

on the political aspects of the Kashmiri nationalism, which sustained itself from 1947 to 1989. Cockell (2004) notes that this assertion denies Kashmiris any political agency outside of that state's definitions for militant assertion. This chapter examines how armed militancy was neither sudden nor purely motivated by religion. The events were guided by political continuity arising from the structural weakness of state institutions and the constant development of autonomous nationalistic consciousness.

This chapter tries to explain the transition of Kashmiri nationalism to militant terrain. It examines the assertions of the differing political and militant organisations in terms of ideology and the larger aims they pursue. Further, it explores the strategies and struggles for power within militant groups. The chapter also evaluates the methods, strengths, and limitations of Kashmiri nationalism.

## **Political Nationalism and the Politics of Plebiscite**

The section tries to understand how a collective sense of history, memory, myths and symbols combined and culminated in political nationalism. These trigger points could be understood as events or series of events that created a stronger identity, a sense of being subjected to injustice, and a perception of agency. This marked a shift from widespread sympathy to participation in political nationalism. The other important variables for mobilisation are the changing political, economic, and structural context of the society, including the emerging middle class, changes in social structures of rural and urban geographies and effects of religious movements tapped into a rich vein of potent political nationalism.

Kashmiri political nationalism emerges as part of the complex normative world, which includes myths, a collective sense of agency, and a language of grievance articulation. These variables establish the paradigm of the behaviour of Kashmiri nationalism and also build the relation between the normative and the material universe, between the constraints of reality and demands of an ideal model of political

nationalism. In a way, Kashmiri political nationalism tries to bridge the concept of reality to an imagined alternative, working as a connective between two states of affairs, one prevailing and the other imagined. At the same time, it is essential to understand the diverse and divergent narrative traditions within the national discourse.

Language, memories, and symbols cannot escape their location in a normative political nationalism, nor can the application of coercive legality embodied in a political negotiation escape its consequences. Inevitably, the force of interpretive commitments holds together a political negotiation, and the functionality of these commitments determines the path a particular political nationalism can take. Thus, political negotiation is viewed as a system of overcoming tensions and bridging diverse tendencies, but it can also invoke fissiparous tendencies if the interpretive commitments tail off.

A significant event in terms of failing interpretative commitments was the ousting and detention of Shiekh Muhammad Abdullah in 1953, which accelerated the constitutional integration between the state and the centre. Qasim (1992) remembers that many contributory events had preceded Shiekh Abdullah's arrest in 1953. They included a triangular correspondence between him, Prime Minister Nehru, and the Praja Parishad leader and founder of Jana Sangh, Dr Shyama Prakash Mukherjee. There was also an agitation and a vigorous press campaign against his policies. Abdullah, opposition within the party hierarchy and the erosion of his popularity in Kashmir because of some of his policies. Besieged by these developments, Shiekh Abdullah became more defiant; he suspected his colleagues of plotting against him and openly criticised the central government.

In the backdrop of the Praja Parishad movement, things had taken a volatile turn. Balraj Madhok founded Praja Parishad by building upon the existing organisational network of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its ideology of Hindu nationalism. The party was rancorous against the 1951 Big Landed Estates Act<sup>1</sup> because it abolished the exten-

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1 The land reforms in Kashmir were among the most radical reforms of Shiekh Muhammad Abdullah. It placed a ceiling on land ownership at 186 kanals

sive land holdings without compensation and affected the economic power of the Dogra landlords. Behera (2002) notes that Praja Parishad accused Shiekh Muhammad Abdullah of Islamizing the administration. However, this was only an outward reason. The underlying cause was the slipping of political power and initiative from the hands of Dogras towards Kashmiri Muslims.

In 1952, the Praja Parishad launched an agitation in collaboration with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Ram Rajya Parishad, Punjab Arya Samaj, and a few Akali leaders. The demands of the agitation were full integration of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union; complete application of India's Constitution; doing away with the difference between 'state-subjects' and Indian citizens; bringing the state under the complete jurisdiction of the Supreme Court; removal of customs barriers between the state and India; fresh elections to the state's Constituent Assembly; and setting up an impartial tribunal to probe the cases of alleged corruption in the state.

