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# Political Consciousness of the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State 1846-1947

#### Abstract

The history of nationalism and political consciousness in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K State has a great importance. Political activism and freedom struggle in the J&K state had passed through various vicissitudes immediate after the foundation of Dogra Rule. The Dogra rule started in 1846 and ended in 1947. Kashmiri Muslims have seen have seen worst type exploitations and oppression during this rule. The present paper aims at discussing the Dogra rule and unjust behavior of rulers and their authorities with Muslim subject. It is followed by the aspirations of Muslim community and subsequent political, social and religious activism. The paper also discusses the formation of socio-political organizations, which tried to safeguard and secured the political, economic and social rights and interests of concerned community.

**Key Words:** J&K, Muslims, Social Reform Organizations, Political Consciousness, Muslim Conference.

#### **Introduction:**

Dogra Dynasty in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K¹) was an out-come of the Treaty of Amritsar, inked on 16 March 1846 between the Britishers of subcontinent and Maharaja Gulab Singh). The Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh made payment of 7.5 million Nankshahi to the British Government to get the area the area between River Ravi and River Indus². Gubab Singh's rule was unfair and unpopular to the Muslims of Kashmir, which dissatisfied the majority of population. The J&K was a Muslim majority state having 77% Muslim population.³ They raised their voices against inequities between Hindus and Muslims, and poor quality of education, less employment prospects and corruption and bad governing system. These concerns ultimately concretized the political institution/organizations to get rid the atrocities and inequalities of Dogra rule.

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### Jammu and Kashmir State under Dogra Rule:

Since time immemorial, history of Kashmir tells that this land was ruled by various Buddhist, Hindus and Muslim dynasties. However, the fourteenth century is marked with significant changes when Islam came into Kashmir. Islam changed the whole structure of socio-political life. As far as political or governing system is concerned the Mughals captured the Kashmir in 1586, and they changed the governing system of Kashmir. The Mughal rule was followed by Afghans and Sikhs and they continued exploitations and suppression of Kashmiris. The Afghan rule is considered as the darkest period in the history of Kashmir. Later the Sikh continued their policy of suppression and plunder. Rangit Singh died in 1839 and his successors loosed the empire in Anglo-Sikh war of 1845. The Sikh territories of J&K and Ladakh were awarded to Gulab Sigh by Amritsar Treaty (famously known as sale deed of Kashmir). The new ruler of Kashmir recognized the terms of the treaty and made commitment to remain loyal with British Empire. Due to this agreement, the Dogra armies seek the help of British and Sikh soldiers and occupied the Kashmir on 9 November 1846, while disregarding the aspirations of larger group of population.

## **Grievances of Muslims during Dogra Rule:**

Dogra regime led by Maharaja Gulab Singh followed by Ranbir Singh (1857-1885) Partap Singh (1885-1925) and Hari Singh (1925-1947). This regime lasted for 10 decades, on the cost of the blood of Kashmiris. Since 1846 to 1947 Gulab Singh and his forerunner deprived the Muslims of Kashmir to the state affairs and administrations, e.g., 28 Premier were appointed, but none of them was a Muslim<sup>4</sup>. Even the high rank posts were filled either by Hindus or by Kashmiri Pundits. Dogra rule was declared as "Dharam Raj" the Hindu Rule. This dharam raj had no respect and regards for other communities especially for Muslims. Gulab Singh and his successors followed the pro-Hindu policy and they did not hesitate to declare Kashmir as Hindu state, even majority of subjects were Muslims<sup>5</sup>. The ignorance and discriminations of rulers flickered resentments against this dharam raj.

The Dogra rule was an oligarchic and tyrannical for the Muslims of Kashmir. It was one man rule and all powers were vested to man (Mahraja). In spite of majority population, Muslims were exploited because the rulers ruled by the help of Pundits, (Kashmir Hindus), who monopolized the whole system and onus of administration was left in their hands. They did not pay any heed to address the difficulties of Muslims. The rulers and their machinery made the life miserable for Muslims. They did not allow any opportunity to reduce the difficulties of Muslims. The Begar (forced labor) was sort worst exploitations, in which Muslim were used as carriers of supply and Rashan for army. When these called for begar, the villagers were bound to obey despite of their unwillingness.

