

KASHMIRI PANDITS THE PIONEER OF JOURNALISM **IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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ABSTRACT

This article pronounces the evolution of Press in Jammu and Kashmir and the Kashmiri Pandits being the first to heralded journalism in Kashmir. The paper also describes the genesis of Press in British India by emigre Kashmiri Pandits provided the road to the native Pandits of Kashmir. The study portrays the exploded space for social reforms, political rights, economic problems, and how political and social actions of the community related to larger political worlds in which they operated and how it related to the process of the formation of the community identity. Many Kashmiri Pandits exercise their own paper and have their own theme of reflection but the notion centered towards fostering the community consciousness through social, political and economic restructurings. The paper is an endeavor to reconnoiter miniscule Kashmiri Pandits contribution for social and political awakening through Press and the prolific results enjoyed by the majority community. Moreover the founders of different papers took the contemporary subjects and were critical of ruling government, ushering grievances of masses, Unemployment etc. were put forth by them into limelight.

KEYWORDS: - Newspapers, the Martand, the Hamdard, the Vitasta, the Kashmir Chronicle, Dress and Community consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION: - In Jammu and Kashmir, there was always apprehension of the communist onslaught on the British Empire in India through the State. So the British government kept a vigilant eye on the events in the border state, and saw to it that Press did not create any animosity against them. Thus, the laws about the Press were very strict. Moreover the British Government did not like to have awakening in the strategically located state of Jammu and Kashmir¹. Until 1932 A.D, there was blanket ban on the publications of newspapers. The absence of any freedom of press, platform or association amounted in actual practice to an utmost complete estrangement between the ruler and the ruled². The only sort of political activity that was allowed was the formation of societies but only for social and religious reforms. Prior, to their formation they had to declare that they would not participate in any type of Political activity. Since newspaper publication was not allowed in the State until 1932 A.D, newspapers, periodicals, and Gazette were published from Lahore found their way in the State³. The civil and military Gazette and the tribune of Lahore and a number of Urdu weekly magazines circulated in the State. Sometimes the Statesman and the Pioneer also came for the British visitors in Kashmir⁴. The people had thus no paper of their own wherein they could ventilate their feelings regarding various social and political problems of the State. The papers published from Lahore which entered the State, contained much information with regard to Kashmir affairs⁵. Kashmiri Pandits the traditional literati of Kashmir had produced outstanding people who were excelled in Urdu and English print media outside the State. Sheo Narayan Bahar of Lucknow started an Urdu caste Journal Murasla Kashmir devoted to social reforms in 1872 A.D. The Khair-Khawa-i-Kashmir, an Urdu weekly, published from Lahore and edited by Pandit HargopalKhasta during 1882-83A.D, was critical of Maharaja Ranbir Singh Government and fought for identity of Kashmir⁶. The Kashmir Prakash, a monthly magazine of Lahore, edited by Pandit MankaMaghar during 1898-1901A.D, worked for the social upliftment of Kashmiri Pandits. Pandit Mukand Ram Gurtoo, the founder of Akhbar-i-am, published from Lahore, Ratan Nath DharSarshar, EditorAvadhAkhbar, Pandit HargopalKaulKhasta founder editor of Ravi Benazir published from Lahore, Pandit LaxmiNarainKaul edited Bahar-i-Kashmir published from Lahore, Pandit Tarachand Bulbul who later earned the name and fame as Kashyap Bandhu was an Arya Samajist activist in Lahore. He was on the editorial staff of a widely read Urdu daily 'Vir Bharat' all published from Lahore entered the State indirectly by various means and reflects political and economic events of the State⁷. Motilal Nehru started a newspaper 'the Independent' in January 1919 A.D. He was a

