



Political Identity in the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir: Rise and Emergence

Dr.Sameer Ahmad Bhat

PhD History

Abstract:

In Princely State of Kashmir, Political movements started during the early half of 20th century. Nationalism was not a determining aspect of politics till the till 1930's in the politics of Kashmir. A fundamental change took place in valley after the rise of massive nationalist movement in 1931 and the movement was against the Dogra rule as Mohammad Ishaq Khan describes that 13th July 1931 was a historic day in the annals of Kashmir. The “dumb- driven cattle” raised the standard of revolt. This was really the turning point in the modern history of Jammu and Kashmir as this was the first mass based revolt against Dogra rule. Later it was given a firm support by the first political organisation namely Muslim Conference in 1932, of the said princely state. After the secularisation of the said political organisation in 1939, it came under the influence of communist ideology and communist leadership from Punjab actively monitored the political movements in Kashmir and national conference acquired as a stance of the political ethos of Kashmir. Besides this Ahamdiyas and Ahrars from neighbouring state also started to intervene in Kashmir affairs. So, the main aim of the paper is to study the rise of nationalism as well as political identity in Jammu and Kashmir princely state.

Keywords: Jamamu and Kashmir, Muslim conference, National Conference, Nationalism, Political Identity, princely State.

Formation of political Identity:

Beginning in the nineteenth century, nationalism became the predominant ideological vehicle to counter colonial dominance in India. Same was in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir whose rulers were working under tutelage of the British Empire as the founder of the dynasty was the vassal of the British Empire. Most of the historians have termed it as the inauguration of the movement against the autocratic rule as the people openly challenged Maharaja and his Government. According to Rekha Chowadry the

movement defined Kashmiri political identity. During 1931 many people died due to police firing during the protest related to the hearing of Abdul Qadeer¹ in Srinagar Central Jail.² According to the available literature at least 22 Muslims and about three Hindus were killed and some shops were also looted.³ Kashmiris till date trace their political consciousness to the incident of 13th July 1931. Zutshi calls it the political alienation of Kashmiris from the Maharaja Government. The Muslim conference acted as the sole representative of the Muslim community to reflect their demands for the development of education and the representation of Muslims in the administration and politics of the state. The Kashmiri Muslims in Punjab supported the Muslims of Kashmir through an organization called all India Kashmir Muslim Conference, based in Lahore. The organization provided financial help to poor and needy students of Kashmir to get trained in various educational and technical institutions abroad. The political mobilization of Kashmiris has been seen with reference to the Muslim Politics of the Indian Subcontinent. Punjab based Ahamdiyas and Ahrars also sought to intervene in the politics of the state.⁴

After the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference in 1939 in order to introduce the concept of secularism in it, some of the members of the Muslim conference were not agreed with National Conference and later they formed Azad Muslim Conference. So, during the annual session of Muslim Conference in 1944 and Jinnah's visit to Srinagar he declared that:

*"Ninety-nine percent of the Muslim who met me was of the opinion that the Muslim Conference alone was the representative organization of the state Muslims."*⁵

National conference demanded government jobs for Muslims and Kashmir moment under its momentum. The secular shift of Muslim conference urged the people of Kashmir and especially an appeal was made to the Hindu community as well in order to join the movement against Dogra rule. A political discourse related to economy and the issues related to peasantry, artisans and workers were also discussed. Much before the fragmentation of Muslim politics of the state on regional lines in 1940, regional factor was quite significant in Kashmiri identity politics. The relationship of Kashmiri nationalism with the Indian nationalism therefore was quite complex. On one hand there was a sense of communality of ideological framework and political goals and on the other hand there was a strong sense of specificity of Kashmir and the need to maintain its political identity and autonomy.

There was close association of Kashmiri leaders with the leaders of Indian national congress. The ideological position of congress resonated quite well with the twin goals that the Kashmiri movement had laid before itself- those of abolition of monarchy and dismantling the feudal structure. Congress had clearly committed itself both to economic changes especially in the agrarian sector as well as to the rights of the people to govern themselves. So, a movement against the rulers started in princely states. It linked the Kashmiri leadership with the leadership of mainland India. The leadership played an important role also when the national movement in Kashmir was heading towards the parallel movement of Quit Kashmir movement in 1946. The main emphasis was related to the autonomy. It was a parallel movement with Indian

national movement which looked for the concept of Kashmiri self. A nostalgic interpretation of the notion of *Kashmiriyat* developed successfully in the Kashmir in the 1940's.⁶

