

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS AND THEIR ROLE IN POLITICAL AWAKENING IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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### **Abstract**

Kashmir under Dogra's has seen exploitation and oppression of worst kind. The Dogras had taken the Kashmiris as purchased slaves by the Treaty of Amritsar 1846. For a Dogra ruler, the state was a Hindu state. To make it more Hinduistic, he reorganised various institutions of the state after Hindu names. The Dogra rule followed the discriminatory policies against their Muslim subjects. These discriminations were clearly reflected in the fields of State services, social spheres, education, justice, etc. If all classes of people in the valley were discontented with the Dogras in 1930 A.D., the Muslims had added reasons for becoming sullen comments Prem Nath Bazaz. The start of socio-economic organization helped to develop a collective thinking within the Kashmiri community. In other words, there were many factors and causes, both positive and negative which generated political awakening among the people of the state during the Dogra rule. This paper will help us to understand how the Associations formed during Dogra rule help in generating the consciousness of their rights among the people of Jammu and Kashmir against the repressive policies of their ruler.

**Keywords** Religious Communities, Arya Samaj, Yuvak Sabha, Dogras, Press

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## Introduction

The history of Kashmir is a sad story. As one scholar, Vincent H. Smith, wrote, “Few regions in the world can have had worse luck than Kashmir in the matter of government.” And his explanation, which seems to be echoed by other historians, ascribes their fate “partly to the cowardly character of the population, which invited oppression.”<sup>i</sup> The people of Kashmir lived under a succession of dynasties- Pandava, Mauryas, Kushan, Gonandya, Karkota, Utpala and Lohara, Sultans, Mughals, Sikhs, Afghans and Dogras<sup>ii</sup>.

The promising land of Kashmir lost its independence when the Mughals annexed and joined it with their empire of India in 1586; and thus from that time it served as the north most point of an empire whose power pedestal was situated in Delhi. As the Mughal power waned in India (A.D 1753), Kashmir was conquered by Afghans (1753-1819) who lacked the benevolence and proved tyrannical. The Afghans did not take part in a state building process in 18th century India and it becomes clear from the Kashmiri documents that the Afghans presence in the valley of Kashmir proved fatal and disruptive.

Although both Mughals and Afghans were Muslims but when the Sikhs drive out the Afghans from Kashmir in A.D 1819, the Kashmiris welcomed them with open arms but these fortune seekers soon turned out to be even greater oppressors. The rule of Sikhs (1819-1846) says Balraj Puri —established a specifically Hindu tone which continued although the Dogra regime. In 1846, the land was sold to Maharaja Gulab Singh, a vassal of Sikh rulers, during the first Anglo Sikh war by Lord Hardinge, the Governor General of East India Company for 75 lakhs of rupees Or Nanak Shahi (around £100,000 at current rates). It was a price for his disloyalty against his master. By the treaty of Amritsar the state was handed to Maharaja and his male descendants with an independent authority ‘maintained the dynastic, feudal and religion-centric rule over his subjects; which was a total contrast of transforming rule of British in India.’<sup>iii</sup>

Under Dogra’s the repression became more severe and a common Kashmiri became helpless and hopelessness. Such was the nature of repression that he was reduced to a mere entity. The nature of repression had turned him into a docile and subservient. Under these conditions, what led to the political awakening of the people of Kashmir is the focus of this paper. The paper further

tries to answer the question of how such a population was able to mobilize itself against the repressive Dogra regime. What organization was active in this mobilization? What role religion played in the political awakening of Kashmiris?

### **Socio-Religious Reform Movements**

Many socio-religious reform movements were launched in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Kashmir. These reform movements, in turn, gave rise to the desire for the achievement of a democratic political system in place of autocracy. The early socio-religious reform movements among the Hindus and the Muslims made an effective impact on the politics of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. These movements brought about socio-political awakening among the people.

### **The Arya Samaj**

Among the earliest movements in the Kashmir, it was the *Arya Samaj* movement which began its operations in the state in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The moving spirits behind the movement were men from outside the State<sup>iv</sup>. The influence of the Arya Samaj, a movement which combined Hindu religious reform with agitation for political progress, was first felt in Jammu in the last years of the nineteenth century. In 1903, it inspired the Dogra Sabha, mainly confined to Hindus and essentially conservative, but for all that a pioneering experiment in political activity in the State. The Arya Samaj believed in the purity of Hindu life and religion and it wanted to restore Hindu religion to its prestime order of Vedic age. Politically, it demanded “India for Indians”. The reformist activities of the Arya Samaj extended to the removal of social evils and prejudices. It preached the marriage of young widows, whose number was appalling<sup>v</sup>. The Arya Samaj fully supported the Gandhian movement of non-cooperation and enlightened the people on the necessity and importance of Swaraj and on the methods of its movements. The Samaj also appealed to the students to boycott schools and Government officials to boycott the offices. The people responded to the call of the Samaj by courting arrests and imprisonment. Though a branch of the Arya Samaj was established in the valley, but no Kashmiri Pandit became its members in early years. It remained confined to the Punjabi Hindus only<sup>vi</sup>. By 1915, the ideas associated with the Arya Samaj had also taken root among the Pandits

