

**Struggle for Social Reform in Kashmir (1900- 1930):
A Study of the Role of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah.**

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The customs and innovations (bida'h) have gone so deep into the Muslim society that to separate them from one another appears as painful as separating a nail from the flesh. But, it is the need of hour to bring about socio-religious reforms among Muslims for the overall development of the community.

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Being a princely state Kashmir during the period under reference was socially, economically and politically backward in comparison to British India.¹ That is why we witness a delay in the beginning of socio-religious reform especially among the Kashmiri Muslims. The idea of social reform was the direct impact of western education. It was the backwardness of Kashmiri Muslims in western education that caused a delay in their social reform. However, towards the end of the 19th century they began to respond to western education.² It resulted into the rise of sizeable number of Muslim young men qualified in English education. These people became conscious about the limitations of their culture and began to reform it on the basis of reason. These people had studied western literature and had become conscious about the change that had occurred world over during the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, they had understood the benefits of democracy and the disadvantages of colonialism. So they desired to struggle for the regeneration of their society. As was true in case of other parts of the sub-continent. Religion was also a dominant feature in the life of the people of Kashmir. Therefore, no social reform was possible without religious reform.³

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A legendary character in the social reform of Kashmir was Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah who had dedicated himself to the cause of his community. The present article would endeavour to discuss his role in the social reform of Kashmiri Muslims.

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah is regarded as *Sir Syed-i-Kashmir* because of his struggle for the reformation of Kashmiri Muslims.⁴ He was conscious of the fact that centuries of subjugation and oppression had turned the Kashmiri Muslims lethargic, fatalistic and superstitious.⁵ In order to instill a modern consciousness in his community, he thought that it was only through the agency of education that this dream could be realized. In this connection he established a Primary School at Razi Kadal, Srinagar, in 1899.⁶ This school served a long way in the education of Kashmiri Muslims. It were the students of this school who later on asserted against the sectarian Dogra State for the fulfillment of the genuine aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslims.

After six years, the Maulvi with the consultation, guidance and cooperation of some prominent Punjabi Muslims established an association namely *Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam*.⁷ It consisted of a General Council and Executive body and various other sub-committees. Matters of importance and general policy were decided by a majority vote in the General Council. The matters related to general routine work and the budget were decided by the Executive body. The sub-committees could be appointed from time to time to report to the *Anjuman* on the matters assigned to them. The *Anjuman* threw membership open to every Muslim without any residential bar. The basic fee of the membership of the *Anjuman* was four annas.

The main programme of the *Anjuman* was to facilitate education for the most backward children of the Muslim community and help them in their educational efforts as much as possible, to infuse the true spirit of Islam among the Muslim masses and to inculcate in them good manners and a sense of

mutual cooperation and unity.⁸ Every member of the *Anjuman* was enjoined to make serious efforts for the realization of the objectives of the *Anjuman*.

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah emphasized upon the members of the *Anjuman* to work with a missionary zeal. The first task that he set before the *Anjuman* was to persuade the Muslims to take to education. He urged upon the Muslim parents to send their children to the school which he had already started for this purpose.⁹ He brought his school under the direct control and management of the *Anjuman* which upgraded it to a High School within a couple of years. This school was popularly known as Islamiya High School and subsequently its branches were established in Srinagar and some prominent towns of the Kashmir province.¹⁰

The *Anjuman* published its official journal called *Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*. It was published every year and contained useful information about the activities of the *Anjuman*.¹¹ Besides, it contained the speeches delivered at its annual sessions by prominent men from within and outside the State. The student participation in such annual sessions was a special feature of the activities of the *Anjuman*.¹²

As mentioned earlier that because of a long drawn subjugation and exploitation, the Kashmiris had deviated from the doctrine type of religion and had become the victim of various social evils and superstition.¹³ The religious class by and large had lost the patronage that it enjoyed during the Muslim rule, especially since 1919, when the valley came under Sikh rule.¹⁴ It was most probably because of economic reasons that the Muslim clergy had deviated from the doctrine form of religion and had preferred to act as intermediary between the man and God.¹⁵

