

**Royal Expenditure in the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir (1885-1947)**

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**Abstract**

*Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state ruled by Dogras from 1846 to 1947. The state was considered as the less progressive state as its annual expenditure on the social services was very low. Although a very reasonable amount of revenue was generated annually by the rulers but very little was returned in the form of social services. However, on the other hand huge amount was spent on the royal household which included allowances to the Maharaja, his brothers and other members of the royal family, salaries to the palace guards, palace attendants and the private servants of the Maharaja and his family. Spending on personal lives and neglecting social welfare was common in the princely states during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this paper an attempt had been made to highlight how Maharajas of Kashmir indulged in merry making and lived luxuries lives despite poor socio-economic conditions.*

*Keywords: - Expenditure, Extravagant, Luxurious, Maharajas*

**INTRODUCTION**

From cars to clothes, jewels and ornaments, monogrammed crockery and linen, furniture and fixtures, even the design of entire palaces, Indian princes ordered the best and most expensive items available in the luxury houses of Europe, mainly London, Paris and Milan. They were so much extravagant that in 1928 the British Press reflected “Indian Princes had nothing to do except live in luxury and spend only with a shovel”.<sup>1</sup> This shovel had to be handcrafted, gold-plated and made by the most famous jeweller of the time. From Scandia’s silver plate to toy train that served as a mobile bar at the dining table to Kapurthala’s copy of Elysees palace, Patiala’s extravagant jewellery from Cartier and Boucheron, the fleets of custom built Rolls Royce cars, engraved weapons from Holland, clothes from legendary fashion houses in Paris and even wines from Fortnum and Masons, all was mentioned by British Newspapers as unnecessary and unethical expenditure.<sup>2</sup> The royal wives called *Maharanis* too indulged in extravagancy and created a great burden on the state budgets. In India, they wore traditional Indian dresses and while travelling abroad they switched to costly European dresses. The

Maharani of Kapurthala (Seta Devi) was known as the best dressed women because she wore dresses prepared by leading fashion houses of the Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The royal expenditure was very unique and was a great burden on the state's budget. For a very long time the Government of British India didn't interfere in princess's way of personal expenditures. The amount under this head was not fixed and they could draw as much as they can. However, during the World war one, the princes were directed to spend only 10 % of the money on their personal expenses.<sup>4</sup> The less progressive states like Alwar and Kashmir were more extravagant than the progressive states like Travancore and Baroda. The latter states had a reputation of spending modest amount on themselves. For Instance, the Maharaja of Travancore reduced his amount of privy purse and decided that he will bear cost of his all travels to Europe from his personal pocket.<sup>5</sup> The modest royal expenditure was also adopted by Princely state of Mysore. In 1920s it was 9 % of the total budget and in 1940s it decreased to 3%. However, reduction in royal expenditure was not followed by all princes. In 1935-34 the royal households of Kotah and Bikaner absorbed 16% and 17% respectively out of their total budget. According to Rudolph and Rudolph "an impression was always created in the annual administrative report by the states of consuming royal expenditure below 10%, and major portion of the personal expenses were hidden".<sup>6</sup> The political department also declared in 1941 "under the head name of PWD (Public Works Department) the states are using an enormous portion of budget on the construction and repairing of palaces and unfortunately actual amount spent on the royal household is never revealed".<sup>7</sup> These states were less progressive and were dubbed by Ian Copland as the "Blatantly Corrupt state".<sup>8</sup> The administrative staff of such states was not organized for the requirements of the people but for the ruling class. They were inefficient, incompetent and more dangerous to the British interests, so their reorganisation is the need of the hour.<sup>9</sup> Along with Patiala and Alwar, the State of Jammu and Kashmir which is the focus of study here also fits very well in the Ian Coupland's categorization of blatantly corrupt states because of its more spending on merry making and less on social services. The colonial government was surprised to see the luxuries of the Maharaja who had earned a very bad reputation in the British circles for spending public money on personal adventures. It is the self-centred adherence of Kashmiri Maharajas to this merrymaking despite poor social conditions in the state that has prompted me to choose the subject under discussion.

