

Political Awakening in Kashmir through Urdu Newspapers from 1924-1975: A historical Study

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Abstract

This paper is intended to bring on limelight the role of some prominent political organizations in Jammu and Kashmir and their internal political development within the state. The paper is an attempt to look objectively into the role of such organizations in raising political awareness among Kashmiri masses through a variety of means and tools in the shape of newspapers, especially Urdu newspapers, which were crucial in raising political consciousness. In this context this paper will make a modest attempt to illuminate the press's development from its beginnings and their contribution to the national awakening of Kashmir's masses. As we saw how the press encountered a number of challenges at the national level under colonial control, the state press likewise encountered a lot of challenges during this time and was opposed by the state government on every level. The Punjabi newspapers, on the other hand, were essential in raising the voice of Kashmir during early phase of the 20th century, which in turn helped the Kashmiri masses become more politically aware. Additionally, this paper would make a small attempt to investigate how these newspapers unite people socio-culturally and politically. There are large number of newspapers which cover wide-ranging issues so far as the Kashmir issue is concerned. There were a lot of newspapers published in Urdu, but most of them only lasted for about six months once they displayed their political leanings, which the government forbade.

Key words: Kashmir, Political, conflict, masses, newspaper, Khidmat

Introduction

The proverb “Pen is mightier than the sword” refers to how much more potent a weapon writing is than violence. It was written in 1839 by English novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton (Lytton, 1839, p. 1). A pen is much more versatile than a sword. It suggests that while the

power of the sword is transitory, the power of writing is enduring. Writing skill is more important than a sword's edge sharpness.

Thomas Jefferson, was a leading jurist and Ex-president of United States of America, he said "if I have to choose between a government and the press, I would choose the later." (Parrey, 2018, p. 1) Jammu and Kashmir's press history is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is often referred to as Kashmir. This appears to be a relic of the British Raj in India. The British referred to it so and spelt it first as 'cashmere' and then occasionally as 'Kashmere' later, however, 'Kashmir' became the standard form.

Now coming to the initial period of Dogra rule we see a large number of Kashmiris migrated from the state because of widespread famine and economic strangulation. Most of them settled in Punjab, where comparatively under free atmosphere they received education and become economically sound. This indicated that they had not forgotten the land where they actually belong. (Saraf M. Y., 1977, p. 449) In the meantime, the Kashmir Muslims formed various associations such as the Anjuman-i-Kashmiri Musalmanan-i-lahore (1896). Some association members began publishing newspapers that were specifically dedicated to the cause of Muslim advancement in the state. Consequently, it may be claimed that Punjab Press established a forum for state-wide freedom of expression (Saraf M. Y., 1977, pp. 449-50).

In the 1930s, we saw how Kashmiri and Indian scholars paid close attention to the history of the region. This period is interpreted by Kashmiri academics as the beginning of modernism. For the Muslim majority, who bore the brunt of the consequences of state corruption? (Bazaz, 1941, pp. 252-53) When Pratap Singh's dominion ended and the last Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, ruled from 1925 to 1947, Kashmir saw a wave of politically conscious among the oppressed Kashmiri Muslims. (Barton, 1934, pp. 127-28)

On the other side, Saraf decided to concentrate on the events of July 13, 1931, which are today remembered in Kashmir as Martyrs Day. On this occasion, the State police opened fire on a large crowd waiting outside the Srinagar Central Jail for the verdict in the case of Abdul Qadeer, who had been detained for making anti-government remarks (Saraf M. Y., 2005, p. 373).

The more idealistic members of the British establishment in India undoubtedly did not share the Dogras' views of good administration, but it is unlikely that their rule was any worse than that of another autonomous Asian State at the time. The Maharaja's failure to exert authority over his underlings, rather than any malice on his part, was the cause of much of the misrule in Kashmir. (Lamb, 1967, p. 28) The Dogras have always regarded Jammu as their place of origin and Kashmir as the one they had conquered (Bazaz, 2003, p. 127).

