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QUIT KASHMIR MOVEMENT – A PROBE

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| Keywords | Abstract |
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| <i>Nizamat,</i> <i>Praja Sabha,</i> <i>Muslim Conference,</i> <i>Naya Kashmir,</i> <i>Dyarchy,</i> <i>National Conference,</i> <i>Cabinet Mission,</i> <i>Dogra Raj and Quit Kashmir.</i> | <p>This paper highlights that the inclusion of identity conscious Muslim majority of Kashmir into Jammu kingdom had far reaching political consequences. The Kashmiri Muslims became more conscious of their political rights therefore raised their voice against the Dogra Maharaja from time to time. They believed that Maharaja was responsible for all their miseries and therefore always in search of opportunity to browbeat the Maharaja in one way or the other. The formation of Muslim Conference provided them required platform to raise their voice against the Dogra rule. This paper also highlights the political agitations of Muslim Conference later on turned into National Conference to restore democracy from autocracy.</p> |

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern State of Jammu and Kashmir came into being through the treaty of Amritsar on 16 March, 1846 concluded between Raja Gulab Singh and the Government of India. The inclusion of identity conscious Muslim majority of Kashmir into Jammu Kingdom had far reaching political consequences. They resented this treaty as sale deed of Kashmir and wanted to get rid of it as early as possible. So, they were always in search of opportunity to browbeat the Dogra Maharaja's in one way or the other. During the days of Maharaja Gulab Singh they accused the administration of the State as the most oppressive which had imposed exorbitant taxes on the Kashmiris especially on Pashmina and Wollen trade. They raised their voice against high taxation system and as a result the government put them in exile and some of Kashmiri artisans left Kashmir and settled in some parts of Punjab such as Lahore and Amritsar. It was the largest princely state of India and its rulers



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were enjoying near despotic powers like rulers of other princely states. The early Dogra rulers inherited a crude and primitive system of administration. The machinery of the government remained unorganized, arbitrary and medieval until internal and external factors compelled its democratization. Therefore, Gulab Singh (1846-57) did not reorganize the administration of the state. However, Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-1885) reorganized the administration of the state on sound footings. He codified laws, set up a new department of judiciary known as Nizamat. The existing departments were overhauled; he also enlarged his council of advisors. However, like his father, he too did not thought of associating the popular will in the administration and the resentment of Kashmiri Muslim against the Dogra administration continued. During the time of Maharaja Pratap Singh (1885-1925) the state constitution on sound footing was framed. 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. As a result the Kashmiri Muslims became more conscious of their rights and raised voice against the Dogra Maharaja from time to time therefore, it was in the third decade of twentieth century that the workers of the Silk factory of Kashmir launched the first organized agitation against the Maharaja in 1924. The Muslim labourers of the Silk factory formed a ring against the Hindu employees of the factory in general and against the filature officers of one of the barracks in particular who were mostly Hindus. They demanded the removal of the Hindu workers and officers and their replacement by the Muslims1.

However, it was only after 1930 that the political upheavals assumed alarming proportions. In all the upheavals, the Muslim leadership played crucial role. The agitations were designed primarily for the purpose of seeking redressal of Muslim grievances, genuine or imaginary. The Muslim leadership wanted not only a substantial share in the government services, freedom of speech and expression in political as well as religious matters, it also aimed at grabbing political powers and shifting the centre of power from Jammu to Srinagar.

Though there were agitations in the state against the Maharaja and his government, there was no leader to direct them and no political party to organize them. The Muslim leadership realized that without a political party it would be impossible to realize its goal. So, ultimately, All Jammu and Kashmir Muslims Conference Party came into being in October 16, 1932. The great force behind the formation of the party was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The inspiration and guidance for it also came from the British Officers of the Political department of the government of India, who were annoyed over the anti-British attitude of Maharaja Hari Singh.

The Muslim Conference Party began as a religious political movement aimed particularly against the Hindu Maharaja. It held its sessions at different places and at different times, which led to the presentation of memorials containing demands which were sometimes genuine one because by the time the movement started in the State many Muslims had acquired modern education in many Indian Universities. These Youngmen failed to get handsome jobs. Consequently, they adopted rebellious attitude against the Maharaja and his government.



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The anti Maharaja and anti-Hindu propaganda of the Muslim Conference roused the illiterate Muslim masses which resulted in widespread anti Hindu riots in the State. Thereafter on 12th November, 1931 Maharaja Hari Singh announced the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry to look into the grievances of the Muslims in the State. The same day, Hari Singh announced the appointment of a constitutional reforms conference to examine the feasibility of political reforms in the state again Bertrand J. Glancy was appointed as the Chairman of this Conference². This Reform Conference began its work on 14th March 1932³.