As was true in case of the social reform movements of British India, the *Anjuman* also laid a stress on the concept of monotheism in order to liberate the common masses from the

hegemony of the exploiters of the religion.¹⁶ The religious ideology of the *Anjuman* was, therefore, based on the belief of the concept of *Tauhid*. The leaders of the *Anjuman* preached that the God is an Absolute reality without any partner.¹⁷ It was through the concept of *Tauhid* that a spirit of unity and a sense of cooperation was generated among the Muslim masses who had hitherto remained scattered. It was due to the efforts of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah that a common platform in the shape of *Anjuman* was made available to the Muslims of Kashmir.¹⁸

In its infancy the educational activities of the *Anjuman* were confined to the imparting of religious education. But soon the need for introducing the courses of study on modern secular lines was felt by its members. It therefore, introduced western education in the schools under its control and retained Islamic theology as a compulsory subject for all the Muslim students.¹⁹ The leaders of the *Anjuman* under the inspiring guidance of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah left no stone unturned in acquainting the Muslims of Kashmir with the benefits of education. They thought, "No nation can progress and no nation can claim to be civilized until it reaches the zenith of its educational career."²⁰

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool was aware of the fact that Kashmiri Muslims had been suffering from educational, social, cultural and commercial disabilities. He believed that the state of backwardness of the Muslims had degraded them in the eyes of the people outside the State.²¹ The Kashmiri Muslims were generally considered to be unreliable especially in their commercial dealings. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool knew that the policy of the State with regard to trade and commerce was defective and discriminatory. Besides, the policy of exorbitant taxation was mainly responsible for such a state of affairs.²² A leader of the *Anjuman* while addressing at an annual session argued that "no part of the world is without liars, but why are you (Kashmiri Muslims) the only people who have become victims of this

notion" and then replied himself "the only reason is that you are not educated and your trade and commerce in this State has no principles."²³ Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah and his associates had been, thus, instrumental in transforming the Muslim masses according to the need of the time.²⁴

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool believed that the Muslims had to be roused from their deep slumber of ignorance and their dependence on others. They had to learn the need and importance of self help and self confidence, which alone could save them from their degrading condition and solve their immediate problems.²⁵ The leaders of the *Anjuman* therefore, warned their co-religionists that in case they did not follow the principles of self- help and self confidence, none could bring them out of their miserable condition. It is pertinent to quote a leader of the *Anjuman*:²⁶

Who can save our nation from this deteriorating condition? Neither a King, nor a ruler, nor a *Waiz* (Preacher) nor a sympathizer or a Rais.... but only self help can make a nation exemplary. God helps those who help themselves.

Similar to the leaders of Indian National Congress, the leaders of the *Anjuman* referred to the countries of Asia and Europe. The only difference between the militant nationalists of the Indian National Congress and the Kashmiri leadership of the *Anjuman* was that while the former referred to foreign countries for the attainment of *Swaraj*, the latter presented the examples of Japan, Germany and Switzerland only for infusing the spirit of self- reliance among their co-religionists. It is worthwhile to quote a leader of the *Anjuman*:²⁷

Japan's example is before all of you. Since the second half of the last century, she has abruptly risen from her helpless condition and entered into the ranks of first rate powers of the world. The most powerful countries had to admit her strength. The reason for this is that Japanese make use of their God- given talent.

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool realized that in addition to dissemination of modern education it was necessary to adopt a

compact programme of social reform. He had perceived that there was an intimate relationship between social reform and economic progress.²⁸ As mentioned earlier that centuries of sufferings had made the Muslims credulous and tradition bound. They were suffering from various evil social customs. The need was to reform the community in order to build a healthy society with scientific approach to life.²⁹ Therefore, a meeting held on 5th October, 1922, the *Anjuman* decided to prepare a list of all evil customs prevalent in Muslim community.³⁰ The job was assigned to Munshi Assadullah. Another meeting of the *Anjuman* in this connection was held on 8th July, 1923. Among others, this meeting was attended by Sheikh Sadiq Hussain, a prominent Muslim from Amritsar. Addressing the meeting Sheikh argued:³¹

The Waizeen (preachers) should preach in their sermons in every mosque that the people should raise their moral standard by offering prayers, keeping fast during the month of Ramadan and by remaining truthful.

