



Exploring the role of *Khalid* in socio-cultural and political awakening in Jammu and Kashmir (1938-1947)

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Abstract

Numerous newspapers emerged in Jammu and Kashmir after the 1930s, and their significance, commendable nature, and lasting impact cannot be overstated. During that period, running a newspaper was considered an honor rather than a lucrative profession, and those involved often led a financially precarious existence. One such influential publication was the *Khalid*, a popular, secular, nationalist, and socio-cultural newspaper in Urdu. It played a courageous role in the Kashmir freedom movement and was founded by Khawaja Sadr-u-din Mujahid, a powerful and impactful writer. The pen, symbolizing a potent force transcending the might of the sword, manifested its influence through the dynamic and fearless editorials featured in *Khalid*. The newspaper's message resonated widely, awakening the masses in their own language and significantly contributing to the political mobilization of society, a crucial aspect that this paper aims to highlight.

Keywords: *Khalid*, Jammu and Kashmir, newspaper, people, dogra rule, political awakening

Introduction

The ascension of Dogras to the monarchical rule of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, as formalized by the Treaty of Amritsar on 16th March 1846, marked a significant turning point in the region's governance. This treaty, colloquially known as the Treaty of Amritsar, had far-reaching implications, particularly affecting the predominant Muslim community in Kashmir. Notably, P.L. Lakhanpal contends that the "sale-deed of 1846" essentially subjected a densely populated Muslim state to Dogra rule, characterized by descriptions of despotism, tyranny, and sectarianism^[1]. This shift in authority had profound and lasting effects on the socio-political landscape of the region. In the era of Dogra autocracy, governance in Jammu and Kashmir was characterized by centralized authority vested in a singular figure—the Maharaja. Within the feudalistic structure of the state, the Maharaja embodied the core essence of governance. His dictates not only held the force of law but were also perceived as morally and legally binding, compelling unequivocal submission from the populace. Under this regime, the people experienced a profound sense of oppression, misery, and cruelty, rendering them powerless in the face of their circumstances^[2]. There was a complete absence of political freedom in the state, and civil liberties, including freedom of the press and the formation of associations, were entirely prohibited. The mere act of submitting an application to establish a press was perceived as a rebellious undertaking^[3].

In this context, the press emanating from the region of Punjab assumed a pivotal role in providing essential support to the Kashmiri populace. It served as a catalyst for instilling political consciousness and acted as a conduit for articulating their grievances. Kashmiris, who had hitherto felt estranged within their own homes, found a medium of expression through the Punjab press, enabling them to narrate their tales of suffering and adversity to a global audience. These publications systematically disseminated information concerning the state, functioning as conduits of political awareness and enlightenment upon entering the region^[4]. Numerous daily and weekly publications

originating from Punjab undertook the noble task of championing the cause of the Kashmiris. Noteworthy among these were publications such as the *Kashmir Gazette*, *Kashmiri Magazine*, *Panj-i-faulad*, *Tarikat*, *Rehnuma-i-Kashmir*, *the Safir*, *the subh-i-Kashmir*, *Bahar-i-Kashmir*, *Hamadrd Hind*, *Kashmir*, *the Kashmiri Musalman*, *the Mazlum-i-Kashmir*, *Maktub-i-Kashmir*, and others^[5]. These periodicals played a significant role in amplifying the voices of the Kashmiri people, contributing to a broader discourse on their predicaments and aspirations.

Breaking the Ice

The introduction of modern education in the region served as a transformative force, dismantling the formidable barriers that had long separated the local society from the global community. This surge in modern education and progressive ideologies triggered a renewed wave of socio-cultural, economic, and political consciousness among the populace. Individuals became increasingly aware of their rights and privileges, particularly among the younger generations, who embraced a newfound enthusiasm for constructive and progressive ideas rooted in Western political thought, justice, and liberty. This heightened awareness was not an isolated phenomenon but rather part of a broader dissemination of liberal concepts, primarily conveyed in English. The catalysts for this intellectual shift were manifold, with political movements spearheaded by the Indian National Congress, liberation movements in various Indian states, and unfolding political developments in Turkey, Ireland, and Egypt contributing significantly. Moreover, these transformative ideas were actively promoted by various sources^[6]. Consequently, the press in the region experienced notable positive outcomes, marking a pivotal moment where these socio-cultural and political progressions created fertile ground for the growth and expansion of the press in Kashmir.

