interest in or expressed sympathy with, persons connected or associated with such movement, would be subjected to the severest punishment that the Darbar under political law could inflict”. He further warned that “persons making any speech either in public or in private or even holding private meetings to cause any kind of dissatisfaction or any public demonstration of individual feeling of discontent, will be equally severely dealt with.”¹³ Some statistics are given below which shows the number of muslims in government services in comparison to Kashmiri Pandits.¹⁴

<i>Executive</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Non-Muslims</i>
Public Works Department	54	183
Electricity Department	3	47
Telegraph and Telephone	7	73
Custom	14	195
Revenue (Girdawar, patwari)	9	75
Revenue (Tehsildar)	22	65

¹² National Archives of India, Foreign Department, January 1909, Nos. 15-16, op. cit., see also Das, Diwan Narsing, *Tarikh-e-Dogra Desh*, (Jammu , 1967), pp. 697-710.

¹³ File No. 24/N-118, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, Year 1907.

¹⁴ *Tebreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir* 1931-1939, p. 215.

<i>Clerk</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Non-Muslim</i>
Finance	29	367
Public works	3	194
Judicial	21	162

<i>Peons</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Non-Muslim</i>
Public works	23	120
Custom	108	314
Forestry	278	784
Stationary	5	16

There were various muslim organisations who took initiatives to ameliorate the conditions of the muslims. The prominent among them were Taraqui-Talim-wa-Itihad, the Anjuman-i-Islamia and Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam. All these organisations aimed at the advancement of the education, cooperation and coordination among muslims and greater participation in the administration of the state. Education was the pressing need of the time and even the Kashmiri muslims who had settled in the rest of India voiced for the education of the muslims in the state but no heed was given to their demands.¹⁵

Till 1932 mass mobilization and overt political activities were prohibited in Jammu and Kashmir. There was also a ban on the publication of newspapers in the state until the Glancy Commissions report in 1932 had incorporated a recommendation for the freedom of press. The only sort of public activity allowed was the formation of societies for religious and social reform. These activities contained the provisions that they would require prior sanction for their establishment and the explicit abjuration of any intent to engage in political activity.¹⁶

Akhbar-i-Aam was a newspaper in Lahore and in 1925 an article appeared in the said paper which read "unemployment in Kashmir". The author was Gwash Lal Koul who was influenced by the student community of China, who had raised a revolt against oppression in China. The author appealed to the Kashmiri youth to raise against the exploitative and oppressive nature of the government. Gwash Lal Koul appealed to the educated masses to organize themselves into an association and solve the problem of bread peacefully, honourably and legitimately. He concluded that "the whole world is a struggle for existence in which the strongest survive, while the weakest go to wall. 'Now or never' is the problem. Those alone who are prepared to die at the altar of their motherland will wear a martyrs' crown, while the rest will die uncare for, unmourned and unwept. So get up, you lions and come forward, happen what may." It is mentioned that strict action was taken against Koul, he along with other educated young man carried on a restless agitation in Indian press for Kashmiris to be exclusively employed to the administration.

The Maharaja of Kashmir banned the publication of newspapers in 1906 without his prior permission. Magazines and newspapers which carried what the govt. considered violent and offensive articles and the attempt of the worst type to strive up hatred were not allowed inside the state.¹⁷ There were a variety of newspapers circulating in the state and one famous among them was "The Patriot" which was a muslim

¹⁵ National Archives of India, Home Department, Political, September, 1921, No. 18.

¹⁶ Mridu Rai, *Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir, Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, (New Delhi, 2004), p. 227, see also Glancy Commission Report Vide Dastawaizat, pp. 128-130.