According to the available sources the conditions of the people were quite deplorable. They suffered of an abject poverty. Agriculture was the mainstay of the people but whole land was considered to be the property of a ruler. Kashmiris worked as serfs in the fields of absentee landlords. They were heavily indebted and it compelled them to leave Kashmir and worked as labourers in Punjab. The same conditions were with the artisans and they were working under the oppressive conditions of taxation. G. M. D. Sufi opines that Dogra rule was as foreign to Kashmir as the British rule to India.⁷

The period between 1940s and 1950s as a period of political mobilization and the understanding of national identity by enabling the expression of the notion of *Kashmiriyat* by the National Conference. Kashmir identity is not only highly politicized but also loaded with past memories, alienation, mourning, and also the emancipatory political movements of the 1940's. Kashmiri identity has to face many hardships since moghal annexation of Kashmir in 1685 when Mughals Emperor Akbar imposed direct Mughal rule over Kashmir and in 1846 when Kashmir was sold to Maharaja Gulab for Seventy five lakh Nanak Shahi according to The Treaty of Amritsar' on 16th March 1846,⁸ integration of Indian states and after the Independence of India. The treaty further increased the marginalization of Kashmiri people.⁹ The author is of the opinion that the socio economic and political conditions created since 1586 and the victimization of Kashmiris first by the Mughals, followed by Afghans, then Sikhs and finally Dogras led to the political upsurge of 1931. Mostly peasantry and artisans suffered a lot.¹⁰ The establishment of Dogra rule in the aftermath of 1846 brought about the creation of new system of agrarian exploitation with a parasitic urban growth. In 1847 shawl weavers went on strike against the heavy taxation and in 1865 they made a demand related to increase in daily wages.¹¹ The oppression against the workers continued and in 1925, the silk workers went on strike against the pathetic working conditions. The lower class movements became the focal point of the movements in first half of 20th century. According to author, these movements intensified the sense of self and the political identity and 1930's was the peak decade.

Rise of Kashmiri Nationalism:

Nationalism was mainly based on the feelings of the people and was mainly distained over political power. It basically involved the idea of indigenous control over political power and was essentially related to a deep-rooted feeling that Kashmir has been ruled by aliens for centuries together. Rekha Chowadry argues that during the Dogra rule a particular type of indigenous movement evolved which gave idea of "Kashmiri nationalism." Movement According to The self-rule became more articulated during 1940's. There were common basis of two kinds of nationalisms: Kashmiri Nationalism and Pan India Nationalism. Kashmiri nationalism was defined by the idea of self rule. Since from times before Kashmir was ruled over by foreigners. Chandra talks about the autonomous nature of Kashmiri nationalism, which resulted in the emergence of a popular consciousness which may be dominant form of national consciousness in the minds of the people and was in many ways different from the dominant form of

national consciousness in India especially in respect of the anti feudal struggle. The foundation of Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam in 1905, by Molvi Rasool Shah, helped in the spread of education among the majority community and produced a chain of schools throughout the state. The education helped in the political consciousness among the people and also helped in the social reform. So, this also played an important role in the rise of Kashmiri Nationalism.¹²

The event of 1931 is an important turning point in the history of Modern Kashmir and due to the death of 22 civilians by Dogra forces; it is celebrated as Martyrs day in Kashmir as well as other parts of the world. It was movement against the autocratic rule and against the prosecution of Abdul Qadeer. He had come to serve an English officer and during his stay in Srinagar he had been attending the meeting at Khanqahi Maula. His speech was considered to be seditious and he was charged under section 124A and 153 of Ranbir Penal Code.¹³ This was also followed by the discretion of Holy Quran and many other incidents also. According to Prem Nath Bazaz the agitation of 13th July 1931 was discontent of Muslims. The attack was not against the minority in Kashmir but it was against the tyrannies of the Government which has resulted the people to mere oppressors.¹⁴ This created a sense of political identity and Kashmiri Nationalism among the subjected masses. 13 July was the discontent among rank and file of Muslims in Kashmir and the attack on jail was only towards the unsympathetic government. It was a fight by tyrannized against tyrants.¹⁵