An important measure towards the social reform was the appointment of a Committee in 1922 for the purpose of removing social evils from among the Muslims. The Committee met on 20th December, 1925, at the residence of Mirza Ghulam Mustafa. After long deliberations the following reforms were recommended:³²

- 1) *Fatihah* Ceremony (memorial function for the dead) held on Fridays be abolished.
- 2) Only two dishes of vegetables and two dishes of meat be served to guests on marriage occasions.
- 3) The parents of the bride and bridegroom should give dowry worth 25 to 400 rupees only.
- 4) Only the relatives of the concerned should be invited to a feast on the occasion of the circumcision ceremony and the barber's fee for performing the circumcision operation should be paid by the parents alone and no invitee should be allowed to contribute to it.
- 5) The evil customs connected with marriage such as sending *Khabars* (paying a courtesy call to the bride and taking gifts in cash and kind) to the in-laws of a daughter be stopped.

The purpose of introducing such reforms was to save extravagant expenditure on marriage or death ceremonies and to put an end to traditional rituals. Spending money lavishly on such occasions had become a habit with the people and the result was that the poor had often to loan money to defray the expenses incurred on such occasions.³³ In order to convey its message of social reform a programme was chalked out by the *Anjuman*. The members and the *Waizins* were directed to preach these reforms to the Muslims at every shrine and mosque at the time of prayer meetings. Moreover, a journal on social reform entitled *Dastur-ul-Amal* was compiled and published under the signature of the members of the *Anjuman*. It was sold to people on a nominal payment and the document mainly contained material on remedial measures to overcome the economic disabilities of Kashmiri Muslims.³⁴

As mentioned earlier that the princely states in general and the State of Jammu and Kashmir in particular was lagging behind in case of civil liberties. It is evident from the fact that as late as 1933 there existed no freedom of thought and expression in the State.³⁵ The *Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam* under the dynamic leadership of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah was the first organization that strived for the redress of the genuine grievances of Kashmiri Muslims. The struggle for securing to the Muslim subjects of the State their civil and semi-political rights formed an important feature of the programme of *Anjuman*, especially after the First World War.³⁶ By this time, it had successfully encompassed a considerable area in the field of Muslim education. It had trained and guided a good number of educated Muslims who were expected to play their role for the welfare of the Muslim community.³⁷

Towards the twenties of the 20th century, the leaders of the *Anjuman* under the leadership of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah remained busy in taking up with the Government the issue related

to the educational welfare of Muslims, their poor representation in Government services, dispute over some religious places, share in the law making body of the State and the reasons of their chronic poverty.³⁸ In sorting out these issues with the Government, the role of these leaders was always well planned, constitutional and moderate. The strategy of working through which the demands could be realized comprised; sending deputations to Maharaja and other leading officials of the State, passing resolutions, convening public meetings and preaching in mosques and other religious places.³⁹

A meeting of the leaders held under the leadership of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah on 3rd June, 1922, at Islamia High School decided that a deputation be organized and sent to Maharaja for a discussion on the Rights and demands of the Muslims.⁴⁰ This deputation could not make any headway. Another deputation was sent to see the Minister- in- Charge of Education on 19th June, 1922. This time the members of delegation discussed with the Minister various problems pertaining to Muslim education, deficiency of Muslim teachers in the Department of Education, primary and compulsory education, lack of Muslim representation in Municipal Office, the Department of Press and Stationery and in various other departments of the State.⁴¹ Following these discussions, the Executive Committee of the *Anjuman* met on 30th August, 1922 and passed the following resolutions:⁴²

- 1) A list of all educated Muslims serving in Government offices be prepared, showing the number of those superseded by non-Muslims. The list was to be sent to the Government.
- 2) A representation in the form of an application be sent to the Maharaja mentioning therein the grievances of Muslims related to education, Government services, abolition of *Begar* and a sufficient representation in the law-making body of the State.
- 3) A request should be made to the Maharaja to allow the meeting of a deputation for expressing its desire verbally.

