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Topic: Social Dynamics of the Institution of Waqf in Kashmir: A Sociological Study

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Abstract (Thesis)

This study brings an introduction to the concept of waqf and explores the institution of waqf in the valley of Kashmir. Waqfs (pl. Auqaf) are Islamic endowments which can be movable or immovable property by Muslims for the welfare of the poor and the upkeep of the mosques, shrines, imambaras, madrassas, orphanages, etc.. The study was undertaken to venture into the sociology of these endowments and see the dynamics and role of waqf institution in the welfare of masses especially the deserving populace. The main objective was to highlight and explore the institution of waqf in Kashmir with a special reference to the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Wakf Board for specified wakfs and specified wakf properties (JKMWB). The Board is a significant religio-social organization for it possesses the largest assets after the State government and has an immense potential and ownership in terms of huge properties besides having rich and perpetual cash and kind donations, gold, silver and other commodities.

Therefore this study besides exploring the waqf institution, sociologically probed into the social, religious and philanthropic interventions of the Wakf Board besides studying the waqf of education (both religious and general). Also a passing reference on personalized Auqaf, local waqf committees particularly shia Auqaf was also made. As far methodology employed, the study was purely a qualitative study using various sociological perspectives like functionalism, grounded theory besides a range other concepts to see the total role of waqf that it has been playing for the people's welfare in the valley of Kashmir since its establishment in 1940's. Besides micro-perspectives helped to gain insight into the people's take on waqf scenario and their perception of empowerment through waqf was also studied through different methods and tools like observation, case studies, in-depth interviews, casual interactions, etc, be that in the area of waqf run education, waqf welfare, philanthropy, religious waqfs, etc.. The overall discussion revealed the social dynamics of waqf institution in Kashmir valley is increasing its social interventions and making difference in the lives of many deserving Muslims within its capacities.

Some of the findings of the study are as under:

- The Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Wakf Board for Specified Wakfs and Specified Wakf Properties still remains a specified waqf body quite like a private waqf institution and does not operate beyond Kashmir valley having all its social interventions limited to the valley exclusively despite having the name tag of 'Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Wakf Board'. The Board administers about 91 shrines and mosques besides running a chain of schools, a nursing college, aiding a university, 5 seminaries and a chain of makhtabs and a small charity section as well.

- The utilization of the waqf fund or donation amount (*Nazr*) is still not a transparent exercise as believed by the masses. People hardly trust the waqf administration and criticize auqaf for their limited social intervention amid the prevailing conflict situation when it was most needed.
- Waqf administration in Kashmir has still not ensured that waqfs administered are properly maintained and managed in accordance with the provisions of the State Waqf Act (2004) and in accordance with the objectives of the Islamic Auqaf.
- Despite being an organization worth thousands of crores, there is not a single waqf library, publication, waqf bank, waqf shares mechanism, waqf real estate like developments or even any workable ideas put forth by the board to address poverty, youth unemployment, moral waywardness, scholarships, madrassa overhaul, etc.,
- The education and pedagogical aspects of the Islamic seminaries (*Darul-Ulooms*) and Darsghahs are not satisfactory and need to be revisited seriously though waqf schools are at par with private schools.
- Among religious, educational and philanthropic objectives of Auqaf, JKMWB has been stressing upon the religious Auqaf and spends much of its income on religious Auqaf like mosques, shrines and the respective rituals. If religious objective is kept aside, Auqaf in Kashmir displays a poor show in terms of its social and welfare intervention.
- Shia Auqaf continue to be the fiefdom of a few influential families without any noteworthy contribution except a few educational institutions like some darsghahs and a few schools. State should consider the betterment of shia and other localized Auqaf.
- This study suggests the creation of the Islamic Religious Council of Jammu & Kashmir along with Waqf engineering, waqf banking, more commercial buildings and construction of Islamic heritage centers as a future strategy for waqf organization. Moreover, a substantial proportion of the waqf income should go to education of the poor and to the uplift of the weaker sections of the Muslim society.
- Asset creation is poor and the already potential assets despite being huge in number (1400 shops, 2 hotels, etc) yield a poor income (about 2.4 crore per annum) owing to the traditional rent structure.

This research is perhaps the first of its kind for it is sociological and academic work that covers the social intervention of the waqf institution in Kashmir valley and explores different waqf institutions with the help of in-depth interviews, case studies, focus group discussions, casual interactions, etc.,. Therefore the study will be beneficial to whole of the Muslim community, waqf administrators especially waqf administration in Kashmir valley to streamline auqaf as a socio-religious institution. Moreover, the study is a contribution to the sociology of endowments and sociology of religion as it highlights the very concept of auqaf and studies it in relation to people and their welfare. This study will further inspire the researchers to work out the theoretical and practical aspects of auqaf to realize waqf development and Muslim welfare in future. This research though a humble beginning in the sociology of Muslim endowments in Kashmir will inspire other researchers to conduct researches on other untouched aspects of auqaf like Islamic finance , waqf banking, waqf real estate, cash waqfs and shrine management, etc.,. The study will also contribute in policy and planning of waqf for the poor and will further motivate people to explore the least or never studied auqaf in Kashmir.