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Towards an understanding of Kashmir problem: A political economy perspective

Daleep Singh¹, Dr. Sakshi Metha²

¹ M. Phil Scholar, Political Science, Apex University, Jaipur Rajasthan, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Apex University, Rajasthan, India

Corresponding Author: Daleep Singh

Abstract

The researcher has argued that land reforms in Jammu and Kashmir have been on a whole a success story as it was able to bring greater equality and justice in the rural areas. There were certain shortcomings in the land reforms because of which influential people managed to retain more land than required by the law. The successive State governments when realised the shortcomings in the existing laws made amendments in the law so that there was more equitable distribution of land. One of the drawbacks of the reform has

been that it created a situation of extreme land fragmentation and parcelisation with the average farm size being below the optimal size of farms. Research has revealed that small land holdings are not the best place to introduce Green Revolution which requires large land holding and also technological/capitalist investment. Agriculture scientists suggest green revolution technology in Kashmir to boost agriculture growth as climate and topography do not help in sufficient food production.

Keywords: Kashmir conflict, economic perspective, political perspective etc

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir even after signing the Instrument of Accession 66-years ago in 1947 in favour of India is still crying to be 'integrated' with the country. Speaking at the country's 67th Independence Day celebrations Chief Minister of the State Omar Abdullah said: "The differential treatment meted out to Jammu and Kashmir is fueling its alienation and as long as it continues, the state cannot be integrated into India. We are treated differently, like we are not part of the mainstream. You want to scrap the Article 370 of the constitution to integrate Jammu and Kashmir fully with the rest of the country, but you treat us separately. As long as you do, integration will not happen by changing the clauses of the constitution. It will happen when you change your attitude" (Hindustan Times 2013:11). The Kashmir problem has become of utmost significance in cementing the unity and integrity of India. Seeking a lasting solution to this problem assumes importance as it remains one of the oldest causes of tension between India and Pakistan. In South Asia, Kashmir is also an issue of concern for powers like The United States of America who believes that if not resolved it might spark a nuclear confrontation and would like to see an end to the terrorist activity that Kashmir's disputed status inspire, warning that "tension between the India and Pakistan has made Indian sub-continent (Kashmir) the most dangerous place in the world." The people as well as governments of the two countries are keen to develop good relations and settle the issues that divide them by peaceful means as all the parties involved in the conflict¹ – India, Pakistan and Kashmiris – have not been able to change the status quo through military means or otherwise in their favour (Zeb & Chandran 2005). Needless to say, all the parties advance a rhetorical claim to the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed prior to its accession to India in 1947 – though New Delhi actually has long wanted the line of control to be made into the permanent international boundary, which Pakistan as well as most pro-independence Kashmiris does not want to accept (Bose 1999). Among the key reasons that peace initiative between these two neighbours have historically failed is the vexing problem of Kashmir. Whereas Pakistan has repeatedly termed this the 'core issue' in its contentious relationship with India, New Delhi has maintained that this matter was settled with Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India. The United States of America also believes that the Kashmir issue remains central to and at the heart of India-Pak relations (Puri: 2001).² Many intellectuals from India also hold the similar point of view as far Kashmir issue is concerned (Thapar 2013). Both New Delhi and Islamabad hold different views regarding their conflict. As far as India has been concerned the only issue for discussion between the two countries has been what India regards as Pakistan's continuing illegal occupation of part of Jammu and Kashmir (Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir or POK), an occupation that began in 1947-48, during the war between the two nations.³ Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee in February 1999 during his visit to Lahore agreed to put Kashmir on the agenda in a bid to reopen dialogue with Pakistan.⁴ However, this glimmer of promise was extinguished later that year by Pakistan's adventure in the

Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir. This move precipitated a clash that had developed into a full scale war-what became known as the Kargil war-by May 1999. Why has the conflict over the Kashmir persisted for so long? Writing way back in 1954, Joseph Korbel (1954), chairman of the United Commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP) until 1949, argued in his book *Danger in Kashmir* that “the real cause of all the bitterness and bloodshed, all the venom speech, recalcitrance and the suspicion that have characterised the Kashmir dispute is the uncompromising and perhaps uncompromising struggles of two way of life, two concepts of political organisation, two scales of values, two spiritual attitudes, that find themselves locked in deadly conflict, a conflict in which Kashmir has become both symbol and battleground”