In the light of the above resolutions a charter of demands was sent to the Maharaja. But, no action was taken on it. On 28th May, 1923, a deputation consisting of Munshi Assadullah, Ghulam Ahmad Ashai, Mirwaiz-i-Kashmir Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah and his brother Maulvi Atiq-Ullah Shah met through the good offices of Khan Sahib Siraj-ud-Din, the Resident of Kashmir, in connection with the annual session of the *Anjuman*. It was during the course of discussion that Munshi Asadullah found an opportunity of explaining to the Resident the conflict over Hira Masjid, the economic condition of the Muslims in the State and the reasons of Muslim educational backwardness.⁴³

The above discussion which is, of course, incomplete makes it abundantly clear that Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah was the pioneer of social reform in Kashmir. It was because his selfless efforts and commitment to the cause that culminated in the regeneration of Muslim society in Kashmir. The political consciousness that dawned upon the valley of Kashmir in 1930's was the outcome of the contribution of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah and his associates.

References and End Notes

¹ Most of the princely states were run as unmitigated autocracies, with absolute power concentrated in the hands of the ruler or his favourites. The burden of the land tax was usually heavier than in British India and there was usually much less of the rule of law and civil liberties. Some of the enlightened rulers and their ministers did make attempts, from time to time, to introduce reforms in the administration. But, the vast majority of these states were bastions of economic, social, political and educational backwardness, for reasons not totally of their own making. For more details see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence (1857-1947)*, p.356, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988.

² For details about the response of Kashmiri Muslims to western education in the beginning of the 20th century see Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, p.136, Kashmir Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1954.

³ Given the inter-connection between religious beliefs and social practices, religious reformation was necessary pre-requisite for social reform. Religion was the dominant ideology of the times and it was not possible to undertake any social action without coming to grips with it. For more details see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence (1857-1947)*, pp.82-83, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988.

⁴ Information taped during the course of interviews that the author conducted with the living elders of Srinagar in early 1990's. Most of them recalled Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah as *Sir Syed-i-Kashmir*.

⁵ Prof. Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir, (1931-1940)*, p.60, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The office bearers of the *Anjuman* included: 1) Maulvi Ghulam Rasool Shah (President), 2) Khawaja Hassan Shah Naqueshbandi (Vice-President 1st), 3) Maulvi Ahtiq-Ullah Shah (General Secretary) 4) Maulvi Ahamad Ullah (Financial Secretary), 5) Munshi Kamal (Joint- Secretary), 6) Munshi Sharif Ali Khan (Joint Financial Secretary), 7) Sheikh Muhammad Husain (Accountant), 7) Khawaja Aziz-ud-Din (Examiner) and 9) Malik Sher Muhammad (Secretary Nazim-i-Talim). Maulvi Atiq- Ullah Shah, *Serat-ul-Waizeen*, p.24, Rafai Aam Press, Lahore, 1910.

⁸ Every issue of the *Anjuman's* official journal *Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad* contained in the inner side of its cover the aims and objectives and rules of membership of the *Anjuman*.

⁹ Information taped during the course of interviews that the author conducted with the surviving elders of Srinagar in early 1990's.

¹⁰ Hakim Abdul Ghani Islamabadi opened a middle school at Islamabad (Anantnag) which was later raised to the level of a High School under the management and guidance of Maulvi Ghulam Mohammad. The *Anjuman* also prevailed upon theologians to establish *Nusrat-ul-Islam* High School at Bijbihara, Islamia Primary School at Kupwara and Islamia Lower Middle School at Shivpora. For more details

see *Khososi Shumara*, Mirwaiz Rasool Shah Memorial, pp. 43-44, published by the *Anjuman*.

¹¹ Prof. Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir, 1931-1940*, p.6, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ It is pertinent to quote the observations of Walter R. Lawrence an expert on the society and economy of the period under discussion. "...In their hearts they (Muslims) are Hindus, and the religion of Islam is too abstract to satisfy their superstitious cravings, and they turn from the mean priest and the mean mosques to the pretty shrines of carved wood and roof bright with the iris flowers where the saints of past time lie buried. They like to gaze on the saint's old cloths and turban, and to examine the cave in which he spent his ascetic life..." For more details see *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 286, Chinara Publishing House, Srinagar, 1992 (reprint).