### **Extravagant and Luxuries Life Styles of Kashmir's Maharajas.**

It constituted a greatest burden on the State's budget and was next important to the expenditure on defence. The expenditure on this head was incurred mainly on the allowances to the Maharaja, his brothers and other members of the royal family.<sup>10</sup> A good amount was also spent on the salaries to the palace guards, palace attendants and the private servants of the Maharaja and his family.<sup>11</sup> Out of the allotted funds a major share was also spent on the Modhikhana<sup>12</sup>, private servants, attendants, cattle, stables and the reserve battalions.<sup>13</sup> A lions share was spent on the members of the royal family while travelling in India or abroad. All these expenses were included in the Maharaja's civil list. P.N Bazaz writes " out of the total revenues, actual amount spent on the Maharaja's civil list was very difficult to estimate , it was never discussed on the floor of assembly as it was a reserved subject".<sup>14</sup> The full details of expenditure under this head were never provided in the budget and several items spent on his highness's family were so mixed up with the other items that it becomes difficult to find out the exact figure.

The following table will reveal the expenditure on the Maharaja and his family since the establishment of the state council: -

Years	Expenditure in Rupees
1890-91	7,54,000
1895-96	9,23,917
1900-01	8,46,295
1905-06	10,87,000
1910-11	10,44,837
1915-16	21,03,003
1920-21	29,76,721
1925-26	44,39,020
1930-31	24,66,000
1935-36	30,40,000
1940-41	25,31,700
1945-46	28,97,700

*The above table has been prepared by consulting the annual administrative reports of Jammu and Kashmir State from 1890 to 1946.*

During the early years of his rule Maharaja Pratap Singh consumed almost 15 % of the total civil budget for his civil list because there was no check and balance on his powers. He could draw money from the state treasury to any extent as his allowances were not fixed.<sup>15</sup> Maharaja withdrew 34 lakhs from the Reasi reserve treasury and spent on his civil list soon after his accession.<sup>16</sup> In the year 1888 allowances drawn by him amounted to rupees 11.35 lakhs of rupees.<sup>17</sup> The government of India decided to re-organize the financial aspect and transferred the power and control in the financial matters from the Maharaja to the Resident. The expenditure on the privy purse of the Maharaja was reduced and rupees 6 lakh was fixed as an allowance on him. In the year 1890-91 the expenditure on the civil list was 7.54 lakhs. Out of this amount 6.71 lakhs were drawn by the Maharaja for his personal use, Rs. 1800 for the travelling allowance and 26 ½ thousand rupees for the expenses of the Maharaja's family.<sup>18</sup> In the year 1895-96 out of the total amount spent on the civil list, major share was spent on the marriages of the Raja Ram Singh and Bua Singh.<sup>19</sup>

In the year 1901-02 the total expenditure was Rs. 8,46,295 and in the year 1910-10 it reached up to a million of rupees. This increase was mainly due to the increment in the allowances and the Maharaja's visit to the different states.<sup>20</sup> There was a sharp rise in the expenditure during the year 1915-16 due to the lavish money spent on the Raja Hari Singh's second wedding. Many distinguished European guests were invited in the honour of the auspicious event. There was a grand reception and entertainment for them. Among the 72 European guests foremost was Sir Michael O' Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab. All the arrangements connected with the camp and catering party were made. Apart from this entertainment, reception was arranged for the 5,8 45 guests. The expenditure in the year 1920-21 showed an increase of 9 lakhs (See table). This was because of his highness's visit to Delhi to attend the chief's conference held there in the year 1919-20. His highness was accompanied by the Resident, Chief Minister and his other ministers. A large amount was spent on this visit.<sup>21</sup> It was also after 1920 that the Resident lost control over the finances of the state and Maharaja began to spend lavishly.<sup>22</sup> The allowances of the other family members were also increased. The sacred thread ceremony of the Maharaja Kumar Jagat Dev Singh Sahab which took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1920 at Mandi palace also took a major share. A public durbar was also held in the Shergarhi palace on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1920. His highness Maharaja Sahib Bahadur formerly conferred the title of Raja on the Tikka Dev Singh Sahib, the eldest son of the late Raja Sir Baldev Singh Sahib of Poonch. The main highlights of the 1920-21 was also that his highness Maharaja Sahib Bahadur accompanied

by the Chief Minister proceeded on a short visit to the Aligarh and Banaras leaving Jammu by a special train on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1919. From Banaras his highness extended his tour to Calcutta and Puri. In the year 1925-26 the civil list amounted to Rs 44.39 lakhs emerging as a single largest item of the expenditure.<sup>23</sup> This was because of the extraordinary and the unavoidable expense incurred in connection with the lamented demise of the Maharaja Pratap Singh and the auspicious Raj Tilak ceremony of the Maharaja Hari Singh who succeeded the former to the throne.<sup>24</sup> The Raj Tilak ceremony was performed at Jammu on February 1925 in presence of a number of distinguished guests including the several ruling princes, which caused a great burden on the state budget.<sup>25</sup>