shareholder of the Leader, the leading newspaper but was dissatisfied with its policy. The changing politics in the U.P was the yearning on the part of Motilal Nehru to have a newspaper of its own⁸. RadhaKrishanPurbi launched an Urdu weekly ‘Sudhar’, the official organ of Bohra BiiRadari of Kashmir valley. Later he shifted to Moradabad where he set up his own printing Press and started an Urdu daily ‘Naya Sansar’⁹. Pt. Maharaj Krishna KaulGhamkhar through the community journal Safeer-e-Kashmir were moved by the sufferings of Kashmiris in Kashmir. The floods in Kashmir in 1903, made the life miserable and through the medium of his journal, he highlighted the grievances of the people¹⁰. The Kashmir Gazette, Lahore an Urdu monthly edited by Munshi Mohammed Din Fauq during 1901-04 A.D, was published for the social and political awakening of Kashmiri Muslims. The KashmirMakhzen, Lahore an Urdu monthly during 1905 A.D, dealt with the social upliftment of the Kashmiris¹¹. Among the other paper must be mentioned the Akhbar-i-Kashmir, the Safir, The Subhi-i-Kashmir, TheBahar-i-Kashmir, TheHamdard-i-Hind, The Kashmir, the MazlumKashmir, Kuktab-i-Kashmir and the Kashmir Muslam etc.¹². The influence of these papers on the educated community mostly Kashmiri Pandits of Kashmir had a deep impact on them. By 1925 A.D, hundreds of Pandit graduates carried out an organized agitation in the outside press against the policy of Dogra Maharaja due to favoritism to outsiders mostly Punjabis in employment. Kashmiri Pandit were the first who raised their voice against the government and demanded freedom of Press, establishments of associations, a due share in the government services etc. In 1925 A.D, an article appeared in the Akbar-i-Aam a newspaper in Lahore. The article was written by Pt. GwashLal Koul. It was written under the heading ‘‘Unemployment in Kashmir’’. The author of this article appealed to the educated Kashmiris to raise the sort of agitation in Kashmir that the student community had raised in China¹³.

The Birth of Press in Jammu and Kashmir goes back to 1924A.D, when ‘Ranbir’ was started by a Jammu based Hindu Namely LalaMulk Raj Saraf had published in Urdu. The name Ranbir was selected because of the name of the Maharaja Ranbir Singh. The paper continued till 1929A.D, but on the complaint of Maharaja Hari Singh’s chief secretary G.E.C Wakefield, the paper was banned on May9, 1930A.D¹⁴. With the publication of the report of the Grievances Enquiry Commission as well as of other reports by B.J.Glancy which was submitted to the Maharaja brought forth the Press and Publications Act on April 25, 1932A.D, to facilitate the publication

of newspapers from both Srinagar and Jammu and provisions for the security of the Printing Press and newspapers were also modified¹⁵. Maharaja Hari Singh was willing to give legitimate freedom to the Press because he could know the pulse of the people. He read the foreign and Indian papers and magazines with interest¹⁶. He did not believe in choking the freedom of the Press as it was his belief that healthy criticism of the government policies would serve as feedback to his administration to redress the grievances of his subjects¹⁷.

THE VITASTA: - Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz holds the distinction of being the first to start an Urdu weekly namely the Vitasta in Srinagar in 1932A.D¹⁸. The Daily Vitasta, used to popularize the ideal of secular politics and fight for the establishment of responsible government in the State. Influenced by the writings of the popular Pandit intellectuals, published in the column of the Vitasta, the working committee of the Muslim Conference constituted a sub-committee early in 1933A.D, to find out ways and means of uniting Hindu and Muslims. This sub-committee could not function but it indicates that the idea of a joint action in politics had taken birth¹⁹. The paper discussed themes which were to become journalistic common places in the succeeding years: the need for internal reform in Hindu and Muslim society, the position of women in Kashmir society, admiration for modern education and the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Vitasta was critical of the Maharaja's government for not taking action against those who indulged in sins like early marriage and juvenile smoking²⁰.

THE MARTAND:-The Martand, second daily newspaper was the mouthpiece of Sanatan Dharma Yuvak Sabha which represents the minority point of view in Kashmir. It discussed the social, political, economic problems beset within Kashmiri Pandits community and themes of Hindu-Muslim unity, expansion of industries and labour welfare²¹. Kashyap Bandhu humorous column proliferate the ideas of social reform in the community and expresses the grievances of the community through his column challant²². The Martand devote its columns by the steep rise in the prices of articles of daily use. It launched a virulent attack on the Black-marketers, profiteers and grain- hoarders (Galladars). The Martand opposed to the abolition of the Food control department²³.

