

## Role of the Majlis-i-Ahrar Islam-Hind in the Kashmir Movement of 1931

By Iqbal Chawla

### **Introduction**

Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam saw its birth in 1929 at Lahore with the following goals in mind: firstly, to uphold the anti-imperialist stance in India as a Muslim-run group and secondly, to provide support to and work closely with the moves and actions of the All-India Congress in the larger political arena. Maulana Azad, the highest-level Muslim functionary of the Congress, played a key-role in its formation.

The MAI had hardly been formed a year when the majority Muslim population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which had been ruled by a dynasty of Hindu rajas, to whom it had been sold in 1846 by the British, erupted in agitation. Here it would be pertinent to point out that the territory of Jammu and Kashmir (henceforth, only “Kashmir”), which comprised two independent but neighboring territories of Jammu and Kashmir, was overwhelmingly a Muslim-majority state, but representatives of Kashmir were not even consulted before the British decided to sell the territory to its new Hindu rulers.

This Hindu ruling dynasty of Kashmir had ruled its Muslim-majority territories with harshness and cruelty since 1846, and had, as a deliberate policy, failed to carry out any meaningful changes for uplifting the lives and living standards of its subjects ever since it took over the reins of the two territories. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir, therefore, due to the rising frustration amongst its Muslim population, had reached an explosive point. This point happened to correspond perfectly with the formation of the MAI in distant Lahore, a totally unrelated event, in one of those unique historical coincidences, which was to leave its deep mark on the Indian national political scene in the times to come.

There is no doubt that the Kashmir issue exploded on the Indian national political scene with a fury and vengeance in 1931 and there were many factors responsible for this. The main ones included, as also pointed out above, a host of unresolved, long-lasting complaints of the Kashmiri people against their uncaring and exploitative rulers, the interest and involvement of the British government of India, and the role of the Kashmiri political leaders, which intensified the

Kashmiris' movement of 1931. Viewing the Kashmiri's agitation against their rulers as a red flag, the British in India decided to set up the Glancy Enquiry Commission, to sort out this problem. This commission produced a report detailing the problems with Hari Singh's administration as a consequence of which, the latter was forced to introduce social, economic, and political reforms in the territories under his rule.

A lot of historical literature exists about the role of various Muslim political parties in the Kashmiris' movement for independence before and after the creation of Pakistan, but an important phase of this movement, which took place in 1931, has generally been ignored.

This writer wants to shed some light on the movement of the Kashmiri people for their rights in 1931, as he feels that it is an oft-neglected area of the Indian political scene of that era and the writer wants to highlight the prominent role played by the MAI in this movement. Additionally, in spite of the fact that the literature available to the writer about the MAI's role in the movement is unclear about its stated goals for participating in the *Kashmiris'* struggle, the writer feels that it had two main goals in sight which prompted its participation: firstly, the motivation for helping the Kashmiri Muslims to secure their due rights and secondly, to prevent the *Ahmadiyahs* from playing a leading role in the Kashmiri struggle, thereby securing a strong base amongst the Muslims of Kashmir.

### **Foundation of MAI**

The Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam-Hind was founded in December 1929, at the time of the Congress session of 1929-30, in Lahore, during which the Congress had adopted a resolution for the complete independence of India. Persuaded by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, some prominent *Ulema* (Muslim religious scholars) of India, mostly hailing from Punjab and led by Maulana Syed Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Chaudhry Afzal Haq, Maulana Zafar'Ali Khan and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, established the Majlis-e-Ahrar Islam on 29 December 1929. (Mirza, 1975: 81-84) All the above-named leaders of the Majlis Ahrar had been very active in the Khilafat Movement. They had previously made important contributions to the Muslim cause in India in educational, religious and political fields. However, their differences began to appear with the other leaders of the Khilafat Movement like Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar following the presentation of the Nehru Report in 1928 (Aziz, 1977: 41-42).

The Central Khilafat Committee under the presidentship of Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar had condemned the Nehru Report as they considered it to be against the interests of the Indian Muslims, but the members of the Punjab chapter of the Khilafat Committee were in favour of accepting the Nehru Report. Although forming a part of that miniscule portion of the Muslims of India who were in favour of the acceptance of the Nehru Report, they probably supported the Nehru Report believing that since the joint electorates had not proved harmful for the Muslims of the Punjab, therefore there was no harm in supporting their introduction at the all-India level either. (Ahmed, 1967: 79-88) However, once they opted for support of the Nehru Report, they decided to quit the Central Khilafat Committee and set up their own political party. As referred to earlier, it is generally believed that the strong persuasions of die-hard Congress leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played a big role in the formation of the MAI.

The MAI was formed with the following aims and objectives in mind:

1. To safeguard the religious, educational, economic and social interests of the Muslims by providing them proper political guidance.
2. To secure complete independence for India through peaceful means. (Mirza, 1975: 148-150).

