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**Majlis-i-Ahrar-ul-Islam as a Political Party: Stance on Struggle and Resistance in Kashmir (1931-32)**

**Dr. Shahzad Qaisar**

Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

[shahzadqaisar@numl.edu.pk](mailto:shahzadqaisar@numl.edu.pk)

**ABSTRACT**

*The abolition of the khilafat institution creates the space for religion in Politics. Majlis-e-Ahrar is one of the byproducts of this incident. Its politics have influenced the whole region of India, but its activity has centered mainly in Punjab. Majlis-e-Ahrar was the complex interplay between religion, politics, and colonial resistance. This party is not credited in the political discourse of Pakistan despite having an important and glaring role in the 1930s politics of Punjab. The role played by Ahrar in agitation against the despotic ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh Dogra, needs valid appreciation. This research paper will investigate the causes of its foundation, aims, and objectives, as well as the role in agitation in Kashmir during 1931-1932. Exploring the role of Majlis-e-Ahrar in the agitation of Kashmir offers critical insights into how religion and religious sentiments are employed to evoke mass mobilization and garner political support in the political arena.*

**Key words:** *Majlis-e-Ahrar, Agitational Politics, Kashmir, Religion.*

**Introduction**

The British colonial system introduced political parties in the Subcontinent in post 1857 phase to avoid such conditions in future. The first political party was Indian National Congress which was formed in 1885 which marked beginning of political activities in the British India. It was meant to be a non-communal organization in early years but later on it was dominated by the extremist factions from puritanical Hindus. The shifting of Congress from neutral to a faction ridden political parties with weaker moderates and extremist groups compelled the Muslims to form All India Muslim League in shadow of partition of Bengal and upcoming reforms act to protect their representation and electoral method. The coming decade witnessed political activities between League and Congress to bridge up differences, but both failed terribly in 1920's. Khilafat movement ushered new era of religio-political parties in India such as Jameat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, Majlis-i-Ahrar, Khalafat Party, Khaksar Movement, and many other non-communal parties. Among these historical parties, Majlis-i-Ahrar holds significant importance for understanding the evolution of political thought in the region. In the cacophony of Colonial India's freedom struggle, where voices of moderation and extremism collided, the Majlis-i-Ahrar emerged as a thunderous roar of defiance against imperialism and political compromise. This rich political movement was deeply rooted in the Deobandi ideological grounds. It contains elements of resistance and religious activism. Its strategy was the mobilization of the Muslim masses through the advocacy of emotional and

topical issues. However, it did not miss the opportunity of participating in any movement or commenting on any issue that was likely to influence the future of India or that of Indian Muslims. Their main constituencies were the Sunni Muslims, particularly those living in Punjab. Constitutional issues did not evoke as much interest in its ranks as social and religious issues, which meant that the clerics and not the lawyers set the agenda. The anti-colonial and determinedly pro-Muslim attitudes were reflected in the MAI's reaction to the constitutional issues. Soon after its formation, it aimed to project itself as an anti-colonial and pro-Indian National Congress party by actively participating in the civil disobedience movement of the 1930s, championed by Mahatma Gandhi. It supported the Red Shirts Movement led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the passing of the India Act of 1935, and efforts for an agreement among different communities in India. In the National discourse of Pakistan, Ahrars are hardly credited as a party that played a decisive role in India's Colonial history.<sup>1</sup> These marginalized parties should be studied to understand Pakistan's political discourse. From the very outset, Pakistan's historiography was dominated by the official version of freedom, which excluded those movements and parties that were against the All-India Muslim League. The prominent absence of parties like the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement in N.W.F.P, Jeeya Sindh in Sindh, and the Awami League in East Bengal from the mainstream political discourse leaves a vacuum in the political discourse of Pakistan. This research paper will focus on its foundation, along with its role and struggle in Kashmir against colonial hegemony. This study will help in understanding the 1930s political scenario of Pakistan after the abolition of the khilafat institution, the event that led to the trend of politics based on emotions and the impulse of a mindless mob.<sup>2</sup>