Moreover, during Dogra regime the peasants and workers were under worse situation. They used to work for landowner from dawn to dusk but large share was taken by Hindu landowner or Maharaja's revenue collectors. The peasants and laborer were controlled like dumb driven cattle. Dr. Elmslie stayed in visited Kashmir from (1865-1872), says that out of 45 Jagirs only 5 belonged to Muslims and rests were to the Hindu Community<sup>7</sup>. This Jagirdari system was kind of

Political Consciousness of the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State 1846-1947 feudalism under which the peasants were drudged only for the enjoyment of feudalists. Maharaja himself was granting the Jagirs to allies, working for him; actually it was one kind of bribe for political and spying services for Maharaja. Although, the main revenue was produced from lands, but the peasants were also forced to pay the various kinds of taxes on cows, houses, fruit orchards, and household animals etc. The artisans and craftsman were forced to work for rich till they lost their eyes. In this situation the Kashmiri Muslim had only few options to survive, either to bow down before the authority or to migrate from Kashmir. Even migration was also a punishable crime for Muslims. During Ranbir Singh's time number of Muslim families moved to Lahore and other Muslim majority area to escape from begar and oppression of Maharaja. This is to be said that several migrants were drowned in Wullar Lake as punishment of migration. Under Dogra regime, overburdened taxes were imposed and even income sources were also seized. There were 77% Muslim population but their representation in government departments was minimal.<sup>8</sup> For example in Revenue department there were only 35 Muslim against 113 Hindus, in Finance 13 Muslim against 150, in Custom department one against 150, Judiciary 4 Muslims against 33, Health department 32 against 88, Education 6 against 56, and Police 662 but they were not more than the rank of constable. The Muslims were totally barred from joining the military services except to work as carrier for military supplies. In the state gazetted

In brief, during Dogra regime from 1846-1947 the Muslims were the worst sufferers. They were discriminated and dredged in poverty and backwardness. Even the ruler interfered in religious affairs of Muslim and policies were designed to convert the Muslim into Hinduism. In 1931, the incidents of blasphemy, insult of Holy Quraan and Masajids were occurred. The religious places like Khanqah-i-Mullah, Khangah-i-Bulbul Shah, Khangah-i-Dara Shikoh, Pather Masjid (Srinagar). Malashah-i-Bagh Mosque (Ganderbal), Khaiiqah-i-Sofi Shah (Jammu), Bhu Mosque (Jammu) and the Sringar Eid-Gah were confiscated by government 10. The marriage ceremonies of Muslims were taxed known as satarshahi, Kashmiri Muslims several times protested against such policies of Maharaja. However, in the nonexistence of any political platform it was hard to secure the fundamental rights. It was in 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Kashmiri graduates returned their native land after getting modern education. They called the Muslim community to stand-up against the injustice of rulers. Progressively this educated young class became popular because of their active contribution to wake the people about their socio-economic, religious and political rights<sup>11</sup>.

### **Social Reforms Organizations:**

services, there were 4 Muslim against 71 Hindus<sup>9</sup>.

The exploitations of Dogra rule made the Muslims to think individually, rather than to think about other communities. It was only because the Hindu and Kashmir Pundits both they were in good position and their status were also protected in "dharam raj". Only the Muslims were in least and vulnerable position, it was challenge for them to survive in this situation. The hardships of time made them realize to create socio-economic organizations to protect the social life. Later these organizations achieved their objectives by raising their voices against economic, educational backwardness, begar system, poverty and inequities in jobs.

History of the subcontinent reveals that, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was started with political activism as the people started to struggle and raised voices against the British slavery. Such voices started to penetrate in Kashmir as the Muslims J&K rose against the Dogra rule. They formed some social organizations with aims to up-lift life standard of Muslims. Before the Muslim organization one of the earliest Hindu organizations Arva Smai 1892 created bring changes in Hindu community, Later Yuvuk Sabha formed and achieved its objectives by uplifting the Hindu community. These organizations were emblem for the Muslims of Kashmir to create such organizations. Therefore, earliest socio-religious organization Anjaman-e-Islamia was created in 1888. It was the pioneer pioneer of all organizations <sup>12</sup>. Second important organization Anjaman Nusrt-ul-Islam 1905) formed with objectives to protect the religious affairs, uplift of social life and education of Muslims. Anjaman Nusrt-ul-Islam was followed by Anjaman Hamdard, Anjaman Taraqi Va Ithad, Anjaman Islamia Jammu, Anjaman Kashmiri Muslamanan-e-Lahore, Kashmir Committee, Yong Mans Association, Kisan Mazdoor and Reading Room Party etc.

