

Chapter 3

Political and Militant Dimensions of Kashmiri nationalism

Introduction

The chapter looks at the political and militant dimensions of Kashmiri nationalism. The chapter establishes that Kashmiri nationalism has defied a neat organisational characterisation and reflects the intersection of three distinct forms of political action: firstly, through participation in democratic institutional political process, in terms of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah's role in the pre-1953 politics; secondly, through involvement in extra-institutional forms of non-violent direct action that may have been illegal and thoroughly reflected in the resistance politics till 1989. And, finally, with the participation in direct violent action. In a way, Kashmiri nationalism has charted its course through violent and non-violent ways of expression and through parliamentary politics, too. The movement of 1989 only served as the immediate catalyst for the transition of politics into a militant.

Employing various strategies of collective action through violence, disruption and convention, Kashmir nationalism has sustained itself through its ability to combine multiple forms of collective action. Most of the prominent inquiries into the outbreak of militant movement have suggested that militant nationalism was a result of a breakdown of centre-state relations as well as a consequence of the alienation of the Kashmir youth from the rest of India. Such analyses, in a way, miss out

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