

Working Paper Number 19
The Muslim Identity and the Politics of Fundamentalism in
Kashmir

Rekha Chowdhary*

This paper examines the role of religion in the formation and assertion of political identity in Kashmir. The issue has been highlighted by the rise of Islamic militancy in the 1990s. Four aspects are examined: the meaning of Islam for the people of Kashmir; the role of Islam in the formation of Kashmiri political identity; the secularization of this political identity; and the implications for the politics of fundamentalism. The paper concludes that despite the sharpening of their Muslim identity, the logic of Kashmiri politics continues to be governed by the demand for autonomy - a question which remains largely non-communal. The basic issue for the people still remains the right of the political community to determine its own political future.

October 1998

* Commonwealth Visiting Fellow, Queen Elizabeth House

Reader in Political Science, University of Jammu, Jammu, 180004 India

The Muslim Identity and the Politics of Fundamentalism in Kashmir

An attempt is being made in this paper to analyse the factor of religion in the process of formation and assertion of political identity in Kashmir. This analysis assumes importance in the context of fundamentalist trends in the recent politics of Kashmir, especially in the wake of militancy in the decade of nineties. Kashmir's politics has been traditionally hailed as secular in its roots and orientations but in the recent years it has displayed a drift towards Islamization which has affected a consequential space of its politics. A shift seems to have occurred both in the nature of the normative order as well as in the direction of political responses of the people. This shift needs to be explained and placed in the context of politicisation of the community. What specifically needs to be explained is the 'Muslim factor' in the political identity of Kashmir. It is important in this context, to understand firstly, the bearing that the Muslim reality of the Kashmiris has on their political responses and, secondly, the political circumstances in which this reality acquires a communal and fundamentalist form. Such an analysis needs to be based on an understanding of the factors underlying the political identity in general, and the process of political mobilisation of the community, in particular.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the meaning of Islam for the people of Kashmir. The second section deals with the process of the formation of the Kashmiri political identity and the factor of Islam in the process of politicisation of Kashmiris. In third section an analysis of the factors underlying the process of secularisation of the political identity is undertaken and in the fourth section the politics of fundamentalism in the present context is analysed.

I Kashmiri Identity and the Meaning of Islam

For an understanding of the meaning of Islam for the people of Kashmir, it is important to point out three factors that have given a context of specificity to the question of religion - the first factor that relates to the philosophical tradition of Kashmir, the second that points to the Sufi Order as the basis of propagation of Islam, and the third that suggests the continuity in the cultural patterns despite changes at the religious levels. All these factors have led to a distinct conception of Islam that is peculiar to Kashmir.

Kashmir has had a rich philosophical tradition. In the past, it was an important centre of learning and made important contributions to the fields of philosophy, religion, poetry, grammar. 'There was scarcely any branch of learning which the people of Kashmir had not studied and to which they did not make their original contributions.'¹ Its geographical location at a point where a number of countries meet made it open to various kinds of ideas that came along with the travellers, traders and scholars. It was a result of such an interaction of ideas that there evolved an openness within the culture that allowed a relative freedom for expression of varying religious and philosophical beliefs. Such an openness was symbolised in the *Trika* philosophy - an indigenous system of ideas which represented a fusion of ancient Vedic and Buddhist philosophy and culture. *Trika* had, in fact emerged as a form of Kashmiri Shaivism but it was quite distinct from other kinds of Shaiva philosophies as available within the Indian subcontinent. It was characterised by 'absolute monism' and dealt with three vital matters, namely the man, the universe and the Reality. As a philosophical system not only was it open to all human beings despite their religious dispositions, but it also encouraged expression of divergent opinions.

The rich philosophical tradition and the resultant cultural openness had definite implications for the religious orientations of people. Religion, therefore, could never acquire a rigid form in Kashmir. It operated within a culture that was receptive to different ideas and allowed these to flourish without any obstruction. That is the reason that there always existed influence of more than one religion on the lives of people. When Shaivism was dominant one could perceive the influence of Buddhism as well, and when Islam was popularised, the influence of Hinduism continued to exist. The process of transition from one religion to another was not only smooth but also reflected a continuity. In the assimilation of new values, the past was not eliminated but 'was allowed to blend quickly with the new'.² The philosophical and cultural traditions were carried over.

¹ P.N.Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political* (N.Delhi:Kashmir Publishing Company,1954) p24.

² P.N.Kaul Bamzai, *Kashmir and Power Politics : From Lake Success to Tashkent* (Delhi:Metropolitan Book Co., 1966) p17.

Islam that was introduced in Kashmir, did not mark a break in the cultural and philosophical traditions, though it brought about great transformation in its society.³ It was quite in tune with the philosophical way of thinking of Kashmiris. Its appeal for absolute monism fitted into the sensibilities of people. Emphasis on personal salvation and personal devotion 'had a particular resonance for a population familiar with such ideas via Hinduism (especially Shaivism) and some of the devotional aspects of Buddhism'.⁴ Due to its gradual introduction, this new religion took the form of a 'sociological form of acculturation'. As Khan has noted, change over to Islam was 'a gradual and continuous process of social transition than any felt experience of groups in religious terms'.⁵ It had its liberating role for the society for it came to Kashmir at a time when Hindu social order was losing its philosophical basis and was not being able to fulfil the spiritual demands of the people. It was being weighed down by the mass of rituals and superstitions and was getting engulfed by sectarianism.⁶ As a new religion, Islam, therefore, formed the basis of a resurgence movement and assumed its own popular cultural form. As a resurgence movement, it popularised idealistic, sentimental or religious humanism and as a cultural form, it came to reflect its eclectic basis, containing the values and the cultural gains both of Shaivism and Islam.⁷

In laying down the humanist foundations of Islam, the Sufi order played a great role. The Sufis 'exerted enormous influence on the religious and philosophical beliefs of the people, and moulded their mind and set up the ideal of religious tolerance and abiding faith in the grace of

³G.M.Rabbani, *Kashmir: Social and Cultural History* (Delhi:Anmol Publications, 1986) p.142.

⁴ Vernon Hewitt, *Reclaiming the past? : The Search for Political and Cultural Unity in Contemporary Jammu and Kashmir* (London: Portland, 1995) p.12.

⁵ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, 'Six Centuries of Islamisation in Kashmir: Retrospect and Prospect' in Balraj Puri, (ed), *5000 Years Of Kashmir* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1997) p.65.