(Habibullah 2004: 4). The ruler of former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir⁵, regarded by many as the paradise on the earth for its natural beauty and also considered very precious strategically, signed the instrument of accession on October 26, 1947. India’s argument for the legitimacy of its claim to Kashmir has been grounded in that accession. Pakistan, however, has always questioned the legality of the accession⁶ arguing that districts with Muslim majorities should have been assigned to the new State of Pakistan as partition took place on the basis of religion. For India, this argument militates against the concept on which Indian nationhood is founded, namely, India as a multi-ethnic, secular nation-state. These opposing views have set the tone for the adversarial relationship between the two countries ever since (Habibullah 2004). However, it goes without saying that the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered immensely from the ongoing conflict between the two hostile neighbours. While the compulsions of Islamabad’s domestic politics ensure that Kashmir and its integration with Pakistan will perennially remain on Islamabad’s political agenda, India is committed to its territorial integrity and will not accept any solution which changes its territorial borders. Truth is also that no political party or coalitions worth its salt in India can afford to change the existing status quo in Kashmir without risking to be electorally marginalised. For Pakistani military establishments, Kashmir could give them a chance to settle the score with India which they had suffered in 1971 Bangladesh War. Moreover, the Kashmir issue legitimises the dominance of armed forces in the power structure of Pakistan as it claims to safeguard the interest of the nation. In addition to these, there are the regional complexities of the Jammu and Kashmir state. While the Kashmir Valley’s population is more or less committed to the option of ‘independence’, the people of the other two regions of the state-Jammu and Ladakh-consider themselves as an integral part of India. Writing on “Social Reform and Political Future of Kashmir” in 1953, Michael Brecher (1953) was of the opinion that the Kashmiris were essentially pro-Kashmir and not pro-India or pro-Pakistan, and that this feeling was tied up with the universal admiration for their leader Sheikh Abdullah (grand-father of the present Chief Minister) and his programme of social and economic reforms. According to Brecher (1953), a relatively small group in the Valley which had suffered as a result of the unsettled conditions in the Kashmir since 1947, particularly the tourist-dependent community, was inclined to favour Pakistan, and that the overwhelming majority, who benefited from the social and economic reforms especially the land reforms instituted by

the ruling National Conference government, favoured the continuation of Sheikh Abdullah government, which meant accession to India. The plight of the people garnered international attention in the closing decades of the 20th century, although, unfortunately, only because they had revolted and resorted to political violence. Throughout the 1980’s as the people of Kashmir suffered from the stagnant economy and high level of unemployment, the government of Jammu and Kashmir was scarred by corruption, riddled with nepotism, and prone to blunders. After a series of missteps by the governments in Srinagar and New Delhi culminated in 1987 in what appeared to the Kashmiris to be a rigged election. The newly formed but unpopular coalition between the Indian National Congress and the State’s ruling National Conference made mockery of the State Assembly elections and deprived the dissident groups of representation in the new Assembly by rigging the election results in their favour. This was not something that happened for the first time in the state. The Kashmiris’ anger boiled over. Violence increasingly marked the expression of their political demands. Finally in 1990’s a revolt broke out. Who, then, are the Kashmiris, what are their demands? The state of Jammu and Kashmir can be seen as the microcosm of India given its diversity of ethnicity, language, culture and religion. Majority of the Kashmiri population living within India resides in the Kashmir valley. Those who live in the Valley and the surrounding area speak Kashmiri. Other two major components of the state are the regions of Jammu and Ladakh. The people of Jammu speak various forms of Dogri, which is different from Kashmiri. Ladakh, the largest of the three components in the terms of area, has predominantly Muslim and Buddhist population (Habibullah 2004). Jammu and Kashmir in 1989 became involved in a mass-based nationalist movement which was accompanied by a wide scale insurgency. The civil administration of the state was brought down by two agitating groups: the secessionist.

