Chapter 5

Emergence of Political Awakening

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The Twentieth century witnessed the rise of great revolutions and democratic movements throughout the world. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, that shook the world, offered a fresh paradigm. Even more abundantly, so were subsequent upheavals in Germany, China and countless other countries experiencing revolution’s in the later twentieth century.¹ In fact the revolutions have nevertheless sought legitimacy in doctrines of popular sovereignty all traceable to claims first explicitly made in 1789 in France.

In fact the changes occurring at the world political scene as well as in the neighboring areas of British India laid a positive impact on the political scene of Kashmir. Kashmir, ‘in 1846 witnessed a critical break in its nature and arrangement of power—the establishment of the Dogra rule. This rule ushered in a new stage in Kashmir history for a number of reasons. Although recognizing its strategic and economic importance to their empires, the earlier rulers of Kashmir Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs had ruled the region through proxy while remaining primarily engaged with the concerns of their larger empires. For the Dogras, however, Kashmir itself was the empire; as a result, the story of Kashmir under the Dogras is imbricated with the story of the fashioning of the Dogra dynasty itself.’²

The fashioning of the Dogra dynasty, in its turn, was thoroughly intertwined with the project of the British colonialism in mid-nineteenth century India. Doubtful about their decision to hand over Kashmir—which occupied a strategically critical position—to a minor Hindu Raja from Jammu who also happened to be ruling a Muslim majority population, the British began a policy regarding Kashmir which was geared towards endowing Gulab Singh’s dynasty with the ideals of legitimate rule.³ While the Dogras

² Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 47.
³ Ibid.
would be subject to constant security, Kashmiris became the subjects of a twice-removed situation within colonial rule, with dual loyalties and no clear means of seeking redressal for their grievances. Hence the Dogra regime was explicitly safeguarded by its peculiar relation to the imperial authorities; the political consciousness in the state, thus, arose slowly and in the face of great obstacles.

5.1. Early phase

Kashmir was a place where overt political discussion was deemed none of the subjects business. Until 1932, there was a blanket ban on the publication of newspapers. The absence of any freedom of press, platform or association amounted in actual practice to an almost complete estrangement between the ruler and the ruled. The only sort of political activity that was allowed was the formation of societies for religious and social reform. Prior, to their formation they had to declare that they would not engage in any type of political activity.

However, taking advantage of the limited space provided by the Dogra state, there was a proliferation of socio-religious reform organizations beginning with the last decade of the 19th century. In 1919, a list showing the presence of roughly twenty societies, anjumans and sabhas within the state representing a variety of particularized interests was superseded by another list prepared by the Darbar in 1927 which reflected an exceptional increase in the number of these societies totaling about more than one hundred within quasi-political and religious categories.

Both the communities of Muslims and non-Muslims were responsible for the emergence of the movements in the state; it was, however, the later which had taken the lead in social reform movements. The most prominent among these sabhas, societies and

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4 Ibid.
6 Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, p. 94.
7 Political Department, OER, file no.66/102-C, 1924, JKA-J.
8 Political Department, File No. 312/7-C, 1919, JKA-J.
9 "List of Societies, Sabhas and Anjumans in existence in Jammu and Kashmir" on 31" Dec. 1926, General Department.1928, JKA-J.
Anjumans were Arya samaj in 1890, Dogra sabha founded in 1903, yuvak sabha, the most important social political organization of the Kashmiri pandits. The necessity of forming the said organization was for reasons nonpolitical in nature… but with the passage of time Yuvak Sabha became a common political forum for all Kashmiri Pandits.

Among the Muslims, Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam was the earliest and the most important socio religious organization in Kashmir. In 1889, with its founding by Mirwaiz Rasool Shah, he established a primary school, originally a *maktab*, which developed into the Islamic High School by 1905. The school received the patronage of the Dogra maharaja from 1904 onwards through small grants enabling Muslims to receive both religious and secular education. The aim was to facilitate education for the most backward children of the Muslim community and to help in their educational efforts as much as possible and to inculcate in them good manners, a sense of mutual cooperation and unity.

The Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam published its official journal called *Halat –wa-Rouidad*. This journal was published yearly contained useful information about the yearly activities of the Anjuman. It also contained speeches delivered at its annual convocation by prominent men from within and outside the state. The students’ participation in such events was an important feature of the Anjuman’s activities.

However, the role of the Anjuman with regard to the reformation of the Kashmiri society entitled not only making Kashmiri Muslims aware of their inadequacies, but also awakening them to the benefits of modern education. The Anjuman shed light on the twin agenda of the Muslim leadership of this period. The Anjuman’s aim was to, ‘ensure religious and worldly education for Muslim children who are backward in education’ and to ‘create an aptitude for reforms, social awakening and mutual unity among the Muslim

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10 Political Department, File No. 215, 1910, JKA-J.
12 Ibid.
14 Old English Records, File No. 68/p-57, 14 September, 1903, JKA-J.
16 Ibid., p. 61.
community’.

The leaders of the Anjuman were aware of the disabilities of the Muslims that they had been suffering from. The leaders of the Anjuman advocated that there was an intimate relation between social reform and economic progress. Centuries of sufferings had made the people lazy, lethargic and tradition-bound; they had been suffering from evil social customs. The need was to reform the community so that they were brought to the level of modernism.

The leaders of the Anjuman were highly influenced by the movement launched by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan about whom they made recurrent references in the annual convocations of the Anjuman. Although, its leadership was entirely composed of the religious elite, they developed a religious discourse which attempted to provide for the regeneration of the Muslim community alongside its advancement in the western education. Unlike the religious elite of the British India like Deobandi’s who launched a bitter critique of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Kashmiri religious elite had appropriated his methods as a model for the educational and ultimately for economic advancement of the people of Kashmir. While highlighting the sufferings of the people they reflected an international outlook, Khawaja Mohammad Maqbool Pandit, one of its prominent members, went so far as to give example of Japan and Germany which as nations had risen from their helpless conditions to claim their God given position from the world.

The leaders of the Anjuman explicitly stated that it was not the king or the preacher or the administrator, but rather the educated, which would raise the moral fiber of the society. The leaders of the Anjuman also lamented in their annual convocation of 1913 that the Kashmiri masses were not introduced in education in large numbers due to their abject poverty, but now the educated from the state and other schools had attained ‘a space’ in the administration, and the traders had benefited from these educational centers,

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18 Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, p. 64.
Muslims had to come to their senses.\textsuperscript{21} Despite the progressive outlook and role of the Anjuman its activities, by and large, remained urban in nature.

However, placing the role of the socio religious reform movements in historical context, these movements in the twentieth century social milieu of Kashmir corresponded to similar movements in the nineteenth century British India. These movements brought home upon their respective followers that the outmoded social customs and practices that had been observed or traditionally accepted as norms in the name of religions were not only irrational or unlawful but also the cause of their weakness as well as social and economic inequality.\textsuperscript{22} The chief objective of their mission was to secure self-identity so that they obtained for themselves an honorable status in social, economic and political spheres, which was almost denied to them. These movements, therefore, naturally connected with economic and political objectives and were independent.\textsuperscript{23} They certainly generated both social and political consciousness and roused the people to a sense of awakening, which paved the way for anti-feudal and anti-colonial trends in the emerging political movements in Kashmir.\textsuperscript{24}

However, as explored in the previous chapters, the very nature and character of the Dogra rule deprived the people even of the elementary rights of the humanity. This sparked off searing attacks on the Dogra rulers from the very inception, and since newspaper publication was not allowed in the state until 1932, Muslim-owned newspapers in the Punjab brought out to fore the economic and religious oppression under which the people of Jammu and Kashmir in general and Muslims in particular were groaning. If the press dared to incant, not only were its owners deprived of proprietary rights of land, but subjected to arbitrary acts of eviction, oppression by the ‘pettiest officials’ and the compulsory and unpaid requisition of their labour, from all of which the non-Muslims were exempted. The press criticized the state’s failure to provide for the education of its Muslim subjects, thereby disqualifying them from lucrative jobs in administration, monopolized by the Hindus by keeping the majority subjects in abject

\textsuperscript{21} Halat-wa-Rouidad, 1913, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{22} Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, pp. 399-402.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
poverty. The press criticized the Muslim religious elite of Kashmir for their failure to provide a strong leadership.\textsuperscript{25}

The growing discontent among the people, with the passage of the time, assumed robust dimensions. The sense of the deprivation and denial of rights combined with the growing consciousness among the working class people of Kashmir as they started to question the misrule of the state. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the first challenge the Dogra rule witnessed—as reported by the contemporary sources—was in 1865 from the shawl weavers. The driving forces behind the uprising were the miserable economic conditions of the weavers of the shawl industry in Kashmir. As the exploitation grew more and more, so did grow class consciousness of the workers in their class solidarity as is evinced by their protests from the beginning of the Dogra rule against the practice of employing them in bondage, arbitrary acts of officials and heavy taxation.

In 1886, soon after the imposition of the British Resident in Kashmir at 1886, at least two petitions had been delivered to the Resident, signed by some seventeen or eighteen respectable Kashmiri Muslims, with an anonymous address, addressed to the viceroy and the Resident. The subject of the petitions was to say that the Muslims of Kashmir had hoped that with the establishment of the Residency there would be some relief from the ‘tyranny and oppression’ they had suffered for many years at the hands of the state.\textsuperscript{26} In 1909 yet another memorandum addressed to the viceroy from a group defining themselves more broadly as the ‘representatives of the Kashmiri Muslamans’ again with an anonymous address and identified only by illegible seal prints, spoke of the ‘hopes’ for ‘justice and safety’ of all Kashmiri Muslims, which the representatives believed, only the British Resident could guarantee, ‘for justice and safety’. The representatives made some far-reaching demands relating to an increase in the number of Kashmiri Muslims in the state’s administration to offset the overwhelming dominance of the ‘patronage groups’ of the Dogra regime. The representatives also highlighted the question of the education of Kashmiri Muslims. According to the representatives the greatest cause responsible for the lack of education was the absence of the Muslims

\textsuperscript{25} Paisa Akhbar, Lahore, 11 September, 1912, NAI.
\textsuperscript{26} Foreign Department, Secret- E/ Pros., October 1886/Nos. 235-300, NAI.
among those in charge of education, both as inspectors of schools and instructors. It was argued that Muslim teachers were best able to cater to Muslim educational interests.²⁷

Support for this increasingly assertive posture adopted by the Kashmiri Muslims also came from outside the state. The All India Educational Conference meeting in Rangoon in 1909, appealed to the maharaja of Kashmir that since Muslims formed a clear majority of his subjects, the number of Muslim teachers and school inspectors should be increased and additional arrangements of scholarship should be made available to Muslim students.²⁸ Also speaking from outside the State with regard to the condition of the Kashmiris was the Muslim Kashmiri Conference (Lahore) that had since the early twentieth century served as a forum for expatriate Kashmiris to give ventilate to their grievances against the Dogra administration in Kashmir.²⁹ The conference made appeals on behalf of Kashmiri Muslims, regarding their rights to educational advancement and representation in the state. In the same year the Conference drew the maharaja’s attention to the resolutions of the All India Mohammdan Educational Conference and requested the maharaja to act upon them.

At the Conference’s annual session in 1912 the Kashmiri Muslim conference suggested that the Kashmiri Darbar employ ‘Muslims from the Punjab in the state services if competent Muslims in the state couldn’t be found. In response to their suggestion maharaja gave the example of the definition of ‘state subjects’ instituted in 1912 which ‘obliged’ him to reserve administrative posts for the latter. Since this had not prevented the employment of Punjabi Hindu officials, the rulers’ justification was regarded as a clear instance of the discrimination practised against the Muslims in the state.³⁰ It is essential to point out that Kashmiri Muslim expatriates in the Punjab faced discrimination in terms of recruitment to the army, educational institutions and in other areas of administration. Therefore, petitioning the Dogra state for the recruitment of the

²⁷ ‘Petitions of the Kashmiri Muslims regarding the employment of Muslims in the Kashmir State’, Foreign Department, (General B), Pros., January 1909, nos. 15/16, NAI.
²⁸ Political Department, File No. 70/p-37, 1911, JKA-J.
³⁰ Political Department, File No. 254/p-127, 1912, JKA-J.
Kashmiri Muslims from the Punjab in to the departments of administration clearly had an economic motivation.\textsuperscript{31}

However, by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the third decade, the demands of both internal and external organizations on behalf of the Kashmiri Muslims were becoming increasingly embroiled with the larger political issues, both in Kashmir and the Punjab. In its resolutions of 1918 at Rawalpindi Muslim Kashmiri Conference (Lahore) demanded an efficient share both for the Punjabi Muslims themselves as well as for the people of Kashmir.\textsuperscript{32} The Pandits as compared to the Kashmiri Muslims formed only the five percent population of the Valley as against the ninety-three percent of the Muslims but had maintained and consolidated themselves sooner because the Muslims entered the fray of state politics considerably later than the Pandits. Kashmiri Muslims were also concerned to correct their position in education prior to active participation in politics. The Kashmiri Pandits were well in advance of the Muslims in taking to modern education. Therefore, the efforts of the Muslims at mobilizing in favour of privileges for representation in the state services had no resonance in what was, at best, a miserably educated Muslim community. However, the year 1907 marked a decisive shift when a representative group of Kashmiri Muslims spoke out on behalf of the subjects of the maharaja, with a serious concern with making their own social leadership in Kashmir as they seemed to be concerned about the plight of their co-religionists. The representatives also brought into light the lack of Muslim representation in the state administration and suggested only that education can make their situation better. They pointed out that the backwardness of the Muslims was caused by non-Muslims officers who ignored the interests of the Muslims and the Hindu teachers who wished to keep the Muslims illiterate.\textsuperscript{33}

The root cause behind the backwardness of the Muslim subjects of the maharaja was brought into fore by the Sharp Committee Report in 1916. Mr. Sharp, the educational commissioner with the British government of India, visited at the request of the Kashmir Darbar, the educational institutions in the state, examined the demands of the Muslims,

\textsuperscript{31} Chitralekha Zutshi, \textit{Languages of Belonging}, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 199.
\textsuperscript{33} Foreign Department (Internal A), Pros. February 1907, Nos. 15/16, NAI.
enquired into their grievances and submitted a report containing his recommendations for
the guidance of the state authorities. The report pointed out that the system however, is
top heavy. Poverty and agricultural class basis of Kashmiri Muslims was the reason for
the lack of literacy among them. The commission in its report felt that the Muslims in the
state were so overwhelmingly poor that they couldn’t send their children to schools.\textsuperscript{34}
However, after the publication of the report it was ‘safely’ put into the archives from
where nobody could find it out. Fifteen years later Glancy commission (discussed later)
had to admit that, ‘no one appears to be aware of the nature of the report submitted by the
educational expert.’ The Muslims rightly felt aggrieved over such a state of affairs. For
years they complained and protested, fretted and fumed, but all to no purpose.\textsuperscript{35}

However, during the period the discourse of the Muslim leadership converged on
the issues of the slow progress of education among Muslims and their lack in state
employment on which they focused more to get the redress. Although the Darbar claimed
time and again that it was doing its best to promote the educational position of the
Muslims, the leadership held the state responsible for the small number of educated
Muslims and even small number of Muslims employed in state government services.\textsuperscript{36}
But with the passage of time the nature of the demands started to take a broader shape; in
1920, for instance, the demands of the Muslim leadership moved far away from the
provisions of education to the major demands of more economic rights.\textsuperscript{37}

