

Praja Parishad Movement and the Student's Agitation in Jammu (1952): A Study

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ABSTRACT

The present paper throws light on the popular agitation launched by the students of Jammu in 1952 and the role of the leaders of Praja Parishad in this agitation. This paper shows how the situation became worse when on January 1952, some students of G.G.M College in Jammu demonstrated against the hoisting of the National Conference flag alongside the Indian Union flag. Therefore, the state administration came down heavily upon the student's agitation. Though none of the Praja Parishad leaders were actively involved in the disturbances but Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's administration arrested many of its leaders including its President Pundit Prem Nath Dogra. However, the state authorities released the Praja Parishad leaders with the intervention of Central Minister, Gopalaswamy Ayyanger and on the advice of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru the then Prime Minister of India.

KEYWORDS: student's agitation, national flag, state flag, praja parishad, national conference

INTRODUCTION:

Three years had been completed since the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir joined India. The process of unification of other princely states in India was almost complete. But in Jammu and Kashmir this process was not only slow but stopped. The process of implementing the Indian Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir was decided through Article 370. The main objective of this section was that in order to implement the provisions of the federal Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir in future, the constitution does not have to be amended again and again, so this power was given to the President. Through Article 370, he was authorized to amend it while implementing various provisions of the Federal Constitution in the matter of Jammu and Kashmir. The power to abolish Article 370 was also given to the President with some provisions. However, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was not ready to implement the provisions of the Indian Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, he became interested in disrupting the process of integration. His demand was a separate Constitution and separate Flag for the state. The constitutional head should also be elected by the state legislative assembly, instead by the President. It was evident that Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah had followed the path suggested by the external powers to impose a new type of dictatorship in the state. In 1952, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, walking on this path, confronted the people of the state at every turn. Surprisingly, the people of the state were not only fighting for their democratic rights in independent India, but also had to make sacrifices. The year 1952 witnessed this struggle.

On January 15, 1952, the State Government's Education Department organized a physical demonstration of students at the Government Gandhi Memorial Science College, Jammu. In this, students of schools and college also had to demonstrate their physical abilities. There was a discussion in the college that the National Conference flag would be hoisted in the program and Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah was the chief guest of the festival. Initially the national flag of India was hoisted, followed by the flag of the National Conference, headed by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah himself. The state flag had not yet been fixed, so officially the state's prevailing flag was still valid. The college program was also official. Therefore, there was no justification for hoisting the flag of any political party in a government program. The biggest thing was that now students were to salute this flag while marching past. "Some students and others protested this; the police forcefully expelled them from there. After some time they again reached there and starts shouting anti-government conference slogans. Due to this chaos, the police arrested 6 students including Yash Bhasin, General Secretary of the Student National Association and took them from there by putting them in the police van¹ but all the students were released the same night". The Student National Association raised two questions about this whole scandal. According to the general secretary of the organization, "The state has its own red saffron colored flag for a long time. Now Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah wants not only a separate flag for the state but also that his party's flag should be the state flag." I am bound to answer two questions. Should the

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state of Jammu and Kashmir have a separate flag? Can the government force college students to hoist the flag of any political party?"²

Due to the dogma of the government, this protest of the students gradually started to take the form of a mass movement in the entire Jammu region. If the government had regretted the incident of hoisting the National Conference flag in colleges and would have been hesitant to take retaliatory action on the students, this incident would not have changed in the mass movement. Several incidents of protests took place in the city on 6 February. The District Magistrate of Jammu also urged the leaders of the Praja Parishad to assist in resolving the quarrel. On his request, the leaders of Praja Parishad had come to a compromise between the college administration and the students. On 6 February, the quarrel would have been resolved, "but the state's Deputy Prime Minister, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, could not make it to the end. He wanted the students to surrender completely."³ On the other hand, the number of students performing was increasing and they started getting public support. The group of protesting students proceeded towards the Secretariat shouting slogans and "Police lathi-charged five times and fired three times to stop the protesters on the way"⁴. However, they reached the secretariat. The demonstrations went to the Secretariat where they became violent, broke a wall, entered the offices, burnt furniture and records. At a number of places the police restored to firing.⁵ But instead of meeting the representatives of the protestors and instead of listening to them, the doors of the secretariat were closed. The situation deteriorated further and the army was called out to quell the disturbances.⁶ Therefore, the state government imposed a curfew in the city for seventy two hours during which period no one could move from his house.⁷ The government started efforts to surround the Praja Parishad under the guise of the student movement by not adopting the way to interact with the students. Though none of the leaders of the Praja Parishad were actively involved in the disturbances, the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's administration moved quickly to arrest many of them, including their President Pundit Prem Nath Dogra.⁸ According to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, Deputy Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, "Praja Parishad is behind this movement. Praja Parishad is challenging the government's power, sabotaging and trying to create confusion among the people. Government will defeat this movement in any condition"⁹.