However, Huttenback mentions the aims and objectives of the Ahrar and according to him, "Its manifesto supported Indian nationalism, secular democracy, representative institutions and communal harmony." (Huttenback, 2004: 140)

During the first two years of its existence MAI worked closely with the Congress. Its leaders had taken an active part in the 'Salt Movement' which was initiated by Gandhi in 1930. (Gopal, 1976: 224)

The explicit mind-set of most of the *Ulemas* of India at that time was that the British rule of India was a curse and that all the religious-social groups of Indian people should bury their differences and unite politically to force the British to leave. This approach strongly inclined the MAI towards the All India National Congress Party because the MAI believed that the Congress was against the continuation of the British rule in India whereas the Muslim League was allegedly a pro-British party that was not as outspoken as the Congress in its opposition to the British. Having declared in 1929-30 that it stood for the complete independence of India, Congress felt that a strong support by the

Muslim theologians would enhance its prestige amongst large groups of the Indian Muslims. Congress perceived that the *Ulemas* carried more weight in the Muslim community than the politicians, and MAI was founded with great support from Azad. MAI emerged as a party but remained under the Congress umbrella until its differences developed.<sup>1</sup> However, the Congress-Ahrar cooperation soon experienced changes that led to the emergence of the MAI as a separate politico-religious party.

The MAI leadership had been greatly disappointed by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. Their main complaint centered on two points: firstly, they were not consulted before conclusion of the pact and secondly, their leaders failed to receive any political relief as most of the top Congress political prisoners were released following the pact while MAI's members remained locked up. Besides, the Congress, at this stage, contrary to its earlier pronouncements, seemed ready to cooperate with the British Government and was ready to set aside its demand for complete independence. The Ahrar Party, therefore, decided on a totally independent course of action and in this regard they convened its first conference in Lahore on 11 July 1931 (Mirza: 1975: 150). Ahrar also decided to take part in the ongoing Kashmir movement, to help Muslims of Kashmir to get their due rights.

### **Kashmir Problem**

Kashmir was a princely state during the British rule in India from 1846-1947, under a Hindu Dogra ruler (Chitkara, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Kashmir was a lake that was drained by the sage Kasyapa, who settled Brahmans in the valley.<sup>3</sup> The Mahabharata refers to the Kashmiri people, "the Kashmiras", as Kashatriyas. Kashmir came

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<sup>1</sup>The Majlis might have contested the August 1930 election, but boycotted them as a result of its decision to participate in the INC-sponsored civil disobedience movement.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Chitkara maintains that "The Maharaja was a Hindu, but that did not make it a Hindu state. The majority of the population was Muslim, but that did not necessarily make it a Muslim state. In a state where various historical, cultural, and traditional influences have intermingled and produced a happy harmonious synthesis, the only way to keep it together is through secular democracy, with equal respect for all religions and appeasement to none, guarantee safeguards for the human and all its inhabitants, in particular the minorities." But he also admits that even in the twenty first century. But despite such safeguards regional and religious discrimination is written large in J&K.

<sup>3</sup> An ancient story also has some co-relation to the origin of the name "Kashmir". The Hindus believe that once upon a time the Kashmir was a great lake which was called the lake of Sati-Sar or the lake of the Sati (Hindu Goddess Durga).

under the Muslim rule<sup>4</sup> when Shah Mir ascended the throne under the name of Shams-ud-Din; his successors ruled until 1586, when the Mughal emperor Akbar conquered and annexed it. In 1752 Kashmir was conquered by Ahmad Shah Durrani and it remained part of the Kingdom of Afghanistan until Ranjit Singh subjugated it in 1819, starting the Sikh rule. Kashmir came into the British possession as a result of the defeat of the Sikhs in the First Sikh War of 1846,<sup>5</sup> and the British in turn sold it to Gulab Singh for a paltry sum of 7.5 million rupees. (Kapur, 1995: 56)<sup>6</sup> Gulab Singh entered into a treaty with the British Indian Government that recognized him as an independent ruler of Kashmir and Jammu. Gulab Singh died in 1857, but his successors, Ranbir Singh (1857-1885), Pratab Singh (1885-1925) and Hari Singh (1925-1949), continued to rule Kashmir until the departure of the British from India.

The Muslims of Kashmir, who constituted approximately eighty percent of the population,<sup>7</sup> were extremely unhappy under the Hindu Dogra<sup>8</sup> rule, due to its pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim policies.<sup>9</sup> The Muslim population was deliberately kept illiterate in the urban areas while laboring under poverty and suffering from lowly economic conditions in villages.” Even educated Muslims faced either unemployment or remained under-employed. Government jobs were given mostly to the Hindus, as they were considered more loyal to the government.<sup>10</sup> There was neither religious freedom nor freedom of expression, especially for the Muslims. According to Brig. Asif Haroon, “The murder of a Muslim would cost only rupees two, the slaughter of a cow was taken as a capital offence.” (Haroon, 1995: 39) As they had been sold like a commodity, so they were governed like dumb cattle. (Jaffar, 1992: 82)

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<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan, believes that it was not the sword but the teaching and teaching methods of the Muslim Mushaiks (Mystics) which brought about so great conversion of Hindus to Islam.

<sup>5</sup> The first reference of the transfer of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Hazzara occurs in the clause of treaty of Lahore, signed on March 9, 1846, after the termination of the first Anglo-Sikh war.

<sup>6</sup> On March 16, 1846 the British sold out Kashmir to Gulab Singh against the payment of seventy-five lakhs of rupees through another treaty known as the Treaty of Amritsar.

<sup>7</sup> The population of the State was 3,648, 243 in 1931, but only 2, 905,578 in 1901. In the Vale itself there were 1,331, 771 of whom 1,256,274 Muslims, in 1931.

<sup>8</sup> The Dogras, called so from Gugra or Dungras and the Chibs

<sup>9</sup> Castes and sub-castes are the characteristics of the Hindu population in India including Kashmir. The high-caste Hindus were called Pundits or Brahmins by caste. The majority of them were found in Jammu Province.