In order to elect representative for the Muslims, a public meeting was held by the members of Reading Room Party on 21st June 1931. It was one of the most important meetings of the Reading Room Party in which many important leaders like Mir Waiz Yusuf Shah and Molvi Abdullah Mirzai were also present. Regarding to the incident of 1931, Maharaja appointed Glancy commission in which suggested for the constitution with significant degree of freedom of speech and association. Later the constitution came into being in 1934 and politics started to develop rapidly.¹⁶ The constitution also provided for the establishment of Legislative Assembly with Maharaja as a sole authority for selection of members of the assembly. It provided a way for the establishment of forum for political activity and helped Muslim conference to dominate all Muslim constituencies. New constitution was introduced in 1939 after a large campaign and protest organized by the majority community. Lamb argues that the Communal constituencies remained and the restrictions on franchise according to the constitution of 1934 constitution were retained. In the politics of Kashmir, Nationalism was not a dynamic element until 1930. One of the fundamental changes that took place in valley after 1931 was the rise of massive nationalist movement. The movement was against the Dogra Rule. As Mohammad Isaq Khan describes that 13th July, 1931 was a historic day, regarding to Kashmir as “dumb driven cattle” raised the standards of revolt.¹⁷

It was an attempt by the masses against oppressive Dogra regime. After his incident a commission was appointed by the Maharaja in order to find out the reasons of unrest and to look after into the grievances of the people. The appointed commission recommended for a number of reforms like reforms in administration and in education sector, the representation of Muslims in press and platform and in Government services

also. The Maharaja accepted these recommendations. There was an agitation from the Kashmir Pandit community, led by Kashmiri Pandit Yuvak Sabha and was later suppressed but they succeeded in getting on the communal basis. Their movement ceased to be an independent political movement.¹⁸ The object of the commission was to give every community a fair chance of representation.¹⁹

In 1932 Muslim Conference was formed for democratic government, socialization and to mark the beginning of Kashmiri Nationalism. The organization did not have communal objectives but it came in order to help the people to get rid of excessive taxes. After this the other political parties came into existence like Kashmiri Pandit Conference and Hindu Sabha in the state. Sheikh Abdullah led for the non-communal struggle that would end all miseries and lead to the goal of responsible government. A severe criticism was giving to Punjab press for giving communal colour to politics in Jammu and Kashmir. Actually the movement was against the feudal bondage and to end Jagirdari System (land ownership).²⁰

In 1935 Sheikh Abdullah urged people to rise above the hatred and work for the welfare of the state and rights shall not be jeopardized if both Hindus and Muslims join hands together. For this he also tried to secularize his political organization and reconstituted All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference into national conference in 1939.²¹ The change in the nomenclature resulted in the formation of secular politics in the state. Besides the secularization of Sheikh Abdulla's political organization, Sir Albion Banerji who was Prime Minister as well as Foreign and Political affairs Minister under the reign of last Dogra monarch Maharaja Hari Singh wanted to end the oppression of the subjected masses. Maharaja disapproved this approach and as a result, Banerji resigned from the cabinet in 1929. During a press brief of State People's Conference held at Lahore in 1939 he told to reporters that various kind of injustice is prevailing in Jammu and Kashmir princely state. The Muslim community who were in majority was illiterate and poor and are driven like dumb cattle and system to grievance redressal is lacking. Majority community of the state is Muslims but they are lacking every comfort of life.²²

Sheikh Abdullah in his speech said that we should shoulder both religious and political responsibilities. The relations of people here with India had some basis and when these basis are not present the relation will automatically cease to exist.²³ Rekha Chowdhary in her article "Kashmir in the Indian project of Nationalism" is of view that the relationship between National Conference and Congress had their foundation on common standpoints. The movement against Dogra Monarch- Hari Singh initially represented the subjected peasantry. Later it acquired religious, regional and economic content.²⁴

Treatment with the Majority:

Due to the ill treatment of an officer with Sheikh Abdullah's brother- Mohd Khalil, lead Sheikh Abdullah to think that why Muslims are singled out for this treatment. We are in majority in the state, pay heavy taxes, still we are continuously oppressed. According to Sheikh Abdullah's experience most of the officers Non-Muslims and lower grade servants were Pandits and ill-treatment of Muslims was due religious intolerance.