However, on March 29, 1936, All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference met in Srinagar. The Conference appealed to the Maharaja to widen the scope of the constitutional provisions created in the Act of 1934, which the committee thought had done considerable harm to the development of the representative and responsible and administrative institutions in the state. The working Committee of the Muslim Conference demanded transfer of effective powers to the Praja Sabha extension of franchise and abolition of the separate electorates⁴.

The working committee also took a decision to organize demonstration and protest all over the state on May 8, 1936 in support of the institutions of Responsible Legislature⁵.

However on June 24, 1938, a resolution was moved in the working committee of the Muslim **Conference seeking amendment in the constitution of the conference to the effect:**

1. That the name of the conference should be changed; and
2. All the people of the state irrespective of their religion, caste and creed are allowed to join its ranks⁶.

The working committee remained in session for four days. Finally, on June 28, the committee approved the resolution, therefore, on August 5, 1938, the second anniversary of the “Responsible Government Day” was observed in the State.

On August 27, 1938, while the agitation was going on, the leaders of the Conference Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad. Sadiq, Pandit Prem Nath Bajaj and Pandit Shyam Lal Saraf, drafted the Memorandum was called a National Demand. The next day, the State authorities arrested Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, Sardar Budh Singh and Khawaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. On August 29, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and other signatories to the National Demand were also arrested⁷.

Immediately, after the Tripuri Session of the Indian National Congress, on June 11, 1939, the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference are converted into All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference⁸. The first grand session of All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference was held on September 30, 1939, at Anantnag in Srinagar. It was at this session that the National Demand issue of August 29, 1938 was ratified⁹. Simultaneously, the Maharaja ordered the repeal of the Regulation No. 1 of 1934 A.D.

On 23rd March 1940 when Pakistan resolution was passed in Muslim league session of Lahore. Some of the Muslim leaders of Kashmir they tried to revive All J&K Muslim Conference in Kashmir and 9 elected members of the Praja Sabha out of 20 severed their connection with Muslim



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Conference. Muslim Conference had their seek for Muslim League. However, the demand for Responsible Government continued, therefore, the National Conference evolved a programme of reforms and reconstruction for the state. The programme was entitled the Naya Kashmir. In February 1944, the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference adopted it as its manifesto¹⁰. The New Kashmir Plan represented Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's concept of a model State in which the democratic and Responsible Government would ameliorate the lot of the masses and secure freedom from all sorts of economic exploitation¹¹.

Therefore, in October 1944, Maharaja Hari Singh announced through a proclamation his intension to adopt two ministers to his council from among the members of the Praja Sabha. They were Wazir Ganga Ram and Mirza Afzal Beg, one each from Jammu and Kashmir¹². The appointment of these ministers from the Praja Sabha was erroneously called "dyarchy" for actually no sphere of administrative operation was demarcated to the two ministers nor were they constituted into separate structure of political instrument vested with authority defined by statute¹³ instead the two ministers were quietly integrated into the council of ministers in office.

The Muslim Conference rejected the scheme outright¹⁴. The Dual government was fraught with many inherent contradictions and procedural defects. The two ministers appointed to the council on the mandate of the Praja Sabha were bound in their responsibility to both the Maharaja and the Sabha. The ministers apparently changed to carry out the mandate of the Sabha were in effect placed within ring fences constituted of the official block inside the Sabha¹⁵.

Meanwhile Ram Chander Kak was appointed as Prime Minister of the State. He replaced B.N. Rao, who had been appointed the Prime Minister of the State in November 1944. Kak on his part was severely opposed to any devolution of authority and was not reconciled to the appointment of the Ministers from among the members of the Praja Sabha. Immediately, after he took over, he took away whatever little initiative and prestige the two Ministers enjoyed¹⁶.

The National Conference which constituted the largest elected party in the Sabha had its own grievances its nominee in the council did not agree to submit to any official decision which was contrary to the primary purposes the conference sought to achieve¹⁷.

The National Conference realized that the Diarchy was organized puppetry. The two representatives of the Praja Sabha were posted in the ministerial columns of the Maharaja to serve him rather than carry out the mandate of the Sabha or implement the policy plans the Conference idealized¹⁸.

As a reaction to these, Mirza Afzal Beg offered to resign and requested the government to be relieved of his office immediately. On 19th March, 1946 his resignation was accepted.

Shortly after Beg was relieved of his office, the Prime Minister, Pandit Ram Chander Kak, changed his policy and offered the post to Mian Ahmad Yar, the deputy leader of the National Conference Parliamentary Party in the Praja Sabha was invited to take the place of Mirza Beg. This appointment added fuel to the fire and worsened the already charged relations and became immediate cause of Quit Kashmir Movement¹⁹.