In 1922, Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam president, Mirwaiz Ahmadallah, presented a
representation to the council of the state for consideration. In the representation, he
clearly accepted the flaws of the Kashmiri Muslim community- such as their apathetic
attitude towards English education as the reason for their illiteracy. However, just as
clearly he pointed out to the duty of government in alleviating this apathy by promising
employment to educated Muslims in the state services. The remedies suggested in this
representation made it clear that, by the early 1920s, the demands of the Kashmiri
Muslim leadership had gone beyond the provision of educational opportunities. But the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} ‘A Note on Education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir’, 1916, NAI, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Bazaz, Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, pp. 131-2.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} ‘Petition of grievances by the Muslim representatives of Kashmir’, General Records, File No.3/5, 1918,
    JKA-J.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} General Records, File No. 566/ad-9, 1923, JKA-J.
\end{itemize}
platform of education had become a means for their leadership to force the state to acknowledge the distinct demands of the people of Kashmir, which derived from its particular economic and political situation in the state.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, besides demanding the appointment and recruitment in various government departments, the rest of the demands of the representation, however, are most significant, since they reflect the changing political climate of the valley. The representation demanded that the council abolish the begar system, return the religious place of the Muslim community, granting of proprietary rights of their own land and considering the numerical strength of the Muslim population, allot them seats in the representative Assembly that might be brought into existence in the future.\textsuperscript{39}

With the spread of education and political evolution in British India, which couldn’t but act upon the minds of the people of the state began to dream of an independent political power, the ground for which had not yet been fully exploited. Till 1920s the character of the leadership associated with various Anjumans was more or less local in influence but the inspirations and reflections of the major political waves sweeping through British India brought in its sway the nascent political consciousness of the people of Kashmir. In this context the Khilafat movement, which from late 1920s onwards began to play such a seminal role in Muslim nationalist agitation in British India aided and abetted not only by Mahatma Gandhi but also two prominent figures of the Kashmiri origin Pandits Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Moti Lal Nehru, had relatively an impact upon the political life of Kashmir. The movement affected both the Jammu and Kashmir provinces, but remained mainly confined to Muslims, and made no significant impact upon the local Pandit community despite the role played in it in British India by Tej Bahadur Sapru and Moti Lal Nehru.\textsuperscript{40}

However, this is not to suggest that the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements raging in British India failed to have an impact upon the political landscape of Kashmir. The mass character acquired by the Khilafat movement in Kashmir made it imperative

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Alastair Lamb, \textit{Kashmir a Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990}, Karachi, 1993, p. 87.
\end{flushleft}
for the leaders to shift the venue of Khilafat meetings from the coffins of mosques to the public arena. The first mass meeting of this kind was held at Id-gah (prayer ground) Srinagar, on August 1, 1920. The meeting was attended by twenty thousand people and was presided over by Moulvi Mohammad Yusuf Shah. The popularity of the movement made the government alert and a serious note was taken of everything that was going on. The Khilafatists were being strictly watched by the state authorities and the intelligence agents of the government of British India. The governor of Kashmir had gone to the extent of warning the chief organizers of the movement either to stop the agitation or face the consequences.\(^{41}\)

The main significance, which shouldn’t be underestimated of the Khilafat movement in Jammu and Kashmir was the introduction of the many of the Muslim leaders of the Muslim community to the name of the Mahatma Gandhi.\(^{42}\) The sympathetic consideration to the Khilafat issue by the people of Kashmir, the emergence of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements, the press in the Punjab which projected the sufferings of the people of Kashmir in British India were a few of the key factors which seems to have objectively and subjectively had a cumulative effect in building up a major mass upsurge of the Kashmiris from 1931, onwards. But the effects were neither immediate nor very direct.\(^{43}\)

Already in the previous chapter the origin and development of the silk industry has been discussed. The worsening labour conditions of the industry gave birth to labour uprisings, which marked another important milestone in the history of the struggle for freedom in Kashmir. In 1924, Kashmir experienced a crisis which was to mark another important stage in the evolution of political opposition to the maharaja’s rule.\(^{44}\) The silk factory workers at Srinagar gave an expression to get their economic grievances

\(^{41}\) Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, pp. 82-85.  
\(^{42}\) Lamb, Kashmir a Disputed Legacy, p. 87.  
\(^{44}\) Lamb, Kashmir a Disputed Legacy, p. 87.
redressed by an organized strike in 1917 and then in 1924\textsuperscript{45} and ‘showed themselves as the harbingers of a new epoch of mass struggle for emancipation.’\textsuperscript{46}

Dr Allama Iqbal, while on a visit to Kashmir in 1921, wrote a poem ‘\textit{Saaqi Nama}’ in the famous Mughal garden ‘Nishat Bagh’ in Kashmir. In the following couplets, the poet depicts the condition of the silk weavers:\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{quote}
‘Kashmiris are slaves by temperament,  
They worship grave stone as idols,  
Their mind is devoid of great ideas,  
Unaware of their ego, they are not ashamed of themselves,  
With their blood and sweat they weave silk into the master’s gown,  
Yet wear tattered clothes themselves,  
O God! breathe a new life into Kashmiris,  
So that ashes revive as embers.’
\end{quote}

As if Iqbal’s ‘prayer’ had been heard, the silk factory workers launched the agitation in 1924. The shawl weaver’s revolt in 1865 and the silk factory workers revolt in 1924 clearly brought out the solidarity of the laboring classes against the economically and politically oppressed.\textsuperscript{48} N.N. Raina, one of the observers of the political scene in Kashmir regarded the revolt of 1924 as a ‘dress rehearsal for the events of 1931-34.’\textsuperscript{49} Both the uprisings were suppressed with the use of considerable violence by the government. The telegrams sent by the silk factory workers spoke more and more pointedly of oppression by the Dogra Darbar. For instance, more evidence, a telegram reads:

‘Subject of the telegram: ‘Marshal Law in force... kindly save us Muslim inhabitants’.

Another goes as:\textsuperscript{50}

‘Kashmiris silk factory Muslim coolies approached of bribery of pandits of consideration about thirty imprisoned rest marshaled out deaths yet unknown wounded about sixty. Maharaja tries to hush up whole case, insisting raises to deny occurrence, kindly soon relieve from tyranny.’

\textsuperscript{45} D.N. Dhar, \textit{Kashmir a Kaleidoscopic View}, pp. 57-8.
\textsuperscript{47} Khayal, \textit{Allama Iqbal and Tahreek-i-Azaadi-e-Kashmir}, pp. 188-9.
\textsuperscript{48} Prakash Chandra, \textit{The National Question in Kashmir}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{50} Telegram No.2, Foreign and Political Department, (Secret), File No. 19 (2) - p/1924, NAI.
Another telegram concludes depicting the same nature of oppression, addressed to his Excellency the Viceroy at Simla. The striking weavers at the silk factory trampled under the hooves of cavalry commanded by the crown prince Hari Singh and made the people believe that with an immense sense of self-worth they could spark a quest for the attainment of their deprived socio-economic and political rights.

The communalization of the feudal structure was the basis of Dogra Hindu rule, which hampered both the economic as well as the political awareness of the people of Kashmir. As a newspaper claimed, ‘the Hindus from outside were given the opportunities to have contracts, establish trade and industry in far more favourable terms than those offered to the native subjects.’ Even then, the communal nature of the feudal economy was evident in the fact that out of twenty five jagirs that were granted during first five years of Maharaja Hari Singh’s rule (1925-1947), only two were granted to Muslims. Such an open discriminatory policy hampered the growth of a regional bourgeoisie and development of capitalism in the state. In fact feudal fetters retarded industrial development to such an extent that a noted representative of the Indian capitalist class, Jamnalal Bajaj complained that the ‘cottage industry in the village of Kashmir was not valued by the government.’ This deprivation had obviously an effect on the political expression of dissent when it occurred.

It was in this scenario of deteriorating economic, political and social conditions that in 1924, when the Dogra regime under its strong mechanism suppressed the uprising, which was spearheaded by the signatories to the historic memorial that had been submitted to lord Reading in 1924. As pointed out earlier, the telegrams sent by the silk factory workers to Viceroy brought to the fore the grave situation in Kashmir, and exposed the condition of the ordinary people in Jammu and Kashmir to the attention of the British Indian government in a manner which was difficult to ignore. When in

51 Foreign and Political Department, 1924 (sec.), File No. 19/2-p/1924, dated, 22/7/1924, NAI.
52 The Kashmiri (weekly), Lahore, 7th February, 1925.
53 Though being considered liberal, but it was a small beginning, and only served to underline the newly aspiring Muslim Kashmiris awareness of deprivation. Piecemeal benevolence didn’t sit well at all with the Kashmiris deep-seated sense both of being superior and being a victim. David Devdas, In Search of a Future: the Story of Kashmir, New Delhi, 2007, p. 7.
55 Bazaz, Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, p. 139.
October, 1924, the Viceroy Lord Reading, visited Srinagar he was presented with a memorandum signed by many prominent members of the Kashmiri Muslim community, (including the Mirwaiz-i-Kashmir) which outlined their grievances not only in the context of silk factory, but in all aspects of their life. Chitralekha Zutshi, argues that, the presenting of the memorandum to Viceroy was a last ditch effort made by the Kashmiri leadership to act as representatives of a united Kashmiri Muslim community, at the same time openly challenging the authority of the Dogra state. The prominent demands of the memorandum included: (i) Property rights in land should be granted to the tenants, as these have been forcibly snatched away from them, (ii) Muslim representation in the state council should be according to their ratio in the population, (iii) To weed out corruption from services which had exceeded all limits, an Imperial tribunal be appointed to enquire into these complaints and award punishment, (iv) Since, agriculture was the principal occupation of the people, the governor of Kashmir valley should be a Muslim and if Muslims of required qualifications are not available, some Englishmen may be appointed to the post. Similarly, Muslims should be appointed to important posts such as the superintendent of police, superintendent customs etc., Other demands were the protection of the Muslim religious establishments, the abolition of all forms of forced labour, equitable distribution of government contracts to all communities, providing a legislative Assembly in which Muslims were properly represented.

The memorandum in fact provided an outline of reforms which any effective organized opposition to the maharaja’s autocracy could hardly fail to follow, it indicated to the political department of government of India, which was responsible for the British crown’s relations with the Indian princely states, that there existed serious social and political problems in Jammu and Kashmir. Swift action was taken against the authors of the memorandum who clearly subverted the legitimacy of the Dogra state in Kashmir.

A committee of inquiry was appointed to probe into the grievances presented in the memorandum. The commission in response refuted the grievances in great detail,

56 Lamb, Kashmir a Disputed Legacy, p. 87.
57 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 203.
58 Lamb, Kashmir a Disputed Legacy, p. 88.
59 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 204.
attributing their seditious nature to the work of ‘agitators from British India’. The commission took the written statements from each of the signatories of the memorandum, who were awarded varied punishments. The leading memorialist khawaja Saad-ud-Din Shawl was banished from the state. Among the other memorialists, Khawaja Hassan Shah Naqshbandi was deprived of his jagir; Khawaja Nurshah Naqashbandi was dismissed from his services and the rest of the signatories of the memorial were reprimanded and warned. With the exile of the Shawl, the unrest gained momentum. Srinagar was handed over to army, but it appeared that its fear was on the wane. The repressive policy of the Dogra regime helped to build a strong public opinion in and outside the state. Meetings were held in several places like Lahore, Jabalpur, Jattan, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Simla, Amritsar and in many other places condemning the repressive policy of the Dogras and calling upon the British government to intervene and safeguard the rights of the Muslim citizens of the state.

The memorandum was basically an expression of a long felt desire of suppressed and deprived masses of the people of Kashmir for a demand of economic justice and restoration of human dignity, but was put down heavily by the authorities on the grounds that the representative institutions were at that time beyond practical politics. The failure of the memorandum to convince Lord Reading did, however, sharpen the consciousness of being victimhood among the elite of Kashmir. According to R.L. Handa, ‘the memorandum brought nothing to the Muslims, but it certainly gave a fillip to their movement to put forth their demands in an organized manner.’

The memorial was construed as revolving around the issue of the exclusion of Muslims by the state government from government posts on the basis of their lack of educational qualifications and it was declared that their demand for proprietary rights was irrational. However, the claims of the Dogra oligarchy and the British imperialists regarding the demands as ‘irrational’ and their claim in the improvement of socio

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61 Ibid.
62 Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, p. 98.
65 Ibid.
economic and political conditions of Kashmir was made evident most poignantly in 1929 by Sir Albion Banerjee, a Bengali Christian, civil servant who had been employed in the state as Foreign and Political minister. Banerjee, as a trained administrator with a successful record in other states shared gloomy anticipates regarding the prevailing conditions in the Kashmir. Muslim Outlook, a newspaper published from Lahore worked that having been Dewan of both Cochin and Mysore, it was expected that his services would streamline the antiquated system for the toiling masses of Kashmir. He ha[d] rendered valuable services to the maharaja of Kashmir. He gave learner[d] advice in all important matters of administration, chiefly under finance in connection with which he affected an increase in revenue, a retrenchment of expenditure and the exploitation of the rich and abundant sources of the country.’ ‘Banerjee professed to be so much above communitarian considerations in a state where a small minority rule[d] with an iron hand on overwhelming majority and left Kashmir ‘unwept, un honored and unsung’.

Disgusted with the policy of the rulers and the inability of even conscientious members of the administration to effect a change, he resigned from the post he had held for two years. Banerjee reportedly resigned on the grounds which he made public through the Associated Press in Lahore that ignited protests not only in Kashmir but also in the Punjab newspapers. He bore witness to the fact that:

‘Jammu and Kashmir state [was] laboring under many disadvantages with a large Mohammedan population absolutely illiterate, labouring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb driven cattle. There [wa]s no touch between the government and the people, no suitable opportunity for representing grievances and the administrative machinery itself require[d] overhauling from top to bottom…it ha[d]… no sympathy with the people’s wants and grievances.’ He also said that there is hardly any public opinion in the state. As regards the press it is practically non-existent, with the result that the government is not benefited to the extent that it should be by the healthy criticism’.

66 ‘Muslim Outlook’, Lahore, 18 January, Foreign and Political Department, File No. 7(5)- R of 1929, Government of India, ‘R’ Branch Nos. 1-2, NAI.
67 ‘Civil and Military Gazette’, Foreign and Political Department, File No. 7(5)- R of 1929, Government of India, ‘R’ Branch Nos. 1-2, NAI.
In the course of his remarks Sir Albion said, ‘that the state administration was rotten from top to bottom, he described it as ‘a looting show’ and declared corruption to be rampant from the highest officials downwards.’ Banerjee argued that ‘low economic condition[s] of the people wer[e] responsible for the moral evils which existed. The state government wa[s] taking drastic steps to combat the evils, but they couldn’t be entirely eradicated until and unless village life was raised to a higher level… who were living very poor lives and the artisans who were well known throughout the world for the excellent quality of their workmanship, but unfortunately in recent years the quality was steadily deteriorated and the need of the hour [was] to raise the standard of masses who had fallen to prey to various abuses and evils owing to grinding poverty’.

The resignation and press conference of Banerjee produced a great stir in the young minds of Kashmir. Whatever his attentions, he may aptly be said to have awakened them from the slumber and his statements laid a constructive impact in the maturing of emerging political awakening in Kashmir. Undoubtedly, the educated classes were affected by the incident and their consciousness was to manifest itself during the subsequent years.

5.2. Contextualizing 1931 Events:-

As already mentioned, the nature and orientation of the political discourse in Kashmir from 1920, onwards entered into in a new phase by the middle of the 1920s. It was in such an unsettled societal milieu that another new class joined the social climb. Its notion of superiority was based on a new paradigm of status, one that threatened not just to shake up the current hierarchy but to bring down stratification itself. This was the class of the newly-educated Kashmiris. This class had been the first to take advantage of the combined efforts of the Muslim leadership and the state at encouraging Muslim education and received higher education in British India. The increasing impact of education, the influence of the press and publication market on the common Kashmiri, rise of Srinagar.

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68 Foreign and Political Department, File No. 247 of 1929, NAI.
69 ‘Muslim outlook’, Lahore, 18 January, Foreign and Political Department, File No. 7(5)- R of 1929, Government of India, ‘R’ Branch Nos. 1-2, NAI.
70 M.I. Khan, History of Srinagar, p. 173.
as the center of competing ideologies and the general economic discontent of the valley’s inhabitants could be clearly seen in their attitude towards the state. The discontent among the people towards the end of the 3rd decade of the twentieth century could also be partly explained on the basis of the developments taking place elsewhere in the world which affected the state’s economy in way or the other.

