



Society And Religion In Kashmir: Uprising Of 13th July 1931

Dr. Anu Mankotia¹

Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Jammu, Jammu.

The modern state of Jammu and Kashmir came into being through the Treaty of Amritsar on March 16th 1846. The emergence of a large number of social organizations, development of means of transport and communication and spread of western education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir influenced the political behaviour of masses. The people of Jammu especially the Dogras regarded the Maharaja as their own leaders; therefore, never raised any voice against them. However, the people of Kashmir thought otherwise. They had started feeling the Maharaja as an alien and the root cause of their miseries. Of course, the people of the state were facing various hardship. Nevertheless, there were the people of Kashmir, especially the Muslims, who raised this voice against the administration for the mitigation of their genuine grievances.

The workers of the Silk factory of Kashmir launched the first organized agitation against the Maharaja in 1924. The Muslims labourers of the Silk factory formed a ring against the Hindu employees of the factory in general and against the filatures officers of one the barracks in particular who were mostly the Hindus. They demanded the removal of the Hindu workers and officers and their replacement by the Muslim¹.

However, on September 23, 1925, Maharaja Hari Singh immediately after his accession to the throne the young Maharaja started taking independent decisions particularly those relating to the Gilgit were unpalatable to the British. Since, the State government ruthlessly crushed the Silk Factory Agitation; therefore, in 1926, the Political Department of the Government of India got established the *Kashmir Muslim Conference* soon afterwards this organization took up cudgels with Maharaja in the name of Muslim of Kashmir.

In 1928, the Maharaja proceeded to England in connection with his work relating to the Indian States Committee². Taking advantage of the Maharaja's absence from the scene the political department of the Government of India got busy in drawing up a virulent campaign of Calumny against him and his administration. The *Muslim outlook*, the *Siyasat* and the *Pasban* carried on a hostile propaganda against the State Government³. As a result of the two speeches of Maharaja Hari Singh in the Round Table Conference, London, the British Government along with the Political department of the Government of India and the Resident started feverish activity against the Maharaja and therefore, given instruction to Mr. Wakfield⁴ (the Political Minister)

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Jammu, Jammu.
e-mail: anu.mankotia89@gmail.com.

Thus, the preparations were therefore, completed for organizing a Muslim uprising inside the state of the earliest opportunity possible, the opportunity came handy only a few days before the Maharaja's return to the state after participating in the Round Table Conference and the ground was prepared by violent articles which suddenly began to appear in the Punjab Muslim papers like the *Inqilab* in which His Highness' Government and its officers were attacked in most abusive and virulent language. Next followed the session of the All India Kashmiri Muslim Conference which was held in December 1930 at Lahore. This body had been carrying on its propaganda and tone of the resolutions and the trend of the speeches made threat were never so violent as at the last session⁵. Its President openly stated in his presidential address that it was a shame for the Muslim majority to be ruled by a minority. About this time the All India Muslim League also held its annual conference and its President Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal gave utterance to the Pan-Islamic dream of an independent Muslim State in the North-West of India including Kashmir⁶.

The articles in the papers like *Inqilab* grew more bitter and the activities of the Young men's Muslim Association of Jammu also become more objectionable. A warning was administered to the Association, through its office bearers by Mr. Wakefield* under the orders of the Government but without any effect. For a time His Highness Government adopted a policy of laissez faire towards the *Inqilab* but it soon become evident that this forbearance was being mistaken for weakness as the campaign of vilification and misrepresentation grew daily in bitterness and virulence⁷. The entry of the *Inqilab* was there upon prohibited within the State immediately after the *Inqilab* was proscribed another paper known as '*Kashmiri Musalman*' was started which displayed even greater violence in its writings and when this paper was also proscribed, a third one and later on fourth one was started. Copies of these papers were distributed in Jammu and Srinagar in some cases free of charge⁸.

In April, 1931 two unfortunate incidents occurred in Jammu which though small in themselves, were utilized by those interested in creating trouble to stir up religious fanaticism among ignorant masses who had neither the opportunity nor the means to ascertain and verify true facts.

On the Id day April 29, 1931⁹ soon after the Jammu Muslims had offered their namaz at Shalamar Bagh in Jammu, Babu Khem Chand, Sub Inspector of Police, who was on duty there warned the officiating Maulvi who was reading the *Khutba* that a political Lecture was going to be delivered there on this purely religious occasion, specially in view of the frayed communal atmosphere prevailing in the State at the time. This incident was magnified into a deliberate interference with religious freedom¹⁰.

As soon as the report of this incident reached the Inspector General of Police, he immediately suspended the Sub-Inspector and the Youngmen's Muslim Association of Jammu started an agitation in Jammu against the Maharaja and His Hindu Administration¹¹.

