

Jamâ'at-i-Islami's Struggle for Social Reform Among the Kashmiri Muslims (1946-1990)

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Owing to the dissemination of the Western education, the Indian sub-continent witnessed the emergence of various social reform movements in the 19th century. This development paved the way for the emancipation of the society.¹ These movements were organized by the leaders of various communities who struggled hard to liberate their co-religionists from superstition, fatalism and obscurantism.² It was a sort of cultural renaissance that the Europe had witnessed during the 16th century. The main purpose of these movements was to modernize the mentalities of the people and to inculcate a rational attitude among them³. Needless to mention, the leadership of these movements was pro-British as it believed in the British benevolence. It was so because the Indian leadership till late 19th century had not a proper understanding about the exploitative character of the Raj.⁴ However, the constructive role that it played by reforming the society, served as a bedrock for the rise and growth of political consciousness in India. The most prominent among these movements were the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Aligarh Movement.

Kashmir being a princely state lagged behind in modern education that caused a delay in its endeavours for social reform. It was towards the close of 19th century that Kashmiri pandits initiated a movement of social reform.⁵ The Kashmiri Muslims like their brethren in the subcontinent had remained educationally backward that caused further delay in their struggle for social reform.⁶ Nonetheless, the leadership of both

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the communities made a remarkable contribution towards the modernization that ultimately paved a way towards the rise of political consciousness among Kashmiris in early thirties of the 20th century.⁷ There is no denying the fact that the leadership of this period struggled hard to liberate the Kashmiris against the psychological hegemony of religious classes, illogical traditions and the fatalistic approach to life in order to enable them to think and act according to the changing times.⁸ But, the degeneration of the society was so deep that it was not possible for the leadership of the times to achieve its objectives in totality. That is why that some of these movements continued their struggle even after the end of the colonial era and even in some cases new movements were organized in different regions of the country. In case of Kashmir, one among the reform movements of the post colonial period that played a vital role in the regeneration of the Muslim community was the Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir. No doubt, it is a religio-political organization with a comprehensive constitution (*dastûr*). But, the present study seeks to discuss its contribution towards the socio-religious reform of Kashmiri Muslims.

1. Dissemination of Islamic Doctrines in its pure Form:

The students of social science generally believe that the Hindu society was more vulnerable to superstition as polytheism and idol worship reinforced the influence of priests. But in case of Kashmir where the mass conversions to Islam had taken place during the 14th and 15th centuries, the Muslim masses had not given up the age old traditions⁹. No doubt, the spread of the western education during the 20th century brought significant changes in the outlook and attitudes of the Muslim society of Kashmir. But, the fact remains that till today a big majority of Muslim population is inclined to tradition and does not subscribe to digest the doctrines of Islam in its pure form.¹⁰ A large number of people still live in submission not only to God, the Powerful

and the Unseen, but to the whims and wishes of the corrupt priests.¹¹

Jamâ'at-i-Islami movement, since its inception in Kashmir, was particular about building a monotheistic Muslim society. It struggled hard to introduce and promote the gospel of *tawhîd* (belief in the oneness and ultimate authority of God) among Muslims¹² which stands for submission only to God and not to the *pirs* and *faqirs* (priests) who had been acting as intermediaries between the people and God with the avowed purpose of exploitation. The leadership of the *Jamâ'at* strived for the development of a rational approach to life. It urged upon its co-religionists to give up doubts and superstitious beliefs and to follow the pure doctrines of Islam¹³. Outwardly, it appears simply as a measure of religious reform, but it also helped in the economic salvation of the poverty stricken masses, who otherwise were considering it as a religious duty to make various types of offerings to their concerned priests.¹⁴ In order to achieve this objective Jamâ'at-i-Islami circulated its literature among its cadets which emphasized upon *Tawhîd*. It also organized *ijtimas* (meetings) wherein the learned scholars stressed upon the Muslims to give up the irrational traditions, customs and rituals.¹⁵ Thus, the Jamâ'at played a significant role in the socio-religious consciousness of Kashmiri Muslims.

It is not to suggest that it succeeded in revolutionizing the prevailing belief system in totality. But on certain counts it achieved a considerable success. For instance, the Muslim masses to a great extent got extricated from the psychological hegemony of the unworthy religious classes¹⁶. While working on this front the leadership of the *Jamâ'at* followed moderate means and methods. But in spite of that the movement could not escape from the opposition of the conservative *mullahs* and the ignorant masses and there are numerous instances to prove their hostile attitude.¹⁷ The traditional masses leveled vague allegations against the activists of the Jamâ'at by declaring them

American agents and the enemies of Islam. Nevertheless, the organization made a significant contribution in popularizing the pure doctrines of Islam.