The Kashmir economy was found to be very sensitive to this development. High valued handicrafts, carpets, embroidered goods, felt matings, paper machie, carved sliver and wood work, precious and semi-precious jewelry… have had their market mostly in western countries. It were only the shawls, pashmina goods, dry and fresh fruit, saffron which were sold mostly in Indian subcontinent. With the beginning of 1930, the whole economy of Kashmir took a sudden downturn… compounded by depression in agricultural prices on a global scale. Paddy wouldn’t fetch as shown in the census reports of rupees two per ‘ass load’ (about seventy five kilograms) in the market while the people starved.\(^{72}\) The situation thus took a turn for which there were few precedents in terms of starvation and destitution even in the long run and chequered history of the state. By 1930, Kashmir was simmering; ready to explode. It was evident that a major mass explosion was quite on the cards, the only moot point was what shape it would take and whom it would hit.

The valley’s contact with the Punjab resulted in the increasing number of Muslims travelling to Punjab; the limited spread of education had encouraged a concomitant expansion of the publication market, particularly in Srinagar. There was an exceptional increase in the circulation figures of the newspapers of both English and Urdu between 1911-1921 and the number of daily or weekly newspapers in circulation by 1921 had risen to a staggering 2000, with the number for English newspapers being as high as 450.\(^{73}\) Besides this, there was an exceptional increase in the circulation of number of books, published at printing press in Lahore, Amritsar, further attesting the growing relationship between Punjab and Kashmir politics because Punjab during this period was the hotbed of nationalist activities.\(^{74}\) All these developments laid a positive impact on the

\(^{72}\) Ibid., pp. 216-8.
\(^{73}\) Census of India 1921, Jammu and Kashmir, p. 90.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
nascent political psyche of Kashmir. The emerging educated class, which played a pivotal role in the formation of the future political discourse of Kashmir. It was in part a consequence of the development of various associations interested in educational reform of Kashmir and of a number of young Kashmiri Muslims, several of whom passed the level of secondary education and went to institutions of higher learning in British India such as the University of Punjab and the Aligarh Muslim University.

It was a time when modern politics were taking shape in different parts of the world. Particularly in the Indian subcontinent, leaders of the movements had a clean slate on which to design models for the management of communities emerging from a feudal, agrarian past into the opportunities of the twentieth century. The stay of the youth of Kashmir in British India for the purpose of education was more for these men than just to gain education. These men came to witness various political during and ideologies especially while their stay at Aligarh Muslim University. Upon returning to Kashmir with the fervor of new ideas and armed with academic and professional degrees these men found the Dogra state unwilling and unable to accommodate their needs. Facing the problem of unemployment and a seemingly rapidly disintegrating community, they consolidated into a leadership that would lead Kashmir out of Dogra rule.

These young educated people having come out from the portals of Indian universities, as already mentioned, started to organize themselves. To begin with, they demanded government jobs for the educated youth. On the other hand, Kashmiri Pandits who had taken advantage of the presence of schools and colleges in Srinagar were more advanced in education and state service than the Muslim educated youth. In 1905 was established the Sri Pratap College Srinagar, where mostly Pandits got themselves educated. By 1925, hundreds of Pandit graduates after the completion of their studies came out with a great hope to hold posts in the administration. While competing for the jobs they faced a chunk of discrimination by Punjabis and next by Dogras who were wielding authority in places of power.75 The Pandits got disappointed with the policy and attitude of the government which openly favoured the people against the natives of the

land. Hence the policy of the discrimination became more manifest during the ‘enlightened’ Dogra ruler Maharaja Hari Singh.

In response of the discriminatory treatment the Pandits carried out an organized agitation in the outside press against the policy of the Dogra maharaja. They demanded a freedom of press, a due share in the government services, establishments of associations, and representation of the people in the administration of the state. But initially their demands remained only confined to newspapers. In practice they failed to organize an active political forum to pressure the state to concede these demands.

Later on, however, the movements of the Pandits for the struggle of the rights called ‘Kashmiris for Kashmiris’ gained momentum as a result of which the maharaja appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Major General Janak Singh to define the term ‘state subject’. The commission submitted its report in 1927 defining the term ‘state subject’. The term ‘state subject’ divided the subjects into three categories…class first state subject, class second and class third.

Being educationally advanced than the Muslim community, the Pandits and the Rajputs of Jammu became the immediate beneficiaries of this step of the government. Needless to say that that the Muslims were yet out of picture. The Pandits adopted a narrow communal and opportunist posture. They demanded job security for themselves. This narrow communal attitude was condemned by the congress leaders of British India like Tej Bahadur as ‘unsound in principle’.

At the same time the emerging Muslim middle class appeared on the scene. They organized themselves into the Reading Room party, the closest thing to a political outfit that the regime would tolerate. The party functioned under a committee of which Sheikh

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76 Ibid.
77 Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, p. 103.
78 As per the definition of the term, all persons born and residing in the state before the commencement of the reign of maharaja Gulab Singh and also the persons who settled there in before the commencement of Samvat 1942 (1885) and have since been permanently residing in the country are hereditary subjects of the state. Bazaz, The History of the Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, p. 140.
79 ‘Letter from Tej Bahadur Sapru to Kashyap Bandhu’, Albert Road, dated 5 May 1934, Sapru Papers, Nehru Memorial library, New Delhi.
Mohammad Abdullah was the general secretary.\textsuperscript{80} Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah along with his other young associates, Mohammad Rajab, Qazi Saif-ud-din Qadri, Gh Ahmad Mukhtar came to Kashmir after completing their educational degrees at Aligarh Muslim University, which in 1930 had become the nerve of Muslim unrest.\textsuperscript{81} During the period of their study in Aligarh Muslim University, some of the newspapers of Lahore had already started to speak out about the condition of the Kashmiris. These people, in order to make the voice of the newspapers more strong, started to work for their consolidation.\textsuperscript{82} While coming to the valley these people from outside came with their novice political concepts. At that time there was neither any political party nor organization in Kashmir nor were there such audacious people who could to form an organization, union or an amateur political party. However, this group of young educated men, which included people like Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Mir Mohammad Rajab and Molvi Bashir Ahmad set up a partially hidden Reading Room in Srinagar in Syed Ali Akbar’s somewhat dilapidated house, where in one part of the house, post master Mohammad Sikander was also residing. It was decided that secret political discussions will be held and steps will be taken, both at personal and organizational level, to eliminate economic deprivation in the valley. Thus, the members of the Reading Room were picked over.

\textsuperscript{80} Rashid Taseer, \textit{Tahreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir}, 1931-39, (Urdu), vol. 1, Srinagar, 1978, p.83. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah with a middle class family background was born in Soura, Srinagar in 1905. His father Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim was a shawl trader. His father started off with a small business, but with persistence and hard work turned it into a medium scale enterprise. Abdullah passed his matriculation in 1922 from the state high school \textit{Fateh kadal}, and it was with great difficulty and after several meetings with the educational minister that he secured admission in the Sri Pratap College Srinagar, the only college, then in the whole valley of Kashmir. After passing the, F.S.C in 1924, he tried to get admission for B.Sc. in the Prince of Pales College, Jammu, because science had not been introduced at degree level in Srinagar. But his admission was refused on the ground that the seat has been already allotted to the son of an officer, though not a state subject. Finally he took admission in the Islamia College, Lahore for B.Sc. at the time of the rejection of his application by the college principal Mr. Suri, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah approached General Samander Khan, the leader of the Anjuman-i-Islamia which had been setup at Jammu then to help the Muslim candidates with such problems. The General along with a few of his colleagues agreed to plead sheikh’s cause. But he still couldn’t get for what he approached. To quote Sheikh, ‘As we were leaving the principal’s office, General Samander Khan tried to console me, ‘sorry about all this, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah you touched Suri’s vulnerable spot when you spoke about your rights and oppression of your people. A less blunt man would have been accepted. You are strong and courageous, but flattery is a sure winner. Pity that Kashmiri Muslims are not allowed in the army. You could make an excellent soldier.’ Sheikh’s struggle first to get admission then job in the state services which he couldn’t get according to his will and wish made him realize the injustice which remained ingrained in him for a long time. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, \textit{Flames of Chinar}, pp. 19-20.


\textsuperscript{82} Taseer, \textit{Tahreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir}, p. 77.
To continue the activities of the Reading Room a committee was organized to collect the funds from the people. A room was taken on rent in Zaina Kadal, Srinagar. Then after some time, the location was again shifted to Fateh Kadal, in the house of Mufti Jamal-ud-din where an organized election was held for the members of the Reading Room. Mohd Rajab was elected as the president and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as the secretary.

After the formation of the reading room meetings were held regularly. According to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, ‘the reading room served as a rendezvous, where national issues were discussed and amongst other things, it deplored the existing conditions.’ It was at the same time that the party members started to campaign through various newspapers regarding the condition of the Kashmiri people. They opened a window to the world to appraise it of the wretched conditions of Kashmir. Letters were sent to Urdu newspapers of Lahore. Besides this the Reading Room party members contacted Rajini P. Dutt, editor of the progressive journal, Indian States whose founder was Sir Albion Banerjee.

It was for the first time that the historical account of the reality of Kashmir became evident to the world. Maluna Azad Subhani, the preacher at the Jama Masjid of Calcutta visited the Reading Room party, who was both a believer and lover of freedom. He expressed solidarity with the ideology of the Reading Room party and instructed the members how to start a people’s movement. After the publication of the news in Zimindar (a daily newspaper of Lahore) of the visit of Subhani, the government got terrified and tried to hold him but by that time he had left the state.

It is important to mention here that, in the meantime in the province of Jammu an Association namely Young Men’s Muslim Association came in to being. Though, the Association was founded back in 1924, when its first session took place under the presidency of Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, it was not in organizational shape. In the session of the Association, according to Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas a large number of

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., p. 79.
86 Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, pp. 40-3.
people participated and the leaders of the Association became the hope of the political future of the people of Jammu. The Association highlighted socio economic conditions of the people in comparison with the people of British India. According to Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, ‘the oppressed unrespectable and despairing Muslims of the valley of Kashmir were in the state of wretchedness. It was, may be, because the Dogra Darbar considered them as bonded slaves, thereby justifying the oppression, the like of which is found in the condition of the Roman slaves, long before the birth of the Christ. These self-appointed masters of Kashmiri Muslims were not ashamed even in the arena of the twentieth century’s new culture and tradition…of the degree of oppression and tyranny they subjected the people to’.

The Reading Room party at its first instance presented a memorandum to the council of ministers, while Maharaja Hari Singh was away in England to attend the Round Table Conference from where he and his wife proceeded to France. In his absence the memorandum was presented against the Civil Service Recruitment rules framed by the state council. The new rules were designed to make qualifications instead of patronage. The recruitment rules restricted the entry of the Muslim youth in the government employment, who at that time were in search of employment. Some of the rules were: A candidate shouldn’t be above the twenty years old; Arabic was replaced by Sanskrit; a candidate seeking employment should have good family background. Besides this if a candidate fulfilled all the required qualifications, still the government was having power to reject his/her application without assigning any reason.

While presenting the memorandum, according to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, in response the members of the council took great pains to explain that the Maharaja’s government was very kind to the Muslims and that it was most ungracious of the representatives to oppose it! P.K. Vatil recounted instances of the maharaja’s ‘kindness’.

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., p. 39.
89 Ibid., p. 57.
90 Taseer, Tahreek-i-Huriyat-i-Kashmir, pp. 79-80.
91 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Flames of Chinar, p. 50.
Abdullah’s reply was ‘that Muslims wanted no more than their just rights’. Members of the council especially Vatil, tried to come down and said that such activities would be ‘appropriately dealt with’. However, Abdullah spoke with great firmness: ‘if recruitment rules are not amended the consequences would be unpleasant’. Abdullah’s retort infuriated them and they abruptly ended further discussion.92

Though the memorandum, according to Abdullah, ‘had no immediate effect, it did create a stir among the ruling elite.’93 The state at that time had no newspaper and in order to express their self-expression the leadership took the help of the Punjab press. In fact, the impact of the Punjab press and more particularly the concern of the Kashmiri expatriate settled across northern India in general and Punjab in particular made a significant contribution. Some such persons of eminence have played very important role in the Kashmiri awakening and in highlighting the plight of the people. These person of eminence include Allama Iqbal, Sonaullah Amritsari, Mohammad din Fauq, Saif-ud-din Kichloo and host of other persons.94 Some of these people influenced Kashmir situation both by their ideas as well as actions. Iqbal, with his deep emotional and intellectual commitment to Kashmir, must have been tremendous inspiration through his poetry to the emancipative forces working for Kashmir. In one of the annual sessions of Kashmir Conference, Dr. Iqbal said:

The clutches of tyranny and ignorance have made us wretched,
As if a clipper has clipped our wings,
O God, destroy the hands of tyranny which has,
Suppressed the soul of the freedom of Kashmir.

A number of periodicals and papers were published from Lahore solely devoted to the awakening of the Kashmiri Muslims and focusing on their plight. Among these periodicals was one weekly Kashmiri Magazine brought out by Munshi Muhammad din Fauq; Inquilab edited by two famous Urdu editors and writers Maulana Gh. Rasool Mahar and Abdul Majid Salik. After the entry of the paper in the state it was banned, while editors of the paper started a new weekly paper namely ‘Kashmir’ but after a passage of time its entry was banned and the editors of the Inquilab started a new paper

92 Ibid., p. 53.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 55-6.
namely ‘Mazloom-i-Kashmir’ and ‘Akbhar-i-Kashmir.’

It is, therefore, imperative for one researching on the awakening of Kashmir to acknowledge the contribution of the outside forces, before the beginning of an organized movement.

Up to this period the major thrust of the Reading Room Party leadership was to get the grievances of the Muslims redressed in general and of the unemployed educated youth in particular. Shankar Lal Kaul, a Pandit writer under the pseudonym of ‘Kashmiricus’ in an article brought out the nature of the Dogra state’s recruitment policy in the united India and Indian states. He claimed that,

‘Kashmiris are treated as strangers in their own house, in their own country, their status is nil. A post of rupees forty falls vacant in some office…ninety to one an outsider is brought to fill it up… and the state officials who indulge in this luxury have not… good sense enough to bring at least as good a man from outside to fill up the post, as could be available in Kashmir… a good for nothing outsider almost illiterate… but whose qualification is a communal or geographical alliance with some powerful official in the state…is given a post to which a Kashmiri graduate may aspire… the latest civil and military lists of the state presents the miserable spectacle of five percent Kashmiri Hindus, one per cent Kashmiri Muslims… and less than seven per cent of the rest of the state subjects. Two colleges were established by the state authorities… every year more and more pour into them… and what are their prospects? The state has encouraged then to be ambitious… diverted them from and unfitted them for pursuing humble occupations… in short, the end is… it has ruined them.’

In 1930, a significant political development took place when Sheikh Abdullah and Chaudhary Gh. Abbas met at Jammu where they sought each other’s cooperation for the future progress of the movement. Both were the leading political figures and were running the semi political organizations respectively in Kashmir and Jammu province. Their meeting resulted in preparing a strong front to voice against the autocratic rule.

