

CHAPTER – 4

ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1932-1939

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2.1 National Conference - Emergence of a Movement:

The State of the Jammu and Kashmir was handed over to Maharaja Gulab Singh and to his male descendants in lieu of seventy five Lakh of rupees by the British in 1846 by virtue of the Treaty of Amritsar¹. Both Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors considered the State especially the Valley of Kashmir as their purchased property² and claimed to be its' absolute sovereigns. Foreign rule was not new to Kashmiris but the Dogras were the strange foreign rulers who were themselves vassals of another mightier power and unlike other foreign rulers, they did not live in the Valley as its inhabitants and considered Jammu as their home. So Prem Nath Bazaz, a progressive historian of Kashmir rightly argues that, "Dogra imperialism brought nothing but misery, thralldom, physical and mental deterioration in its wake while other imperialisms did not come without some blessings". It was only in twenties of the twentieth century that the signs of consciousness against the oppressive Dogra rule started germinating in the Valley. However, it was in 1932 that first known political organization of Kashmir, All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, was formed which played an important role in political awakening of general masses and in changing the pattern of the Dogra rule. As Muslim community was worst hit by Dogra rule and the non-Muslim subjects did not participate in the fight against misrule, so Muslims of State named the organization after their own community which was secular in nature from its beginning. In 1939, a very significant development took place when Muslim Conference was changed into National Conference to remove the hindrance in the entry of non-Muslims in the struggle for freedom from misrule. The Dogra rulers took little interest in providing basic medical and educational facilities to its subjects. They also remained hostile towards the Christian Missionaries who were pioneers of modern medical and educational amenities in Kashmir. Till 1872, European visitors were not allowed to mix with the people³ as Maharaja did not desire the British India to get aware about the pathetic conditions of Muslim subjects of State. In 1885, a full-fledged British Residency was introduced in Srinagar during the rule of Pratap Singh and some positive changes

were introduced in the administration of the State upon the intervention of the British Resident Commissioners.

The Dogra rule was very oppressive and every section of society was paralyzed by its actions and orders which were mostly communal in nature. The main factors which led to the emergence of the National Conference as people's movement against the tyrannical rule of Dogra regime are discussed below:

2.1(a) Sectarian Nature of Dogra Rulers:

The most important factor that accounted for the rise of dissatisfaction against the Dogra regime and finally culminated in the emergence of first political movement in Kashmir was sectarian nature of Dogra rulers. The Dogra rulers demonstrated an open bias in favour of their co-religionists when they withdrew the privileges of Muslims and transferred the same to their co-religionists⁴. The transfer of jagirs from Muslims to non-Muslim subjects remained a dominant feature of the Dogra rule. *Inquilab*, an Urdu daily from Lahore in its issue of 20 November 1931 writes about the situation in these words:

*“Right from the coronation of Maharaja Hari Singh up to the present time, about twenty Kashmiris were deprived of their jagirs which valued from Rs 5,000 to 10,000 each. These jagirs were offered to other twenty persons among whom eighteen were Hindu rajputs and the rest two belonged to Muslim community.”*⁵

To promote Hinduism, Maharajas established Dharmarth Trust to which they endowed huge amount of revenue⁶ while on other hand, they confiscated the rent-free grants enjoyed by Muslim religious persons and institutions⁷ and levied *Mandri* and *Ashgal* taxes⁸ on the Muslims for maintenance of temples and support of Hindu priests respectively. Besides *Mandri* and *Ashgal*, the Muslims had to pay marriage tax known as *Sathrashahi*. Hindu subjects were totally exempted from the notorious exaction of *begar* (forced labour) and the whole blush of it fell exclusively upon the Muslims especially peasantry. Proprietary rights were given to peasantry of Jammu province while Muslim peasantry of Kashmir was deprived of these rights.

The slaughter of ox/ cow/ buffalo was forbidden by the rulers and whosoever was found guilty of slaughtering them was awarded capital punishment or sentenced to

gorous imprisonment⁹. The term '*Hathai*' was used to describe the crime of killing cow, an ox or a buffalo¹⁰. In the initial phase of Dogra rule, *Hathai* was awarded death sentence but subsequently the punishment was reduced to life imprisonment and then to seven years of rigorous imprisonment. Describing the situation, E. F. Knight who visited Valley in 1891 writes:

Until recently, the killing of that sacred animal was punishable with death. Imprisonment of life is now penalty, and many unfortunate Mohammedan, I believe lying immured in Hari Parbat because in that time of famine, he has ventured to kill his own ox to save himself and his family from starvation."¹¹

Apart from imprisonment, several fines were imposed upon the people who were suspected to be involved in cow slaughter and sometimes the localities where *Hathai* was supposed to be committed were burnt to ashes. Even the slaughter of sheep and goats was prohibited during the sacred festive days of Hindus, which numbered about 65 days in a year¹². The Muslims considered the prohibition as a serious interference in their religious freedom and consequently they complained against it before the Glancy Commission (1931-32)¹³. Even after the acceptance of the recommendations of Glancy Commission by Maharaja Hari Singh on 10th April 1932, no butcher was allowed to open his shop on four days viz *Ram Navami*, *Anam Ashtami*, birthday of Maharaja and birthday of the heir-apparent. It is also worth noting that in the dominion of Maharaja, nobody could cut the Pipal tree or its branches as it was considered sacred by the Hindus¹⁴.

The State discriminated against its Muslim subjects on all fronts including economic front. Rulers of the State encouraged the contractors belonging to their own community and ignored the interests of the local aspirants. The Maharajas invited the Hindu contractors from outside the State¹⁵ and offered them contracts even at the cost of the State exchequer¹⁶. The State policy of pampering the non-local and non-Muslim contractors was a great factor that resulted in resentment among the local Muslims. The demand to abolish this practice figured in the memorandum submitted by some prominent Muslim representatives of Kashmir on behalf of the local Muslims, to the Indian viceroy Lord Reading in 1924. The economic oppression of the Muslim subjects has been described by Dr. Elmslie as, "*most of the oppressive restrictions and taxes are only imposed within the limits of the Valley. Hindus being*

*the ruling class were exempted from the burden which pressed heavily on the Muslims".*¹⁷

The religious fanaticism of the Dogra rulers is evident from their attempts to replace the Muslim names of some localities of Kashmir by the Hindu nomenclature. Maharaja Rambir Singh changed the name of *Islamabad* to *Anantnag*¹⁸. Similarly *Takt-i- Sulaiman*, a mount in Srinagar, was renamed by him as *Shankar Acharaya*. Moreover, Dogra ruler's bias towards Muslim subjects was further demonstrated when they promulgated a law according to which if any Muslim would embrace Hinduism, he was within his rights to inherit property and enjoy guardianship over his children, whereas if a Hindu became a Muslim, he was deprived of all such rights. Thus the religious liberty and tolerance was not allowed in the Dogra rule¹⁹. This discriminatory attitude of State against the Muslim community of Kashmir further alienated the Muslim subjects and it was one of the main grievances of the Muslim community which they submitted to Maharaja Hari Singh through a memorandum in 1931 and repeatedly asked for its abolition in annual sessions of the Muslim Conference. In the memorandum submitted to Maharaja in 1931, Muslim community sought complete religious freedom in the State and urged that no person should be deprived of his property on conversion to another religion, as it amounted to religious interference.