¹⁷ Ravinderjit Kaur, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, (New Delhi, 1996), p. 35.

paper. On 25th April, it had published an article depicting muslims as down trodden slaves. The state administration thought that such articles shall affect the minds of the Kashmiri masses and the government or the darbar put restrictions on its publication. The state administration was very much concerned about the publication of cultural and religious magazines and such magazines were not allowed to be published. The administration believed that such papers interfere with the politics of the state. A ban was imposed on all newspapers in 1910 containing seditious ideas and offenders were liable to persecution under section 124-A of the Penal code of 1860.¹⁸

One of the prominent and widely circulating papers of the state was “The Zamindar”. The other leading paper was the “Paisha Akhbar” of Lahore which played a leading role in pleading the cause of the muslims of Kashmir and Punjab. The complaints of the muslims whether related to government services or right to separate electorate in all the municipal and district boards in Punjab was published in this newspaper during 1910. The circulation of such newspapers made the people of Kashmir politically alert and sowed the seeds of mass dissatisfaction against both the British and the Dogras¹⁹.

That is why the Maharaja was against the publication of newspapers in the state. The possession and reading of newspapers was regarded as seditious and unlawful and anyone found to possess any of the disallowed papers or pamphlets was prosecuted. An order was issued by the Maharaja under which steps would be taken against state subjects sending articles to the newspapers concerning administrative and political questions. Besides strict watch was kept over prohibited political literature, so that it might not be imported into the state. Packages of anti-British newspapers and other postal packets believed to contain newspapers entering Srinagar from North-West frontier province and addressed to some people in Kashmir, were confiscated.²⁰

The biggest segment of the Kashmiri population which was reeling under state discontent was the peasantry class. They had many difficulties but the most crucial was the confiscation of property rights and the oppression they were subjected by the state and its supporting structure like Jagirdars, Chakdars and Maufidars. A big portion of land was appropriated by the Jagirdars, Chakdars and Maufidars. The society was a feudalistic type of society where the major portion of the peasant produce was taken away by state and its collaborators.²¹

The ruling class of the state was under the possession of different categories of lands. Majority of the land was under Hindu domination. The issues like confiscation of property rights and occupancy rights became a center of their demands. The Kashmiri muslims particularly the muslim conference has presented memorandums to the government in 1924 and 1931. The leaders of the muslim conference had suffered heavily to redress the grievances like the confiscation of land.²²

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁹ Paisha Akhbar, 11th April 1903

²⁰ File No. 99, National Archives of India, Home Department, Political.

²¹ File No. 117, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, Year 1896.

²² The peasants lost not only the property rights but also the occupancy rights. The new law does not apply to the Jammu peasants because the Dogra rulers always considered Jammu as their home and Kashmir as their conquered territory. “The majority of the land lords belonged to the ruling community i.e the Hindu community who constituted only 20% of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir and not more than 5^{1/2} % of Kashmir valley.” There were only a few muslim jagirdars in the state and it was after 1890 that some of them were deprived of their jagirs and that was why abolition of landlordism became one of the main slogans of muslim conference, Mohammad Yousuf Ganai, pp. 37-39, Census of India, Jammu and Kashmir Library, Srinagar, 1931, pp. 73-74.

There was a deep resentment among the Kashmiri masses due to the ills they suffered in every walk of life.²³ The high pitch of land revenue and other taxes, faulty method of land revenue assessment and collection, the exaction of illegal taxes (rasum), the beggar and the gross neglect of basic problems of the peasantry by the state and the landlords were their main grievances. The magnitude of land revenue in case of Khalsa land of Kashmir was 1/3rd of gross produce, while as it is quite strange to see that in Jammu it is only 1/4th of the total produce.²⁴ The mode of revenue collection was also repressive Revenue was collected both in kind and cash. 2/3rd of assessment was paid in cash while as 1/3rd was paid in kind.²⁵

We have a long history of Kashmiri peasant sufferings. They not only became the victims of their own rulers but had also been victimized by the great economic depression 1929. It was on 6th June 1847 for the first time that labour movement appeared in Kashmir. Some 4000 shawl bafis came out on the roads to highlight their pitiable conditions. They organized themselves under a leadership and proceeded towards Lahore but were stopped in the way. The labour class remained quiet for a long time hoping that their conditions may be enhanced. It was in 1865 when the labour class again protested against the dag shawli department for their atrocities on the peasantry class.²⁶