### **Foundation of Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam**

In Punjab, political life has always been complex. There is a deep layer of historical subtlety behind this apparent simplicity, which holds many hidden secrets. The institutions here are of such a nature that they reflect a historical consciousness. The British Colonial Government established such institutions to maintain its rule, which gave birth to the mentality against change. However, Ahrar was the only organization that showed resistance against foreign hegemony.<sup>3</sup> Ahrar is derived from the Arabic word, which means to be free<sup>4</sup>. Shorish Kashmiri best describes the emergence of Ahrars on the political landscape of India as;

<sup>1</sup> Tahir Kamran, "Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam: Religion, Socialism and Agitation in Action", *Centre of South Asian Studies and Culture* 4, no.4 (2013): 1-2., \*[Majlis i Ahrar in South Asian History and Culture.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> Nadeem F. PARACHA, "The Roots of Religious Radicalism," *Dawn*, August 28, 2016. [The roots of religious radicalism - Pakistan - DAWN.COM](#)

<sup>3</sup> Shorish Kashmiri, 'Ahrar Ka Tajzia', *Bou-e-Gul, Nala-e-Dil, Dood-e-Charach-e-Mahfil*, (Lahore: Maktaba-e-Mujtaba, 1974), 305-07. [buye gul nala-e-dil, dood-e-chiragh-e-mehfil Volume-001 by Shorish kashmiri | Rekhta](#)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 310.

“Undoubtedly, Ahrars were the outcome of the Khilafat Movement, the ideas of Al Hilal, and the pen of the Zamindar put together. It was a combination of an anti-British outlook, love for Islam, patriotism, hatred of capitalism, enmity with superstition, love for sacrifice, ambition to bring about revolution, and enthusiasm for conducting *jihad*.”<sup>5</sup>

It was also said that it was the idea of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad to set up the Majlis-Ihrrar<sup>6</sup>. After the abolition of the institution of Khilafat. This party was established in Punjab in December 1929. Its President was Habib-ur-Rehman. Not only the abolition, but also some other events resulted in the formation of MAI, like the calling off of the civil disobedience movement by Gandhi, and embezzlement in the Khilafat fund. These events divided them into two groups: namely, the Muslim Nationalistic Party led by Muhammad Alam, which later got submerged with the congress and the Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam. Afzal Haq writes the emergence of MAI in these words.

Punjab Khilafat Committee was the soul of the Central Body; unintentionally and unconsciously, it had two distinct factions in itself. Khilafat Punjab had an elite faction and a downtrodden faction. The elite, like the son of a prostitute and the horse of a trader, had been sluggish and enjoyed the easy life. All the laborious work was the fate of the downtrodden faction. The elite were conscious of their distinctness as a “class, whereas the downtrodden had no such realization; they thought of themselves as a part of the totality ... When Majlis-i-Khilafat Punjab severed its link with the Central body, the elite formed its organization by the name of Muslim Nationalist Party, and the downtrodden constituted Majlis-i-Ahrar”.<sup>7</sup>

Ahrar was the most influential party of the 1930s. The episode of the Maclagan Engineering college agitation helped Majlis Ahrar’s political presence to be felt in Lahore<sup>8</sup>. This party advocated social equality, which attracted the middle and lower sections of India. The social activities during the Quetta earthquake and the Bengal famine are glaring proof in this context. Sahibzadda Faiz-ul-Hassan, one of the founding members of the Ahrar, stated in his speech that Socialism and Islamic Musawat were the same thing. He further enunciated that; “The unjust distribution of production is the real root cause of all maladies and social injustice. Controlling it properly will be the actual cure of a big problem faced by human beings. Such control can be called Musawat too. Socialism is an ideology brought out after thorough research, and to me, it is better than capitalism, fascism, and other contemporary ideologies”.<sup>9</sup>

It cannot be considered solely a left-wing or communist party, but it is a blend of both religion and politics. The use of Islamic symbolism was very much evident in the agitational politics

<sup>5</sup> Kashmiri, *Bou-e-Gul, Nala-e-Dil, Dood-e-Charach-e-Mahfil*, 310.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> Afzal Haq, *Tareekh-e-Ahrar*, (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Ahrar, 1946), 70-71...[Tareekh-e-Ahrar by Afzal Haq : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

<sup>8</sup> Samina Awan, “Muslim Urban Politics in Colonial Punjab: Majlis-i-Ahrar’s Early Activism,” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 16, no.2 (2009): 247-48.[Microsoft Word - 5-Samina Awan 16.2 Final.doc](#).

