

## Composite Culture in Theory and Practice- An Analysis

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So far a number of students and scholars were fed on the theory of composite culture and little attempt was made to analyse it in the context of theoretical and practical perspectives. It is, perhaps, because it is a fascinating ideology and it has become a convention to glorify it without applying mind to some of its limitations. Besides, it perhaps suits to the State as it helps it in underplaying the internal contradictions of the society and in marginalizing the voices of dissent. Thus, in order to please the power structure it has become a fashion to build stereotypes around the concept of composite culture. The present study is a humble attempt to analyse the formulation of composite culture in the context of Kashmir freedom struggle (1931-47) with a concluding reference to the period of militancy in Kashmir. It would endeavour to substantiate the argument that the concept of composite culture has failed to deliver on the political front not only in Kashmir but all over the Sub-Continent. It is evident from the irony of partition that resulted in the bloodshed of innocent millions. However, if composite culture represents the notion of living of various religious communities in an atmosphere of love, peace and harmony, without any contestation on the issues of power sharing and future political arrangement, then Kashmir presents the best example of composite culture. Being a princely state and backward in different fields of life, the freedom struggle of Jammu and Kashmir began as late as 1931.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the inordinate delay caused in organizing this struggle was due to the educational backwardness of Kashmiri

Muslims.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the minority community was educationally advanced in comparison to majority community and it could have initiated the movement earlier<sup>3</sup>. But it did not do so for several reasons. It was not even ready to cooperate with any such move that would disturb the statuesque and not to speak of initiating it. It was mainly for this reason that the Muslim leadership named the movement after the name of their own community i.e. *All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference*.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately most of the writers of Kashmir Freedom Movement in a conventional manner have referred to this phase of the struggle as 'communal' because they have casually tried to grasp this phenomenon in the context of nomenclature alone. However, once we ponder over the programme and activities of this organization, we immediately reach to the conclusion that it had been a secular movement with progressive agenda.<sup>5</sup> It is also evident from the fact that the struggle of this organization benefitted the minorities as well.

From day one this organization strived for the cooperation of minorities and frequently invited them to join the movement in order to struggle for the establishment of a Responsible Government in the state. But they always gave a cold shoulder and did not respond to the passionate appeals of Muslim leadership. It was just at its first annual session held in October, 1932, at historic Pather Masjid, Srinagar, that Muslim Conference appointed a Sub-Committee in order to contact minority leadership and to seek their cooperation. But the Committee could not achieve positive results due to their non-cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

It was in 1934 that S.M. Abdullah came into contact with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the latter suggested him to change the nomenclature of his organization in order to broaden its base by ensuring the participation of the minorities. Pandit Nehru argued that this measure would not leave any excuse for the minorities in

joining the Kashmir freedom struggle. Besides, it would close the mouth of Hindu communalists in India who were launching propaganda against the Kashmiri Muslim leadership by arguing that their movement was 'communal' and directed against the Hindu Maharaja.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Muslim Conference was converted into National to ensure a common platform for the struggle for freedom in Kashmir. This event had far-reaching consequences in the freedom struggle of Kashmir. Pandit Nehru wrote letters to the leaders of minority community suggesting them to join the new organization. Accordingly the minority community leaders joined the National Conference. But, this experiment failed just after a short span of time and we find that within a few years all of them except Sardar Budh Singh resigned from National Conference one by one.<sup>8</sup> These leaders raised trivial issues and desired S.M. Abdullah to give up the religious idiom that he had been using throughout as a tool of mass mobilization. It was impossible for him as the Muslim Conference had been revived by Chaudri Ghulam Abbas Khan and Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah in 1942, and they had already accused S.M. Abdullah of "compromising on the Muslim interests." No leader resigned on substantial grounds and their reasons of resignation were insignificant and illogical.<sup>9</sup> Still the document of *Naya Kashmir* issued by National Conference in 1944 included a full-fledged charter aimed at the promotion of composite culture in the State. But the ground reality is that it did not deliver on the political front and none other than S.M. Abdullah has admitted this fact while writing a chapter on this theme in his autobiography entitled *Apnai be khafa muj say hai, beganai be nakush*.<sup>10</sup>

There is no denying the fact that some minority community leaders returned to National Conference in mid forties but it was mainly with the interest of power politics. The question of non-cooperation of minority community with Kashmir freedom struggle deserves a pragmatic analysis. After a dispassionate and careful study

of the subject a reader finally reaches to the conclusion that it was mainly due to economic and psychological reasons that the Kashmiri Pandits generally remained aloof from the freedom struggle of Kashmir<sup>11</sup>. By and large they were well placed under the Raj appropriating a lion's share in the landed aristocracy and the State services.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, they were not ready to go against their own immediate interests and see their power base eroded by joining the people's movement. The Muslims on the other hand formed the working classes and as such were worst hit of exorbitant taxation policy and the miss-governance of the period.<sup>13</sup> Another important reason that made the minority community to remain away from the main stream of Kashmir Freedom Movement was purely psychological. Being a minority community the Pandits were apprehensive about the majority domination in a democratic set-up for which the nationalists were struggling. Being a minority they entertained doubts and fears about their treatment in a democratic system.<sup>14</sup> Besides, they were afraid of losing their grip over state services and landed privileges at the end of autocracy in the state. composite culture.<sup>15</sup> Tolerance and secular values are inherent among Kashmiris. The State does not require any wastage of resources while organizing cultural shows and *Sufi Sangeet* in order to remind the people about secular values. Kashmiris have practically displayed their commitment to secularism during 1947, an event when there was a bloodbath all over India, but the valley of Kashmir continued to remain an abode of peace and communal harmony. That is why Mahatma Gandhi could see 'a ray of hope in Kashmir.'<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately some people while living outside the valley during the last twenty years (1989-2009) have given an impression in their writings about the so called disruption in the secular ethos of Kashmir. But that is simply a distortion and exaggeration. The age old secular traditions of Kashmiris are intact for all practical pur-