⁶ G.M.Rabbani, *Kashmir: Social and Cultural History*, p.142.

⁷ P.N.Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political*, p.83.

God'.⁸ The Sufi thinking was a continuity to the mysticism as already in vogue in Buddhism and Shaivism. In the words of Hewitt:

“Sufism with its clear emphasis on practical questions of worship and devotion, and less concerned with the theological and speculative elements within religion, fitted neatly into popular idioms of thirteenth century Kashmir. It also had profound similarities to some Tantric practices. Many Muslims and Hindus became followers of both Shaivic and Sufi preachers. Other notionally Islamic mystics, such as the *rishis*, also had followers from different religions and had profound similarities to Shaivism.”⁹

The *Rishi Order* made a significant contribution towards popularising Islam in its cultural form. This Order was established by Sheikh Noor ud Din, a local Sufi mystic who was influenced by the spiritual ideas of Lalleshwari. Lalleshwari, a Hindu mystic poet had rebelled against the dogmatic traditions of Brahmanism and was spreading the message of humanism. It is in the ideas of Lalleshwari, popularly known as Lalla, and Sheikh Noor ud Din, fondly remembered as Nand Reshi, that one can see the link between the old tradition of Shaivism and the new ideas of Islam.

Reflecting a synthetic and eclectic basis, Islam has acquired a distinct form in Kashmir. So unique has been this form that it has led some even to doubt its authenticity. Such a doubt is cast both in relation to the way of worship as well as in relation to the way of life of the people. Lawrence notes that there is greater influence of the shrine on the life of Kashmiris than the influence of the mosques or the Mullahs.¹⁰ In his opinion, the Kashmiri Muslims never gave up the old Hindu religion of the country. So he observes that ‘Kashmiri Sunnis are only Musalman in name. In their heart, they are Hindus, and the religion of Islam is too abstract to satisfy their superstitious craving, and they turn from the mean priest and the mean mosque to

⁸ P.N.Kaul Bamzai, *Kashmir and Power Politics : From Lake Success to Tashkent*, p.17.

⁹ Vernon Hewitt, *Reclaiming the past?The Search for Political and Cultural Unity in Contemporary Jammu and Kashmir*, p.36.

¹⁰ Walter Lawrence, *The Valley Of Kashmir* (Srinagar:Kesar, 1967) p.287.

the pretty shrines of carved wood and roof bright with its iris flowers where the saints of the past time are buried.’¹¹ It is in the similar vein that Sufi observes:

‘He (Kashmiri) almost justifies to this day the observations recorded by Mirza Haider Dughlat about 1550 A.C. The Mirza said that so many heresies have been legitimised in Kashmir that people know nothing of what is lawful or unlawful. The so-called ‘Pirs’ (spiritual guides) and ‘Sufis’ (mystics) are “forever interpreting dreams, displaying miracles and obtaining from the unseen, information, regarding either the future or the past... Consider the Holy Law (Shariat) second in importance to the True ‘Way’ (Tariquat) and that in consequence, the people of the ‘Way’ have nothing to do with the Holy Law.”¹²

Despite such observations, it may be noted that religion occupies an important role in the life of ordinary Kashmiris. To a substantial extent it also defines their identity. Yet due to the interaction between religion and culture the question of identity for Kashmiris assumes a complex nature. Religion, on its own does not provide the explanatory factor for understanding the *Kashmiri* identity. This identity reflecting the cultural heritage of Kashmir as well as its philosophical and normative order, incorporates the factor of religion, yet is not limited to it.

II Process of formation of Political Identity

The process of formation and assertion of political identity vis a vis the question of religion, has been an intricate one in Kashmir. In fact, there appears to be a vacillating Kashmiri response to the politics based on religion. The initial stage of evolution of political consciousness has been defined by the assertion of the Muslim identity. Yet, the later politics has been pursued, more or less, in secular directions. There has been a reassertion of Muslim identity in the more recent years. Such a vacillating response can be explained with reference to the specificity of the time and the political circumstances. Before we attempt to analyse in

¹¹ *Ibid*, 288.

¹² G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir (From the Earliest Times to Our Own)*, Vol.II (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1949) p.19.

detail such specificity of circumstances, it may be pertinent to note that the assertion of political identity based on religion, does not necessarily indicate the communal basis of politics. Kashmir has not had an extended history of communal tensions or conflicts. There has been, on the whole, a harmony at the intra-societal level. Such a harmony is reflective of the commonality of Kashmiri culture of which Hindus are as much a part, as the Muslims. Yet it is in the sphere of politics that there has been a divergence between the two communities. Such a divergence, to begin with, had been a manifestation of the variation in the socioeconomic conditions of both the communities - a variation that was reflected in their individual process of politicisation as well. While the process of politicisation of the community of Muslims of Kashmir was a result of the consciousness of their situation of deprivation and utter powerlessness, the politicisation of the community of Hindus was a step towards maintenance of their position of dominance. That explains why the political movement that took shape in Kashmir in the decade of thirties had not much enthusiastic participation of Kashmiri Hindus. With the exception of few progressive and vocal Kashmiri Pundits who were catalysts in the process of secularisation of this movement, the mass of Hindus was indifferent to the political movement at best, and opposed to it, at worst.

Assertion of Muslim Identity

The early assertion of the Muslim identity in Kashmir was a consequence of the socioeconomic situation in which the community was placed during the Dogra rule. The recorded history shows that the condition of the Kashmiris during this rule was quite pitiable. There was widespread poverty and the masses, particularly the peasantry and the artisans, faced lots of hardships. Agriculture formed the main source of production for the majority of the rural population, and yet the proprietary rights to land were not enjoyed by them. Whole of the land was considered to have been the property of the ruler. A large number of Kashmiris who were landless labourers were working as the serfs of the absentee landlords while many others, unable to earn sufficiently to meet their requirements and heavily indebted, were compelled to leave the state to work as labourers in the neighbouring Punjab.¹³ The artisans were similarly working under adverse conditions mainly due to oppressive nature of

¹³ *Ibid*, p.825.