The exposition of the policies of the maharaja by the Punjab press, the public campaign of the Reading Room party members, the forerunner of the Muslim conference,

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95 Ibid., p. 58.
96 ‘Miserable Kashmir’ an article published in United India and Indian States, Madras dated 22, September 1921, Political Department, OER, file no. 73/97-C, 1921, JKA-J.
the efforts by the Young Men’s Muslim Association Jammu helped to create a united front, which succeeded in creating quite a stir among a people accustomed for long to a passive submission to oppression.\(^{97}\) Alongside, there were other happenings on all too familiar a pattern: the desecration of the *Holy Quran* and ban on *Khutba* (Sermon) events took place in Jammu. The happenings further surcharged the atmosphere. All this was clearly calculated to accentuate communal bitterness, polarization of communities as antagonistic entities rather than a united front of the oppressed against oppressors and social parasites of all hues.\(^{98}\)

The government made efforts to polarize the people on religious grounds and to give the grievances of the people a communal colour. At the same time maharaja Hari Singh at the advice of the G.E.C. Wakefield, the minister for political affairs, invited a representative delegation which was permitted to submit their grievances before the maharaja.\(^{99}\) The representatives of both the Young Men’s Muslim Association Jammu and the representatives of the Reading Room party were invited.\(^{100}\)

The Young Men’s Muslim Association nominated Mistri Yaqub Ali, Sardar Gauhar Rehman, Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas (president of the Association) and Sheikh Abdul Hamid. The Reading Room party in Kashmir called a public meeting on 21\(^{st}\) of June 1931 to choose their representatives. According to Sheikh Abdullah, ‘in Kashmir the selection was done on a large scale. We organized ourselves with the dual purpose of electing delegates, unifying the different factions and bringing the people on one platform. Followers of senior and junior Mirwaiz were always at loggerheads. We managed to create a sort of rapprochement between them. A well-attended meeting was convened in the open space in front of Khanqah-e-Mualla. This was the beginning of our movement for independence. We swore on an oath of loyalty to the nation. Seven representatives were elected, Mirwaiz Mouli Yusuf Shah, Mirwaiz Ahmadullah, Agha Hussain Jalali, Khwaja Gh. Ahmad Ashai, Munshi Shahabuddin, Khwaja Saad-ud-din Shawl and Sheikh Mohammad Abdulllah.’\(^{101}\) According to Prem Nath Bazaz, ‘this was

\(^{98}\) Ibid.
\(^{100}\) Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, *Kashmakash*, p. 73.
\(^{101}\) Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Flames of Chinar*, p. 84.
one of the most important meetings in the history of the movement. In certain respects it was unique. Both of the irreconcilable Mirwaizes appeared on the same platform. Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah entered the precincts of the Khanqah-i-Mualla which neither he nor perhaps his forefathers had done before. Even Moulvi Abdullah, an Ahmadi, was also present. All the sectional differences had been relegated to the background. Whole community was unanimous in its demands.102

The arrest of Abdul Qadir103 provided an occasion for the open mobilization of Muslims in the valley for his release. It was while he was being tried at Srinagar central jail premises that a vast concourse of people thronged to witness his trial on 13th July 1931. The armed police there resorted to firing; seventeen fell down dead immediately, and several died afterwards. It was found on the 26th of July, that twenty one persons died as a result of the jail incident.104 Without demoralization, the people carried their dead on charpaïs (cots) taken from the police lines outside the jail wall and went towards the city in the form of a procession. The people carried a blood-soaked banner in front and raised slogans. Public opinion among the Muslims had, by this time, crystallized on the point that the government and the Hindus were inseparable and one stood for the other. Almost all the officials were Hindus- the Maharaja was a Hindu.105

The situation both inside as well outside the valley followed by the 1931 incident has been discussed at length by most of the writers of Kashmir’s modern history.106 However, what is important to mention here is that the incident of 1931 was unique in various ways, not just the beginning of the Kashmiris struggle for freedom against the Dogra Raj. The incident was a catalyst but of course could not happen have happened

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103 It was almost at the end of the meeting at Khanqah-i-Mualla that Abdul Qadir (who belonged to the NWFP and had come to Srinagar with a European visitor as an attendant) came on the scene and ‘exhorted people to rise from the thralldom of passivity to fight for their rights.’ According to him, ‘the time [had] come when [they] must retaliate with full strength.’ Pointing towards Raj Mahal [place of the Maharaja]’, he said, ‘to pay them in their own words.’103 His was a vitriolic speech against the Dogra Maharaja; he was arrested soon after this under Article 142 of the Ranbir Penal Code. General Records, file no. 85/p-6, year 1931, JKA-J.
104 Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, p. 76; N.N. Raina, Kashmir Politics and Imperialist Manoeuvres, p. 88.
without any causational process. It was not a spontaneous outbreak but was preceded by many important developments, which suggest that emancipative forces were already at work in Kashmir. The symptomatic of these included shawl baf agitation of 1865, reformative role played by various organizations, the presenting of memorandum to Lord Reading, the silk factory workers revolt, Banerjee’s exposition of the nature of the Dogra Raj; its impact, emergence and role of Reading Room party, and most importantly the fast growing economic discontent among the people.

There is also evidence that the ‘specter’ of Bolshevism entered the state even in the form of literature and Russian currency was confiscated from certain traders in Kashmir. Such types of activities were bound to have an emancipative influence on Kashmir situation. Therefore, on the basis of the above stated developments, which stretched over a number of years, with in the environment of sustained period of uncertainty, disorder and conflict. Despite the fact, that the public arena was strictly restricted in the state prior to 1932, the people could not remain unaffected. According to Chitralekha Zutshi, ‘the Kashmiri Muslim leadership had crafted and laid claim to a public space in which they debated and defined their political agenda as well as the contours of their community identity. What can’t be doubted of course is that 1931 explicitly changed the course of Kashmir politics, steering it towards the anti-colonial movement of British India’.

However, the root cause of the mass awakening in Kashmir have been taken into least consideration by most of the scholars. It was in fact the invidious position of Muslims in Kashmir society, who comprised 53% of the population of Jammu province and 93% of the Kashmir province, but were without any wealth or influence, which was the precursor of their agitation. At the policy making level, power was shared between the dynastic ruler maharaja Hari Singh and a four executive council, which in 1931 consisted of the maharaja’s brother, two British officers loaned by the government

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107 OER, File No. 61/30-c of 1919, JKA-J.
108 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 211. For a fuller discussion regarding the course of events in 1931-32 and how these events as well the preceding and succeeding political developments were linked with the broader political atmosphere of British India, see Suhail R. Lone, Indian National Movement and the Freedom Struggle of Jammu and Kashmir, M.Phil. Dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 2013.
of India and a Sikh. In the bureaucracy, the share of different communities was as under:\textsuperscript{110}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gazetted</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>29.21</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>64.69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-gazetted</td>
<td>4943</td>
<td>32.04</td>
<td>9281</td>
<td>60.15</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>15429</td>
</tr>
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At the local government level the disparity was less marked overall but non-Muslims still dominated, especially in Jammu. For instance, the Tahsildar in Kotli and Rajouri, the superintendent and deputy superintendent of police and nearly all the Magistrates were either Sikhs or Hindus, while in Mirpur tehsil it was estimated that 94% of patwaris (village record keepers) were Kashmiri Brahmans.\textsuperscript{111}

Besides, the low ratio in the employment, the overall economic scenario of the Valley, as already discussed in the preceding chapters and pages, gives clear evidence about the root cause of the ‘national awakening in Kashmir’. The worldwide economic depression beginnings in 1929 had also begun to have an impact on a wide cross section of Kashmiri society. A large population in Srinagar was dependent on the different handicrafts industries such as shawl and carpet weaving, silk, Paper Machie and silver works. Though, the state being rich in other natural resources at the time of the depression the development of industries was in an inactive state or had reached only the infant stage of development without any protection.\textsuperscript{112} The census report of 1931 mentions that, ‘the principal natural resources available to the state and its people for raising wealth and converting that wealth into necessities of life required by the higher standard of life into which the progress of civilization is pushing the peoples of the world

\textsuperscript{111} Report by Major General, Finlayson, G.O.C., Mirpur, dated 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1932, Political Department, File No.1/29/870, 1932, JKA-J.
\textsuperscript{112} Anant Ram, Census of India 1931, vol. xxiv, Jammu and Kashmir State, part 1, Report, p. 36.
day by day are noted below than that pushing feature in Jammu and Kashmir.\(^{113}\) The depression created alarming consequences to the employment of thousands of adults and immatures in Kashmir and also the prices of shawls had considerably fallen. An era of cheap shawls had set in and cheapness was acting adversely on the quality of produce.\(^{114}\) The depression reduced the workmen and petty shopkeepers to low straits. The shawl embroidiers and the paper machie artists were thrown out of job. Distress and frustration were writ large on every face.\(^{115}\)

The already high land tax was further increased in 1930 by up to 14.4% in several southern tehsils of Jammu;\(^{116}\) in Srinagar, the food control policy of the Dogras had been breaking down gradually since the summer of 1931, when the rice crop was ‘scantier than usual’ as a result of floods and the ravaging effects of a crop disease called *rai*. In the conditions of shortage, the poorer segments of the city’s population had been finding it increasingly difficult to obtain their staple at a rate higher than they could afford. In the countryside the zamindars were unwilling to relinquish their limited harvests, wishing to hold on to as much of it as possible for themselves. This caused prices to take a dramatic turn upwards further aggravating the problem in Srinagar.\(^{117}\) The agriculturist was not getting a fair return for his labour. There was a horde of intermediaries who were intercept[ing] a major portion of the profit; while the agriculturist was getting very little, the consumer had to pay much more.\(^{118}\)

To improve the position of the agriculturists the Dogra Darbar in 1926 passed a Land Alienation Act in 1926 to control the land transfer by sale or mortgage, which disallowed the transfer of the newly acquired rights to any but a member of the agricultural classes and prohibited the alienation of more than 25% of any holding for a period of ten years. The peasants exercised this right in full for the liquidation of debt. These sales increased the fragmentation of holdings which resulted in the transfer of much land to members of the agricultural classes who were not cultivators and the

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\(^{113}\) Ibid., p. 236.

\(^{114}\) Ibid.


\(^{116}\) Memorandum by Resident, dated 1 Jan. 1932, Foreign Department, File No. 6/5/28/870, 1932, NAI.


alienation of land on a large scale to non-cultivating owners was bound to lead to greater difficulties in the feeding of a rapidly increasingly population. It also led to soring land prices and the desire to own land among the richer classes of the valley usually non-agriculturists, was so strong that land previously valued at Rs 20 per kanal was alleged to have been sold at Rs 300 per kanal.119

Less money was spent on education, sanitation and other public services than on the maintenance of the courts. Newspapers were heavily censored, and political parties banned. As one probes deeper, however, it becomes clear that Muslims were the prime sufferers.120 Press censorship was focused on Urdu papers printed in Lahore which were read mostly by Muslims. Under a new dispensation of 1927, the legal definition of state subject hood was altered in way that excluded all Kashmiri Muslims domiciled outside the state from entering the public service or holding immovable property in Kashmir, and the Muslim share of state scholarships and places in government schools was the smallest of the three communities.121

Thus, in this way according to Prakash Chandra, ‘in the 1931 upsurge, the plebian masses (of artisans, traders and peasants) laid siege to the capital of Srinagar. For the first time, the national aspirations of the Kashmiris were awakened during this popular uprising’.122 ‘It was not a frenzied mob looking to kill in the name of religion, but one intended to redress the immediate economic grievances of Kashmiri Muslims’.123 Before probing further the consequences of the uprising of 1931, it is essential to mention that, why only the year 1931 proved decisive in the case of awakening of Kashmir.

According to Ian Copland three factors contributed. These were the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement in British India, death of the hereditary spiritual leader of the Srinagar Muslims, known as Mirwaiz and third, the emergence of Muslim political class. Though the death of Mirwaiz was an important event, the claim of Ian Copland

121 Ibid.
123 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 224.
does not have much substance as the events unfolding at the political firmament of Kashmir before 1931 proved that the death was not much contributory cause of the 1931 awakening. As discussed in the previous chapters the movements and agitations had taken place in 1907, 1920 and 1924. In fact, even after the Mirwaiz had abandoned the Khilafat agitations, it was still carried on by the people for some more time.

There was also the example of the Civil Disobedience movement in British India, which showed the people of Kashmir—Muslims and Hindus alike—that hereditary authority, could be resisted. Even the British Resident was impressed by the solidarity of the hartal (strike) which followed Gandhi’s arrest in 1930, and noted that it marked the beginning of a new era in Kashmir politics.\footnote{Ian Copland, Islam and Political Mobilization in Kashmir, 1931-34, p. 103.} The old Mirwaiz had been a staunch supporter of maharaja, and his restraining had helped to keep the more radicals Muslims in check. With his death, the Dogra Darbar not only lost a powerful instrument of social control but had to contend with a bitter succession dispute between the old man’s eldest son, Yousf Shah, and the head of the junior branch of the family, Muhammad Ahmadallah Hamandani, which galvanized the Muslim community as no purely political issue could have done.\footnote{Ibid.} The third factor as already mentioned, was the emergence, in the late 1920’s of an embryonic Muslim political class able and willing to carry the torch for the freedom of the suppressed masses of Kashmir. Most of those who took part in the July uprising were daily wage labourers, artisans especially weavers, but the direction of the movement was controlled by a core of middle class professionals-mainly teachers and lawyers- belonging to Srinagar based Muslim Young Men’s Association. One such was Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah about whom as already mentioned an employee in the Kashmir education department, who before and after July 1931, established himself as a

\footnote{According to P.N. Bazaz, ‘After the death of Maulana Ahmad ullah, Mirwaiz of the Jama Masjid in the early 1931, about the lakh of Muslims accompanied the mourning procession which followed the bier towards the graveyard. The procession was held by the Reading Room party who were conspicuous by their activity in honouring the dead and arranging the procession. Maulana Yusuf Shah, an earnest Youngman with some education, was installed as the new Mirwaiz of Jama Masjid. He was in entire sympathy with the Reading Room party and promised all help. He was prepared to allow the young men to use the Jama Masjid as their political platform. Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, pp. 119-20.}
tireless organizer and the Young Men’s most gifted orator, by September 1931, he was perhaps the second most influential Muslim in Kashmir after the Mirwaiz.\textsuperscript{126}

The July 1931, uprising sent a wave of indignation among the Muslims all over British India, resulting in protests, meetings, and processions almost in several cities, towns and villages expressing their sympathy and solidarity with the people of Kashmir and calling upon the British government to dispose Hari Singh and take the state under its direct administration. Press statements were issued by all prominent Muslim leaders condemning the outrage and assuring the Kashmiri Muslims of their full support.\textsuperscript{127} To coordinate these activities Mirza Bashir-ud-din Ahmad, 
\emph{Amir} of the Jamat-i-Ahmadiya took initiative in convening a meeting of some leading Muslims at Simla on 25\textsuperscript{th} of July 1931, to consider the situation. It was in this historical meeting that the foundation of All India Kashmir Committee was laid.\textsuperscript{128} The leaders of the committee expressed deep sympathy with people and assured their full moral and material support to their struggle. The committee passed resolutions-to bring pressure on the British Indian government to help the people of Kashmir in securing to them the elementary rights of life hitherto denied to them, to acquaint the ruler with the real affairs of the state, appointment of an independent commission of enquiry in Kashmir affairs, and to make affairs of the Kashmir known to the entire civilized world by various means of print media.

In response to the appeal issued by the All India Kashmir Committee (Qaidan Gurdaspur), to observe Friday August 14 Kashmir day was observed throughout India and the participants sympathized with their Muslim brethren in Kashmir in their sufferings. The local Khilafat Committee had also arranged to observe the day in Bombay. The committee passed resolutions too. In one of the resolutions, the president in a lengthy speech described the sufferings of the thirty two lakhs of Kashmir Muslims and the atrocities perpetrated on them by the officers of Kashmir. Messages were received from Punjab, Delhi, Gorakhpur, Cawnpore, Nagour, and other towns in British India about the observance of Kashmir day by Muslims.\textsuperscript{129} The Kashmir Committee also

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Saraf, \textit{Kashmiris Fight for Freedom}, p. 454.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Times of India}, ‘Kashmir Day in Bombay’, August 15, 1931.
arranged for the publication of news about Kashmir in British newspapers such as the Daily Telegraph, Ring Post and Sunday Times, London. The Kashmir Committee supported the demands of the Kashmiri Muslims for the expulsion of the Hari Kishen Koul and the introduction of reforms. In brief the committee not only provided moral and material support to the people of Kashmir but also gave wide publicity to their cause and helped the people of Kashmir in presenting their case before the Midelton Commission on 5th Dec. 1931 and the members of the committee also played an important role in the formation of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference.