The ignorant and illiterate Kashmiri masses had lived in darkness under perpetual misgovernment. Describing their condition, The Foreign and Political Minister of the state for two years, Sir Albion Baneerji, spoke to the press in 1929 after submitting his resignation to Maharaja Hari Singh:

Jammu And Kashmir State is labouring under many disadvantages with a large Mohammadan population absolutely illiterate, labouring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb-driven cattle. There is no communication between the government and the people, no appropriate avenue for voicing complaints, and the administrative system itself needs a complete makeover to meet today's efficiency standards It has at presented little or no sympathy with the people's wants and grievances. In the state, there is rarely any public opinion. As for the press, it is essentially non-

existent, which has the effect of preventing the government from benefiting as much as it might from the influence of constructive criticism (Bamzai, 2004, p. 707).

Emergence and Role of New Political Parties:

With the Advent of modern education, in the state people became aware about their fundamental rights. Meanwhile, different socio-political organizations were formed. Among them the most significant one was the Muslim Conference under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah which was later changed into National conference in 1939. (Bazaz, 2003, p. 141) Jammu and Kashmir's political parties and movements have a very turbulent past. Their genesis and growth in Jammu and Kashmir paint a very diverse picture and appear to have been severely constrained up until the second quarter of the current century, possibly due to the specific ecological influences of politics in Kashmir. (Singh, 1982, p. 45) The National Conference has dominated the political landscape in J&K. However, no local party has been able to unify and adequately represent the state of J&K's stark ethno-regional variety to this point.

After dismissal of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah on the grounds of a conspiracy against the Indian state in August 1953. While the sheikh and his party men were under detention his associate Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg was released on parole on account of bad health. He went to Delhi on the plea of a medical check-up. He contacted various political leaders in Delhi and on his return founded the Plebiscite Front on August 9, 1955. (Jabbar, 2011, p. 59) We see Alternate leadership and party's starts to emerge in Kashmir like Awami Action committee, Kashmir Political Conference, Jamaat-i-Islami, The National Conference and Congress are the two main political parties active in the state. The NC holds the most significant position among all political parties currently in existence, not only because of its electoral success in the elections for the State Legislative Assembly and the Parliament, but also because of the significant historical role it has played in state politics over the past 50 years. With the exception of a decade-long break (from 1965 to 1975) caused by G.M. Sadiq's decision to convert the party into a congress unit in 1965, the party won a resounding majority in every election for the state Assembly from 1951 to 1987. (Shah, 1989, p. 26)

Role of Press in Jammu and Kashmir:

Since there was no press freedom in the State at the time of the popular uprising in 1931, no newspapers of any kind could be published. In June 1924, a public-spirited Dogra youth by the name of L. Mulk Raj Saraf received a special permit to establish a weekly (the Ranbir) from Jammu. After receiving repeated rejections in the beginning for a number of years. Despite significant difficulty, Mr. Saraf's business acumen allowed the publication to be published for roughly six years. (Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, 1941, p. 353) It was obvious that fighting was necessary to protect the birth right of press freedom. Nobody ever received it willingly from an autocratic government. (Bazaz, 1941, p. 353) If we look at the history of press in Jammu and Kashmir; it has got a chequered history. In the year of 1867 Bidya Bilas weekly pro- government was started in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. (Parrey, 2018, p. 1) In the first half of the 20th century, no publication was permitted. We have discussed above that in 1924 first public newspaper Ranbir was started. However, some magazines were issued but these could not continue possibly due to the discouragement by the state authorities. The newspapers of the Punjab Muslim press, which highlighted and exposed the government's anti-Muslim practises, amplified the voice of Kashmir at this time.

In order to facilitate the publication of newspapers within his own domain, Maharaja Hari Singh created the Press and Publication Act in April 1932. During the year 1932 to 1947; there were unprecedented growth of local newspapers. (Seminar on Media in Kashmir: Challenges and Future, 2005) This played important role in the dissemination of modern concepts of democracy, secularism, and socialism among the state subjects.