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In the meantime talks for transfer of power started in 1946. British Government sent a mission comprising of three persons, i.e., Sir Pathric Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and John Alexander. The mission recognized only three political entities, the congress, the Muslim league and the Princes, as the legitimate parties to take the future course action after independence and partition of the country²⁰. It was provided in the Cabinet Mission Plan that Maharaja's and nawabs of princely states should decide their own future.

On the other hand on 19th April Cabinet Mission arrived at Srinagar and remained there till 24th April. During that time Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was at Lahore. He sent a telegram to the Cabinet Mission. In the telegram it was written that he as President of All Jammu and Kashmir Conference, welcome the visit of the Mission to Srinagar. He had also written that as Mission is at the moment reviewing relationship of princes with the paramount power with reference to treaty rights, he said that Treat of Amritsar 1846 by which land and people of Kashmir were sold to Dogra for 75 lacks of Nanakshahi rupees should be re-examined. In the memorandum submitted by National Conference to Cabinet Mission, the party maintained “No sale deed, however, sacrosanct, can condemn more than four million men and women to the servitude of an autocrat when the will to live under his rule is no longer there. We people of Kashmir are determined to mould our destiny and we appeal to the members of the Cabinet Mission to recognize the justice and strength of our case”²¹.

It was at this time that Sheikh Abdullah raised the demand that Treaty of Amritsar of 1846 should be annulled. He asserted that Dogra rule was established by the Treaty of Amritsar and that Kashmir was sold to the Dogras for a paltry sum of Rs.75 lakhs²². After few days Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah returned to Kashmir from Lahore and started delivering inflammatory and anti-Government speeches at various places. In these speeches he made full effort in educating the people about the Treaty of Amritsar²³. First speech was delivered on 15th May, 1946 at Dhanji Bhai Adda compound, Srinagar, where he declared that with the departure of British from India, the rulers of princely states were also to leave the administration²⁴.

Another speech was delivered at Zaina Kadal, Srinagar. During the course of speech he said “We will collect one, one rupee to make 75 lakh rupees to pay Maharaja Hari Singh whose great grandfather had purchased Kashmir after paying 75 lakh rupees and by doing this we will take back Kashmir”. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah visited a large number of towns in the valley and delivered inflammatory speeches²⁵. Workers and meetings, especially in Kashmir valley; in these meetings, the treaty was read and explained to the audience who were called upon to prepare themselves for a final struggle to over throw the Dogra Raj²⁶.

However, when Kashmir was passing through a critical phase. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad played an important role. Bakshi through his organizing capacity organized the associations of different groups i.e. Tonga Association, Shopkeepers Association, Boatmen Association etc. These associations played a great role in making this movement powerful²⁷.



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Even in British India he pursued his activities and apprised the public of what happened in Kashmir. In India he came to be considered as the symbol of Kashmiri's struggle against monarchial bondage. During the 'Quit Kashmir' movement he had been the liaison between Delhi and Srinagar. Bakshi was more popular among the masses of Kashmir on account of having an urban base. He was useful to Sheikh Abdullah because he could control the urban masses²⁸.

On 19th May, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah suspended the programme of procession and meetings perhaps to ensure that the Government was not able to bring about Hindu-Muslim clashes and thus sabotage the real objectives of the movement. On 19th and 20th May, 1946, he held a series of meetings with his top colleagues particularly Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg, Bakshi Ghulam, Maulana Saeed, Khawaja Mohi-ud-din Kara²⁹. In Srinagar and some other towns of Kashmir valley, the movement somehow remained alive and the main activities sprang and forth came within the precincts of the Mosques³⁰. Sogam was a major centre of the Quit Kashmir Movement and also the site of mass arrests³¹.

There was a spurt in Poonch, Rajouri and Mirpur but elements of Muslim league diffused the situation. The Hindus of Jammu on the other hand, were not ready to rise against the Dogra Dynasty. Infact, a number of leaders in Jammu who had ardently worked with National Conference were embarrassed by the sudden eruption against the Dogra rule in Kashmir province³². As the 'Quit Kashmir' movement gained progress, government arrested most of the leaders of National Conference. Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad and Khawaja Mohammad Sadiq escaped Lahore. On 20 May, Sheikh Abdulah went to Delhi via Rawalpindi with the object of making consultations with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. But he was arrested at Kohala³³. In three days after 20 May twenty people died in police firing, hundreds were injured, and hundreds more were arrested³⁴. The Prime Minister of the state Mr. Ram Chander Kak declared that we have been preparing for this situation for 11 months and we are ready to meet the challenge³⁵.

The 'Quit Kashmir' movement was sporadic and spontaneous. Mass arrests, shooting, victimizing and crawling order had became order of the day. The State government declared that Hindu Raj was in danger, but the problem was basically a political one³⁶. As a climax to the Kashmir movement, the Sheikh and other leaders including, Sardar Budh Singh, Maulana Masodi, were brought on trial and accused of sedition and revolt against the Maharaja³⁷.