<sup>10</sup> The discriminative policies of the Dogra rulers towards the Muslim can best be understood from the fact that out of 76 prime ministers from 1846 to 1946, not one was Muslim. Out of the thirteen battalions of the state army, there was only one Muslim battalion..

The government, instead of remaining impartial, showed no sympathy with the Muslim grievances and complaints. There was no contact between the government and the governed and no suitable opportunity was provided to the people for proper representation of their problems. Although outwardly calm, the masses were waiting for a proper occasion for expression of their suppressed angry feelings about the misgovernment by their Hindu ruler.

Khilafat Movement (1919-1922) had provided Muslims an opportunity on the one hand, to express their religious passion and on the other, to display their intense dislike for the autocratic governance by the Hindu Dogra rulers. The Kashmiri ruler of that time, Maharaja Pratab Singh, had, however, suppressed this movement immediately for it could have exposed the weaknesses of the government and at the same time proved a catalyst for forging unity in the rank and file of the Muslims. (Kaul, 1990: 17-18)

The Khilafat Movement was followed by another crisis in the Kashmir valley when the workers of the State Silk Factory went on strike in 1924. This time the Maharajah's government, however, wasted no time in accepting the workers' demands, although they were mostly Muslims, because the British government in India had already taken notice of the misery of the people and the then viceroy, Lord Reading, had also cared enough to visit Kashmir. (Chaudhry, 1990: 123-24)

During his visit, the Viceroy met important Kashmiri leaders who apprised him in detail of their sufferings. In their memorandum, they demanded that a constituent assembly of elected representatives be established in Kashmir. They also requested that they be given appropriate representation in both the public and private sectors. As mentioned earlier, Maharaja Hari Singh had announced some reforms in this connection, but these reforms fell far short of redressing the sufferings of the common man. As a result, the people continued to seethe in anger against the government.

Educated Kashmiris who had not received jobs commensurate with their education nor proper representation in the government services were far more frustrated than their common, illiterate brethren. At this time, Sheikh Abdullah, along with a few other educated Kashmiris, formed a party by the name, Reading Room Party (Hereafter RRP), with the aim of publishing articles reflecting upon the conditions of the people of Kashmir, in publications outside of the state, to gain support for their cause in other parts of the country. (Ibrahim, 1990: 31)

The party leaders of the RRP used to discuss the political issues of the state and disseminate their views secretly amongst the people, which led to a greater level of political awareness amongst the population. Besides Sheikh

Abdullah's party, there were many other political associations of Kashmiris as well as non-Kashmiris, both in and outside Kashmir, that were trying to generate feelings of nationalism among the Kashmiris. Allama Iqbal, who lived in Punjab, besides other prominent Kashmiris, was prominent [Comment to author: maybe consider changing the word "prominent" here to "outspoken in voicing his concern....", so that you do not have prominent twice in the same sentence. It's not incorrect, but I would change, just so the sentence reads better] in showing his concern for the problems of the Kashmiri Muslims (Affaki, 1990: 123-24). Others included Mirwaiz-i-Kashmir and Muhammad Yousaf Shah, who was a religious as well as political leader of Kashmir and always openly spoke against the government's policies. An eminent non-Muslim, Albion Bannerjee, an Indian Christian, who had been serving as the Senior Member of the Council of State of Jammu, a seat that was soon to be given the title of the Prime Minister, resigned in March 1929, in protest against the state government's policies of discrimination against the Muslims. Thus at the end of 1920's, political circumstances in Kashmir were heading in a direction that could result in great upheaval.

### **Kashmir Movement of 1931**

Finally, an episode that took place in Kashmir in 1931 prompted the Muslims to organize a movement against the Dogra rule in Kashmir. There had been many complaints by the Muslims against the official religious policy of the government. The Muslims of Kashmir state had not reacted strongly against these complaints as nothing serious was done against the fundamental principles of their religion. During the 1920's, Hindu extremist leaders like Shurdhanad, Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr. Moonje, launched Shuddhi and Sangathan movements aimed at reconverting those Muslims that they claimed had once been Hindus. This fundamentalist approach to religion on their part led to Hindu-Muslim riots in India and Kashmir.

The bulk of the Hindu population had generally been very tolerant (there was a cross-community sense of *Kashmiriyat*) but Hindu officials of the Dogra government not only encouraged expression of Hindu extremism against the Muslims, but time and again became an integral part of it. It was reported that Hindus had demolished a mosque in Riasi with the approval of the Dogra government of the Jammu province. It also came to be believed that Dogra authorities had stopped *imams* from delivering Friday sermons in the mosques. Babu Khem Chand, a sub-inspector of police, stopped Imam from delivering *Khutba* on *Eid-ul Azha* prayer on 15 April 1931. He thought it would be a political speech against the Dogra government. These fundamentalists had also

disrespected the Holy Book of Islam (Quran) and a few times. Sacred pages of the Holy Book had been found discarded in public washrooms. On 15 June 1931, the Holy Quran was profaned in the central jail in Jammu. It was reported that one Hindu landlord, at Oudhampur, in Jammu embraced Islam and the area revenue officer, who happened to be a Hindu, confiscated his property for that reason. (Malik, 1982, 157-163) When in June 1931, it was reported that government officials in Jammu province had forbidden Muslims from worshipping and they had also been disrespectful to the Quran, it made people extremely angry throughout Kashmir, particularly in Srinagar.