poses. The eruption of militancy that largely owes its origin to the denial of democracy could not in any way jeopardize the secular traditions of Kashmir.<sup>17</sup> Besides, mass migration of minority community should not be deemed as erosion in the secular values of Kashmiris. Again, it was not any communal hatred but the fear psychosis that made the minority community to opt for migration. The minority has every reason to be afraid of majority domination in case it visualizes any change in the political structure of the state. Some communal organizations like *RSS*, *Shiv Senah*, and *Bajrang Dal* during the past years launched a vigorous campaign at national and international level about the so called 'Pandit Massacre in Kashmir' and the Kashmiri intellectuals adopted a conspicuous silence on this matter. However, the fact remains that during the militancy all the communities suffered equally and there was no disruption in the age old traditions of mutual brotherhood and tolerance. It is abundantly clear from the fact that even today we have a number of minority community families living in the remotest corners of the valley. These households do not live in these remotest exclusively at the support of the State but in the affectionate and sweet company of their Muslim neighbors.

**Foot Note:-**

1. On 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1931, about twenty two Muslims were put to death by *Dogra* armies outside the Central Jail, Srinagar, who had gathered to witness the trial of Abdul Qadir an outsider Muslim, a butler of an European, who a few days earlier had been arrested because he had delivered a provocative speech against the Government in a mass meeting at *Khanqah-i-Muala*. While writing about the importance of this event Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz observed, "Historically and politically the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1931, is the most important day in the annals of contemporary Kashmir. From this day the struggle for independence and freedom in the most modern sense started openly". For more details see: Bazaz, Pandit Prem Nath; *Struggle For Freedom in Kash-*

*mir*, Kashmir Publishing company, Kutla Mubarkpur, New Delhi; 1954. pp. 154-155.

2. For the educational backwardness of Kashmiri Muslims it is worthwhile to see Glancey Commission Report vide *Muntakhib Dastawaizat*, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, 1992, pp. 98-100.

3. Census of India, 1931, II, p. 254.

4. For details about the formation of *All Jammu And Kashmir Muslim Conference* see Taseer, Ab. Rashid, *Tehrik-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Vol. I, Muhafiz Publications, Srinagar, pp. 259-61.

5. In order to have comprehensive information about the nature and character of Muslim Conference see the Presidential Address delivered to its First Annual Session by S. M. Abdullah on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1932 at Pather Masjid, Srinagar; vide *Dastawaizat*, pp. 219-232.

6. For details about the Constitution of this Committee see Taseer, Ab. Rashid, *Tehrik-i-Hurriyat-i- Kashmir*, Vol. I, Muhafiz Publications, Srinagar, p. 268.

7. To have an elaborate information about this historic meeting between S. M. Abdullah and Pandit Jawharlal Nehru see Abdulla, Sheikh Muhammad, *Atashi Chinar*, (autobiography), Ali Muhmmad and Sons, Srinagar, 1986, pp. 227-28.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid. p. 244.

11. An Interview with Pandit Jagan Nath Sathu, a progressive journalist and close associate of Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, August, 1998.

12. For preponderance of Kashmiri Pandits on key positions in administration see Lawrence, Walter, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Chinar Publishing House, Srinagar, 1992 (reprint), pp. 400-4001. About their lions share in landed aristocracy see Rai, Mridu, *Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004, pp. 156-57.

13. In this connection it is worthwhile to quote Pandit. P. N. Bazaz, "The poverty of the Muslim masses was appalling. Dressed in rags which could hardly hide his body and barefooted, a Muslim peasant presented the appearance rather of a starving beggar than of one who filled the coffers of the State... The channels of human kindness and mercy had run dry. To loot the peasants was no sin and the society did not disapprove of it; Bazaz, Pandit Prem Nath ; *Struggle For Freedom in Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing company, Kutla Mubarkpur, New Delhi, 1954. p.144.

14. Interview with Pandit Jagan Nath Sathu , August, 1998, The learned journalist told the author that he had a meeting with M. A. Jinhah when he was on his visit to Kashmir in 1944. Mr. Jinhah had confirmed from Sathu about the aloofness of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Freedom Movement. The latter in a straightforward manner had told to Mr. Jinhah that the 'Pandits being a minority entertain doubts and fears about their treatment in a democratic system'. The League leader had agreed to the genuineness of his argument and had told Mr. Sathu that, " the Indian Muslims being a minority also think along the same lines"

15. In comparison to other regions of Indian Sub-Continent the Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits have lived in harmony especially, during the freedom struggle perhaps because of their old tradition of tolerance.

16. See Abdullah Sheikh Muhammad, *Atashi Chinar*, (autobiography), Ali Muhmmad and Sons, Srinagar, 1986, pp. 442-443.

17. After the dismissal of S.M. Abdullah, as Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir state on 9 August, 1953, the New Delhi continued to impose puppet Governments on Kashmiris and almost all the elections were badly rigged. Thus, the main cause for the rise of militancy was the denial of democracy to the people of Kashmir.