taxation. Shawl manufacturing, for instance, was an industry employing large number of Kashmiris - so oppressive were the conditions of the ordinary workers in it that it had resulted in the accumulated discontent. Much before the organisation of the political consciousness, a number of agitations had erupted in this industry. Although, as Zutshi notes, there had emerged in this industry, a small class of the Shia Muslims who were economically dominant and enjoyed the patronage of the state, yet, the condition of work for the majority of the wage workers was really exploitative.¹⁴ Several restrictions were placed on the manufacture of shawls and the industry was heavily taxed. Besides the fact that wool was taxed and the manufacturer was taxed for every workman he employed, there was also an enormous duty on the finished product.¹⁵ The oppressive nature of taxation during the Dogra regime has been recorded by many a historians and scholars. Walter Lawrence, the Land settlement officer who himself was responsible for introducing many revenue-related reforms, noted that almost everything save air and water was taxed in Kashmir.¹⁶ Younghusband notes that the butchers, bakers, carpenters, boatmen, and even prostitutes were taxed. So much so that the poor coolies who were engaged to carry load for travellers, had to give up, as tax, half of their earnings.¹⁷

The Dogra rulers remained quite indifferent to the pitiable condition of the masses and took no pain in alleviating their overall condition. Sufi notes that this regime was totally unsympathetic towards the aspirations of the people and in its attitude towards the valley it was as foreign to it as was the British were to India.¹⁸ It was because of such an insensitive attitude of the Dogra regime that the Kashmiris remained the most backward community in the state. They were among the last to take an advantage of the new opportunities thrown open by the forces of modernisation.

¹⁴ U.K.Zutshi, *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Manohar,1986)

¹⁵ P.N.Bazaz,*The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political*, p.129.

¹⁶ Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p.

¹⁷ Sir Francis Younghusband, *Kashmir*, Quoted in P.N.Bazaz,*The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political*, pp.129-130.

¹⁸G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir (From the Earliest Times to Our Own)*, Vol.II.

It was because of the backwardness of the Kashmiri Muslims on the one hand and the insensitive attitude of the Dogra regime, on the other, that the process of early politicisation came to focus on the Muslim identity of Kashmiris. They perceived their deprivation in the context of their reality as 'Muslims' within the Dogra 'Hindu' regime. For them their backwardness was a consequence of their being subjects of a regime that was discriminatory against Muslims in general. A number of factors, including the pro-Hindu attitude of the administration on the one hand and the relative bias against the Muslims in the matters of employment in the bureaucracy and army, on the other, contributed to the formation of such perceptions. Brecher argues that the policies pursued by the Dogra ruler were so markedly favourable to the Hindus that it was not surprising for the national movement to have developed a communalist orientation in the first stage.¹⁹ It was in accordance with the Hindu interest that the conversion of religion was legally banned and slaughtering of cows was made a capital offence.²⁰ While the rest of the communities were disarmed, the Arms Act allowed the Rajputs, the dominant Dogra Hindu community, to have 'one firearm with sufficient ammunition per family for 'religious ritual and worshipping'.²¹

The objective situation in which Kashmiri Muslims were placed, in comparison to the dominant classes which were mainly Hindus both from Kashmir as well as from Jammu, also led Kashmiris to perceive their deprivation in terms of their religious identity. The main dominant class within the state, was the class of the Dogra Rajputs. The Rajputs, were not only socially the most privileged group in the state but also enjoyed almost a monopoly over the administrative, military and political positions. They owned a substantial portion of the

¹⁹ Michael Brecher, *The Struggle in Kashmir* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1953) p.10.

²⁰ In the context of the pro-Hindu attitude of the Dogra regime, Bazaz has noted:

“Speaking generally ... the Dogra rule has been a Hindu Raj, Muslims have not been treated fairly, by which I mean as fairly as the Hindus...contrary to all professions of treating all classes equally, it must be candidly admitted that Muslims were dealt harshly in certain respects only because they were Muslims.”[P.N.Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Quoted in G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir (From the Earliest Times to Our Own)*, Vol.II.p.823.

²¹ Jyoti Bhushan Das Gupta, *Jammu and Kashmir*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968) p.52.

cultivable land in the Valley, and related to the mass of Kashmiri peasantry as the absentee landlords. The other dominant class of the state was that of the Kashmiri Hindus, commonly known as the Pundits. Kashmiri Pundits had been traditionally associated with the court and were having the potential to gain from the new opportunities made available by the forces of modernisation. They were among the first to take to education and to get themselves equipped for the highly desired as well as the highly competitive state services.²²

Thus, in the early politicisation of the Kashmiris a linkage was established between the backwardness and deprivation of Kashmiris as a community and their religious identity. The prejudice in the attitude of the rulers towards the Kashmiris was interpreted in terms of difference in later's religious identity as compared to that of the rulers and the dominant classes. Sheikh Abdullah has referred to early perceptions of Kashmiris, including his own, as regards the religious identity of the Kashmiris vis a vis the rulers, in his autobiography:

‘I started to question why Muslims were singled out for such treatment? We constituted the majority, and contributed the most towards the state's revenues, still we were continuously oppressed. Why? How long would we put up with it? Was it because a majority of government servants were non-Muslims, or, because most of the lower grade officers who dealt with the public were Kashmiri Pundits? I concluded that the ill-treatment of Muslims was an outcome of religious prejudice.’²³

Sheikh Abdullah belonged to the emerging class of educated Muslims of Kashmir who were asserting what Bazaz²⁴ calls their ‘class rights’. Articulating their political demands in specific-Muslim context, they set the basis for the political movement of Kashmir. Among the most commonly raised demands by them were those related to the employment of the Muhammadens in the state services, improvement in the condition of the education for

²² P.N.Kaul Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir : Political, Social, Cultural (From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, p.645.

²³ Sheikh Abdullah, *Flames of Chinar*, (Translated by Khushwant Singh) (Delhi: Vikas 1993) pp.12-13.

²⁴ P.N.Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political*, p.165.

Muslims, etc. For pursuing their demands in an organised manner they had established the Reading Room Party. It comprised of young educated Muslims of Kashmir. The main purpose of this organisation was to press for more jobs for the educated Muslims. It was to become a precursor to the political movement and had the effect of early politicisation of the educated middle class Kashmiri Muslims.