During the Dogra regime, on one hand, there was complete denial of rights and demands of the Muslim subjects while on the other hand, there was no freedom of Press, no freedom of speech and no freedom for establishment of associations although these rights were granted to other British Indians. The people of Kashmir were denied such facilities and there was a strict ban on the freedom of Press as late as 1931. In 1875, there were 478 newspapers being published in British India, whereas in Kashmir, Prem Nath Bazaz published the first newspaper representing the interests of masses '*Vitasta*' in 1932. The State not only rejected request of Muhammadud-din Faruq, an eminent journalist of Punjab to bring out a daily in Kashmir but also denied permission to a Muslim deputation led by Nawab of Dacca, Sayyid Mohsin Shah for visiting the Kashmir Valley²⁰. The State Government did not even tolerate the submission of memorandums and when Government came to know of memorandum submitted secretly by some prominent Muslim citizens of

Kashmir to Lord Reading in 1924 regarding the redressal of their grievances, it persecuted them all²¹. Khawaja Sad-ud-din Shawl was exiled while Khawaja Nur Shah Naqesbhandi was forced to resign from the post of tehsildar. Similarly Agha Sayyid Hussain Shah Jalali was dismissed from Zaildari and his jagir was confiscated²². Thus there was no freedom of Press and no suitable opportunity and platform for presenting the grievances. Besides, there was lack of existence of public opinion, as there was ban against formation of political associations and organizations as late as 1932. Sir Albion Banerji, the Foreign and political Minister of Maharaja Hari Singh after his resignation had rightly said that there is no touch between the Government and people, no suitable opportunity for representing grievances and the administrative machinery has little or no sympathy with the people's wants and grievances²³. The sectarian nature of Dogra rule is described by Prem Nath Bazaz, a contemporary historian and politician as:

*"Speaking generally and from the bourgeois point of view, the Dogra rule had been a Hindu Raj. Muslims have not been treated fairly by which I mean as fairly as the Hindus. Firstly, because contrary to all professions of treating all classes equally, it must be candidly admitted that Muslims were dealt with harshly in certain respects only because they were Muslims."*²⁴

This sectarian nature of the Dogra regime was the basic reason which forced the Muslim subjects to start a movement for attainment of their basic demands and plead for their rights.

2.1(b) Communalization of State Services:

The Dogra rulers followed a policy of the communalization of State services. During the initial phase of Dogra regime, the Maharaja handed over all the key positions to non-local Hindus²⁵ and appointed local Pandits on clerical positions²⁶. It is worth mentioning that in 1872, there was not a single Muslim occupying even a lowest position in State services, whereas there were 5,572 Kashmiri Pandits working as clerks²⁷. The local Pandits with the passage of time rose to high positions especially in the Revenue Department. The representation of Muslims has been described by Walter Lawrence, when he mentions that in 1890, he could not find a single Muslim occupying any Wazir-i-wazarat (Deputy Commissioner). The poor representation of

Muslims in State administration was one of the major grievances which was mentioned in the famous memorandum, submitted secretly by prominent Muslim citizens to Lord Reading. According to statement attached with the memorandum, the number of non-Muslim gazetted officers in Kashmir Valley was 421, who drew as pay, a sum of Rs 16, 50,114 while the number of gazetted officers belonging to Muslim community was hardly 55 whose pay amounted to Rs 1, 47,325.85²⁸. Here it must be mentioned that majority of these Muslim officers were outsiders who hardly had any say in the Government affairs. When Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah applied for scholarship, he could not get it although the Education Minister was a Muslim namely Agha Sayyid Hussain Rizvi. The Education Minister called Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to his office and expressed his helplessness in sanctioning the scholarship and told Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah that his position in the State ministry was like that of a gramophone machine²⁹. It will be worth mentioning that in 1930 when the same Education Minister recommended the name of a non-local Muslim for the post of college lecturer on merit basis, the State cabinet rejected his application and instead appointed a non-Muslim with a lower merit³⁰. This substantiates the fact that Muslim officers who were mainly from outside the State were just pawns with no actual say in the State administration. It is fact that policy of importing officials from outside Kashmir for modernizing the administration was opposed by Kashmiris especially by the Kashmiri Pandits which resulted in a law in 1927 defining the term "State subjects" by which preference in State services was to be given to State subjects but this did not made any difference to the Kashmiri Muslims as they were neglected in the State administration. The policy of discrimination adopted by Dogra rulers is clearly evident from the official figures which show that Muslims of State were under-represented in all fields in State administration, although they constituted 80% of population of the State. In the revenue department, there were five Muslims and twenty-six non-Muslims working as tehsildars³¹. Likewise, no Muslim occupied any official position in department of customs except two Muslims who worked as assistant inspectors³². There was no Muslim who was working as Session Judge, Additional Session judge or Additional District Magistrate in the whole State as late as 1931³³. In the police department, Inspector General of Police, Superintendents of Police and Inspectors were all Hindus except one Muslim Superintendent of Police³⁴. Similarly in the Education

Department, the offices of the Secretary, Assistant Secretaries, Director, College Principals and school inspectors were all occupied by non-Muslims in 1931³⁵. Thus the Muslim representation in different branches of administration was nominal even in 1931-32.

The State defended its policy by saying that the Muslims were educationally too backward to be appointed or given adequate representation in the administration but the facts are contrary to it. The administration of Kashmir was run on medieval lines up to 1907 and Persian was the official language³⁶. Kashmiri Muslims particularly those with noble ancestry had a long tradition of being well versed in Persian but even this could not benefit them in getting the Government services. Thus there was a deliberate attempt by the rulers to keep the Muslims away from the administration. It is a fact that Muslims of Kashmir started modern education later than Hindus but even when they acquired the requisite qualifications, the State Government devised ways and means to stop their entry into State administration. The plea of poor representation of Muslims in State services due to their backwardness in modern education was also criticized by Glancy Commission (1931-32) by reporting that there were twelve graduates and 133 matriculates among Muslims who were unemployed when the commission began its hearing³⁷. Unfortunately even among class IVth employees for which no educational qualification was prescribed, Muslims accounted for less than 25% although they constituted 80% of the entire population.

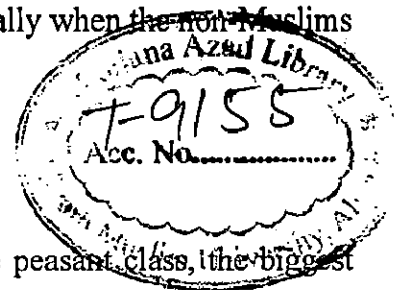
Dogra rulers not only under-represented Muslims in State services but also discouraged them by taking various steps to deny them positions consistent with their qualifications. The most noticeable example of State's discouragement to Muslim educated youth is the treatment meted out to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who inspite of being M.Sc in Chemistry was appointed merely as a school teacher³⁸. In 1930, the Government constituted a Civil Services Recruitment Board with the purpose of making appointments in various services but only those candidates were declared eligible to apply who came from noble families and were not above 20 years³⁹. Most of the Muslim educated youth unlike the Kashmiri Pandits did not come from a 'rich pedigree' and majority of them were above twenty years of age as they were first generation learners. Thus when there were less number of educated

Muslim youth, Government blamed Muslim backwardness for their poor representation in State services and when they found that there was a good number of educated Muslims available, it came out with a new policy to discourage them⁴⁰. In the competitive examinations, Hindi and Sanskrit subjects were made optional, whereas Urdu, Persian and Arabic were totally excluded. Government filled 60% positions without referring them to the Board and only 40% of vacant positions were filled up through Recruitment Board⁴¹ and if any Muslim would overcome all these obstacles, the Government reserved the right to disqualify him without any explanation. These young educated men of Kashmir who were denied their deserved positions were later the architects of Muslim Conference. Reading Room Party – the forerunner of the Muslim Conference, mainly focused its attention on anti-Muslim appointment policy of the State and published information about poor representation of Muslims in different branches of administration in the daily '*inquilab*' to awaken people and create public opinion for a mass movement against the Maharaja's tyrannical rule.