2. Struggle for Social Welfare

Jamâ'at-i-Islami had a concrete social welfare programme to its credit. It not only struggled hard to build the confidence of the people by making them to believe that God is the only and ultimate authority and it were the deeds of an individual that determine his status and in this regard caste and colour carried no significance. All this helped in the promotion of the notion of equality. In addition to it, the Jamâ'at did enormous social work that in one way or the other contributed to the social welfare. It declared to establish such a socio-political setup in the state which:¹⁸ would ensure welfare by following activities :

- a) Striving for the elimination of vices and propagation of virtues.
- b) Eliminating every form of cruelty, illegitimacy, exploitation and immorality and reconstructs society on the basis of Islamic values and establishes justice in every aspect of life.
- c) Guaranteeing citizens the basic necessities i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education and medicare through all proper means and establishes equitable system of distribution.
- d) Catering to the welfare of the people irrespective of race, caste and creed and where the fundamental rights of the people were completely safe.
- e) Understanding the problems of the people before they cry-out for their redressal and help them before they ask for the same.
- f) Striving a democratic government established by the true and fair general elections.

The Jamâ'at believed that the present social structure was without any ethical foundations. Therefore, the socio-religious consciousness of the people was the need of the hour. It also realized that such awareness could be brought out by the righteous Muslims. That is why, the organization emphasized upon the individual character building. It believed that such individuals would act as torch bearers towards the construction of a just society.¹⁹ In order to disseminate its message of social reform the leaders of the Jamâ'at distributed literature in different languages. Besides, it frequently held congregations across the length and breadth of the state in order to spread its message of social welfare.

In the event of natural calamities like floods and earthquakes the organization mobilized, on emergency basis, its resources in order to provide a succor to the victims irrespective of their creed.²⁰ It is pertinent to refer to certain instances in order to give a fair idea of the humanitarian measures of the organization. In 1963 the valley was rocked by a series of earthquakes. The Jamâ'at came to the forefront and raised donations in order to provide relief to the victims without any discrimination, whatsoever. The volunteers of the organization also erected makeshift shelters for those whose houses had been badly damaged.²¹ In 1978 mysterious fires continually broke out in north Kashmir which destroyed hundreds of houses thus, rendering thousands of people homeless. The Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir rose to the occasion and collected donations both in cash and kind and distributed the same among the sufferers in order to ensure their rehabilitation. The relief in kind included clothes, bedding, building material, household commodities and medicine. The recipient of the Jamâ'at's relief as usual included the non-Muslim residents of Sangrampora, Sopore²². Similarly, in 1973, Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir distributed relief among the victims of the destructive floods. The relief was a matter of

social and religious obligation provided to non-Muslim brethren of Kaloosa Bandipora whose houses had also been washed away.²³ To carry out the work of such nature, the organization had a permanent department of public service through which financial assistance, possible within limits, was provided to the needy, orphans, widows and other poor classes without any discrimination.

3. Quest for Educational Welfare

Since its inception in 1946, Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir took a lot of interest in the educational welfare of the state. As rightly pointed out by its first *amir* (president) Sad-ud-Din, "that the revolution has many dimensions. To educate the people and change their mind is inclusive"²⁴. As such it was the policy of the organization to launch a sustained movement of educational welfare in the state.

From the very beginning, Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir was conscious about the significance of education towards the overall development of society. It was one among the earliest non-governmental organizations in Kashmir to adopt the policy of following educational schemes. The Jamâ'at established a net work of schools with a good standard where in students were educated along secular lines. However, the moral education formed an integral part of the curriculum²⁵. The organization produced sufficient literature and circulated the same among people in order to make them understand the prospects and significance of education. In this regard it is pertinent to quote an official historian of the Jamâ'at, "in order to make the people understand the message of Jamâ'at-i-Islami, it was felt that the education was indispensable... because only the educated younger generation can properly control the reigns of not only a just Muslim society but of humanity as a whole."²⁶

The Jamâ'at opened a school the first of its kind at Nawab Bazar in the heart of Srinagar city. The school was initiated

with just five students on roll and a single teacher²⁷. From the first standard itself, the students were taught English, Urdu, Mathematics and Islamic Studies and their performance was so good that, “parents started priding in the fact that their children were studying not in Christian missionary schools but in a school run by Jamâ‘at-i-Islami.”²⁸