of Srinagar. From them sprang a number of associations like the Yuvak Sabha and Arya Kumar Sabha<sup>vii</sup>.

In 1915, some Kashmiri Pandits organised, an organisation called Kumar Sabha which in due course of time came to be known as the Arya Kumar Sabha. It was established at Rainawari, Srinagar as an independent socio- religious organisation based on the Sanatanist principle of Hinduism. The Kumar Sabha became a part and parcel of the Arya Samaj, Srinagar. Its members were already the members of the Arya Samaj. The Kumar Sabha was connected with the Arya Samaj, Maharaj Gunj. It was affiliated with the Arya Samaj Srinagar (Amirakadal), which was a branch of Arya Samaj Pratinidhi Sabha, Punjab, a registered body with the head office at Lahore<sup>viii</sup>. The Arya Kumar Sabha worked as “a part of the great Vedic movement in Kashmir State<sup>ix</sup>. The Sabha started its activities as a social reform movement which stood against the practice of evil customs among the Hindus, such as infant marriages, enforced widowhood and waste of money on marriages. The political character of the Sabha was manifest in that it was in favour of the Swadeshi movement. It propagated use of *khaddar* to foreign cloth. In 1921, the members of the Sabha had come into contact with the revolutionary party of Bhagat Singh. It stood for indianization of everything in the country. Swaraj for India and Gandhian principles of living, were its main items of propaganda and programme. Both the Arya Samaj and Arya Kumar Sabha tried to bring the people of the State in line with the policies and politics of Indian National Congress, but they were not allowed to do so because the State Government did not approve of the political character of these organisations with the result that stringent measures were taken against any anti-British political activity of the Sabha<sup>x</sup>.

### **The Dogra Sabha**

The **Dogra Sabha** was a semi-political organisation of the Jammu province. It was founded by Lala Hansraj in 1903. It was a secular forum consisting of Muslim and Non- Muslim members who came from middle and upper middle classes and were loyal to the ruler. In principle the Sabha advocated the cause of the downtrodden subjects of the state; to spread the education; to fight for the redress of people’s grievances; to bring about mutual cooperation and unity between different communities, to fight for protection of the right of State subjects in State

services and to start a social reform movement for eradication of social evils such as infant marriages, the *begar*, smoking, trafficking in women etc<sup>xi</sup>.

The Dogra Sabha was, in fact, a semi-political body whose members had to be essentially faithful to the person and throne of the Maharaja and his Government. It was concerned more with its class interest than with the rights and interests of the masses. It was, therefore, primarily a body of vested interests of the Dogra oligarchy. A few non-Dogras, non-Muslims and Muslims with similar class interests joined the Sabha from time to time<sup>xii</sup>. It believed in constitutional method for achieving its aims. It endeavoured to see that middle and high schools were established in villages and towns, that technical and industrial education was imparted to students in these schools, that the system of transport and communication was improved and that new roads were constructed, making of primary education compulsory and allotting of Government contracts to State subjects constituted the demands of the Sabha.

The Dogra Sabha could not become popular because its activities usually remained confined to the passing of resolutions in the meetings. It could not succeed in raising a public platform to make a direct approach to the people. It had neither a revolutionary programme to offer nor any such reformatory scheme which could bring about real socio-economic transformation. In fact the Sabha was more interested in pleading the cause of the Dogra oligarchy under the guise of its humanitarian philosophy. The most important and positive contribution made by the Sabha to the growth and development of the political consciousness among the people was the patriotism and national sentiment among the inhabitants of the State<sup>xiii</sup>.

### **The Yuvak Sabha**

Another important socio-religious reform and political organisation founded by a Kashmiri Pandit, Prem Nath Chicken, was the *Yuvak Sabha*. Basically it was brought into being for the protection of religious places of the Hindu community in Kashmir province. Although the membership was restricted to young men, the association was the chief nucleus of the Kashmiri Hindu workers in the city and enjoyed the confidence of the older members of the community and also of the non-Kashmiri Hindus<sup>xiv</sup>. During the political disturbances in 1931, the Kashmiri Pandits began to think in terms of a united political organisation. As they could not form any

political association without the prior sanction of the Government, they thought it advisable to join the *Yuvak Sabha* because it had already been recognised by the State. The first organisation to join the Sabha was the Fraternity Society<sup>xv</sup>. The members of the Fraternity Society gave the Sabha a definite shape by transforming its non-political character into a political one with a well-thought-out programme<sup>xvi</sup>.

