

Growth of political consciousness and early socio-religious reform movements in Kashmir

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The great changes in the social order of the world which have occurred during the past two centuries are very largely the direct or indirect result of social movements. For even if a movement did not achieve all its goals, parts of its programme were accepted and incorporated into ever changing social order. This has been the main or manifest functions of these movements

As a movement grows certain secondary and latent functions may be observed, first the movement contributes to the formation of public opinion by providing for the discussion of social and political problems and through the eventual incorporation of some of the movements, ideas into dominant public opinion and secondly it provide training of leaders who become part of the political elite and may eventually rise to the position of leading statesman. Social reform movements are generally used to denote a wide variety of collective attempts to bring a change in certain social institutions to create an entirely new order. These are of specific kinds of concerted action groups and are more integrated than mobs, masses and crowds and which mobilises and motivate people for pursuing common concerns mostly outside established practical and social institutions.¹ Social movements of various kinds have proliferated in all types of societies *i.e.* modern and traditional. The difference is only in emphasis on relevant matters in their respective concerns. Every social movement has its base which provides it legitimacy and following. Every society has different confrontations and challenges at different times and the successes and failure of a movement depends upon the level of movemental

In this paper a modest attempt has been made to examine the various aspects of socio-religious reform movement launched in the state and to provide an analysis of how political consciousness got constituted during the late nineteenth and early years of twentieth century. As a political community Kashmiri people reflect a high level of political consciousness. Both men and women share an equal political space in protest activities, especially in demonstrations and processions. They respond spontaneously to situations of political upsurge and come out in large numbers to register communities reactions to political events of particular nature. It was for the first time in post independence era that the Kashmiri separatist movement took recourse to arms struggle since late 1980's. No doubt Kashmir has witnessed protests of political nature earlier also. However this paper focuses on the evolution of political consciousness and role of socio-religious reform movements in its early phases which became basis of the freedom movement in Jammu and Kashmir.

I

Nineteen century was crucial in Indian history as it was a period of transition. It was pivotal century that saw initiation of the process that brought about an enormous transformation in the religious social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The transformation came for the involvement of some interrelated factors among which the first is the total impact of the British rule. It influenced Indian life through many channels: administration, legislation, trade, the creation of network of communication, *inchoative* industrialization and urbanization, all had great influence not only on the people who became directly involved in them but also on society as a whole. Every measure in some way interfered with some traditional patterns of life. In the cultural field also British

exerted pressure through the work of scholars, educators, and missionaries. The entire effect of this influence acted on the life and ideas of the people in multiple ways, forcing them to adjust their patterns of life to the new circumstances and thus affecting a continuum of social change. Under these circumstances the reformers excelled as land marks in these gradual adaptations to new condition. These people consciously reacted to new situation and advocated deliberate changes in social religious attitudes and customs. Although they were not by far only factor in effecting the change. The reform movement later on became closely conjoined to a political movement, and consequently sought to influence political authority, administration and legislation.

It was in the second half of nineteenth century that modern education began in Kashmir with the advent of Christian missionaries. English education and European literature brought a constellation of fresh ideas which constituted a challenge to new intellectuals. Rationalism as the basis of ethical thinking, idea of human progress, the possibility of scientifically engineering social change, the concept of natural rights connected with individualism, were all alien to traditional society. An equally strong influence was exerted by the ideas and work of the Christian missionaries.

II

The social and religious reform movements were a necessary prelude to the political awakening . Like the movements in the other parts of India, the socio-religious movements in Jammu & Kashmir, formed the background of the evolution of the movement against the personal rule of the Dogras in the state and against the dominance of the British and also represented the nascent urge to change the prevailing social and religious frame in the preparation for a political change.