Against these outrageous acts by the officials, there was general discontent and anger among the Muslims, whose leaders made fiery speeches in the mosques and also organized public meetings to register their protest. Two important parties, the Young Men's Muslim Association of Jammu and the RRP of Srinagar became very active and launched a joint movement against the government. The government failed to exhibit its serious concern for Muslim complaints and did not bother to take any remedial action (Bose, 2003: 19).

Failure of the peaceful methods forced the Muslims to resort to other means. On 21 June 1931, at one such meeting, Muslim leaders suggested violence to teach a lesson to the enemies of Islam. Abdul Qadeer<sup>11</sup> recommended the use of violence against the Hindu government of the State, which had threatened the existence of Islam in its territory. He was arrested on 25 June for delivering a seditious speech, and this act by the government caused an increase in religious vehemence amongst the Muslims in the State (Hussain, 1992: xvi).

Abdul Qadeer was put on trial at the Session Court, Srinagar, in July 1931. His trial created such an enthusiasm among the Muslims, who came in thousands to witness the court proceedings, that the government felt that the trial, posed a serious threat, not only to the peace of the city, but also to the peaceful proceedings of the court. Therefore, the court proceedings had to be moved to the Srinagar Central Jail, a more secure place. The trial of Abdul Qadeer reopened on 13 July. Once again, Muslims gathered in thousands to protest what they claimed was an illegal trial. Their demand that they should be allowed to hear the proceedings in the jail was turned down by the authorities. When people tried to break into the prison, the situation turned serious, as the trial could not proceed under such conditions. Consequently, police decided to disperse the crowd. This

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<sup>11</sup> Abdul Qadir, a cook by profession, came with his British official from the NWFP province, was a religious person and delivered speech which was regarded by the officials as seditious and he was put behind the bars. His trial put oil on the fire and thus anti-Dogra activities got momentum as thousands of Kashmiri Muslims wanted to witness the trial proceedings.



dispersion resulted in agitation, and protesters threw stones at the police and some even broke into the jail itself. The police opened fire on the protestors, killing twenty-three people and wounding hundreds. (Bazaz, 1976: 142)

Zahur ul Haq has commented that, “The fact surfaced as never before that oppressed people of the State were Muslims and the Oppressor, the Hindu Dogra,” (Zahur ul Haq, 1991: 22). It had created anti-Hindu feelings among the Muslims. The Kashmiri Muslims got enraged and attacked Hindu settlements killing a few Hindus and looting their property (Lal, 1995: 44). The civil government failed to control the affairs and for that reason, the army had to take over the responsibility for restoration of peace and order in Kashmir.<sup>12</sup> The government ordered the arrest of politicians such as Sheikh Abdullah and Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas. Rabbani observes, “Their arrest and imprisonment paralyzed the life in Srinagar, Streets were deserted, schools and colleges were closed.”<sup>13</sup> Prime Minister G.E C. Wakefield was dismissed from his post on the charge that he was responsible for engineering all these anti-government activities. Raja Krishan Kaul, a Hindu landlord, was made Prime Minister of Kashmir, to deal with the new situation in the territory.

### **Role of the Ahrar in the Kashmir Movement of 1931**

The Kashmir movement, which started in July 1931, continued until February 1932. The movement occurred in four periods: in July 1931, when Police opened fire and killed many Muslims; in September when some serious rioting took place in the Kashmir valley; in November and changing into “rioting” that engulfed Jammu; and in January 1932, a civil disobedience movement<sup>14</sup> broke out and engrossed Mirpur, Rajouri and Bhimber, in the Jammu Province. The brutal act of the Hindu authorities on 13 July stoked the religious fervour of Muslims in and outside Kashmir. Mohammad Ishaq Khan has recorded, “13 July was a historic day in the annals of Srinagar. The ‘dumb-driven cattle’ raised the standard of revolt. The people never cowed again by punitive police action. Even the women

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<sup>12</sup>Rabbani recalls that Sheikh Abdullah was arrested on 14 July and put behind the bars along with his companions in the Dogra army barrack of Badmi Bagh under the orders of Sutherland, Police Commissioner.

<sup>13</sup> After 13 July incident, reign of terror was unleashed. The city of Srinagar, (the towns, Anantnag, Baramulla, Sopore) were handed over to the Dogra army and spearmen on horses. Every passer by in the street had to sat ‘Maharaj bahadur Ki Jai’ at the gun point. Every resident in the city had to stitch on his shoulder symbol of Dogra flag indicating loyalty to the dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> In November 1931 Sardar Gaquhar Rahmn, one of the leaders of Kashmir, asked the Muslims not to pay land revenue to the Government that created a spirit of defiance among the Muslim peasantry. Mirpur, Kotli and Rajoaori witnessed the acute form of civil disobedience where law and order situation deteriorated.

joined the struggle and to them belongs the honor of facing cavalry charges in Srinagar's Maisuma bazaar" (Khan, 1999: 193). Subsequently, Muslim protests against this brutal act of the government took place in Kashmir and throughout India as well.

The Ahrar party played a significant role in creating awareness among the Muslims in Kashmir State, and the British India and the British Government about the mistreatment of the Dogra ruler of the Muslims in Kashmir. Ahrar party leaders indulged in talks with the Dogra ruler and the Kashmir authorities to resolve issues through dialogue. After failing through peaceful means, the Ahar party adopted physical force and thus started demonstrations, strikes, agitations, and finally the civil disobedience movement was launched to achieve the party's goals.

Sanjay Prakash Sharma recorded that, "One of the first things done by Sheikh Mohammad Abdulla on his assuming the reins of administration of the Jammu and Kashmir was to declare July 13, as the official "Martyrs' Day" 19 all over the State" (Sharma, 2004: 19).