The *Yuvak Sabha*, like the Dogra Sabha in Jammu, was essentially conservative in its politics though active in social questions as the improvement of the condition of women (in particular the re-marriage of widows); and it posed no challenge to the authority of the Maharaja. It did, however, provoke a number of Pandits into adopting more radical views; and provided an example to the Muslim Community of the effectiveness of techniques of communal organisation<sup>xvii</sup>. Politically the Sabha advocated the cause of political rights of the Kashmiri Pandits. It demanded the establishment of law and order in the State and of helping the Maharaja in the maintenance of the State against the rebels and anti-state elements. Its objectives were also to infuse the spirit of patriotism among the Pandits. In order to achieve its aims, the Sabha believed in the constitutional approach and non-violent methods of agitation. The Sabha was powerful instrument to articulate the demands of Kashmiri Pandits and active in conducting the community's programmes.

### **Socio-Religious Reform Movements among the Muslims:**

The beginning of the twentieth century brought the Muslim subjects of Jammu and Kashmir into the arena of socio-religious and political activities. The fundamental aim of the early Muslim socio-religious reform movements was to acquaint the Muslim masses with the causes of their stagnation and what had kept them in a state of backwardness. The credit for creating the atmosphere of socio-religious reform among the Muslim goes to Mirwaiz dynasty. It produced a dynamic personality namely Ghulam Rasool Shah<sup>xviii</sup>.

The most active of the Muslim societies formed in the valley was the **Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam**. It was Moulvi Rasool Shah, the Mirwaiz of Kashmir, who took the brunt upon his shoulders. He established a primary school in 1889. In 1905, he founded an organisation called Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam and threw its membership open to all Muslims. The main objectives

of the Anjuman were to spread education among the Muslims, to infuse the spirit of Islam among them and to cultivate good manners, sense of cooperation and unity among the members of its community<sup>xix</sup>. The role of the *Anjumans* in spreading education among Muslims was so great that in a short period of time it was able to raise the status of the primary school to middle and then to high standard. It was because of his keen interest in advancing the cause of Muslim education that Moulvi Rasool Shah came to be known as Sir Sayed of Kashmir.

Like social reformers in other parts of India, the leaders of the Anjuman had realized that there was an intimate relation between social reform and economic and political reform. They also knew that the evils of social customs had rendered Muslims lazy, lethargic and tradition-bound. The need of the time, according to them, was to put Muslims on the path of modernism. For achieving this purpose, they prepared a well thought-out programme of social reforms, requiring every preacher in every mosque to exhort the Muslims that they “should raise their moral standard by observing the prayers, by keeping fast and that they should not speak lie”. The *Anjuman* also provided Muslims with public platform through its organisational activities. It was from this platform that the Muslims were made aware of their strength. They were taught the benefits of self-help and self-confidence which make a nation exemplary. The political programme of the *Anjuman* aimed at securing the civil and political rights of the Muslim subjects<sup>xx</sup>.

**Anjuman-i-Hamdard-i-Islam**, Srinagar was established by few Punjabi Muslims after the start of the World War-I. The dynamic force behind this *Anjuman* was one Babu Mohammad Ibrahim. The aim of this *Anjuman* was to ameliorate the conditions of the Muslims of Kashmir whose state of existence was extremely pitiable. The *Anjuman* had an orphanage for free board and lodge for all those parentless children who were admitted to it. It also made arrangements for providing them with education and vocational training<sup>xxi</sup>.

The *Anjuman* played vital role in Muslim renaissance and re-awakening. It brought about a radical change in the thinking and outlook of Kashmiri Muslims. It infused Muslim subjects with the spirit of cooperation and unity. The *Anjuman* taught and preached its co-religionists the benefits of living in peace and amity with the people belonging to other religious. Hence, the

*Anjuman* was not a communal organisation. Politically, the *Anjuman* fought for the rights of the Muslim subjects and for the just treatment of the labourers and the workers in the State. Its progressive character became manifest in 1924 when the *Anjuman* directly participated in the labour-rising of the Silk factory workers. But when the labour movement was crushed by the Government, the *Anjuman* also suffered. It began to grow weak after 1924, never to rise again<sup>xxii</sup>. A social reform movement was brought into being in Jammu province, namely **the Anjuman-i-Islamia**. The Anjuman-i-Islamia was the oldest of all associations in Jammu. It was a semi-political body. Its mission was to protect the rights of the Muslim subjects, to work for their educational advancement and to free them from social evils. It organised public meetings at which speeches were made by men of influence and rank. The resolutions passed at its meetings from time to time were sent to the Government for consideration. The Anjuman believed in constitutional methods and it always pursued the policy of moderation<sup>xxiii</sup>.