Usually the Judicial system plays an important role in maintaining social equality and justice in any political system but judicial system of the State was acting as perpetuator of injustice as has rightly been remarked by Bagh Ram, the judicial member of the State Council that the institution of justice has lost its meaning and hence perpetuated injustice and oppression. Being conscious of their cruel rule, the Dogra rulers had given enormous powers to police and other law enforcing agencies without subjecting them to checks and balances. Thus the Dogra rulers not only oppressed the Muslim majority of the State but left no stone unturned to close the doors of Government offices to them⁴². This led to a situation where primarily economic nationalism assumed 'communal' colour especially when the non-Muslims refused to become a part of the mainstream.

2.1(c) Agrarian Crisis:

The most neglected class of the Kashmir Valley was the peasant class, the biggest segment of the population of the Kashmir. The crucial cause was the confiscation of proprietary rights in land and the oppression by jagirdars, chakdars and maufidars. Jagirdars were next to the Maharaja who appropriated a considerable portion of revenue of the Valley⁴³. There were both small and big jagirdars and they too were



infrequently the proprietors of the land. The *Chakdari* system was created in 1862 which led to emergence of a new class of landed aristocracy called *Chakdars*. The creation of this institution was motivated by two objectives, first to bring the fallow land of Valley under cultivation and to reinforce a class of favourites⁴⁴. The rent free land grants given either for the life time in propriety to religious classes, religious institutions and others was known as *maufi* or *dharmarth* and the grantee was called *maufidar*⁴⁵. The portion of land occupied by the *jagirdars*, *chakdars* and *maufidars* can be judged from the fact that immediately after the end of the Dogra rule, fifty five lakh kanals were transferred to the tillers by passing the abolition of Big Landed Estates Act (1950)⁴⁶. Although this act was beginning towards abolition of landlordism in India, only that land was transferred from the landlords which exceeded 182 kanals and the orchard and *maufi* land were exempted from it. The most critical feature of landlordism in Kashmir during Dogra rule was that majority of landlords belonged to Hindu community which constituted only 5.5% of population of Valley and 20% of total population of the State⁴⁷. It is strange to note that it was Kashmiri peasant whose propriety rights in land were confiscated. The new law did not apply to Jammu⁴⁸ because the Dogra rulers always considered Jammu as their home and Kashmir as the conquered territory. It was only upon strong recommendation of the A. Wingate and his successor Settlement Officer, Walter Lawrence that Occupancy Rights were conferred upon the peasantry in 1894-95⁴⁹ but the peasants of the jagirs, chaks and *maufi* continued to remain as tenants-at-will. The restoration of Proprietary Rights in land was one of main demands which the Kashmiri Muslims presented to the Government in 1924⁵⁰ and 1931. This restoration of Proprietary Rights was one of the main issues on which struggle of Muslim Conference centered and which finally led to restoration of propriety rights in case of *khalsa* land in 1933⁵¹. However, even after 1933, a sizeable peasant population who were working in *jagir*, *chak* and *maufi* lands continued to remain either mere crop sharers or tenants-at-will⁵².

There was discrimination not only on the holding of propriety rights between Jammu peasants and peasants of Kashmir province but also in magnitude of land revenue in case of the *khalsa* land. The *khalsa* lands were those lands which were directly under management of the State. The land revenue for *khalsa* land in Kashmir was 1/3rd of the gross produce⁵³ while it was only 1/4th in Jammu province⁵⁴. Besides the

Government used to fix standard per unit productivity of land but as the productivity of land varies from place to place so peasants whose land yielded less than what was fixed were at receiving end. The State realized $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of its assessed revenue in cash and $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ in kind⁵⁵. The Kashmiri peasant who depended upon moneylenders called “Waddars” for supply of cash was exploited by these waddars by charging high interest on the money lent by them to the peasants for payment of land revenue in cash and purchased the peasant produce at very cheap rates. After payment of $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ of land revenue in kind, the peasant was left with small quantity of produce hardly sufficient to fulfill his basic food needs for a few months. Unlike the khalsa peasant, who had to pay $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the assessed revenue in kind, the *kashtikar* (who worked on jagir, chak and maufi lands) had to pay $1/2^{\text{th}}$ of his assessed revenue to his owner in terms of grains⁵⁶. The *kashtikar* had not only to part with half of his grains but even the grass had to be divided equally. The peasant had to pay a number of taxes besides the land revenue. He had to pay twelve annas as Chowkidari Tax⁵⁷, six paise per rupee as cess on repair of Jamia Masjid, grazing tax and tax on walnut trees and all kinds of orchids⁵⁸. The Muslim peasantry had not only to feed officials but also to provide for the needs of their relatives and friends by illegal exactions like rasum and mutabir. Rasum consisted of requisitions for village produce and under this system officials would obtain wood, fodder, milk, poultry, grains, blankets and an occasional pony, cows and sheep free of cost⁵⁹. By mutabir, Muslim peasantry had to provide for needs of relatives and friends of officials⁶⁰. Prem Nath Bazaz rightly says:

*“Almost the whole of official corruption has been borne by the Muslim masses. The police, the revenue department, the forest departments and even the employees of the cooperative societies had their palms oiled by exaction of the usual rasum. Nobody felt any sympathy with this distressing picture of poverty. The channels of human kindness and mercy had run dry up. To loot the peasants was no sin; society did not disapprove of it.”*⁶¹

The peasant was not left with more than one fourth of his produce after parting a major portion of produce with State and its officials. This was not all as the peasant was subjected to another inhuman exaction called begar (forced labour). Though begar was partially abolished by Government in 1891 and fully in 1920, it continued

for a long time in different forms. The Government order that the remuneration should be paid to the forced labourers was applicable only to labourers working for Government works⁶² and did not mention about begar being used for personal services of the officials. It is also worth mentioning that position of peasants working on chak, jagir and maufi lands was like those of the serfs⁶³. Even as late as 1932, Glancy Commission found the Government's order regarding the abolition of begar a dead letter⁶⁴. It may be also noted that abolition of begar orders did not apply to construction of canals, embankments and so on. The whole burden of begar fell exclusively upon the common Muslim peasantry as the Hindus, Sikhs, Sayyids, Thakurs and Rajputs were exempted from it⁶⁵. Thus on one hand, Muslim peasantry formed the major portion of the revenue of the State, on other hand, they were most neglected class of the society. The Kashmiri Muslim leadership through memorandums and resolutions tried to inform the Maharaja as well as the British Indian Government about the pathetic conditions of Muslim peasants and these demands constituted the main cornerstone of struggle by Muslim Conference.

2.1(d) Erosion of State Industry:

The labour class was the second biggest segment of the State's population residing mostly in urban centres and was exclusively comprised of Muslims⁶⁶. Upto 1870, shawl industry was the leading industry of the Kashmir⁶⁷. It employed about thirty thousand Muslim shawl-weavers and innumerable number of spinners⁶⁸. However, the condition of the shawl-weavers was apathetic. The department of Dagshawl exclusively manned by Kashmiri Pandits regulated the shawl trade and subjected the weavers to great miseries which often led to the forced migration of these shawl-weavers to Punjab. And when they succeeded in escaping to plains, their immediate relatives like father, mother, or wife were brought before the Dagshawl and either fined or imprisoned⁶⁹.