The Daily Martand became the vehicle of social reforms among Kashmiri Pandits. Its Shivratri, JanamAshtami, Diwali and Navreh, special issues carried stories, articles and poems advocating change in the moribund societal traditions. Distinguished writers like Dina Nath warikoo ‘Shahid’ in Kashmiri, ShyamLalWali, ‘Tirath’ in Kashmiri, Prem Nath Sadhu ‘Pardeshi’, Pitamber Nath DharFanni, ‘posh Bagh and posh Dalya’, NandLalDhar ‘Baygarz’, Dina Nath NadimVirVisheshwar, Jalal Bharti and SarvanandKaul ‘Premi’ contributed articles on social reform²⁴. In social matters, the Martand dwelt on the backwardness of the Pandit community and attacked social evils like child marriages, dowry and the maltreatment of Hindu daughters-in-law at the hands of their mother-in-law²⁵. The glory of the Martand reached its climax under the editorship of Kashyap Bandhu and after that Pandit S.N.Kaul and Pandit GwashaLal Koul took over the charge. Its circulation is said to have reached even 1900, which was much higher than that of any other local paper. Both in typography and contents the Martand maintained a fairly good standard and enabled the readers to have some acquaintance with different sections of Public opinion²⁶.

THE KESARI: - The Kesari, an Urdu weekly edited by Kashyap Bandhu floated his own paper in 1936A.D, due to differences with the management of the Martandpaper. The Kesari wholeheartedly supported the demand for responsible government and counseled both Hindus and Muslims to shun party politics and fight shoulder to shoulder with one another against the despotic government²⁷. The slow progress of education in Kashmir was also debated in the Kesari. Kashyap Bandhu changed his mind from social reforms towards political reforms by writing an editorial captioned: “Tabdil- Iqulab” i.e., change of heart. The paper lampooned corrupt official in the heading of the “challant” captioned, “BanamiShukarDivtaWazaratiShumali” i.e A Dig Was Made On The then District Commissioner for his policy of extortion and oppression²⁸. The Government did not like this spirit of criticism and on some occasions it succeeded in preventing the Broca’s press from printing the Kesari. The paper was banned when Shiekh Abdullah started the National Demand Agitation in 1938A.D. All important Kashmiri Pandits leaders were court arrested²⁹.

THE DESH: - With the release of all important leaders involving in the National Demand Agitation, Kashyap Bandhu started again his weekly, “The Desh” which was strong supporter of

National Conference³⁰. Kashyap Bandhu was outspoken in his comments and was a zealous and unflinching advocate of constitutional reforms. The *Desh* by its vigorous denunciation of the big zamindars and heroic stand on behalf of the helpless and oppressed cultivators occupied a unique position in Kashmir Journalism. It wrote against communalism and parochialism³¹.

The humorous columns of Kashyap Bandhu which reappeared in *Kesari* and subsequently in *Desh* poured sarcasm, scorn and contumely on the functioning of the Maharaja government. His challant (special columns) on “Mahatarmoo Ki Conference in *Desh*, “Fir Ha Fir Ha Fir Ha HaKaryo, BekalBayo Fir Ha Faryo” (decrying ostentatious and vulgar display of wealth on Kashmiri Marriage) etc. were not only written in humorous vein but also reflected the social and economic problems of Kashmiris as a whole³². The movement for change of dress among the Kashmiri Women’s was first brought to limelight by Kashyap Bandhu. He comes into conflict with orthodox Brahmins over the alteration of dress. But despite that he depicted the picture of Kashmiri Women as miserable and apathetic. In his weekly ‘*Desh*’ he writes of the reforms undertaken by Women’s and rid off the Pheran (Kashmiri Women Dress). After meeting a major success in his mission for change of dress of Kashmiri womenfolk, Kashyap Bandhu took to editing a weekly under the title of '*Sandesh*.' The *Desh* too became quite popular like *Martand* but owing to its pro-nationalist attitude, the *Desh* was blacklisted in 1946 A.D³³.