In the waning years of the third decade of the 20th century, the political landscape of the region underwent rapid and tumultuous changes. A prevailing sense of unease and discontent permeated Kashmir, marked by a general

restlessness. Muslims found themselves in a state of socio-political backwardness, a condition exacerbated by stringent restrictions on press and public platforms. This prohibition hindered Muslims from establishing any form of association independently, necessitating prior authorization for assembling or delivering speeches. The oppressive environment extended to the realm of media, as Muslims were precluded from initiating newspapers, journals, or magazines ^[7]. Attempts to articulate their grievances in British Indian publications were met with government scrutiny, leading to the identification and subsequent repression of individuals responsible for such expressions. Additionally, the authorities barred the entry of these publications into the State, further stifling the dissemination of dissenting perspectives ^[8].

In the historical narrative of Kashmir's political consciousness and its struggle for freedom, the 13th of July, 1931, emerges as a pivotal milestone. On this day, a tragic event unfolded, wherein a considerable number of individuals fell victim to the gunfire unleashed by Dogra soldiers. The Muslim population harbored aspirations for liberation from the oppressive Dogra Raj, awaiting a catalyst to ignite their fervor. The incident on July 13, 1931, served as precisely that catalyst, galvanizing a renewed sense of awareness and unity among the people. This momentous day symbolized the initial stride towards the pursuit of freedom for Kashmir ^[9].

In response to the inefficacy of various measures employed by the Dogra Government to suppress the burgeoning unrest, the Maharaja was compelled to acknowledge the public discontent. Seeking to restore control, he instituted the Glancy Commission on November 12, 1931. The commission, spearheaded by B.J. Glancy, a European official affiliated with the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India, included representatives from Kashmir, namely Ghulam Ahmad Ashai and Prem Nath Bazaz, and from the Jammu province, Choudhary Gulam Abbas and Lok Nath Sharma ^[10]. The findings of the Glancy Commission were officially presented on April 25, 1932. The commission aptly recognized the presence of legitimate grievances demanding immediate attention. Consequently, amendments were introduced to the Press Act, aligning it with the corresponding legislation in British India, as part of an earnest effort to address the identified issues ^[11].

In response to the burgeoning revolutionary sentiments prevalent among the youth, Maharaja Hari Singh astutely acknowledged the imperative to rescind the absolute prohibition on newspapers. Consequently, in April 1932, aligning with the recommendations of the Glancy Commission, he enacted "The Press and Publication Act," thereby authorizing the publication of newspapers within the State ^[12]. This newfound liberty for the press precipitated a notable surge in the number of newspapers in Jammu and Kashmir, fostering the emergence of several influential publications, with the *Khalid* newspaper being particularly noteworthy.

Role of *Khalid*

The *Khalid* was started by the famous freedom fighter and National Conference leader Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid in the month of June 1938 ^[13]. Prior to the establishment of *Khalid*, Mujahid had previously launched two newspapers, namely "Bekar" and "Dehqan." The weekly publication *Bekar* originated in 1936, emanating from Srinagar under

Mujahid's editorial guidance. Historical accounts, as conveyed by Rashid Tasir, elucidate that during the nascent stages of the freedom movement, Sadr-ud-din Mujahid, in consultation with Maulana Syed Masoodi, shared the challenges of unemployment and poverty that he encountered. Maulana Masoodi advised him to start a newspaper named *Bekar*. While *Bekar* resolved Sadr-ud-din Mujahid's unemployment issue, over time, people began to address him as *Bekar Sahib*, a term he did not appreciate ^[14]. After consistently publishing the paper for a year, Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid voluntarily closed *Bekar*. Following the closure, he submitted a declaration to the District Magistrate, proposing a new paper named *Jihad*. However, the District Magistrate denied permission, arguing that the term *Jihad* might incite the public, posing a potential threat to peace. Faced with the rejection, Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid submitted another declaration to initiate a paper named *Dehqan*, which received approval. However, the content of *Dehqan* displeased the Chief Secretary, Pandit Ram Chandra Kak, leading to the paper's subsequent ban ^[15].

Upon the closure of *Dehqan* following government directives, Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid took the initiative to establish another newspaper, named *Khalid*, in 1938. This publication swiftly evolved into a prominent mouthpiece, initially for the Muslim Conference and subsequently for the National Conference. It served as a vital conduit for disseminating the policies and agendas of these political parties to the broader populace ^[16]. Remarkably, Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid faced immediate arrest on the very day the inaugural issue of *Khalid* was published. *Khalid*, from its inception, undertook the task of unraveling the actions of the Maharaja Hari Singh-led government, critically analyzing its policies. Consequently, the newspaper found itself subjected to governmental censure, leading to its inclusion in the official blacklist on multiple occasions. This underscored the paper's persistent commitment to uncovering and challenging the perceived irresponsibility of the ruling administration ^[17].