<sup>9</sup> Kashmiri, *Bou-e-Gul, Nala-e-Dil, Dood-e-Charach-e-Mahfil*, 310.

of Ahrars. Dr Samina has described this as: “The Khilafat legacy, which the MAI followed, posited it as an anti-establishment and anti-colonial organization. It had a reformist agenda for rural Punjab, combined with a religious ideology. It struggled against the feudal system in villages, where its orators mobilized public opinion through ‘Tabligh’”<sup>10</sup>.

It has imbibed features of both communism and patriotism. Its main asset was the eloquence of its leaders. The speeches had a strong influence on the audience, and it also became a source of becoming one of the strongest Political parties in the Punjab.<sup>11</sup>

### **Aims and Objectives of the Organization**

The party’s main objective was to guide the people of India in both political and religious affairs. Initially, its thoughts were similar to those of Khilafatists, but later, it changed after 1929. The Ahrar aimed to work for complete Indian freedom through peace full means; to provide political guidance to the Muslims; to strive for ensuring betterment of the Muslims in the fields of religion, education, economic and social plight; to promote indigenously manufactured products; to organize peasants and workers on the economic principles and to set up voluntary organizations by the name of Jayush-i-Ahrarul Islam throughout India. The party’s flag was decided to be red with a white crescent with a star in its center. They wore red attire to remember those Khudai Khidmatgars who were killed on 23 April 1930 in a fight with the Colonial Government in Qisa Khawani Bazar, Peshawar. The working Committee of Ahrar approved its party’s red-colour flag with a white crescent and a star in the middle. The Ahrar leaders decided on a red-coloured uniform for the Ahrar volunteers who regularly drilled with a band and a drum and carried hatchets.<sup>12</sup> The decision to wear red was made in memory of those Khudai Khidmatgars who died in an armed clash with the British in Qisa Khawani Bazar, Peshawar, on 23 April 1930. During the early days, Ahrar volunteers were widely known as surkhposh, but subsequently, that appellation became specific to the Khudai Khidmatgars. All of these symbols, nonetheless, were representative of the Ahrar leadership’s aim to imbibe influences not only from Islam but also from socialism. Samina Awan provides a succinct account of the ideological mix underpinning the Ahrar’s ideology. The movement not only aimed at eradicating the ‘darkness of imperialism and feudalism’ but also ‘stood for equal distribution of wealth; eradication of untouchability; respect for every religion; and freedom to live according to the Sharia. The prominent founders of the MAI, who were also involved in drafting its initial program, were Afzal Haq, Syed Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Maulana Daud Ghaznavi, Ghazi Abdul Rahman, and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar. Most of them hailed from the Punjab and had been active in various movements, particularly the Khilafat movement. Although the MAI had sympathizers all over India, Punjab was their main center of activity. The party headquarters were located in

<sup>10</sup> Samina Awan, “Oratory on Social Issues: Ahrar in British Punjab,” *Pakistan Vision* 10. no1(2009): 100-01. [pu.edu.pk/images/journal/studies/PDF-FILES/Artical - 6.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/studies/PDF-FILES/Artical - 6.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Kamran, “Majlis-I-Ahrar-I-Islam: Religion, Socialism and Agitation in Action,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> Awan, “Muslim Urban Politics in Colonial Punjab: Majlis-i-Ahrar’s Early Activism”, 237-38., [5-Samina Awan 16.2 Final.pdf](#)

