

# Resistance movements and poetry: A case study of movement against Dogras of Jammu and Kashmir and Role of poet Abdul Ahad Azad

Kowser Ahmad Ganai

Assistant professor, History, GDC Boys Anantnag, J and K, India  
Email - lectkowsar@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Poets like philosophers have to be situated in their own political, social and economic times because they too are products of their own times (history-specific) and have versified the then existing conditions. One such poet of Kashmir was Abdul Ahad Azad, who not only portrayed the then condition of Kashmir but urged his countrymen to rise from deep slumber and free themselves from the centuries old subjugation. His poetry was revolutionary in tune and content and was firm believer in power of poetry in mobilising masses against the exploitative political and socio-economic order. His poetry besides inculcating patriotism (cultural renaissance) among Kashmiris, envisaged the future course of political order as well. His role as a poet in movement against Dogras cannot be underestimated.

**Key Words:** Politicisation, marginalised, stirring, nationalism, didactic, mathnavi, slavish mentality, slave syndrome, oppressed, pauperised, exactions, avaricious, lament.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The role of philosophers in politicising masses and thereby changing the course of history has been the dominant narrative in interpreting major revolutions. The role of poets in politicising of masses has been marginalised. Poetry, in fact is a powerful means of giving vent to collective expression and collective trauma. Poetry was always engaged in political resistance, besides engaging with other pursuits of life. Percy Bysshe Shelley in his 'defence of poetry' said that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Poets and their poetry in fact have given voice to the oppressed and downtrodden, exposed the oppressors, challenged the authority, infused new hope among despondents and thereby acted as agents of transformation.

Indian sub continental history is replete with examples of great poets who not only influenced the wider circle of people but were able to mobilise them behind their ideology. During the anti-colonial struggle of India, the poetic verses played a vital role in not only arousing nationalism but even mobilising people for action. The poetic verses besides stirring the souls of Indians got so deeply embedded in the collective psyche of people that some of the verses were used as a form of verbal resistance to colonial government. The following verses of Ajit Singh not only depicted the plight and exploitation of peasantry in general and of Punjab in particular but also became the common cry of nationalists.

Pagri sambal o jatta,

Pagri sambal oye,  
Loot leya mal tera,  
Haal behal oye,

There were other poets in North India whose poetry fired nascent nationalism in to fire. Bankim Chandra Chatterjees, 'Bande Matram' raised nationalism to the dignity of religion. The poem has been rightly called as 'Bible of modern Bengali Patriotism'. Rabinder Nath Tagore's 'Jana Gana Mana Adhinayak jaye Hay' Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal's 'Sare Jahan Se Achcha Hindustan Hamara' became the songs of resistance to colonial rule. In south India too, Subramanyam Bharti's collection of nationalist poems were published in 1908 under the title of 'songs of freedom'. An excerpt from one of his poems is as;

Our dharma will unify the Motherland, make it free,  
Independent of others, and a republic new! .....  
I shall see that the alien rules my land no more,

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Abdul Ahad Azad was one such revolutionary poet, whose verses revolutionised minds of youth thereby creating intense patriotic fervour among them. Abdul Ahad Azad was born in 1903 in Ranger, a small village in Tsar-i-sharief, situated to the south-west of Srinagar in district Budgam. His father's name was Sultan Dar. His father being a mystic, was living a life a mystic but was learned in Persian and Arabic languages. Due to educational environment of the family, Azad too was taught Persian, the holy Quran and elementary subjects of Muslim Fiqa (Jurisprudence). In 1916, Azad's elder brother Ghulam Ali opened a private school where he was trained in elementary Urdu. Azad's father loved hearing poetry both didactic mystical and lyrical. At the age of 15, Azad starting writing poems.

In his early poetic career, Azad composed *Watsun* (wanawun), local form of a love lyric or traditional ghazal. He soon started writing *Mathnavis*. He composed two *Mathnavis*, 'Tabassum-i-Gul' (the smile of the rose) and 'Qamar Zaman'. These *mathnavis* turned Azad a household name. He initially used his 'nom de plume' as 'Azad' which changed in to 'Janbaz' and finally in to 'Azad'.