In this early stage of the evolution of the political consciousness in Kashmir, the religious institutions were to play a significant role. The Reading Room Party worked with the full cooperation of the two *Mir Waizes*, the religious heads of Srinagar.²⁵ The institution of the *Mir Waiz*, representing an altogether new tradition of religion, in accordance with which a single centre - of religious authority as well as of the mass following was created, was actively involved in the process of educating the Muslims. Such involvement provided Kashmir with many of political leaders including Sheikh Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg and G.M. Sadiq. There was also, in this period, a substantial use of the mosques for the political mobilization of the Kashmiris. As a ban was imposed by the Dogra regime on all types of societies, whether social, religious or political, it was from the mosques only that the small class of intelligentsia could involve the masses into the political movement.

It was with respect to the Muslim identity of the people only that the first expression of the mass discontent could be perceived in Kashmir. The mass expression of the people of Kashmir on 13th July, 1931, the day known as the landmark in the political movement in Kashmir, manifested a politicised Muslim identity²⁶. The spontaneous political response that was the manifestation of the deep-rooted discontent of the masses against the Dogra administration

²⁵ Jyoti Bhushan Das Gupta, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p.55.

²⁶ Kashmir's freedom movement is considered to be born on 13th July 1931. The importance of this day lies in its being the first occasion when the spontaneous response of people against the Dogra ruler came to be publicly expressed. The mass protest followed the arrest of an 'outsider' Muslim charged with the offence of inciting local Muslims to massacre the Hindus. As many as 21 persons died as a result of police firing. The day is celebrated in Kashmir as the 'Martyrs' Day'.

had an exceptional but a definite communal content that could be revealed through the communal outburst in Kashmir at that time.²⁷ Such a communal outburst that shook the traditional amity and goodwill between the Hindus and Muslims, was not only unprecedented but was also not to have a parallel even in the later years.

Despite its apparently communal nature, the significance of this first mass political response of Kashmiris cannot be in any way considered to be limited to its communal dimension. One may reasonably argue along with Gias ud-din that the 1931 revolt was, besides a Muslim revolt, also, ‘... an authentic revolt of the people of the state against the political, social and economic oppression by the ruling class and their henchmen. The rebellious elements were the Muslim intelligentsia, the trading class and the mass of the peasantry who were groaning under the feudal rule.’²⁸ This revolt of the people was to take, later, a substantive political and economic form and had to help Kashmiris rise above their Muslim consciousness. Yet in the earlier years, it could not manifest itself except through such consciousness that was getting sharpened in the early twentieth century.

In sharpening the Muslim consciousness of Kashmir, the role of the Muslims outside the Valley was quite significant. Outside the state, there was a lobby of Muslims which was actively involved in voicing the problems of the Kashmiri Muslims. Kashmir, according to Samad, has been, historically a sensitive issue in Muslim Punjab. To a substantial extent this has been due to the influence of the Kashmiri *Biradari*. According to him a large number of Kashmiris had migrated to Punjab due to the natural disasters as well as due to the Dogra oppression. A number of these Kashmiris were also influential people belonging to the *rais* families or class of professionals. These people of Kashmiri origin, in Punjab, in the beginning of the decade of thirties had started mobilizing other Muslims of Punjab and with their help

²⁷ P.N.Kaul Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir : Political, Social, Cultural (From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, pp.657-658.

²⁸Gias ud Din, ‘Kashmir: Islam, Ideology and Society’ in Balraj Puri (ed), *5000 Years Of Kashmir* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1997) p.83.

had initiated an organised campaign in support of the Muslims of Kashmir.²⁹ It was the result of such a campaign that *All-India Kashmir Muslim Conference* was formed. This organisation functioned from Lahore and was actively involved not only in campaigning for the Muslims of Kashmir but also in providing them material and emotional support.

It was the result of the politicisation of Muslim political identity of Kashmiris that their first organised political response was reflected in the form of the *All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference*. Muslim Conference that was established in 1932 clearly manifested the political interest of the Muslims of the state. In the establishment of this organisation, the presumption of a united Muslim response within the state was pursued. This kind of initial political response was inevitable to the educated youth of Kashmir who were exposed to the ideas of Pan-Islamism during their education in the Indian Universities, specifically, Aligarh. It was inevitable for them to find a common cause with the Muslims of the rest of India, specifically, those within the state.³⁰ As the political movement reached its maturity and as the regional political aspirations became more predominant, such a unity across the geographical and cultural boundary of Kashmir, on the basis of religion, could not sustain itself.³¹

²⁹ Yunus Samad, 'Kashmir and the Imagining of Pakistan', *Contemporary South Asia*, 4 (1), (1995). pp.65-77.

³⁰ Jyoti Bhushan Das Gupta, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p55.

³¹It may be noted that the political response of Muslims of Jammu was organised on the lines of the the Muslims of the rest of the northern India and that the influence of the politics of the Muslim League on it was complete. That is the reason that the Jammu Muslims neither could accept the secularisation of the Kashmir politics nor could they continue their affiliation with the National Conference after its conversion from the Muslim Conference. They, in fact, revived the Muslim Conference and through this organisation made all efforts to influence the political responses in Kashmir.

III Secularisation of Political Identity

Despite the fact that the Muslim identity was first to be politicised, it could not define the politics of Kashmir for a long time. Even as the early political responses were evolving on the basis of Muslim identity, a number of political leaders were reflecting their discomfort especially in the context of the sharpening of the communal responses and consequent communal tensions within the state. Such a politics, in their opinion, did not match with the traditional ethos of Kashmir and had the impact of shaking the roots of harmony existing between Hindus and Muslims.³² Sheikh Abdullah personally felt that communal nature of politics in general and the restrictive nature of the Muslim Conference, in particular, had the limiting effect on the very nature and the purpose of the political movement. So he initiated a campaign for widening the base both of the party as well as of the movement. In 1935, he found an Urdu weekly in collaboration with a prominent Hindu leader, Prem Nath Bazaz and used it to make a case for extending the ideological base and the support structure of the movement. It was mainly because of the persisting efforts of Sheikh Abdullah that Muslim Conference later altered its name and amended its constitution to make it possible for 'all the progressive forces in the country' to be rallied under one banner to fight for the achievement of the responsible government. The membership of the National Conference was, therefore, opened to all 'irrespective of their caste, creed or religion'. Soon the leadership of this organisation was to raise a 'National Demand' with the aim of bringing about complete change in the social and political outlook of the people and achieving responsible government.

