

# Different Ideological Groups and their Influence on Freedom Movement in Kashmir During the Dogra Rule (1846-1947)

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**Abstract**—The political consciousness in Kashmir against the Dogra regime emerged around 1930s and once the movement started in the form of the Muslim conference which represented the demands and aspirations of the people of the state, it got transformed into a myriad change due to many ideas represented by external factors. The developments in politics at an all India level, directly manifested in the politics of Kashmir as well. In this paper an attempt has been made to trace out the influence of different ideological groups like Indian National Congress, The Muslim League and the Communists, which not only represented the opinion of the people of the whole of British India but also laid a deep impact on freedom struggle in Kashmir. And the paper also try to investigate on issues like how the nomenclature of Muslim conference got transformed into National conference and how the Communists shaped the mentality of National conference leaders that manifested in new Kashmir plan in 1944.

**Keywords:** Ideological Groups, Kashmir, Dogra Rule, National conference, Nomenclature.

## Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir with its present boundaries was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh on 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1846 by the treaty of Amritsar signed between East India Company and Maharaja. It was by virtue of this treaty Kashmir was transferred and given to the Gulab Singh for a sum of Rs 75, 00,000. As a result of this Maharaja became an independent authority over the internal affairs of the state and the Dogra regime proved to be very despotic, oppressive and feudal in nature which laid devastating effects on Muslims who constituted the majority of the population of Kashmir. The Dogra always considered Jammu as their home and Kashmir a purchased property and established a sort of Dogra imperialism where they elevated themselves to the position of masters and other non Dogra communities were brought down to the inferior position.<sup>1</sup> The condition of the lower classes became deplorable. Peasants, labor's, and other working classes suffered miserably. However the peasants in Kashmir suffered most miserably by the state officials because he could be evicted at any time. They had no property rights over land and used to live his life at the mercy of Jagirdars, and Chakdars.<sup>2</sup> Politically the people were deprived of all basic rights and civil liberties. Public opinion was absent in the state and the freedom of speech, freedom of press and platform had been made unlawful.<sup>3</sup> After squeaking under the oppressive and tyrannical rule of the Dogra's, the Muslims of Kashmir failed to launch an organized struggle against it till 1930s. Many reasons have been propagated by historians for the emergence of late political consciousness among Muslims of Kashmir. The main reason was the Dogra autocracy which had put ban on the formations of political organizations. Mass illiteracy had also been an important factor. By 1930 the signs of political consciousness among the young educated Muslims became manifest. And it were these educated youths who had come from different universities after finishing the education, they didn't get government job and felt frustrated. However during their educational career, they had acquainted themselves with the political movements of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>4</sup> It was during their unemployment they started a reading room near Fateh Kadal in Srinagar where most of them used to meet and discuss the current topics of the day.<sup>5</sup> Even after presenting different memorandum's to the Maharaja nothing came out beneficial for the Muslim community. Then afterwards some major developments and incidents took place which facilitated the widespread resentment both within and outside the state against the oppressive rule of Maharaja. The Kashmiri leadership received an overwhelming support from the masses and Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin which ultimately paved the way to launch an organized struggle by forming the political organization. Muslim leaders of Jammu province were consulted for the said purpose and the leaders of all India committee who assured full support and cooperation. To give a practical shape to the idea, a committee was setup which drafted a constitution of the proposed organization and was named as All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference which launched a struggle against the despotic rule for the freedom of Kashmir.

In order to understand the politics of Muslims under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah of those days it is mandatory to understand and grasp the role of outside forces which influenced the local politics.<sup>6</sup> Before 1930s it were the Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin who shaped the mentality of the Kashmiri educated youths. They played an immense role in highlighting the miseries of the Kashmiris at the hands of the Dogra's. Several organizations had been established like All India Kashmiri Conference, All India Majlis-i- Ahrar and the All India Kashmir committee. The main intention of all these organizations was to help the Kashmiris and make them aware politically, socially, culturally and economically. Prominent role in shaping the mentality of the oppressed Kashmiris was done by the poets and also by the press which published articles regarding the atrocities done by the Dogra regime. The whole British India became aware about it and started showing sympathy for Kashmiri struggle.<sup>7</sup> The Punjabi Muslims were also the backbone in helping the Kashmiris to establish a political organization which would fight for the basic rights in an organized way against the government. Apart from this the Kashmiri freedom movement came under the influence of different ideological groups like the Indian National Congress, the Muslim league and the communists that were fighting for the same cause against the British. The conversion of Muslim conference into National conference was due to the impact of the Indian National Congress. The Muslim conference got gravitated towards Muslim league and the communist influence was seen in the formation of the Naya Kashmir manifesto.

