

Chapter 5

Contesting Kashmiri Nationalism

The chapter seeks to analyse the changing dimensions of Kashmiri nationalism in terms of its relationship with the competing nationalistic tendencies within the Jammu division of the state. It tries to locate the position of Jammu in Kashmiri nationalism and how the internal dimensions of the competing nationalisms operate. It is imperative to understand Jammu's pre- and post-partition and its attitude towards Kashmiri nationalism to get a clear picture. Given the fact that religious or national belongings weren't of theatre nature over the whole geographical territory called the erstwhile as the valley of Kashmir and Jammu were separate entities till 1846 when the Dogra king Gulab Singh brought these regions together to form what came to be known as the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The post-partition dynamics and religious resurgence solidified factors of otherness and, subsequently, respective nationalisms.

Historical Background

River Ravi binds the present area of Jammu on one side and the Pir Panchal range on the other. Historically, the boundaries of the current Jammu region have undergone many changes, with its numerous principalities aligning with the neighbouring kingdoms. Sufi (1948) writes that during the time of Shah Jahan, the hill chieftain of Jammu settled down quietly in a feudatory position and carried out the orders

of the Delhi court. However, they could retain their autonomy, and the Mughals did not interfere in their internal affairs. Except for brief periods, Jammu is said to be ruled by external forces. It was ruled by the Mughals from 1733 to 1745, while it was a part of the Sikh empire from 1808–1820. The Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs could not get a foothold in the Jammu region. At this time, Jammu did not exist as a well-defined region or territory as it exists today. Instead, it was a composition of many small kingdoms by Dogra king Ranjit Dev, who gained control over many lesser kingdoms and principalities. However, his successors soon began fighting against each other, leaving space for many warring Sikh Misl (confederacies) from Punjab to intervene and gain control of the kingdoms.¹ During the later period, however, a resistance movement led by the legendary hero Mian Deedo continued against the Punjabi rule till Gulab Singh was installed as Raja of Jammu by Ranjit Singh in 1820 under his overall lordship, which ended in 1846. Thus, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, as it is understood today, became a single political entity in 1846 after Gulab signed the Treaty of Amritsar with the British. The treaty was concluded on 16 May 1846. It transferred the mountainous country with its dependencies eastward of River Indus and River Ravi westward into the independent possession of Maharaja Gulab Singh and his male heirs. In return for this transfer, Gulab Singh paid the British government the sum of seventy-five Nanak shahi rupees and an annual tribute of one horse, twelve shawl-bearing sheep, and three pairs of Kashmiri shawls. Jammu always displayed a closer affinity to the political culture of Punjab than with that of the Valley

1 The Treaty of Amritsar, signed on 16 March 1846, formalised the arrangements in the Treaty of Lahore between the British East India Company and Gulab Singh Dogra after the First Anglo-Sikh War. By Article 1 of the treaty, Gulab Singh acquired all the hilly or mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of the river Indus and the westward of the River Ravi including Chamba and excluding Lahul, being part of the territories ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State according to the provisions of Article IV of the Treaty of Lahore, dated 9th March 1846. Under Article 3, Gulab Singh was to pay 75 lakhs (7.5 million) of Nanak Shahi rupees (the ruling currency of the Sikh Empire) to the British Government, along with other annual tributes.

of Kashmir. During the late nineteenth century, though the Jammu province did not have a cohesive political outlook in whatever form politics was pursued, it was greatly influenced by the neighbouring Punjab province. Both Hindus and Muslims of Jammu closely watched the political developments in Punjab. Subsequently, the popular socio-political organisations in the Punjab province also got a strong foothold in the Jammu region. The Hindu reformist movement Arya Samaj, which Dayanand Saraswati founded, was the first movement in the Jammu region in 1875, gaining a massive presence. Within the next few years, Arya Samaj had a substantial following and branches throughout the Jammu region. Sharma (1988) notes two years after it was established in Jammu, Maharaja Ranbir Singh met with Swami Dayanand Saraswati in Delhi. In some years, branches of Arya Samaj came up in different parts of the Jammu region like Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber, Rajauri, Nowshera, Reasi, Ramban, Bhaderwah and Kishatawar. The Arya Samaj faced stiff resistance in other parts of British India when challenging the upper-class Brahminical hierarchy. In contrast, Jammu embraced the organisation and was given universal acceptability across all sections of the Hindu society and the rulers alike. The numeric strength of Muslims in the region and the desire of people to identify on religious lines was muscular and reflected in the ever-growing membership of the Arya Samaj. Chaudry (2015) writes that from 70 members in 1890, the group grew by around 23,000 new members every year till it reached 940,000 in 1931. The immense popularity of Arya Samaj and its growing influence alarmed the other religious organisations in Punjab, who started making their forays into Jammu. This proliferation indicated competing tendencies of the socio-reform movement in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. By 1890, a Sikh organisation called Guru Singh Sabha had formally made inroads in Jammu. Sharma (2002) records that by 1906, Guru Singh Sabha had its organisational and infrastructural presence in Mirpur and Muzaffarabad. As communitarian consciousness provided the context for identification regarding religious collectivity, the Muslim responses to these political influences were also rapid. The Anjum-e-Islamia Jammu was established in 1893 and was the first socio-political organisation looking towards Muslim