With the passage of time enthusiasm and missionary spirit increased and the programme got widened. It led to the opening of schools at village level in order to cater the needs of rural people. People started sending their children to such schools for moral development. The dedication and commitment of teachers was so impressive that even non-Muslims sent their children to the Jamâ‘at schools and there are several instances to prove the point.²⁹ It is worthwhile to mention that the Jamâ‘at schools were open for all without any regard for caste and creed. The educational programme of the organization was so appealing that the people of various localities came forward in order to set up buildings themselves with the purpose of having the Jamâ‘at schools in their respective localities.³⁰ The people began demanding that there should be at least one Jamâ‘at school in every locality. However, this dream was not realized owing to the lack of resources and the teaching staff. Still, the efforts were made to establish one school at every important place. In such areas where it was difficult to open regular day schools the organization started evening classes.³¹

The expenses of the Jamâ‘at schools including the salaries of the teachers were met entirely from the fee collected from the students. Though the teachers were under paid, their enthusiasm for the cause for which they were working kept them contented and as a result it was said that, “the students of the Jamâ‘at schools turned out to be generally more meritorious than those in Government and Christian Missionary schools.”³² The local effort in the establishment of these schools did not come only from the Muslims, but the non-Muslims also contributed in this regard. It is

pertinent to mention that Mr. Roshan Lal one of the prominent science knowing teachers provided training to the newly appointed teachers.³³

With the passage of time many of the primary schools set up by the Jamâ'at grew into Middle and High schools. Separate schools were established for boys and girls. The girls were taught broadly the same mix of modern and religious discipline as the boys, although they were also made to study Home Science. All the teachers at the girl's schools were women³⁴. To streamline its expanding sphere of education the Jamâ'at set up an Education and Research Centre at Soura in Srinagar on a plot of land donated to it by one of its members. As already mentioned that there was a thrust on the ethical aspect in the personality development in these schools and the officers of the state education department had also commended their moral standard. It is substantiated by the fact that in August, 2007, The Director of School Education Jammu and Kashmir conducted a survey, in which he found an increasing trend of moral degradation among the youth, due to the absence of moral education in curriculum. However, in this context he appreciated the working of the schools run under Falah –i – Aam Trust (Educational wing of Jamâ'at) because of their thrust on the moral aspect of the students.³⁵

4. Concern for the Destitute

From the very beginning, the organization was particular about the upliftment of the destitute. It was perhaps this desire that made it to organize a *bait-ul-mal* (an institution aimed at raising funds in the form of donations and alms). The affluent Muslims were mobilized to contribute *sadqat* and *zakat* to *bait-ul-mal*. It enabled the organization to provide financial assistance to needy students, orphans, poor and the physically challenged people³⁶. It is pertinent to mention that some brilliant students who could manage to continue their education only

due to the financial assistance of the Jamâ'at and later on rose to prominence in different capacities. Every unit of the Jamâ'at had its own treasury or *bait-ul-mal* under a treasurer and the resources of which were invested exclusively upon the poor and needy. It also provided interest free loans to the people. The organization had 181 *bait-ul-mals* at Islamabad, followed by 102 at Kulgam, 100 at Pulwama and Shopian, 90 at Budgam, 80 at Baramullah and Bandipura each, 50 at Kupwara, 30 at Ganderbal and Srinagar, 20 at Kishtwar, Banihal and Ramban and 10 at Jammu, Rajouri and Udhampur. Beside, the organization had its central *bait-ul-mal* at Baran Pather, Srinagar.³⁷

5. Modus Operandi

Jamâ'at-i-Islami adopted ways and means purely guided by Islamic principles. It denounced falsehood, hypocrisy and coercion in spreading the message of truth and righteousness. The organization adopted moderate and constitutional methods in order to realize its objectives. It is clear from the constitution of the Jamâ'at, which provides that, "violence is totally uncalled for and rejected in all its manifestation because the Holy Qur'an itself emphasises as upon the fact that by coercion one cannot convince the other."³⁸ The organization aimed at transforming the spiritual and mental outlook of the people which had been heavily invaded by the Western way of life. It believed that Islam can flourish only when the Muslims would inculcate right attitudes and unalloyed chaste.³⁹

As mentioned earlier, one of the popular methods of working that the Jamâ'at adopted was the production and the circulation of literature. The organization had the privilege of having extensive literature that comprehensively dealt with different dimensions of its ideology and programme. Its founding father Maulana Abul A'la Maudûdî was a prolific writer and had been able to inspire and produce a large number

of authors committed to his ideology. Thus, the organization had sufficient literature at its disposal and while mobilizing public opinion it made extensive use of it.⁴⁰ It went a long way in strengthening its cadres and disseminating its message of social reform.