Under the guise of the student movement, the National Conference Government started the work of suppressing, intimidating and threatening the Praja Parishad. The Praja Parishad denied the government allegations of its involvement in the movement. According to the Praja Parishad spokesperson, "Praja Parishad has no faith in any kind of destructive action. It is working for peace and goodwill atmosphere in the state. Since Praja Parishad takes the pro-India side, the state government making the Praja Parishad scapegoat for her political self-interest. Praja Parishad demands a fair inquiry into the entire incident"¹⁰. Vishnugupta Deshpande, All India Organization Minister of the Hindu Mahasabha and Captain Keshav Chandra, President of Punjab, came to Jammu to study the situation. After meeting several people "they demanded the government to immediately release the people of Praja Parishad. They asked how the college officials can force anyone to salute the flag of the National Conference."¹¹ The

Praja Parishad decided to send a delegation to Delhi for government repression and its dealings with the people of Jammu, so that the Government of India can be made aware of the right situation. Members of Praja Parishad reached Delhi for this. In the official release, "The arrested students were described as members of Praja Parishad; while those students said that they have nothing to do with politics. They said that we have demanded that the students who were expelled from the college in the 15 January case, their expulsion canceled and the economic penalty waived". The government probably wanted to abolish the Praja Parishad on the pretext of the student movement. Timeless police raids were conducted at the houses of members of Praja Parishad. "Police even raid the party's central office"¹².

In this dispute that has been going on for almost one and a half months, the government made clear for the first time the real issue of the quarrel about raising the flag of National Conference in government programs. On March 1, State Revenue Minister Mirza Afzal Bag made it clear, "As long as there is a National Conference government in the state, then the flag of the plough will be hoisted in the state. If people join the National Conference then it is fine but if not, then they can have their own views. But no one will be allowed to disturb the peace of the state. If he wants, he can go to Pakistan"¹³. About 4 days later, the same statement was repeated by the state Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah in Delhi. Whatever stand Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah had with his flag, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the government to bear the heat of the student movement in Jammu. The government withdrew the fine imposed on the students on March 9, 1952 and also canceled the expulsion of the students from the college. This was believed to be the first victory of the students of Jammu against the government. By releasing the students and accepting their demands, the government could now directly attack the Praja Parishad. Praja Parishad workers were not released yet. The workers of Praja Parishad started underground due to the government's intention. Praja Parishad general secretary Durgadas Verma and Vice-president Dhanvantar Singh were expelled from the state indefinitely under Jammu and Kashmir security rules. Arrest warrants were issued against many other underground workers of Praja Parishad under Security Rule 24¹⁴. On 20 March, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah came to Jammu and expressed his opinion about the Praja Parishad. According to him, "We are compelled to keep the President of Praja Parishad in jail along with his colleagues. We gave many opportunities to improve Praja Parishad. We also told them that they are not harming Kashmir only by their activities, but also they are harming the India with whom they want to meet. We heard the abuses of the Praja Parishad, endured insults, only in the hope that they would at last realize the reality. Until now, the leaders of the Praja Parishad do not believe that they will use the legal and constitutional methods from now on, till then they will be kept in jail"¹⁵. The distressing reports about the Jammu disturbances, the attack on the Secretariat, the calling out of the troops, the arrest of the Dogra leaders and above all imposing of the curfew for seventy two hours perturbed and annoyed the Indian Press.¹⁶ Therefore, on April 4, 1952, the Minister of princely ministry Gopal Swami Ayengar reached Jammu. He pressured the state government to immediately release the people of Praja Parishad, so on April 6, Praja Parishad president Premnath Dogra and other associates were

released from the prison. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah himself gave this information in a banquet given by the citizens of Jammu in honor of Gopal Swami Ayengar¹⁷. Throughout this time, the government resorted to notorious and anti-people laws to arrest and prosecutes the leaders of Praja Parishad. Arrests were made under the Indian Safety Rules and Public Safety Rules. Under these rules, the so-called criminal does not get the benefit of ordinary judicial process.

Conclusion

But the main question is why did the government give so much ground to this dispute with students? Initially, if the government ends the expulsion of the students and withdraws the penalty imposed on them, then the matter does not increase much. But the government made the whole issue a question of prestige and started challenging it for Jammu in a way. It is so clear that the government wanted to end the Praja Parishad in the state by shaping this student movement and wanted to instill fear in the minds of ordinary workers of Praja Parishad on the strength of power. Just as Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was popular in the Kashmir Valley, the same situation was created in Praja Parishad President Pandit Premnath Dogra that Jammu division. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah knew that, as the strength of the Praja Parishad would increase in the state, in the same proportion the bargaining power from the National Conference of Delhi would decrease. He was also trying to establish National Conference branches in Jammu division. They were attacking the Praja Parishad under the guise of the student movement. Therefore, instead of ending the student movement, the government's strategy was to provoke it so that it could be dealt with by the Praja Parishad under its pretext.

Notes and References:

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- [11] Ibid., 07/04/1952.
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- [13] Ibid., 02/03/1952.
- [14] Ibid., 21/02/1952.
- [15] Ibid., 21/03/1952.
- [16] Bazaz, P. N., op. cit.
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