However, the Sub-Inspector was suspended and although he offered to apologize in public for this mistake he was prosecuted by the complainants in court of law. He was however, acquitted by the court on the basis of evidence given by respectable Muslims and it was held judicially that the Sub-Inspector had no intention of interfering with the performance of a religious ceremony¹².

Unfortunately, this incident was followed by the incident known as that of *Tauhin-i-Quran* on 4th July, 1931¹³ at Jammu. A police constable Fazal Dad, who happened to be a Muslim, was late in attending to his duty and remained lying in his bed in Police Lines, when he should have been up and on duty¹⁴. The Head Constable Labha Ram remonstrated with the constable for this neglect of duty and rolled up the bedding and throw it over the box which was lying close to the bed which had in it a copy of the *Panjara Sharif*¹⁵.

The Head Constable had no intention of injuring the religious feelings of the Mohammadan Constable. As a result, Mr. Wakefield was deputed by His Highness to go to Jammu and hold an enquiry¹⁶. In this enquiry it was definitely proved that there had been no *Tauhin*. The Head Constable had no intention of injuring the religious feeling of the Mohammadan Constable. In spite of this enquiry it was asserted by Mohammadan agitators that Mr. Wakefield admitted at the conclusion of the enquiry that *Tauhin* had been committed and some of them even Mr. Wakefield to his face that he had given expression to that opinion in Jammu and changed it on arrival in Srinagar¹⁷.

There is considerable difficulty in dealing with these so called leaders because they are ready to change their attitude and speech according to circumstances His Highness Maharaja Hari Singh in council decided that as a result of the enquiry the Mohammadan Constable who made the false allegation and tried to stir up communal strife should be dismissed and the Head Constable who lost his temper and acted in a manner unbefitting a police officer should be compulsorily retired on pension¹⁸.

Two Mir Waizes* were summoned to the Council and informed of this decision, they expressed their entire satisfaction at the result and promised to acquaint the Mohammadan of these glad tidings¹⁹.

The matter of the alleged *Tauhin-i-Quran* was used as a slogan to excite the Mohammadan masses who without any scrutiny believed that the government had of set purpose insulted the Mohammadan religion. At the critical moment Srinagar was not lacking behind in unfortunate incidents.

At this very time, things were taking a turn of their own in Jammu. As the Wakefield had gone to Jammu on the pretext of inquiring into the *Tauhin-i-Quran* affair but he had utilized the opportunity for completing his plans for a simultaneous uprising of Jammu and Kashmir Muslims. With this end in view he had directed the Muslims there to draw up a list of this grievances to be laid before the Maharaja²⁰.

At the same time Mr. Wakefield asked the Srinagar Muslims also to prepare a Memorandum continuing their grievances for presentation to the ruler and to elect some representatives of their own for this purpose²¹.

This mishandling of the Jammu deputation when it arrived in Srinagar may be considered to be another cause for the explosion of the 13th July. Mr. Wakefield while at Jammu had promised audience of the Jammu Mohammadan. Such a deputation arrived in Srinagar and was kept hanging here without a date being fixed for audience of His Highness. This was step fraught with great danger because opportunity was given for the agitation which had been permitted to mature in Jammu to take root in Srinagar²².

In the meanwhile, a public meeting of the Muslim of Srinagar was accordingly convened on June 21, 1931 in the open compound of the *Khanquah-i-Mualla* mosque at which Muslims of all sects assembled without any distinction of sect or creed. All the Muslim leaders present at this meeting took an oath on the *Holy Quran* that they would remain faithful to the cause of Islam to the very late. Some fiery speeches were given by duly elected including Mir Waiz Yusuf Shah, Mir Waiz Ahmed Ullah Hamdani Khwaja, Ghulam Ahmad Ashai, Munshi Shakabudin and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah²³.

At the end of this meeting, when most of the leaders had left for light refreshment at a nearby house, an ugly looking short stature Pathan, named Abdul Qadir who was one of the audience under excitement of the speeches delivered at the meeting stood up on dias and made a very unrestrained and inflammatory speech in which he attacked the State Government and Hindus in the State. He exhorted the Muslims to rise against the Dogras and destroy the Hindus and burn their temples and shrines²⁴.

This Abdul Qadir actually belonged to the North-West Frontier Province and had come to Srinagar with a European Military Officer as his cook. As this speech of Abdul Qadir was considered inflammatory and seditious, he was arrested on June 25th 1931²⁵.

The Muslim Reading Room Party started its agitation against the authorities. When the trial of Abdul Qadir opened in the court of the Sessions Judge on July 6th 1931 there was great excitement among the Muslims of Srinagar²⁶. During four hearings in the Court of Sessions on 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th it was found that the trial had greatly excited the Mohammadans obstructed traffic on the way while the prisoners was brought to court and taken back every time to the judicial lock up²⁷.

