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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BRITISH INTERVENTION: A BLESSING FOR KASHMIR.

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Abstract

There is a common perception among different scholars and historians that the arrival of British resulted into drain of wealth, de-industrialization, backwardness, poverty and other negative impact wherever they went. But this paper highlights how intervention of British into the affairs of Kashmir not only provided sigh of relief to the poverty stricken people but also resulted into the development of those important sectors which at presently are taken as indicators of development. Both in short-run as well as in long-run British intervention not only benefited the state but the common man was blessed by their arrival and it was by dint of their intervention that Kashmir was taken on the path of modernization.

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Introduction:-

Once British became supreme political power in the Indian sub-continent, there policy towards Indian states remained of two type's i.e., direct and indirect policy. Direct policy was forwarded towards the states which were directly ruled by British through their governors and indirect policy was carried towards the states ruled indirectly by British through their residents. The preference to bring a state under direct or indirect policy was mostly determined by state's geography and economic resources. British annexed Punjab in 1846 and Kashmir being part of Lahore darbar also came under the suzerainty of British. But at that time fate of Kashmir was determined by the need of the time and British found sale of Kashmir inevitable because Punjab was yet to consolidate and North-West Frontier and Afghanistan unsettled. The only need of the time was to have an ally in the north and they were admirably successful in getting one in the person of Gulab-Singh.ⁱ Immediately on 16 March 1846, British concluded treaty of Amritsarⁱⁱ with Gulab Singh, raja of Jammu, and handed valley of Kashmir to Dogra family on a mere sum of 75000 rupees. Through the treaty of Amritsar, British agreed to "transfer and make over forever independent possession to Maharaja Gulab Singh and the heirs male of his body all the hilly and mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of the River Ravi including the *Chamba* and excluding *Lahul*, being part of the territories ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State..."ⁱⁱⁱ

When Russia started advancing towards the southern and eastern regions in 1864 and occupied *Chinkent*, it was taken alarming by British. It was followed by the occupation of Tashkent in 1865, Kohj in 1866 and Yuni Kurgan in 1867. The Russia subjugated Samarkand in 1868. Thus, within a span of four years, Russian influence had touched Afghanistan, Chitra, Gilgit, and the Pamirs. The British India started worrying about the approach of Russia and took effective steps in the consolidation of the 'scientific-frontier' of their empire and all this increased the geographical importance of Kashmir in the eyes of British.^{iv} Once British came to know about the misgovernment and mal-administration^v in Kashmir their intervention in Kashmir became inevitable. On the eve of the coronation of Pratap-Singh the intervention achieved its peak and finally British appointed its permanent resident in Kashmir in

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1885. In 1889 Maharaja Pratap Singh was dethroned on a suspicion that he was in a league with Russia^{vi} and accordingly an *irsad* (voluntary resignation) was issued, signed by Maharaja, that give council of ministers all administrative powers in all departments of the state for a period of five years. The council, or rather the Resident who was to supervise its work, became the virtual ruler of the country.^{vii} Once power was retained by the resident number of steps was taken in favour of subjects that resulted into the modernization of Kashmir. Politically, socially, economically and culturally the impact of British became visible and all those sectors which were, even presently, taken as indicators of development started flourishing and developing throughout whole valley. In fact, from 1885 the period of modernization started in Kashmir and truly the intervention of British was more than a blessing in terms of education, medical facility, communication facility, construction of roads and nourishing the spirit of freedom for Kashmir. The blessings of British rule can be highlighted by discussing some of these developments which might have remained a dream only, if British had not interfered in the affairs of Kashmir.