Methodology: As no single methodology would have been most appropriate to conduct study on such a nature so for the purpose of the present research which is analytical in nature, an attempt has been made to use both inductive as well as deductive method. It adheres to deductive method as the study focuses on the arguments presented in the scholarly literature on the subject. It also adopts inductive method as the subject required projections into the future. The researcher has also used comparative method of research in which an intra-State comparison has been made between three regions of the state i.e. Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh while discussing their respective concerns. The researcher has used data wherever it was required. The data used in the thesis are from both the sources – official reports and also from published academic books and journals. The researcher has collected information from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary sources include reports, official documents and other publications from the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The secondary sources include published books, autobiography, articles, journals, newspapers, and documentary.

Autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir under British Rule The State of Jammu and Kashmir, with its three distinct regions of Jammu (majority Dogri-speaking Hindus), Kashmir Valley (pre-dominantly Kashmiri-speaking Muslims) and Ladakh (majority Ladakhi-speaking Buddhists), is a recent political and geographical entity. The ruling family of the State was ethnic Dogras, 16 an upper caste Hindus from

Jammu region. The founder of the lineage was Raja Gulab Singh,¹⁷ one of the many local princes in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a Sikh warrior, who established a mini-empire in the northern and north-western India in the 19th century with its capital in the Punjab city of Lahore (now in Pakistan). Jammu had consisted for centuries of a number of small principalities whose uninterrupted pastime was warring upon one another. One principality in the southeast area, high in the hills, was populated by the Dogras. Korbelt (1954) quoting Sir William Barton (1934) writes that Jammu people are known generally as Dogras whatever their origin. They consisted of Sikhs, Rajputs, other Hindus and Muslims. When the Sikhs launched their expedition, in July 1819, against the Afghan ruler in Kashmir, they were assisted by Raja Gulab Singh. Because of his help, the Sikhs rewarded him by establishing his control over the whole province of Jammu. In 1837 and in 1839, Gulab Singh extended his rule by seizing from Tibet the northern areas, Ladakh and Baltistan on behalf of the Sikhs with the help of his famous general Zorawar Singh (Korbelt 1954). After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, Raja Gulab Singh began to collude.

Political economy of land reforms: An appraisal

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Sheikh Abdullah's reputation, spreading gradually since the events of July 1931, registered a leap every time he was arrested since jail going had become a badge of honour among the nationalists throughout the Indian subcontinent. Prem Nath Bazaz (1954) writes that politically and historically the 13 July, 1931 is considered as the most important day in history of Kashmir. Similarly Mridu Rai notes that the 13 July marked the inauguration of the 'freedom struggle' started by Kashmiris against the Dogra rule. "Neither the events of that day in Srinagar nor the death toll of twenty-two demonstrators and one policeman seem remarkable when compared to contemporaneous developments in British India. However, the significance of the date drew from the fact that it was the first time that a gathering of Kashmiri Muslims openly challenged the authority of the Maharaja and his Government" (Rai 2004:258). Bazaz writes that: "The incident of the 13th July shook the whole State including the administration: it unnerved the Maharaja. An official commission under the presidentship of Sir Barjore Dalal, Chief Justice, was set up to enquire into the causes of the happenings. The enquiry was boycotted by Muslims" (Bazaz 1954: 155). As it was, the 13th July saw the beginning of the gigantic force behind the mass movement in Kashmir. "The country from one end to other was now a big mass of discontent and unrest. Law and order remained only in name and the instructions of the authorities were publicly flouted at every place. Complete and spontaneous hartal was observed by the Muslim shopkeepers throughout the Kashmir province. ... Finding that the Cabinet was unable to grapple with the political problem, the Maharaja discharged two of his ministers, G. E. C. Wakefield and P. K. Wattal, and installed a Hindu Jagirdar, Raja Hari Kishan Kaul, as his Prime Minister" (Bazaz 1954: 155-56). Despite severe repression by the police, the Muslims continued to struggle and the Maharaja, realising that the resistance was strong, issued an order on 5 October, 1931 withdrawing the ordinances and other emergency measures. All political prisoners were also released (Bazaz). In a remarkable turn-about of trends, by September 1931,

Sheikh Abdullah and the New Kashmir Manifesto Kashmir freedom movement during its first phase of its struggle, writes Riyaz Punjabi (1995), was mainly confined to the problems of Government employment for newly educated and qualified Muslims of Kashmir. However, over a period of time, the objectives of the struggle were enlarged which included among other things challenging the feudal, autocratic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh. According to Punjabi, the abolition and feudalism and establishment of a secular democratic State were the two pillars of this struggle. The aspirations of the struggling masses in Kashmir were best reflected in a document titled the New Kashmir (Naya Kashmir).