This second phase of the political movement, under the leadership of the National Conference, provides significant insights into the process of construction of political identity as well as the political responses of the people of Kashmir. Political identity that came to assert itself at this time had not only transcended its narrow religious limitations but also had come to acquire a politically seasoned form. It was a political identity that took the Kashmiri social and cultural ethos as its foundational point, its historical subjugation for centuries under alien political control, as the basis of its collective consciousness and, emancipation of its masses from the

³²P.N.Kaul Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir : Political, Social, Cultural (From the Earliest*

Times to the Present Day, p.658.

economically and politically oppressive systems, as the reference points of its organised resistance. This political identity was also to reflect a sense of 'political community' that had been gradually shaping itself.

The nature of political movement in this phase was quite different from what it was in the initial period - at least in three terms - firstly, in terms of transcendence of narrow limits of elite politics and extension of the mass base, secondly, radicalisation and secularisation of goals underlying the political movement and thirdly, in terms of formation of a concrete ideological and normative structure. The mass base and the radicalisation of politics were, in fact, interlinked processes. As the masses were incorporated into the movement, the political agenda came to reflect their interest. It was due to its successful strategy of mass-mobilisation that National Conference was to reflect a strong rural base in Kashmir, especially within the class of peasantry. It was this rural base of the Conference that led to a substantive socioeconomic content in the political movement.

The linkage of the peasantry with the National Conference is very important for understanding the process of secularisation of political identity in Kashmir, because as we shall see later in this paper, the assertion of the Muslim identity and rise of fundamentalist forces in seventies, has been, to a large extent, a consequence of the erosion of the mass-support of the National Conference, specifically, within the rural peasantry. One of the factors that had contributed to the process of subduing the communal basis of politics in the decade of thirties was the channelisation of the grievances of the mass of peasantry into the radical demand of the 'land to the tiller'. This objective was consciously incorporated into the National Conference politics because Abdullah was clear that it was of utmost importance to divert the minds of the majority of the people from the communal issues. He would rather let them 'concentrate their thoughts and energies on problems which really matter, the economic problems'.³³ Land being one of the major issues for the mass of the economically oppressed and exploited peasantry, politics of land reforms had a definite impact on the political psyche of people. This could be

³³ Wolf Isaac Ladejinsky, 'Land Reform : Observations in Kashmir' in W.I. Ladejinsky

(ed.), *Agrarian Reform as Unfinished Business : the Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1952), p185

perceived from the nature of Kashmir's politics in the decade of forties. With land reforms adding a substantive social content, politics, shedding its communal nature, acquired a socially purposive and politically efficacious nature. Muslim religion of the farmers did not loom any longer as a serious issue as large segments of the farm population had been 'successfully induced to shift their attention from religious to economic matters.'³⁴

[Ladejinsky, 188-189]

In bringing the agenda of the land reform to the forefront of the political movement, the Indian Communists had a role to play. The National Conference was penetrated by the communist influence in the decade of thirties and forties. Communist leaders from Punjab had been actively monitoring the political movement in Kashmir. It was due to their close alliance with the National Conference during this phase of the political movement that not only a left-oriented cadre emerged within the party, but the concrete ideological structure of the party was also chalked out in the lines of the communist ideology. The *New Kashmir Manifesto*, the blueprint of the Conference, was a document that was set in the language that was typical of a communist document. It not only addressed the issue of the land reforms but also the issues related to the right of the workers and other oppressed classes, including the women.

New Kashmir Manifesto was to become a manifestation of the political ethos of Kashmir. As soon as it was adopted by the National Conference, it acquired a stance of the political vision of the community as a whole. The political value of this document was not limited to the specificity of the movement. It was to have a long-term political relevance for people of Kashmir because it provided them a conception of a 'New Kashmir', a Kashmir purged of its miserable past reminiscent of external political control, economic oppression and social backwardness on the one hand and its loss of political and moral dignity, on the other. Transcending the level of the political rhetoric, it was to catch the imagination of people - creating for them, a new meaning of politics.

This new politics, devoid of its narrow limitations of religion, was to create a sense of *political collectivity* that was to inform the political consciousness of Kashmir, for the times to come.

³⁴ *ibid*, pp.188-189.

No more this collectivity was to be recognised as a Muslim collectivity. On the contrary, this was a *Kashmiri* collectivity whose Muslim background was incidental. Its particular context of an indigenous political movement against the Dogra rulers, parallel to the Indian freedom movement as well as to the Muslim politics of the subcontinent, helped evolve within this collectivity, a conception of a distinct and a self-contained entity - that had evolved a singular idea of nationalism - a 'Kashmiri' nationalism.³⁵

In sharpening the Kashmiri political identity, a number of factors contributed, the most important of which was the secularisation of the political organisation itself. Though in its new *Avtar*, the National Conference could not attract large number of Hindu masses either from the valley or from other parts of the state, and though basically its sphere of influence remained limited among the Muslims of Kashmir itself, yet, it was no more restricted in its political agenda. Besides pursuing the goal of reorganisation of the agrarian structure, its political energies were channelised in the direction of articulation as well as the projection of the demand of 'self-rule'. This demand was a corollary of a political discourse around the issue of 'political dignity' that had evolved within Kashmir during this period of the political movement. The 'Political dignity' of Kashmir was projected to be compromised due to the centuries-old external political control over it, of which the Dogra Rule was still a symbol. Dogra rule, in fact was portrayed as a mark of a more severe indignity of the community - not merely due to its externality but because of the way it had come to acquire control over Kashmir through the Treaty of Amritsar on the payment of a paltry sum of seventy-five lakhs of rupees. Projected as a symbol of the enslavement of the community, this fact of history was invoked to raise political emotions and organise a politics of resistance with the aim of reversal of such a history and the assertion of the right of Kashmiris to control their own political destiny.³⁶

³⁵ Balraj Puri, 'Kashmiriyat: The Vitality of Kashmiri Identity', *Contemporary South Asia*, 4 (1), 1995

³⁶ There was no concrete idea formulated by the National Conference as to what would be the exact form of this self rule. On the question as to what was actually being envisaged by the National Conference - whether a form of an independent Kashmir, or an autonomous political unit

The discourse around the issue of 'self-rule', in the decade of forties, secularised the political language of the political movement of Kashmir and brought it at par with the discourse of the Indian freedom movement. Secularisation of Kashmir's politics and an affinity of the National Conference with the Indian National Congress, in fact, were related factors. By this period, there existed not only a close ideological proximity of the Conference with the Congress but also a close association of the leaders as well. The leaders of the Congress like Nehru, Gandhi and Azad had appreciation of the political aspirations of the people of Kashmir and their moral support to the movement, therefore was quite forthcoming.