By 1930's, Azad grew mature thereby fully grasping the political and other affairs of state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is worth to mention that Kashmir had been subjugated by foreigners for centuries which had created 'slavish mentality' among them, so much so that, Kashmiris had been referred to as 'Zulum Parast' (those who bear oppression voluntarily). This was the character of almost all colonial societies and may be referred to as 'colonial syndrome'. The Kashmiris saw no end to their miseries which only heightened with the change in ruling powers. Though, through the treaty of Amritsar of 16<sup>th</sup> march 1846, the rule passed on to the Dogras, the Rajputs of Jammu, but the rule only added to the miseries of already oppressed and subjected Kashmiris, because Dogras considered Kashmir as their purchased property. Moreover people of Kashmir, both Muslims and Hindus considered Maharaja as an alien ruler.

The Dogras pauperised the Kashmiris by heavy and undue taxation. Colonel Torrens commenting on the taxation policy of Dogras as far back as 1863, writes, "Gulab Singh went far beyond his predecessors in the gentle acts of taxation and extortion. They had taxed heavily, it is true, but he sucked the very life blood of people". The same voice is echoed by Sir Walter Lawrence, the settlement officer appointed in 1889 A.C. He writes, "Dogras taxed everything that existed under sky except water and air. He goes on to say that the many illegal exactions were collected from the Muslim peasantry known as *Nazrana* and *Rasum*". Robert Thorp, a Britisher candidly admitted that the treaty of Amritsar pushed Kashmiris to live a life of ignorance, slavery and degradation. He writes, "for purposes entirely selfish, we deliberately sold millions of human beings into the absolute power of one of the meanest, most avaricious, cruel and unprincipled of men that ever sat upon throne".

The oppressive nature of the Dogra State and its bureaucracy disgusted even foreign officials, who were in the state service so much that they thought it better to leave the job than to be part of this exploitative state apparatus. Sir Albion Banerji, the political and foreign minister of the state, was so disgusted with the state of affairs that he resigned from his job. Explaining the reason of his resignation before a press enclave at Lahore on 15<sup>th</sup> march 1929 he said, "Jammu And Kashmir State is labouring under many disadvantages, with a large Mohammedan population absolutely illiterate, labouring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb driven cattle. There is no touch between the government and people, no suitable opportunity for representing grievances and administrative machinery itself requires over-hauling from top to bottom to bring it up to the modern conditions of efficiency. It has at present little or no sympathy with peoples wants and grievances".

These observations of Sir Albion Banerjee regarding the miserable lives of Muslims of Kashmir not only created uproar in the whole country but stirred the deadened souls of many patriotic Kashmiris, who decided to awaken their people from deep slumber to fight against oppressive Dogra state. The political consciousness and nationalist sentiments were not only aroused but kept alive by Azad's revolutionary poetry.

The events of 1931 A.C in the state and subsequent unrest seems to have bearing on Azad's poetry. The cold blooded murder of twenty two Muslims of Kashmir on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1931 A.C caused uproar in the valley of Kashmir. To quote Prem Nath Bazaz, "historically and politically 13<sup>th</sup> July 1931 was the most important day in the annals of Kashmir history. From the day the struggle for independence and freedom in the most modern sense started openly". According to P.N. Ganju, Azad was a traditional poet from 1916-1931, but after 1931, his poetry was revolutionary in theme and tune. The revolutionary and nationalist fervour in his poetry went a long way in politicisation of Kashmiris. Azad was a true Patriot of the soil. His patriotism had two aspects; one was love for the natural beauty of land and second was administration of its intellectual and spiritual legacy. His revolutionary poetry not only revolutionised minds of Kashmiri youth but instilled patriotism and pride for Kashmir among them by referring to valiant soldiers, noble kings and eminent scholars of the soil. Prem Nath Bazaz says, "He deserved to be called a revolutionary and one who brought cultural renaissance".

