

Kashmiri Women Folk from Subservient to Striving Subjects during Dogra Regime in Jammu and Kashmir.

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Abstract: Women are essence and prerequisite part of any society in the world, but from times immemorial they have been discriminated in all spheres of life-political social, educational etc. It is well-known fact that the Jammu and Kashmir was under the capricious and inhuman reign of the Dogra's during the colonial period. Majority population of the state was subjected to oppression under the different Dogra rulers. The research paper will focus on social evils like women trafficking or harlotry and the role played by Kashmiri men in abolition of such practices. Further researcher will bring to light the educational status of Kashmiri women on the one hand and the role played by them in the freedom struggle on the other hand against oppressive rule, which started in the thirty's of the twentieth-century in Jammu and Kashmir, in order to uproot the despotic, dynastic, feudal centered, and religious centered rule of medieval ages.

Keywords: *Women, essence, prerequisite, capricious, inhuman, harlotry, education, oppressive, freedom struggle, despotic, dynastic, feudal, and religious-centered.*

Introduction:

In 1846, by virtue of treaty of Amritsar, J&K was handed over to Maharaja Gulab Singh and his male heirs with an independent authority to rule over internal affairs of the state and to maintain the dynastic, feudal centered and religious centered rule of medieval ages. After becoming the ruler of state, Maharaja Gulab Singh claimed to be the absolute sovereign. Moreover, he considered the state especially the valley of Kashmir as his purchased property. His successors also carried on both these claims. Thus Dogra rulers indulged in gross misgovernment. It is worthwhile to mention that Muslim women were subjected as beast of burden. These Dogra's legalized flesh trade or prostitution in Kashmir especially of Muslim women. It is strange to acknowledge that one considerable item of revenue to the Maharaja was received from a traffic, which most government endeavor to conceal, due to shame attached with it.

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There used to be two ill fame prostitution centers in Srinagar one at Maisuma other at Tashwan. The license granting permission to purchase a girl for the purpose, costs about 103 chilkee rupees. It is very much tragic, that so many socio-religious and political reform movements gained foot in Srinagar but the pathetic plight or hue & cry of women did not draw their attention. Tribute, however, goes to prolific young person of Maisuma namely Muhammad Subhan Naid (Barber). The regardless services of Subhan Naid bore the fruits of his efforts when in 1934 state assembly during Hari Singh's rule passed an act. It declared flesh trade, trafficking, sale of girls as illegal and those who indulge in it were liable to be penalized. Muslim women in general were illiterate and the role played by Missionary schools with regard to their education could not be underestimated after facing severe criticism.

Despite of their social disabilities and illiteracy, Muslim women played an indispensable role in the freedom movement against the centuries of servitude under Dogra's. It is remarkable that illiterate women of Srinagar were guiding the men in freedom movement against in human and capricious Dogra regime.

Purpose of the study:

1. To examine the social evils among Kashmiri Muslim women during Dogra regime.
2. To explore the efforts of Kashmiri men in the abolition of social evils like prostitution.
3. To analyze the attitude of Dogra rulers towards Muslim women.
4. To highlight the contribution of Christian missionaries towards women education.
5. To evaluate the contribution of Muslim women towards freedom struggle against Dogra's.

Methodology:

The research is purely based on available data like travel accounts, contemporary writings, autobiography and secondary sources like books. It is a text based literary research based on sources pertaining to this aspect of history. Accordingly an attempt will be made to interpret the available data in order to unveil the truth in such a way as to present a new perspective which may be helpful for future researchers and readers in this field of knowledge.

Prostitution a curse:

