

Political Activities in Jammu and Kashmir (1846-1946)

Najma Zahoor

PhD Scholar, Department of Kashmiryat (Social Sciences), Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Many political reform movements were launched in the last decade of the 19th century in Kashmir. These reform movements, in turn, gave rise to the desire for the achievement of a democratic political system in place of autocracy. The early socio-religious reform movements among the Hindus and the Muslims made an effective impact on the politics of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. These movements brought about socio-political awakening among the people. Political awakening leads to the awareness among the masses about their rights and the nature of relationship that exist between them. In a scenario where the relationship is oppressive and discriminatory, political awakening leads to movements for change of the structure. In this paper I will try to find out the factors responsible for the emergence of political consciousness in Kashmir during the period under study.

KEYWORDS: Kashmir, Dogra period, Political Movements, activities, awaking

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir has seen exploitation and oppression of worst kind under Dogra period. The Dogra rule followed the discriminatory policies against their Muslim subjects. These discriminations were clearly reflected in the fields of State services, social spheres, education, justice, etc. The start of socio-economic organization helped to develop a collective thinking within the Kashmiri community. We can say there were many factors and causes, which generated political awakening among the people of the state during the Dogra rule. Beggar system (forced labour) was common in those days, heavy taxation was imposed on them and their land was also snatched by Dogras. Muslims were also backward in education field; they have no proper education and have no political rights. All their political activities were banned, so all the institutions were shut down for the Muslims due to lack of education. Muslims were faced lot of problem in religious activities and cannot perform their religious duties freely. Due to these causes Muslims started to organize themselves against this cruel rule. In Dogra period, the people of Kashmir Politically were deprived of all basic rights and civil liberties. There existed no public opinion in the State. The right of freedom of speech were made unlawful.

Political Movements in Kashmir

The political movement in Jammu & Kashmir state were an expression of a deep detests again the Dogra rule. The people had no sense of belonging to each other. Even they deprived of the basic right of humanity. They were subjected to various form of oppression, but as things became more and more unbearable the people could no longer be repressed. They fought number of times for their rights through constitutional and peaceful methods. But every time they

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were forcefully kept down. They had been purchased and so they had lost their right to free life. The Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir were subjected to the rule of injustice and oppression during the Dogra period in the State. The Muslims of Kashmir were discriminated against in every sphere of life like, social, economic, political and religious. To protect themselves the people of Kashmir started political activities against the Dogra rule, although ban was imposed on political activities at that time.

The Anjuman- Kashmiri- Musleman Lahore was established in 1896 by the some prominent people in Lahore. The purpose of this organization was to create unity among the Muslims. It was a reformatory organization. It had no political agenda. Myan Kiram Beaksh was the first president and Allama Iqbal was first secretary of this organization. Iqbal was student at that time. This organization worked for the migrated people.

The aims of this organization were, Betterment of migrated people, Unity and communion among them, Prosperity and rehabilitation, agriculture Industries and trade.

In 1908 Anjuman Kashmiri Mussalmanane Lahore” was reshaped as “All India Kashmir Committee. Allama Iqbal was nominated its first general secretary. On July 25, 1931, this organization was re-set by prominent Muslim leaders like, Sir Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal, Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan, Khwaja Hassan Nizami, Mirza Bashir-u-Din, Moulvi Abdul Rahim Dard, Sayed Mohsin Shah, Muhammad Ismail, S.Habib Shah etc. Allama Muhmmad Iqbal and other leaders were called by Mirza Bashir-u-Din to form the committee. From the very beginning of Dogra rule in 1840 Maharajah Gulab

Singh enforced a body of the harshest rules upon the people of Kashmir. Even grass, growing trees, on which the people were used to pasture their cattle, was subjected to a heavy tax. The situation became critical on 13 July 1931, then the Maharajah resorted to harsh force and seventy two Kashmir's were killed and hundreds were wounded. Mirza Basheer-u-Din, the Head of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was aware of the situation. He invited on July 25, 1931 and he stressed upon them that something should be done to the helpless Kashmiri that there are people in India who are aware of their lot. The committee was met with severe criticism by Indian National Congress and nationalist Hindu press. The committee was termed as an organized rebellion against the Maharaja of Kashmir. An organized campaign of political awareness was run by the Committee which resulted in creation of a Muslim political revival in the Jammu and Kashmir state. Party's offices were established in various towns and cities of Kashmir. Political workers were activated to raise the awareness among the Muslim populations in Kashmir. After a year of its creation, Basheer-u-Din Ahmad, urged the Committee to elect a new President but Dr Iqbal with the support of the Kashmir Committee urged him to carry it on same lines.