Before mentioning about the next phase of the freedom for struggle of rights, it is pertinent to mention here that after the 13 July uprising most of the chosen representatives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir including Chaudhary Gh Abbas and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah were arrested and kept locked in Hari Parbat Fort. But their arrest too proved insufficient in the restoration of the law and order situation. As a matter of fact says Bazaz, ‘it added fuel to the fire of wild excitement, which held the people in its grip. As it was, 13th July saw the beginning of the gigantic force behind the mass movement’. Until the release of the leaders complete strike was observed. According to Chaudhary Gh Abbas, ‘up to our release complete strike was observed successfully by the people, this step of the people of Kashmir was so strong and national in nature that it broke the record of the all previous strikes observed in British India’.

The aftermath of the 13th July shook the whole state including the administration; it un-nerved the maharaja. An official commission under the presidency of Sir Barbour Dalal, chief justice of Srinagar High Court, was set up to enquire in to the causes of the happenings. However, the commission was boycotted in both Jammu and Kashmir provinces, with huge demonstrations to condemn the policy of the government regarding the appointment of the commission. Despite opposition it submitted its report on the 24th of September 1931. The findings of the committee presented ‘the movement not

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130 Saraf, Kashmiris Fight for Freedom, p. 460.
133 Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, p. 88.
135 Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, p. 96.
against the Maharaja person or his reign, but as a movement of the Muslims against the Hindus of the valley, many of whom held positions of power within the government. According to the committee’s report, ‘even extremist Muslims had full faith in the maharaja and the laws he had enacted for the betterment of his subjects. But they complained that ‘a section of the Hindus had overpowering representation in the government and the section oppressed the Mohammedans’. The report made frequent reference of establishing communal peace and future prevention of communal tension in the state; paradoxically, on the other side, admitting the fact that the incidents of 1931 might represent the genuine economic and political grievances of the Kashmiri Muslim population. According to the report, ‘the grievances [paucity of state Muslims in state service] does exist… the grievances becomes acute when the Mohammedans themselves find that they have no ability to satisfy their natural desire for a voice in the government of the state…this dissatisfaction is a perpetual source of embitterment of the Mohammedan intelligentsia[sic] religious grievances in order to force the government to accept their claim for a much larger share in the state than they enjoy at present’.

According to P.N. Bazaz, ‘in fact the riots enquiry committee started with assumption and wrote its report on this basis. The Hindus became definitely hostile to the movement and openly and solidly joined the government forces to get it suppressed’. The findings of the committee further didn’t mention anything to say about the entire absence of freedom of press, platform and association in the state. May be due to the reason according to Bazaz that such demands were nationalistic in essence and the committee, which had presumed from the outset that the unrest was communal, didn’t like to countenance them. Instead to evaluate the internal situation the committee blamed the Punjab press and role of the All India Kashmir Committee for such an outburst on the part of the people of Kashmir.

Surprisingly, a representation made by a deputation of Muslims to the Maharaja claimed/declared that ‘true to their tradition…’ the deputation not only asserted the non-

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137 Ibid., p. 45.
139 Ibid., p. 139.
The communal nature of the Muslims’ movement but squarely put the blame of communalism on the shoulders of Pandits. For the first time the term ‘communal’ is seen in the context of Hindu-Muslim relations in the state.

However, it is a debatable point whether the Kashmiri Muslims or Hindus were advocates of communalism. According to Mridula Mukherjee, ‘the nature of any particular movement flows not from its forms of struggle or methods of mobilization, but from the nature of the primary contradiction that is sought to be resolved, its social and political objectives, its ability to mobilize and politicize wide sections of the masses, its capacity to challenge the existing order and pose the question of structural change, its long term impact on areas and social classes not directly involved in the struggle, on society as a whole and on the relationships of power and exploitation’.  

The demarche of the Muslim representatives further stated that the 1931 shouldn’t be dismissed as an outburst driven by religious passion but the result of the years of oppression and suppression. According to the representation, ‘the causes of the present troubles and the tale of oppression to which the Muslim subjects have been and are being subjected have a long history behind them and it would be no place to mention them here. Suffice it say that the non-Muslim community was actuated by definite purpose to interfere with the religious affairs of the Muslim subjects and the ball was set rolling by the officers of the government, for example the prohibition of Khutbal-i-Eid-ul-Zuha, the insult to the Holy Quran, the dismantling of mosques, the stoppage of Azan, were the heart rendering events of a nature which grievously wounded the religious feelings and prestige of the peaceful Muslim subjects and they were so impressed by the shortsightedness of the authorities that they considered ‘Islam to be in danger’. In fact religious oppression also played energetic role in the outbreak of the mass mobilization in Kashmir, but was it, to use D.N. Dhanagare’s phrase, ‘only the symptom and not the disease’. Religion providing, an avenue for organization, and propaganda and a sense

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141 Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in India’s Non Violent Revolution*, p. 390.
142 ‘Representation made by deputation of Muslim representatives to His Highness,’ August 15, 1931, p. 5.
of oneness or communality among the Muslims, which transcended the formidable barriers of class, education and region.

Therefore, even if the Muslim leadership used religious tools for political mobilization, it cannot outrightly be labeled as a communal movement when the primary contradiction that it sought to revoke is taken into consideration. Nor can this label be put on the whole Pandit population, for they too were more drawn into the political activism by the class interests, and not necessarily by religion.

Although as already mentioned previously, the government keeping in view the growing mass unrest tried to divide the communities on religious lines by hurting the religious sentiments of the one community against the other. This is one of the problems in studying the freedom struggle of Jammu and Kashmir and a chain of scholars often label the movement as an outburst of the religious fanaticism, which is not the case. In fact, the future vision as well as the actual practice of the national movement, was clearly democratic; it was consciously anti-monarchial, anti-authoritarian, and anti-totalitarian. In fact, a basic critique of the Dogra regime made by the Muslim leadership was that it was not democratic, it didn’t base itself on fully representative institutions, and it curbed civil liberties and the freedom of the press and the like.

The period between from, 13 July 1931 up to September 1931 can be characterized as the first phase of the freedom movement. The successful termination of the short-term movement which resulted in the release of its leaders gave a great flip to the activities of the people of Kashmir. It strengthened the movement against the despotic nature of the Dogra regime. The representatives chosen some days before the 13th July became the confirmed and recognized leaders of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.144

During the period of 1931, the leaders of the national fame from British India visited Kashmir and expressed their solidarity with the people of Kashmir.145 This produced a sobering effect on both sides and through the intervention of Syed Sir Newab Mehr Ali Shah, a moderate Muslim politician of some standing in British India, an understanding was arrived at between the Dogra Darbar and the representatives of the

144 Bazaz, The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, p. 149.
people of Kashmir. On 26th of August a temporary truce was signed. According to the terms of the truce the leadership was obliged to stop all political activities, it was undertaken that the Muslims would remain loyal to His Highness, that they would not be affected by the outside influence and would present their legitimate demands in due course of time to the maharaja. But the signing of the truce created a great stir among the people against the representatives. It exposed the lack of political foresight among the signatories of the truce. From its nature it became clear to the people that the truce was more in favour of the government than in the interests of the people. By giving an undertaking the leaders put themselves under political bondage.

The people’s repose upset the leaders. While explaining their position, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Moulvi Mohammad Yusuf Shah swore on the Quran that they wouldn’t betray the nation, Sheikh while pleading that he held the nation dearer than his own life said, ‘the government asked for two months to consider our demands. If during this period the government practised deception we shall not sit quiet, nor shall we let the government feel comfortable. You see it very soon that our sacrifice for the nation will puzzle the government of Kashmir, the government of British India and the entire world.’

The Kashmir Pandit community was at same time exhibiting a hostile political behaviour towards the Muslim leadership in their public meetings. They had grown hostile against the government and blamed the latter for having made the truce with the Muslims without their consent and cursed the maharaja and his administration. The Pandits, who considered themselves secular nationalists, didn’t even appreciate the statement of Dr. Mohammad Alam, a reputed Congressite, ‘that the demands of the Kashmiri Muslims were of national character’.

However, it was against the environment which the truce created that the leaders again made the bold statements and defied the condition of truce which in no way benefited the masses. According to Prem Nath Bazaz, ‘But one might ask; what was there

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146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Al-Fazal, (Qadian), December, 8, 1931, p. 4.
149 Al-Fazal, September, 10, 1931, p. 1.
in the terms of the truce which benefited so much so that they responded to the call again so readily? The truth is that the masses had once risen in revolt owing to grinding poverty and hunger. They wanted to end the regime that was the cause of their economic backwardness'. Commenting on the inefficient political foresight of the leadership at the time of the truce Bazaz is of the opinion that the leadership couldn’t derive the best advantage of the situation and utilize this gigantic force for higher purpose. The leaders, while playing the historic role of leading the masses, couldn’t realize that importance of their charge and toyed with it. An enormous force which could have changed the very complexion of the government of Kashmir was allowed to fritter away. The leaders reduced the movement for securing a few demands, which they were bound to alter keeping in view the growing mass unrest.

The growing mass unrest led the breakage of the truce on September 21st 1931, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was arrested on the ground that, ‘before and after the truce he broke the understanding by making political speeches in mosques under cloak of religious exhortations’. In the meanwhile various incidents followed like the huge mass gatherings and strikes followed the arrest of Sheikh. On September 22, twenty two thousand people assembled in the Jama Masjid for a meeting. The government responded with repression which led to the killing of four persons and about thirty got injured.

The significance of the events of 1931 lies in the fact that they marked the entry of new political developments in Kashmir. The 24 September of 1931, was another important day in the history of Kashmir. On this day the masses in spite of their leaders behind the bars made an attempt of armed struggle against the state. Sources point out that not a single non-Muslim was harmed by the Muslim mob. In the absence of the leaders again they proved that the struggle was political and non-communal in nature and directed entirely against the ruling structure. To substantiate the argument that the

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151 Ibid., pp. 145-6.
152 Foreign Department, File No. 12-C/131, September, 28, 1931, NAI.
153 Home and Political Secret, File No. 423 (2) of 193, NAI.
154 Ibid.
nature of the movement was nationalistic in character not against any community, Mahatma Gandhi once said, ‘what can be the meaning of communalism in the state which is overwhelmingly one population according to religion? What can communalism mean in, say, Kashmir or the frontier, where the population is predominately one faith?’ R.P. Dutt states that ‘where communal strife has since been reported from Indian states in certain cases, as in Kashmir in 1931-32, this has commonly been a mis-description of an entirely different struggle unconnected with communal questions; thus in Kashmir the issue was that of a popular rising of a four fifths Muslim population against a ruler who happened to be Hindu; this was misreported as a communal rising, although the British press was compelled to admit that ‘paradoxical position’ of ‘a communal rebellion in which not a single Hindu has been killed.’

The September event widened the mass base of the movement, in which there is evidence that thousands came from the countryside with all kinds of crude weapons to participate in these demonstrations. It was a protest simultaneously against the selfish, bourgeoisie leadership against truce. To control the movement from further expansion the Dogra Darbar acted severely and a monstrous ordinance framed on the lines of ordinance promulgated for the Burma rebellion some years ago, became the permanent law of the state. What further complicated the situation by October 1931 for both the British and the Dogra government was the emergence of yet another Punjab based group known as the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam (commonly known as Ahrars). The party was founded in Lahore, and reflected a unique blend of religion and politics in the multi-cultural province of Punjab. Their movement had a distinctly urban, middle class character in stark contrast to the landowner dominated All India Kashmir committee founded by the Ahmadiya sect.

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156 Harijan, September, 17th 1938.
157 R. Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 455.
159 J.L. Nehru, The Unity of India Collected Writings (1937-1940), New York, 1942, p. 37-8. The Notification No.19-L, originally issued on September 24th 1931, to direct the course of Martial Law in Srinagar and other places. It was withdrawn on October 5, 1931, and promulgated again on June 1st 1933. Hundreds of arrests were made under this notification during the first two Civil Disobedience agitations and during 1938.
160 The Times of India, September, 5, 1931.
The Ahrars were composed of anti-British urban Muslims and reformist members of the Muslim religious section with links to the Indian National congress. The plight of the Kashmiri Muslims under a Hindu ruler supported by the colonial government became the focal point of their propaganda.\(^{161}\) The Ahrars having broken with the congress over separate electorates for Muslims, the Ahrars didn’t wish to be seen as drifting into the conservative circle of the Muslim League. Like their former partners in agitation they were self-styled revolutionaries opposed to the presence of the British and to the traditional rule of landlords and princes. In taking up the cause of Kashmiri Muslims, the Ahrars were able to pose not only as defenders of Islam, but as the patrons of the weak and the oppressed.\(^{162}\)

The presence and role of the All India Kashmir Committee rival to the Ahrars in Kashmir after the 1931 represented everything that was an anthem to the Ahrars; they were determined to discredit it by usurping its role as the champion of the people’s movement in Kashmir.\(^{163}\) On 12 July 1931, the Ahrars demanded an independent investigation into the conditions of Muslims in Kashmir.\(^{164}\) At the same time the All India Kashmir Committee too called for an enquiry by the government of India into the uprising of 13 July, determined the observance of 14 August as ‘Kashmir Day’ and went so far as to suggest a review by the British parliament of the 1846 Amritsar Treaty.\(^{165}\)

In the mid-August 1931, Mazhar Ali was dispatched to Sialkot to recruit the volunteers for a *jathabandi* (non-violent protest march) in to Kashmir.\(^{166}\) By early October 1931 some 2,000 *jathadars*, red shirted in imitation of Abdul Gaffar Khan’s of NWFP, entered Kashmir where they were immediately detained by Darbar police.\(^{167}\) As their entry began to grow, as the stream of volunteers kept flowing they were arrested and taken back to Sialkot, and the authorities were forced to reconsider\(^{168}\)

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\(^{163}\) Ibid.


\(^{165}\) Ibid., 29 July 1931, pp. 7-8.

\(^{166}\) *The Times of India*, September 5, 1931.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., October 6, 1931.

\(^{168}\) Ibid.
However, what made their entry much important and effective in Kashmir was that they had gained sympathetic adherents within the state. While Jammu’s Muslim cultivators had welcomed the Ahrar Jathas, the Ahmadiyas and Sheikh Abdullah were locked into their own mutually supportive alliance.\(^{169}\) The Ahrar’s Jaths mobilizational activities in the Jammu province provoked months of violent attacks that racked the tehsils of Mirpur, Rajouri, Kotli, and Seri between 1931-1934. Largely a rural revolt, Muslim cultivators directed their wrath against Hindu revenue officials, land owners and moneylenders and engaged in no revenue campaigns. In reaction the state took the ‘unfortunate decision in January 1932 of extracting revenue forcibly in Mirpur tehsil by sending out its collectors under armed escort.’\(^{170}\) According to Prem Nath Bazaz, ‘nearly 4500 Jathas Volunteers entered the state boundaries in the month of October. Encouraged by their presence, Jammu Muslims intensified the pace of political demonstrations.’ The situation grew too difficult for the maharaja’s government to handle on its own and so the state was compelled to call in British troops.\(^{171}\)

However, the arrival of the British troops didn’t prove an ultimate solution to the mass upsurge, instead the events swiftly moved to a climax. Inspired by the example of the Ahrars, Muslims in the border region of Jammu and Mirpur began to take out their Jathas of their own, while in Jammu city huge crowds occupied the streets and threatened to launch Civil Disobedience.\(^{172}\) Oppressed, indebted and grindingly poor, the Muslim peasants of Jammu were ripe for mobilization and they listened attentively to the speeches of the Ahrars. They began to organize and to hit back. On 10, January 1932, villagers from a hamlet near Mirpur ambushed a party of Amils (revenue collectors) and forced them to flee.\(^{173}\) The Sahukars (moneylenders) in Mirpur were rich. For a long time in the past they had been bleeding the poor peasants by extorting their hard earned pennies in the shape of interest on imaginary or genuine debts. Even after having 300%...

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\(^{169}\) Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 263.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., p. 264.