Radically drastic change which British brought about in the

government administration, revenue system, industrial organization, and in the education system-had many far reaching effects *i.e.* emergence of a new middle class of land owners, industrial entrepreneurs, traders, government servants and English educated youngmen began to take shape. These youngmen assumed the leadership of their communities. The emergence of the new middle class led to wider integration of the many regional, cultural, religious and linguistic identities in the state. It was in fact, the rise of middle class, the spread of English education, and the articulation of interest effected by the wider integration, that proved the ground work for the evolution of political consciousness in the state and of the ultimate expression of this consciousness into a regular wide spread movement against the British paramountcy and Dogra rule. The new middle class and English educated intellectuals were committed to social and religious reform. Their commitments to reform were more pronounced, in fact, the permanent element of the Christian mission in the state was the initiation of vigorous movement for social and political reform. In this respect the missionaries led a strong campaign against illiteracy, social evils, orthodoxy, casteism and conservatism². The new middle class intellectuals carried a deep impression of the missionary movement. With regard to social reform, the leadership of the educated young men seemed to be more emphatic. In fact, ills like child marriage, trafficking in women, untouchability, widow hood and casteism were rampant in the State and educated young men sought to remedy these evils³.

The major issues over which the socio-religious movements among the Muslims grew round were, spread of education, removal of social evils and the emancipation from disabilities. The socio-religious reform movements among the Muslims were dominated by religious puritenism and a desire for educational advancement to seek a wider participation in the government of the state. Al-

though they believed that personal social reform needed to be based upon the solid foundation of religious reform.

According to Moulvi Rasool Shah, who founded Anjum-i-Nusrat-ul-islam in 1905, the basic cause of Muslim backwardness lay in their lack of modern education⁴. Moulvi Rasool Shah with support and co-operation of some eminent and influential persons like Hassan Shah Naqashbndi, Aziz-ud-din Kawoosa and Abdul Samad Qaqrु established the association⁵. Mirwaiz Rasool Shah claimed leadership of the Kashmiri Muslim community through his activities, on the educational front, founding the first reform association for Kashmiri Muslims. The aims and objectives of Anjuman-i-nasrat-ul Islam were to ensure religious and worldly education for Muslim children who were backward in education and to create an aptitude for reforms, social awakening and mutual unity among the muslim community ⁶.

The reform movement started by Moulvi Rasool shah had some social implications in Kashmir⁷. The first and immediate implication was the creation of social cleavages and conflict between the votaries of the new trend and the upholders of the conservative tradition. The latter, calling themselves, "Ahle-Aitiqad" the believers of the six shrines were led by the chief priest of the shrine of the Khanqah-i-Mualla at Srinagar. The second implication was the creation of a single center of mass following and influence under the Mirwaiz, under cutting the influence of many smaller and scattered peerzadas and making their position redundant . The latter were faced, as result, with dire consequences as to their social position and economic prosperity. And third implication was to cast away the traditions that were a result of the past "contamination" with *Kufur* , idolatory.

Similarly the aims and objectives of the other Muslim associations like Anjuman-i-Islamia, Anjuman-i-hanfia, Anjman-i-Islat-ul-Musalmim, Anjuman-i-Hamarad Islam were to persuade the Mus-

lms of Kashmir to take to education, to stress the learning of technical and commercial education and to help Muslim students who could not continue further studies.

By the year 1918, a new group of young educated muslim emerged. They were against the conservative thinking of Anjum-i-Nusrat-ul-islam. This group decided to form a new organization called Anjman-i-taraqqi Talim-wa-Ittihad. The aims and objective of this organization were advancement of education and co-operation between the people and the educated community. Sometimes there used to be a conflict between the votaries of the new trend and the upholders of the conservative tradition.

Among the Hindus Arya Samaj was earlier recognised organisation to start socio-religious reform movement in the state. It was set up in the state in 1892. Primarily a religious reform organization, it remained confined to Jammu for a long time. In the beginning it was not connected with political propaganda. The main aim of the Samaj was to propagate vedic principles and to fight social evils. The other prominent associations established by the Hindus or pundits were Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, Dharm sabha, Arya Kumar Sabha , Arya prtinidhi Sabha and Kashmiri Pandit social uplift Association. Kashmiri Pandits were first to take advantage of modern education. They were first to demand a free press, free platform and a legislature based on qualified franchise with powers of law making. The appealed the educated people to organise themselves into an association and to solve the problems of bread peacefully, honourably and legitimately⁸.