THE HAMDARD: - The weekly *Hamdard* was started by P.N.Bazaz in collaboration with Shiekh Mohammed Abdullah on August.1935A.D, with the purpose of re-orientating Kashmir politics on secular lines. The Urdu weekly popularizes the ideology of progressive Nationalism in the State. The *Hamdard* was made the mouth-piece of the policy and programme of Indian National Congress in Kashmir politics³⁴. It was a standard-bearer of democracy and unity of all Kashmiris without any consideration of caste or creed they professed. The illustrated weekly issues of the *Hamdard* contained a lot of information with regard to the history, sociology and literature of Kashmir³⁵. The *Hamdard* had sections for womens, children, literature, science, cinema, health etc. this indicates the variety of information to which a reader was interested. The *Hamdard* became a daily when Bazaz broke his partnership with Sheikh Abdullah due to his communal and short- sighted politics. As a daily, it displayed great courage in discussing political problems; excoriate the administration and economic problems facing the State. The

daily was banned on 28th August. 1945A.D. by the Maharaja Government due to anti-government articles were published³⁶. P.N.Bazaz “Hamdard” served as an institution, where young apprentices learned intricacies in art of Urdu journalism. P.N.Bazaz wrote his first book in 1935 A.D, “Kashmir Ka Gandhi” in which he described the S.M.Abdullah as the “chief hero of Kashmir movement” and also the most respected man among the Muslims, who conferred on him the title of ‘the Lion of Kashmir’. It was mainly through the sober, thoughtful and inspiring writings this weekly that Muslim conference was converted into National Conference in 1939A.D³⁷. Even Bazaz raised his voice against the ‘goondaism’ and ‘gangsterism’ of National Conference when it ceased to work on principles of secular lines, of which Bazaz wrote later that, “it had ceased to be a revolutionary nationalist body which had come into existence to express the inner urge of suppressed and tyrannized masses and to fight for the freedom for the country”³⁸.

THE KASHMIR TIMES: - In 1934 A.D, Pandit GwashaLalKaulstarted publishing “The Kashmir Times” and later in 1939A.D “The KashmirChronicle”. These two papers were first English newspapers to be published from Kashmir³⁹. The Kashmir times was a standard weekly and held independent views. The government’s attitude towards the paper was favourable and it was allowed to be circulated through the schools of the State because it carried material of educational value. Even the Maharaja Hari Singh consulted The Kashmir Times in order to feel the trends of Public opinion. Reformist and liberal- minded Hindus generally found in this paper a valuable ally because of its strong support in favour of social reform⁴⁰. The Kashmir Times endeavored to fight against illiteracy and advocated the establishment of a network of primary schools throughout the State. It whole heartedly supported the demands of the Muslim Conference for the spread of education, the establishment of a university, extension of medical aid and the exploitation of mineral resources of Jammu and Kashmir⁴¹. The lifting of the ban on the Kashmiris, entry into the army was also pleaded. Wrote the Paper: “we cannot understand why Kashmiri have been declared ineligible for military service when history provides ample evidence that Kashmiris were always a martial nation.

The Kashmir Times criticized the Government for its bankruptcy in the sense of justice captioned, “Bankrupt Judgment”. It also agitated for the rights of the state subjects. It was critical of the Govt.’s policy of giving high posts to non-State Subjects⁴².

THE QAUMI DARD: - Another English paper “Qaumi Dard” started by JiaLalKilam in 1935A.D was first published in Urdu and later in English. The sole function of the paper was to educate on healthy non-communal lines and to inculcate in them a sense of common citizenship⁴³. In the July 20, 1937A.D, edition, the paper wrote that communalism should be banished in the body politic and the goodwill of the minorities should be secured. It also contained articles against capitalists and bureaucrats⁴⁴. The paper wrote about need of the hour to foster constitutional reforms and people participation in political reforms. The author later on formed **The Progressive Party** to strengthened cohesion among the community, Hindu-Muslim unity and mass participation in the freedom movement. As against the opposition of the Yuvak Sabha to the setting up of the responsible Government, the Qaumi Dard remarked: “woes betide the lot of the community that has created such a narrow outlook for itself”⁴⁵.

The Qaumi Dard was critical of Hindus and Muslims for showing a callous indifference to social reform and critical to bureaucracy, the Paper wrote:

“The high officials of the government generally engrossed in routine work-transfers, appointments, travelling allowances and pension cases. They have almost no time to look to proper work for which they are presumed to be appointed. Even if they have time, they javegenerally no will to do it. This is the case with all irresponsible government: in Kashmir it is only in a greater degree.....”⁴⁶.