Land settlement:-

The first step taken by British in favor of Kashmir was appointment of land settlement commission in 1887 under the supervision of Mr. Wingate's and later in 1889 Walter. R. Lawrence took over full control of the commission. Lawrence discussed in detail the working of land revenue system in Kashmir before the implementation of new land settlement. The working of old administration was totally against common man in general and cultivator in particular to whom justices was a dream. The quick dynastic changes, six month absence of *maharaj* from Kashmir, absence of written records of holdings and revenue liabilities, selfish, greedy and immoral officials were responsible for injustices and exploitation of people^{viii}. Moreover, administration under Dogras was monopolized by pandits who had rare sympathy for the majority Muslim population. These officials combined systematically to defraud the state and rob the people.^{ix} The cultivators were compelled to bear responsibility of feeding all state officials. *Tehsildar, pathwari, sazawol, kardar, shakdar* (officials responsible for revenue collection) all receive fixed share after harvesting. Besides, *chakaldar* and *mustajir* exploit cultivators through revenue farming or *izad-boli* (auctioning).^x Such was the intense of burden on cultivators that they sometimes sell their mobile property to fulfill revenue demands and sometimes leave their villages to settle somewhere else. *Tukm-musada* (advance seeds), *Sakim-ul-hal* (poor sections unable to pay revenue) were taken by state as welfare measures but the poor and ignorant cultivator was never benefitted and only huge arrears fill his account. *Rasum*(perquisites) was charged almost on every item produced in valley which was annually estimated Rs.1332.6.0 *chilkis*^{xi}. Not only agricultural class but *watals* (scavenger), grave-diggers, prostitutes were not spared. Coercive and violent methods were used by official in recovering land revenue.

Being the active participant of the field survey that lasted for more than four years the British settlement officer, Walter. R. Lawrence, formulated such a novel administrative set-up which was not only friendly to the cultivators but also healthy for the future of Kashmir. In the new settlement all the problems were taken in consideration i.e., old revenue system, methods of collection, means of payment, powers of officials and conditions of the common people. The opposition of the official class was natural because they were at the losing side. But due to the support from *Maharaja* Lawrence was left with enough powers to deal with all kind of suits related with the land which make settlement department very powerful to override any official.^{xii} Lawrence after making hard and difficult survey fixed the state demand permanent for ten years. Most important decision taken after strong opposition was declining state demand in the form of oil-seeds, cotton, pulses etc and accepting only in Rice and Maize along with cash payments only, which prevented perquisites and peculations which had become fashion of the day. He totally modified *Assami* system when he bestowed permanent hereditary occupancy rights on every person connected with *Assami* and did best by denying cultivators right to sale and mortgage land in order to stop eviction and absentee landlordism. The positive results of these measures was that cultivator remained stick to his land and production increased steadily. He found it difficult to ascertain revenue that a village had to pay because he find generalization could result dangerous. Thus, to fix the revenue of *assami*, area of holding, soil-type, fertility and irrigation facilities were taken into consideration^{xiii}. The best land being under the control of *Patwaris, Lambardars* and other influential persons were called upon to pay revenue accordingly.

Once the settlement was executed its impact on Kashmir's peasants was optimistic. It appeared that within a few years of the settlement there emerged, in Kashmir, a stable revenue-paying peasantry. The agriculturists, who used to wander from one village to another in quest of the fair treatment and security which they never found, got settled down on their lands and got permanently attached to their ancestral villages. The revenue was often paid up before the date on which it falls due...Every *assami* knows his revenue liabilities in cash and kind, and enough kind was left with them for food and the ever present sepoys were removed from the villages forever.^{xiv} Moreover, he quickly

and successfully resists any attempt to extort more than the amount entered in his revenue-book... The annual dread that sufficient food-grain would not be left for the support of him and his family has ceased, and the agricultural classes of Kashmir became well off in the matter of food and clothing as any agriculturists in the world^{xv}. The 1901 census noted that cultivators were better off than before and enjoyed peace and prosperity as a result of the settlement and considerable areas had been converted into flourishing fields during the last decade. Not only was the peasant now at the mercy of the revenue officials, but he was now in a position to sell his surplus grain to urban grain traders, thus entering the sphere of legitimate and lucrative trade^{xvi}. More and more wastelands was brought under cultivation "fields fenced, orchards planted, vegetable gardens stocked and mills constructed."^{xvii} As a result the revenue rose from 13.4 lacks to 38.9 lacks in 1905 and to 53.18 lacks in 1925-26.^{xviii} In short, the British settlement officer did what local administrators and *rajās* could not do for centuries. The settlement being pro-poor, pro-peasant, pro-state remained famous throughout the valley and the inventor of the settlement is still remembered as Lawrence *Saab* (sahib)^{xix}.