The famous slogans of Praja Parishad were, "*Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do nishan, do pradhan, nain challenge, nahin challenge*" (In one country, two Constitutions, two flags and two chiefs will not work, will not be tolerated), "*Abdullah Hakumat Khatam Karo*" (end Abdullah's rule) and "*Jammu Alag Karo*" (separate Jammu). Provoked by the developments within the state, Shiekh Abdullah gave a powerful speech at Ranbirsinghpura in Jammu on April 10, 1952

So long as communalism exists in India, the accession of Kashmir with it will be strictly limited. We want to accede to India without any conditions. But how can we do it unless we are assured and convinced that communalism has been buried in India? We are prepared to apply the

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(about 22 acres). The rest of the land of a landlord was redistributed among share-croppers and landless labourers, without any compensation to the landlord. Transferring land without compensation was possible since the provisions of the Indian constitution did not yet apply in the state. The land reforms were so popular in Kashmir that they continued to be pushed for the next quarter-century. The ceiling was gradually decreased until the last of the reform acts in 1975.

whole constitution of India to Kashmir and will welcome it. But in this regard, we are not fully satisfied. We have acceded to India concerning Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Communication. Other matters are separate from the Agreement. We have done this because we are interested in having some internal autonomy. (The Daily Telegraph, 135 Fleet Street London, E.C 4 March 13, 1957)

This defiance was expressed repeatedly after systematically erasing the state's autonomy. The divergence between the centre's state-sponsored and the Shiekh's political nationalism created visible chasms through the different spheres of representation. Subsequently, the above-quoted speech laid the basis for the sharp difference between Shiekh Abdullah and the central government. Speaking before a massive gathering at Ziarat-e-Naqshband Sahib Srinagar on 13 July, which is a symbolic date in the annals of Kashmir history, Shiekh Abdullah said,

The essential thing is that we have not made any sacrifices in Kashmir to pawn ourselves either to India or to Pakistan but to achieve freedom for the people of Jammu and Kashmir State. The message that the martyrs have left for us is that they have performed their duty, and now, the Nation (Quom) has to perform its duties. This duty is not to join either Pakistan or India but to secure freedom for all the people of the State. We will adopt the path where we find our freedom, honour, and future safe. (The Daily Telegraph, 135 Fleet Street London, E.C 4 March 15, 1957)

Subsequently, Shiekh Muhammad Abdullah was arrested in 1953, and a local unit of the Congress party replaced the existing National Conference. The Centre's policy led to the shrinking of the avenues for democratic political participation and the weakening of local politics. In response, several youth groups were formed to bring the right to self-determination as the primary objective of the political struggle in Kashmir. Against the backdrop of such developments, the All-Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front or *Mahaazi-Rai-Shumari*, was founded by Mirza Afzal Beg on August 9, 1955. Led by colleagues and sympathisers of Shiekh Abdullah, the group contested the finality of the accession of Kashmir to In-

dia and demanded the right to self-determination. Detailing the events of the 1950s, Shiekh Abdullah later wrote in the weekly *Awami Daur*,

I was detained in August 1953 due to my fundamental differences with the Government of India. The differences between the Government of India and me started sometime earlier. The Government of India wanted to back out of all those promises and agreements that she had made and concluded with me and the people of Kashmir.<sup>2</sup>

### Strategies Adopted by the Plebiscite Front for Garnering Public Support

The Plebiscite Front managed to penetrate the grassroots levels by operating on the plank of the plebiscite. Gradually, the front launched educative campaigns to magnify its presence. *Mahaaz-e-rai-Shumari*, as popularly known, acquired a mass character as its politics were presented as some service and sacrifice and not as politics of power. The rise and growth of the Plebiscite Front represented an ideological shift as it was asserted that Kashmiri cultural identity was incompatible with the mainstream culture and could only be maintained through the operationalisation of certain autonomous zones. Secondly, the intervening role of the state in the repeated distribution of patronage also created absolute chasms for political nationalism to thrive. The state's weakening of autonomous provisions through legal and constitutional measures was equivalent to sponsoring a formal nationalism.

In the political formation of identity, the state used specific historical references and symbols to promote cultural homogeneity. The state's espousal of Praja Parishad politics and the subsequent incarceration of Shiekh Muhammad Abdullah were working towards creating inaudible spheres of representation. These inaudible spheres were never formally

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2 Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah, "Sarguzasht-i-Nau August 1953", p.175 October 2, 1978, Weekly *Awami Daur*, Jammu.