The dag shawli department used to supervise and conduct the shawl production. It also regulated the labour employed by the proprietors of the factories. The shawl weavers were ruthlessly exploited and were the lowest paid working class. The main reason for their revolt was the employees of the dag shawli department particularly the head of the department Pandit Raj Kak Dhar.²⁷ He was supposed to recover and pay to the state 12 lakh rupees. The taxation policy of the state was managed in such a way by the employers that its greater burden fell on the weavers. The weavers were to pay 49 rupees each as a contribution towards the sum of the 12 lakh rupees to be paid to the state. A shawl baf had to pay rupees 5 as tax out of his monthly income which varied from rupees 7 to 8. So it was very difficult for an ordinary shawl baf to pay the fixed money. It was due to these hardships that the weavers had to form a united front. On April 29, 1865 all the shawl weavers of the city marched towards Zaldagarin the form of a procession. There were slogans against Raj Kak Dhar and his effigy was burnt down. The helpless people were surrounded by the troops and charged with guns and spares. Hundreds of the processionists were arrested and imprisoned in Habak who died there due to starvation and cold. The leaders were also arrested and mercilessly beaten and in this way the revolt was crushed down. In this clash 28 labourers died whose bodies were returned by the security forces. The shawl weavers were terrified by the employees of the dag shawl department and they cannot say a word against the employees. If a person found guilty of doing so, he had to face severe punishment.²⁸

²³ Corruption was rampant in the ranks of the revenue staff managed by the Pandits, who made a common origin with the revenue officials, tampered with deeds and contracts and so as to serve the latter's interest and made their own prosperities. It is therefore in the context of these emerging agrarian relations that the opposition of the pandit officials to Sir Walter Lawrence's reforms needs to be studied.

²⁴ Walter, R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, (Srinagar, 2005), pp. 428; see also Mirza Afzal Beg, *Agricultural Reforms in Kashmir*, pp. 15-16.

²⁵ Glancy Commission Report Vide Dastawaizat, pp. 128-130; see also Walter, R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 435-436.

²⁶ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, Bhavana Prakashan, Delhi, 2000, p. 204.

²⁷ Mohammad Yousuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Feroz Sons, Lahore, 1977, p. 333; see also P N K Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, Metropolitan, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 668-69.

²⁸ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, op. cit., p. 205.

An attempt was made by the Kashmiri people in 1877, when they secretly submitted a memorandum to the viceroy of India. The contents of the document were kept confidential and no one came to know about it. The document contained the grievances of the state administration. The Kashmiri pandits were the main runners of the shawl industries. They had manned the dag shawl department, which regulated shawl trade. The shawl weavers lived in an absolute poverty because they were left only with mere subsistence, but on the other side the life of the employees were pompous.²⁹

“It is to be noted that the condition of the peasants worsened beyond expectations after 1870. The weavers became jobless and many of them changed their profession. Kashmir was the main exporter of shawl and its products reach to far off countries. France alone purchased 80% of the Kashmiri shawls. However, the Franco German war of 1870 lead to the economic bankruptcy of the France. Kashmiri shawl almost lost its market. The industries were closed, shawl bafs were thrown out of the employment and majority of them became daily labourers. The government took no steps to maintain the world famous shawl industry of Kashmir by exploring new market once the france market was closed to it.”³⁰

There was also a large scale corruption in the system and the personal belongings of the peasants were taken away.³¹ After the confiscation of property rights and raising revenues, Maharaja Pratap Singh had an eye on the savings of artisans especially the shawl weavers. Shawl industry was heavily taxed and the peasants’ had to pay other taxes as well like pool tax of Rs 47 on each shawl weaver. Maharaja Gulab Singh kept the peasants attached to the industry by one way or the other and there were least chances for the labourers to escape. He also charged an advolerm duty of 25% on each shawl. Besides this the officials draw some illegal exactions which had put the people in further miseries. So in the backdrop of such oppression, the workers preferred to flee from the valley.³²

Both freedom fighters from Kashmir and their supporters in India have held dogra rule responsible for the downfall of Kashmiri handicrafts and pathetic condition of peasant. German das who was an Indian nationalist has given the fallowing description “during the past times Kashmir was famous in India and abroad for its arts and crafts, for its shawl and pashmina. Now the position is reverse and the cloth from foreign countries is imported, thus resulting in the economic devastation of the villages which were the centers of arts and crafts.”