These newspapers highlighted above like Martand, Vitasta, Hamdard, Desh, The Kashmir Times, Kashmir Chronicle and Quami Dard had a large circulation. There are dozens of newspapers edited and owned by Kashmiri Pandits during the 1930’s and 1940’s A.D. such as

- 1). Pandit Shamboo Nath Kaul started Urdu weekly ‘Vakil’ and this turned into daily by Poshkar Nath Kaul.
- 2). Pandit Dina Nath Chikan was founder editor of ‘Rahbar’ an Urdu weekly.
- 3). Lambodar Nath Tickoo owned Urdu daily ‘Navyug’ edited by NandLalWattal.
- 4). Prem Nath Kanawa launched his own Urdu weekly ‘Kukroon Koon’ devoted to comic and Humour. He opposed ‘Naya Kashmir Resolution’ and raped the government of Maharaja

Hari Singh, for not proceeding with investigation, in cases related to serious financial irregularities, pertaining to K.G.Saiydain, the then Director Education (who take anti-Pandit Policies)⁴⁷.

5). Ram Chand Kaul Abhay of Motiyar, Rainawari used to edit 'Jyoti' and Urdu daily and the Official organ of Sudhar Samaj Samiti.

6). Amar Nath Kak, elder brother of Pt. R.C.Kak (P.M. of Jammu and Kashmir State), launched Urdu weekly 'Vichar'.

7). Shiv Narain Fotedhar, former president of Sanatan Dharm Yuvak Sabha founded an Urdu Weekly 'Young Kashmir'⁴⁸.

8). Radha Krishan Purbi launched an Urdu weekly 'Sudhar', the official organ of Bohra Bii radari Of Kashmir valley. Later he shifted to Moradabad where he set up his own printing Press and started an Urdu daily 'Naya Sansar'.

9). Pandit Shyam Lal Razdan started an Urdu weekly, 'Sharda'⁴⁹.

10). After meeting a major success in his mission for change of dress of Kashmiri womenfolk, Kashyap Bandhu took to editing a weekly under the title of 'Sandesh'⁵⁰.

Between 1932 A.D and 1947 A.D, Kashmiri Pandits dominated the main print media. The economic interests of the State were also catered by the newspapers like the Kesari, the Desh, and the Nur were inclined to the left. The daily Hamdard vigorously championed the cause of the Kisan movement⁵¹. The newspapers cover important news events on a number of occasions like the public address of Mohd. Ali Jinnah, President of Muslim League, when he visited Srinagar in 1944 A.D. The Hamdard was the one who published a detailed story on Jinnah's speech in Srinagar⁵². The following years, 1931-38 A.D. turned into the years of turmoil, communal riots, a divide in Kashmiris on religious basis, loud assertions for freedom, big shake-up in conservative minds, autocracy and despotism and a crusade for social change were all the shades and topics of newspapers. Even the 1947 A.D. Pakistani invasion in Jammu and Kashmir was covered up by Ram Chandra Kak. He covered important political events right from the visit of Jawahar Lal Nehru to Kashmir under Dogra reign and his effect on the politics of Kashmir. He was the first journalist who through his write-ups brought into focus China annexation of Xinjiang and Tibet⁵³. People like Kashyap Bandhu, P.N.Bazaz, Prem Nath Kana, Saligram Kaul, Jia Lal Kilam, J.L.Kak, and others joined the print media, they were motivated by a mission i.e., to inform and

educate people, who virtually live in isolation in Kashmir about social events, political and economic events within the State and outside⁵⁴. The spread of western education and modern thought wrought a revolution in the old mentality and people began to think in modern tone and compared themselves with civilized societies where freedom of thought and expressions were bestowed. With the communal upheaval of 1931A.D, writers and poets began to depict the inner longing of the people. A new spirit was being fused in Jammu and Kashmir through newspapers, writings, poems, books etc. with zest, vigour, and force which brought the unbearable social, economic and political conditions into limelight. Thus Press and Platform played a vital role in ushering the contemporary demands of the time and brought political consciousness in the Pandit community. The consciousness of the Pandit Community in social and economic arena renders to reflect the majority community to follow the same steps and fosters reforms in their respective arena.

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