In order to propagate its ideas the organization was very active in the field of publicity. It published a monthly organ, *Azân* in 1948 which later on changed into weekly and finally a daily. Commenting about this newspaper Pir Sad-ud-Din observed that, "the object of *Azân* is the presentation of the teachings of Islam in such a manner suitable to modern times and to prove that Islam is the best faith and a complete way of life"⁴¹. In addition to its other objectives, *Azân* launched a vigorous campaign against the prevalent social evils and thus played a significant role in reforming the society. No doubt, its circulation remained confined mainly to the *Jamâ'at* cadres, but it had an impact on the society as a whole.

The leadership of the *Jamâ'at* used *mosques* to preach Islamic way of life to the masses. They took full advantage of Friday congregations to persuade the people to follow the actual doctrines and injunctions of Islam in every field of life and to give up the vague traditions and customs having no sanction in the Holy *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. The sermons of the *Jamâ'at* members delivered in *mosques* played a significant role in eradication of social evils. Moreover, it instilled a confidence among the Muslim masses and diminished the importance of those religious classes who used to interpret Islamic teachings keeping in view the security of their vested interests. In addition to it, study circles were set up in large numbers throughout the state in order to propagate the fundamentals of Islamic teaching⁴². Besides, numerous public reading rooms (*darul-mutalas*), and libraries were established throughout the nook and corner of the state where Islamic literature was easily available to the people. The *Jamâ'at* had 301 libraries in

Kupwara, followed by 143 at Islamabad, 118 at Kulgam, 95 at Budgam, 90 at Pulwama, 65 at Baramullah and Bandipora, 60 at Shopian, 50 at Doda, 44 at Ganderbal, 20 at Srinagar and 10 at Banihall and Ramban.⁴³

In order to promote its mission the convening of *ijtimās* (meetings) formed an integral feature of the programme and activities of Jamā'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir. These *ijtimās* were conducted at village, tehsil, district and provincial levels in order to disseminate the message and programme of Jamā'at at grass root level. On such occasions, the learned scholars delivered their lectures aimed at popularizing the religious teaching of *tawhīd*, Piety and brotherhood among the Muslims. The speakers also used to condemn various types of social evils and persuade the people to launch a crusade against various types of vices prevalent in the society.

Conclusion:

Jamā'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir played an important role in reforming the Muslim society of Kashmir. It did not work only as a revivalist movement, but it had a concrete social welfare programme to its credit. By popularizing the pure doctrines of Islam it extricated the Muslim masses from the psychological hegemony of the priests who used to exploit the common people in order to serve their selfish ends. It spread education widely in the state on healthy line by establishing schools at its important quarters. In addition to it, the organization did enough social work by providing moral and material support to the down trodden and destitute. On the occasions of natural calamities it helped in the rehabilitation of the people irrespective of caste and creed. Moreover, it launched a campaign against the prevalent social evils and thus, went a long way in the reformation of Muslim society in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

References and Notes

1. For details about the socio-religious reform movement in 19th century India see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, Penguin Books India, 1988, pp.82-90.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. In order to have a comprehensive information about the socio-religious reform movements of Kashmiri pandits and Muslims see Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Early Social Religious Reform Movements in Kashmir vide History of the Freedom Struggle in Jammu and Kashmir*, edited by Yasin and Rafiqi, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, pp.89-109.
6. Ibid.
7. In connection with the rise and growth of political consciousness in Kashmir see Prem Nath Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1954, pp. 151-163.
8. See Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Early Social Religious Reform Movements in Kashmir vide History of the Freedom Struggle in Jammu and Kashmir*, Yasin and Rafiqi, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 89-100.
9. In this context it is worthwhile to quote, Walter Lawrence, the Settlement Commissioner of Kashmir who had an intimate knowledge about Kashmir and Kashmiris, "The Kashmiri Sunnis are only Mussalmans in name. In their hearts they are Hindus, and the religion of Islam is too abstract to satisfy their superstitious cravings...it may be mentioned that certain places are held in reverence by Hindus and Mussalmans alike..." For further details see Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Chinara Publishing House, Srinagar, 1992, p. 286.
10. The western education no doubt brought healthy changes in the attitude of Kashmiri Muslims. But, still a big majority has not come out of fatalistic and superstitious approach to life.
11. The author has himself lived the most part of his life in a remote village of district Anantnag and is still in touch with the people of his locality. Even today he is listening astonishing stories about the deceitful attitude of the local priests and the innocence of common masses.