The **Youngmen's Muslim Association** was founded in Jammu in 1920 by Mr. Hamidullah, an advocate, in association with Allah Rakha Sagar and others. It was important organisation from political and social reform points of view. The Association was formed basically with a view to:-

- I) Reform the Muslim community and foster a spirit of cooperation among its members;
- II) Help the poor Muslim students in their educational pursuits and career;
- III) Construct mosques, "*Jinazah-Gah and Sabil-Gah*".<sup>xxiv</sup>
- IV) Render social service to people of all shades of opinion, faith, creed, colour, race and religion.

Its political character became evident in 1931, when it took an active and leading part in the struggle for freedom. After that it became more of a political forum than a social reform organisation. It also provided the movement with bright and promising leadership<sup>xxv</sup>.

**Ahmadiya Movement:** The emergence of a new Kashmiri Muslim leadership has to be further contextualized with the rise and impact of the Ahmadiya movement in the Kashmir Valley. The Ahmadiya movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in Qadian, began as a rural, small-town middle-class religious resurgence in the late nineteenth century. Mirza claimed that Jesus was brought down alive from the cross and travelled East looking for the lost tribes of Israel, until he settled in Kashmir.



By 1920s, however, the Ahmadiya presence in the Kashmir Valley had begun to assert itself beyond Jesus Tomb in Srinagar. The petitions to the government on behalf of Ahmadiyas of the Kashmir Valley testify to the growth of the sect during the decade. Moreover, they illuminate the growing involvement of the Punjabi center of the Ahmadiya movement in Muslim political affairs, despite the movement's assertions to the contrary. There were several internal and external reasons for the increasing Ahmadiyas influence on the affairs of Kashmiri Muslims from the third decade of the century. The educated, middle-class Kashmiri Muslims, mostly doctors, lawyers, publishers and teachers, played a significant role in spreading the movement in the valley<sup>xxvi</sup>.

To sum up, the dark aspect of the socio-religious reform movements was that for a long time they stood in the way of a joint platform for the common political aspirations of the Hindus and Muslims. It is to be noted that *Yuvak Sabha* played a reactionary role throughout the whole course of freedom movement, and stood on the side of Maharaja against the revolutionary forces even after 1938, when the Muslim Conference was converted into National Conference in order to accommodate all the communities in the struggle for freedom. But, the cultural ideological struggle represented by these movements, was an integral part of evolving the political consciousness in Kashmir. This was so because it was instrumental in bringing about the initial intellectual and cultural break which made a new version of the future possible. Second, it was a part of the resistance against colonial cultural and ideological hegemony. Out of this dual struggle evolved the modern cultural situation: new men, new homes and a new society.

### **Role of Press in Political Mobilisation**

It was the press which portrays the true picture of the miserable conditions of the people of Kashmir. The first paper which wrote about it was *Chowdween Sadi*, from Rawalpindi and the first article came in its issue of 23 July, 1985. This paper contains writing about the maladministration of the Maharaja. Another weekly, entitled *Gulshan-i-Kashmir* was started by Taj-Ud-Din in 1901, which also writes about the Kashmir cause. The other papers, which dedicated their writings to the cause of the Kashmiris were, *Inqilab*, *Siyasat*, *Muslim Outlook*, *Farooq* and *Afzal*, all from Punjab, because no paper could be issued from Kashmir<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Political activity and mobilization through public meetings were prohibited in Jammu and Kashmir until 1932. There was also a ban on the publication of newspapers in the State until the Glancy Commission's report in 1932 had incorporated a recommendation for the freedom of press. Maharaja Hari Singh was not, however, entirely responsible. The policy of suppressing public opinion had been assiduously followed by his predecessors and whole heartedly supported by the British Indian Government. Taking undue advantage of the isolation of the state and the backwardness of its people, the British Government, jealous of maintaining the safety of their frontiers, took active steps to prevent the infiltration of "seditious" ideas. They prevented the formation of any association, political, social or even religious, and publication of a newspaper in the State<sup>xxviii</sup>.