Forced by miserable economic conditions, these shawl weavers organized first ever labour uprising in 1865⁷⁰ demanding hike in salaries and betterment of working conditions of shawl weavers. The immediate cause of the labour uprising was an oppressive measure adopted by the contractor of the Dagshawl Pandit Rajkumar Dhar who ordered each weaver to pay rupees five out of his monthly income⁷¹ which ranged from seven to eight rupees. So on 29 April 1865, the shawl weavers marched

in a procession towards Zaldagar, Srinagar chanting slogans highlighting their demands. They were ordered to disperse and when they refused, troops fired on them which led to death of 28 people including its two prominent leaders, Sheikh Rasool and Abli bhaba⁷². Other leaders were fined, imprisoned or sent to jails outside the Valley⁷³. While the Hindu officials associated with the collection of taxes from shawl-weavers were living a pompous life, the Muslim shawl-weavers lived in abject poverty. The economic conditions of the shawl-weavers worsened further after 1870 when Franco-German war of 1870 led to the economic bankruptcy of France⁷⁴. France used to purchase 80% of the total export of Kashmiri shawls. So when economic conditions of the France weakened, the Kashmiri shawl almost lost its market. Unfortunately, Government took no steps to maintain shawl industry by exploring new markets once the French market was closed to it. It is true that market in West was lost temporarily but it is also true that Government could have explored new markets elsewhere. But this could be achieved only if the Government had been sympathetic and wide awake⁷⁵. The pitiable condition of these Muslim shawl weavers has been highlighted by Madusuden Ganju as:

*“The standard of living of the workers engaged in the woolen industry, as a whole is very low. Their food is poor, clothing tattered, and the houses in the most dilapidated condition. They can't afford to drink milk and eat mutton say even once a week. Their staple food in Kashmir province is rice which they eat with an ordinary kind of cooked vegetable leaves, called hawk. Some of them can't afford even that much.”*⁷⁶

Besides shawl industry, silk industry was also affected badly by the Dogra regime. Silk industry which was Government undertaking provided livelihood to thousands of people⁷⁷. The Srinagar silk factory alone employed 5,000 workers, all Muslims⁷⁸ and almost all the officials of the silk industry belonged to non-Muslim community. The workers of factory had constantly been complaining against inadequate wages and rampant corruption of officials. When Government ordered an inquiry, the allegations of corruption were found to be true, but instead of taking action against the guilty, they were mutually transferred from one block of the factory to another⁷⁹. To suppress the popular movement of workers, Government arrested some of their ring leaders in 1924 and when labour force demonstrated in a peaceful manner demanding the release of their leaders, punishment of corrupt officials and a

reasonable increase in their wages⁸⁰, they were mercilessly beaten by the soldiers of the Maharaja. The State Government patronized non-local industrialists and contractors who preferred to employ non local labourers thus forcing local labour to leave for plains each year in search of livelihood.

In his Presidential address to second annual session of the Muslim Conference, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah observed:

*“From time immemorial, Kashmir was known for its arts and crafts and the Kashmir artisans were famous throughout the world for their skill. The European Kings and nobles were fond of Kashmiri crafts. But the downfall of market and disorganization of Kashmiri artisans gave a blow to the arts and crafts of the Kashmir. The lack of Government patronage added to the devastation and ruination of Kashmiri crafts. No doubt, the Government has established an industrial department, but if this department will be asked what it has contributed towards the welfare of craftsmen like shawl-weavers, goldsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths, paper-makers, gun-makers, other artisans and the development of these industries, the answer would be totally negative.”*⁸¹

The discontentment of a large segment of industrial workers in industries provided a fertile ground to those few educated youth who had realized that only a sustained struggle against the Dogra rule can ensure that the people of Kashmir get their genuine rights. Thus the erosion of the State industry mainly shawl industry forced the common man to think that it was not possible to get their rights till the Dogra regime was in command. So they supported the freedom movement whole heartedly. Thus when Muslim Conference was formed in 1932, the industry workers supported it vehemently and followed the programme of the Muslim Conference.

2.1(e) Awakening among Muslims of the State:

Education plays an important role in awakening of the general masses during any freedom movement. In British India, it was the elite educationists who imparted a sense of Nationalism to general masses which eventually led to formation of Indian National Congress in 1885. But in Kashmir the political movement against the Dogra rule started late as the Muslims started modern education very late⁸². The Hindus

were favourite subjects of the Dogra rule and enjoyed State patronage while most of the Muslims except a few handful of religious class did not have either literal or official pedigree nor did they enjoy any State patronage. The Muslim religious class did not feel the pressure of the modernization for long time due to their vast economic resources⁸³ and even discouraged the community from receiving modern education. The awareness that Dogras were Hindus and the overwhelming majority of the Kashmiris professed Islam constantly made the Dogra rulers apprehensive⁸⁴. They disliked the idea of making their subjects politically conscious and thought that imparting of education was only an effective way of awakening the people to their political and human rights.

The establishment of British Residency in Kashmir in 1885 benefited the Kashmiri Muslims in particular and led to establishment of primary and middle schools. In 1891, there were eighteen schools, out of which ten were situated in Srinagar and eight in other towns of the Valley⁸⁵. It may be noted that predominant population of the Hindu community was of urban dwellers while most of Muslim population lived in villages. Therefore, the negligence of the Government with regard to the establishment of primary schools in most of the villages of Kashmir was more disadvantageous to the Muslim community. Out of 3,579 villages of Kashmir, only 618 villages were having elementary educational facilities⁸⁶.

It was the result of the efforts of Muslims of British India that Maharaja showed interest in education of Muslims of State. In 1913, All India Muslim Educational Conference sent a deputation headed by Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan to Kashmir which presented a memorandum to the Maharaja requesting him to take care of the educational aspirations of the Muslim community⁸⁷. In response to this, the Government instituted an office known as Special Inspector for Mohammedan Education⁸⁸ and appointed an Educational Commission in 1916, under the chairmanship of Mr. Sharp⁸⁹ but unfortunately the recommendations of the Sharp commission were not implemented at all or implemented partially. The Government kept the recommendations of the Sharp commission secret and soon after publication, the report was safely put in the archives from where nobody could find it⁹⁰. Thus Government was adamant in its policy of no-help for education of the Muslims. In 1924, when Kashmiri Muslims presented a memorandum to the Lord

Reading, they specially mentioned this State apathy and requested that a Muslim or an European expert on education should be appointed to look after Muslim education and more Muslims should be recruited as teachers and inspectors and sufficient number of scholarships should be made available to Muslims for higher education in India and abroad. This negligence of Muslim education was most common and severe complaints were submitted to Glancy Commission in 1931⁹¹. The Glancy Commission remarked in its report that about some sixteen years ago, the Education Commissioner of the Government of India visited Jammu and Kashmir in response to request made by the Kashmir darbar so that he would make necessary recommendations for reforming educational system but it is a common complaint that the recommendations of Mr. Sharp were not properly published and were to large extent forgotten⁹². The Hindu teachers were also discouraging Muslim students from taking science subjects as was revealed by Glancy Commission report⁹³.