The socio-religious reform movements among the Sikhs were also the expression of their response to the English education as well as the urge to liberate themselves from the disabilities they suffered. The prominent Sikh organisations were Chief Khalsa Dewan, Khalsa youngmens association and Sikh Sahaik Sabha. These associations worked for the educational uplift of poor Sikh subjects

of the state and their rights in the state. With the simultaneous rising of the Akali movement in the Punjab, the Sikh community of the state equally participated in the movement⁹. Repression and economic distress quickened the pace of the Akali agitation. Akali movement played an important role in creating political consciousness among the Sikhs. Sardar Budh Singh, a Sikh revolutionary from Jammu joined the said movement and launched a campaign against the corruption in administration, beggar, untouchability, social evils and laid stress on the education of the Sikh community, freedom of press and platform and responsible government in the State.

III

The socio-religious reform movements led by various community organisations is an indicator of the deep influence for freedom of the reformist content of the English education had on the people. In fact, reformist movement formed the basis of the political consciousness in the state and such reaction was gradually assuming political character. Quest for reform led to a wider and deeper understanding of social backwardness, economic stagnation and political isolation. With the development of higher English education in the State, the strong barrier between the local society and the rest of the world was diminished. The infiltration of liberal ideas, mostly available in English language, the political movement of the country led by the Indian national Congress, the movements for liberation in other States of India, the political movements of Turkey, Ireland and Egypt, and the part that youngmen played in these movements made an impact on the political consciousness of the Kashmiris which later on was influenced continually by the Punjab through press and other media. In spite of the heavy hands of repression with which the government sought to stifle the entry of Indian news papers, many old news papers continued to foster the spirit of nationalism, and a number of maga-

zines dailies and weeklies made their appearance¹⁰. The spread of English education had another dimension also. The turn over of the educated young men far exceeded the opportunity of political participation and employment in the state government. Many of the young men found their way in the service of the state. Most of them, however, failed to find any avenues of employment. The agrarian economic frame offered few prospects for the educated people. Except for the indigenous not so prosperous and industrial establishments, a stable industrial structure did not exit in the state. Baring the township of the Jamnu where trade and commerce flourished due to the proximity of the commercial centre in the Punjab, the rest of the province was as poor as Kashmir province was. Imbibed by the liberalist tradition, which underlined the English education, and therefore, were keen to find place in the administrative organizations of the state.

The state administration, however offered, very restricted margin of employment. Most of the officers were filled by the government of India from among its civil service cadre or filled by the Dogras on political and other considerations. The British officials, who considered the government in the state as their own preserve and managed to assume positions and roles for their personal benefits or utilize the distribution of employments as an effective instrument of patronage, paid little attention to the difficulties, the educated youth faced. The clash of interest was inevitable. A deep sense of resentment was created against the British officials as well as those appointed by them. These educated sections were associated with reform endeavours and played a leading role in founding reading rooms, libraries and associations which moulded the public opinion in the contemporary society. These intellectuals wanted to reshape their lives according to the new standards and values that they were discovering. Meanwhile a number of Kashmiri Muslims, who had settled in rest of India, started voicing their feelings

against the policies of state government, with regard to the education of the Muslims of the state. A number of resolutions were passed by the Muslim Kashmiri conference in its various sessions held in 1909, 1911, 1912, 1913 and 1920, strongly condemn the policies of preference given to non state subjects over state subjects by the government. All India Muslim education conference in 1915 presented a memorandum to Maharaja Pratap Singh regarding the provision of education facilities to the Muslims. Many social and political organisations were founded in the state by the educated youth, more prominent among them being the Dogra Sadar Sabha, Yuvak Sabha of Kashmiri Hindus, Muslim Youngmen Association and Old boys Association. It was in 1930 that a new organization called a reading room party was formed in Fateh kadal Srinagar. The objectives of these associations reflected the earnest desire of the educated youth to assume wider participation in the politics and administration of the state. Apart from educated sections, the impact was seen among different social groups in the society. Social transformation was an important feature of the programme of the new movement. It cannot be said that the middle class intellectuals had lost the sense of their cultural values. But it is definite that orthodoxy was no longer acceptable to them.

The leadership was conscious of the fact that no social transformation was possible without wide spread and effective educational expansion. The social organizations emphasized the need of expansion of educational facilities all over the state. As the movement assumed wider mass participation, they turned into peoples movements for political participation.

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