Thus July 13 was declared as the Martyrs' Day; and it was decided to observe 14 August as the Kashmir Day [Comment to author: the last half of this sentence is awkward. I would consider changing this phrase to: "and 14 August was proclaimed Kashmir Day." (Lamb, 1991: 88). On the appointed day there were meetings all over India---in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Simla and other places. Protest rallies were held throughout Kashmir. Fifty thousand people gathered near Jamia Mosque, Srinagar, to protest, despite an official embargo to the protest. The protest marked the official beginning of a struggle of the Muslims of Kashmir for independence from the Hindu domination. Majlis-i-Ahrar seized the opportunity and tried to play an important role in solving the problems of the Kashmiri Muslims.

The Ahrar, which felt betrayed by the Congress, needed some opportunity to show its strength and commitment to the cause of the Muslims. It had played an important part in a movement against Mr. Watekar, a British principal of the Engineering College of Lahore, who had used blasphemous words against Islam and the Holy Prophet during his lecture in a class. Ahrar started an organized movement against that principal, who was forced to apologize (Mirza, 1970: 148). Joseph writes that, "According to some sources their activity in this case was largely due to the fact that they felt they had been compromised themselves in Punjab by attempting to collaborate with the Indian National Congress, and

wished now to regain their popularity by such organized assistance to the Kashmir and Jammu Muslims”(Korbel, 2005: 19).

Sir Mian Fazl-i-Hussain, an outstanding Muslim leader of the Punjab, convened a meeting of the prominent leaders of the province at Simla, on 25 July 1931, to discuss the complaints of the Muslims of Kashmir. The leaders decided to establish a Kashmir Committee, to find the facts about the sufferings of the Muslims of Kashmir and to recommend some solution to their problems. The committee also wanted to bring the serious conditions of the Muslims of Kashmir to the attention of the Indian Government. The Committee was composed of Allama Iqbal, Maulana Syed Habib, Maulana Muhammad Ismael Ghazanavi, and Mirza Bashir-ud-din, etc. Mirza Bashir-ud-din became the committee’s president and Abdul Rahim was its general secretary. Alistar Lamb has observed:

A scarce week after the killings outside the Srinager Central Gaol a Kashmir Committee was formed in British India by leading Muslims including that distinguished Kashmiri Sir Muhammad Iqbal who was strongly supported by the head of the Ahmadiya community at Qadian, Mirza basher Ahmed. Its aim was to alert the Government of India to the situation in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and to secure appointment of an impartial Commission of Enquiry into the background of the crisis. It also resolved henceforth, in the memory of martyrs of 13 July, there should be observed a special Kashmir Day, for which fateful date 14 August was selected. (Lamb, 1994: 90)

The Ahrar leaders did not endorse the constitution of this Kashmir Committee and decided to establish their own party. In fact, they were against Mirza Bashir-ud-Din, who was chief of the Ahmadiya sect. The Ahrar, considering the people belonging to the Ahmadiya sect to be non-Muslims, felt that they had no right to speak for the Muslim community. Secondly, Ahrar leaders considered Ahmadiyas to be planted by the British, and therefore, they felt that Ahmadiya would serve the interests of the British in Kashmir. They also feared that the Ahmadiyas might establish an Ahmadiya state with the aid of the British in Kashmir. According to the Ahrar sources, the Ahrar leaders discussed this matter with Allama Iqbal, who allowed them to launch their separate committee, to solve the problems of the Kashmiri Muslims. Therefore, the Ahrar decided to establish a Kashmir Committee in order to discover the facts about sufferings of the Muslims of Kashmir and to recommend some solution to their problems. After accepting this task, the Ahrar called the meeting of its Working Committee on 18 August 1931 at Lahore. During that meeting, Ahrar passed the following resolution:

1. MAI does not perceive Kashmir agitation as a Muslim versus Hindu problem. However, the conditions of the farmers and labourers of Kashmir are as bad as in other parts of India; therefore, the MAI would welcome the cooperation of those parties who were desirous of solving the problems of the oppressed anywhere, irrespective of their religious feelings.
2. Ahrar has neither any intention of overthrowing the Maharaja's rule nor of establishing a Muslim rule in the state.
3. It is the considered opinion of the Ahrar that the British Government of India is encouraging the agitation in Kashmir for its vested interests.
4. An inquiry committee under the chairmanship of Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar is being set up to investigate the crisis in Kashmir. It will also work out the means to redress sufferings of the Muslims in Kashmir.
5. A Kashmir-week will be celebrated from August 19-25 throughout India.
6. Following the celebration of the Kashmir Week, the inquiry committee will visit Kashmir. If the Kashmir authorities do not give permission to the committee to enter into Kashmir or do not cooperate with it, a civil-disobedience movement against the Kashmir government will be initiated.

Therefore, the Kashmir Committee established by the Ahrar, a separate body set from Mian Fazli-Husain, observed Kashmir Day throughout Punjab. Similarly, the other Kashmir committee under Mirza Bashir also observed Kashmir Day in the same province. The Kashmir Movement of 1931 had made the Ahrar very popular and an important political force in the Punjab. During the first Ahrar Conference held in Lahore on 11 July 1931, Ahrar leaders created a resolution condemning the Kashmiri Hindu officials who had stopped the Muslims from performing their religious duties. The Ahrar party demanded from Maharaja Hari Singh, permission for responsible parties, including MAI, to inquire into the matter and also punish those officials who were responsible for these happenings.