It was the cumulative effect of the type of politics being pursued by the National Conference -, i.e. - an assertion of the Kashmiri identity, articulation of the demand of popular control over political power, an insistence on the reorganisation of the agrarian structure - that a hiatus developed between the politics of Kashmir on the one hand and the Muslim politics of India (as pursued under the banner of the Muslim League), on the other. The fact that the Muslim league was supportive of the right of the ruler, on the question of deciding the political future of a princely state, made it difficult for the Conference to rely on it for the fulfilment of its goal of the 'power to the people'. The feudal character of the League was also suspect for the Conference leadership. Its vision of redistribution of the land on the basis of the principle of 'land to the tiller' did not fit in the League's ideological or organisational politics. That is the reason that the Kashmiri leaders did not respond to the idea of Pakistan as the homeland of all Muslims. They had their own distinct political agenda in accordance with which they demanded a distinct political space, which was not feasible within Pakistan. Indian leadership, on the contrary, especially Nehru and Gandhi, had shown a sensitivity to this Kashmiri urge for an independent political space. So, there was an inclination on part of the leadership of

within the Indian state - there is lot of ambiguity. Sheikh had nursed the idea of independent Kashmir but at the same time had also expressed his apprehension regarding the possibility of a secure future for an independent Kashmir. Punjabi argues that there were two different shades of opinion about the future of Kashmir, one envisaging independence for Kashmir and the other leaning towards the idea of an autonomous state within the Indian union. See, Riyaz Punjabi, 'Kashmir Imbroglio: The Socio-Political Roots', *Contemporary South Asia*, 4(1), 1995.

Kashmir, especially Sheikh Abdullah, to prefer an association with India - a preference that came out of a consciousness that the ideal choice of having a separate political entity of Kashmir may not be a functional one.³⁷

The politics of Kashmir in the period after the accession revolved around the factor of the assertion of Kashmiri rather than the Muslim identity. The discourse that had evolved during the period of political movement, continued to have its political relevance, in the period after 1947. The political issues that emerged as the most significant for Kashmiris were related to the politics of political dignity, independent political space and the self-rule.

IV Reassertion of the Muslim Identity

It was by the decade of seventies that a politics around the Muslim identity started to assert itself in Kashmir - though even at that time, the space occupied by it was quite marginal. Such a space extended itself gradually during the next decade. By the time Kashmir came into the

³⁷What went on in the mind of Abdullah at the time of accession, gets revealed from the following narrative from his autobiography:

‘ I had my views. If we were to accede to India, Pakistan would never accept our choice, and we would become a battleground for the two nations. My colleagues felt differently. The Muslim League, they said, will always be dominated by feudal elements which are an anathema for enlightened and progressive views. The people’s vision of a ‘ New Kashmir’ will never be accepted by the newly created Pakistan. Chains of slavery will keep as in their continuous stronghold. But India was different. There were parties and individuals in India whose views were identical to ours. By acceding to India, then wouldn’t we move closer to our goal?’

The other choice was an independent Kashmir. But to keep a small state independent while it was surrendered by big powers was impossible. If these powers guaranteed stability to an independent Kashmir, it was another matter.’ See, Sheikh Abdullah, *Flames of Chinar*, p.83.

grip of militancy, this space had enlarged itself substantially - to the extent that fundamentalism became an important reality of the politics of separatism.

The process of reassertion of the Muslim identity in Kashmir is closely linked to the politics of separatism arising mainly out of a widely prevailing deep-rooted discontent against the existing political arrangements. The major reason of discontent has been a divergence between the political aspirations of the political community on the one hand and the content of politics on the other. A distortion in the politics of Kashmir emerged in the early fifties, when the National Conference, the major political agency of the community, lost its autonomy and its politics came to be heavily intervened by the Central government. This had the consequence of a loss of political space that the community hoped to retain for itself in its association with India. Such a political space was very much required for the people of Kashmir because they had been highly mobilized during the decade of thirties and forties and had evolved an indigenous tradition of politics.

The arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 followed by the 'Congressisation' of the National Conference and the jeopardisation of the political autonomy granted to the state under Article 370 of Indian constitution, on the one hand, and the loss of credibility and eligibility of the local political elite pursuing a politics that was essentially devoid of openness, dissent and a sense of popular participation, on the other, resulted in a gradual erosion of mass base of Kashmir's politics.³⁸ Politics, thereafter, started losing its meaning and relevance for common people. As the legitimacy of political power came to be challenged, an extra-systemic political

³⁸ Politics in Kashmir, in the decades of fifties and sixties was severely distorted on various counts. There was a constant threat to the legitimacy of the government as Sheikh Abdullah, the popular and charismatic leader of Kashmir, was ousted and kept in custody, without a trial for a long time. In his absence, the local politics run by Centre-supported political elite acquired the manipulative and corrupt nature. The persistent interference by the Centre in the state politics led not only to loss of the autonomy of the local politics but also to a tradition of undemocratic political practices.

space was created. It was from this space that the politics of the assertion of Kashmiri identity and its search for an autonomous political space gradually came to be organised. A part of the extra-systemic space also came to be communalised.