Lahore, Sialkot, Amritsar, and Jalandhar, while its regional branches existed in almost all the major towns of Punjab<sup>13</sup>. Most of these members were inclined towards the Deobandi school of thought. Initially, this party was associated with the Indian National Congress, but later separated their ways from them on the issue of separate electorates during the Nehru Report. According to Dr. Samina Awan: “The MAI maintained contacts with all the political parties and responded positively to other opposition groups, though its pro-INC leanings remained quite explicit”.<sup>14</sup>

The independence resolution in India attracted the anti-imperialist sentiments of the Majlis-i-Ahrar and brought it closer to the Indian National Congress. The MAI opposed the Round Table Conference in November 1930, which aimed to work for a constitutional formula in India. The first RTC reached a consensus on a federal system, but the MAI remained focused on its original objectives, aiming for complete independence for India. The British government realized the futility of framing a constitution without the INC, and many of its leaders and activists were imprisoned during the INC-led civil disobedience movement. The British government approached the INC leadership, and Gandhi was released unconditionally to attend the second RTC. Negotiations with the Viceroy culminated in the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on 5 March 1933. Gandhi attended the second RTC in London, but the MAI felt the INC had bypassed it. The leaders of the Ahrars, Maulana Habib Ur-Rahman and Syed Ataullah Shah Bukhari, tried to persuade Gandhi not to attend the RTC but failed. This led to the "parting of ways" between the INC and MAI, shattering the blind faith and trust that the MAI leadership had reposed in the INC. The MAI did not openly share a common platform with the INC<sup>15</sup>.

### **Story of Resistance and Struggle**

The MAI strategy was the mobilization of the Muslim masses through the advocacy of emotional and topical issues. However, it did not miss the opportunity of participating in any movement or commenting on any issue that was likely to influence the future of India or that of Indian Muslims<sup>16</sup>. Although the Ahrar aspired to all-India support, its greatest influence was in the Punjab. It played an important role in the Muslim politics of the province during the 1930s. This is not always acknowledged by Pakistani scholars because of its rivalry with the Muslim League. Immediately after the Lahore Conference, where it assumed the formal status of a political party, Majlis-i-Ahrar plunged into political work. Until the setback of the Shaheed Gunj affair in 1935, it posed the only major challenge to the Unionists in urban Muslim politics. The Unionist Party was an agriculturalist party. All the major landlords and

<sup>13</sup> Zahoor, M. A., & Gujjar, M. “Colonialism and the Construction of Religious Identities in Punjab: The Case of Muslims,” *Journal of History, Culture and Art Research* 8, no.4 (2019): 56-67. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v8i4.2004>

<sup>14</sup> Samina Awan, “Reconciliation or Confrontation: Majlis-i-Ahrar and the Politics of Punjab in 1930s”, *J.R.S.P.*, Vol. 45, No. 1, (2008): 22-23. [Microsoft Word - awan.doc](#)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*,21-22.