12. See the constitution of Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, Department of Publication and Publicity Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, Art. 5; p. 9.
13. In his inaugural speech to the newly founded Jamâ'at cadre Pir Sad-ud-Din observed "the sad state of Islam in this land." He lamented that Kashmiri Muslims were "totally ignorant of the true spirit of Islam and no true Muslim can be satisfied with them." He also emphasized upon the audience to follow the basic fundamentals of Islam.
14. The common Muslims of Kashmir who belonged to working classes like peasantry and shawl-weavers lived in chronic poverty. Still they were offering some portion of their meager income to their priests by considering it as religious obligation.
15. The author in his age of twenties attended a few *ijtimas* wherein he had an opportunity to listen to the critique of Jamâ'at leaders against the irrational customs and rituals prevalent among Kashmiri Muslims.
16. Due to the role of Jamâ'at and other non-conformist movements like Jamiat-i-Ahli-Hadith over the years a radical change is evident in the attitude of young generation of Kashmiri Muslims. Consequently the Muslim clergy to a great extent has lost its grip over the masses.
17. The author is personally witness to certain instances of reaction of conservative Mullahs and tradition band people.
18. *Riyasti Jammu-wa-Kashmir Tehrik Islami ek Nazar Mein*, a pamphlet published by Jamaat-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, p.5.
19. Ibid; p.6.
20. An interview with Assad-Ullah Bhat, Amir-i-Block, Shangus, Anantnag, 20 May, 1996.
21. Information gathered during an interview with Syed Ali Shah Gilani by Younus Rashid, Research Scholar, P.G. Department of History, University of Kashmir Srinagar on 24-09-2009.
22. *Jamâ'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir at a Glance* by S. M. Hassan, Secretary General, Jamâ'at-i-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir, p.3. (presently he is *President of Jamâ'at-i-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir*).
23. Ibid; pp.3-4
24. Interview with Pir Sad-ud-din by Nikhil Lakshman, *Illustrated*

- Weekly of India*; 10 March, 1985, p.9.
25. Younus Rashid, *Social and Educational Role of Jamā'at-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir-A Historical Perspective* (Unpublished M. Phil, Dissertation, Department of History, University of Kashmir Srinagar), p.121.
 26. Ashique Kashmiri; *Tareekh Tehreeki Islami Jammu and Kashmir (Urdu)*; Srinagar, Publication Branch Jamā'at-i-Islami, New Kashmir Press, Vol. 11, 1982; p.101.
 27. Afroz Ahmad Bisati, *Religio –Political Role of Jamā'at-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir* (Unpublished M.Phil. thesis) S.H. Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, 1997, p.28.
 28. Ashique Kashmiri; *Tareekh Tehreeki Islami Jammu and Kashmir (Urdu)*; Srinagar, publication Branch Jamaat-i-Islami, New Kashmir Press, Vol. 11, 1982; pp.100-101.
 29. An interview with Ashique Kashmiri the official historian of Jamā'at by Younus Rashid on 23-08-2007.
 30. Younus Rashid, *Social and Educational Role of Jamā'at-i-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir-A Historical Perspective* (Unpublished M.Phil, Dissertation), p.122.
 31. Ibid.
 32. An interview with G.Q. Sofi (teacher at S.I.M. Charar-i-Sharief) by Younus Rashid on 23-08-2007.
 33. An interview with Ghulam Mohammad Dar (Principal S.I.M. Charar-i-Sharief) by Younus Rashid on 22-08-2007.
 34. Ashique Kashmiri, N-26, p.102.
 35. An interview with Gh. Qadir Wani (N.T.), FAT, by Younus Rashid.
 36. Younus Rashid, N-30, p.102.
 37. Ibid.
 38. Ibid. p.30.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Syed N. Ali, *Sayyid Maududi ka Ahad* (Urdu), Rampur Maktaba Zikra, pp. 71-72.
 41. S.K. Gosh, *Muslim Politics in India*, Ashish Publications, New Delhi, 1887, p.36.
 42. Ashique Kashmiri, Supra,N-26, p.102.
 43. Satish Ganjoo, *Politics*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p. 36.