Activities of the MAI for motivating the Muslims of India towards taking an active part in the Kashmir problem greatly expanded after this development. The MAI's activities for motivating the Muslims of India to take action in the Kashmir problem greatly increased after the Ahrar Conference. It was decided that a delegation of the MAI should be sent to Kashmir to inquire about the

incident of 13 July and also to find out about the sufferings of the Muslims of Kashmir. The Ahrar delegation was to leave for Kashmir on 2 September 1931 with Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, who had been made its leader, whereas Chaudhry Afzalhaq, Khawaja Ghulam Muhammad, and Rana Aftab were to accompany him as its members. In the meantime, an agreement between the Maharaja and the political activists of Kashmir, like Sheikh Abdullah and Mirwaiz Yousaf Ali Shah, had been concluded on August 28. The political prisoners were released and the government also promised to fulfill almost all the demands of the leaders. The Ahrar leaders were not happy with the terms of the agreement and preferred to witness the condition of the Muslims of Kashmir by themselves. The "Ahrar deputation" left for Kashmir on 2 September 1931 from Lahore. As the delegation traveled towards Kashmir, the Muslims of the Punjab expressed their deep concern for the Muslims of the Kashmir. The delegation received an unprecedented welcome from the people of the Punjab, all the way from Lahore to Gujranwala. People displayed immense concern about the condition of the Kashmiri Muslims and also endorsed the decision of the Ahrar to visit Kashmir and inquire about the conditions existing there.

The Dogra government decided to extend official hospitality to the Ahrar leaders, lest their visit result in some serious repercussions in Kashmir politics. The Prime Minister of Kashmir, Krishan Kaul, sent his representative to Sialkot to have a word with the Ahrar leaders. Consequently, an agreement was reached between Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar and the Governor of Jammu, who was also the DIG of Kashmir. It was decided that the Ahrar delegation would be permitted to visit Kashmir under the following conditions:

1. No agitation or protest will be made in the Kashmir State
2. The investigation will be impartial.
3. Ahrar leaders will be royal guests.

The Ahrar leaders accepted these terms in the party's Working Committee's session held in Sialkot on 3 September. The Ahrar delegation reached Jammu the next day and was accorded warm welcome by Kashmiri Muslims and the delegation informed them of the reasons for its visit. Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar told them that they had come to help restore peace and order in Kashmir and to solve problems of the Kashmiri Muslims. He asked the Muslims to register their complaints against the government in the State guesthouse, where the government officials resided. Very few people, however, registered their complaints in Jammu. On 7 September, the delegation went to Srinagar. In

Srinagar, the welcome accorded to the delegation by the people, was quite contrary to the delegation's expectations, because not a single figure of importance in the city came to welcome it. Political leaders of Kashmir considered the delegation an intrusion by an alien political party, into their state politics. The Kashmiri leaders also maintained that the Srinagar agreement between the Kashmiri leaders and the Maharaja, whom they considered oppressor, had already been concluded. Some even expressed their doubts about the sincerity of the Ahrar party's aims, as the Ahrar delegation had preferred to become guests of Maharaja instead of the Kashmiri people. Anyhow, the delegation waited on Maharaja Hari Singh and the Prime Minister Hari Krishan Kaul and discussed various matters. After some time, the Ahrar delegation realized that they were not getting the proper response from the Kashmiri Muslims, so they wrapped up their stay and returned home. The Ahrar leaders had mixed opinions about the failure of their visit to Kashmir. Firstly, they held those Kashmiri leaders responsible who had made a weak agreement with the Kashmir government on 30 August, and thus had betrayed their nation. Secondly, they found Kashmiri leaders divided into groups and every group contained people with different aims. Thirdly, British Government had its own interests in Kashmir, due to the changing international scenario, especially due to Russian interests in the region. The Ahrar leaders felt that the British had designs to tighten its grip on Kashmir by destabilizing the Kashmir government. Last, but not the least, they held the Ahmadiya community of Kashmir and India responsible for their failed effort, believing the failure was perpetrated against the Ahrar delegation by declaring them Maharaja's agents. ( Mirza, 1975: 190).

Whatever the real reason for its failure, the Ahrar decided to work independently of Kashmiri political parties and to initiate a civil disobedience movement against the Dogra government. In November 1931, Sardar Gauhar Rahman, one of the representatives of the Muslim leaders of Jammu, had launched the civil disobedience movement, which was welcome by the local peasantry, who were illiterate as well hard hit by the heavy government taxes. They stopped paying land revenue. The Kashmir in the south was linked with the Punjab districts of Jehlum, Gujrat, Sialkot and Gurdaspur (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1993). Huttenback has recorded the activities of the Ahrar Party in these words:

At the same time, Jathas from the Punjab increasingly crossed the borders of Kashmir. They were under the leadership, it was asserted, of Mazhar Ali, head of the Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam-Hind, a political organization founded in the Punjab on the ruins of the Khilafat movement. Its

manifesto supported Indian nationalism, secular democracy, representative institutions and communal harmony. This benign and harmless group was characterized by the Punjab government as the most dangerous body to have taken part in the agitation in the province (Huttenback, 2004: 140)

The Ahrar party had started sending volunteers (*Jathas*) from Punjab to help their coreligionist to get their due share in the Kashmir State, (Sharma, 2004: 58-60) but Ahrar Party gained popularity and strength with the due course of time in the province of Punjab. During the civil disobedient movement, their aid to the Kashmiri freedom fighters created anarchy in the state, particularly south of Kashmir.<sup>15</sup>

