



COLONIAL INTERVENTION AND INDIRECT RULE IN PRINCELY JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

This paper tries to throw light on the intervention of British colonial power in Indian states during nineteenth and twentieth century and main focus of the work is on princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, which was one of the largest princely states in India along with Hyderabad and Mysore. The paper unveils the motive and benefits behind indirect annexation and also obligations of princes to accept paramountcy. The indirect rule observed different degrees of interference and it was supposed to correct abuses in so called backward native states.

Key Words: Paramountcy, Princely, Colonial, Indirect rule, Intervention, Native.

Introduction

After 1858, British abandoned their earlier policies of “ring fence” (1765-1818) and “subordinate isolation” (1818-1858) and adopted new policy which laid stress on “non-annexation with the right of intervention” and it remained functional from 1858 till 1947. These un-annexed areas came to be known as Princely states. By intervention it means that government had right to intervene in the internal affairs of native states and set right administrative abuses. Michael Fisher opined that by this arrangement the colonial power was able to gain control over nominally sovereign states through a single British resident or political agent or just by giving advices to local princes.¹

Indirect rule refers to the system of administration where states were directly ruled by native princes under the paramount power. After the revolt of 1857, colonial India was divided into two parts- British India and princely India. Princely India comprised of three fifths of the territory and four fifths of the population of Indian subcontinent. This arrangement was such that whole Indian subcontinent was ruled by Britishers comprising of different parts, directly ruled (British India) and indirectly (Princely) ruled India.² These native princes enjoyed autonomy in certain spheres while for others were under British crown. For The placement of resident, dictation of philanthropic work, giving titles to sovereigns, their crowning or their deposition, confirming their ruling rights all were parts of indirect ruling agenda in the Princely states. Indirect rule was also beneficial for empire that in case of any grievances native rulers could be blamed for faults and misgovernment and colonial empire would escape from any unfavourable revolt like event. This would also help them to extend their influence over distinct peoples and regions without the economic and political costs of direct annexation.

Discussion

Jammu and Kashmir State right from its formation in 1846 observed indirect rule of colonial empire in the state. The treaty of Amritsar signed in 1846 made the princely house of Jammu and Kashmir as subordinate rulers who recognised British

suzerainty and acknowledged British supremacy by agreeing to pay tribute to them.³ Jammu and Kashmir State had strategical importance due to its geographical position as it was a meeting place of three different empires. So Maharajas of the state were made allies of colonial empire in view of 'breakwaters in storm' theory of Britishers. Four different rulers ruled the State from 1846 to 1947 and colonial policies were conceived by different rulers differently. On scrutinising the history of the state it can be concluded that this indirect rule in the state can be divided into three different phases. These different phases between 1846 and 1947 are:

- 1) Balanced system phase (1846-1889)
- 2) Dominant Resident phase (1889-1925)
- 3) Conflicting and mutual mistrust phase (1925-1947)

In fact the relations with the states and the degree of interference depended on circumstances, changing colonial policies, national and international political conditions and on the personality and individual nature of the prince and British agents. When ruler did not work according to the wishes of the government then faults were found in them to dethrone them by propagating the misgovernment theory.⁴ Sometimes rulers of the State acted promptly like puppets to remain in power and were obliged to execute the policies of Government of India. As rightly pointed out by Caroline Keen the policies dictated under '*mission civilisatrice*' in Princely states became a pretext for various degrees of coercion and interference in these states. By this mission, colonial government provided guidelines and instructions to native rulers for governing their states and improving their administration on western lines.⁵

Phase I: Balanced System Phase (1846-1889)

Maharaja Gulab Singh was first ruler of this princely house and was great supporter of British Empire. He supported British ways and instructions passed by them to him were followed by him eagerly. Because of this, his relations with colonial empire were friendly and so this phase of indirect rule can be termed as balanced phase. Gulab Singh was in good books of Britishers and so was accorded various titles along with 21 gun salutes⁶ which were on the third level besides Queen of England and Governor General of India. The most noticeable criteria for according favourable status and title was service to colonial power and introducing reforms in administration on western lines.

