

Chapter 2

The Origin and Nature of Kashmiri Nationalism: A Historical Background

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(If the sentiment of love for the
homeland rises from the heart,
it will not prove a burden to the
individual)

Introduction

This chapter tries to locate the origin and nature of Kashmiri nationalism. By delving into politico-historical, sociological, educational, and psychological factors, it attempts to discover how they corresponded to the formation of Kashmiri nationalism. The chapter tries to map the emotional and political nature of nationalism, highlighting the role of prominent political actors. Also, it tries to initiate a theoretical engagement as to how, beneath the actual historical process, other factors intensified the consciousness of identity and the nation-state.

As with other nationalisms, Kashmiri nationalism evolved concretely due to economic, political, and social changes. These changes had a peculiar psychological impact, eventually making the geographical unit more compact and a sense of commonality. A belief in a common

¹ A critical edition of *Shakristan* of Mullah Hamidullah Shahabadi Kashmiri with necessary annotations (1783–1848).

historical past maintained an understanding of difference. Historical memories were gradually interpreted verbally diffusely over the generations. Thus, the imagination of everyday social and genetic descent was consciously developed and propagated through intelligentsia and was diffused throughout the social strata. This mobilisation was supported by social and cultural differentiation. Instead, a distinct, intense, and exclusive culture erupted with its social boundaries. This was followed by continued dichotomisation between the members and the outsiders, making the entire phenomenon continuous.

The chapter also examines how various socio-political processes created the identification of the self and the dichotomisation of the other as a stranger. It broadly tries to understand how the boundaries of Kashmiri nationalism were set.

Politico-Economical Factors

Class formation in Kashmir and the corresponding politico-economic changes are instrumental in understanding the nature of nationalism in Kashmir. The political discourses emerged with the change in economic character for both rural peasantry and urban artisans.

The state became a single geographical entity through the Treaty of Amritsar, signed between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the British on 16 March 1846 for a meagre Rs 75 lakh². Since Gulab Singh sought to earn back the vast amount quickly, he enlarged the existing taxation system from the pre-Dogra period. The trade in the valley was monopolised, and

2 After the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845, the British demanded 1.5 crore from the Lahore Durbar against the cost of war and breaching the friendship treaty with the British. They also realised how controlling the entire Sikh territory would require more significant military and financial costs. More so, a mountainous territory like Kashmir was difficult to defend and closer to the Russian frontier. The inability of Lahore Durbar to pay the war indemnity paved the way for the sale of the territory eastward of the River Indus and westward of the River Ravi to the Dogra rulers. (Zutshi 2004)