It is important to note that communal political response always existed in Kashmir's politics - even at the time when radicalisation of the politics had taken place in the decade of thirties and forties³⁹ - only it had a very limited sphere of influence at that time. It had been marginalised as a result of the wider political response of a more progressive nature, generated by the National Conference. It was from this space of marginality, however, that it sought to assert itself during that period but failed to make any impact. After the launching of the New Kashmir Movement, it had even lost its visibility. Such a visibility was regained, to some extent, in the early sixties, during an episode of religious nature which acquired definite political dimensions. It was the episode related to the theft of the 'Holy Relic' from the famous Hazaratbal shrine. The knowledge of this theft led to the manifestation of the Muslim emotions of people on the one hand and the revival of the political importance of clergy in Kashmir after a gap of almost three decades, on the other. This particular episode is important for an analysis of the political psyche of Kashmir as it represents the first major manifestation of a deep-rooted mass discontent that had been accumulating for want of its expression since early fifties. It was during this period that the institution of *Mir Waiz*, that had come to play a political role in the early period of political mobilization in Kashmir, once again came to claim its role in politics. Specifically, it was the rise of Moulvi Farooq, the Mir Waiz of Kashmir, who became the head of the Action Committee organised by various political organisations to

³⁹When the Muslim Conference was converted to the National conference, there was a resistance from a small section of the leadership. Although those who were against its conversion were mainly the Jammu based Muslims, yet there were a few Kashmiris who were also opposed to this step. Later, when the National Conference was split by the Jammu Muslims to revive the Muslim Conference, Kashmiri religious leader, and the initial founder of the National Conference, Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah also joined it. Yusuf Shah, at that time, had a limited hold on certain areas of the city of Srinagar. See, Riyaz Punjabi, 'Kashmir Imbroglio: The Socio-Political Roots', pp.39-53.

coordinate the mass protests during this episode. Later, he launched his own political organisation, the Awami Action Committee. The Awami Action Committee was 'the first genuine Pro-Pakistani group of importance and it attracted militant sections of population, among the youth in particular, especially in parts of Srinagar.'⁴⁰ The leadership of Moulvi Mohammed Farooq had significant implications for the politics of Kashmir because he represented in his position as a religious head, a political tradition, that had originated in the period of evolution of the political consciousness in Kashmir. This tradition, though eclipsed by the rise of the National Conference, nevertheless, was as rooted in the immediate political history of Kashmir as the tradition represented by the National Conference.⁴¹ It, therefore had the potentiality of asserting itself, specifically in the reversal of conditions that had made it possible for the politics to be secularised in the decades of thirties and forties. It was such a potentiality that came to be realised later, as the politics of religious fundamentalism overtook Kashmir in the nineties.

It was in the decade of seventies that some impact of communal and fundamentalist forces could be perceived in Kashmir. Among those who came easily under the influence of the Islamic fundamentalism were the students and young people who were disillusioned by the economic and political realities of the state. Such a disillusionment basically resulted from a lag that existed between the aspirations of the newly emerging middle class and the infra structural facilities available in Kashmir to fulfil them. Kashmir witnessed a relative mobilization in the post-1947 period, especially in the context of agrarian reforms and the expansion of educational opportunities. It has been, as Ganguly notes, an asymmetry between mobilization and accommodation that has resulted in the middle-class discontent. Mobilization, he argues, 'set off other expectations and demands. Young Kashmiris acquired a modicum of education and became aware of improved economic prospects. They were no longer content to seek employment in the traditional sectors of economy, namely, the

⁴⁰ Balraj Puri, 'Jammu and Kashmir', in Myron Weiner (Ed), *State Politics in India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) p.235.

⁴¹ Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir : A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1992) p.334.

handicraft industry or the tourist trade...'⁴² The result has been a pressure on the governmental jobs. Even in the rural areas, there has been enormous demand for the governmental and the semi-governmental jobs both due to the money as well as the status involved with these.⁴³ Inability of the state to absorb the youth in the state services, inevitably resulted in their indignation which came to be compounded many times due to the denial of democratic channels of expression of their resentment.

It was in the context of the prevailing discontent that many a young Kashmiris got attracted to the appeal of Jamat - e - Islamia and its student organisation, Jamat - e - Tulba, which were actively engaged, in the decade of seventies, in giving a fundamentalist turn to Kashmir's politics of discontent. Discontent of similar nature, in the period of 1930s, had been channelised in the direction of left-oriented politics of the National Conference but now people 'were more inclined to seek security in communal roots. Among the Muslims the fundamentals of Islam became increasingly the basis of political identification...'⁴⁴

Before making its presence felt in a big way, Jamat had been generating its sphere of influence through the network of schools attached to mosques, known as *Madrasas*. These schools have been responsible for the Islamisation of rural society and ingraining a secessionist ideology in the common sense of the youth in particular.

The influence of Jamat increased in Kashmir in the decade of eighties. By the 1983 Assembly elections, the presence of Jamat could be felt. Though it was not able to make electoral mark, yet it had proven its capability of catching crowds. As people got more and more

⁴² Sumit Ganguli, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of war, Hopes of Peace*, (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Press and Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.74.

⁴³ Pir Gias ud-Din, *The Historical Destiny of the Kashmir Insurgency*, (Jammu: Jay Kay Publishers, 1997) p.73.

⁴⁴ Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir : A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 310-311.

disillusioned by the political scenario, it came to further consolidate itself.⁴⁵ Alastair Lamb describes the post-1983 period in Kashmir as the first phase of a 'general Islamic rebellion'. Incidents like the clash between the supporters of the National Conference and supporters of Jamaat during a cricket match between India and West Indies, were, in his opinion, more than a clash of parties on specific issues but a manifestation of an increasing disorder, of which the 'Muslim Fundamentalism' was a prominent feature.⁴⁶

The influence of the fundamentalist organisations, especially in the rural areas, can be directly linked to the failure of ideology in Kashmir's politics. The politics of land reform which had been successful in weaning away the role of communal factors in Kashmir's politics in the decade of thirties, failed to sustain itself after the initial achievements. After the radical start - whereby the big landed estates were abolished, the ceiling was introduced, compensation to the expropriated landowners was denied, and land was redistributed to the tiller - the agenda of land reforms remained incomplete. Not only there remained a number of anomalies at the level of implementation but also at the level of legislation. The net result of such anomalies has been an economically divided society, with a large gap between the neo-rich classes both in the urban and the rural areas on the one hand and the common peasantry on the other.

⁴⁵Lamb refers to the enormous influence of the Iranian Revolution and emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini on the world stage, on the Islamic politics of Kashmir. In his opinion, the Jamaat to begin with had been seeking an Iranian style solution to Kashmir's problem. By 1983, however, 'the Iranian parallels were probably of little significance; and the Jaamat-i-Islami remained closely associated with similar fundamentalist movements in Pakistan. One of its leaders, Maulana Sa'aduddin, on a visit to Pakistan in 1983, however stressed that the aim of party was not so much to bring about union between the state of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan (which it neither disapproved nor approved) but to secure the implementation of the will of the Islamic Kashmiri people: in other words, some forms of plebiscite.' [1992:333-334]

⁴⁶Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir : A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1992) p.329.