Due to the setback which the traditional Kashmiri crafts received, the devastation has attracted the hearts and minds of people across the country. The Indian nationalist and the Indian press have shared sympathies with their lot.³³

Kashmir is famous for two important items throughout the world, one is Kashmiri shawl and second one is wood work. The traditional arts and crafts of Kashmir ruined and the state administration did nothing to save its century’s old cultural heritage. The attitude of the rulers and the officials towards the artisans was hostile which has increased the grudge between the two.³⁴

²⁹ Ibid., see also Gulam Hassan Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir*, Gulshan, Srinagar, p. 79.

³⁰ Mohammad Yousuf Ganai, *Kashmirs Struggle for Independence*, Mohsin, Srinagar, 2003, pp. 57-58.

³¹ R. L., Hangloo, *Agrarian System of Kashmir*, Common Wealth, op. cit., p. 117.

³² Mohammad Yousuf Ganai, *Kashmirs Struggle for Independence*, op. cit., p. 59.

³³ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

The main disgruntled artisan class of Kashmir was the shawl weaver. On one hand the artisans were discouraged by the officials and on the other hand the hand made goods were unable to compete with the cheap machine made goods. Both these factors lead to the decline of Kashmir crafts. The silk industry is the only single industry in Kashmir which maintained its flourishing condition during dogra rule. The industry provided livelihood to thousands of people and was a government undertaking. The workers of the silk industry were all muslims and all the employees were mostly non-muslims which had further aggrieved the situation.³⁵

The labour rising of 1924 was a landmark in the history of freedom movement in Kashmir. It had changed the very nature of the movement. The labourers of the factory were paid a daily wage of 4^{1/2} annas per head which was not only insufficient but next to nothing. The cost of living was high and the corruption was so rampant that the Kashmiri pandit officials shamelessly pocketed even a part of their wages.³⁶ The labourers had demanded an increase in their wages and a just and humanitarian treatment from their seniors. The labourers take out processions and made demonstration for the economic sufferings caused at the hands of officials. They got united and fought for their cause, but the workers were not successful in their protests against the state officials.³⁷

The labour movement matured with the passage of time. It had drawn the attention of leadership of muslim conference in 1934. The leaders of muslim conference believed that economic freedom was a fundamental prerequisite for political freedom. According to them the freedom movement in Kashmir is anti- autocratic and anti- imperialistic. They had the perception of human unity and solidarity irrespective of caste, creed and religion and as such subscribed to the growth and development of composite nationalism. They were the propagators of hindu-muslim unity. They had broaden the base of the freedom movement by believing in the belief of secular and nationalist politics which forms the basis of socialistic pattern of society.³⁸

By attacking the ideology of imperialism, they preached the politics of extremism and anti-imperialism in Kashmir. They had warned the government of India that if their demands were not considered they will start an agitation similar to French Revolution in Kashmir. They termed it as a fight between exploiters and exploited. They had adopted an inclusive approach and included people who were oppressed. All those people got attracted towards this approach who suffered miseries belonging to different sections of the society irrespective of caste, colour, religion etc. It was not a fight against any particular community but its real purpose was to snatch rights from the oppressors. They based the movement on secular and progressive lines.³⁹

The freedom struggle had gained momentum during the course of time. The socialistic character of the movement had some positive impacts on the society. The forerunners of the struggle got popularity and Sheikh Abdullah (father of the movement) own the agitation along with its programme. Secondly the younger had also convinced a small but enlightened sections of non- muslims of their secular approach to politics.⁴⁰

³⁵ Census of India, 1931, p. 222.

³⁶ Mohammad Yousuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight For Freedom*, op. cit., p. 333.