tribal Sardars (chieftains) had gathered under its banner. The Ahrar had to contend not only with fortified landed interests but also with Mian Fazl-i-Husain's (a Unionist leader) tenacity in the realm of politics. Interestingly, this leading exponent of Muslim Punjabi interests initially revered Chaudhri Afzal Haq because of the rectitude and forthrightness that he had demonstrated in the Punjab Legislative Council. Afzal Haq, too, held Fazl-i-Hussain in high esteem. In *Tarikh i-Ahrar*, Haq rates him as the best political figure among the Muslims.<sup>17</sup> This mutual respect and reverence turned into hostility when Fazl-i-Hussain recommended Sir Zafarullah Khan, an Ahmedi leader from the Punjab, for a vacant slot in the Viceroy's Executive Council. The Ahrar party's uncompromising stand on the issue of Khatam-i-Nabuwat meant that any association with the Ahmediya sect was considered out of bounds. Following the selection of the Ahmedi leader, Hussain, became a special target for Ahrar's wrath. However, the Unionists' rural base of support remained unaffected by the use of religious techniques. Thousands of their followers gave the already unbeatable Unionist Party an extra boost because of local power dynamics that linked shrines and their rulers, the Sajjada Nashins, to a type of Sufi Islam. They were effective in thwarting the Ahrar's religious appeal because its leaders included religious scholars from every branch of Islam. The socialist aspect of the Ahrar was the other one that fared well in rural regions. The Punjabi agricultural downturn increased the impact of Majlis-i-Ahrar's extreme economic program. However, like the Kisan Sabhas, the Ahrar discovered that the Unionists could still divert growing dissatisfaction by attributing the tough circumstances to the extortion of the bania (moneylending) elite. Nevertheless, the 1934 Ahrar's defeat in a by-election to the Central Assembly showed that the poor state of Punjab had exposed at least some weaknesses in the Unionists' defenses. Khan Bahadur Rahim Baksh was chosen by Sir Fazl-i-Hussain as the Unionist candidate for a seat that included the districts of Lahore, Amritsar, Ferozepur, and Gurdaspur. Khalid Latif Gabba, the son of well-known Punjabi businessman Lala Harkishen Lal, was Ahrar's nominee. He converted to Islam but later repudiated it. As the time for the election drew near, the propaganda for an Ahrar candidate gathered momentum, rightly causing panic to the Unionists as the Ahrar won the seat<sup>18</sup>. This was at a time when the party was at the peak of its popularity, the basis of which came from their activities in Kapurthala and Kashmir.

#### **Ahrar's role in Kashmir:**

Ahrars have played a great role in improving the lives of Kashmiri Muslims during the despotic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh. Sohail-ul-Rehman Lone describes the role of Ahrar during the Kashmir agitation of 1932 as: "The Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam, a Lahore-based organisation, unlike other pro-Kashmir organizations, made an exception to the usual trend of passing resolutions and issuing press statements: it sent its jathas (bands of volunteers) into the state to launch civil disobedience against the government. Composed mainly of ex-

<sup>17</sup> Afzal Haq, *Tareekh-e- Ahrar*, 208-209.

<sup>18</sup> Kamran, *Majlis-I-Ahrar-I-Islam: Religion, Socialism and Agitation in Action*, 7-8.

Congressites, and having gained enough expertise in matters of political mobilization during the Khilafat movement and the on-going Civil Disobedience Movement in British India, the party's activities in Jammu and Kashmir created such a stir that the state government not only issued an Ordinance (Notification 19-L) prohibiting the entrance of Ahrars into the state but also sought military assistance from the British Government"<sup>19</sup>.

Although their contribution is not significantly acknowledged in the political history of Pakistan. There are very few notable publications that adequately acknowledge the Ahrar Party's significance and contribution to colonial Punjabi politics. Ayesha Jalal supports the idea that the Kashmir episode gave them the chance to become more prominent in British Punjabi politics.<sup>20</sup> For a variety of reasons, Muslims thought Kashmir to be hell under the Dogra Raja's rule (1847–1948). For Hindus, butchering a cow, a holy animal, was a terrible offense punishable by up to seven years in prison. During Eid, Muslims were required to pay a special tax for the slaughter of animals for sacrifice, and Hindus who converted to Islam were required to give up everything they owned. Due to the unequal distribution of economic resources, the Maharaja believed that he could control the populace, and throughout the 1930s, the Muslim press consistently brought attention to the suffering of the Muslims in Kashmir. The massive economic and political stress got pace with the act of Jammu and Kashmir, where a police constable committed a blasphemy act. This created a sharp reaction among the Muslim masses. The situation in Srinagar was more critical as it was a predominantly populated area. On 21 June, people gathered in Jamia Mosque, where this act was condemned, and a Muslim, Abdul Qadeer, who was on vacation in Srinagar, raised a voice against the administration; the authorities promptly arrested him for this act.<sup>21</sup> The arrest of Abdul Qadeer was a volcano that erupted in violence because he was highlighting and criticizing the cruel policies of the Maharaja's rule. Due to his agitated speeches and continued condemnation, he was trailed in Srinagar on 6 July 1931. On the day of his trial, Muslims of where police opened fire and killed many marchers.<sup>22</sup>

The same situation of this event is described by Tahir Kamran as: "The arrest of Abdul Qadeer, from Amroha District, Muradabad, who was in Srinagar as a guide to a few English travelers, provided the catalyst for violence when he urged Muslims to launch an active

<sup>19</sup> Lone, Suhail-ul-Rehman. "The Princely States and the National Movement: The Case of Kashmir (1931–39)." *Indian Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (2020): 88–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983620905010>.