The objectives of these organizations were almost same, i.e. the melioration of Muslim society, in education, economy, socio-cultural and politics etc. It is important to note that during this process, the Kashmiri Muslims received unforgettable support from Muslim brethren of Punjab. The leadership of Muslim League had concerns over worst situation of Kashmiri Muslims. Leadership including Dr. Muhammad Iqbal supported the Kashmiris by raising their voices to the British government. Because of these reform organizations the Kashmiri Muslims became conscious and started to gather on unified agenda and platform. The development of such organization proved as fruitful so the community has shown positive response to support their leaders. Now the Muslims of Kashmir were in a position to demand their political rights and they started to challenge the authority of Maharaja.

# **Political Reforms Organizations**

The oppressive behavior of Dogra ruler was not acceptable for educated class of multi communal society, so they were active against Maharaja's government. Maharaja did not having any mechanism to satisfy this generation, so he used the same tyrannical behavior with these youngsters. Hari Singh succeeded in 1925. He was brought up and educated from abroad. He was believed to be happen a liberal and reformist but he also adopted the policies of predecessors for his subject<sup>13</sup>. His attitude and governing policies created angerness in the state. The Muslims were the most victims of his policies, so they were fully prepared to counter his policies. It was the result of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' modern education and the resemblance of struggle of the people of subcontinent against British colonialism <sup>14</sup>. In the subcontinent the Muslims were the victims of same policies of the Britishers.

In J&K, earlier to 1930 few organizations were working in awakening the Muslim community. However, credit goes to Reading Room Party (1930) and its founders, which provided the base for educated youth to sit-together. Reading Room was organized to read books and newspapers but in fact, it was a milestone in achieving the political rights<sup>15</sup>. Through this party an environment was created for assimilation of public at various places, like Jamia Masjid Srinagar, Khanq-i-

Political Consciousness of the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State 1846-1947 Mullah, Khanq-i-Dstageer Sahib and Darga-i-Hazratbal. It is a fact, that the political consciousness after 1930 was not a result of sudden incident, but it was a constant effort of Muslim of Kashmir. It took almost half decade to create challenging mindset.

However, the year of 1931 emerged as revolutionary against Maharaja and his state officials. The issues of religious interference and insult of Holy Book became cause for revolution and sacrifices in Valley<sup>16</sup>. These incidents became reason for violent protests in Srinagar and other parts of J&K against culprits. During these protest a young man Abdul Oadeer (employ of British army officer), joined the protest and he delivered an emotional speech. In this he advocated rebellious movement against culprits. It was an emotional speech, which ignited the minds of Kashmiri Muslim as they were fully charged against Maharaja. Abdul Qadeer speech was considered as seditious against Maharaja and he was arrested and sends to Srinagar jail for prosecution <sup>17</sup>. On the date of hearing he was brought to court and thousands were assembled to see the Abdul Qadeer. It was on 13 July when the trial was ongoing a big crowed entered the jail tried to get free him. In resistance the Dogra forces opened the fire and killed 22 people. The incident of 13 July shook the minds of Kashmiri Muslim and open the ways for educated leadership to lead the community. These young men including Sheikh Abdullah and Ch Ghulam Abbass took center stage in the movement against Maharaja. In addition to the 13 July incident the Punjabi Press bravely portrayed the condition of Kashmiri Muslim while circulating to all Muslims reforms organizations. The organizations like All India Kashmir Committee, Anjuman-i-Kashmiri Muslamane Lahore, All India Muslim Kashmir Conference and Muslim League severely criticized the Maharaja and his policies towards Kashmiri Muslims<sup>18</sup>.