After the 1925 no details about the major part of it are in the budget and some of the items that are actually spent for his highness and the ruling family are so mixed up with the other items that it is not possible to find out the exact figure.<sup>26</sup> However, after 1935 onwards the British government decided to reduce the amount spent under the privy purse of the Maharaja. The Maharaja was allowed to draw only 5 % of the total revenue as an allowance. It was earlier 16 %, apart from this Maharaja Hari Singh was forced by the British government to amalgamate the Jagirs which he considered as his private property within the state. He was given compensation of Rs. 85,0000 annually for Jagirs in addition to the 5% of the revenue just mentioned.

However, in the merrymaking and lavish spending Hari Singh was not behind Pratap Singh. This is clearly narrated by the Qudratullaha Shahab in his work *Shahabnama*. While narrating his own story Shahab says “after winning an essay competition my name came in the leading newspaper of Kashmir. On reading this Hari Singh called me for a cup of tea in the Jammu palace, in excitement I reached there on time, but had to wait for almost two hours in the waiting room because the Maharaja was indisposed which made me impatient. Somehow i got a chance to meet the Maharaja but the latter was semi-conscious because of the hangover of last evening’s liquor. Maharaja was so much de-activated that he can’t stand on his legs. The Maharaja of Kashmir got such a treatment which the queen of England can’t afford”.<sup>27</sup>

Hari Singh squandered away a lot of wealth by showering bounty on women of easy virtues such as prostitutes and sex girls in Paris and London. He frequently visited London and Paris carrying huge wealth with him and in an event of 1918 he was robbed at a gun point while staying in Douglas Castle in Scotland. He also earned a bad-name for his

youthful escapades, the blackmail and court case on him by a prostitute in Paris was the most wicked episode of his life. In 1924, the case was taken to court by the prostitute against Mr. A whose name the Indian office in London tried to conceal was Hari Singh. The blackmailer was silenced by offering { 3,000,00 pounds which was quite astonishing and a record sum.<sup>28</sup>

Maharaja Hari Singh's lavishness and unnecessary expenditure during the birth of his Son Karan Singh attracted much criticism not only in Kashmir but also in the other princely states.<sup>29</sup> Karan Singh was born on March 9, 1931 and his birth is an event that matches fairy tales of the yore. with earlier three wives as childless, he was born to fourth wife of Hari Singh and therefore his birth was greeted with the extravagant enthusiasm. Three days were declared as public holidays and feasts went on for days. The entire state was in a cheerful mood, offerings were made at the religious places and people prayed for long life of the prince.<sup>30</sup>

After the end of end of Dogra rule in the state and its accession with India, privy purse for the royal family was continued.<sup>31</sup> In the post-independence period the privy purse payments to the former ruling families constituted a significant outlay of the government funds. Even after the end of Hari Singh's rule, he was entitled to receive rupees ten Lakhs free from all taxes as a privy purse. In 1949, the Home affairs minister of Independent India Shri Vaiabhbhai Patel wrote a letter to the Hari Singh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Kashmir asking him to send a list of his private property including the securities and thereafter the said property was enlisted as the private property of the former Maharaja of Kashmir. The government of India also agreed occupation of Kashmiri house at Bombay by the Maharaja Hari Singh free of rent for his lifetime.<sup>32</sup> The erstwhile Maharaja of Kashmir was also granted exemption from the payment of sea custom duty. However, after three decades of the Independence, the privy purse granted to the princes received much criticism. It was often questioned as a relic of past and against the idea of equality enshrined in the constitution of India. Moreover, it constituted an added economic pressure on a newly independent nation that was galloped with the challenges of hunger and poverty. Therefore, the then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi pressed for its abolition and was done by the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution of India in 1971. The step received much applause across the political circles. The times of India reported "the special privileges like privy purse was discordant with the principles of democracy and equality and its existence was unfavourable to any social and economic development". While a hue and cry was made by Maharajas and Maharanis of princely states because they saw abolition of privy purse as a constitutional