In these circumstances the Maharaja issued a proclamation to all his subjects on 9th July, 1931²⁸. The Maharaja proclaimed that he had no desire to suppress the legitimate requests and the voice of the people, whether expressed in writing or in speech, but he was unable to solve the problem so long as the communal tension existed, therefore, he requested the leaders of the various communities to take immediate steps to put a stop to all political activities which were a barrier in the establishment of friendly relations between the various communities²⁹.

In the meanwhile communal tension prevailed in the State due to the trial of Abdul Qadir. On 11th July 1931³⁰ the District Magistrate, therefore, suggested that the trial should be held in jail and permission was granted on 11th July, the Chief Justice making it a condition that the District Magistrate will be responsible for everything else. But on the night of 12th there was a Mohammadan meeting at Gankadal to incite the Mohammadans to go in large number to the jail³¹. The usual exciting declarations were made there of danger to their religion. Both the District magistrate and the Deputy Inspector General of Police had received warnings on 12th July 1931, of probable alarming happenings next day. Similar news of attack on the jail was brought by Pt. Sudershan Koul, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Srinagar. Neither District Magistrate nor Deputy Inspector General of Police took alarm, because this information was not ratified³².

When the session judge arrived for the trial about 1 P.M. a crowd of four or five thousand Mohammadans had collected at the jail and transparently the jail force was entirely inadequate to over-awe such a crowd. The crowd wanted to enter the jail compound and wanted to have a look at the accused. Permission was not given to crowd, not even to enter the jail compound. The total police force at that time consisted of 22 armed policemen and 110 other policemen, 22 with dandas and rest with small clubs 5 Head Constables, one Sub-Inspector and 2 Inspectors. The force was completely inadequate to over-awe to crowd which at that time grown according to the Deputy Inspector General's estimate to the number of about seven thousands³³.

It appeared that the crowd which entered with the Session Judge had gone right up to the iron gate. There is convincing evidence of this but it was not very clear what force the crowd used to the iron gate. When the crowd came up to the jail gate naturally the jailor and others examined the capacity of the gali and discovered the one rocket of the inside bolts was missing³⁴.

The mob was in an excited state, slogans were being shouted the telephone lines were furiously shaken and it was feared that they will be cut off as they aware subsequently cut off. Stones were thrown by the mob on the constables some constables were wounded, on the western side of the enclosure there was a cry that there was a fire. According to the Governor he gave orders, which resulted in firing times. The firing line was drawn up to the right of the road from wooden gate to the iron gate. Ten men fired at first in the air twice. Subsequently two more rounds were fired. The mob did not disperse and continued to throw stones even with grater violence. Two more rounds were therefore fired. In spite of this the stone throwing did not stop and continued with quarter intensity where upon he ordered three more rounds to be fired³⁵. As a result of it 10 men were killed by the firing at the jail and several wounded. All the dead bodies were removed to the Jamma Masjid and no dead bodies were left at the spot. Dr. Vosper, Superintendent, Mission Hospital, Srinagar examined all these bodies on the 14th of July at the Jamma Masjid. It was most significant that all these men had received shot wounds right in front or in the chest. So it was an advancing crowd which had been shot at and not a retreating crowd³⁶.

One section of the mob on this way back from the jail invaded the Maharaj Ranbir Ganj Bazaz which is the principal trade centre of Srinagar and with reinforcements from that part of the town looted and burnt Hindu shops destroying or carrying away property worth several lakhs and inflicted bodily injury on number of Hindus. Another mob almost simultaneously raked Hindu houses and shops in Vicharnag.

Shortly after the riots His Highness appointed a Commission of Enquiry presided over by the Chief Justice of the High Court. Sir Barjor Dalal who was a Parsi or Civilian Judge of the Allahabad High Court and consisting of two Puisne judges one of the Hindu and other a Muslims and two non official members one of whom was Muslim and other a Hindu. But the Muslim member refused to attend and another Muslim who was nominated in his place also refused to co-operate. The Hindu non-official was there upon eliminated and the Commission become purely official consisting of the Chief Justice and the two Puisne Judge³⁷.

Therefore before 1931 no doubt there were grievances of the people against the Maharaja, it was never on communal basis but events of 1931 changes the outlook of the state after this there were communal riots in different parts of the state like in Jammu, Rajouri, Mirpur, Poonch and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah become more popular among the masses after this event. As a result Grievances Commission, Glancy Commission was appointed on its basis Praja Sabha Act 1934 first legislative assembly was established and steps were taken to associate the people into the State Administration.

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