Health-Care:-

The indigenous traditional system of medicine was followed since time immemorial in Kashmir. Such were the people and *hakims* (physicians) professional that they turn nearly every plant and tree to some use and attribute medical properties to every growing thing.^{xx} *Unani* and *Ayurvedic* medicine were popular among people. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that modern system of medicine and hospital concept was initiated in Kashmir by none other than Christian Missionaries of London. It was actually in early 1862 that attaching a Christian Missionary to Kashmir was considered at Lahore conference, where Kashmir was specially referred as being a country where medical aid was not available^{xxi} and people still depend on the traditional medicine that were not enough to cure recent diseases effectively like Cholera. Thus, Rev. Clark became the moving figure behind the establishment of the Kashmir mission.^{xxii} It was on 8th may, 1865 that Dr. Elmslie opened first dispensary in Srinagar^{xxiii} and that became a memorable day in the history of Kashmir medical mission. While carrying his work further, he was meddled by state and despite of encouragement and aid he was not allowed to have a roomy house for performing his duties. Mr. Biscoe writes, "His life was hard and difficult for he had no hospital, his operations being performed under trees; also orders were issued that the people were not to visit the doctor, and sepoys were stationed around to keep them away, as the sick persisted in coming for relief. Several patients suffered imprisonment for disobeying the order of the authorities."^{xxiv} But the Missionaries didn't lose hope and remained staunch and firm in their mission and in time they were successful in changing the attitude of the state through their selfless labour and dedication.^{xxv} Government started following missionaries and opened number of dispensaries in the valley and the first state dispensary was inaugurated in 1870.^{xxvi} After Dr. Elmslie missionaries flocked into the valley, both men and women from London left their luxurious life for the cause of poor-stricken people of the valley. Elmslie departure led to the arrival of Dr. Theodore Maxwell and he was followed by distinguished personalities like Dr. Arthur Neve, who devoted thirty years of his life to serve Kashmir. Doctors like Edmund Downes, Arthur Neve, Earnest F. Neve paid frequent visit to the villages and district headquarters to treat the sick, unable to visit the hospital owing to long distance and lack of transportation.^{xxvii} Not only men but missionary women like Fanny Buttler, Nora Neva, Miss Lucy, M. Cormack, Miss Irene Pertie, Miss Robison, Ht. Smith etc who were qualified, trained and skilled doctors and nurses staffed the missionary hospitals. Such was the response of the people that people flooded to get treatment. So crowded were missionary hospital that Arthur Neve described *Drugian* Hospital as a second pilgrimage center, the first being famous *Hazratbal* Shrine.^{xxviii}

During tough times like famines and epidemics missionaries did commendable job and saved thousands of lives in Kashmir during the fatal years of 1888, 1892, 1900, 1907, 1910 etc. Being superstitious mindset, on an arrival of natural calamity, people of Kashmir close the doors of their houses and wait for death^{xxix} because they believe it as a curse from God. A large number of workers combined with the Church Missionary and Church of England Zenana Society did their best to lift the veil over the moral condition of the miserable and diseased city.^{xxx} Such were they meticulous towards improving the health status of people that they even carried the filth in the baskets on their shoulders outside the residence. With the efforts of missionaries' people of Kashmir gradually attributed sickness to germs and within few decades' allopathic treatment became very popular among the people.^{xxxi}

Modern-Education:-

From ancient times, Kashmir had attained fame as an important land for the promotion of Sanskrit learning and literature. This ancient glory continued in medieval period as well when Kashmir was under Muslim Sultans. By the end of seventeenth century, Kashmir stood as a beacon of light to the surrounding territories^{xxxii}. However, the past glories of Kashmir came to halt during the most tyrannical rule of Afghans and Sikhs respectively as they extracted