When Jinnah came to know about the "Quit Kashmir" slogan launched by the National Conference, he characterized the agitation as an attempt on the part of the National Conference to coerce the Maharaja into recognizing the National Conference as representative of all Muslims Leaders of the National Conference as well as those of the All India States. People's Conference felt that Sheikh Abdullah was transcending the directions given to him by the two organizations. They failed to realize the moment and perhaps Sheikh Abdullah himself was not aware that the slogan had such far reaching psychological reverberations³⁸.

However, on hearing that the atrocities were committed on the people, Nehru, who was at that time busy in talks with the Cabinet mission, rushed to help the Kashmiri people³⁹. He had written to the



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Maharaja on 16th June, 1946 that he would reach Srinagar by the 19th evening along with defense lawyers for the sedition case against Sheikh Abdullah and others. Further, it was his mission to bring about a settlement in view of the larger interests of the country⁴⁰. The state government on the other hand, considering perhaps, that Nehru had adopted a partisan attitude in favour of 'Quit Kashmir', banned his entry into the state, rest it should create a disturbance⁴¹. Some people believed that the ban was not directed against Nehru as such. It had been imposed by the government in a bid to keep the state free of outside interference while it was engaged in curbing the movement for Maharaja's ouster. Had Nehru's entry permitted, there might be a danger of the dying movement earning a fresh lease of life⁴².

Jawaharlal Nehru became almost harsh when he was stopped by the State government at Kohala and forbidden to advance⁴³. However, the ban seems to have hurt Nehru's ego and he was determined to force his entry into the State at Kohala on June 19, 1946⁴⁴. The government had stationed a military picket at Kohala. The reports of Nehru's intended visit had provoked the ire of State Hindus. A fairly large group of Dogra Hindus had to make a hostile demonstration against him⁴⁵. When Nehru reached at Rawalpindi, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and many leaders of Congress met him and started walking with him. They shouted slogans supporting Nehru and his incursion and on the other side the Dogra demonstrators waved black flags⁴⁶. An order was served upon Nehru instructing him not to enter the boundaries of the state, as that would disturb peace. He refused to take any notice of it. Meanwhile Nehru's men had begun to quarrel with the Dogra demonstrators⁴⁷.

However, the District Magistrate allowed Nehru to proceed further as he liked. The Congress men thought that they had won and all was over. Thereafter Nehru reached Domel within an hour and stopped in Dak Bungalow. The District Magistrate followed him. Pandit Nehru was arrested for defying the lawful orders of the District Magistrate⁴⁸. The news of Nehru's arrest spread all over India just like wild fire. Congress committees and Praja Mandals all over Punjab and cadres of the Congress offered to proceed to Kashmir to enter the State and defy the orders of the State authorities⁴⁹.

On the request of Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Abdul Kalam talked with Nehru on telephone that in Delhi his presence was needed⁵⁰. Maulana made him believe that his dignity is the dignity of Congress. After great insistence, J.L. Nehru agreed to come back to Delhi on June 23rd 1946⁵¹. Mr. Asaf Ali, a famous lawyer of India conducted the trial of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. However, the court delivered its judgement on the 10th September, 1946 in which Sheikh Abdullah was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to imprisonment for 3 years for three speeches and a fine of Rs.500 for each speech⁵².

Acharya Kriplani, the Congress president who also paid a visit to Kashmir and rightly advised the people of Kashmir to give up the demand of "Quit Kashmir" as directed against the Maharaja⁵³. "The Quit India" slogan against the British power was raised to eliminate alien rule. But 'Quit Kashmir' demand, in his opinion, was unjust and unreasonable. It was a golden advice to the



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National Conference and “we trust the slogan will die”⁵⁴. It has been sometimes said that Quit Kashmir Movement had been launched on the advice of congress but the only evidence cited in support of this supposition in Pandit Nehru’s personal role therein⁵⁵. It is easily forgotten that Congress openly condemned it through its powerful press and not a single congressman of note except Pandit Nehru uttered a word of sympathy even for the wanton killings and repression in the valley. Why Pandit Nehru supported it to the limited extent of condemning government repression was only to express solidarity with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah for political reasons⁵⁶.

Nehru was the man who was conducting more than anybody else, negotiations with the British Government for the transfer of power and he may be credited with the knowledge, more than any other congress leader, of the picture that the future had in store. He realized the importance of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as a popular leader in a geographically vital Muslim majority area and was wise enough to realize that it was in the interest of congress that he should be on its side. It was for this and only this reason that Nehru cast himself in the role of a friend and supporter of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah⁵⁷.

This movement spread awareness among the people of Kashmir. This movement gives general impression that the Maharaja was an alien ruler and it is their moral duty to get rid his rule. However factually it was an agitation against autocracy to restore democracy.

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