\(^{171}\) The Times of India, November 4, 1931.


\(^{173}\) Ibid., p. 242.
interest the loan still remain[ed] intact and [was] never written off. A large number of peasants [were] born in debt, remain in debt all their lives and [died] in debt.¹⁷⁴

The preaching of Civil Disobedience and defiance of authority produced a hatred for the Dogra government. Almost all the Sahukars were Hindus. Therefore, all Hindus were perceived as enemies by the Muslim peasantry, of Mirpur.¹⁷⁵ Most of the land was acquired by Hindu Sahukars, traders and some by larger landowner and the rest by officials, some of whom were not even residents of the state.¹⁷⁶ These Sahukars faced the brunt of the peasantry when the whole villages and the property of these moneylenders was burnt down by the peasants and the entire buildings razed to the ground in the greater part of the tehsils of Mirpur, Kotli and Rajouri. Economic and religious factors, played equal parts and for the first time being it was difficult to separate them.¹⁷⁷ It is also important to mention that in areas where some Muslim were known to be moneylenders, their houses too were looted, so proving that the strained financial relations between the agriculturists and moneylenders as one of the main causes of revolt. Although the Ahrar agitation in Kashmir soon dwindled from the lack of the support and factionalism it certainly jolted the Dogras and the colonial government, since the Ahrars refused to give up their stance as ‘saviours of Kashmir’.¹⁷⁸

To control the situation from further deterioration the British govt. directly interfered in the internal affairs of the state. On 25th September following a summit conference at Viceregal lodge, Watson (Political Secretary) called on the maharaja to get rid of Hari Kishen Koul (the Prime Minister) and to accept the services of a senior political officer, Sir Bertand Glancy to head an enquiry into the grievances of the Muslims.¹⁷⁹ Prior to the direct British intervention the Maharaja, keeping in view the growing pace of the movement and that it could not be suppressed, announced a general amnesty. He also proclaimed that ‘if any section of his subjects desired to submit its

¹⁷⁴ Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, p. 163.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
¹⁷⁶ Note by Settlement Commissioner, J&K State, OER, dated 1st April 1915, File No. 273/H-79, JKA-J.
¹⁷⁷ Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, p. 163.
reasonable demands they would receive his sympathetic consideration’.

Following the announcement several memorials were submitted by different communities. It will not be out of place to discuss briefly the contents of some of these;

The memorial submitted by the Muslims was an elaborate document and the demands contained in it were of national character. The memorial outlined a constitution and a number of fundamental rights. Some of these were: Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of speech, Freedom of press, perfect equality of rights and equality of treatment for all state subjects in all respects. An attempt was made in this memorial even to visualize the constitution and according to it, ‘every citizen of the state should be eligible for election to the Assembly irrespective of his creed or nationality’. Added to this there was demand for the increase of Muslim representation in the services, since until then the disparity between their percentage in population and representation in services was enormous.

The memorial submitted by Kashmiri Pandits endorsed too the demand for a representative Assembly. The memorial stated that, ‘they were as anxious as any other community for the introduction of constitutional government and they were equally anxious that the body politic be not corrupted by the canker of communalism’. The Rajput memorial didn’t relate to any constitutional problem at all. In these memorials it is evident that none of the communities preferred to play the communal card at this point of time.

Subsequently, on 12th November 1931, Glancy Commission was appointed which consisted of four non-official members headed by Bertrand Glancy, a senior member of the Indian political service, to make out a case for reform. Importantly the commission had not invited complaints from individuals but from representatives of the only recognized entities in the state. The function of the commission was to ‘enquire into and

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180 *Kashmir*, by General Secretary, All India State People’s Conference. Bombay, January 1939, p. 7.
181 Ibid., p. 8.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.

The four non-official members were Prem Nath Bazaz, one non-Muslim member from Kashmir province and G.A. Ashai, one Muslim and Lok Nath Sharma, one Hindu from the Jammu province, and Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, one Muslim from Jammu, each nominated by their respective communities.
report on the various complaints of a religious and a general nature, already submitted to his Highness government and also such complaints as might be directly laid before the commission’.  

The report of the commission when it finally appeared in March 1932 satisfied nobody. But the recommendations of the commission confirmed the fact that the Muslims had real grievances. Its recommendations included ‘complete religious liberty; an expansion of primary schools, recruitment of additional Muslim teachers, a clear recognition by the Darbar on the occupancy rights of the land, the abolition of Malikana (dues paid to zamindars) and kacchari (grazing tax), and the appointment of a franchise commission to draw up a scheme of representative government, abolition of begar and promotion of industries, grant of freedom of press and platform.

The recommendation offended the Darbar and its Hindu supporters. The organization of the Kashmiri Pandits Sanatana Dharma Young Men’s Association, founded in 1925 for religious purpose but actively engaged in politics from 1931, termed it a challenge to minorities and sacrifices of their interests at the altar of the majority community, and started what is popularly known as ‘Roti Agitation’ as protest against the recommendation of the commission. On the other hand, the Muslim members of the commission, G.A. Ashai and Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas decline to sign the final report and appended a joint note of dissent calling for proportional representation in the public service within ten years.

Prior to the publication of the report in January 1932 Sheikh Abdullah was arrested for a minor ‘breach of peace’ under the provisions of the notification 19-L and sentenced to six months imprisonment. His arrest gave birth to mass arrest, but soon after the publication of the report Sheikh was released. As argued by Ian Copland, ‘it was different Shiekh who emerged from jail in 1932. Tempered by his confinement, angered

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185 Ibid.
186 OER, File No. 225, p. 3, 1933, JKA-J.
187 For more details see, Glancy Commission Report, pp. 50-53.
188 ‘Mehendra Singh’s (General Secretary Hindu Yuvak Sabha Jammu), Letter to Prime Minister’ April 21, 1932, Political Department, File No.306/p-s/124/1932, JKA-J.
190 Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, p. 164.
by Colonel Colvin’s (P.M. of the Maharaja) refusal to let him testify before the Glancy Commission and disillusioned-like everyone else in the Muslim camp by the conservative tone of Glancy Commission Report, the Shiekh now proceeded to release his considerable potential as a political leader’. 191

II

5.3. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, National Conference and Kashmir—A Transitional Phase

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah about whom mention has been made previously was a master political strategist who dominated the political scene of Kashmir for five decades. ‘Kashmir’s struggle, for freedom, the mass awakening in Kashmir under the leadership of Sheikh are synonymous, coeval and concomitant. In fact, the political uprising in the state has been the outcome of the untiring efforts of this giant patriot, who relinquished state services and plunged into the uncharted sea of public life with firm determination and terrific zeal and gathered the afflicted and tormented people under one banner, with the aim of putting an end to the oppressive regime and establishing democratic popular government in the state.’ 192

The people of Kashmir, who were groaning under iron heels of a top heavy and despotic administration, found in the Sheikh Abdullah their friend, philosopher and guide. Not only did they give a healthy response to the clarion call of their leaders but they pledged to suffer and sacrifice everything for the cause of freedom and to follow the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah with unflinching faith and tenacity of purpose. 193

Sheikh’s strategy was twofold: first to unify the movement, and to consolidate his hold over the people of Kashmir. In June 1932, at the first instance he led a demonstration in honor of Kashmir Martyrs Day. In October Shiekh hosted the state’s first ever political Conference 194 as per the recommendations of the Glancy

192 Ibid. 191
193 Ibid.
Commission, which also urged that minimal freedom of press and public expression should be tolerated. Some limited halted action on the Glancy Commission’s proposals was undertaken in the following years. But through the 1930’s and 1940’s it became increasingly clear that the autocratic regime couldn’t be reformed to the extent demanded by an increasingly mobilized, politically conscious people.\textsuperscript{195}

To give a flying start to his first ever political endeavor for people of Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah with the support of his comrades laid the foundation of the first known full-fledged political organization of Jammu and Kashmir known as the All Jammu and Muslim Conference in October 1932 (the name of the same organization was changed in 1939 as All Jammu and National Conference) with himself as its first President. Its principal leaders were Sheikh Abdullah from the valley and Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas from the Jammu region besides Mirwaiz and others.\textsuperscript{196} The aim of the conference was to direct the nascent but growing political movement to its logical end of social and political change. Though, theoretically the Muslim Conference was a political party aimed at safeguarding the interests of the Muslim community alone, yet the policy of the Muslim conference as enunciated by its several presidents from time to time, has been national in essence.\textsuperscript{197}

In his first presidential address the elect president Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah laid down in unmistakable terms the following:\textsuperscript{198}

‘I consider it necessary to make our position clear at the very outset with regard to our movement, it is not communal nor it is directed against any particular community, to assure my Hindu and Sikh brethren that we will endeavor to put an end to their miseries and troubles just as we will do it for Muslims, our country’s progress is impossible so long we don’t establish amicable relations between the different communities. This is possible only when each community learns to appreciate the like view point of other communities. He called on Kashmiri Muslims to unite, gain education and be prepared to serve notice to the

\textsuperscript{195} Sumantra Bose, Kashmir Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace, Harvard, 2003, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{196} Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{197} For a detailed nature of its Presidential addresses see, Mirza Shafi, (eds.), The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims, 1931-1939: Selected Documents, Pakistan, 1985.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., pp. 220-32.
government as well to participate in Assembly elections as soon as they called. Sheikh recalled the past glory of Kashmiris, which was lost when they became the slaves of non-Kashmiris. While appreciating the Glancy Commission’s recommendations he bitterly criticized its non-implementation by the administration and demanded withdrawal of ordinances in the Mirpur along with the freedom of the press and use of the political platform. Elaborating, he critiqued the setup of the proposed constitutional Assembly and demanded restoration of the people’.

Though hampered by various difficulties including the reactionary propaganda of clergy class and the communal frenzy that prevailed at that time, Abdullah, by dint of his immense sincerity and devotion to the masses, brought out an organization and discipline in the movement which soon made him beloved of the people and their leader in the fight against the forces of exploitation and reaction.

The food control policy of the Dogra Darbar was in deteriorating condition since the summer of 1931, when the rice crop was ‘exiguous than usual’ due to various reasons like floods and the disastrous effects of the crop disease called rai. In conditions of scarcity, the famished sections of the city’s population had been finding it increasingly difficult to obtain their staple at an affordable rate. In the rural areas the zamindars were not ready to sell their produce, wishing to hold as much of their produce as possible. This caused a dramatic rise in the prices which pushed the situation from bad to worse. Though, the harvest season of 1932 was better than the 1931, the Darbar’s decision to import grains from British India signaled a sudden downswing in prices, which caused a great loss to the cultivators, with the result that between 1931-32 both the poor segments of the city and the poverty stricken peasantry had a cause for discontent. In this, the leadership of the Muslim conference found fertile ground for further mass mobilization.

As discussed in the preceding pages, the disastrous impact of the economic depression of 1929 on the non-agrarian sector of Kashmir created a congenial atmosphere for Sheikh to garner the support of the effected classes like shawl and carpet weavers and

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199 All India State People’s Conference, Kashmir, p. 10.
paper machie workers. Labour unrest in the silk factory in Srinagar, brewing on and off since 1924, provided the leadership with another constituency of supporters. In a lengthy note presented in 1932, Sheikh elaborated on the problems faced by the people in the context of the collapse of the silk trade.\textsuperscript{201} Abdullah alleged that the precarious conditions of the silk factory, in Srinagar in the recent times has been partly due to the trade depression and mostly due to the irresponsibility of its managers. According to sheikh the impoverished conditions of the silk factory workers was made worse by the irresponsible behavior of the Pandit dominated managerial staff. The latter were accused of embezzlement, with holding the pay of labourers to ensure a captive workforce; the displacement of large number of workers rendering them jobless in the harsh years of depression, the non-payment to others. Encouraged by Sheikh Abdullah, the workers at the silk factory adopted belligerent attitude both against the managerial staff as well as against the Darbar, which provided an opportunity to carve out a space for himself as well as to force the government to put an end to the growing economic discontent.\textsuperscript{202}

In the chapter three, the post settlement scenario has been discussed; a period which saw the emergence of a body of landless labourers. Forced labour had reduced the Kashmiri cultivator to no control of his own labour; added to this were the rising agrarian indebtedness, and the crushing revenue demand that continued to be extracted by the revenue department. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah criticized the govt.’s anti-cultivator policy because the prevailing rate of revenue in Kashmir was more than the prevailing revenue rate in Punjab. During Sheikh’s visit to Mirpur the peasants of Bhimber the frontiers of which are contiguous with Punjab. Some of the inhabitants of the Bhimber were holding the land holdings in both Punjab and Bhimber.\textsuperscript{203} The Punjab government was providing every facility of irrigation to the peasants but the peasants of Kashmir were both without protection and irrigation facilities and there was much difference between the revenue rates of the Jammu province and Kashmir. The revenue rate of Kashmir according to Sheikh was higher than the revenue rate of Jammu.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{201} ‘Labour Unrest in Srinagar’, Political Department, 1932, File No.2/3, JKA-J.
\textsuperscript{202} Political Department, File No.216/P.S-250, May 1936, JKA-J.
\textsuperscript{203} Mirza Shafi, (eds), The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims, 1931-1939, p. 423.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
Throughout 1930’s and the 1940’s, Sheikh in collaboration with his comrades Mirza Afzal Beg and Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, seemed to be weariless, listening to the complaints of the peasants, drawing petitions on their behalf and turning the Muslim conference most powerful representative voice of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. On behalf of the cultivators demands were made by Abdullah, for responsible government, a reduction in land revenue by 50% and correction of the usurious rates at which money was lent. Abdullah adopted socialist symbols and rhetoric, and even desired a flag for his party, coloured red imprinted with a white plough.205

A further Depiction of the state of the landless labourers and the creation of the ground for secular protest is found in the poetry of Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor (1887-1925), a well-known poet of Kashmir. Mahjoor, through his poems, proved an inspiration for Shiekh Abdullah,206 Mahjoor through his poems sung out the condition of the downtrodden and stressed on them to come out of their centuries old slumber and tried to inspired them to fight for their rights. Conscious of the urgent need for progress and unity, he gave a new and cheerful call for material and cultural regeneration. His poems came as a spontaneous expression of change and were imbued with revolutionary zeal and a high sense of patriotic fervor. During the period of the thirties he has most genuinely presented the throbs of the ordinary man bent under social and political injustice. At the same time he has held to him the promise of rosy dawn.207

Portraying the sad plight of the landless peasantry Mahjoor writes,208

‘My grandfather’s life, property were mortgaged for a mere penny,
The loan that I toiled all my life to repay, is still unclear,
Even after yearlong toil I am left starved,
Usurers, goldsmiths gobble up all my earnings,
After day long toil, I have to contend with the half meal,
The master does out…Alas!
He realized my sad plight.’

