

an excessive loss to the tax regimes. Maharaja introduced the *Rehdari* System to evade the situation, ordering his troops to plug all the escape routes and passes. The hapless shawl weavers, stranded in a whirlpool of oppression, began chopping off their thumbs to evade weaving.

Despite several delegations sent to the British government to deal with the grievances, things only worsened. Ali (2017) writes about the agitation of 1865 when the shawl workers agitated against the Maharaja's atrocities. It was perhaps one of the first organised demand days in the history of class struggle in the erstwhile subcontinent. Workers from all parts of the city marched towards *Zaldagar* and raised slogans against the Dogra administration. The protestors were dealt with severity, and many lost their lives after getting drowned in a marshy canal nearby. The dead bodies were buried secretly, and punitive fines were put on those who survived.

The international situation also impacted the politico-economic conditions in Kashmir. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 had deteriorated the condition of shawl trade and weavers as France, which had emerged as a significant market for Kashmiri shawls, had ceased to exist as one. It is pertinent to understand that the decline of the shawl merchants had implications for Kashmir's social and political landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shawl merchants were an influential class in the valley, developed contacts with the outside world, and contributed immensely to the revenue. After losing the principal sources of income to the decline of the shawl trade, many merchants recognised the Muslim community's political and economic condition, paving the way for internal and external contestation.

## Sociological Factors

Gellner's concept of social entropy can help us understand the position of Kashmiri Pandits as an entropy-resistant group. Gellner (1983:65) explains his exposition in hypothetical terms, "supposing a society contains a certain number of individuals who are by heredity, pigmentationally blue. After several generations, the blues persist in occupying either

the top or the bottom of society. In other words, the blues tend to capture either too many or too few of the privileges and the services available in the society". This would make blueness a 'social entropy-resistant trait'.

A cursory look at the history of Kashmir reveals that the Pandit community has wielded enormous influence on the affairs of the state. Its members would hold power irrespective of who was ruling. The prime reason was the education within the community and the ability to learn and master the languages of the rulers quickly. However, the education and learning of the rulers' languages are not innate endowments; they flow with state privilege and other social factors. Gellner (1983) puts it down that the traits for social entropy might be invented as natural notions, and the group might reinvent notions whenever it finds itself in a challenging state. The ideological and sometimes punitive mechanisms confirm expectations and internalise them thoroughly. In the case of Kashmir to this day, the legend states that Kashmiri Pandits are naturally intelligent. A prominent Kashmiri Pandit writer Kilam (1955:90) describes the community as a fountain of deep thought, having deep insight into human nature and poetics. He quotes from *Ain-i-Akbari* (2003:204),

The most respectable class in this country (Kashmir) is that of Pandits, who, notwithstanding their need for freedom from the bonds of tradition and custom, are the true worshipers of God. They do not loosen their tongue of calumny against those not of their faith, beg, or impotune. They employ themselves in planting fruit trees and are generally a benefit to the people.

The recurring attestations of being unique and gifted explain the community's self-perception. Smith (1986) situates myths and symbols as critical dimensions for communication, such as mobilisation. Nurtured by collective experiences, the myths, epics, and ballads form the cognitive maps of the community's history.

The myth-symbol complex functioned impressively in the case of the Kashmiri Pandit community. The segregation worked both on genealogical and ideological grounds, genealogical in terms of the difference in

caste, which led to conversion to Islam, and ideological in terms of the difference in religion. While education inevitably gave Kashmiri Pandits a mobility that their Muslim counterparts could not even dream of. The advent of the Mughals rapidly improved this mobility as community members started trickling out of the valley. Mughals saw allies in Pandits compared to the Muslim majority that had resisted the forceful Mughal takeover of Kashmir<sup>3</sup>. This trust earned them essential positions in the power corridors of Delhi and Agra. To accommodate themselves in the Mughal dispensation, Kashmiri Pandits quickly learned Persian.

Kilam (1955:96) notes the establishment of the Mughal rule in Kashmir opened a new vista for Pandits. After one of his visits to Kashmir, Akbar left along with several Pandits. He distributed rent-free lands to Pandits, and the community enjoyed the fruits. At the same time, the Muslims lived a life of complete political disempowerment as a matter of State policy. In another incident, Akbar participated in the religious festivals of Pandits as a mark of recognising their distinct social existence. The Kashmiri Muslims were ousted from all channels of administration as the Mughals didn't want to repose administrative trust in Kashmiri Muslims. Moreover, their entry into the army was closed. The powerful Muslim families who once ruled over the lands were pulled off from higher positions.

Ahmed (2017) writes that to kill the urge of Kashmiris to regain freedom, Akbar utilised the Kashmiri Pandits as informants of the Mughal court, and they willingly obliged. The royal patronage Pandits enjoyed was restricted to Akbar's reign and continued throughout the Mughal era. To maintain their separate identity, the term Kashmiri Pandits was coined by Emperor Mohammad Shah to distinguish them from the Brahmins from other parts of India.

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3 Kashmir lost its sovereignty to Mughal emperor Akbar on October 6, 1586. The mighty Mughal army was defeated two times by Kashmir Army. Finally, Akbar resorted to treachery and offered friendship to the Kashmiri King Yousuf Shah Chak. Chak visited Delhi to meet Akbar where he was arrested and sent off to a prison in Bihar where the former died (Fauq 1993).

The Mughal decline made way for Afghan rule over Kashmir, which is seen as one of the worst periods of poverty and persecution. During this period, the Pandits were deeply entrenched with the administration and connived at aborting any chances of rebellion against the Afghans. Similarly, during the Sikh and Dogra reigns, Pandits enjoyed power and patronage of the Lahore Durbar while naked economic, political, and religious aggression was meted out on the Muslim subjects.

During the Dogra era, a series of natural calamities took a heavy toll on lives, forcing a considerable portion of the population to move to neighboring Punjab. Against this scenario, Kashmiri Pandits did not feel any pressure to migrate. Lawrence (1895) validates that since Kashmiri Pandits were powerful, they could avail grains during natural calamities. The enormity of the Muslim migration to Punjab can be realised from the Punjab Census Report (1891), which listed around 111 775 Muslims from Kashmir settling in Punjab.

The differential access to the political and economic centre created fissures, rather veritable chasms, in Kashmiri society. Since Muslims had limited to no access to education, the community was likely to remain at the bottom of the social and political hierarchy. Hence, it could not correct and compensate for the disadvantages that had haunted them. The Kashmiri Pandits were comfortably placed and continued to work as an arm of repression.

However, Gellner's (1985) argument also suggests that within the differentiated population, there will be many who are much better and much more fit in terms of whatever performance criteria may currently be relevant and applied. The condition of this section will be painful and fraught with tension. And the sociological obstacles won't be easily removed by goodwill or legislation.

## Historical Factors

The year 1931 is critical to understanding the emergence of civil society and its role vis-a-vis the growth of Kashmiri nationalism. The events of 1931 satisfy all the qualifications that a nationalist narrative demands: a