

Political Awakening in Kashmir: Role of Punjabi Muslim Intelligentsia

Ishfaq Ahmad¹, Bashir Ahmad² and Mohamad Shafi³

^{1,2,3}Research Scholar Dept. of History, K.U

E-mail: ¹optiashfaq@gmail.com, ²basharatmushtaq14@gmail.com, ³bhatshafi481@gmail.com

Abstract—Kashmir is a land of fabled beauty and eternal romance. It is blessed with beautiful scenery, wondrous fertility and salubrious climate. Besides its beauty Kashmir had a strategic importance that from the remote past it has recurrently been the focus of external concern. At the end of sixteenth century Kashmir came under Mughal rule followed by Afghans, Sikhs and Dogras all of whom proved to be despotic and oppressive in nature. The oppressive nature of these regimes resulted, at times, in the mass migration of Kashmiris to Punjab in search of relieved conditions. This paper is an attempt to understand the role of Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin in freedom struggle of Kashmir by establishing different organisations aimed at highlighting the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims. An endeavour has also been made to understand the innovative and progressive role played by Punjabi Muslim poets of Kashmiri origin and also of Press in highlighting the existent wretched conditions of Kashmiris and bringing about the political consciousness and helping them to redress their grievances.

Keywords: Political Awakening, Kashmir, Intelligentsia, Ahrar, Dogra, Iqbal, Press, Struggle, 13 July 1931.

1. INTRODUCTION

The state of Jammu and Kashmir as a single contiguous unit was formed as a result of Treaty of Amritsar signed between East India Company and Gulab Singh on 16 March 1846, under which Kashmir and its adjoining territories were transferred to Gulab Singh and his male heirs on the payment of Rupees 75000.¹ In this agreement between British and Maharaja Gulab Singh, the peoples interest was not at all taken into consideration. In the words of Christopher Thomas, "The people never asked for it, never wanted it, and never loved it."² During the period of the Dogras, the people of the state suffered miserably. There is no doubt that the British gave the state a semblance of peace and to some extent ameliorated the conditions of the people but actually their policies at the best helped, "The upper classes of the Hindus in particular to consolidate and fatten themselves at the expenses of the masses."³ P. N. Bazaz a veteran freedom fighter and progressive historian of Kashmir writes: "The people of the valley were thus brought under the imperialism of Dogras which itself was functioning as a vassal of the super imperialism of the British. But though Dogra imperialism brought nothing but misery thraldom, physical and mental deterioration in its wake,"⁴

By founding misery all around in Kashmir Robert Thorp, who was the first foreigner to sacrifice his life for Kashmir, felt that British had done a great injustice to Kashmiris by selling them to the

Dogra Maharaja. He was the first Britisher to have openly accepted this fact: “For purposes entirely selfish, we deliberately sold millions of human beings into the absolute power of one of the meanest, most avaricious cruel and unprincipled of men that ever sat upon a throne.”⁵

Many European travellers left an account of miserable condition of Kashmiris under different rulers, one such traveller Moorcraft writes: “Owing to the persistent oppression, Kashmir was subjected to, right from Mughal occupation to the Dogra rule, it had become the habit of the oppressed Kashmiris to flee to Punjab in search of relieved conditions.”⁶ Besides, as Punjab was an entrepot of trade between Kashmir and India, Lahore and other cities of Punjab had attracted a good number of Kashmiri merchants to benefit themselves from the lucrative business opportunities. In the nineties of the nineteenth century there were about one lakh Kashmiris residing in different parts of Punjab. Though these people were no doubt permanent subjects of Punjab they had never forgotten their emotional relationship with their mother country.⁷

It was very late and not earlier than twenties of the twentieth century that the signs of consciousness against the dictatorial and oppressive Dogra raj began germinating in Kashmir.⁸ There was no political organisation in Kashmir as late as 1931. Punjabi Muslims, being culturally, educationally and economically better placed, played an ambassadorial role in freeing Kashmiris from the clutches of tyranny and despotism inflicted upon them by Dogras. It were they who blazed the trail for freedom in Kashmir by initiating the process of voicing the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims.⁹ They guided and provided support to the freedom movement of Kashmir in freeing them from the chains of imperialism. It is a matter of great surprise that though the freedom movement of India had started long back, there was no political organisation in Kashmir as late as 1931. However we find political organisations being formed in Punjab to represent the cause of Kashmiri Muslims as early as 1896.