During this period, an orthodox Islamic religious party under the name of Ahrars came into being, funded by Indian Congress party. It started agitation against Mirza Basheer-u-Din, as he was the leader of a sect of Islam at odds with the Ahrar ideology. He resigned from Presidency of the Kashmir Committee as a number of members in the Committee had their own doubts after the agitations. Dr. Iqbal was elected the President after, but on 20 June 1932, he also resigned from the Presidency of the All India Kashmir Committee. Due to internal dissent among different leaders of the committee and external influence of Ahrar, the All-India Kashmir committee ceased to exist within a few years of its conception.

The main significance of the All-India Muslim Kashmir Committee laid at in its encouragement of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir to mobilize the Muslims politically. It was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the Muslim Conference.

The following were its aims and objectives: To bring pressure upon the Government of India to help the Kashmiri for their rights, acquaint the rule with the real affairs of his State, ask the Viceroy and the foreign department of India for the appointment of an independent Commission of inquiry in Kashmir affairs, seek a new interpretation to the Treaty of Amritsar which had deprived the Kashmiris of their proprietary rights in the state and make the Kashmir affairs known to the entire civilized world by writing books on Kashmir in this respect.

The people of Poonch were impressed by the Reading Room Party and Young Man's Association which were establishing by the Shaik Muhammad Abdullah and Ch. Gulam Abbas. Peer Hassamu Din, Sayed Amir Ali Shah, Sayed Badhar Ali Shah and Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan were also established an association Anjuman-i-Isalmia Pooch. This Anjuman established a Primary school and many reforms programs Launched. The aim of this Anjuman was to educate the people of Ponch. The prominent people of this Anjuman were, Khwaja Habib, Khwaja Abdallah, khan

Muhammad Khan, Atta Muhammad Khan, Sardar Muhammad Ayuab Khan, Ahmed Shah, Rehamat Shah, Sardar Muhammad Sheer Khan Sardra Sakandar Khan, and Hussan Shaha etc. This organization was non-political organization, but on the occasion of the annual session number of people gathered and discussed about the national affairs.

Young Menes Muslim's association was founded in 1909 for the religious purpose. It was organized by Ch. Gulam Abas and his fellows. They provided opportunity to young Muslims to raise their voice against injustice and also try to judge their rights. The purpose of these organizations was politics.

Young Menes has many Aims and objectives like, Control on bed customs, Advice and recitation, Call for Namaz and fast, Develop the interest in education among Muslims, Progress and advisement for Urdu, Construct Janaza-Gah and Sabil-Gah, Help the poor students in their education career. Ch. Gulam Abas reorganized the socio-political organization Young Men's Muslim Association, which was established earlier in 1909 and was the only platform that Muslims were using to raise their political voice in Jammu and Kashmir. This organization conducted some massive demonstrations against the Dogra rule and its activities won admiration among the Muslim masses. This organization was established to spread education among the Muslims and to define Islam against attacks by men professing other religious.

In 1930, there was already unrest in Kashmiri Muslims against the Dogra Rule. In 1920 dissatisfaction with Dogra rule had been articulated among the Muslims by the group of Aligarh students. They had started to get organized under the name of "Reading Room Party" in the house of Mufti Zia-ul-Din at Fateh Kadal where they would exchange their views on discriminatory policies of Government and the troubles of Kashmiri Muslims. The Reading Room Movement take up the cause of the educationally and economically backward Muslim Community. The stage was therefore all set for these educated but unemployed young men to play their part and act as lights to the hapless Kashmiri nation. Khwaja Ghulam Ahmad Ashai along with Maulvi Abdullah Vakil, Khwaja Saddudiin Shawl and Maulvi Ateequllah opened a Reading Room. Actually, the reading room was a place to read newspapers, magazines and books but in fact, it acted as a rendezvous where these educated men held deliberations upon the contemporary socio-political and economic issues confronting the Kashmiri Muslims.

The "Reading Room" also managed to obtain statistics regarding the Muslims in government service and got them published in the newspapers of Lahore. The "Reading Room" played a very pivotal role in Kashmir's struggle for freedom. It not only educated the masses about their political rights but activated and brought them into active politics and political action. The Reading Room Party soon grew in size and became popular. In its first election Sheikh was elected as its Secretary. He decided to present a memorandum to Maharaja Hari Singh inviting his attention to the troubles of Kashmiri Muslims. The outwardly purpose of this party was reading newspapers and study of different books but the real intention was to unite the Muslims.