The Government sanctioned very meager amount for Muslim education while major part of Government scholarships were given to students belonging to the Hindu community. According to official figures, Out of 190 students who were receiving Wazaif-i-yatami (scholarships for orphan students) there were only forty two Muslims and the rest were Hindus. Government had the provision of granting scholarships to those students who were interested in doing post-graduation in Science subjects as well for students who were interested in going abroad for further studies. But these scholarships were generally awarded to non-Muslim students. For going abroad for further studies, the Government had fixed age limit at twenty four years but it was done under a plan⁹⁴. Its main purpose was to keep the Muslims away from the opportunity of receiving higher education. Because of poor educational background, Muslims usually started their education very late, they usually crossed age of twenty four years till they achieved their post-graduation. Similar was the case with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who was the first Kashmiri Muslim to get M.sc degree but had crossed the age limit of twenty four years on completion of M.sc degree and when he applied for going abroad to receive higher education, his application was rejected⁹⁵.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kashmiri Muslims started actively enrolling their children in schools and till twenties of the twentieth century, the

number of the Muslim students in educational institutions increased and became equal to number of non-Muslim students⁹⁶. Many Muslim students went outside State for obtaining higher academic degrees from different universities of British India. As these Indian universities were hubs of political activities, these young Kashmiri Muslim students studying there obtained their degrees as well as education about practical politics. These universities entrusted these Kashmiri Muslim youth with spark for freedom for liberating their land from tyrannous rule of the Dogra regime. In the 1931, a batch of young men returned to home just after seeing the Civil Disobedience Movement in British India which had created an atmosphere of defiance against tyrannical rule of Dogra raj. The stage was set for setting up a full fledged movement against this rule and only the actors were needed to play their role. And it was these young educated Muslims who became the harbingers of political consciousness in Kashmir⁹⁷. The middle pass and matriculates who constituted a sizeable number of Muslim literates in Kashmir acted as active workers of the new leadership. Even those Kashmiri Muslim students who had gone to India for receiving higher religious education returned as hard core patriots. Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf Shah returned to Kashmir from Deoband in 1931 and gave his whole- hearted support to nascent political uprising of the Kashmiri Muslims⁹⁸. The most prominent grievance of these Muslim educated youth against the Government was its denial to provide them suitable jobs⁹⁹. The most prominent example of such discrimination was none other than Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah himself who after obtaining the degree of M.sc (Chemistry) from the Aligarh Muslim University was simply appointed as a school teacher whereas only a decade earlier, the Deputy Commissioner of Mirpur namely Makhan Singh was totally illiterate¹⁰⁰. This discrimination by State Government under influence of Indian National movement and modern ideas forced these young educated Kashmiri youth to form Reading Room Party at Fateh Kadal, Srinagar where they used to discuss the problems created by the autocratic regime¹⁰¹. It was this Reading Room Party which eventually led to formation of Muslim Conference which started the mass movement against the Dogra rulers.

2.1(f) Socio-religious Reform Movements:

The socio- religious movements started in Kashmir Valley in the beginning of the twentieth century and basic aim of all these movements was to reform the social and religious life and sought to create a social climate for modernization. The socio-religious movements among Kashmiri Hindus were scattered in different groups viz Kashmir Arya Samaj¹⁰², Arya Kumar Sabha¹⁰³ and Fraternity Society¹⁰⁴. These organizations fought mainly against the evil practices which included the enormous waste of money on marriage ceremonies, dowry system, infant marriage, prevalence of widowhood, superstition and rigid caste system. After 1931, Kashmiri Pandits thought of an united political organization and joined Yuvak Sabha because it was registered by the State. The Fraternity Organization was the first organization to join the Sabah and then other groups joined it. In 1931, Yuvak Sabha entered into politics and Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz was chosen its first President¹⁰⁵.

In Muslims of Kashmir Valley, the socio-religious reform activities started in early twenties of the twentieth century with an aim to familiarize the Muslims with the reasons of their backwardness for centuries altogether and the credit for creating the atmosphere of socio- religious reform among the Muslims goes to the Mirwaiz dynasty¹⁰⁶ under the leadership of Ghulam Rasool Shah popularly known as Sir Sayyid-i-Kashmir. He led the foundation of first primary school in Kashmir in 1889 at Rajveri Kadal in Srinagar¹⁰⁷. In 1905, he after consultation, guidance and cooperation of some prominent Muslims of Punjab founded Anjuman-i-Nusrat-Ul-Islam¹⁰⁸. In 1906, the Anjuman made the formal nomination and selection for the different positions and Moulvi Ghulam Rasool was unanimously elected as its first President. Anjuman-i-Nusrat-Ul-Islam played an extraordinary role in the socio-religious welfare of the Muslim community of Kashmir. Its main aims were as¹⁰⁹:

- 1) To equip the youth with modern education along with Islamic teachings;
- 2) To make adequate arrangements for the teachings of Holy Quran and the Sunnah;
- 3) To provide right kind of leadership in the cultural, economic and moral affairs;

- 4) To project the character of Muslims reflecting the value system of Islam;
- 5) To create a balance between Modern education and religion;
- 6) To unite the Muslims by creating among them the sense of being an intermarry community and
- 7) To strength the cause of universal peace and brotherhood by promoting spiritual and moral consciousness.

Anjuman played dynamic role in the spread of education among Kashmiri Muslims and social transformation of the community¹¹⁰. In 1922, Ghulam Mustafa brought the issue of social reform before Anjuman and a Social Reformation Committee was appointed for the purpose of removing social evils from the Muslim community¹¹¹. The purpose of introducing new Committee was to save lavish expenditure on marriages and various other types of ceremonies which forced the poor people to borrow money.

Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam leaders engaged themselves with the Government on the issues related to educational welfare of the Kashmiri Muslims, their representation in Government services, disputes over religious places, share in law making bodies and the economic backwardness¹¹². Thus Anjuman played a significant role in the reconstruction of the Muslim society of the Kashmir. Anjuman-i-Ahle- Hadis which was formed in 1925 stood for reforms in Muslim society and elimination of social evils and superstition from Muslim society.

It is sad to mention that although there were two ill-famed centers of prostitution in Srinagar in Tashwan and Maisuma, both protected and encouraged by the Dogra rulers¹¹³, the socio-religious organizations of Kashmir Valley never raised any voice against them. It was selfless crusade of a barber of Srinagar, Muhammad Subhan Naid¹¹⁴ that the State assembly in 1934 passed an act suppressing immoral trafficking of women¹¹⁵.

It is a fact that although religious reformation was a major concern of socio-religious movements, but none of them was exclusively religious in character. Religion was the dominant ideology of the times and it was not possible to undertake

any social action without coming to grips with it. Socio-religious movements played an important role in evolving the political consciousness in the Kashmir as these were instrumental in bringing about the initial intellectual and cultural break which laid foundation for formation of mass movement for achieving genuine rights of common people.

2.2 Formation of Muslim Conference:

The organized struggle in Kashmir started as late as 1931 partly because of ban on formation of political organizations and partly because of mass illiteracy and lack of political consciousness. The working class revolted openly before 1931 on some occasions but these revolts lacked organized character. It was during twenties of the twentieth century that the signs of political consciousness started evolving in Kashmiri educated youth which was enhanced by support of their sympathizers particularly Muslims of Punjab. There was no permission of forming any association and ban was even imposed on the entry of Indian Muslim Press in Kashmir. Such a situation pained all persons having humanistic bent of mind, the prominent example being Sir Albino Banerji, a senior Minister of Maharaja Government who resigned in protest and explaining the reasons of his resignation before Press, he exposed the sectarian and autocratic character of the Dogra rule¹¹⁶. Sir Albino Benerji's statement created uproar and shock in the foundations of the State administration¹¹⁷. Reading Room Party¹¹⁸ was formed by the Muslim educated youth who had returned from various Indian universities. A Committee headed by Mohammad Rajab and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as General Secretary was formed to run the Reading Room Party on a solid basis. The Reading Room Party submitted a memorandum to the Regency Council headed by Mr. Wakefield¹¹⁹. The Government invited the leaders of the Reading Room Party for a discussion¹²⁰ but did nothing substantial to redress the grievances of the educated Muslims. With the help of Punjabi Muslim intellectuals and editors, the Reading Room Party continued its Press campaign against State's discriminatory attitude against the Muslims particularly in its recruitment policy¹²¹. In fact, the Muslims of Punjab of the Kashmiri origin being educationally and economically more sound than Kashmiri Muslims started anti-Dogra movement much before 1931, the year in which first anti-Dogra movement was started in Kashmir Valley. Political organizations were formed in Punjab as

early as 1896 to represent the cause of the Kashmiri Muslims. On 18th February 1896, the Punjabi Muslims of Kashmiri origin formed an association named Anjuman-i-Kashmiri-Musalmanani-Lahore which was revived in 1901 under the name of Muslim Kashmiri Conference¹²². During the twenties of the twentieth century, this organization assumed all India character and was therefore, called as All India Kashmiri Conference¹²³. The main aim of this organization was to ameliorate the social, political and economic conditions of the Kashmiri Muslims. It was due to efforts by this organization that the State Government cancelled the order of exile of Khawaja Sad-ud-din Shawl and revoked the confiscation of jagir of Khawaja Shah Naqesbhandi¹²⁴ who had been sentenced, as they had submitted a memorandum to Lord Reading in 1924. The Muslims of Punjab not only supported the Kashmiris through various organizations but also published the grievances of Kashmiris in newspapers and also arranged the publication of Kashmir news in British newspapers such as *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Times* and *Ring Post* etc. These Punjabi Muslims were instrumental in increasing the pace of consciousness among the Kashmiri Muslims¹²⁵.