From the very first day of Maharajas rule, British tried to exert their influence over the Maharaja and dictating him the terms and conditions of ruling the state. The very first work of social welfare in the State introduced by Maharaja Gulab Singh was on the advice of Henry Lawrence (British official at Lahore). At the persuasion of British Officials the rite of sati was declared illegal in 1847 and female infanticide was also banned thereafter in 1853. He also reorganised Shawl Industry.⁷ He also improved judicial system as he executed a new policy of suppressing local crime and ordering public executions to deter the offenders.⁸ For introducing all these reforms in the state whether social, administrative or any other, Gulab Singh received a written proposal of Reynell Taylor (British Official, Assistant to the Resident at Lahore) on 12th July, 1847.⁹ On 29th November, 1847, Lawrence wrote a letter to Maharaja and warned him that the British government would make some other arrangement for Kashmir if the tyrannical situation continued in Kashmir.¹⁰ They

started dictating terms of rule to Maharaja so that they could keep a check on him and would strengthen their indirect rule. In spite of this Maharaja Gulab Singh expressed his thankfulness and gratitude to colonial government in these words, "*The plant which has hitherto been dependent entirely upon the waters of your unexampled generosity may continue to receive nourishment and put forth fruit abundantly.*"¹¹ This was balanced state of affairs but it was balanced as ruler was in favour of colonial government in all situations whether happily or compulsorily.

Gulab Singh at his death bed advised his son Ranbir Singh to trust and support Britishers. His last words of instruction to his son and heir were "*Should one English man be left in the world, trust him.*"¹² Maharaja Ranbir Singh acting on his advice became great supporter of Britishers. He also participated in revolt of 1857 on advice of his father from the side of Britishers. He supplied his 2000 troops, 200 cavalry and six guns to assist stressed Britishers in Delhi.¹³ He was rewarded with title of Grand Commander of Indian Empire (GCIE) and with *sanad* in 1860. The titles accorded to princes like Faithful Ally of British Government, Grand Commander of Indian empire and Order of the Star of India also depicted the position of Indian princes that they were mere agents of British government under indirect rule. Lord Mayo addressed to an assemblage of Rajput princes, "*If we support you in your power in return we expect a good government.*" By this the position of princes was reduced to that of government officers. He established three principles on the basis of which colonial government can interfere in princely states and strengthened their indirect rule. These were:

- 1) Misgovernment in States.
- 2) In the charges of sedition
- 3) In case of civil war in state.¹⁴

During the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the long cherished desire of colonial government to install a resident in the state was increasing. Maharaja Ranbir Singh sometimes resisted the suggestions of the British government and tried to act independently unlike his predecessor Maharaja who was very humble in his dealings with British Government. Sometimes he worked on the advice of Government of India in order to remain in their good books. The question of appointment of Resident was fervidly resisted by him.¹⁵ This resistance was not much opposed by Government because of services rendered by him in suppression of revolt of 1857 and also they were facing repercussions of war and don't want any such war in near future. Colonial power did not want to alienate the ruler of this strategically important state. But civilised expansionism of imperial indirect rule continued and various welfare services were launched under the influence of colonial power by ruler of the state in addition to his benevolence. Although appointment of Resident was resisted by Ranbir Singh but Officer on special Duty to look after the visitors in Kashmir was appointed in 1851 and in 1872 it was designated as Political Agent. Political officers were also appointed at Leh in 1866 and at Gilgit after Madhopur Settlement in 1876.¹⁶ In 1877, Lord Ripon made background for appointment of resident in state by divesting from the Punjab Government to rule state and brought it under direct control of Government of India.

But time and again Maharaja tried to please colonial power by his policies so that he could remain in power. He established Motamid Durbar in the state. It was for

British officials and their families as well as for European visitors visiting the state in order to save themselves from scorching heat of the Indian plains. He also showed great hospitality to Europeans in his state. Dr Wakefield in this connection Wrote, “*If an English Officer is so unfortunate to come to his death during his stay in the valley, this attentive Prince to show his sympathy with the melancholy event, usually sends a shawl of price to wrap the body in before burial.*” But sometimes he did things unwillingly due to British intervention because of indirect British rule. This indirect rule was more dangerous than the direct rule as rulers were not sure about their actual condition and worked like puppets instead of being rulers of their states. In reality they were not independent like provinces of British India.