<sup>20</sup> Ayesha Jalal, "Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850," (London: Routledge, 2000), 356-57. [Self And Sovereignty: Individual And Community in South Asian Islam since 1850 : Ayesha Jalal : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive](#)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 356.

<sup>22</sup> Zargar Yasir, "The Cow Slaughter Ban in Indian-Held Kashmir is Another Reminder of India's Disregard for Kashmir's Majority – The Muslims," *The Nations*, September 17, 2015. [The cow slaughter ban in Indian-held Kashmir is another reminder of India's disregard for Kashmiris.](#)

struggle against the Maharaja's rule. The State authorities promptly arrested him. When his trial began in the Sessions Court of Srinagar on 6 July 1931, Muslims assembled there in such a huge number that proceedings were shifted to the safer environment of Srinagar Central Jail. When the trial commenced at the newer venue, people thronged again, and the police ruthlessly baton-charged them. The violence escalated, and the police opened fire, thus killing 22 demonstrators<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, 13 July 1931 became known as 'Martyrs Day'. However, the inquiry report has considered the firing as a need for law and order.<sup>24</sup> In the 1920s and early 1930s, Punjabi Muslim newspapers in the state of Kashmir consistently highlighted the miserable plight of Kashmiri Muslims. The violence escalated when a procession of demonstrators forced a Punjabi Hindu shopkeeper to close his shop in protest, and when he refused, the protestors ransacked his and other Hindu-owned shops. This was possibly the most serious communal outbreak in India between the Moplah rebellion of 1921 and the Calcutta riots of 1946<sup>25</sup>. This resulted in the arrest of more than 300 Muslims, including Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas and Sheik Abdullah. Bloody processions, strikes, and riots kept the environment of Kashmir high. During the last week of July, leading Muslims assembled at Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali's residence at Simla and formed the All-India Kashmir Committee. The committee claimed to redress the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims through peaceful and constitutional means and demanded the appointment of an impartial Commission of Enquiry to determine the reasons for the agitational crisis. It also proposed to observe 14 August as a special Kashmir Day in memory of the martyrs of 13 July 1931. The prominence of the Ahmadiyahs was too much for the Ahrars, who were both ideologically opposed to the Ahmadis and aware of the political mileage that the new group could take from them. In other words, it carries everything that was anathema to the Ahrar. They claimed the Ahmadis and the ruler of Kashmir alike, which resulted in evoking considerable response from the masses in support of their stand. The Ahrar leadership became more active and requested the Government of Kashmir to permit an inquiry committee into the valley.

The situation in Kashmir was now more sensitive as these protests converted into communal tension. After getting no response, they entered Kashmir forcefully and also persuaded other volunteers to enter Kashmir for the sake of other Muslims. Mazhar Ali Azhar and other comrades spoke at gigantic conventions at Gujranwala city and at various regions of Sialkot that alarmed the British Government. The role of Kashmiri Prime Minister Hari Kishan Kaul is very important. He sensed the matter wisely and permitted the protesters to enter Kashmir because he did not want the situation to become graver. Here, too, the protestors demanded

<sup>23</sup> Kamran, "Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam: Religion, Socialism and Agitation in Action". 8-9

<sup>24</sup> Barjor J. Dalal, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the 1931 Srinagar Riots*, Srinagar: Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 1931, [1931 Barjor Dalal Report : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive](#)