Within a week of its initiation, the Ahrar civil disobedience movement had caused a law and order situation to emerge in both the Punjab and Kashmir. In January and February, volunteers, who had turned up in thousands, had made assaults on the military and police. It was alleged that they also damaged the properties of non-Muslims. Virtual anarchy ensued in the area south...). Grover has pointed out that “from the 7<sup>th</sup> of January onwards on the end of the month: practically the whole are comprising the Tehsils of Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber and Rajouri and *leaga* of Poonch was under the mob rule”. Owing to the difficulty of communications and the scarcity of transport faculties, it took some time before military assistance could reach to effected areas from Jammu. Meanwhile, insurgents, who belonged to war-like communities and many of whom were armed, harried the entire area, burning the houses of non-Muslims, destroying their places of worship and making forced conversions, etc.

The situation in Kashmir had been out of control for some time now and Krishna Kaul, Prime Minister, had failed to deal effectively with it. He was, therefore, removed from his post and replaced in February 1932 by a British Lieutenant Colonel, E. J. D. Calvin, who was successful in restoring some peace in Kashmir.(Huttenback, 2004: 142) The Dogra ruler requested, under the provisions of Article 9 of the Anglo-Kashmir Treaty of 1846, that the British Government in India lend the military support to deal with the internal situation of Kashmir.(Huttenback, 2004: 141) Thus, with the assistance of the British government and Indian army, peace was brought to Kashmir, including in the most effected areas of Mirpur, Bhimber, Kotli, etc.

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<sup>15</sup> Against the Raja of Poonch enormous uprising occurred and the ruler had to shut himself in the local fort for several days to escape annihilation.

The British not only passed anti-*Jatha* Ordinance to restrict Ahrar's activities in the Punjab but also decided to provide military assistance to the Dogra ruler of Kashmir, to crush movement in the Kashmir state. No wonder Ahrar condemned the invitation extended by the Kashmir government to the British army into its state; it maintained that such a move would strengthen the British imperialism in India and would weaken the grip of the Dogra ruler in the internal matters of the state.

Resultantly, the Dogra Maharaja constituted the Glancy Commission on 13 November 1931, to investigate the problems in Kashmir and to suggest a remedy for their ills. The Ahrar was against this move and so criticized it strongly. Meanwhile the meeting of the Kashmir Committee of the Punjab took place in Lahore under the presidentship of Sir Fazl-Hussain. Mirza Bashir-ud-din and other members of the second Kashmir Committee did welcome the findings of the Glancy commission but the Ahrar party decided to continue its movement.

By February 1932, Ahrar's activities in Kashmir came to an end. British government in India had imposed restrictions on political activities. The Ahrar also suffered from this ban. Meanwhile, the Maharaja of Kashmir, on the recommendation of the Glancy Commission, had announced certain reforms in Kashmir and a wave of optimism had spread amongst the Kashmiris and consequently they had become bit less interested in extra-constitutional activities. The Ahrar leaders had been arrested and were in prison in Punjab, Kashmir and other provinces. At this stage, the Ahrar party also began to realize that they had played their role long enough for the cause of the Kashmir State

### **Repercussions**

The civil disobedience movement of MAI created awareness amongst the Muslims of India about the problems of the Kashmiri Muslims. The MAI sent Muslims from almost every nook and corner of the province of the Punjab, who in tens of thousands in organized groups (*Jatha*), slipped through the open plains between Punjab and Jammu via Sialko, a bordering area with the Kashmiri state (Montmorency, 1942: 73-74). In fact, the MAI found that thousands of volunteer groups (*Jathas*) presented themselves for entering Kashmir, to force the government there to introduce reforms, including the establishment of a legislative assembly elected by the people. Gawash has observed, "Thus, in spite of the fact that His highness Government came to an understanding with the local leaders who consented to top agitation on receiving certain assurances, the Ahrar party in the Punjab, foiled in the attempt to alive the agitation the State, started



sending *Jathas* through the Punjab into the State territories in order to embarrass the Government.” (Grover, 1995: 46 )

MAI adopted an independent, non-cooperative policy, for putting pressure on the government of Kashmir and tried to bypass the established political leadership of the Kashmir state. As a result, the struggle of the Ahrar for political freedom of the Kashmiri Muslims remained isolated. Nonetheless, the government of Kashmir was fearful of Ahrar’s street power and extended warm welcome to its delegations and time and again invited its leaders to talk about the Kashmir problem.

Kashmir government was forced to invite the British army to control the internal administration and security of Kashmir. It was also obliged to appoint a British Prime Minister in place of its Hindu Prime Minister, Krishan Kaul. Additionally, it requested the Punjab government to deal with the illegal entry of the Ahrar volunteers into Kashmir. The Punjab government introduced some reforms in this connection and Unionist- Ahrar conflict began after its efforts to control Ahrar’s illegal activities.