1.1. Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmanan-i- Lahore and Kashmir Movement

On 18th February 1896, the Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin formed an association named *Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmanan-i-Lahore*, aimed at ameliorating the social, political and economic conditions of Kashmiri Muslims. In addition to Alama Iqbal, its founding members were Mian Karim Baksh and his son Mian Shams-ud-din, Molvi Ahmad-ud-Din and Khawaja Rahim Baksh.¹⁰ The first meeting of *Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmanan-i-Lahore* was held in February 1896.¹¹

The *Anjuman-i-Kashmiri Musalmanan-i-Lahore* was revived in 1909 under the name of *Muslim Kashmiri Conference*. In 1912 we find *Muslim Kashmiri Conference* strongly condemning the state for its policy of giving preferences to non-state subjects over the state subjects in government services. During the twenties of the twentieth century this organisation assumed all India character and was, therefore called as *All India Kashmiri conference*.¹² The branches of this organisation were opened at Lahore, Amritsar, Gujranwal, Sialkot, Gujarat and Rawalpindi. It often convened public meetings in which the socio-economic disabilities of Kashmiri Muslims were highlighted. The Anjuman worked for the recruitment of Kashmiris in army and demanded for the restoration of proprietorship of land to the peasants. The presentation of memorandum of 1924 to the Viceroy and Governor General of India, Lord Reading, and the resultant banishment, confiscation of property and dismissal from government services of some leading public men was strongly condemned by

Gujranwala branch of the *Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmaman-i-Lahore*. In its resolution passed in a meeting held on 20 June 1925, the Anjuman while supporting the reforms appealed the Governor General of India to mitigate the anxiety of all Kashmiri Muslims and protect their rights. This meeting of the Anjuman also emphatically protested against the Kashmir government's orders of exile of Khawaja Sad-ud-Din Shawl from Kashmir, the confiscation of jagir of Khawaja Hassan Shah Naqshbandi and the removal of Khawaja Nur Shah Naqshbandi by means of forced resignation from his service.¹³ In view of such developments, Maharaja Hari Singh started a policy of conciliation and compromise towards Muslims. He lifted ban on Sad-ud-Din Shawl and permitted him to return home. The state also lifted ban on all those leaders who had submitted the memorandum of 1924, to seek government offices.

The news of 13 July 1931 regarding the indiscriminate and unprovoked firing outside the central jail, Srinagar, reached Lahore on the evening of 16 July and was published in the Muslim press on the 17th morning. Muslim individuals and organisations from all over India sent about seven to eight thousand protest telegrams to the Maharaja. Thousands of telegrams were also addressed to the viceroy urging immediate intervention.¹⁴ The publication of this news sent a wave of indignation among the Muslims all over India, resulting into protest meetings and processions almost in every city, town and village expressing their sympathy and solidarity with the Muslims of Kashmir and calling upon the British government to depose Maharaja Hari Sing and take the State under its direct administration. Press Statements were issued by all prominent Muslim leaders condemning the outrage and assuring the Kashmiri Muslims of their full support.¹⁵

1.2. Muslim Kashmiri Conference and Kashmir Movement

This organisation was initially mooted in 1911 at Lahore (Punjab), and took an interest in the spread of education among the Muslims of Kashmir. The conference, at its very first session, passed a resolution inviting the Maharajas attention to the resolutions passed by the *All India Mohammedan Educational Conference*. Further at its annual session in April 1912, the Muslim Kashmiri Conference after thanking Maharaja for the introduction of Free education in State, expressed the hope for appointment of large number of Muslim teachers in primary departments of State schools and also prayed for the employment of Muslims from the Punjab in the state service if competent Muslims in the state were not available for the various departments of the state.¹⁶