After the formation of the Reading Room Party, some events took place which helped the party to mobilize masses openly against the Government. These events included Eid Khutba in Jammu on April 29, 1931, Tauhin-i-Quran in Jammu¹²⁶ and ban on Friday prayers in a village of Jammu. The Reading Room Party cooperated with the Young Men's Muslim Association of Jammu and exhorted Muslims to take out processions and to observe hartals¹²⁷. The Muslim leaders came out openly and delivered fierce speeches against the Government. Government tried to suppress these protests violently and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was dismissed from Government services¹²⁸. It further increased the popularity of the Sheikh and other leaders of the Reading Room Party among the masses. After the dismissal of the Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah from the Government services, he organized public meetings in Srinagar city which used to be attended by thousands of people¹²⁹. But it must be acknowledged that such large gatherings were possible only due to full support and cooperation from Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah- the Mirwaiz of the Kashmir¹³⁰. One such big gathering was of 21 June 1931 which was organized at Khanqahi Mualla, Srinagar which is considered to be the formal inauguration of the freedom movement of Kashmir¹³¹. In this historical gathering a representative body

of seven prominent Muslims of Kashmir was formed which comprised of Khawaja Sad-ud-Din Shawl, Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf Shah, Mirwaiz Atiqullah Hamdani, Agha Sayyid Hussain Shah Jalali, Khawaja Ghulam Ahmad Ashai, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Shab-ud-Din¹³². At the end of Khanqahi Mualla meeting, Abdul Qadir, a butler of an European official delivered an emotional speech against the Government¹³³. He was arrested by the police and tried in central jail on 13th July 1931. A large crowd gathered outside the prison walls and when the session judge and other officials arrived, the mob became unrestive, and some of the Muslims forced their way into the outer compound of the jail. The District Magistrate ordered the arrest of some of the ring leaders of the mob. The mob demanded the release of their leaders and when their demand was not met, they threw stones. The Magistrate on duty ordered to open fire which resulted in massacre of twentytwo innocent Kashmiri Muslims¹³⁴. Historically and politically, the 13th July 1931 has been the most important day in the annals of contemporary Kashmir and from this day, the struggle for independence and freedom started openly¹³⁵.

The arrest of Muslim representatives soon after the jail incident added fuel to the already burning situation. The publication of the 13 July news in Muslim Press resulted in protest meetings and processions in almost every city and town of the British India expressing their sympathy and solidarity with Muslims of Kashmir. Mirza Bashir-Ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, Amir of Jamat-i- Ahmadiya convened a meeting of some leading Muslims at Shimla on 15th July 1931 to discuss developments in Kashmir¹³⁶. Muslim individuals and organizations 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 intervention¹³⁷. It was in this historic meeting of 15 July 1931 that the foundation of All India Kashmir Committee was laid which gave the call to observe 14th August 1931 as Kashmir Day. On this day, complete hartal was observed in the Valley and a large mass meeting was called at Martyr's Graveyard in Srinagar in which thousands of people participated¹³⁸. It was upon the intervention of a prominent Punjabi Muslim, Sayyid Mehar Shah that accord was signed between the Government and the Muslim representatives¹³⁹. After signing the accord, pro-establishment elements launched a disinformation movement against the Muslim representatives and argued that Government had purchased them. To clear their stand, Muslim leaders were

forced to convene a public meeting at Jamia Masjid on 28 August 1931¹⁴⁰. After a few days, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah along with Khawaja Sad-Ud-Din Shawl and Khawaja Ghulam Ahmad Ashai visited Baramullah, Sopore and Islamabad and formed peace Committees¹⁴¹. In the same period, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took upon himself the task of collecting funds for annual session of Anjuman-i-Nusrat-Ul-Islam and organized public meetings in which he criticized the policies of the State. So he was again arrested on 21st December 1931¹⁴² but it resulted in widespread processions in all corners of the Valley. A war Council under the leadership of Mufti Jalal-ud-Din¹⁴³ was formed but as soon as this gathering ended, Mufti Jalal- Ud-Din was arrested and the public was fired upon resulting in death of four innocent Muslims. Then Mouvli Mohammad Yousuf Shah, the Mirwaiz of the Kashmir gave a call for jehad which evolved into a tremendous response but Government restrained its forces from taking any action against the processionists¹⁴⁴. The Muslim leaders felt the need of an organized struggle, consulted the Jammu leaders as well as leaders of the Kashmir Committee for forming a political organization^{145, 146}. All India Kashmir Committee dispatched a team to Srinagar to assist the Kashmiri Muslim leadership in making the necessary arrangements. Financial assistance was also made available along with a car to facilitate movement of workers¹⁴⁷. The Muslim leadership of Kashmir constituted a Committee which drafted the constitution of the proposed organization and decided to name it as All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference¹⁴⁸. The inaugural session was held on 14, 15 and 16 October 1932 at the historic Pather Masjid, Srinagar under the Presidentship of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah¹⁴⁹. A platform, fifteen feet high from the ground was constructed in the spacious ground of the Masjid on which sat about two hundred representatives and about a hundred Press representatives and observers¹⁵⁰. The session was attended by about three lakh men and the flag hoisting ceremony was performed on 14th October by Waliullah Zain-ul-Abidi, a representative of the All India Kashmir Committee who in its address to the audience said:

“The Kashmiris who were considered a dead nation for three centuries have risen again and are today a living nation. During the last years, they have offered great sacrifices in their struggle for people’s demands. The whole world is amazed to see that a nation who had fallen in the abyss of slumber for centuries and the nation which was considered uncivilized has again obtained its place in the community of

*nations. Today, the hoisting of this green flag with crescent opens a new epoch in the history of Kashmir. As such, it is the duty of Kashmir to see that it remains hoisted always. This flag is the harbinger of love, peace and brotherhood among all the communities living in the State and is the guarantor of peace, progress and happiness for all subjects of the Maharaja.”*¹⁵¹

The Committee adopted a flag for organization which consisted of green cloth with a crescent and a star representing Muslim community and a piece of white cloth representing the minorities¹⁵².