In 1928 Anjuman was established by the various groups of people of Bagh (Poonch) for the betterment of the people of Poonch. The members of this Anajuman were Peer Hasamudin, Sayed Ameer Ali Shah, Syed Badhar Shah and Charag Hussain Hasrat etc. This Anajuman established Islamia high school Poonch and later organized many reforms program. This Anajuman tried to awake the awareness and promote the education. After the incident of 13 July 1931, this Anjuman became political organization.

The All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was founded as a political party in August 1932 in Srinagar. Prominent amongst the participants were Sardar Gohar Rehman, Chaudhry Ghulam Abbass, Syed Muhammad Habib Ullha Shah Zia, Khwaja Ghulam Ahmad Ashai, Shaikh Yaqoob Ali Mistry, Sardar Fateh Muhammed Khan Karelavi, Sheikh Ghulam Qadir, and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. Sardar Gohar Rehman favoured the formation of a Provincial Muslim Conference in Jammu, but he was succeeded upon by the others to accept an All Jammu and Kashmir M.C. In the aftermath of the gathering in the last week of August 1932, at Pathar Masjid (Stone Mosque) of Srinagar, thousands of people have attended the procession. This figure was roughly about sixty thousands.

The leaders of M.C Khawaja Ghulam and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah highlighted the purposes of the establishment of the M.C during the course of the session; ten propositions were presented and accepted by the committee's members. The constitution of the M.C was largely accepted and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was elected as the President, Sheikh Abdul Majeed (Advocate) as Vice President, and Chaudhry Ghulam Abbass as General Secretary. In concluding address, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah stressed the need for unity and goodwill. Formation of the M.C was the much popular desire of the Muslims of Kashmir, which was accomplished after a great struggle and many sacrifice of the Muslims of the state. The aim of M.C was to promote the interests of the Muslim population that too largely in the Kashmir valley. The organization was intended to be communal. Organization of Muslim of Jammu, unity of Muslims and provided protection of them and protection of the political rights of Kashmiri Muslims are the main objective of Muslims conference. A section of the M.C leadership based mainly in Jammu, had strong reservations about the move to secularize the Kashmiri politics. In this view, the reorganization the M.C would divide the Muslim. In any cause Hindus would not cooperate because their interest were tied up with the Dogra government. Ch. Ghulam Abbas openly declaring that Hindus and Muslim were two nations and Islam did not admit their integration into a social and political unity. Therefore the M.C developed two competing groups. One led by Sheikh Abdullah and other by the Mirwaiz-i-Kashmir.

The aim and objective of this party were, to organza the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir, Maintenance and strengthening of the unity among them, to protect the rights of Muslims, Struggle for moral, educational, cultural economic reformation and progress of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir.

In October 1932, Sheikh Abdullah founded the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. On 11 June 1939 the M.C staunchly advocated nationalist and secularism. It was renamed as the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference.

The N.C was affiliated to the All India states people conference. In presidential address of N.C Sheikh Abdullah categorically stated that the M.C had come into existence to struggle for the rights of all oppressed sections of the society and not Muslims alone. It was not a communal party and would struggle for the rights of the oppressed, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, with the same favour. He reasserted that the struggle of Kashmir's was not a communal struggle.

In March 1933 the M.C established a committee which comprised Molvi Abdullah and nine other members. The purpose of this committee was to contact with non-Muslim parties and exploring the possibility of forming a joint organisation. Those nine members were Khwaja Saad-ud-din Shawl, Khwaja Hassan Shah Naqshbandi, Mirwaiz Kashmir, Molvi Ahmad-Ullah, Mirwaiz Hamadani, Agha Syed Hussain Shah Jalali, Mufti Sharif-ud-din, Molvi Atiq-Ullah and Haji Jafar Khan. According to Sheikh Abdullah this effort was not successful because of the unfavourable reception of the idea by the non-Muslim parties. Sheikh Abdullah kept up the moment of his political activities. Gradually he realised the need to carry with him the non-Muslims to achieve his aim. In 1938 the working committee of the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference was held. Sheikh Abdulla moved a resolution proposing a change in the name of the party Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and amendment of its constitution to admit the non-Muslim also into the party. He campaigned to change the name of the M.C to N.C, under the influence of among others Jawaharlal Nehru. After a protracted and vital campaign a special session of the M.C held in June 1939 voted to change the name of the party to N.C. of the 176 members attending the session, 172 members voted in favour of the resolution the M.C got its new name as N.C. Sheikh Abdullah thought the support of Ch.Ghulam Abbas of Jammu was very important in motivating the members to vote for this change. He introduced a resolution in the working committee of the M.C for changing its name to N.C on 24 June 1938 to allow people from all communities to join the struggle against the autocratic rule of the Maharaja. But when Sheikh Abdullah developed his association with Nehru and the Congress, Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas withdrew from the N.C. The struggle between the Congress and the Muslim League over the partition of India had its repercussions in Kashmir and the idea of Pakistan gained ground, the N.C lost its popularity. Consequently, the M.C was revived under the leadership of Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas. During the early month of 1941, influential Muslim leaders in the state sought to revive the M.C. As a result the revival of M.C was announced in 1941.