The pivotal role played by the newspaper *Khalid* in fostering and cultivating nationalist sentiments within the state of Jammu and Kashmir is noteworthy. Allying itself with entities like the Muslim Conference and subsequently the National Conference, *Khalid* effectively disseminated principles of responsible governance, liberty, and democratic institutions among the general populace. Serving as a potent instrument, *Khalid* facilitated the widespread transmission of their distinctive programs, agendas, and strategies of resistance to the masses, concurrently contributing to the establishment of organizations with a robust popular foundation. From its inception, *Khalid* ardently advocated for a representative and responsible government in the state. It is imperative to highlight that, owing to prevalent educational limitations, the people of Kashmir were largely unfamiliar with modern political concepts such as democracy and liberty. Their adherence to the divine origin theory, wherein rulers were perceived as representatives of God without any role for human agency in their selection or removal, posed a considerable challenge. Consequently, the task of educating the populace about the evolving political discourse at both national and international levels was a formidable undertaking. In this context, *Khalid* played a substantive and constructive role, bridging the gap between political ideologies and the local populace.

In an article discussing the concept of Democracy, *Khalid* asserted that “the pioneer of democracy was Plato, who outlined the theoretical framework of the government system in his work ‘The Republic.’ He views the government as the protector of the people’s well-being.” The article goes on to highlight the advantages of democracy, emphasizing that it constitutes a form of governance created by the people for themselves. In such a system, diverse groups can coexist harmoniously, share common interests, and hold the government accountable to the people. Every individual is considered equal, regardless of factors like caste, color, creed, gender, or economic status. The populace has control over leaders, and if the government falters, an alternative can be elected [18].

The paper consistently targeted the younger demographic, aiming to instill a heightened political consciousness among them. In an article titled “Grasp the Swiftness of Time and Your Responsibilities: A Message to the Youth on the Occasion of Eid,” *Khalid* strategically delivered its message, particularly tailored to the youth, during the auspicious occasion of Eid. The article urged young readers to contemplate global events and, in light of prevailing circumstances, cautioned against apathy and inertia. Instead, it advocated for emulation of the proactive efforts undertaken by the youth in prosperous nations striving for national dominance and independence. *Khalid* underscored the imperative for readers to engage in decisive action, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding their positions before the relentless march of time renders their achievements unattainable [19].

The Dogra rulers implemented a policy of communalization within state services, resulting in a significant underrepresentation of Muslims in these roles [20]. *Khalid*, through its publications, consistently emphasized the stark lack of Muslim participation in the state apparatus. An article titled “The Only Solution to Proper Representation of Muslims in State Services” underscored the significance of employment not merely as a means for livelihood but as a crucial factor in empowering a community within the government system. The paper articulated that addressing the issue of unemployment is paramount for the overall development of the country, emphasizing the imperative of inclusivity and equitable distribution of opportunities among diverse communities. Highlighting the discrepancy in Muslim representation in government services, the article emphasized that community empowerment hinges on proportional inclusion within the administrative apparatus. Despite Muslims constituting over 80 percent of the state's population, their presence in government services was notably absent. While acknowledging the necessity of minority reservations, the paper cautioned against an excessive allocation that might inadvertently relegate the majority of Muslims to a minority status [21]. To substantiate its claims, *Khalid* presented statistical data on the underrepresentation of Muslims in various state departments, offering a critical assessment of the government’s role in perpetuating the communalization of state services [22].

During the period under investigation, agriculture functioned as the predominant economic cornerstone, supporting the livelihoods of the majority of the populace comprised mainly of peasants engaged in arduous labor within the fields. Regrettably, the agrarian sector bore the brunt of persistent impoverishment, primarily attributable to

an excessively burdensome taxation regime. This situation led to the destitute state of the peasantry, as individuals were born into debt, lived their lives in debt, and ultimately died in debt. The administration, in its exploitation of the peasantry, resorted to egregious acts of exploitation, subjecting the submissive peasants to a cycle of destitution and, at times, even starvation. The imposition of exorbitant taxation policies by the State further aggravated the agrarian crisis, as nearly everything, excluding air and drinking water, was subjected to heavy taxation [23].