The protest, against 13th July incident compelled the Maharaja to form a Commission on the recommendation of British of British Government. The commissioned was chaired by Sr. B.J Glancy (Glancy Commission) included the members of all communities, and the Muslims' representative were Ch Gulam Abbass and Kh Ghulam Muhammad Ashai. This commissioned recognized the grievances of Muslim thus by supporting demand of release of religious places, share in services, and improvement of education, and social welfare of Muslim community. This was a great success and the Muslims were able to assert their self in government and political affairs. However, the recommendations of Commission were not implemented because the Pundit of Kashmir called protest (Roti Agitation) against commission. The protest against the development of Muslim community exposed the real face of Kashmiri Pundits. In these circumstances it was felt by the Muslim leaders to formulate a political organization which can protect the political rights of Muslims. In pursuance of political rights, the "Muslim Conference (MC) was formed on 16 October 1932<sup>19</sup>. MC's charter was fully endorsed by the activists and they nominated Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah as president and Ch. Ghulam Abbass as General Secretary<sup>20</sup>. The objectives of MC were; (a) organization of the Muslims of the state; (b) consolidations of the Muslims; (c) protection of political rights; (d) struggle for moral, educational, cultural economic reformation and progress of the Muslims<sup>21</sup>.

# Maharaj's Divided and Rule Policy:

The creation of MC was emblem for attaining rights of oppressed community because from 1846 all the political activities in J&K were banned and the MC was first of its kind which challenged the authority of Dogra Rule. So Maharaja and his government started to play divide and rule policy within the platform of MC. It became in practice when Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah and Molvi Yusuf Shah became opponent to each other. Their differences and conflict was not only the division of two leaders but the Muslim community at large.

The Government of Maharaja crated another trouble as the religious leaders were also opponent to each other. The heads of two factions claimed the title of Mir Waiz, one of Jamia Masjid and other Khanq-i-Mullah. This rift divided the religious sentiments of their followers thus created open conflict. When Sheikh Abdullah became success to recognize herself as the popular leader of the Muslim of Kashmir, at other hand Molvi Yusuf Shah joined the hand of Government. The follower of both the opponent fought with each other in Jamia Masjid, which resulted injuries to several. This witnessed that, Maharaja Government became successful in creating division and hostilities amongst the Muslims.

### **Muslim Conference to National Conference:**

After formation of MC, the leadership of the MC decided to include all the communities in it. It was only to organize the suppressed people regardless of any creed against the Maharaja. It is evident that a committee was constituted in 1933 to contact with non-Muslim communities for joint origination<sup>22</sup>. In this view S.M. Abdullah states that in the beginning our idea of joint organization was not endorsed by the non-Muslim communities but he was assigned to achieve this task<sup>23</sup>. He (S.M Abdullah) continued his efforts and engaged the non-Muslim communities for joining the unified platform. He achieved this, and proposed the changing of the name of MC to National Conference (NC). The working committee of MC also agreed to bring changes in the constitution of MC<sup>24</sup>. However, the support of the Ch Abbass the General Secretary of the MC was very important to convince the members to favour this change. In 1939 S.M Abdullah called the special session of MC and majority of the Members 172 out of 176 favoured the changing the name of MC to NC<sup>25</sup>. It is important to mention here that SM Abdullah was keenly interested to change the name of organization after when he developed his closeness with Nehru and Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan of Sarhad. On their recommendations he started fully campaign for this <sup>26</sup>. The closeness between Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru was deepening day by day and also Sheikh Abdullah started to follow the direction of Indian National Congress. This was not acceptable for Ch Ghulam Abbass and he decided to take side from Abdullah's NC.<sup>27</sup> Ch Abbass with Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah decide to revive the previous MC.

# Revival of MC and differences between the Leadership Muslims

During 1940 the struggle of the Muslims of the subcontinent for creation of Pakistan had a significant impact on the political affairs of J&K. In 1940 by adopting the famous Pakistan Resolution the idea for new country of the Muslim was becoming real. It created rays of hope for the Muslims of the J&K. Therefore,

Political Consciousness of the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State 1846-1947 influential Muslim leaders in the state sought to revive the old MC in 1941 under the leadership of Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas. <sup>28</sup> Some political activists were not in favour of revival of MC. They were encouraged by Moulana Zaffara Ali Khan and other leadership of All India Muslim League. After revival of MC, the leaders of the MC decided to follow the Muslim League. On the other hand, the leadership of NC was following the ideology of congress and secularism.

