

# SOCIAL EVILS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIETY DURING DOGRA RULE FROM 1846 TO 1947

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## ABSTRACT

The former State of Jammu and Kashmir is famous for its ordinary beauty and rich history and way of life is known to the world by different names. The valley is often described as India's crown treasure. The most trendy being, "The Paradise on earth" a name given by Mughal Emperor Jahangir to the valley after being inspired by its scenic beauty. Before Dogras Kashmir was ruled by Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs, all of whom had a significant influence on the valley's society. The expression of Dogra is more geographical rather than ethnical. It is applied to the people who inhabit the hilly country between the rivers Chenab and Setluj. They are whether Hindus or Muslims, Brahmins, Rajputs, Rathis or Ghirths. The term is said to be derived from the Sanskrit word "Do" and "Girath" meaning "Two lakes." These two words were afterwards corrupted onto Dogra. It is also worth mentioning here, that, the founder of modern Jammu and Kashmir State Gulab Singh was from Dogra caste and the dynasty ruled Jammu and Kashmir State from 1846 till the independence and accession of Jammu and Kashmir State with the Indian Union in 1947. However, the later Dogra era is regarded as the pinnacle of social modernity and the end of societal ills in Kashmir valley.

This study basically focuses on the main social evils that affected the society under Dogra rule from 1846 to 1947.

**KEYWORDS:** Dogras, society, modernization, Kashmir, crown

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the major geo-political developments during the middle of the nineteenth century was the foundation of Jammu and Kashmir State. This state, like the other native states of India, was politically and socially feudalistic in character. Modern trends as we witness in the British India were almost absent in the northern state. Physically, the state was comprised of four geographical divisions. Even with in these divisions, tracts having certain peculiar features were noticeable and, these, physio- graphical conditions deeply influenced socio- religious and politico-economic life of the people. The people of the State were caught in a vicious web created by religious superstitions and social obscurantism. Amid blind beliefs, certain social evils which appeared as religiously sound has crept up in some sections of the society. The most iniquitous of these social evils were: Female Infanticide, Sati, forced celibacy of women, traffic in women and burning of widows and others.

### Robbery

This was main social evil in the society of valley during early Dogra rule. Nobody was secure in the valley because there was no proper law during early regime of Dogra rule until 1873 when Jammu and Kashmir police was established from doom cast of the society for detection and transmission of intelligence. This evil was prevalent in all the paraganas of valley. The most important section of the thieves known as Galwans, were active in the valley. Until, they were suppressed by maharaja. They have created havoc in the society by looting common moths and killing innocent people.

### Female Infanticide

Female infanticide, the act of killing female infants, was a practice that existed in various parts of India, including Jammu and Kashmir, during different historical periods. During the Dogra period in Jammu and Kashmir, which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh and continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were reports of female infanticide occurring in the region. The reasons for female infanticide during this period were complex and multifaceted. Factors such as societal norms, economic conditions, and the desire for male heirs contributed to this practice. Male children were often seen as the primary inheritors and providers for their families, and this preference for male offspring sometimes led tragic practice of female infanticide. It is essential to note that historical records on this issue may vary, and the extent of female infanticide during the Dogra period in Jammu and Kashmir may not be fully documented. Social norms and practices have evolved over time, and it's

crucial to consider the broader context of the region's history and culture when discussing this topic. Efforts have been made to address and eliminate such harmful practices through legal and social reforms in modern times.

### **Dowry System and heavy expenses on marriages**

The dowry system in Jammu and Kashmir during the Dogra period was prevalent, as it was in many parts of India during that time. The Dogra dynasty, particularly under the rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors, oversaw the region from the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1947 when India gained independence. Dowry was customary practice in which the bride's family provided gifts, money, or property to the groom's family as part of the marriage arrangement. The extent and nature of dowry varied across different communities and social classes, but it was generally expected in marriages. During the Dogra rule, the dowry system was deeply ingrained in the society and played a significant role in matrimonial customs. The practice had its pros and cons, as it could offer financial security to the bride or create financial burdens for her family. Looking towards the severity of this evil the Maharaja Gulab Singh enthusiastically embraced this cause and made significant contributions to ending the practice in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. One such meeting was sponsored by Punjab board administration on 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>th</sup> of October 1953 at Amristar. In 1955, the state of Jammu and Kashmir passed the Jammu and Kashmir Dowry Restraint Act, which aimed to curb the giving and receiving of dowries. After the state's accession to India in 1947, dowry – related practices started to be influenced by Indian legislation and reforms.