The movement for reservation in the State services for state subjects had gained ground by this time. With the result the Maharaja government outlined its policy to reserve jobs for state subjects on the basis of efficiency. *The Muslim Kashmiri Conference* resented the approach of Maharaja Government towards the majority population in its annual sessions. The Conference also kept on sending deputations to Maharaja about the backward educational conditions of Kashmiri Muslims.

In 1923, the *Anjuman-i-Islamia Punjab*, Lahore requested the Maharaja to remove the causes that stand in the way of the Muslim subject of his highness in acquiring education. The *All India Muslim League* also stepped in, at its 15th session at Lahore, to press for support to the cause which had hitherto been espoused by the *Kashmiri Muslim Conference* and other organisations. The struggle of various associations in and outside state particularly *Muslim Kashmiri Conference* bore some fruits in 1928 when more scholarships were awarded to Muslim candidates. The scholarships were now distributed equally between Hindu and Muslim candidates. A shift in recruitment policy also

became visible when certain posts were advertised specifically for Muslim candidates. Further, the Civil Service Board instituted in early 1930 was enjoined to take into consideration communal proportion in the state services.¹⁷

1.3. Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam-i-Hind and Kashmir Movement

Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam-i-Hind was founded in December 1929, at the time of Congress session of 1929-30, in Lahore, during which congress had adopted a resolution for the complete Independence of India. Persuaded by Maulana AbulKalam Azad, some prominent ulama of India, mostly hailing from Punjab and led by Maulana Syed Attaullah Shah Bukhari, Chaudry Afzal Haq, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, established the *Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam* on December 29, 1929.¹⁸ Its two main aims and objectives were:

- a) To safeguard the religious, educational, economic and social interests of Muslims by providing them proper political guidance.
- b) To secure complete independence for India through peaceful means.

However Huttenback mentions the aims and objectives of the Ahrar and according to him, "Its manifesto supported the Indian nationalism, secular democracy, representative institutions and communal harmony."¹⁹ *Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam-i-Hind* was a religious cum political organisation founded on the ruins of Khilafat movement in Punjab. Its members immediately after their release from prison in July 1931 were attracted by the Kashmiri movement. The *Ahrar party* had started sending volunteers (Jathas) from Punjab to help their coreligionists to get their due share in the Kashmir state.²⁰ In order to demonstrate their sympathies with Kashmiri Muslims, the Ahrars sent Jathas (bands) of volunteers to the state with the intension of creating disturbances and inviting the attention of the world towards the sufferings of Kashmiri Muslims. It is to be noted that when the Muslim representatives presented their draft of demands to Maharaja Hari Singh on his 36th birthday in 1931, it were the members of *Majlis-i-Ahrar* who assisted them in framing this memorandum. The political alliance between *Majlis-i-Ahrar* and the *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind* was a natural consequence of the development which had occurred from the beginning of the agitation to the end of the peace-making efforts made by the Jamiat leaders. The leaders of both the parties became convinced that the Kashmir government was not sincere in solving the troubles of the Muslim subjects. The Ahrars in Punjab were suppressed with iron hand and their leaders were arrested. The Ahrars were left without any leader to guide the agitation. The *Masjlis-i-Ahrar* leaned to the *Jamiat-ul-ulema-i-Hind* for guiding the agitation and provide it with leadership. The alliance infused a new life into the agitation. This time the feeding centres of agitation were the areas outside the Punjab which was under the ordinance. Jatha volunteers began their march to Kashmir. The firm measures taken by the Government of India suppressed the agitation.²¹