The transformation of the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference into the National Conference was not well-received by the Muslim community. The N.C had not been able to attract any sizable non-Muslims support. There is no doubt that about sixty Hindus and Sikhs were arrested in 1938. It seems that most of them did so with the deliberate aim of creating a more favourable and friendly atmosphere for putting an end to the extremely popular as well as powerful Muslim platform. A group of half a dozen top Hindu and Sikh leaders whose communities were completely opposed to the party and continued to remain embraced with their own rabidly communal organisations. Muslims naturally could not fail to take due notice of this important fact and therefore voices began to be raised and question began to be put to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. His

colleagues asked to what purpose had been served by destroying the powerful Muslim platform that had so successfully championed their cause and brought them considerable relief. The National Conference leadership had no answer. Sheikh Abdullah argued, the movement could not be put on national lines, because some sad happenings took place in the beginning of the Movement which gave rise to certain misunderstanding between the Muslims. In 1941 Ch. Ghulam Abbas who had resigned from the N.C in despair, ultimately decided to guide and reorganize the M.C. Ch. Ghulam said that he had come to the conclusion that the only way out for the Muslims of the state as to revive the M.C. The re-emergence of the M.C was a main contribution of the Ch. Ghulam Abbas and his companions. Azad Muslim Conference was established under the leadership of Mir Wisz when the conflict was started between Sheikh Abdullah and Mirwisz.

In 1944, Maharaja seeking to broaden the base of his popular support appointed Mirza Afzal Beg, the deputy leader of the National Conference and Wazir Ganga Ram as the ministers in his government. It was, however, to be a short-lived experiment. Beg resigned and Sheikh Abdullah launched the "Quit Kashmir" movement with an objective of ending the Dogra rule. This timely political move won the approval of Hindus Muslims alike. Feeling confident, the Sheikh and his political organization demanded that the Treaty of Amritsar be revoked and monarchical rule ousted. The Maharaja responded by arresting Sheikh Abdullah which in turn generated public protest. The response again came in the form of repression and killings. Naya Kashmir (New Kashmir) is the name given to the memorandum that Sheikh Abdullah submitted to Maharaja Hari Singh the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir State. It was the outline of a plan to convert the Jammu and Kashmir state from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy with the Maharajah remaining as the Head of the State as the Monarch is in Britain. A detailed economic plan for the development of Jammu and Kashmir State was a part of this memorandum. It was subsequently adopted by the National Conference as its manifesto. The "Naya Kashmir" plan proved to be immensely popular in Kashmir as it was the blueprint for a welfare state far in advance of its times.

Conclusion

The basic cause of the people's unrest through the world has been socio, economic and political. The reform movements in Jammu and Kashmir also followed on those very lines and was the outcome of economic exploitation, social and political domination of an autocratic rule. The Dogra rulers who ruled over Jammu and Kashmir for more than one hundred years had failed to generate among the millions of their subjects any sense of identity of interest with ruling class. Social religious reform movements were connected with economic and political objectives and were interdependent. They gathered both social consciousness and political awakening which played an important role in the history of the people of state. Reform movements in Kashmir which have faced many challenges in achieving their objectives that they have set, yet their contribution remained comparatively greater. These movements in state represented the emerging support to change the prevailing social and religious frame in the preparation for a political change. The role of these movements is taken in positive sense as it led to the awareness of common Kashmir. All these Movements lunched by the people of Jammu and

Kashmir State, initially to find redress of their grumble, led to the inevitable goal. The entire people of the state seeking reorganization of the social, economic and political organization and institutions raised by the Dogras.

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