In an article titled “Blood Disorder,” the *Khalid* contended that human life was intricately connected to blood, asserting that all human maladies, ranging from severe afflictions such as dysentery to minor ailments like colds, could be traced back to disorders within the circulatory system. The metaphorical parallel drawn between the indispensable nature of blood to individual well-being and the pivotal role of farmers in the national context underscored the publication’s thematic emphasis. Much like an individual’s vitality hinged on the integrity of their blood, the sustenance of a nation was posited as reliant upon the agricultural sector, with farmers occupying a role akin to the lifeblood of the country. The prevailing atmosphere of despair, sorrow, and anxiety within the country was attributed to the perceived failure and decline of the agricultural sector. Drawing a parallel between the futility of treating diseases without addressing underlying blood disorders and the impracticality of alleviating the country’s suffering without addressing the well-being of its farmers, the article established a compelling analogy. Furthermore, the paper underscored the exacerbation of the agrarian crisis in the state by the imposition of exorbitant taxation by the government, shedding light on a critical factor that contributed to the challenges faced by the agricultural community [24].

The periodical also directed attention towards the prevalent issue of inflation impacting the inhabitants of the State. In an article entitled “Curb the Increase in Prices,” the publication earnestly implored the Governor to address this pressing matter. As outlined in the publication, the escalating prices of vital goods precipitated severe consequences, disproportionately affecting both urban and rural populations, who faced the looming threat of famine. The newspaper recounted a recent tragic incident in Qalamdanpura, Srinagar, wherein an indigent individual resorted to suicide due to the insurmountable challenge of coping with the soaring market prices. The article issued a solemn caution, asserting that unless governmental intervention was expeditiously undertaken to regulate the prices of essential commodities, a growing number of individuals would find themselves compelled to resort to similarly drastic measures. This poignant narrative underscored the urgency for effective governmental measures to alleviate the economic hardships faced by the populace [25].

Widespread corruption permeated every facet of the administration during the specified period. The *Khalid* newspaper consistently voiced criticism against the prevalent corruption within government departments. Beyond the imposition of taxes, the populace faced an additional burden in the form of various perquisites, commonly referred to as *rasum*. Consequently, the agrarian community found themselves obligated not only to relinquish a portion of their agricultural yields to diverse

officials but also to share their poultry, livestock, wealth, blankets, ghee, fodder, wood, timber, and essentially every facet of their production. The *Khalid* publication implored its readership to respond to corrupt officials through collective wisdom and unity. It underscored the imperative nature of rejecting the acceptance of oppression, asserting that tolerating oppression only serves to empower the oppressor, thereby exacerbating the prevailing conditions of oppression. The paper's admonition emphasized the need for a resolute stance against injustice, recognizing that acquiescence to oppression only serves to perpetuate and amplify its deleterious effects ^[26].

During the period under examination, the region of Jammu and Kashmir was confronted with the challenge of communalism. The *Khalid* played a pivotal role in championing the ideals of secularism and advocating for the unity of Hindus and Muslims. Serving as a proponent for a pluralistic cultural ethos and the principle of secularism, the publication critically addressed the adverse repercussions of communalism. It identified a communal mindset as a perilous trend detrimental to the broader societal well-being, irrespective of individual's caste or creed. The publication underscored the imperative to recognize the diverse religious communities in Kashmir, encompassing Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, each with their distinct Prophets, Gurus, and Avatars. It posited that effective navigation of any situation necessitates a conscientious and respectful consideration of every community ^[27]. *Khalid* fervently advocated for secularism as a transformative mechanism aimed at mitigating social and sectarian conflicts, thereby fostering harmonious relationships among the varied communities within the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion

This research paper sheds light on the transformative period in Jammu and Kashmir from 1938 to 1947, emphasizing the instrumental role of the *Khalid* in shaping socio-cultural and political consciousness. The *Khalid*, with its commitment to unraveling governmental actions and promoting responsible governance, emerged as a potent force in disseminating progressive ideologies. The paper's focus on democracy, youth engagement, issues of representation, agrarian challenges, economic hardships, and corruption collectively contributed to a nuanced understanding of the region's multifaceted struggles. *Khalid* published numerous articles critiquing state policies, advocating for concepts such as nationalism, freedom, representative government, secularism, liberty, justice, democratic institutions, and independence. Moreover, *Khalid* played a crucial role in advocating for secularism as a unifying principle, fostering an environment of mutual respect among the diverse religious communities in Jammu and Kashmir. The research underscores the significance of newspapers as agents of change during a critical juncture in the region's history, emphasizing the enduring impact of the press in shaping socio-cultural and political landscapes.

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