1.4 Ahmadiyas and Kashmir Movement

All India Kashmir Committee was set up by prominent Muslim leaders of India on July 25, 1931. Muhammad Iqbal and a number of other leaders were invited by Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad to form the committee. Kashmir Muslim identity in twentieth century was most significantly influenced by the Ahmadiya ideology. Ahmadiyahs belonged to Lahore faction of the movement and were very active in educational and political awakening of Kashmiri Muslims throughout 1920's,

30's and 40's.²² The Ahmadiyas gave top priority to the political events in Kashmir in the columns of their official organs such as *Alfazal* and *Sunrise*.²³ The situation in Kashmir became very critical on 13 July 1931 when the forces of Maharaja opened fire on unruly crowd in which many were killed and several wounded. Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud, the head of the Ahmadiya muslim community was very aware of the situation as he visited the state on 25th of July 1931 with leading Muslims in which he stressed upon them that something should be done to tell the helpless Kashmiris that there are people in India who can give unparalleled sacrifice for Kashmiris. An organised campaign of political awareness was run by the committee which resulted in creation of a Muslim political revival in the state. Party offices were established in various towns and cities in Kashmir and political workers were activated to raise the awareness among the Muslim population in Kashmir. After a year of its creation Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud urged the committee to elect a new president but Dr. Iqbal with the support of the Kashmir committee urged him to carry on. Kashmir committee is called as the precursor of the freedom movement in the state. Sheikh Abdullah emerged as a popular young leader for Kashmiri Muslims as a result of direct patronage from the committee members. At the same time the committee was responsible for raising the profile of the humanitarian situation in the region which resulted in improvement in the social status of Kashmiri Muslims.

1.5 Outside press and Kashmir Movement

The contribution of non-resident Kashmiris in bringing about political consciousness among the people of Kashmir stands invaluable. They helped them to redress their grievances and inculcated among them the sense of patriotism through the press. Kashmiri who had become a stranger in his own country found an envoy to tell his story- the story of his agony and pain to rest of the world- the Punjab press. There were number of dailies and weeklies published by the Punjabi Muslims to represent the cause of Kashmiris Muslims. The prominent among these were *Kashmir Gazette*, *Kashmiri Magazine*, *Punj-e-Faulad*, *Tarikat*, *Rehnuma-i-Kashmir*, *Nizam*, *Kashmiri*, *Inqilab*, *Mazloom-i-Kashmir*, *Alfazal*, *Sunrise*, *Al-jamiat*, *Kashmiri Mussalman* and *siyasat*.²⁴

The earliest weekly which championed the Kashmiri cause was *Kashmir Gazette*. The credit for the publication of this organ goes to Jan Muhammad Ganai amigrant Kashmiri Muslim.²⁵ An English newspaper published from Lahore *The Punjabee* founded by Syed Mohammad Azam who later founded the *Lahore chronicle* "was among the first to raise voice in support of the Muslim population, now the slaves of a tyrant."²⁶ *Kashmir Gazette* was another early newspaper which worked for highlighting the Kashmiri cause and propagated for Kashmiri nationalism. It was due to the tireless efforts of this paper that the *Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmanan-i-Lahore*, banned in 1897, was revived in 1901.

At the commencement of the 20th century an important and powerful Kashmiri Mohammad Din Fauq appeared on the scene. In 1901 Fauq began his own paper *Panj-i-Faulad* and in 1906 *Kashmir Magazine* was ushered into existence which lived up to 1934.²⁷ He also worked very hard for bringing out a paper from Kashmir and filed an application to Maharaja Partap Singh in 1905, seeking the permission. Owing to the blanket ban on publishing in Kashmir, permission was not granted instead Maharaja instructed his Minister to frame such rules that would debar even considering these applications in future.²⁸ In 1914, he brought out a new paper *Tarikat* and then in 1918 a journal called *Nizam*. In addition to this he also published *Rahnuma-i-Kashmir*.²⁹ In short, he

dedicated his writings for raising his voice against the plight of Kashmiris and stirring conscience of people against the tyrant rule of autocratic rulers.