With the development of higher education in the State, the barrier between the local society and the rest of the world was diminished. The infiltration of liberal ideas, the movements of liberation in the other States of India, the political movements of Turkey, Ireland and Egypt, and the part that young men played in these movements made an impact on the political consciousness of the Kashmiris. In spite of the heavy hands of repression with which the Government sought to stifle the entry of Indian newspapers, many newspapers continued to foster the spirit of nationalism, and a number of new monthly magazines, dailies and weeklies made their appearance. The Kashmir Residency took active steps to prevent the infiltration into the State of seditious ideas from the rest of the country. In 1906, the Maharaja of Kashmir banned the publication of newspapers without the prior permission. Magazines and newspapers which carried what the Government considered violent and offensive articles were not allowed inside the State<sup>xxix</sup>. The attitude of the State Government towards the printing of a paper in the State can be seen from orders passed against the journal *Ladakh Akhbar* in 1906. The journal was printed at Leh in Bodhi language. The journal gave bare news activities about the mission and since no formal sanction for its publication was obtained, it escaped the notice of the Resident and the Darbar. Three years later the Resident<sup>xxx</sup> came to know that the paper being printed in the State and it brought to the notice of the Maharaja, as to why the State Government was permitting it to be issued without the formal sanction<sup>xxxi</sup>.

The circulation of papers made the people of Kashmir politically alert and sowed the seeds of mass disaffection against both the British and the Dogras. The possession and reading of newspapers was regarded as seditious and unlawful; and anyone found to possess any of the disallowed newspapers or pamphlets was punished.

The only sort of ‘public’ activity allowed was the formation of societies for religious and social reform. And even these carried with them the strict provisions that they would require prior state sanction for their establishment and the explicit abjuration of any intent to engage in political activity. Taking advantage of even this constricted space conceded by the Kashmir State, there was a proliferation of socio-religious reform organizations beginning with the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1919, the durbar reported the presence of roughly twenty societies, Anjumans and Sabhas within the State, representing a variety of particularized interests such as those of the lower castes of Jammu, Rajputs, Dogras, Jammu Brahmans, Sikhs, Kashmiri Pandits and category defined most loosely, the Muslims. A list prepared in 1927, reflected an exponential increase in these societies, totalling about one hundred by now and including the numerous branches that the bigger Sabhas and Anjumans had sprouted in various towns in the State<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Apart from political subjugation and economic deprivation, the Muslims of the State experienced religious persecution also. Delivering the sermon after the Eid prayers on 29 April 1931, the Imam of Jammu city referred to the tyranny of Pharaohs against Moses. The Dogra policeman on duty, on hearing the word tyranny ordered the Imam to stop his sermon as in his view the Imam had transgressed the bounds of law and was therefore guilty of treason. The bigoted Dogra policeman obviously did not appreciate that the tyranny-related incident referred to in the sermon belonged to an epoch many millennia ago in the far off Egypt<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Another unpleasant incident occurred in the Jammu jail on 4 June 1931 in which it was alleged that a non-Muslim policeman had deliberately kicked a copy of the Holy Quran. Similarly, a few leaves of the book were found in a public latrine in Srinagar on 20 June 1931. Hundreds of posters published by the Youngmen’s Muslim Association of Jammu, in regard to sacrilege of the Holy Quran, arrived in Srinagar. Muslim passions were greatly inflamed. A protest meeting was organised in Jamia Masjid, Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah, who had by now become associated with

many a fables made an impassioned speech and asked the Government to punish the guilty in connection with the Jammu Sacrilege. The Government utilised the services of ‘notables’ like Mirza Mustafa, Rahim Bandey, Moulvi Sharif-ud-din to sow discord among Muslims, but in vain<sup>xxxiv</sup>. By these incidents of religious interference and disrespect, Muslims felt deeply injured. Politically suppressed and economically strangled, the incidents aroused deep hatred against their rulers. After these incidents an organised agitation started in Jammu and Kashmir against the autocratic Government<sup>xxxv</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The late nineteenth century saw the birth of socio-religious reform movements in the state with a view to bring change in the outlook of the members of their own communities, the need of the time being to rid the society from medieval obscurantism. Thus, the reform movements started by the Hindus and the Muslims of Kashmir in the twentieth century corresponded to similar movements started by the leaders of the reform movements in nineteenth century British India. These movements in Kashmir strove to bring about a change in the socio-religious outlook of the two communities. The socio-religious reform movements were, connected with economic and political objectives and were interdependent. They made an impact on the politics of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and brought about socio-political awakening among the people against autocracy. They generated a spirit of mobility among them for a bright political future. This role played by religion was significant in that it ultimately paved the way for anti-feudal and anti-colonial trends in the political movement.

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