¹⁴ For more details about the revoking of *jagirdars* and other kinds of land grants enjoyed by the Muslims see JKA, File NO: 117 of 1886.

¹⁵ They preached religion in such a way that would suit to their economic interests. The shrines of the glorious saints and Sufis became the centres of the belief of polytheism and to propagate *Tauhid* on these centers was totally impossible. Thus, the *waizeen* created their laws of presumptions and apprehensions unmindful of the basic faith of Islam. For further details see Ashiq Kashmiri, *Therik-i-Islam in Kashmir*, p. 236, Srinagar, 1982.

¹⁶ For more details see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence (1857-1947)*, p.84-885, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988.

¹⁷ Speeches delivered by Maulvi Anwar Shah, Lolabi, at the second annual session of the *Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*, p.30, Lahore, Himalya Steam Press.

¹⁸ Prof. Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir, 1931-1940*, p.61, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980.

¹⁹ *Ibid*; p.62.

²⁰ Speech delivered by Munshi Ghulam Mohammad Khadim at the second annual session of the *Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*, p.41, Lahore, Himalya Steam Press.

²¹ Information gathered during the course of interviews that the author conducted with the surviving elders of Srinagar in early 1990's.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ Speech delivered by Munshi Ghulam Mohammad Khadim at the second annual session of the *Anjuman, Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*, p.41, Lahore, Himalya Steam Press.

²⁴ Muhammad-ud-Din Fauq, *Tarikh-i-Anjuman-i-Kashmir*, vol. ii, p. 433.

²⁵ Information gathered during the course of interviews that the author conducted with the surviving elders of Srinagar in early 1990's.

²⁶ Speech delivered by Sad-ud-Din Shawl at the second annual session of the *Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*, p.63, Lahore, Himalya Steam Press.

²⁷ Speech delivered by Khawaja Muhammad Maqbool Pandit at the second annual session of the *Anjuman* in 1915, *Halat-o-Rou-i-Dad*, p.39, Pratap Kashmir Steam Press, Srinagar.

²⁸ Information gathered during the course of interviews that the author conducted with the surviving elders of Srinagar in early 1990's.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The man who thought in terms of social reform for Muslims was Mirza Ghulam Mustafa. He was one among the top leaders of the *Anjuman*. It was on his insistence that the *Anjuman* appoint a Social Reform Committee in 1992.

³¹ Hafiz Muhammad Ismail, *Personal Diary*, dated, July 8, 1923, item 3.

³² *Ibid*; dated, December 20, 1925, item 3.

³³ For more details about the rituals associated with birth, death and circumcision of Kashmiri Muslim see Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 286, Chinar Publishing House, Srinagar, 1992 (reprint).

³⁴ The author consulted the journal of *Dastural-ul-Amal*, containing guide lines about the programme of social reform.

³⁵ In this connection it is worthwhile to quote Sir Albion Banerji, the Foreign and Political Minister of the Maharaja, who was so much disgusted with the state of affairs that he resigned and explained the reasons of his resignation before a press conference at Lahore on 15th March 1929, "... there is hardly any public opinion in the State. As regards the press it is practically non-existent with the result that the Government is not benefited to the extent that it should be, by the impact of healthy criticism."

³⁶ Prof. Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir, 1931-1940*, p.65, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid*; p. 66.

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ Hafiz Muhammad Ismail, *Personal Diary*, dated, June 3, 1922, item 1.

⁴¹ The deputation consisted of Mirwaiz Kalan, Mirwaz Hamadani, Atiq-ullah, Munshi Assadullah, Saif-ud-Din Ganai, Mahi-ud-Din Kawoosa, Mohi-ud-Din Gangroo, Khawaja Sad-ud-Din Shawl and Pir Abdullah Shah Qamli. Mirza Ghulam Mustafa read out the notes and Munshi Assadullah acted as interpreter. *Ibid*; dated, June 19, 1922, item 2.

⁴² *Ibid*; dated, August 30, 1922, item 2.

⁴³ *Ibid*; dated, May 28, 1923, item 2.