as much as to fill their coffers^{xxxiii} and Kashmir came to known to outside world chiefly for desolation of its land and the misery of its people. During Dogra period state didn't paid any heed towards the spread of modern education. British entered the valley in the form of Christian Missionaries and after great struggle with the state rescued locals from the darkness towards light by establishing a permanent mission in Srinagar in 1864^{xxxiv}. Education before Christian missionaries was confined to *maktabs* and *patshalas* where students were taught religious sacred books. In other words, religious education was dominant discourse in Kashmir and when education means all round development then education in Kashmir was in a very backward state. In 1854 retired army officer, Colonel Martin, from Peshawar, Rev. Robert Clark from Punjab missionaries tried to open a school in Kashmir but failed due to hostile attitude from state. But Robert Clark with his indomitable will, after 8 years, on 18th April, 1864 tried again and was successful in opening a school despite the opposition of the authorities^{xxxv}. It was an important event in the history of Kashmir but the parents who sent their children to the missionary school were scared by the authorities and received domiciliary visits from the police^{xxxvi}. They were told if their children went to school, they would be banished to Gilgit for *Begar*(corvee). Once the proposal of Christian missionaries to found schools in Kashmir was approved by C.M.S. in London, Rev. J.H.Knowles laid the foundation of C.M.S. school on the hospital premises in Srinagar and became the founder of the modern schools in Srinagar^{xxxvii}. In its infancy C.M.S. school had to face a number of problems. The most pressing problem was that of school building. In 1890 the govt. permitted the C.M.S. to shift school down to the city and it was moved from hospital premises to a large house compound on the river bank in the middle of the city (*FatehKadal*). As a result of this, the number of students increased from 5 in 1880 to 200 in 1890^{xxxviii}. Mr. Knowles in this sacred work was assisted by Rev. C.L.E. Burges, A.B. Tyndale and also by some Kashmiri teachers in the work of building up the school. When Rev. Tandale Biscoe joined the school in 1891, he was dissatisfied to see the habits, dress, curriculum and attendance of the students. The first step taken by Biscoe was to insist upon punctual attendance by the pupils. Thus, he dedicated himself full towards the development of educational seeds among its pupil. For this purpose he introduced regular hours of instruction, fines were imposed and holidays were arranged on western pattern and education as per need was imparted like Geography, Agricultural Science, and General-knowledge etc^{xxxix}. This was not enough, sometimes the boys didn't come to school pretending to be sick. To check this tendency Biscoe hit on a novel scheme of visiting the houses of the boys. Moreover, students were reluctant to play games^{xl}, because of superstitious sway of their minds and parents regarded sports as wastage of time. But for Tyndale Biscoe School meant an institutions were citizen's mind and bodies were to be trained. The great task to which Mr. Biscoe addressed himself was to teach the boys manliness, loyalty, charity, manners, cleanliness, truth and other virtues^{xli}. For bodily development he laid stress on social service, games and sports and for mental exercise he introduces subjects like English, Indian languages (Urdu and Hindi), classical language (Persian), Mathematics, History, Geography, Science and Art and swimming was made compulsory. The efforts given by these British citizens and the hardwork to which they dedicated themselves started bearing fruits slowly but steadily. It was in 1905, that a college was established at Srinagar with the efforts of Mrs. Annie Besant, president of Theosophical Society, which in 1911 was taken by the state and named it as Sri Pratap College. In nutshell, it was British who did the commendable job by introducing modern education in the valley and debited the people of Kashmir forever.

Conclusion:-

There is a common perception among different scholars and historians that the arrival of British resulted into drain of wealth, de-industrialization, backwardness, poverty and other negative effects on India and elsewhere they went. But regarding Kashmir the role of British has remained different and thus had changed the general perception regarding the impact of British rule. When British entered into the valley of Kashmir the situation here was deplorable in every aspect. The peasantry, villagers, townsmen, elders and children all were reeling under the miserable conditions of their family and backwardness of the state. Modern Education was absent and only few *maktabs* and *patshalas* existed. Modern Medical facilities were not only absent but people used weeds, leaves, mud and other things to cure diseases. The peasantry class was fed-up by the oppressive attitude of the Dogra rulers and their corrupt officials, who took majority of their output and forced them to sleep half starved. It was only after the dethronement of Dogra ruler Pratap Singh and the appointment of British resident, who acted as a ruler, that Kashmir witnessed all round changes. Land settlement was introduced that was not only pro-poor, pro-cultivator but pro-state as well. The credit for the establishment of modern schools and colleges goes to British. The British in their schools not only focused on curricular but co-curricular activities were made compulsory in order to remove laziness and idle reflections from their character. The British should be credit as well for making Kashmir famous around the globe. It were these Europeans who ascribed Kashmir as 'Venice of the East' 'Switzerland of the East'^{xlii} and labeled it with other different names that made it a picnic spot and In long-run resulted into the development of the tourist industry in Kashmir. Truly, the intervention of British in Kashmir was a blessing that in short-run

liberated people from the corrupt practices of the alien Dogra rulers and give them a sigh of relief. At the same time in long-run their intervention resulted in the foundation and development of all those sectors that are taken as the indicators of development in modern times.

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