

## **Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris**

Christopher Snedden, **Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris**, London: Hurst & Company, 2015, xix + 372 pp., £20 (pb).

Reviewed by: Mr. Ahmad AlQadri\*

Christopher Snedden is an Australian Politico-strategic analyst. In the book ‘Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris’, he has given a brief history of Kashmir, rule of different kings and Maharajas, formation of state, partition of Sub-continent, start of Kashmir dispute and factors involved in its long and awaiting resolution. This book has five chapters in all, important antecedents, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), 1846-1947, from Princely state to disputed state, contemporary and divided J&K and resolving the Kashmir dispute.

Author has given an overview that the valley of Kashmir was ruled by Hindu rulers till 15<sup>th</sup> century and then by Muslims till 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sikhs ruled Kashmir valley till 1846 when British overthrew them and got control of J&K State. Jammu’s Dogra rule (After treaty of Amritsar) became ruler of whole state in spite of the fact that area was having larger Muslim population in comparison. That the term ‘Kashmir’ refers to valley of Kashmir but later when British Empire combined different regions (Jammu, Ladakh, Gilgit Agency and Valley of Kashmir) for formation of state, it was called as ‘Jammu and Kashmir’. By looking at history one comes to know about two important things about the Kashmir, first, the strategic importance of this region and decisions about it i.e. ignoring basic party ‘the Kashmiris’. Rulers deliberately ignored Kashmiri people and looked for only strategic position of this land. British decision to form one state and then its sale to Jammu’s Dogra ruler Ghulab Singh were life changing events for Kashmir as the author mentions “British sale of Kashmir to Maharaja Ghulab Singh in 1846 was an immoral and invalid commercial transaction that rendered the people of Kashmir who had not been consulted, ‘into servitude’” (p. 132). Author describes that the Dogra rule (1846-1952) in Kashmir was

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worst era of Kashmir history in which people were treated as slaves and were not given the basic rights. People started revolt against Dogra rule but what they got in response, bullets, arrest, and detention in jails.

Before partition of British India, British Empire and Dogra Maharaja deliberately ignored Kashmiris' wish for future accession. They rather went for accession against the wishes of Kashmir. Even at partition time Hindu Prime Minister of Kashmir stated the fact as author describes "...considered that J&K should join Pakistan because of the state's religious composition and its economic and geo-graphical links with its dominion." (p. 155).

Christopher Snedden has also described that for accession, Maharaja Hari Singh and India never considered three factors, firstly, Poonch Revolt (1931) was a formal start of Kashmir's freedom struggle. Maharaja took this struggle with heavy-handed way. Secondly, Maharaja started killing Kashmiri people who were coming from Northern Areas to help their Muslim subject but India and Maharaja considered them as aggressor from Pakistan in Kashmir state. Author has mentioned that the Kashmir dispute was instigated by India, not by the tribesmen as he writes, "they (Kashmiris) themselves actually instigated the Kashmir dispute in 1947, and not Pakhtoon tribesmen from Pakistan, as India has long claimed and in which claim Pakistan has long, and surprisingly, acquiesced." (P. 3). At that time, Kashmir was not part of India and Kashmiri sought help from tribes as Maharaja went for Indian army. Muslim Killing in Kashmir was on high rate in those days. Thirdly, independence of Azad Jammu & Kashmir from Dogra rule on October 24, 1947. Maharaja finally acceded to India on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 1947; Jammu & Kashmir had already been physically and politically divided as a result of these three actions. Maharaja had lost the authority to make his accession as he had been overthrown. The consequences of which was that his accession was "Null and Void" (p. 169). Maharaja's Illegal accession gave birth to worst Kashmir dispute which is still waiting for peaceful solution.

Author has described the history that after accession, first war broke out between Pakistan and India and India took this issue to UNO where UN called for ceasefire. Later on UN passed many resolutions for

Kashmir dispute but India rejected them later and continued her illegal occupation on Kashmir which is still continuing. Having no involvement of Kashmiri people in resolution process pushed the issue to close tunnel. As delay in plebiscite, due to many factors like multiple options to solve this issue, trust-deficit, lack of confidence and excuse of terrorism, Indian stubbornness made the solution to Kashmir dispute impossible.

Conflict of interest is going on Kashmir dispute from 1846 up till now where Kashmiris are slaves. It is a 'zero-sum' game in which neither Pakistan nor Indian will obtain anything without plebiscite. Author has suggested that there should be confidence building measures and representation of Kashmiri people on resolutions process for plebiscite so that people can decide their future as he has written, "J&K-ites are actually first party to the dispute because they instigated the fight over J&K's status in 1947 before the Maharaja's accession to India in 1947" (P. 281).

The book makes an interesting reading, giving deep insight into Kashmir, people of Kashmir and the dispute of Kashmir. The writer has effectively presented facts of the issue and also accurately depicted wishes of Kashmiri people. Christopher Snedden rightly emphasizes that involvement of Kashmiri people and allowing them to decide about their future (p. 283) is the best option for solution of Kashmir issue.