205 Resolution of Muslim, General Records, File No.134/D-4, 1940,JKA-J.
208 Ibid.
Mahjoor goaded the people on to action, urged them to work out their own salvation and be ready to face hardships that might befall them. How progressive he was in his outlook can be judged from the following verse:\textsuperscript{209}

\begin{verbatim}
Who will free you, o 'bulbul'
While you bewail in the cage?
With your own hands, work out,
Your own salvation,
If you must awaken this rosy,
Habitat, give up harp,
Bring about earthquakes and thunder, raise tempest.
\end{verbatim}

Therefore, in late 1930’s the Kashmiri Muslim leadership began the gradual articulation of the agenda and discourse of the movement in clearly national terms, one that addressed the issue of the Kashmiri nation as a whole. Socialist ideals, which had the potential to unite people of different religious affiliations under a single political and economic programme, became the basis of the movement. More significantly still, the concept \textit{kashmiriyat}, with its emphasis on a united, syncretic Kashmiri cultural identity, came to inform the political discourse of the period.\textsuperscript{210} More significantly the social significance of the emerging leadership lay not only in the interpretation it provided of the Kashmiri past and present or the contribution made to the literary and cultural traditions but above all in the fact that it made this knowledge a wide popular consciousness. The spread of nationalist consciousness in this way ultimately helped in the emergence of a composite Kashmiri culture without any emphasis on Muslim sectarianism. Thus, by 1939, every conscious of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh community joined the national movement.\textsuperscript{211}

The second annual session of the Muslim Conference was held in December 1933 at Mirpur, a town in Jammu province, Sheikh Abdullah being again elected the president. Besides stressing on the non-communal nature of the movement, Sheikh embraced the demands of all sections of the people evident from the following extracts:\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{209} Mahjoor, \textit{Kuliyyat-e-Mehjoor}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{210} Chitralekha Zutshi, \textit{Languages of Belonging}, p. 244-5.
\textsuperscript{211} Prakash Chandra, \textit{The National Question in Kashmir}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{212} Mirza Shafi, (eds.), \textit{The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims}, p. 291-305.
'It gives me immense pain to see the rights of the people being smashed indiscriminately. If the movement were to concede to the people of the state what they had cruelly, it is bound to do good to Hindus and Sikhs as much as to the Muslims. The achievements of the Muslim conference so far have benefited all communities equally. The freedom of press and platform…and other concession have not been wrested from any particular community but from the unwilling hands of the Darbar itself and have been distributed equally among all. Abdullah also in his address discussed the state of the jagir lands, traders and other working class people. The government’s in sympathetic attitude has thrown these classes out of gear.’

In the meanwhile the Darbar announced that an Assembly would be convened early in 1934, on the basis of the recommendations of the Franchise Committee. Not surprisingly, the entrenchment of autocracy and the corresponding lack of political freedom were reflected in the fact that up to 1934 Kashmir lacked the most rudimentary form of legislature wherein grievances could be voiced. The word of maharaja was law and any effort to question such authority could be, and was, treated as sedition.\(^213\) Hence the announced state Assembly was to be known as *Praja Sabha* (the subject’s Assembly). In the Assembly there were thirty three elected seats out of total of seventy five, of which twenty one were reserved for Muslims while ten for Hindus and two for Sikhs. The rest forty two were to be nominated by the Maharaja and all ultimate powers were reserved to the maharaja.\(^214\)

The use of communal constituencies, a highly restricted electorate (as little as 3% of the total adult population as has been estimated by some observers), and by no means impartial system of security of nominations and the presence of nominated and appointed members (who were in majority in the 1934 constitution), combined to produce a far from perfectly democratic arrangement.\(^215\) The Franchise was restricted to village and district headmen, priests, managers of religious property, holders of titles, those who paid rupees twenty either as land revenue or municipal tax or rupees sixty as rent, those who owned a house worth rupees six hundred or more. Medical practioners, pensioned

\(^{215}\) Lamb, *Kashmir a Disputed Legacy*, p. 92.
officers, and those who had passed the middle school examination or its equivalent. Women in general were excluded except for those with the required educational qualification. It was intended to enfranchise about 10% of the adult population, but in practice this franchise gave the vote to 3% or less.\(^{216}\)

Thus, in the proposed Assembly the recommendations for an elected majority was replaced by an official majority and its powers of legislation were greatly reduced. It adopted the conclusions reached by the Franchise committee which embodied the creation of narrow electorate possessing property and educational qualifications. As compared to this the minimum qualification for the Franchise, in the Travancore state Assembly was the payment of rupees one as land revenue, and the payment of municipal or income tax irrespective of the amount paid.\(^{217}\) Instead of boycotting the limited electorate the leadership, despite realizing that the Praja Sabha was a powerless body, they decided that by contesting the elections and winning seats, the Muslim Conference could demonstrate its popularity in the state and use the Sabha as a forum to propagate its ideology of nationalism. In the 1934 elections to the Praja Sabha, the Muslim Conference won all the twenty one seats of the Assembly earmarked for Muslim community.\(^{218}\)

However, the leadership took a strong note of these changes on the ground that Franchise committee had no business to alter the recommendation of Sir B.J. Glancy and to undo his work in this direction. Voicing the feelings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, Abdullah issued the following statement on Jan. 29, 1934:

‘The people of this country didn’t spill their blood for such a mock show. It was an extremely disheartening document; no community will get benefit from it. Sir B.J Glancy, though not agreeing with the legitimate aspirations of the Muslims had recommended majority in the proposed Assembly in unambiguous terms. It was no business of the Franchise committee to turn down this recommendation. What hopes can the people of this country have in this kind of Representative

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\(^{217}\) *Kashmir*, All India State People’s Conference, p. 12.


Assembly where the dead weight of the official and nominated majority will always be ready to crush the popular voice’? Criticism of a similar nature on the proposals of the Franchise committee was voiced by almost all the political bodies within the state. The government treated this criticism and the original recommendations of Sir B.J. Glancy with scant respect. Recurrent attempts by the elected representatives to persuade the government to accelerate the process of reforms failed. Thus, in 1936, they resigned from the Assembly. According to P.N. Bazaz, ‘Astonishment descended upon an un-expectant outside world when it read in the newspapers in autumn 1936 that the entire block of the elected members with the solitary exception of one Hindu member walked out of the Kashmir Assembly as a protest against the unsympathetic attitude which was persistently maintained by the government towards the public demands’. The Tribune of Lahore wrote:

‘From the events that have happened in the Assembly during the last few days it is evident that there is a general awakening in the state and that the people can no longer be satisfied with the toy legislature, though it may be given the grand eloquent name of Praja Sabha’

The Muslim Conference not only fought for responsible government but also attempted to bring other communities in its fold. In view of the un-representative nature of the constituted Assembly, the leadership under the supervision Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas the sent a memorial to the government on 15th February 1934, in which they observed that, ‘the demand of the people was for full responsible government’ as unless there is a ministry responsible to the country no recommendations are carried.’ The government replied very curtly that, ‘it was not prepared to discuss constitutional reforms.’ Chaudhary Abbas, therefore, decided upon an immediate programme of civil disobedience.221. The leaders stressed that the hour had come for all sections of the people to combine against the encroachment of the government on their democratic rights. Responsible government and self-government couldn’t be the monopoly nor the aspiration of Muslims only but of the entire people. Attempts to rally up all sections of

221 Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, Kashmakash, p.124.
people all shades of opinion under one banner were made by calling a meeting of all people of any political standing. As also before starting the civil disobedience movement, the leaders of the Muslim conference, notably S.M Abdullah, issued the following appeal to the minorities:

‘Let me hasten to say a few words to my non-Muslim countrymen. The poor Kashmiri Muslims has since the commencement of this battle of liberation of motherland fallen a prey to a vicious propaganda which has sedulously carried on by interested parties in different parts of India. Time has now approached when we should shed all fear and distrust of each other and bridge the gulf which has unfortunately separated us. The past three years must have shown to you that however, hard you may cry the demands of Muslims, so far as they are legitimate, have become irresistible, and no force on earth can with stand their rising tide of democracy that has actuated their mind. So whether you will or not, Kashmir will in years to come have a constitution while make it incumbent upon our rulers to part with the autocratic power and transfer more share of administration in the hands of common people and masses. The spirit of the age demands it. Would it not be better, therefore, in your own interest and in the interests of the country at large if instead of standing as a stumbling block in the way of liberators of the motherland as you have mostly done so far, you were good and kind enough to stand shoulder to shoulder with your Muslim brethren? Speaking for myself this is an appeal that I would make to you from the depths of my heart as well as a well-wisher of your country as well as mine. Speaking for the Muslims I may assure you that they are prepared to give you the same safeguards, weightages, and all that is necessary in the constitution for minorities, that the Indian National Congress is prepared to give the Muslims of British India and other minority communities. Perhaps we should be more liberal. Let the dead past bury its dead. The Assembly proposed by the Franchise committee is an ill wind that blows no body good. So, if the Muslim and not theoretical gushes out of you. And that means a reply in the shape of counter statements but a real change of hearts’.

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Sheikh’s declaration of Kashmir as motherland was a quite new turn in Kashmir politics far above from assigned label of communalism. In its weekly issue *Hamdard* articulated the nascent national ideology of mid 1930’s. Kashmir attained the status of mother nation and its inhabitants became the children of Kashyap Rishi. The newspaper contended that the formation of Responsible government in the state rested on the coming together of Hindus and Muslims under one flag since they were the two sons of the mother nation.

It was early in 1935, Sheikh Abdullah and Prem Nath Bazaz (1905-84), the Ex-non-official member of the Glancy commission from the Kashmir. Bazaz the left leaning pandit jointly started an Urdu newspaper called the *Hamdard* as a ‘standard bearer of democracy and unity of all Kashmiris without any consideration of caste or creed.’ It was to revive the tolerant spirit characteristic of Kashmir culture and to espouse the cause of secularism and social democracy in the state. *Hamdard* was a weekly Urdu newspaper. The opening ceremony was performed by, Dr. Saif-ud-din Kitchlew, respected congress veteran of the Punjab. This might be called the dawn of nationalism in Kashmir, an early sign of which was the united demonstration staged by the legislative members of the Assembly.

Abdullah’s efforts to garner the support of all communities for a common platform assumed a new direction from 1935 onwards. Abdullah and Bazaz extended a joint invitation to Jawaharlal Nehru to visit Kashmir in 1936 in an effort to boost their attempts at establishing a joint Hindu Muslim National front in politics. Although, Nehru declined, Abdullah had the opportunity to meet him in the NWFP the following year, a meeting that so impressed Abdullah that he in unambiguous terms expounded his faith on nationalism. In an exclusive interview to press representative at Lahore Sheikh observed, ‘communalism in the state owes its origin to the false propaganda of the communalist leaders of the Punjab. I desire that those self-made guardians should no longer interfere in

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223 *Hamdard* was an Urdu weekly published jointly by Abdullah and Bazaz from 1935 onwards. It was the first newspaper of its kind in the Valley which was started on the basis of Hindu-Muslim collaboration.
224 *Hamdard*, Srinagar, May 9, 1936, JKA-J.
227 Ibid.
our internal affairs. It shall be earnest endeavor henceforth to shape the political movement in the state expressly on the principles of the Indian National Congress. Let us all rise above petty communalism bickering’s and work jointly for the welfare of the masses. I appeal to my Hindu brethren not to entertain imaginary fears and doubts. Let me assure that their rights shall not be jeopardized if they join hands with the Muslims’. According to Chitralekha Zutshi, ‘Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah true to his word remained pro Congress in ideology and politics for the remainder of his political career in pre 1947 Kashmir. An important, consideration in Abdullah’s decision to orient himself, with the congress’s increasingly leftist leanings on social and political issues, were similar to the socialist ideals being propounded by the Muslim conference for Kashmir at this time’.

Kashmir leadership observed the Responsible Government Day all over the state in 1936 for the first time. A fresh appeal from Abdullah to non-Muslims brought to his side numerous Hindus and Sikhs who freely joined the processions and meetings. Thousands of peasants and labourers attained the meetings. A wave of mass awakening spread from one corner of the state to the other. The fifth session of the Muslim Conference was held at Poonch in 1937 which was again presided by Abdullah. In his presidential remarks he declared that they ‘demanded responsible Assembly and independent administration. From the beginning of the freedom the demand for a better constitution had not remained the demand of Muslim dominated areas of the state alone, but the other communities had also joined live life of penury alone but all those who live in the state’.

In 1938, Muslim Conference issued a manifesto known as the ‘National Demand’ with a view to demonstrate and acquaint the people of J&K, with their basic objectives of the movement, the acquisition of elementary rights, and basic rights of citizenship.

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228 Mirza Shafi, (eds.), *The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims*, pp. 454-5.
231 Mirza Shafi, (eds.), *The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims*, p. 452.
through a progressive form of government that would be responsible to the people. In the preamble of the manifesto the following declaration was made:

‘The background of the movement is the appalling poverty of the masses of Kashmir, and the growth of unemployment among the educated classes. Thousands of Kashmiri peasants and labourers have to leave their homes, in winter, to earn a meager living in far off places. The land revenue demand of the government is exorbitant and the urban population is crushed under the heavy incidence of numerous taxes. There is an appealing waste of human life due to absence of adequate medical facilities. The administration of the state is top heavy. The government is indifferent to the most pressing problems of the people, for instance the problem of rural indebtedness, illiteracy, growing unemployment, the problem of preventable diseases’.

The elected members of the Legislative Assembly criticized the Government’s financial policy which was doing meagerly for the benefit of the masses. In 1938-39, it published a detailed summary of expenditures incurred by the govt. under different heads. The critique noted that 10% of the total state income was spent on education, which was obviously an insufficient sum for the education of thirty six lakhs of people. The literacy rate among males was as low as 7% not to speak of females. Only, 3.5% of the total revenue being spent on medicine. Agriculture claimed the meager sum of 6% which was meant to be spent on the uplift of the peasantry and the improvement of crops. As against this, about 19% of the total income was spent on the maintenance of the state forces, while Privy Purse consumes 16% of the state revenue. All the mentioned figures show the extreme wastefulness with which the people’s money was spent.

The weekly *Hamdard* published its ‘Responsible Government Number’ on the 5th of August 1938. The same day the ‘Responsible Government Day’ was observed over all

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232 Ibid., 425-35.
the state and the meetings were attended by a very large number of people of all the communities. The following resolution was adopted in five hundred meetings:235

‘This mass meeting of the people places on record its complete repudiation of the present system of irresponsible government and wishes to express its faith in the establishment of complete Responsible Government which alone can curse the ills of the people. Therefore, this gathering appeals to all patriotic persons to muster under the banner of freedom and to be prepared for the coming struggle of liberty. Victories of that struggle alone usher in a period of complete political, economic and social emancipation.’

The rhetoric of the Muslim Conference during these years resembled the discourse on Kashmir of regional belonging from the pre-colonial period. However, there were some qualitative difference between the two. ‘The rhetoric of the 1930’s had moved from the conception of Kashmir as Mulk, which can be conceived as land, place, or homeland, to watan, a more territorial conception of the nation. Kashmir was no longer simply a beautiful land that had sunk into oppression; it was a nation with boundaries congruent with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that had to be rescued from exploiters though nationalism. This is not to suggest that the territorial boundaries of the Kashmiri nation were fixed in this period. Simply that the Muslim Conference presented a more concrete and some instances territorial conception of the Kashmiri nation. Furthermore a sense of the Kashmiri nation was fixed in this period simply that the Muslim conference presented a more concrete and in some instances territorial conception of the Kashmiri nation. Furthermore a sense of desperation and anger at the incessant persecution suffered by Kashmiris pervaded this discourse. Several authors quoted Ghalib’s famous verse to draw attention to the fraudulence of the appellation of paradise on earth for Kashmir, which was in reality steeped in poverty and decline:236

‘I know the reality of paradise, but it is a good thought to entertain the heart. In the words of Kashmiri poet, they think that decadence comes cheap here/ I say that there is an abundance of sorrow here’.

235 Hamdard, Srinagar, July 3 1938.
236 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 250.
However, most significantly a national movement that promised equal citizenship required the participation of minority communities, not their hostility as seemed to be the case in Kashmir. As a result the Muslim leadership made repeated attempts to persuade the minorities’ communities to join their struggle.\footnote{Ibid., p. 252.} The conference’s session of the 1937 was held in Poonch and was presided over by S.M. Abdullah. The session in fact paved the way for the proposed constitutional changes in the nomenclature of the Muslim conference in order to throw it open to those progressive non-Muslim leaders who shared the advanced political aspirations of the Muslim conference.