betrayal but the Maharaja Karan Singh voluntarily surrendered his entitlement, of which he was the recipient since the death of his father in 1961.<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the backdrop of the forgoing discussion and facts narrated, one can safely assume that the Dogra state preferred their luxuries lives at the cost of the social services. The budget was framed unethically and no space was given to the public welfare. The British intervention in 1885 which is considered a mark for many changes in the state couldn't lessen the burden of royal household on the state's annual budget. Thus the annual budgets allowed the great bulk of revenues to be absorbed by the so called funny, extravagant lifestyles of the rulers leaving a very small percentage of total income to be spent on the nation building services such as education, public health, agriculture and the industry. The budget in this respect exposes the most strikingly and the exploitative character of the politico-economic system of the state. This illustrates how Dogra imperialism safeguards its rule of sword by keeping the people hungry, illiterate, diseased and poverty stricken. This evidence validates that the stereotypes created regarding the extravagant and luxuries life styles of the princes have some basis in reality.

### **Notes and References**

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[<sup>1</sup>] Jaffer Amin, *Made for Maharajas: A Design Diary of Princely India*, Rolli Books, September 1 2018

[<sup>2</sup>] Ibid

[<sup>3</sup>] Ibid

[<sup>4</sup>] Strachey Antonio, *Princely vs British India*, Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to Nuffield College, 2015, p.99.

[<sup>5</sup>] Travancore State Annual Administrative Report, 1886-87.

[<sup>6</sup>] Rudolph and Rudolph, "Rajputana under British Paramountcy: The Failure of Indirect Rule", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol.38, NO.2, 1966, p.146

[<sup>7</sup>] Political Department File No.287, Finances of Patiala State, NAI

[<sup>8</sup>] Copland Ian, *Princes of India in the end game of the empire, 1917-1947*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.276.

[<sup>9</sup>] Pol .Intl.b, Conditions of less progressive states, June 1933, NAI

[<sup>10</sup>] Khan Saleem, *The History of Jammu and Kashmir (1885-1925)*, Gulshan Publishers Srinagar, 2002, p. 246.

[<sup>11</sup>] Ibid

[<sup>12</sup>] Modhikhana was a department which used to supply the commodities to be used in the Kitchen

[<sup>13</sup>]All the supplies were furnished to the Modhikhana by the Contractors on indent with regard to the contract rates. The payment of Bills of the contractors were made immediately in their presentation at the Sadder treasury. *Proposals made by the MR. Logan in connection with the financial conditions of the Kashmir*. Indian National Archives of India, New Delhi

[<sup>14</sup>] Bazaz P.N, *Inside Kashmir*, The Kashmir Publishing Co., Srinagar 1941, p.221.

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[<sup>15</sup>] The expenditure on the Modhikhana department was 4.16 lakhs of rupees in the year 1886-87. The total expenditure on the Public Works in the Jammu province during the same year was less than one third of the expenditure on the Modhikhana. Political Department, 31 of 1887, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives.

(hereafter referred as JKSA

[<sup>16</sup>] *General Political Department, No. 22 of 1891, JKSA*

[<sup>17</sup>] *Foreign Department 1892, Proposals made by Mr. R Logan in connection with the financial conditions of the Kashmir*, p. 35. JKSA

[<sup>18</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir Government, 1890-91, p.27

[<sup>19</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir Government, 1895-96, p.47

[<sup>20</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1910-11.

[<sup>21</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1920-21, p. 2.

[<sup>22</sup>] Political department, No. 108/E-7 of 1914, NAI

[<sup>23</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1925-26, p. 72

[<sup>24</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, p. 72.

[<sup>25</sup>] Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1925-26, p. 28-30.

[<sup>26</sup>] Ibid

[<sup>27</sup>] Shahab Qudratullaha, *Shahabnama*, Lahore Sang e Mill, 1987(3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), p.176.

[<sup>28</sup>] Sneddon Christopher, *Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris*, C Hurst and Co Publishers Ltd, 17 August 2015

[<sup>29</sup>] Pathak Nilima, 'Karan Singh: Born with a golden spoon', *article published in Gulf News on 20 July 2013*.

[<sup>30</sup>] Ibid

[<sup>31</sup>] Report on the Privy Purse of Maharaja, 1948, NAI.

[<sup>32</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>33</sup>] Political Department, 1971, Report on the abolition of privy purse of the Maharajas of Princely States, NAI.