It is basically the erosion of the peasant base of the National Conference which changed the character of Kashmir's politics. By the mid eighties, a substantial segment of peasantry had come under the active influence of Jamat.⁴⁷ As the peasant support structure of the National Conference was getting shrunk, that of the Jamat was getting extended. Though it never could attain mass appeal or even mass influence, yet the cadre of Jamaat could acquire a capability to mobilize people in villages.

It was because of the political space created by the Jamat for the communal and fundamentalist politics that a number of political and social organisations of communal nature emerged on the scene by mid-eighties. Among the most visible among these were the Kashmir Liberation Front, the People's League, and the Islamic Student Front. In 1985, it was the Muslim United Front (a collection of Islamic and secessionist parties) that emerged as a force to reckon with. It was a combination of thirteen parties that had proliferated in Kashmir in the context of the emerging Muslim politics and it was led by leaders like Qazi Nissar Ahmed, Prof. Abdul Ghani, Abdul Ghani Lone, and Ghulam Qadir Wani.⁴⁸ Though it might not have had the potentiality to occupy the mainstream of political power, yet it could have made an impressive beginning - had it been given a fair chance to face the electorate in the Assembly election in 1987. Its failure to win the expected number of seats was to ultimately lead to collapse of the very political processes in a short period of two years.

The fundamentalist politics in Kashmir that came to assert itself in the decade of nineties, came to reflect itself in many forms. At one level, it was manifested in the mushroom growth of the fundamentalist militant organisations, the most prominent of which have been the Hizb-ul Mujahiddin, the Allah Tigers, the Dukhtar - e - Millat, Harkat ul Ansar, etc. The preeminence of these organisations in the militant politics, especially the Hizb, has been an evidence of the ascendancy of the fundamentalist organisations over those organisations which have had more

⁴⁷ Peer Ghyas-Ud-Din, *Understanding the Kashmir Insurgency* (Delhi : Anmol, 1992)

p.96.

⁴⁸ Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir : A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1992) p.334.

secular nature of politics- like the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. These organisations perceive the political reality of Kashmir in terms of the Muslim identity of its people and hence support either Kashmir's merger with Pakistan or an independent status with the declared Islamic society.

At a second level, therefore, the fundamentalist politics has been manifested in varied efforts towards Islamisation of the society. The agenda to create an Islamic society along with that of the secessionist politics, was pursued by a number of militant organisations in the early nineties. During this time, all those practices which were perceived to be anti-Islamic were banned by one or the other militant outfits. The bars, video parlours, cinema halls, liquor shops etc. were forced to be closed down. Women were asked to veil themselves. It was in the pursuance of the fundamentalist politics that the political leaders who had attained a reputation of pursuing a secular ideology were specially targeted. The composite culture of Kashmir came to be severely eroded as an environment of hostility towards the non-Muslim population of the valley was created by the fundamentalist organisations. The exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir to Jammu and other parts of India, has been a result of such a hostile environment.

To Conclude

The beginning of the modern political movement in Kashmir, in the opinion of Puri, is traced to a religious issue, as a protest by the Muslims of the state against the desecration of the holy Quran by a police officer in 1931. But as the movement culminated in the demand for the transfer of power from a non-Kashmiri ruler to the people, and the transfer of land from landlords to the tillers, it acquired a wider Kashmiri perspective.⁴⁹ In channelising the political discontent from communal response to the political issues of substantive content, both the leadership and ideology had an important role to play. It was Sheikh Abdullah who had been mainly responsible for moulding the direction of politics, giving it a secular and radical shape. He was successful in controlling the Islamic component of Kashmir's politics in the later period as well. Even when he was not in power, he could check the communal influence

⁴⁹ Balraj Puri, 'Kashmiriyat: The Vitality of Kashmiri Identity', p.56.

because he still represented a vision of *New Kashmir*. Though this vision had become quite compromised by the mid seventies when he came back into power, yet he continued to symbolise the political tradition that had taken shape in the forties. His death created a void in Kashmir's politics- a void both of leadership as well as of political tradition. This void took place at a time when politics in Kashmir had been completely distorted and its ideological vision was almost totally discarded. One of the major implications of such a distorted nature of politics for Kashmir therefore was a widening of space for communal politics and assertion of communal political identity of masses - ultimately making it feasible for the fundamentalist forces to sway the politics of discontent.

It is important to analyse the long-term impact of the fundamentalist politics on the political psyche of Kashmir on the one hand and on the question of political identity, on the other. It cannot be ignored that the politics that took a turn in the early seventies has made a space for the Islamised political responses. Not only there has been a sufficient assertion of the Muslim political identity but there has also been a relative erosion of the secular political ethos. Yet, it is difficult to argue that fundamentalism has completely overtaken the politics of 'Kashmiriyat' or that the politics of Kashmir in its totality has come to reflect the Muslim identity of Kashmiris. Puri has sought to explain the Kashmiri identification with the Muslim politics as a reaction of any other Muslim community perceiving a threat to their identity from diverse directions. He has expressed the hope that the Kashmiri people would not submerge their Kashmiri identity in the name of Islam. This hope to a large extent, is also reflective of the political reality of the time as well. This political reality can be perceived with reference to the multiple political responses available in Kashmir. Of these responses, the communal and fundamentalist response is merely one. The other responses are not necessarily articulated in communal terms. There are political organisations, both within the systemic and extra-systemic space that seeks to raise the political issues within the secular framework. The basic issue for the people still remains the right of the political community to determine its own political future. The logic of Kashmir's politics, therefore, continues to be governed by the demand of 'self-rule' and the political responses of people of Kashmir are expressed mainly in terms of 'Azadi' or 'autonomy'. Though the communal and fundamentalist forces have sought to direct this issue in terms of an Islamic future for Kashmir, yet the mainstream

political response to the question of self-rule, remains, more or less, non-communal. People of Kashmir see their political future mainly in terms of a 'political community of Kashmiris'. Though as a process of sharpening of their Muslim identity, this political community may choose to perceive itself as the 'political community of *Kashmiri Muslims*', yet the fact remains that in this political community of Kashmir Muslims there is a definite emphasis on the *Kashmiri* component of the identity. For the people of Kashmir, their Kashmiri reality is still predominant.