The two groups one MC led by Ch Ghulam Abbass and NC led by Sheikh Abdullah pursuing their goals. The patron of NC was considering himself the popular leader of Kashmiris while the MC's association with Muslim claimed its popularity in whole J&K and it was the affirmed fact. In 1944 when Muhammad Ali Jinnah visited Kashmir both the parties welcomed him. However, the people of Kashmir close association and love with the leaders of Muslim league by supporting the idea of Pakistan. On this occasion Jinnah advised both the group to develop consensus and association while pursuing their objectives against Maharaja. Mr. Jinnah also advised Sheikh Abdullah to learn from elders who worked with Hindus and Congress. But this advice kept away and Sheikh Abdullah continued his association with Congress on the name of nationalism. Abdullah's closeness created rift with the leaders of the MC fully supported the ideology of Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah having some support from Kashmir Valley, however, Ch Ghulam Abbass from Jammu and its adjoining areas even from Kashmir Valley had a good support. It was only because of the majority of the population of Muslims were in favor of the creation homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent that is why they were supporting the MC. In such circumstances, some are of the opinions that the internal differences between the leadership of the Muslim of the J&K provided chance for aggression and occupation of India.

After 1940 with growing demand of freedom in the subcontinent, the Britishers started to lose their control in the subcontinent. They dispatched their mission to consult the political parties to address their demands. This mission also visited Kashmir in 1946 to get the views of the people about Maharaja. The leadership of NC conveyed its memorandum to mission and demanded from Maharaja to quit the Kashmir. When this demand was not addressed Sheikh Abdullah launched Quit Kashmir Movement. Maharaja put seditious charges against Sheikh Abdullah and arrested him. The Quit Kashmir Movement was ended. Such circumstances created momentum for Mirwaiz Kashmir to lead the Muslims of Kashmir. He called the leadership of MC to pass Free Kashmir Resolution against Maharaja. This resolution demanded from Maharaja to finish his unfair state affairs, new assembly and separate electorate and constitution that will guarantee the rights of the people. These demands were very genuine and reasonable but not materialized by Maharaja.

Meanwhile, the MC was in touch with Muslim League and on 18 June 1946, meeting was held between Agha Shoukat Ali and Khawaja Ghulam Muhammad Ashai. Second important meeting was held on 21 June 1946 between Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Ch Abbass about the future of J&K. in this meeting Muhammad Ali Jinnah advised the leadership of MC to struggle for free Kashmir<sup>29</sup>. However, the Executive Council of MC endorsed the resolution to accession with Pakistan. This resolution was passed on 19 July 1947 at the residence of Sardar Muhammad Ibrahim Khan. This resolution was passed by taking certain facts into account such as geographic, economic linguistics and religious.

#### Year of 1947 and its aftermaths

In 1947, British India was divided according to (Indian Independence Act of 18 July, 1947) into India and Pakistan. In Indian subcontinent, there were almost 565 princely states and option was given to these states to join any of the newly formed dominions, keeping in mind, the religious population, as well taking into the consideration of geographic contiguity. It will no wrong to say that the accession of Kashmir with Pakistan was suitable and natural by many ways due to its Muslim majority population, geographical integration, communication, religious and cultural integration with Punjab and North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). This was also best option for Maharaja of J&K to accede with Pakistan, as above condition were meeting the requirements of partition plan.