reform. However, it has not conducted many activities in the coming years.² Soon after, efforts were made to set up an organisation on the secular lines. The first socio-political organisation set up on secular grounds was the Dogra Committee in 1904, founded by Lala Hansraj Mahajan and Sahibzada Hazrat Aftab Shah. However, this organisation could not retain its secular character for long. In the coming years, Khalsa Youngman Association and Sri Ramakrishna Sewa Ashram too forayed into Jammu. As petitioning was the dominant mode of representation, both organisations petitioned the Maharajas court to offer special scholarships to students from their religious communities. The demand was conceded immediately, and a specific amount was set in the exchequer for scholarships for students from the Hindu and Sikh communities. Despite these developments, Muslim leaders tried reviving the dormant Anjum-e-Islamia Jammu in 1910. However, unlike the other organisations, Anjum-e-Islamia was an indigenous Jammu-based organisation and was not politically controlled from elsewhere. Among other reform activities, Anujuman-e-Islamia started a couple of schools around Jammu. However, the formation of the organisation called Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) in 1928 was pivotal in the development of the politics of Jammu in the coming years. The committee had been formed to work against the discriminatory nature of the Maharajas administration in general and in terms of educational scholarships in particular. Because of the severe curbs on political activities, YMMA mostly worked as an underground political organisation to escape arrests but started taking political stands against the Maharaja's dispensation. It soon started issuing the occasional pamphlet aimed at Muslim awakening, bringing forth the discrepant nature of Maharaja's administration with credible statistical evidence. Young Men's Muslim Association was also the first organisation to make political contact with the Kashmiris and developed a common platform with a state-wide appeal during the 1931 crisis. The common platform became known as the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and had its inaugural

2 Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Political Development File No 312/7-C, List of Sabhas and Societies.

session in October 1932. The incident of 13 July 1931 became a prominent political agenda in Punjab and other parts of British India. However, cracks developed between the Jammu-based leaders and the Kashmir-based leaders of the developing organisation in the coming years. The primary reason for this chasm was Shiekh Abdullah's insistence on making the Muslim Conference more inclusive by exploring possibilities of alliances with the Hindus, which Jammu-based leaders vehemently opposed. This eventually led to the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah. Over the years, the Muslim Conference aligned itself with the Muslim League. As the Kashmir Committee based in Punjab focused all of its political energies on the developments in Kashmir valley, Majlis-e-Ahrar, a party of conservative Sunni Muslims, rallied in support of Muslims in Jammu. The situation in Kashmir created a proxy warfare situation where the Kashmir Committee and Majlis-e-Ahrar were working to counter each other's influence.³ The long-term goal of Majlis-e-Ahrar was the creation of Pakistan. Gradually, the Muslim consciousness in the Jammu province was moving towards the idea of Pakistan. The large-scale discontent and its particular political outlook had put Jammu in a precarious situation. Bands of Ahrar volunteers had started arriving in the city, making the security situation volatile. Though the borders were sealed, the clashes transferred even to interior areas like Reasi, Rajauri, Mirpur, and Kotli. In the year 1932, groups of Muslims clashed with Dogra forces at Behrote, leading to the killing of 25 people.⁴ Similarly, civil disobedience movements were simmering at Poonch and Mendhar, too. Maini (2012) records that the Raja of Poonch succeeded in putting down the revolt against the Dogra ruler. The post-1931 uprising became such a strong movement in Jammu province that some states had to withdraw their troops — the strategically important fort of Mangla being one of them. Meanwhile, the Maharaja approached the British resident for help. Saraf (1977) discusses at length how the British forces had taken possible measures to stop the infiltration of Ahrar volunteers into the

3 Siasat, 31 October 1931.

4 National Archives of India, Political/Home Department, File 5/54, 1931.

Jammu province, including bombarding the agitating protestors. As intense political activities took place across the state, the members of YMMA of Jammu and the Reading Room Party of Srinagar unified towards creating a common platform with a statewide appeal, resulting in the Jammu Kashmir Muslim Conference.

Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah insisted on building the party on secular lines, but Jammu leaders had a very different approach vis-a-vis the party's outlook. Gradually, the party was re-christened as the Jammu Kashmir National Conference. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah's close rapport with the Indian National Congress was another obstacle to the functioning of the Kashmir Muslim Conference. Bazaz (1954) informs the growing proximity of the congress and Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, which ultimately led to the resignation of Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas from the National Conference and the restoration of the Muslim Conference in 1942. Whatever influence the National Conference could have had in Jammu province was pre-empted by the resurrection of the Muslim Conference. The political-ideological battle lines were drawn between the two provinces, with the National Conference working in close coordination – with the Indian National Congress having its primary concentration in the valley but claiming a presence across both regions. The Muslim Conference was primarily concentrated in the Jammu province and allegiance with the All India Muslim League. The autocratic Dogra rule ended in 1948, and Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah took over the reins, first as the emergency administrator and then as Prime Minister. This marked a watershed in the history of Kashmir as the 101-year-long Dogra rule ended, and the seat of power shifted to the Valley.

The Moment of Partition

Partition put Jammu in a precarious position as the region witnessed the worst kind of communal frenzy, where the state administration was equally complicit in the perpetration of the violence. By the time the dust settled, the region had a significant central portion of its territory.