### **Child Marriage**

Child marriage was also common during Dogra regime. It was practiced by both Hindu and Muslims. Marriages were viewed as a religious obligation. To do it as soon as possible in order to gain religious credit, lead to evil of child marriage. Early marriage of girls, were preferred because it was considered as shameful to have teenage daughter living at home unmarried. The marriageable age was 12 to 13 years. This evil became the root cause for other evils like widowhood, high mortality rate and high birth rate.

### **Prostitution and traffic in women**

Prostitution was the worst form of exploitation of women since well, known past and as an institution it speaks of man's tolerance of this exploitation on an organized level in society. Under this institution woman was treated as an object and as an outlet for man's baser instinct. This practice was in vogue in ancient Kashmir and seems to have prevalent throughout the medieval period also. The beautiful girls of Kashmir remained objects of attraction and possession during the Mughal period (1586-17520 A.D) and Pathan regime (1752-1819 A.D).It was the lure for Kashmiri women that brought into existence a regular traffic in Kashmiri women, particularly from 1586 onwards. With the emergence of this immoral trade Kashmiri women began to be treated as mere chattel. This saddest of Kashmiri social life also continued during the Sikh period (1819-1846 A.D). As a matter of fact, the immoral trade acquired alarming proportions during the Sikh rule. Those engaged in the women trade received lucrative some in lieu of Kashmiri girls being sold to their customers in the Punjab or in British India, particularly in Lahore, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Peshawar .In Punjab, Lahore and Ludhiana were the two main centers of trade in women, where girls of watal, a low caste, were mainly sold. The evil flourished openly and avowedly during the period of ascendancy of the Dogra rulers also. Early Dogra rulers patronized this disreputable trade and acquired a sizeable amount of revenue from it. During the early Dogra regime, there were ill-reputed centres of prostitution in Srinagar,viz, Tashwan and Maisuma. The women keepers of those houses enticed innocent young girls to adopt the evil profession. Sometimes they even forcibly took young girls away from their parents. Although government derived a lot of income from the prostitutes, nothing was spent for their betterment. There was "no lock hospital' In Kashmir and no care was taken of the sick prostitutes, as a result of this a syphilitic disease had spread terribly throughout Kashmir. The other most notorious places in Srinagar where prostitution was carried on in a big were the houseboats, which were also termed as "the floating houses of ill-fame". These were mostly visited by the foreign visitors, especially the bachelors. Many time these customers succumbed to temptation and often contracted a dreadful disease which occasionally proved fatal. A large and powerful organization existed in the Jammu region which supplied women to fill the brothels of India, and certain secret agencies were involved in this sale. The present Rajinder Bazar in the city of Jammu and southern areas of the Jammu district had some organized brothels before 1947.

### **Sati**

Sati i.e. the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband seemed to be rapidly disappearing from Jammu region, during the period under review. Frederic drew says that 'This practice has absolutely ceased within the country of the Maharaja', but we, however we find few instances of Sati in Jammu region. In Jammu region though the practice of sati was not in vogue yet stringent proclamation were issued to suppress and denounce it. In his dairy, Lt . H.B. Edwardes writes that 'Maharaja Gulab Singh was directed to abolish inhuman rite of Sati from his domain. It was written to him that the practice had been declared by the most learned pundits of Jyepoor and Gwalior to be contrary to the Shastras, and that it would much redound to the Maharaja's credit to do away with this sorrowful practice'. In 1847 Maharaja Gulab Singh issued a proclamation prohibiting suttee in his territories. Maharaja Ranbir Singh also prohibited Sati throughout the length and breadth of his state. He issued an injunction on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1859 and enjoined upon his heirs and successors as also his subjects to ensure that this

evil was uprooted. He not only issued prohibitive commands against this evil but also took constructive steps in that sphere. He analyzed causes Sati and sought to remove them, which according to him were the question of honour and secondly poverty or lack of resources of sustenance for the widows so that a widow was left with no scope for a normal life. Consequently she preferred to burn on her husband's pyre. In spite of some efforts by Maharaja these customs persisted for some decades more. Cases of Sati took place in this region now and then. On the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh himself in September 1885, the Indian press reported that some ranees of the Maharaja were burnt. Even after taking stringent action the custom remained in practice in some parts of the region. It was Maharaja Hari Singh (1925-47) of Jammu who succeeded in rooting out this evil practice.