³⁷ F M. Hassnain, *British Policy Towards Kashmir*, Sterling, Delhi, p. 46.

³⁸ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, p. 207.

³⁹ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir*, p. 79.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

The Kashmiri freedom struggle had entered into various phases with the passage of time. In 1935, it had entered into a new phase. This phase saw the appearance of several congress leaders on the political scene. Dr. Saifuddin Kitchloo was invited in August 1935 to inaugurate a local urdu weekly Hamdard. Dr. Kitchloo in his speech urged upon the people of Kashmir “to fight for economic freedom which included the establishment of industries, development of trade and commerce and construction of roads and routes. He made it a point that religion should not be misused and accused those who mix religion with politics. The articles in the news weekly preached Marxism and also boosted nationalism among the people through its columns. The gradual shift in approach from religion to economic treatment of the public problems became more and more manifest as a new trend in politics in 1936.⁴¹

G H Khan mentions that in 1936-37, the left wing forces engaged in popularizing the idea of class struggle in Kashmir politics. Their aim was to make the illiterate and ignorant masses conscious of the real nature and character of the society they lived in. in order to gain momentum, they organized youth leagues, student unions, *Mazdoor* and *Kisan Sabbas* for this purpose. They popularized the vision of a socialist Kashmir. They also organized cadres of politically conscious workers who taught them the theory of class struggle by means of debates, discussions and even seminars on small scale. The need of the time was therefore, to change the direction of movement from the middle class bourgeois nationalist to socialist character.⁴²

The muslim conference was well aware about the hardships of the peasantry and the working class. But what it did to get out of these miseries was the passing of resolutions to seek justice for them. Sheikh Abdullah appealed to the workers and labourers of the state “to organize their own unions and cooperate with the muslims conference as an associate body so that an organized fight could be waged for the removal of their complaints.” But the attempts taken by the muslim conference failed to bring any organized labour movement.⁴³

Kashmir freedom movement was also influenced by some communist elements. Dr. K. M Ashraf was invited to Srinagar and he presided over the proposed student’s conference on October 5, 6, 1937. In the conference the students were told that “they should work in close liaison with All India Students Federation, whose dominant leadership came from communists and socialists inside the congress.⁴⁴ The immediate outcome of such activities was the formation of small organizations like Free Thinkers Association, Study Circle” etc. These developments were followed by the visits of some other prominent socialist personalities like comrade Bedi and his wife Freda Bedi. They made great efforts to galvanize the people from different walks of life. Due to their untiring zeal and hard work some trade union like associations such as of motor drivers, tanga drivers, boatmen, *shawl bafs*, carpet weavers etc. were formed. They had a great role in organizing mazdoors in the valley of Kashmir. *Mazdoorsabha* became very famous once it was formed and by 1937 all the smaller associations were brought together under the umbrella of a single organization called the *mazdoorsabha*.⁴⁵

Mazdoorsabha was based mainly on the principles of secularism. It had thrown its doors open to all communities, possessing any faith or creed and practicing any religion. No one was allowed to criticize

⁴¹ The Ranbir, Jammu, Har 6, 1990 (Samvat).

⁴² Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴³ Hamdard Weekly, Srinagar, August 29, 1936.

⁴⁴ Hamdard Weekly, Srinagar, October, 3, 1936.

⁴⁵ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, op. cit., pp. 212-13.

any religion but to honour and respect the religious sentiments of one another. The sabha made it clear to both the communities muslims and non-muslims that there existed two classes, the capitalists and workers, the masters and the slaves, the rich and the poor and the oppressor and the oppressed. The sabha had also stressed the members to have the knowledge of class character of their society and prohibited them not to be communal or biased. The membership was open to all labourers whether working in big factories or in small association groups.