2.3 Nature and Role of Muslim Conference:

Although the Muslim Conference was on paper an organization aimed at safeguarding Muslim interests alone but practically it was secular political organization to safeguard the interests of the deprived sections of the society. As Muslims constituted 80% of the population and their condition was pathetic, so naturally the Muslim Conference fought for their genuine rights and demands. Therefore, the socio-religious programme of the Muslim Conference had a class rather than communal character. As the leadership of the Muslim Conference was aware that even among non- Muslims, only a small section belonged to the oppressed class¹⁵³. So formation of a common platform was the inherent desire of Muslim Conference leadership, which ultimately culminated in the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference. It is a fact that Muslim Conference constantly expressed resentment against the under-representation of Muslims in the Government services but it was more a humane rather than a communal demand as Muslims were deprived of their rights mainly on religious grounds. The Muslim Conference leaders publicly declared from initial days of its formation that it is a secular organization and invited the non-Muslims to join it. In the inaugural session of the Conference, the President Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah affirmed that this movement is not directed against the minorities and assured that this organization will redress the grievances of all sections irrespective of their religious affiliation¹⁵⁴. The leaders of Muslim Conference made it clear that they were loyal to Raj of Maharaja and did not want complete freedom. In his first Presidential address, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah asserted that they have no grievances against the person of Maharaja Bahadur and they were faithful to Maharaja in every respect. He

further said that in every civilized country, the king always provided some rights to his subjects at his sweet will and the subjects have right to demand more rights¹⁵⁵. Similarly Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, a prominent figure of the Conference in his Presidential address to the fourth annual session of the Muslim Conference asserted:

*“Some selfish officials and people who are not concerned with the welfare of the State are vainly trying to make the Maharaja believe that the Muslims are against him but he clarified that Islam teaches us to be obedient to the rulers. He further asserted that it is true that Muslim Conference wants establishment of the Swaraj (responsible Government) in that State so that Kashmir should virtually become like a paradise.”*¹⁵⁶

The Muslim Conference's main aim was overall development of State particularly in social, educational and economic spheres. The Muslim Conference fully realized the importance of education among the people of the State in general and those of Muslims in particular. It also acknowledged the significance of female education and therefore, attached considerable importance to it. The leaders publicly declared that the dissemination of education was the duty of the State but the Government of Kashmir has become notorious in view of its apathetic attitude towards the education of Muslim masses. The Muslim Conference recommended that the Government should change the syllabi intimated from outside to make it responsive to the needs and also exhorted to make agricultural education compulsory in village schools¹⁵⁷. The leadership also demanded that Arabic knowing teachers be appointed to attract the Muslims towards education¹⁵⁸ and there should be increase in number of schools and pay of the teachers. They argued that total number of high schools in Kashmir was twenty-two which is equivalent to number of high schools in one district of Punjab¹⁵⁹. Besides primary education, the leadership also urged the Government for improvement in higher education and technical education.

The Muslim Conference from its inception fought to safeguard the civil rights and liberties. Prior to 1931, the formation of an association was considered a crime and it was equally forbidden to Hindus and Muslims¹⁶⁰ but due to constant efforts of the Muslim Conference, the Government ultimately conceded the demand of the right to form political associations and freedom of press and platform.

Similarly Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah made it clear that underrepresentation of Muslims is purely a social problem and not a communal one as depriving eighty percent Muslim population from adequate employment opportunities was in no way justifiable. Constitutional reforms formed an integral part of the programme of the Muslim Conference. In response to Glancy Commission recommendations, the Government had appointed a Franchise Committee under the chairmanship of Chief Justice of State, Sir Barjour Dalal on 31 May 1932¹⁶¹. The Conference demanded immediate establishment of the constituent assembly and increase in the powers of the proposed assembly. It also demanded the extension of municipal Committee and the proposed district boards¹⁶². But the Franchise Committee recommendations had grave lacunae. In cities, right to vote was given to property holders worth rupees six hundred while in villages, it was given to property holders worth rupees ten thousand. The Conference demanded that before publishing the voter list, the Franchise Committee should reconsider its recommendations regarding the right to vote¹⁶³. The report had proposed seventy five member legislative assembly, out of which thirty four would be Muslims and forty one non Muslims. Out of seventy five members, forty two were to be nominated and majority of members were to be title awardees and town/ village officials. Besides Hanjis (boatmen) and Muslim Bakerwals were not entitled to vote while Hindu Bakerwals fully enjoyed this right. So Muslim Conference rejected the Franchise Committee report in 1934 when it was made public but the Conference decided to contest the elections to disapprove the propaganda of the communalists and reactionaries from within and outside the State that the Muslim Conference leadership belonged to a particular interest group and did not represent the masses¹⁶⁴. On 4th September 1934, polling took place and the Muslim Conference won all the twenty one seats reserved for the Muslims and out of these, sixteen were elected unopposed. The first session of the assembly was held on 17 October 1934 at Shergheri in Srinagar in which powers of Legislative Assembly were read out which had already been published. All important powers of the Government were reserved for the Maharaja and Executive was responsible to him and not to the Assembly¹⁶⁵. Meanwhile, Mian Ahmad Yar, a Punjabi speaking person was elected as leader of Muslim Conference in the legislature. In the first session of Assembly held on 17 October 1934, Mian Ahmad Yar expressed dissatisfaction of his party over the Franchise Committee report as well as the limited powers of the legislature. The

Muslim Conference in its fourth annual session in 1935 expressed dissatisfaction over irresponsible character of the legislative assembly. Meanwhile in 1935, the Government of India Act provided the establishment of an All India Federation and a new system of Government for the provinces with provincial autonomy¹⁶⁶. On 8th May 1936, the Muslim Conference observed a Responsible Government Day and resolutions condemning the State assembly as inadequate and unrepresentative were passed. The Muslim Conference called for establishment of a responsible Government and autonomy without external interference in its sixth annual session¹⁶⁷. The second anniversary of the Responsible Government Day was observed on 5th August 1938 and establishment of the independent Assembly was demanded through processions and resolutions¹⁶⁸.

The Muslim Conference adopted different modus operandi at different stages to mobilize the masses and to press for its demands. The main method was to convene annual sessions where the problems of the people were assessed and charter of further demands framed. Working Committee meetings were frequently convened to take decisions with regard to immediate challenges. The methods adopted by the Muslim Conference were mainly constitutional in nature. Initially the Muslim Conference remained confined to cities and big towns only¹⁶⁹ but gradually it spread to villages and tehsils to make the Conference a mass movement. The Conference also called for hartals, demonstrations and mass meetings to persuade the Government to accede to their demands. On the whole, the strategy of the Muslim Conference was based on formula of S-T-S (struggle-truce-struggle).

2.4 Muslim Conference to National Conference:

The conversion of the Muslim Conference to National Conference in 1939 was not an abrupt development but the culmination of a gradual process that began as early as the formation of Muslim Conference. In its inaugural session, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as *President* publicly declared that the aim of the Muslim Conference was to redress the grievances of all communities irrespective of caste, creed and colour. On March 1933, a sub-Committee was set up to contact non-Muslim leaders to seek their cooperation to participate in the movement but it was unable to achieve any results.

On the occasion of the inaugural session of the Muslim Conference, Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf Shah had shun his differences with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and participated in the session. In 1933, Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah parted his ways with the Muslim Conference leadership and formed a separate organization called the Azad Muslim Conference¹⁷⁰ but new organization failed to broaden its base¹⁷¹. In the elections of 1934, the Muslim Conference defeated Azad Muslim Conference in all five constituencies of Srinagar. There were many reasons that resulted in the split of Muslim Conference. Firstly the policy of divide and rule was followed by the Maharaja and he utilized the services of privileged individuals both from Muslim and non-Muslim communities¹⁷². Secondly, Dogra Government rewarded the Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah with a jagir of rupees six hundred and a royal khilaat consisting of two rolls of English makhmal each measuring nine yards, four rolls of China silk, a silver tray and a shawl¹⁷³. The followers of the Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah were called Bakra and those of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Sher and clashes between the two factions became the order of the day. Thirdly, the Ahmediyas used to send financial assistance for the support of the movement in the name of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah which also became the bone of contention between the two leaders¹⁷⁴. Fourthly, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah wanted to broaden base of the organization by including non-Muslims in the Muslim Conference but Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah thought that as Kashmiri Pandits were supported and given patronage by the Dogra Government, they will not support the freedom movement, and any such attempt to persuade them will be a futile exercise.