Ranbir Newspaper:

From 1924 to 1950, as a supporter of the movement for independence in Jammu and Kashmir. As is well known, there was no appropriate venue for the publication of press in Kashmir. Most of them were illegally smuggled from Lahore, Punjab, during the first half of the 20th century. Mulk Raj Saraf, who is recognised as the founding father of Kashmiri journalism, began a newspaper in 1924 under the name Ranbir despite the fact that at the time requesting permission to publish a newspaper was considered an act against the State. Later, as a supporter of the liberation movement, the daily experienced its fair share of difficulties due to the Dogra rulers' despotism. The paper gave the movement to switch from an autocracy to a democracy its full backing.

A man of word well educated background family, Mr. Saraf born in 1894 at Samba near Jammu, received his higher education in Lahore. (Taseer, 1986, p. 226) Profession of journalism was in his blood; he worked with the lala Lajpat Rai's Urdu Daily, "Bande Mahtaram" from 1920. His articles can be seen in the Kashmiri Magazine whose editor was Fauq. (Taseer, 1986, p. 226) In order to print a newspaper from the state, he began writing an application to the Maharaja of the State. Almost three of his applications were rejected but he continued his determination, he felt through a newspaper common mass can be represent and he was actually aware of development press in rest of India. (Saraf M. Y., 2005, pp. 24-30) However, Maharaja Pratap Singh eventually granted Saraf permission to publish a weekly paper called Ranbir. It came into market on 24th June 1924. Newspaper "Ranbir" grant permission with this intuition that it would generally praise the Dogra rulers than highlight the plight of the masses (2005, p. 54). The Publicity Officer authorised Kati and Saraf to launch a newspaper in the State of Kashmir. Prior to its publication there was instruction from the authorities that we would like to see how the State's permanent resident carry out their journalistic Duties of the State. seems that under the monarchical set up of Government, thus it was very tough to run a newspaper smoothly (Reshi, 2013, p. 54).

Ranbir began its constructive work. It seems clear that its focus was on socio-economic field and alienation from the political aspect. Due this confined approach it has faced harsh criticism as Sheikh Abdullah mentions in his autobiography, Aatish-e- chinar: "Freedom of speech and expression was a pipe dream back then. Jammu and Kashmir's Muslims lacked a newspaper. However, a Hindu publication from Jammu named "Ranbir" continued to exist by supporting the Maharaja and his authoritarian regime." (Abdullah, 1986, p. 54)

The "Ranbir" editorials were incredibly bold and energizing. As it addressed to the masses in their own language, this message made enormous headway and caused an awakening among the populace. Pages of Ranbir were full of political, socio-economic, morality, educational and emphasis was on literary works. The pen of Saraf was non-communal because he was aware of ethics of Journalism.

The Ranbir has moderate views in its constructive programme of action, but its soft approach did not work when on 7th May 1930, it published a special edition in regard of

Gandhian arrest. (Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, 1941, p. 353) A story has been narrated by its chief proprietor Saraf that Maharaja Hari Singh's secretary, wake field tried to pressurise him to write an article on a confined subject, but he declined his order, which resulted ban on Ranbir in 1930. (Sharma, 1955, p. 107)

On the eve of historical event of 13 July 1931, when twenty two local residents were murdered in front of central Jail by the Dogra forces, when they assemble to protest against the arrest of Abdul Qadeer Khan, who had given speech against Dogra regime (Bhat, 2011, p. 1).

Actually, it was the day when judgement would have to announce about Abdul Qadeer Khan, historian said this episode was the turning point period for the political consciousness among the common masses of Kashmir. After this black day we see there were emergence of political movements started by likeminded and intellectual people like Sheikh Abdullah and Prem Nath Bazaz. There were protests not only in the state but outside too, against this civilian massacre. As Dr Fozia lone Associate professor at city university of Hongkong mentions in her articles that it was M.L. Banerjee publisher in London which were running a pamphlet on the name of "Indian State" in this pamphlet Dogra's tranny administration were highlighted this also become headline in the Muslim owned press of Lahore, in order to maintain peace in the State and answer them Saraf suggested Maharaja to remove ban from the 'Ranbir' (Rasheed, 1989, p. 104).