Azad's poetry was amalgamation of political protest and a revolutionary zeal. In one of his poems which may be called, "Budshah's lament", the poet shows as if Budshah, the great fifteenth century ruler of Kashmir asks through the medium of Azad's verses, why the blood of Kashmir has frozen and why the tradition of his courage and valour has eroded completely. The poet through this poem tried to remind people of their glorious past and the legacy they had bequeathed.

The excerpts of the poem are:

Pain of heart, music of soul can never be buried,  
One who listens to the call of empathy will lose his legacy,  
It is so that the empathetic does not have the same blood (any more),  
Oh! Where are they hiding away,  
The same breeze, the same land, the same springs even now,

The same pattern river makes even now, the same water everywhere,  
Colder than ice, I can see these hearts have turned in to,  
Once their own music had enthused them,  
Oh patriot! I'm narrating but do you wake up from slumber.

Azad through his revolutionary poetry not only reminded people of their glorious past and lamenting present situation but enthused youth of the land to shun cowardice and muster courage to fight the tyranny. In one such poem, "Songs of country" (Tarana-i-watan), he versified his message as;

Oh, young brave youth,  
Bravo, advance ahead,  
Struggle perpetually,  
Then alone hope and desire,  
Gather thee and desire,  
The songs of your country.

Azad was very much touched by the beauty of his land. He dedicated a poem to his country entitled, "my home land". These verses of the poem must had fired nascent nationalism of Kashmiris in to fire. Some excerpts of poem are;

What a beautiful land my country is?  
My heart blossoms in its environment,  
Both my body and soul crave to be sacrificed.  
For every road and highway leading to this happy land.

Azad as a patriot was deeply concerned over enslavement of Kashmir for centuries and therefore, was strong votary of a revolution to break status quo. He conveyed the revolutionary message in one of his poems, "payam-e-inqilab" (the message of revolution). Some excerpts of poem are;

Life has worn coffin,  
Shatter these shrouds,  
And make thy being felt,  
If they don't choose life,  
Bury them in debris of forgetfulness.

Azad was yearning for freedom and end of tyranny. He narrated his dream in following verses;  
To become free, to end tyranny and to abolish superstition,  
This is my cherish dream, this my desire and this my slogan.

Azad firmly believed that one day his countrymen will rise from deep slumber and throw off yoke of slavery and imperialism. He envisaged the future course of state politics as well. He was great critic of capitalism and favoured a socialist pattern of society in Kashmir. The following excerpts show his denouncement of capitalism.

The wealth of the world is produced by working class,  
The pen is owned by the intellectual and carpenter as his tools,  
The capitalist who collects wealth at any cost,  
Is the enemy of the world and poison for humanity.

Azad was great critic of capitalism and believed that capitalism is the root cause of all ills. He versified his critic of capitalism as,

Valour derailed to cowardice,  
Love transformed in to anger and wrath,  
Voids are created where faith is biased,  
Oh! All these ills emanate from capitalism.

Azad had abiding faith in socialism and aspired for a socialist type of revolution in Kashmir. He gave vent to his vision of ideal state in following verse;

The wealth shall be wealth of all,  
The capitalist, is killed, so it is all.

Azad's fearless and revolutionary poetry raised nationalist sentiments among people of Kashmir which went a long way in destroying the despotic and oppressive Dorga regime. The impact of Azad's poetry in politicisation was even acknowledged by the intellectuals of the time as well. P.N. Bazaz reserved a column for Azad's poetry in urdu daily.

The vision of his posthumous fame was silently captured by Azad through his verse,  
The world will remember me and cry Azad Azad,  
My beloved someday i will remind you.

Azad died in April 1948 A.C at young age therefore, is often referred to as John Keats of Kashmir.

## 2. CONCLUSION:

Azad unlike the traditional poets of Kashmir, versified the then political, social and economic condition of the state. He used his poetry to articulate revolutionary ideas. He through his poetry hoped to stirre the deadened souls of his people and prepare them for transforming the political and socio-economic order of the state. His revolutionary and patriotic poetry went a long way in politicisation of not only elite but masses of the valley of Kashmir. It is due to the impact his poetry left on psyche of people that P.N. Bazaz says, “he deserves to be called a revolutionary and cultural renaissance”.

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