### **Caste system**

During the Dogra period in Kashmir, which began in the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the caste system played a significant role in the social structure of the region. The Dogra rulers, particularly Maharaja Hari Singh, sought to consolidate their rule over the region, and as a result, they implemented policies that reinforced the caste system. The caste system in Kashmir was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy. Brahmins occupied the top position in hierarchy, followed by other upper-caste groups like Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The lower castes, including Dalits, were at the bottom and faced discrimination and social exclusion. Caste determined one's occupation and social roles. Brahmins held positions of authority and were involved in religious and administrative functions. Lower-caste individuals were often relegated to menial and degrading jobs.

### **Begar (Forced labor)**

During the Dogra period in Kashmir, which lasted from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were instances of forced labor, often referred to as "Begar" or "Begari". The Dogra rulers, particularly Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors, implemented a system of forced labor, where local residents were compelled to provide free labor for various infrastructure projects, including road construction, building forts, and other public works. The system of forced labor was oppressive and exploitative. People, especially the poorer sections of society, were often subject to harsh working conditions, low or no wages, and inadequate living conditions. This practice was a source of resentment and unrest among the local population. It's important to note that Dogra rule in Kashmir was marked by various controversies and human rights abuses, the use of forced labor was one of the contentious aspects of their administration. This system was gradually abolished after India gained independence in 1947, and Kashmir became part of India.

### **Poor condition of Shawl Weavers and Labourers**

Under the Dogra rulers, Kashmiri shawl weavers and labourers had endured severe exploitation. They trapped in near-slavery, artisans faced exorbitant taxes, meagre wages, and there was a strict bans on migration. Kashmiri shawl workers worked in unhealthy conditions and earned very low wages while facing heavy taxation. Most of the time workers suffered from disease, exhaustion and economic misery. In this situation in the very first time their struggle peaked on April 29, 1865, when a peaceful protest against state oppression in Srinagar was brutally crushed, resulting in 28 deaths.

### **Social backwardness and superstitions**

As for the social backwardness and superstitions under Dogra rule (1846–1947), these were deeply intertwined with feudal oppression, widespread illiteracy, and autocratic state policies. This era was characterized by severe systemic royal neglect, leaving the general masses—particularly in the Kashmir Valley—in abject poverty and vulnerable to bear exploitation. Moreover, the disease such as mental illness, epilepsy, fever or sudden death were often believed to be caused by evil spirits, jinns, sins committed by people or supernatural forces. People sought treatment from faith healers, pirs and faqirs rather than trained doctors.

### **Epidemics seen as divine punishment**

During the Dogra period, widespread illiteracy and limited scientific awareness led many people to interpret epidemics such as Cholera, plague and influenza as divine punishment or supernatural intervention. Such beliefs often discouraged timely medical treatment and hindered the acceptance of modern healthcare practices, thereby worsening the impact of epidemics on society.

### **Poverty and Famine**

Poverty and famine constituted major social and economic problems during the Dogra period in Jammu and Kashmir. Excessive taxation, agrarian exploitation, recurrent floods, and limited state relief measures pushed large sections of the population into severe poverty. Famines and food shortages weakened the health conditions of the people, increased mortality rates, and made society more vulnerable to epidemics and diseases. Malnutrition poor living conditions, and lack of medical facilities during periods of famine further aggravated public health crises in Kashmir. The famine of 1877-79 severely affected Kashmir and caused widespread suffering and deaths.

### **Corruption among the officials**

Corruption among local officials and revenue administrators emerged as an important social and administrative problem during the Dogra period. Many officials were accused of bribery, misuse of authority, illegal taxation, and exploitation of peasants and laborers. Such practices increased public suffering weakened trust in administration, and adversely affected the socio-economic condition of the people. Administrative corruption and negligence further hindered the development of effective public welfare and healthcare services in rural areas.

### **CONCLUSION**

The focus of this paper is limited to few particular social evil that had affected the society of Jammu and Kashmir during the Dogra regime. Among them at top was female infanticide by which under the pressure of abhorrent social custom, a female infant was invariably sacrificed the instant she opened her eyes, in addition the inability to bear the wedding costs and the shame of keeping daughters was also. To sum up it is right to say that the entire Dogra period is considered as period of social exploitation of people of the valley

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