As already mentioned, in January 1938 Sheikh met Pandit Nehru and accompanied him during his frontier tour. Abdullah sought his guidance about the future line of action, after his careful consideration to the latest developments in Kashmir politics, Pandit Nehru considered it advisable that Muslim conference should change its name for that of national one as it was consistent with its programme and policy which were already national in character.\footnote{J.L. Nehru, \textit{The Unity of India Collected Writings (1937-1940)}, p. 230.}

In his presidential remarks to the sixth annual session of the Muslim Conference on the 26\textsuperscript{th} March 1938 Abdullah observed, ‘Like us[Muslims] the large majority of the Hindus and Sikhs in the state [had] immensely suffered at the hands of the irresponsible [Dogra Rule]. They [were] also steeped in deep ignorance, here to pay large taxes and are in debt. He urged the members of the party to end communalism by ceasing to think in terms of Muslims and non-Muslims when discussing [their] political problems… and open [the] doors to all such Hindus and Sikhs, who believed in the freedom of their country from the shackles of an irresponsible rule’.\footnote{Bazaz, \textit{The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir}, pp.160-61; Mirza Shafi, (eds.), \textit{The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims, 1931-1939}, p. 453.}

A resolution was therefore moved in the annual session of the conference in March 1938, that the Muslim Conference should change its name into that of National Conference. Certain constitutional difficulties arose which made it necessary to postpone discussion on the resolution. In June 1938, however, a meeting of the working committee of Muslim conference was held in which the same resolution was passed by a majority of
17 against 3 votes. This enabled the responsible Hindu and Sikh leaders to join Abdullah. They therefore, set themselves to the task of educating mass opinion in favour of nationalism and responsible government. In June 11, 1939 the leadership attended a special session of the Muslim conference attended by 176 delegates representing all districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The resolution which had been adopted by the working committee on 28th June 1938 was moved in the open session and henceforth the All J&K Muslim Conference became the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. The leadership intended to present the conference as an organization of the down-trodden classes. Its flag, for instance, was red in color with a white plough in center, representing socialist revolution for the Kashmiri peasantry.

The Muslim Conference, and then the National Conference could not prevent tensions among their members and that seriously affected the working of the organizations. However, instead focusing on the political tussle which fallowed after Muslim Conference, was replaced by National Conference; here the focus will be on the role of the National Conference with regard to the economic reconstruction of the Jammu and Kashmir. Its role in ‘resolving’ the mass economic discontent further widens the relevance of our hypothesis, that the root cause of the struggle for freedom was economic in nature. Among the first things enunciated by the National Conference, soon after the change in the nomenclature, was the ratification of the earlier passed resolution commonly known as the ‘National Demand’. This policy, which served as the key stone of its programme throughout the world war second, called for responsible government subject to the general control of the maharaja, and legislature entirely elected by elected suffrage, with reserved seats for minorities. The legislature was to control all revenue and expenditure with the exception of the part allotted to Maharaja’s Privy Purse and the army. The Conference apparently developed leftist and socially radical tendencies, and moving steadily closer to left wing nationalists in the congress. In his presidential remarks Abdullah would usually claim that the organization tried to unify all the poor and exploited the unemployed and all suffering people of the whole state with a view to

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240 Ibid., pp. 163-4.
242 Breacher, The Struggle for Kashmir, p. 11.
243 Bose, Kashmir Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace, p. 21.
reaching the goal of an administration which is fully answerable to the people. Needful of attention was given to the economic rehabilitation of the state.\textsuperscript{244}

Secondly, the main political resolution passed in this session affirmed that, ‘no scheme of responsible government would be acceptable in which the tillers of the soil are not allowed to enjoy the fullest fruits of their labour, for this there can be no other way than this viz, those alone own the land who till it.’\textsuperscript{245} Concessions were demanded for the tenants to alleviate the prevailing distress, and the attention of the Conference was focused on the existing rural indebtedness. A clear demand was made that in case a debtor pays back the principal in the form of interest, the debt should be cancelled out. At the same time debtors were promised cancellation of all debts whenever an elected responsible government came to power in the state.\textsuperscript{246} The reward for all these populist appeals was that, by 1942, the National Conference was said to enjoy the support of 75% valley’s population and Abdullah’s party was considered the best organized and supported in the valley.\textsuperscript{247}

The defining traits—the charismatic leader, the solid organizational network of talented and committed young men, the assertion of a proud regional patriotism rooted in a shared Muslim identity and the promise of progressive social change—were a beacon of hope for an impoverished, politically disenfranchised population.\textsuperscript{248} In 1944, the National Conference adopted a manifesto entitled ‘Naya Kashmir’ for Jammu and Kashmir’s regeneration. its blueprint for the regeneration of the state: heavily infused with socialist jargon.

The manifesto declared that the National Conference ‘fights for the poor, against those who exploit them, for the toiling people of our beautiful homeland; against the heartless ranks of the socially privileged. The history of freedom movements had only one lesson to teach that freedom from all forms of economic exploitation is the only true

\textsuperscript{244} N.N. Raina, Kashmir Politics and Imperialist Manoeuvres, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., p. 116.
\textsuperscript{247} Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{248} Bose, Kashmir Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace, pp. 24-5.
It was a charter of socio economic independence. In the formation of Naya Kashmir, the experiences of the Soviet Union were the main inspiration. New Kashmir had been drafted in Lahore by a group of communists including B.P.L. Bedi, Freda Bedi, Qurban Ali, Danial Latifi and Kashi Nath Bamzai. Abdullah was convinced that the soviet, ‘Soviet Russia had demonstrated not merely theoretically but in her actual day to day life and development that real freedom takes birth only from economic emancipation’.250

In his foreword to the manifesto, Abdullah attempted to reclaim his status and the status of his organization as the leader of the Kashmiri masses, both of which were willing to incur sacrifices for their uplift: 251

‘Progress is a continuous struggle—a tempestuous struggle…the National Conference has been fighting the battle since the inception of the freedom movement…this struggle of ours is the struggle of the workers against the stone hearted exploiters who as a class of discriminators have lost the sense of humanism…in our new Kashmir we shall build again the men and women of our state who have been dwarfed for centuries of servitude, and create a people worthy of our glorious motherland’.

The Naya Kashmir document was divided into three sections. The draft’s basic law provided for a constitutional monarchy with democratic political procedures; its economic blueprint emphasized national planning along socialist and cooperative lines. Section first lays out the party’s conception of states future constitutional framework. At the apex, it visualizes a representative legislature called the National Assembly and a Cabinet government. It calls for decentralized governance based on devolution of powers making administrative responsibilities to districts, tehsils, towns and villages. It placed for the total abolition of feudal order in Kashmir and giving the people of Kashmir a democratic system. Recognizing the multi lingual character of Jammu and Kashmir-the

251 Ibid.
manifesto designates Urdu as the official lingua franca. All other languages like Dogri, Kashmiri, Hindi, Balti and Dardi would be given the status of national languages.\textsuperscript{252}

The second section, of the manifesto dealing with the economy was heavily socialist in tone. Communist sympathizers such as G.M. Sadiq, the party’s main ideologue, were at that time prominent in National Conference leadership and they put their whole effort to make the document to their tune. There was a heavy rhetorical emphasis on state led planned industrialization. The more significant content of this section given the reality of a predominantly peasant society relates to the agrarian economy. The document presupposes liquidation of all types of parasitism in agriculture, thorough implementation of the policy of land to tiller, and cancellation of all debt burdens of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{253} The third section elaborates social and educational schemes for various ‘downtrodden’ sections of Kashmir’s population, including a charter of rights for women. The women’s charter proclaimed complete equality of women with men ensuring them equal rights in administration and political bodies, equal pay for equal work, maternity benefits etc.\textsuperscript{254}

The manifesto in sum, emphasizing on the reorganisation of the economic and the political structure was to catch the imagination of the Kashmiri people as it provided them a conception of a new Kashmir a Kashmir purged of its miserable past reminiscent of its political subjugation, economic oppression and social backwardness.\textsuperscript{255}

By the time the struggle for achieving the goals set in New Kashmir could come to fruition, quick developments had taken place on the world political scene and the programme was not produced in a high tide of mass upsurge.\textsuperscript{256} It was at the same time that the world war second had come with the defeat of Fascist forces. Labour party had come to power in England. They had declared the policy of granting independence to India. As a result on 12 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission sent to India declared that when the British left India, its paramountcy would lapse and the rights of the princely states

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{256} N.N. Raina, \textit{Kashmir Politics and Imperialist Manoeuvres}, p.121.
would return to them. This announcement of an imminently independent, Dogra state of Jammu and Kashmir sent Abdullah into flurry of political alliance making. He was keen to consolidate as wide a popular base as possible to pre-empt a continuation of Dogra autocracy after the departure of the British.\textsuperscript{257}

On May, 20 1946 Abdullah launched the ‘Quit Kashmir’ movement described the Treaty of Amritsar as ‘Sale Deed’, challenged its validity and demanded that ‘the wrong of sale to the Dogra House’ be righted and that full responsibility be granted immediately.\textsuperscript{258} This conception of popular sovereignty is perfectly understandable in the context of struggle against a narrowly based autocratic system which sympathetically denied the most basic rights and representation to a vast majority of people. It is also democratic in that it reflects a genuine, broadly based popular movement for a more inclusive and responsive system of government.\textsuperscript{259} R.P. Dutt states that ‘struggles against the feudal autocracy in the states have begun and are met with the most intense repression by the princes backed by the British political department, the high watermark being reached with the struggle of the people of Kashmir against the autocracy of the Dogra dynasty under the clear and categorical slogan—‘Quit Kashmir.’\textsuperscript{260}

The National Conference regime attempted to implement the economic reforms laid out in its 1944 Naya Kashmir manifesto. The events which followed the ‘Quit Kashmir’ movement, the dethronement of Maharaja Hari Singh, and the power was transferred to Sheikh Abdullah as the head of the emergency administration, and then made Prime Minister on 5, March 1948.\textsuperscript{261}

Soon after the replacement of the autocratic rule by Abdullah led interim government the state took its first concrete steps towards agrarian reforms. In 1948 the various types of land grants like jagirs, muafi and mukarri grants were abolished and the realization of all debts from the peasants were postponed for twelve months protecting tenants from arbitrary eviction without court procedure. These measures were followed

\textsuperscript{257} The Times of India, June 12, 194; Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 281.
\textsuperscript{259} Bose, Kashmir Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{260} R. Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 452.
by the Distressed Debtors Relief Act of 1950 seeking to alleviate the agrarian indebtedness and creating cancellation Boards. The debtor was supposed to prove that he had already repaid the principle plus 50% in the form of interest, and then the debt was automatically discharged, and any amount in excess of 150% of the principle would be refunded to the debtor.\textsuperscript{262}

In the July 1950, at the 9\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Martyr’s Day, the new government made the historic decision of transferring land to the tiller, and on the 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1950, was passed the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, the Magna Carta of the peasants, which has revolutionized the whole organization of the state in a big experiment in moulding the whole structure of village life on new formation of social and economic relativity.\textsuperscript{263} The tenancy reforms benefited nearly three-fifths of the peasantry, cultivating about 700,000 acres out of the total of 2.2 million acres of cultivatable land in the state. Acclaimed by the peasantry as their ‘Magna Carta’ the reforms which were given affect under the act abolishing big landed estates, have revolutionized the whole agrarian system of the state.

The number of jagirdars and muafidars in the state prior to the reforms was 396 and they used to appropriate about Rs 5,56,318 annually of the land revenue. The Mukararidars numbered 2,347 and received Rs 1,77,921 by way of cash grants. In fact, the resumption of assignments and the abolition of feudal privileges not only saved the state about Rs 7 lakhs annually but also relieved the peasants of the crushing burden of payment in kind to the extent of Rs 3,25,000 and released 4,250 acres of land granted by way of self-cultivation and residual units to the jagirdars in favour of cultivators of the soil.

In case of religious assignments the practice of recovery in cash alone was recognized as lawful. The pockets of subsisting feudal elements within the state, called ‘jurisdictional jagirs’ were liquidated and a population of about 2,50,000 was freed from


\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
subjection and medieval autocracy.\textsuperscript{264} Under the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, a proprietor could retain only 22-3/4 acres of land, besides orchards, grass farms and fuel reserves and the right of ownership in land in excess of this unit was extinguished and transferred to the tillers to the extent of their actual cultivating possession during September October 1950.

The tiller was liable to pay land revenue and other dues for the time being in force and also a special land development cess at the rate of annas four per rupees of land revenue. The cess was earmarked for being utilized to rehabilitate the cultivators and to improve the land that passes on to them.\textsuperscript{265} All land of which the right of ownership was extinguished and which were not in the cultivating possession of any tiller, were vested in the state and were made available for settlement of landless peasants and field labourers. The law also applied to lands owned by evacuees and to those which belonged to enemy agents and have since been forfeited to the state. Mr. Raina, the states land reforms officer who submitted a review of the Act to the government of Jammu and Kashmir, said that it was his feeling that the tiller was economically better off than in 1950 before and was putting in substantial hard work to get the maximum produce from his small holding.\textsuperscript{266}

Daniel Thorner an agrarian historian and economist during his visit in 1950 to Kashmir records that despite some ‘defects in implementation and the maximum limit of 22 ¾ acres on the holdings of land owners couldn’t remain as was officially pounced, to evade resumptions was breaking up joint families, thereby entitling each adult male to the limit of 22 ¾ acres. As per the provisions of the Act orchards were exempt from appropriation which paved the way for big land holders to escape the ceiling by converting cereal acreage into orchards. So by retaining their orchards as well as converting some of their cereal acreage, the bigger landlords of Kashmir, whose ranks included Pandits (about whom it is said that 30% of the land belonged to them prior to the reforms) reserved some of their losses by entering into highly profitable world of

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid.
horticultural exports.\textsuperscript{267} But according to Throner due to the passing of the Act many tillers became land owners and some land went even to the landless. The peasantry of the valley was not long ago fearful and submissive. No one who has spent time with Kashmiri villagers will say the same today.\textsuperscript{268} Wolf Ladjenksy another expert observed that, ‘whereas virtually all land reforms in India lay stress on elimination of zamindari [large estates] system with compensation or rent reduction and security of tenure [for tillers] the Kashmir reforms call for distribution of land among tenants without compensation to the erstwhile proprietors… and whereas land reform enforcement in most of india is not so effective, in Kashmir enforcement is unmistakably rigorous’.\textsuperscript{269}

In sum, the chapter has brought to fore the increasing disillusionment of the people of Kashmir in the context of denial of basic economic rights to them owing to their outright exclusion from the political and economic structures, resulting in the eventual alienation. This irreconcilable contradiction that emerged between the Dogra might and the junior ally the local elite on the one hand and the bulk of the people of Kashmir including the middle class, the working class and the peasantry on the other hand laid the seeds of the struggle for ‘national liberation’. The leadership with their emergence on the scene brought a gradual and deep understanding of the complex economic structure of the Dogra Darbar in Kashmir—an understanding they derived by taking in the entire range of economic issues and studying them in their totality within the framework of economic development and opposed all the important economic policies, based on their system with an alternative of the framework;...the framing of the economic policies like National Demand and Naya Kashmir testifies this. One can say without doubt that National Conference leadership got much popularity and success due to the redress of the economic grievances than the political issues. Though, it is hard to believe that only a single cause can lead to a multi cause outburst but keeping in view the dominant trend of the single cause i.e. economic, the present hypothesis holds the argument that the root cause of the awakening in Kashmir was socio-economic...a determination on the part of the people to win for themselves a prominent position in

\textsuperscript{267} Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, pp. 283-4.
\textsuperscript{268} Daniel Throner, The Agrarian Prospect in India, Bombay, 1976, p. 50.
Kashmiri society. The proverbial economic backwardness stultifying all progress...this stultifying nature put the whole economic spectrum in disorder, with the absence of any kind of growth whether social, economic or political which resulted in largely the stagnation of the society. This stagnation which was mainly economic in character helped to a great extent in the emergence of political awakening in Kashmir. The people of Jammu and Kashmir deprived of all sources, above the barest subsistence, and at times below it, the decline of shawl trade, the failure to develop the basis of heavy industry, essential for integrated economic development all this worked for a closed economy and this closed economic setup which prepared the mass psyche of Kashmiri people for resistance against the Dogra rule for which the atmosphere was quite congenial because the dawn of the twentieth century brought awakening and political consciousness to Jammu and Kashmir as it brought in the rest of the Indian subcontinent. The economic exploitation, social adjustment and political domination gave rise to a vigorous battle for self-identification of the people suffering under an imposed political system which had rendered them sullen and submissive.