Phase II: Dominant Resident Phase

This phase began with the end of Maharaja Ranbir Singh’s rule. During this phase the balance between two started vanishing. Britishers were planning to appoint resident in the state. At the beginning of Maharaja Pratap Singh’s rule their long cherishing dream of installing resident was fulfilled with installation of St. John as first resident. The appointment of resident brought a change in the relations of both as residents Oliver St. John and Plowden tried to malign the position of ruling prince before viceroy who was representative of crown in India. With the appointment of resident dual government started in the state. British Resident instructed him to introduce the reforms in the state lest he would be deposed.¹⁷ Perturbed by the Government’s decision, he requested the concerned authorities to provide him a chance of proving his capability so that he could work for the happiness of his subjects.¹⁸

Maharaja Pratap Singh carried out various reforms randomly. He abolished customs of *khodkasht* and *leri*. He reduced duty on rice to half an *anna* from two *annas*. He also stopped forceful enlistment of army. But all proved to be of no use, as Maharaja was declared incompetent to carry out reforms and Maharaja was deposed. These lines of Rudyard Kipling most appropriately describe such situations which seems fit for all native princes:

*Strange departures he made then-yea, Departures stranger still:
Half a dozen Englishmen helped the Rajah with a will,
Talked of noble aims and high, hinted of a future fine,
For the State of Kolazai, on a strictly Western line.
Rajah Rustum held his peace; lowered octroi dues a half;
Organised a state Police; purified the civil staff;.....
Then the Birthday honour’s came; sad to state and sad to see,
Stood against the Rajah’s name nothing more than C.I.E!.....¹⁹*

But unfortunately Maharaja was deposed on charges of sedition and misgovernment in favour of Council of Regency and the position of third Resident, Parry Nisbet was strengthened in 1889 as most of the affairs of the state were directly controlled by him. Maharaja was treated as minor by this council. The council tried to set right administrative framework of the state. Improvements were made in health, waterworks, education, communication and revenue system of the state. Deposition and regency were preferred over direct annexation as annexation could be against 1858 proclamation and this would dampen zeal of other Indian princes.

As rightly pointed out by Madhavi Yasin that time of mere four years from coronation was not enough to declare a Maharaja incompetent. Also not accepting the wish of Maharaja Ranbir Singh to nominate Raja Amar Singh as his successor; indicates that a plot was being nourished by Colonial Government for long regarding the interference in the state. The concept of welfare of people would be a welcome step if had social welfare as its zeal. But it was a form of neo-imperialism and was used as a tool to put a check on power of native princes. The resident who was agent of indirect rule in state, have increased power than political agent and was assisted by a band of officials from Indian civil services. Mr. Wingate, Walter Lawrence, Col Harvey, de Bourbell, Lord Chamberlain were some of the officials assisting Residents in State.

Maharaja pleaded a number of times for restoration of his powers and giving him one more chance yet he never reacted to this deposition intensely which gave a message to British Government that ruling house in Jammu and Kashmir had to bow before their wishes. Maharaja Pratap Singh was removed from all power and authority in his dominions and his position was maligned yet he possessed staunch loyalty to British dominance. Due to this his powers were restored one by one and in 1905 full powers were restored to him. He highly appreciated British over-rule and its many merits and was sincerely anxious to further the objects of the Colonial Government so far as these were compatible with the maintenance of those sovereign rights guaranteed by the Queen to all Indian Princes in 1858.²⁰

During the rule of these first three above said rulers and above said first two phases, it can be said that *de facto* rule in the state was of Government of India. It tried to impose their laws, their officers, and their will on rulers. In return rulers were given *sanads*, titles, gun salutes and authority to rule and were supposed to rule fairly by removing all evils from society and maintain good government. If there is breach of agreement on part of rulers, punishments were given in the form of depositions and abdications on charges of misgovernment.²¹ Thus the relations maintained by the rulers of the state were very complex to understand. They had to do like this either willingly or unwillingly and colonial power was also obliged to adopt milder attitude towards state as they too did not want to loose their allies. But actually relations between the two parties had become tense during this Resident dominated phase; the feeling of anger was not vented out and started getting accumulated over time and was conspicuous during the next phase.