By virtue of treaty of Amritsar, Jammu and Kashmir was handed over to Maharaja Gulab Singh and his male descendants with an independent authority over the internal affairs of the state, maintained dynastic, feudal centered and religion centered rule of Medieval ages.¹ We came to know from the various writers like Walter Lawrence and Robert Thorpe that "every thing except air and water was taxed". Robert Thorpe rightly observed the pathetic condition of people of Kashmir in this way, "The British had sold the Kashmir into slavery and they were suffering untold miseries at the hands of the Dogra officials. It was strange enough; the British did not pay heed to these atrocities. It is not enough fact that politicians sold the Kashmiris into the slavery of the Dogra family of Jammu for a

few pieces of silver.”² It is quite astonishing and tragic that, “one considerable amount of revenue of Maharaja was derived from traffic. The sale of young girls in Kashmir to the established houses of ill fame was both protected and encouraged by the government. The license granting permission to purchase a girl for this purpose, cost about 103 chilkee rupees.”³ The women did not suffered only at the hands of Govt, but also from the supporting structure created by the Dogra rulers i.e. officials. “It was a common practice that a young Muslim peasant lady would serve as a milk maid for the babies of the pundit Naib, so that sucking of milk from breasts of the Naib’s wife would not affect her beauty. The baby of milk maid would cry for Mother’s milk in the stable.”⁴ It is worth while to mention here that most sales took places of “lower caste especially among wattal community”.⁵ It is also said that there were 18,715 state prostitutes in Kashmir in 1880.⁶ The report appeared in the London times on 20th April, 1880, wrote that “his highness the Maharaja received from 15 to 25 percent of the whole revenue of his state from the gains of his licensed prostitutes. There were in the Kashmir territory, 18715 state prostitutes, and they paid over to the government Inspectors a fixed proportion of their disreputable gains. The report which came in times London, forced British government to ask, the officer on special duty in Kashmir, namely Mr. Henry to find out the truth about it. He submitted report: the prostitutes, who are registered and taxed as such, are principally of the wattal or lower caste. They are sold at tender age by their parents to brothel keepers for Rs 200 or Rs 100 per child. This is not only recognized but also recorded on stamped paper by the government. The estimated number of prostitutes acquired in this way is 250 Or 300 for Srinagar. They are divided into three classes according to their ‘gratifications’ and were taxed accordingly”.⁷

1st class rupees 40 per annum

2nd class rupees 20 per annum

3rd class rupees 10 per annum

There is hardly any writer of this period who does not mention the tax on prostitutes. Although state derived lot of revenue from these marginalized prostitutes, but no amount of Money was spend on their health. Mr. Henry, officer on special duty in Kashmir in 1880, writes that “no care was taken of the sick prostitutes. As a result of that a terrible disease was spreading. This is evident from the report of Srinagar mission hospital that reveals that during 1877 – 1879 the total no. of patients who came for treatment was 12977. Out of these 2516 were those who were having venereal diseases”.⁸ Yet another misery attached to these prostitutes was that they could not left the brothels, since they cannot repay money to their purchaser either the price paid for them or the license tax to the government of the Maharaja.⁹ There were two ill fame centers in Srinagar viz Maisuma and Tashwan.¹⁰ It is also fact that ‘the girls from the lower classes were not only sold as maid servants but also used as concubines. The Maharaja himself kept concubines and his example was followed by his successors’.¹¹It was a tragedy on the part of these poor creatures of Kashmir, “no socio-religious and political movements of that period in Srinagar engage their attention. Never they raise voice against for them”.¹² Self respecting

women were obliged to wear dirty garments, for if they wore clean clothes they might be taken for women of loose life, such was the threat among the women which has been best observed by Tyndale Biscoe.¹³ An “significant looking little Mohammedan, a barber by profession, whose trade is considered a low caste one, lived in a street in Srinagar in which were situated many houses of ill fame. His name was Muhammad Subhan Naid (Barber). Unlike of socio- religious and political movements, he was continuously disturbed at night by wrangling men. But what really upset him were the cries of anguish from the unfortunates recently forced into this cruel life, many of them quite young, who had been sold by their relations under the disguise that marriages had been arranged for them. The cries of these poor creatures went to his heart and prompted him to take action. For that matter, he tried to get help from the descent men in order to curb this evil. He used to write pamphlets, to show up this cruel traffic, and distributed hundreds of them in the city in order to mobilize the people of this immoral flesh trade, which was imposed on these poor creatures of nature. He would stand up in the streets and preach, and at night, with some of his friends. For that matter, but unfortunately the keepers of these houses soon became active and with the help of police started to harass him.”¹⁴ One night for instance, “a police officer who was the son of an official of Kashmir, a Sikh. He begged this officer not to enter, but without avail soon he told the official of his son’s whereabouts. He narrated whole episode and said to him, ‘I did not ask for money, but if you wish me to keep the matter quiet regarding your son, you must have all this traffic stopped’. For time being it was achievements and sigh of relief for him when official agreed to close all such places in the municipal areas of Srinagar”.¹⁵ No doubt, “it did not curb the evil, rather his efforts bore the fruit, when in 1934, the state assembly passed an act suppressing immoral trafficking of women. It provided penalties for persons who kept, managed or allowed the use of any place as brothel or procure women or girls for prostitution or live upon the earnings of prostitutes or traffic in women and children. Those who solicited in public places encouraged or abetted seduction or prostitution of minor girls were also penalized”.¹⁶The “abolition of prostitution act has disastrous effect on the large no of women who were forcibly engaged in this kind of trade. It was very difficult for them to eke out their existence. While some on the advice of gallant barber took up the job of spinning charkha while some fled to other parts of India. It is worth while to quote here that some of the prostitutes earned a descent living by working in the silk factory”.¹⁷