An analysis of the politics of economic policy

One of most backward Princely State which joined the Indian Dominion in 1947 was the State of Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Today (1962), "For centuries, Jammu and Kashmir has remained a backward State, probably the most backward in India. A land coveted by rapacious conquerors, it has often been ravaged by war and invasion. An unbroken series of famines, epidemics, earthquakes and floods have added to the sufferings of the people in the past. Historians and travelers from many countries have left a graphic account of the terrible hardships through which the State had passed throughout its chequered history from times immemorial" (Kashmir Today 1962: 43). Jammu and Kashmir was backward in various ways. There was predominance of small peasant economy, absence of heavy industries and deterioration of artisan economy. Nearly 90 percent of the populations earned their livelihood from agriculture. Similarly, more than 65 percent of the total cultivated area was subject to the vagaries of monsoons. There were no heavy or other mill industries in the State. Small-scale industries and handicrafts were either totally deteriorated or were in the process of decay. The State was also very backward in respect of the means of transport. For instance, there were not more than 0.66 miles of roads per square mile. The level of literacy in the State was as low as 6.9 percent (Kashmir Marches Ahead 1958:

According to Puri (1968), during the Bakshi regime there was considerable economic growth in the State. Banks deposits increased. There was manifold increase in the ownership of moveable properties by the people. "Total disbursement by the State in various categories rose from Rs. 95 million (9.5 crores) in 1953-54 to Rs. 400 million (40 crores) in 1962-63. The rise in development expenditures in the same period was from Rs. 16 million (1.6 crores) to Rs. 108 million (10.8 crores). The per capita plan expenditure was among the lowest of the Indian States in the early 1950's, but it equalled the all-India average by the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) and doubled this average thereafter. Furthermore, the per capita budget revenue of the Kashmir Government was the highest: Rs. 48 in 1961-61 as against Rs. 23 for the average of all States. Revenue receipts increased from Rs. 52 million (5.2 crores) in 1953-54 to 220 million (22 crores) in 1961-62. In spite these vast increased expenditures, Kashmir remained the least taxed State in India. In 1958-59 per capita taxes in Kashmir amounted to Rs. 4.23 in contrast to the average of all States in India of Rs. 9.17. In fact, taxation in Kashmir had fallen from Rs. 6.10 per capita in 1951-52 whereas the average for all India had risen from 6.51 in the same period" (Puri 1968:225). According to Puri, the secret of this fiscal and economic miracle was aid from the Government of India.

“The financial integration of Kashmir with Union, which Sheikh Abdullah had resisted and which was readily accepted by Bakshi, brought great financial benefits to the State. Over and above the formal Agreement, the Union Government seemed to be quite generous in meeting the needs of the Kashmir, obviously for political reasons” (Puri 1968: 225). Giving details of monetary assistance from Union to the Jammu and Kashmir Government during the Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed period, Puri (1968) writes that per capita financial assistance to Jammu and Kashmir for the Second Plan (1951-56) was Rs. 50 against the average of Rs. 33 for other States.

Development of Agriculture after Independence Even before Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir could sign the Instrument of Accession, the Princely State was invaded by Pakistan. A sense of uncertainty prevailed in the State and its economy was completely shattered. Needless to add, Jammu and Kashmir was one of the least developed States in the country. The State’s backwardness was reflected in abysmal mass poverty, deprivation, hunger, disease and ignorance. In 1950, the State had a per capita income of Rs. 208 (at 1960 prices). The rate of literacy was as low as five percent. The agriculture was stagnant. Agriculture output per hectare/worker was very low. Industrial development was almost negligible. Infrastructural bottlenecks crippled the State economy and accentuated the poverty syndrome (Misri & Bhat 1994: 28). The programmes for reconstruction of the State economy were articulated by the National Conference leadership in their Naya Kashmir manifesto in 1944. “The programmes envisaged institutional and agrarian restructuring so that the productive forces could be unleashed from the shackles of parasitic landlordism and decks cleared for rapid modernisation and industrial growth. The policies that informed the various development programmes were set forth in the Directive Principles enshrined in the State Constitution” (Misri & Bhat 1994: 28). At the time of independence, the State was very much deficient in food grains, so a ‘Grow More Food’ Campaign was launched in 1948.