Since there was ban on publishing and printing of newspapers in Kashmir, some writers from this land also got their write ups published in Lahore newspapers. “ PanditPremNath Bazaz started writing for a Lahore based Urdu weekly *Akhbari-i-Am* when he was a student as back as 1928.³⁰ S.M. Abdullah used *Inqilab*, published from Lahore, to publish statistical information to demonstrate the under representation of Kashmiri Muslims in the State services. The role of this daily was so dedicated to the cause of Kashmiri Muslims that the Government of Kashmir imposed ban on its entry in the Valley.³¹

From 1931 onwards the Lahore Muslim press started a vigorous campaign against the Maharaja and his administration. Newspapers containing articles written in the words of fire were sent by thousands into the Valley. Thus newspapers published from Lahore played a colossal role to tell the story of Kashmir to the rest of the world

1.6 Muslim poets of Punjab and Kashmir Movement

The Kashmiris of Punjab are ethnic Kashmiris who have historically migrated from Kashmir valley and settled in the Punjab region. And to quote Chitralekha Zutshi, “Kashmiri Muslims settled in the Punjab retained emotional and familial links to Kashmir and felt obliged to struggle for freedom of their brethren in the valley”³² The Muslim poets of Punjab also did a noteworthy job in instilling the feeling of patriotism among the Kashmiri Muslims. One of the most highly educated and prominent Kashmiris in Punjab was Muhammad Iqbal, whose poetry displayed a keen sense of belonging to Kashmir valley.³³ Alama Iqbal continued to boost the morale of Punjabi Muslims through his patriotic poems he used to recite in the meetings of *Anjuman-i-Kashmir-Musalmaan-i-Lahore*. Iqbal infused the sense of patriotism among Kashmiris and provided them with intellectual and political guidance to fight against Dogra rule. In his *Javaid Nama* he had symbolically sent a message of love for freedom and liberty to Kashmiris through a great saint of Kashmir, Syed Ali Hamadani. Likewise, we find him putting seventeen poems in the mouth of an assumed Kashmiri – Mulahzada Lolabi through which he educates the Kashmiris about love for liberty.³⁴ In his philosophical poetry book *Armagan-i-Hijaz* Iqbal laments about the situation in Kashmir by following verses:

“Today that land of Kashmir, under the heels of the enemy, has become weak, helpless and poor;

Once known among the wise as Little Iran.”

“A cry of burning lament issues forth from the heavens;

When the man of truth is overawed by the power and pomp of king and landlord.”

“The old farmer’s cottage, on the mountainside, where pain and grief ever rule—

Tells its sad story of Fate’s hard lot.”

*“So skilful of hands, so rich in mind, these people, alas, or pure breed;
O God, your justice, so long delayed, must come at last as a retribution.”*

Besides Allama Iqbal, there were many other poets who devoted their poetic faculties to the cause of Kashmiri Muslims. Among them, the names of Amin Hazeen, ChiragHasrat, Agha Abdul Karim Shorish and Hafiz Jalandhari are worth-mentioning.

Conclusion

Kashmir has had age old ties with Punjab, particularly Lahore and Amritsar were second home for Kashmiris. The migratory Kashmiris played ambassadorial role in making predicament of Kashmiris known to the world. Kashmiri Muslims who had fled the Kashmir Valley to the Punjab held passionate and familial connection to their country and felt ethically obliged to battle for their brethren against the Dogra administration. Through the distinctive associations Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin highlighted the cause of Kashmir. In spite of all official restrictions which Dogra Maharajas imposed, Punjabi dailies and weeklies brought out in special numbers featured the variegated dimension of socio-political and economic unrest. It might be recollected that the papers published from Punjab which reached the Maharaja’s dominion covered a great deal of information with regard to Kashmir affairs. The circulation of these papers though made limited by official restriction provided a string for unheard Kashmir’s to express their genuine grievances and distress. The miserable plight of Kashmir also inspired many a poets to write highly melancholic odes about the people of this unfortunate land. All these developments created an environment to inspire the young educated Kashmir’s to venture into this field of public opinion and the result was that there started a strong political movement which among other things initially demanded freedom of press and expression and gradually grew into a full-fledged freedom struggle leading ultimately to the end of Dogra regime in 1947.