Role of Christian mission ladies towards women education:

The inhabitants of Kashmir were thankful to Christian missionaries who took up the pinnacle task of imparting education to the women of Kashmir. Among the noble personalities, who faced the severe weather of winter and make girls education acceptable in Srinagar, were Miss Churchill Taylor, Miss Stubbs, and Miss Goodall.¹⁸ It was some time between 1893 and 1895, a girls school was opened at fateh kadal in Srinagar by mission ladies.¹⁹The “establishment of girls school surprised the entire population of Srinagar. In the streets of Srinagar it became the gossip of the day. The people of Kashmir were of the opinion that imparting education to girls would mean to impure their morals”.²⁰ We came to know from the writing of Biscoe that, “the girls who were brave enough to attend

were very timid and their parents were somewhat hesitant, as public opinion was very much against them".²¹ It is once again interesting to quote the episode of prize day, "on this day, the lady superintendent had invited some European ladies to attend the function. All the girls were assembled in the school. Once these guests appeared in the school, somebody in the street spread rumor that the Europeans had come to kidnap the girls. This episode leads to closure of school for some time and even after few weeks, the school reopened and surprisingly school registered an increase in the number of girl students. At Islamabad (Anantnag), Miss Coverdale, a Christian missionary lady had a girl's school in which there were one hundred girl students enrolled."²² In 1912, Miss Fitzee started "a girl's school in which majority roll was of Muslims girls. As per yearly school report maintained by Miss Fitzee remarked, she lost many Hindu girls on account of its being considered improper for them to go outside after the age of 12, until they married. I have lost quite a number of promising ones in this way. Consequently the Hindu's on the roll call number were only 35, while Mohammadan run upto 40."²³ initially "she faced lot of opposition from various quarters but by 1914, opposition seems to have calmed down when the number of girls school rose to 3 in number".²⁴ By 1916 the girls were seen "coming more than even before and mothers actually cherished dreams about their education".²⁵ By 1920, apparently, "girls education had registered some progress. Besides the three mission schools, a new denominational high school run by the state education department, a Muslim school and five Hindu schools there of middle standard were functioning in different parts of Srinagar".²⁶

Contribution of Muslim women towards freedom struggle:

In spite of social and educational problems, Muslim women played an exemplary role in the freedom movement of Kashmir against the alien rule of Dogra's.²⁷ It should, however, be remembered that social, economic and political changes which occurred after 1931 contributed greatly to the emancipation of women.²⁸ The appearance of "women participation in freedom movement could be traced soon after 13 July, 1931 episode. But their contribution to freedom struggle against the Dogra's remained behind curtain due to their backwardness in education and disability due to purdah system which restrained them from achieving the fame which they deserve".²⁹ It is utmost important to mention that "women of Muslim gentry and upper middle class who were generally secluded did not take any active part whatsoever in the struggle. The number of educated ones was very small. It was actually the women of working class who fought with determination and refused to remain confined to four walls".³⁰ In the city of Srinagar and other big towns of Kashmir like Anantnag, Sopore, Baramullah and shopian, hundreds of women raised slogans against Dogra regime.³¹ Soon after the disturbances broke out in 13 July, 1931, they stood in processions entirely composed of women folk, some with suckling babies holding in their arms, raising slogans, denouncing the suppressive policy of Dogra govt.³² After 1931, event one of the women orator addressing to public gathering of women went to extreme of saying that on 02 august, 1931 that "our men should sit in their homes and wear burqas! We are proud of our Punjabi Muslim brethren but so far they confined themselves to merely issuing statements. We request the members of British parliament to take our grievances into the League of Nations. We appeal to the army not to oppress women as