<sup>25</sup> Ian Copland, "Islam and Political Mobilization in Kashmir, 1931-34," *Pacific Affairs* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 228-259, [Copland-IslamPoliticalMobilization-1981.pdf](#)

a government that could be beneficial for both Muslims and Hindus, but failing on all these fronts, they started a kind of civil disobedience and asked their followers to move to Kashmir from Sialkot from 6 October 1931 onwards. This announcement led a stream of followers to keep flowing, and their number was so massive that only from Punjab, 45,000 volunteers entered Kashmir and paralysed the state machinery.<sup>26</sup> According to Ion Copland:

“Finally, there was the rival presence of the AIKC. Upper-class, moderate, and infiltrated by "heretics," the AIKC represented everything that was anathema to the Ahrars, and they determined to discredit it by usurping its role as the champion of the people's movement in Kashmir. To this end, Mazhar Ali was dispatched to Sialkot in mid-August to recruit volunteers for a jathabandi (non-violent protest march) into Kashmir. “By early October, some 2,000 jathadars, red-shirted in imitation of Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Pathans, were encamped at Sialkot. On the 6th, the first jatha entered Kashmir, where it was immediately detained by the Darbari police. At first, neither the Darbar nor the British were unduly worried, for, as the Deputy Commissioner reported, "cold weather and the fact that the members of previous Jathas have lost their jobs have considerably dampened the ardour of [the] soldiers of Jatha Bandi."”<sup>27</sup> However, as the stream of volunteers kept flowing- 2,376 had crossed the border by the beginning of November--the authorities were forced to reconsider”<sup>27</sup>. The conflict escalated so rapidly that the government was compelled to create new prison cells to accommodate the newly arriving prisoners. As stated by Ayesha Jalal, 34,000 Ahrars were detained in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir<sup>28</sup>. This disobedience was so strong that the ruler of the State had to change its Prime Minister, Hari Kishen, with Colonel E.J.D. Colvin, who was now the new Prime Minister. His approval was taken from the Indian Political Department. Hari Singh founded a commission under the leadership of Sir Bertrand Glancy to control the political turmoil, but it could not help control this agitation. This tension in Kashmir became a solid rock in the political uprising of Ahrar in Punjab, as by 11 February 1934, there were almost three legislators in the Judicial Convention of Punjab.<sup>29</sup> The use of Islamic symbolization, however, proved successful in mobilizing people in Punjab. As enunciated by Dr. Mubarak Ali: “Religion mobilizes the religious sensibilities of people to get their support to capture power”<sup>30</sup>.

### Conclusion

The history of Majlis-e-Ahrar in Punjab reflects a significant chapter in the political and ideological evolution of colonial and post-colonial South Asia. As a movement rooted in religious identity and anti-colonial nationalism, the Ahrar party's strategies of resistance and agitation politics played a pivotal role in mobilizing the masses, challenging both British

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,234-36.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>28</sup> Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*, 363-64.

<sup>29</sup> Kamran, *Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam: "Religion, Socialism and Agitation in Action"*, 465-482.

<sup>30</sup> Mubark Ali, "Pakistan in Search of Identity" (Delhi: Aakar Books,2011),105-06. [Pakistan in Search of Identity \(2\). PDF.](#)

imperial authority and, later, the emerging political hegemony in Pakistan. Their opposition to the Muslim League, their engagement with socio-religious issues, and their active involvement in street politics positioned them uniquely among other political actors of the time. The efforts of Ahrar in the Kashmir agitation are commendable; however, the fights for the rights of Kashmiri people have turned into a fight with the Ahmadiya sect. This feature remains its main manifesto even after the inception of Pakistan. Although the Ahrar failed to sustain long-term political dominance, their legacy lies in the frameworks of dissent they cultivated, the questions they raised about leadership, and their attempts to merge religious convictions with political activism. Their narrative is essential for understanding the complex interplay of religion, politics, and resistance in Punjab's political history. Ultimately, the study of Majlis-e-Ahrar reveals how agitation politics and religious symbolism have served both as a force of mobilization and marginalization, depending on the socio-political context and the ability of a movement to evolve with the times.

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