Kashmir government felt insecure not only due to the political awareness of the Kashmiri Muslims but also from external involvement of the Muslim leaders, particularly from the Ahrar leaders. Maharaja Hari Singh was forced to introduce social, economic and political reforms to meet the demands of the Muslim leaders. Therefore, the Kashmir government established a legislative assembly in which a fair amount of representation was given to the Muslims. Bazaz has rightly observed that:

The 1931 rebellion was a grand success as most of the demands had to be conceded by the unwilling Dogra ruler. The proprietorship of the land lost in Mughal days was restored, the confiscated mosques were handed back to the Muslims, freedoms of expression and association with certain limitations were granted and a Legislative Assembly was established though the majority of its members were nominated by the Maharaja; more opportunities were afforded to the Muslims to enter State services. (Bazaz, 1976: 53)

As a result of the Ahrar’s activities on behalf of the Kashmiri Muslims, the interest and the involvement of the British government in the Kashmir affairs increased significantly. The British government tightened its grip on the Kashmir State by sending its army units to Kashmir. British thus could, ostensibly, also

check the Russian influence in the northern border of India. On one hand, it forced the Kashmiri government to introduce more discipline into its administration and on the other, "The British Government immediately banned the entry of the Ahrar volunteers into the State and took stern action against the Muslim elements which had supported the Muslim agitation in Kashmir."(Kaul, 1990: 30) The Kashmir government also set up an inquiry committee to recommend reforms for Kashmir. The Glancy commission was instituted in this regard and the commission suggested some social, economic and political reforms, which subsequently were introduced by the Kashmir government.

Political consciousness, once developed in Kashmir, continued to flourish. The movement gave birth to great leaders such as Sheik Abdullah, Ghulam Abbas, Mirvaiz Yousaf Ali Shah and others who worked for the religious and political liberation of the Kashmiri Muslims in times to come. All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference emerged from the ashes of the Kashmir movement of 1931.

MAI apparently gained nothing in Kashmir from this movement. It failed to get an important place in Kashmir's political and religious circles. It also failed to establish a strong presence of the Ahrar party in Kashmir. Probably, Kashmir's political and religious circles always remained suspicious of Ahrar's support or help so they refrained from helping Ahrar emerge as a forceful political party in Kashmir.

Despite all these bitter realities, the Ahrar party had played a vital part in generating political awakening in Kashmiri people. It enlightened people and the Government of India about the Kashmir problem. Thereafter, the Kashmir problem emerged as the problem of the Muslims of India and the Hindu Maharaja could no longer pursue its openly anti-Muslim policy but was rather compelled to introduce some reforms to satisfy the Muslims. It put a brake on the activities of the Ahmadiya sect in Kashmir. In fact, Ahrar- Ahmadiya conflict came forth after this movement. Although the Ahrar could not benefit a great deal from its services for the cause of Kashmir, in Kashmir it did, however, emerge as a powerful and influential political party of India, particularly in Punjab.

### **Conclusion**

The condition of the Muslims in Kashmir had, by the early 1930s, reached such a point that it could have resulted in political upheavals on a wide scale. Various events of an explosive nature, such as the arrest and trial of Abdul Qadeer and the

government's violent reaction to it, had created a tinder-box like situation amongst the Muslims in that territory, especially in and around Srinagar.

In the history of the Muslims' struggle for their rights in Kashmir, such events gave rise to such prominent leaders in Kashmir history as Sheikh Abdullah, Ghulam Abbas and Mirwaiz Yousaf Ali Shah, all of whom rendered significant services to the Kashmiri-Muslim cause and later emerged as great and undisputed leaders of the Muslims in Kashmir.

MAI, which was established in December 1929, had initially adopted a pro-Congress stance but later parted ways with it (though for a very short time) and entered the arena of the internal politics of the Kashmir state by openly siding with the Kashmiris' struggle for freedom soon after the 13 July 1931 tragedy. Thereafter, they played quite a prominent role in the struggle.

The MAI differed from the Kashmir committee that was established by Mian Fazl-i-Hussain, by sticking to their belief that the Ahmadiyas might benefit from the agitation in Kashmir and could attempt to, in cooperation with the British, turn Kashmir into an Ahmadiya state. Further, the MAI also maintained that the British government of India was behind the protests, to get a hold on the affairs of the territory of the Maharaja. Therefore, it wanted to help the Muslims of Kashmir in their just cause without dethroning the Hindu ruler.

The MAI resorted to a disobedience movement even after the Kashmiri leaders had entered into a pact with the Kashmir government and had postponed their agitation in favor of reforms, as suggested by the Kashmir government. Their important role in the history of the Kashmir movement of 1931, therefore, was a sterling achievement for the rights of the Kashmiri people and the most important one in the history of that party.

However, before the paper is concluded, two important points need to be considered with regard to the history of the MAI:

Firstly, the entry of the MAI on the side of the Kashmiri people turned that issue from being simply a provincial matter into a political issue of an all-India nature, thus prompting the administration of British India to step in, take notice, and, therefore, attempt to bring about positive changes in their condition. Secondly, the MAI raised the possibility of Kashmir eventually being turned into an Ahmadi-governed state, a group they considered as heretics.

Whereas the MAI soon gave up its agitation regarding the rights of the Kashmiri people, it persisted, however, in pursuing its religious agenda. In fact, they steadfastly pursued that agenda even after the creation of Pakistan and were actively involved in the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims, in 1974, during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime.

In a nutshell, the movement in Kashmir reflected the genuine grievances of the Muslims of Kashmir because it was the Kashmiris themselves, who had started the movement. The MAI entered the political fray in Kashmir, not because they were against the Dogra rule or the Hindus in general, but because they felt compelled to protect the rights of the Muslims in general. The biggest compulsion for their participation in the Kashmir tussle was their fear that the Ahmadiyahs would take over the reins of power in Kashmir. Although the MAI's entry on the side of the Kashmiris also brought the British into the overall picture to protect the Dogra rule, the Dogra rule itself was not the real target of the MAI.

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