it was no chivalry. But if they have any such instructions, they will find us ready to meet the challenge".³³ In autumn 1931, "the govt lost nerve and after the city had been handed over to military command, a horrible crowd of women was shamelessly poured upon and lathi charged on 6th September, 1931 by the champions of law and order. The prime minister of that period namely Raja Hari Krishan Koul, thereupon issued orders not to deal harshly with women demonstrators in future".³⁴ This order however remained confined to paper when once again "women gathered in large procession, a few days later were assaulted with gushing water poured upon them. Despite of wet clothes and bodies shivering due to cold, the women patriots hold the ground firmly and held a meeting ventilating their grievances before final dispersal".³⁵ It is interesting to note, whenever the public meetings held by the Muslim political workers were everywhere attended by women" especially when speaker used to be Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah".³⁶ The period between "1931-1933 women would appear on the streets of Kashmir in large numbers. There were so many Muslim women who belong to working class sacrificed their life for the sacred cause of freedom against Dogra regime. Worthwhile were, in shopian Sajida Banoo, aged 25 years received bullet in military firing. She was pregnant and died along with child in her womb on the spot. The second women to die was Jan Begum, aged 35 years was a resident of Nowshera Srinagar. The third victim who died due to police firing was Mist Freechi, a resident of Baramullah. She hurled kangri on the face of police officer. The fourth casualty was of Fazii, who was killed on 24th September, 1931".³⁷

Jan ded "one of the greatest personalities recorded in the annals of Kashmir history. Upcoming from the lower strata of the society, she was having liberal outlook on life. Had she been educated and allowed to bloom fully she would have proved her worth in the attaining of freedom. Unfortunately gets disheartened by Muslim leaders and had to quit politics after 1934".³⁸ The period from 1936-46 Kashmiri women took little or no part in politics. It was when in may, 1946, the national conference launched "Quit Kashmir" under the leadership of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah.³⁹ Once again almost after a decade politically conscious women especially who belong to working class of the society came in large numbers to participate in the movement. During quit Kashmir movement in 1946, the women of Srinagar, "hide the under ground leaders, even when they knew that the revelation would mean the arrest of their men folk and harassment for month. They lent their clothes to disguise runaway leaders. They brewed tea and cooked food for those in hiding. They shouted slogans after curfew hours; they congregated at Dargah sharief every week In spite of military trucks and police guards".⁴⁰ An elusive figure was "Noor Gujri- a milkman's daughter had a great ability of generating energy among women folk due to his attractive speech. She was repeatedly arrested by the authorities".⁴¹ Another heroine of the Quit Kashmir movement was Fatima, a peasant women from Anantnag who was shot dead.⁴² Among many unnamed poor women who suffered for the cause of Kashmir may be mentioned Zoni and Mukhta.⁴³ At last not least women namely Begum Abdullah and Zainab begum both of whom belong to richer section and were educated played unforgettable role in Quit Kashmir movement after the arrest of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah in may 1946.⁴⁴

Conclusion:

In the nutshell, the research shows that in all fields like political, social and educational, the Dogra's treated Kashmiris especially women folk as dumb driven cattle. Many personalities of Kashmir should be credited, particularly the role played by Subhan Naid (Barber) in raising voice against prostitution centers which ultimately due to his constant efforts led to the abolition of flesh trade in Kashmir in 1934. Further regardless work done by the Christian mission ladies can't be neglected in making girls education possible in Kashmir which was till then completely neglected not only at local level but also at government level. At last, women belonging to lower strata of the Muslim community came into forefront in the freedom movement even sacrificed their lives for the noble cause. We witnessed change in the women regarding their outlook on life in the last phase. Thus women played a pivotal role in shunning the foreign yoke along with their men.

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