### **Indian National Congress And Freedom Struggle of Kashmir:**

The freedom movement in Kashmir cannot be apprehended without having clear understanding the role and impact of Indian National Conference (INC) in the politics of the state. The impact of INC was immense from late 1930s that ended up with Kashmiri's accession with India. In the beginning the struggle of INC remained confined to the areas that were under the direct control of British. They had followed the policy of non- interference in the internal affairs of the native states but it changed its policy in 1935 by following the birth of All India State People's Conference in 1927. The party started showing support to the political forces operating within the princely states. The congress also welcomed in the states such movements as were likely to develop more quickly on broader basis and drawing strength from the people of the states without relying on outside help and assistance on the prestige of the congress.<sup>8</sup> Before the Congress gave up the policy of non-interference, Nehru was eager to provide full support to the freedom movement launched in Jammu and Kashmir. It was Nehru who was in touch with P.N Bazar and persuaded him to bridge the gap between the two communities and ask Sheikh Abdullah to open the doors of the Muslim conference to other non-Muslim communities as well. And the two leaders met on July 1932 at Cheshma Shahee in which the two leaders resolved that Kashmir freedom struggle will be conducted on secular progressive and democratic lines.<sup>9</sup> In 1935 a meeting was convened by the Muslim conference at Pather Masjid Srinagar and appealed non-Muslims to come forward and join hands with the party in order to get of the irresponsible govt for a responsible one. Many non-Muslim leaders were part of the meeting such as Prem Nath Bazaz, Kashap Bandhu, Jai Lal Kalim, and Sham Lal Saraf. At the same time Muslim conference leaders had realized that Muslim solidarity won't alone be remedy for all the ills of large scale poverty, economic hardships and exploitation. And its president Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah declared "our countries progress is impossible so long as we don't establish amicable relations between different communities."<sup>10</sup> So the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah tried to change the mass opinion of Muslims in favor of nationalism and secularism.<sup>11</sup> The secular politics in the state was spread with the help of a newspaper *Hamdard* published on August 3, 1935. Its inauguration was performed by the Saifudin Kitchlo Congress leader in a big public meeting at Hazuribag.<sup>12</sup> The weekly *Hamdard* became the mouth piece of the Congress party politics in the state<sup>13</sup>. Apart from this on December 28, 1936 a public meeting was held at Amira Kadal to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the All Indian National Congress. The session was presided by P.N Bazaz. Then Nehru- Abdullah meet was an important development that took place in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir. It helped in widening the secular politics in Kashmir as well as for future political dependence of the state over the Indian union. It was Nehru- Abdullah meet at Peshawar that helped the leadership of Muslim conference under Abdullah to change the nomenclature of the party from Muslim conference to National Conference in 1939 and the subsequent developments in forties ended states accession with India after the partition.

### **Muslim League and Freedom Struggle of Kashmir:**

Mohammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim league and its allies, the political forces which secured the creation in 1947 of the explicitly Muslim nation of Pakistan had significant support in the valley. After the establishment of the all Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference soon it witnessed dissension in its leadership. Due to the internal differences with Sheikh Abdullah some collaborated with Yusuf Shah and formed Azad Muslim Conference and started criticizing the role played by Abdullah in forming a common platform for freedom struggle. At all India level it was also the time when we witnessed the fragmentation of Indian politics and the emergence of Muslim league as a dominating force and represented the Muslims of India that was supposed to be a creative minority and congress represented majority of the Hindus. Its direct impact was on Kashmir politics. In order to mend the Muslim opinion in favor of league the members started visiting the valley of Kashmir. In May 1936 M. A. Jinnah paid a visit to Kashmir and during his visit he expressed his views on politics of Kashmir and conveyed the message of unity between

communities.<sup>14</sup>Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas declared that Muslim conference is part and parcel of Muslim League.<sup>15</sup> However National Conference has totally denounced Pakistan resolution and two nation theory of Jinnah as an emotional slogan. But the opportunity to reconcile the differences between the two came in 1944 on Jinnah's second visit to Kashmir. Sheikh had welcomed him as a beloved leader of the Muslims of India, however unable to reconcile the differences between the two and Jinnah called upon Muslims of Kashmir to rally behind Muslim conference and called National Conference "a band of gangsters".<sup>16</sup>This was retaliated by Sheikh in one of his meetings at Srinagar on June 20, 1944, "if Jinnah doesn't give up the habit of interfering in our politics it will be difficult for him to go back in an honorable manner".<sup>17</sup>And ultimately the rift between the Muslim league and the National Conference proved to be detrimental to the interests of the state which could easily be seen. Though some leaders of freedom struggle supported league but it was the national conference under the leadership of Sheikh representing the opinion of the majority which ultimately paved the way in signing the accession with India.

### **Communists and Freedom Struggle of Kashmir:**

The leftist influence could be seen in the freedom struggle of Kashmir and they had succeeded in molding the mindset of many leaders in both the national conference and the Muslim conference. P. N. Bazaz writes that from late thirties the signs of CPI became visible. The main focus of the leftists was to bring a myriad change in socio-economic structure of Kashmir. Different peasant and labor organizations were formed for the said purpose. The leftists had not only influenced the National Conference leadership that was visible in Naya Kashmir manifesto but also the high caste Pandit community that constituted less than a tenth of valleys population. Among them the one who achieved prominence was Niranjana Nath Raina who was influenced by the ideology of communism when he was student at Allahabad University. In early 1940s several small socialist minded discussion groups were set up by the students in Kashmir.<sup>18</sup> Then in September, 1942 Fazal Illahi Qurban the well-known communist from Lahore organized an anti fascist school in a house boat in Srinagar and the influence of communism began extending in the state.<sup>19</sup> Apart from this the Bedi couple was the influential group of communists in Kashmir writes Bilquees Tasir, the leftists from different parts of India would also be there in Kashmir mixing with and influencing the national conference workers.<sup>20</sup> The most powerful evidence of communist influence within the National Conference that represented the opinion of the majority of Kashmiri population was the party adoption in September 1944 Naya Kashmir policy document. The new Kashmir manifesto has been authoritatively described as the most important political document in Kashmir history.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the adoption of Naya Kashmir manifesto "presented by National Conference Joseph Korbel described, the new Kashmir as a plan supporting communists ideas and predicted that Kashmir would be the first Indian state to embrace communism".<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The freedom movement in Kashmir that started around 1930s against the oppressive and autocratic Dogra regime in an organized manner under the leadership of Muslim conference came under the influence of Indian political parties like the Indian national congress, the Muslim league and the communists. Though it was an indigenous freedom movement but it had greatly been influenced by above mentioned ideological groups. Among them the deep impact was laid by the Indian National Congress that not only changed the mindset of Muslim conference leaders in favor of secularization of politics but also ended Kashmir's accession with India.

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