When the "Ranbir" celebrated its Silver Jubilee on June 24, 1949, State Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was good enough to acknowledge its service in a long message. However, the circumstances did not favour, it was very tough to work as a journalist in that time. So, because of political instability its chief editor Raj closed its door on 18th May 1950, after which an important chapter of journalism came to an end in Jammu and Kashmir (Daily Ranbir, 1950).

Daily Hamdard:

The Daily Hamdard, a well-known, secular, nationalist, political, and socio-cultural newspaper published in Urdu, made a significant contribution to Kashmir's struggle for independence. It was started on August 1, 1935, by shaikh Mohammad Abdullah and Prem Nath Bazaz, a proponent of secularism. (Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, 1941, p. 365) with the intention of building the state's progressive nationalism. They each had a formidable pen. The message of the pen knows no bounds, and it is well accepted that Pen is more powerful than the sword. Daily Hamdard's editorials were incredibly spirited and bold.

After illustrating the original copies of weekly Hamdard one came to the conclusion that this newspaper was not limited to political scenario, but it had multi-dimensional approach. It had thrown light on history, sociology and literature of Kashmir. Apart from this it contained information with regard the social life of people of Srinagar. (Khan, 1978, pp. 178-80)

Inqilab Urdu Newspaper:

The newspapers of Punjab played an important role in raising the voice of Kashmir during the first half of the twentieth century. And these newspapers helped the Kashmiri masses become more politically aware. As one example, the Inqilab Urdu Newspaper highlights the administration's hiring practises with regard to Muslim subjects. On October 1st, 1930, Khawaja Ghulam Ahmad Ashie, who had been hired as the assistant inspector of the school, was fired from his position. just before he retired. He summoned all the experts, including some

government employees, to a meeting to talk about how the Dogra administration is committing atrocities against Muslims. At that meeting, it was decided that the Punjab Muslim Press should expose the brutality and atrocities the Dogra administration has committed on Kashmiri Muslims. Hakeem Gh Safder Hamdani was the lone Muslim employee at the accountant general's office. He took the annual establishment list covertly and gave it to the committee that Khawaja Gh Ahmad Ashie chaired. From that list, they want to know how many Muslim and non-Muslim state employees there are in the government. Several Punjabi Urdu newspapers can be seen publishing this issue in their own publications. which include Siyasat, Inqilab, Zamindar, Kashmiri musalmaan, Mazloom Kashmir, and Maktoob Kashmir. All of these newspapers stress the dogra atrocities committed against Kashmiris, but the inqilab newspaper was crucial in addressing Kashmiri issues. The Inqilab daily played, and the people of Kashmir will never forget the part it played. (Ishaq, 2014, p. 104)

Conclusion

In addition to these Urdu publications, we also have a large number of papers that have major social, religious, and political roles like, Ranbir, Vitasta, Hamdard, Khidmat, Ayeena, Aftaab, Apna Sansaar, Azad, Chaand, Inqilab, Itlaat, Martand, Khalid, Roshni, Ujala, Sach Jammu, Sandesh, Srinagar times, Shamsheer, Imaraat, Saveera Jammu, Masavaat Jammu, Inquillaab , Zamindar, Kashmiri Musalman , Mazloom Kashmir, Maktoob Kashmir, Haftwar Kashmir , Jahaan Nov kashmir, Masawaat, Jammu. But among all of them some newspaper played their role differntly for instance, Jamaat has established a vast network at the Mohalla level throughout the state. It also publishes a weekly, "Azaan," as well as monthly papers, such as "Momin," which have a larger circulation in the region. Hundreds of schools are run by the party in Kashmir. The Jamaat regards the Kashmir issue as a living one and does not consider Kashmir's accession to India to be final and irreversible. The Plebiscite Front publishes its own newspaper called "Mahaz" that promotes government policies and works round-the-clock to raise political awareness among the local populace.

In my opinion the majority of the intellectuals, regardless of their ideological differences, personal interests, or political parties, are important because of the manner they periodically organise the public in opposition to the tyranny's actions against Kashmir's general masses.

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