The President of the Muslim Conference issued a written Statement on 29 July 1934 against the Franchise Committee report and once again requested the non-Muslims to join hands with the Muslims and assured them every kind of help and safeguard¹⁷⁵. With the publication of Glancy Commission report in 1932, it became clear that a section of Hindus led by Prem Nath Bazaz was anxious to see that legitimate grievances of Muslims were redressed and a progressive form of Government be established in the State. In 1932, a historic meeting between Prem Nath Bazaz and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took place at Chashma Shahi Garden, where decision towards the formation of common platform was taken¹⁷⁶. Prem Nath Bazaz started the first newspaper '*Vitasta*' in Kashmir province to popularize the idea of secular politics

and fight for the establishment of a responsible Government in the State¹⁷⁷. In 1934, the Legislative Assembly established by the Government also brought Muslims and non-Muslims close to each other and they realized that most of the basic problems were common to both the communities.

In 1934, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah left for plains to renew contacts with other political leaders of British India. He met Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at Lahore railway station and this meeting proved to be turning point in the history of Kashmir. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah accompanied Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on his tour to North West Frontier Provinces and it was there that he was impressed by political thought of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru¹⁷⁸. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah made it clear to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that the Muslim Conference was a secular organization but Congress leader suggested him to broaden the sphere of movement and include the non-Muslims. After few days, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah addressed a Press Conference at Lahore and announced that future programme would be to act according to the ideology of the Indian National Congress¹⁷⁹. In 1935, '*Hamdard*' was started jointly by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Prem Nath Bazaz to popularize the ideology of progressive Nationalism in the State. From 1935, Prem Nath Bazaz and Sardar Singh began to express the ideas of Nationalism from the platform of Muslim Conference¹⁸⁰.

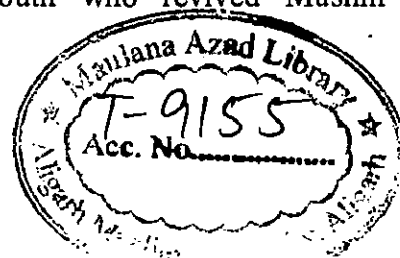
The fifth annual session of the Muslim Conference was held at Poonch in May 1934 in which President Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah once again requested the non-Muslims to join the movement¹⁸¹ and spoke in favour of conversion of the Muslim Conference to National Conference which generated heated discussions and confrontations in the ranks of Muslim Conference leadership¹⁸². On 24 June 1938, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah placed a resolution embodying his views about the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference before the Working Committee. The meeting of the Working Committee lasted for fifty two hours and heated discussion was held on the issue of changing name of the organization. At one stage, Mirza Muhammad Afzal Beg cooperated with Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas, Moulvi Abdullah Vakil and Khawaja Ahmad-ud-Din Banihali and opposed the move. They had the apprehension that the conversion would weaken the movement because non-Muslims would not participate in National Conference

sincerely except for the safeguard of their vested interests¹⁸³. However, the resolution was passed with a majority vote and was recommended for the approval of the General Council¹⁸⁴. A manifesto of National Demands was published on 29 August 1938, under the signatures of twelve prominent leaders representing Muslims as well as non-Muslims who urged people from all communities to participate in achievement of complete responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja¹⁸⁵. A public meeting was held at Hazratbal, Srinagar on 29th August 1938 to ratify the manifesto of the National Demand by the people and it was passed by great enthusiasm.

In March 1939, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was invited by Congress President Rajendra Prasad to the annual session of Indian National Congress held at Tripura¹⁸⁶. The Congress leaders were happy as they got the support of a well organized political party from a Muslim majority State and substantiated their claim that Indian National Congress represented all the communities of India. A special session of the Muslim Conference was held at Srinagar on 10th and 11th June, 1939 under the Presidentship of Ghulam Muhammad Sadiq in which one seventy six delegates representing all the districts of State participated¹⁸⁷. The special session decided to change the name of the Muslim Conference to All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and entitled everyone to become the member of National Conference irrespective of his religion and race. The President clarified that the decision to change the name of the party was kept pending so that on one hand, public interest is elicited and on other hand, the doubts existing in certain sections of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in this behalf could be removed¹⁸⁸. Chaudhry Abbas and his supporters feared that National Conference would become handmaid of the Indian National Congress. They decided that organization would keep aloof from both Indian National Congress as well as Muslim League. Thus on the morning of 11 June 1939, the Muslim Conference gave birth to All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference.

The question arises as to whether the leadership of National Conference did achieve its goal by changing name of the organization from Muslim Conference to National Conference. One finds that although Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his close associates tried their best to reorient State politics on secular lines but the social, economic and mental structures of society frustrated their move. Prem Nath Bazaz in his book writes that National Conference hoped that after the special session in 1939,

Hindus in large number would enroll themselves as primary members of the National Conference but that did not happen¹⁸⁹. While on one hand the educated Muslims did not appreciate the decision of the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, on the other hand, the non-Muslims showed more disdain towards the National Conference. With great difficulty, a few Hindu youth joined the National Conference but they looked at any measure by National Conference with suspicion¹⁹⁰. As a matter of fact, the Pandit leaders who were taken in the Working Committee as well as the General Council of the National Conference had worked for years in various communal organizations and it was difficult for them to totally eschew their mentality. At best from being Hindu communalists, they could take a big jump and become Hindu Nationalists and though all of them paid tributes to secularism in public, that noble creed still existed only in name¹⁹¹. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah after the formation of the National Conference was asked by non-Muslim leaders to change his religious methods of mass mobilization and wanted him not to recite Holy Quran from National Conference platform as was the practice in past. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah tried best to convince non-Muslim leaders by saying that he does so keeping in view the tradition and mental ability of the audience. He also referred to the Indian National Conference that had adopted *Bande Matram* as its National song although it contained anti-Muslim sentiments but Muslim Nationalists did not raise any objection against it but all such explanations proved of no avail¹⁹². National Conference resented the Government order of 1940 regarding the introduction of double scripts in State schools¹⁹³. The condemnation of the Government orders by the National Conference alienated many non-Muslims including Prem Nath Bazaz. The Pandit leaders also raised objections against the celebration of the Martyrs Day of July 1931, as they claimed that Martyrs laid down their lives for exclusively Muslim cause. Thus non-Muslims did not join the National Conference and though some prominent Hindu leaders like Pandit Jai Lal Kilam, Shiv Narain Fotedar and Pandit Kishap Bandu returned in 1943, it was more out of an opportunistic attitude than out of a change of heart. Thus the fears of Chaudhry Abbas and his associates that non-Muslims would not join the National Conference whole-heartedly in large numbers proved right. Besides this change of nomenclature of organization also alienated Muslim educated youth who revived Muslim



Conference in March 1940. Thus Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was unable to fulfill his motives and objectives and he exclaimed:

"Estranged I found my own people as well as strangers."

The ideological orientation of Kashmir Freedom Movement has been nicely described by Pir Gayas-ud-Din as:

*"It will be apt to note that the ideological inspiration, which permeated our movement, was that of great Kashmiri Brahmin (Dr. Iqbal) who remained a unique inspirer of movement from 1931 till his death in 1938. This period should be called as era of Iqbal in our movement. It would not be incorrect to designate the following period as the Pandit Nehru period. Like his predecessor, this great Kashmiri Brahmin through his political acumen put the stamp of his ideas on the political scene from 1938 onwards."*¹⁹⁴

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