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Aitchison, C. U. (1929). A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries (Revised and Continued upto 1929) Vol, XII: Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Assam and Burma. Calcutta: Foreign office Press.
- [2] Thomas, C. (2000). Faultline Kashmir. Uxbridge Brunel Academic Publishers. p. 17.
- [3] Bazaz, P. N. (1941). Inside Kashmir, Srinagar, Kashmir Publishing co. p.61.
- [4] Ganai, Muhammad Yusuf. (2003). Mohsin Publications, Srinagar. p. 3.
- [5] Thorp, Robert. (1980). Kashmir Misgovernment, (Edited by Hassnain, F. M.) Srinagar, Gulshan Publishers Co. p 16-17.
- [6] Moorcraft, William. (1971). Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab, in Ladakh and Kashmir. Delhi, Sagar Pub. p. 67.
- [7] Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1909, Jammu and Kashmir vide Saraf, Muhammad Yusuf. (1977). Lahore-Pakistan, Ferozsons Ltd. p. 298.
- [8] Ganai, Muhammad Yusuf. (2003). Mohsin Publications, Srinagar. p. 3.
- [9] Ibid, p. 93.

- [10] Hussain, MirzaShafiq. Dastawazait, p. 7-8.
- [11] Qayum, Shabnam. Kashmir KaSiyasitiInqilab, Vol. 1, p. 43-44.
- [12] Saraf, Muhammad Yusuf. (1977). Kashmiris Fight For Freedom, Vol. 1 p 450.
- [13] Khan, G. H. (2009). Freedom Movement in Kashmir. p. 96.
- [14] Inqilab, Lahore, August 23, 1931.
- [15] Saraf, Muhammad Yusuf. (1977). Kashmiris Fight For Freedom, Vol. 1. p 454.
- [16] Zutshi, U. K. (1986). Emergence of Political Awakening In Kashmir. Manohar Publications. p. 219-220.
- [17] Ibid. p. 225.
- [18] Janbaz, Mirza. (1975). Caravan-e-Ahrar. Vol. 1. p. 81-84.
- [19] Huttenback, Robert A. (2004). Kashmir and Britist Raj 1847-1947.
- [20] Sharma, Sanjay Prakash. (2004). Kashmiri's Political Leadership: Sheikh Abdulla and His Legacy.
- [21] Khan, G. H. (2009). Freedom Movement in Kashmir. p. 214.
- [22] Inqilab, Lahore, July 29, 1931.
- [23] Khan, G. H. (2009). Freedom Movement in Kashmir. p. 200.
- [24] Ganai, Muhammad Yusuf. (2003). Mohsin Publications, Srinagar. p. 98.
- [25] Saraf, Muhammad Yusuf. (1977). Kashmiris Fight For Freedom, Vol. 1 p 450.
- [26] Taseer, C.Bilqees. (2005). The Kashmir of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, p. 339.
- [27] Sufi, G.M.D. (2015). Kashir, Being A History Of Kashmir. p. 377.
- [28] Taseer, Abdul Rashid. NaqushSahafat (urdu). p. 77.
- [29] SabirAfaqi, Iqbal Aur Kashmir p 42-43.
- [30] Bazaz, Nagin. (1983) Ahead Of His Times: PremNath Bazaz His Life and Works. p. 24
- [31] Abdullah, S. M. (1985). Atish-i-Chinar. p. 271-72.
- [32] Zutshi, Chitralekha. (2017). Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir. p. 191.
- [33] Jalal, Ayesha. (2002). Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam p. 352.
- [34] SabirAfaqi, Iqbal Aur Kashmir p. 41.