Phase III: Conflicting and Mutual Mistrust Phase

Maharaja Hari Singh was the last ruler of the ruling house of princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Clear change in colonial-princely relationships, was first seen during the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh as this was the period when open hostility was observed between two parties at various occasions.

Hari Singh was an English educated prince; who studied at Mayo College Ajmer.²² Education of heirs in princely states according to British model was a more subtle means of intervention for influencing the future of the state as western educated princes would praise Raj and its methods. Because of western education, Maharaja launched reformation movement in the state and he ruled out the possibility of overtaking by Colonial Government on charges of misgovernment.

The nationalist sentiments and nationalist movement was on a rise throughout the country because of formation of INC in 1885. Maharaja Hari Singh was one of the rulers who dreamt of independent India and this further posed difficulties for him and estranged his relations with British. In the capacity of Commander-in-Chief of State forces during the reign of his uncle he showed friendly gestures by making best possible arrangements of sending contingents to foreign war fronts.²³ But in spite of this he was conceived as problematic by Britishers and was stressed. He was made to wait for his formal accession as he was not direct descendant to Pratap Singh.²⁴ This was done purposely to warn Hari Singh against his independent inclinations²⁵ and to demonstrate him real power lied with Colonial Government. These events disturbed him and from then he made up his mind that he would try to exert his independence, lest he would be uprooted and made puppet king by Britishers.

So he started ruling in his own way and the connotation was changed from friends to foes during his reign. In 1927 he formulated state subject definition by which he dissuaded foreigners from entering state services. By this Maharaja wanted to check the flow of interventionist British officers of Indian civil services in the state. In 1928, he replaced union jack of residency building by state flag, made Residency to comply with orders by detachment of state forces.²⁶ He also posed ban on the winter stay of resident in Jammu, relieved octogenarian colonel Ward from state government services and refused to request of Viceroy Irwin to offer financial assistance to editor of newspaper *Bengalee*.²⁷ These were some of the acts which alienated British government and made it to think that Maharaja is denying their requests with such intensity, then what would be the fate of their orders and made it conscious about him. In 1930, he attended first round table conference on behalf of Indian princes and said that Indian Princely states would join “All Indian Federation” and also plead for an equality of status in the British Commonwealth of Nations.²⁸ This stance earned him the wrath of the British who took it as betrayal and unleashed a conspiracy which erupted in communal disturbances in the state.²⁹ They propagated hated ‘divide and rule’ policy immediately after the RTC incident here; as people in Jammu and Kashmir were mostly Muslims and ruler here was from opposite religion. This was because British government tried to destroy all energy and capacity for self government of native princes and whosoever possessed this was not in good books of British officials. By active involvement of Colonial government, democratic government was established in the State by removing autocratic government and Maharaja was made to resign and was exiled from the state. He had to pay price for his independent and self-reliant attitude.

Conclusion

Britishers never tried to disrupt the comfort zone of Indian princes till they supported British government but colonial intervention became dominant in contrary case. Similar was the case with Jammu and Kashmir which remained as breakwater until rulers acted as pliable agents but became turbulent state in the reign of last Maharaja who challenged residency and vicerealty. As rightly pointed out by Madhavi Yasin that by accepting paramountcy princes in the state lost their status from *de facto* sovereigns and *de jure* dependents to *de jure* sovereigns and *de facto* dependents.³⁰ The efforts of indirect rule in Jammu and Kashmir revolved around the techniques to make the native rulers dependents upon British. The local rulers were

forced to co-operate or lose their throne and their rule was disturbed if they tried to exert their will and independence. Thus loyalty was enforced upon them by indirect rule.

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