There was no doubt that Jammu and Kashmir was very backward when it joined India in 1947. Keeping that in mind, in the first two Five Year Plans as it was implemented in the State the focus was on the development of agriculture whereas in the Third Five year Plan, the focus was on industrialisation. The researcher feels that since agriculture situation in Jammu and Kashmir did not improve much the rural masses could not achieve a reasonable standard of living. Agricultural sector contributes less than a half to the State income. Given the limitation of the growth potential of agricultural sector due to weather situation, the Government was required to focus on broadening the industrial sector of the economy on a priority basis. Thus the desired pattern should have been to ensure structural transformation from agriculture to industry and then to service sector. But in Jammu and Kashmir, what followed was a faster transition from agriculture to service, with industry lingering much behind. Similarly, the Government acting as the biggest employer burdened with ‘over developed bureaucracy’ did nothing to promote private capital investment in the State because the incentive available to the private capitalists was not attractive enough for them to invest. Even Article 370 and special status enjoyed by the State discouraged investors who were non-State subjects. Insurgency dealt a death blow to the fledgling industries in the State. In agriculture, economy of

the State has remained handicapped by some carry-overs from the past regimes. The Government policies have been oriented towards favouring the urban population at the cost of the rural. Food is subsidised in the cities and prices of food grains were unduly depressed. Rice production is kept up chiefly because of the subsistence nature of most farming in the State and the legislative prohibition of diverting rice land to other crops. Although Government’s effort to

Conclusion

The Kashmir issue started as discussed in the preceding chapters when just after the declaration of independence in 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh made it very clear to both – India and Pakistan – by asking them to sign the Standstill Agreement making it clear that at that juncture there was no question of Kashmir joining either of the Dominion. In order to get Kashmir in their respective dominion, both Delhi and Islamabad liberally used persuasion, threat and diplomacy as was the case with other Princely States who were found doing dilly-doll on the question of accession. On Kashmir, Nehru’s most prominent argument was that India is a secular country and there will not be any discrimination on the basis of religion and the people of Kashmir need not worry about that. There was also democratic argument, as Pakistan was seen essentially as a polity dominated by the feudal elements. When India and Pakistan failed to resolve the dispute in 1947 through the use of military power and dialogue, the matter reached United Nations for a third party intervention where it was agreed that the most amicable way to resolve the issue would be through holding of plebiscite. Both the parties – who were expecting decision in their respective favour at the world body – agreed for it. India believed that with Indian army promptly going to the rescue of Kashmiris in October 1947 when they were invaded and persecuted by the Pakistan supported tribal forces and also with Sheikh Abdullah, easily the most popular leader in the Valley, at the helm of affairs, decision in favour India was a foregone conclusion. Pakistan was also equally sure of winning the vote of people, as it believed that Kashmir being a Muslim majority State, it would naturally prefer Pakistan especially in the aftermath of communal bloodbath that had taken place in neighbouring Punjab and also in some parts of Jammu. Moreover, Pakistan strongly believed that since Kashmiris had fought against the misrule of Hindu Dogra Maharaja since 1930’s waging popular movement, they would not like to live again in a country where Hindus were in majority. Although Pakistan agreed for holding of plebiscite, but failed to abide by the conditions set for holding it like evacuating its forces from Pakistan occupied

The researcher has done an analysis of the politics of economic policy in Kashmir. The researcher has tried to find out what had been the Government’s industrial and agricultural policies since 1947. For the better understanding of the subject, the chapter has been divided into five parts. In the chapter, a general understanding on the State’s economy has been presented in which major features of the economy is given. In the second part, the researcher has tried present the role of industries during the Dogra regime in providing employment to the local people and its contribution to the economy of Kashmir. It was found that till nineteenth century Kashmir shawl industry did very well. In France, it was most sought after item. First shawl, which reached Europe, was brought by Napoleon as a present to the empress Josephine and from that time shawls became fashionable. The third

section of the chapter covers industrial development in Kashmir after independence. It was found that industrial development in Kashmir emerged as big challenge for the policy makers of India. Certain factors such as lack of resources, treacherous terrain, infrastructural bottleneck, costly transportation and lack of entrepreneurial elite made Kashmir an industrially poor region.

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