Similar was the case in case of appointment in government services.²⁵ According to V. P. Menon the Muslims were in majority but they were lagging behind the Government jobs out of 421 gazetted officers in Kashmir Muslims were not more than 50.²⁶

One of the Muslim officers Agha Syed Hussain Jalali was removed from the government services and his jagir was fortified. After this when Maharaja visited Idgah and the people instead of demanding justice remained silent. National conference tried to retain its independent character and derived ideological support from the communist party of India. CPI had a strong emotional as well as political feeling for the Muslims of Kashmir. It also raised a slogan of self-determination and called for congress-league compromise. Due to the polarization between India and Pakistan movement and the CPI stand, Sheikh Abdullah in 1946 demanded the right of self-determination to all princely states within Indian subcontinent after partition and independence.²⁷

Conclusion:

So, the growth of Nationalism initially began in 20th century as a response to the excessive use of force by Dogra rulers and they were viewed as foreign as well as illegitimate as is evident from the Quit Kashmir Movement launched by Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah in 1946. The political movement started from its nascent stage of 1931 to the peak period of 1939. Kashmiri Nationalism was actually a political movement to overcome the inequalities caused to the majority community which was furthered by *Kashmiriyat*.

Endnote

¹ A non-Kashmiri butler serving with a European.

² Chowdhary, Rekha, *Jammu and Kashmir: Politics of identity and separatism*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2016.

³ Batacharje Ajit, *Sheikh Abdullah; a Tragic Hero of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Roli Books, 2008.

⁴ Bamzai P.N.K., *A History of Kashmir Political, Social, and Cultural from the earliest Times to the Present Day*, New Delhi: M. D. Publications, 1973.

⁵ Puri Balraj. *Kashmir an era of sheikh Abdullah*, Economic and Political Weekly, 1983, 18(6): 186-190.

⁶ Chowdhary, Rekha, *Jammu and Kashmir: Politics of identity and separatism*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2016.

⁷ Sufi, G. M.D. *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir (From the Earliest Times to Our Own*, Vol. II. Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1974.

⁸ The treaty of Amritsar signed 16th March 1846, between the British and Maharaja Gulab Singh for 75 Lakh Nanak Shahi. Due to this treaty Maharaj Gulab Singh became the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir

including some hilly territories. This was done on behalf of the services provided by Maharaja towards the British.

⁹ Wani Gull Mohd, *Political Assertion of Kashmiri Identity* in Khan Nyla Ali, the parchment of Kashmir History, society and polity, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹⁰ Wani, Gull Mohd. *Political Assertion of Kashmiri Identity* in Khan Nyla Ali, the parchment of Kashmir History, society and polity, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹¹ Puri Balraj. *Kashmir an era of sheikh Abdullah*, Economic and Political Weekly, 1983, 18(6): 186-190.

¹² Lamb Alster, *Kashmir a disputed Legacy 1846-1990*, Hertingfordbury: Ruxford Books, 1991.

¹³ Lone G. M., *13 July 1931: A Chapter of Kashmir*, Kashmir Life, 13 July 2014, Available at <https://kashmirlife.net/13-july-1931-a-chapter-of-kashmir-61908/>

¹⁴ Bazaz Prem Nath. *Inside Kashmir*, Srinagar: Kashmir Publishing Company, 1941

¹⁵ Bazaz Prem Nath. *Inside Kashmir*, Srinagar: Kashmir Publishing Company, 1941.

¹⁶ B. J. Glancy, *Report of the Kashmir Constitutional Reforms Conference*, Jammu: Ranbir Government Press, 1931.

¹⁷ Bose Sumantra, *Kashmir Roots of Conflict and Paths to Peace*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. See also Hassnain F. M. *British policy towards Kashmir*, Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2010. *Riot Enquiry Commission of 1931*, Srinagar: Pratap Government Press, Samvat 1988.

¹⁸ Behera Navnita Chadha, *Demystifying Kashmir*, Washington: Brooking Institution Press, 2006.

¹⁹ Bazaz Prem Nath, *Inside Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing House, Srinagar, 1941.

²⁰ Zutshi Chitralkha, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.

²¹ Vashisth Satish, *Sheikh Abdullah then and now*, Delhi: Maulik Sahitya Prakarshan, 1968.

²² Tyang Mohd Yousuf, *Atish-e-chinar- an Autobiography*, Srinagar: Ali Mohammad and Sons, 1986.

²³ *Speeches Delivered by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah*, State Archives Repository, File No. IS-140-A/72, 1972.

²⁴ Chowdhary Rekha, *Kashmir in the Indian project of Nationalism*, in Khan Nyla Ali, the parchment of Kashmir History, society and polity, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

²⁵ Singh Khushwant, *Flames of Chinar- an Autobiography*, New Delhi: Viking, 1986.

²⁶ Menon V. P., *Integration of Princely States*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1957.

²⁷ Puri Balraj. *Kashmir an era of sheikh Abdullah*, Economic and Political Weekly, 1983, 18(6): 186-190.