However, the conspiracies of India were mounted which trapped the Maharaja of Kashmir. Especially, the collusion of Nehru and Abdullah was disastrous for the Muslims of J&K. Even while taking the decision regarding accession the whole leadership of Congress tried to take the Maharaja into confidence. It is stated by Alaster Lamb (1991) that from May 1947 to August, President of Indian National Congress along with Raja of Fareed Kot, Kapur, Patila, Ruler of Punjab and Viceroy Lord Mount Batten arrived in Kashmir. Even, the Gandhi also made his visit to Kashmir. These were the leading from Congress, and they coerced Maharaja of Kashmir to accede with India<sup>30</sup>. Meanwhile, he was pushed to use other tactics to create space for unrest in J&K state. The struggle pf Muslims against the Dogra in J&K was ongoing since 1846, but in 1947 Hindu extremist organizations such as Rashtrya Swayam Sewak Singh (RSS) and Sikh Gang in Jammu led maharaja's forces to start carnage of Muslims, which ignited them to revolt against Dogra government. This indigenous revolt started from Poonch later spreads in whole J&K state.

### **Uprising in Poonch and its Consequences:**

Poonch uprising was an important rebellious movement, which had vital role in the creation of Azad Kashmir. This movement has resemblance with 1832 revolt launched against the brutalities of Sikh Rule. History of Poonch witnesses that during the revolt of 1832 unforgettable sacrifices were made. The martyrdoms of Sabaz Ali Khan and Mali Khan are still in the hearts and minds of the People of Poonch, Keeping in minds the sanctity of such sacrifices, they refused to accept any cruel attitude of governing authorities. The rebellion movement of 1947 was the result of continues struggle of the people of J&K and it was led by the trained local ex-army persons of British Army. Serval Muslims of Poonch had joined British Army in the first and second decade of 20th century and after their retirement they were very active in social and revolutionary activities. During revolt they joined the hands with local political leaders to create a critical situation which was difficult for Maharaja to handle with his law and forces agencies. It was hazardous for Maharaja and he ordered to disarm the Poonchis by imposing curfew like situation<sup>31</sup>. Timing of such event was very important because the dream of new homeland of the Muslim of the subcontinent became in real on 14 August 1947. This great achievement provided energy to the Muslim of J&K to achieve their objectives by using all means.

Political Consciousness of the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State 1846-1947 Sardar Muhammad Ibrahim Khan a young leader from Poonch organized the Poonchis and with the help of local, retired, British arm persons formed an Azad Army to fight against Maharaja regime and clear their land and about 50000 people joined this army. Despite less resources and difficult topography of the region, they started the movement with high moral and anti-Dogra sentiments<sup>32</sup>. Till 22 September 1947, Maharaia loosed the control over large parts of Poonch. Mirpur and large part of Tehsil Muzaffarabad. Meanwhile, on the call of leaders of MC, the Pakhtoon Tribe persons came to help the Kashmiri Muslims to get rid from Maharaja. The Pakhtoon Mujahideen entered on 22 October 1947 and joined the Azad Army. Till 24 October most part of the hilly areas of J&K was captured by the rebellion forces. On 24 October 1947 provisional government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir was announced in liberated part of J&K state. When rebellions reached in Baramulla and moved towards Srinagar the Maharaja Hari Singh realized the situation, and he requested India government for military assistance. On 27 October 1947 Indian Arm forces landed in Kashmir and occupied the larger part of J&K.

### **Conclusion:**

The political consciousness of the Muslims of J&K was because of religious and socio-economic issues. Dogra Raj after 1846 proved as despotic and oppressive for the Muslims. The Dogra rulers treated the Muslims of Kashmir in ill manners and created the environment of exploitations. Heavy taxes and begar system created sense of slavery and economic backwardness. Such discriminative policies proved helpful to the Kashmiri's to get unite and raise their voices against the Dogra rule. Also, the impacts of modern education on Kashmiri Muslims was deep and widespread, which created the sense of resistance for social, economic and cultural reforms. In fact, the movement of young Kashmiri students provided a sound basis for struggle movement This struggle encouraged by wider mass participation. This process took almost half and decade to shape the new directions. However, differences developed amongst the leadership of Muslims, and these differences threatened the wishes of common man. Sheikh Abdullah's closeness with Indian National Congress and P.N Nehru was one of the significant reasons, which created rift between leadership Muslims which weakened the possibility of unified resistance against Maharaja. The movement started by Muslims in J&K tried to liberate the state from Dogra rule could not achieved its objectives fully. In spite of huge sacrifices, a smaller part of J&K was liberated on 24 October 1947 by the efforts of the leaders of the MC and rest is occupied by India.

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