The government was against the membership of labourers in the *mazdoorsabha* and the workers were strictly directed not to go for any membership to the *mazdoorsabha*, if so, they had to bear the brunt of the administration. The labourers had highlighted that their salary is only five annas a month and on it they had to live a life of extreme poverty. The memorandum of labourers had mentioned the government to restore their wage cuts and to save them from unemployment and hunger. They also requested to reduce their work load which had been doubled during the economic depression caused by the First World War. The demands of the workers had mounted day by day but the government paid no attention to their demands. Some of the union members were even misbehaved by the authorities. So on August 19, 1937, under the directions of *mazdoorsabha*, the silk factory workers went on one-day strike in order to protest against the rude behavior of officials, when the memorandum was presented to the director of the silk factory. A big meeting was held by the workers on 7 September 1937 within the factory premises.⁴⁶ G M Sadiq was the president of the *mazdoorsabha*, who urged upon the workers to be bold enough and to create in themselves a feeling of self-sacrifice, mutual cooperation and a sense of discipline. The workers were told to be united and become the strength of the movement. The importance of labour movement was highlighted in one of the meetings held at Pratap Park Srinagar. What they demanded was two time meals, removal of unemployment and freedom from hunger. The challenged the state government that no peace is possible in a country where there is unemployment. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah has depicted the importance of labourers and the movement in the following words;

“the leaders whether hindus or muslims fall prey to capitalists... They fill the state treasury with the blood and sweat. But the money is spent by the others Like Muslims unemployed hindus are crushed under the clutches of capitalists of their own community. This state of affairs will however die away one day. Now the time is fast approaching when a united front of all labourers and peasats will be organized. We must therefore, render every possible help to the *mazdoor sabha* and its leaders.”⁴⁷

The main objective of *mazdoor sabha* was the secularization of politics to the freedom movement in Kashmir. Its programme and policy inspired the masses with the spirit of radicalism. It taught them how to fight the battle of freedom on economic issues. Due to continued struggle of workers, the government was compelled to announce the restoration of cuts in wages on January 26, 1938 of the silk factory workers and the grant of 147371 rupees and 2 annas to be distributed among the affected workers. It was a land mark in the history of labour movements and the first victory of *mazdoor sabha*. The *kisan sabha* was founded firstly in October 1937 and its President was Sofi Mohammad Akbar- a leader from Sopore.

⁴⁶ The meeting was attended atleast by 3000 workers and labourers. Some prominent personalities and intellectuals like G M Sadiq and Prem Nath Bazaz participated in the proceedings of the meeting. Another meeting was held in Pratap Park Srinagar on 11 September 1937 which was attended by 5000 workers. Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, op. cit., pp. 212-13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

It has been mentioned that the *kisan sabha* did not last for long and died without doing any substantial work. In 1943 the party was revived by “the Kashmir socialist party” founded by Prem Nath Bazaz who had developed political relations with the National Conference party.⁴⁸ The Kashmir socialist party was a two member party. One member was Prem Nath Bazaz and the other one was Kanayalal Koul who was an advocate from Sopore and acted as its secretary. This party was finally renamed as All Jammu and Kashmir Kissan Conference in 1945. The decision to form kisan conference was taken at a meeting in Achabal Garden Islamabad. Abdul SalmYutu, a young matriculate was made its president. It had its branches in different villages of the district.⁴⁹

The forced labour was closely connected with the creation of landed Aristocracy was the most prominent feature of dogra administration. In the first few decades of the dogra rule the magnitude of forced labour grew in volume not only due to military expeditions sent to gilgit and the adjoining border areas of Kashmir but also owing to the emergence of an organised landed aristocracy and the week functioning of exchange economy especially in the agrarian set up characterized by localism.⁵⁰

To conclude we can say that the dogra rulers from the very inception showed a hostile attitude towards the masses and due to maladministration they were opposed from every nook and corner of the state. In short the basic reason for resistance activities of Kashmiri masses during dogra rule were the feudal character of the state, the institution of jagirdari system, the defective system of revenue and taxation, corrupt administration and the disgraceful system of beggar or forced labour.

⁴⁸ The Ranbir Weekly, Jammu , November 22, 1937.

⁴⁹ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir 1931-1947*, op. cit., pp. 212-13.

⁵⁰ Gulam Hassan Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir*, op. cit., p. 132.