



Social Background and Political Ideology of Maqbool Bhat (18th February 1938- 11th February 1984)

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Abstract:- The Kashmir Issue has been a nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan on one hand and on the other it has overtime created a genre of Secessionist-cum-Militant leadership in Kashmir itself who have played the role of major ideologues for the militancy of Kashmir. Maqbool Butt was one of the major ideologues of Kashmir militant movement. The present paper aims to focus on the social background and political ideology of Maqbool Butt.

Keywords:Maqbool Butt, Kashmir, JKNLF, JKLF, POK.

1. Social Background and Early Life

Maqbool Butt was born on 18th of February 1938 to a peasant family in Trahagam village Tehsil Handwara, District Kupwara. His father's name was Ghulam Qadir Butt. All we know about his mother is that she died when Maqbool Butt was 11 year old pupil in the village's primary school. He had a younger brother Ghulam Nabi Butt. After the death of his wife Ghulam Qadir married to Shahmali Begum from whom he had two sons, Manzoor Ahmad Butt and Zahoor Ahmad Butt and three daughters. The early years of Maqbool Butt's life, like thousands of other Kashmiris was shaped by the harsh living conditions that characterized the life of peasants under the Dogra regime.

It was the feudal system in the Maharaja's Kashmir that forced Maqbool Butt to participate in the first political action against suppression, occupation and for equality, freedom and social justice. After his schooling from the local school of Trahagam Kupwara, Maqbool Butt was admitted in St. Joseph College Baramulla where from he got B.A in History and Political Science.

2. The Political Career

The political activities of Maqbool Butt started during his College life where he was involved in politics of agitation including rallies and fiery speeches. He was heading the student activists of the Plebiscite Front (PF). In December, 1957 Sheikh Abdullah was released which led to a chain of agitation activities. Abdullah was arrested again on 27th of April 1958. The student activists of the Front were also targeted. It was in the same year that Maqbool Butt completed his B.A and in order to escape from arrest went to Pakistan with his father in August 1958.

In Pakistan they first went to Lahore and tried to get admission in the Punjab University but of no avail. So they left to Peshawar in September 1958 where Maqbool got admission in Peshawar University to do Urdu Literature and joined a local newspaper 'Anjam' (End/Conclusion/Performance) to earn living. Meanwhile he was married with cRaja Begum a Kashmiri woman in 1961. He had two sons from his wife, Javed Maqbool born in 1962 and Showkat Maqbool in 1964. In 1966 he married to a school teacher Zakria Begum and had a daughter Lubna Maqbool from her In 1961 Maqbool Bhat contested and won the Kashmiri diaspora seat from Peshawar, Pakistan in the 'Basic Democracy' elections introduced by the then president of POK Khurshid Hassan Khurshid, commonly known as K.H.Khurshid. In 1965 the political activists from POK got together and crossed into Suchetgarh, a Kashmiri village inside the Indian territories and formed the 'Jammu Kashmir Plebiscite Front' here with Maqbool Butt as Publicity Secretary for his journalistic background and Amanullah Khan as General Secretary. On 13th August 1965 Maqbool Butt, Amanullah Khan, Mir Abdul Qayoom, a Kashmiri migrant from Jammu settled in

Pakistan secretly formed 'The Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front' (JKNLF).

For the next ten months the group recruited more people into the ranks of JKNLF and on 10th of June 1966 the first group of JKNLF including Maqbool Butt, Aurangzeb, a student from Gilgit, Amir Ahmad and Kala Khan, a retired subedar from POK secretly crossed over to the valley of Kashmir. Maqbool Butt with three of his group members worked underground for three months and recruited a number of youth from the valley to his organization. After about three months in an encounter with the security forces besides CID inspector Amar Chand one of the four Aurangzeb from Gilgit got killed and Kala Khan received injuries. Eventually on 14th of September 1966 Maqbool Butt and two of his comrades, Kala Khan and Amir Ahmad were arrested. Two FIR's were registered against Maqbool Butt were in he was charged with border cross without permission and murder of CID inspector Amar Chand.

The Court found him guilty and in 1968 August the Court passed death sentence to Maqbool Bhat and Amir Ahmad while as Kala Khan was given life sentence. However only four months of their sentence Maqbool Bhat with his associates escaped from the prison and sneaked back to POK. "On 22 October 1968 we started planning to escape from the prison and after one and a half month of intense planning we managed to put this plan to practice on 8th of December 1968 at 2:10 am by breaking the prison wall. It took us 16 days to reach to the first border check post. We reached Muzaffarabad on 25th of December and were interrogated in the interrogation centre till March 1969" said Butt in an interview

They were released on 8th of March 1969 when the Plebiscite Front, JKNLF and National Students Federation (NSF) activists staged demonstrations in Islamabad. In November 1969 the annual convention of Plebiscite Front was held in Muzaffarabad where Maqbool Butt was elected as its president.

3. The Ganga Hijacking

It was on 30th of January 1971 at 1305 that two young Kashmiris Hashim Qureshi and Ashraf Qureshi hijacked an Indian airliner 'Ganga' flight from Srinagar to Jammu. The plane was brought to Lahore where the hijackers issued the statement that they had hijacked the plane-a Fokker Friendship – on the instructions of their leader Maqbool Bhat and demanded the release of about two dozen National Liberation Front (NLF) activists from Indian prisons. On February 1st 1971 all passengers and crew members were freed and sent back to Kashmir via Amritsar while the plane was set on fire.

Initially the hijackers were greeted as heroes by the Pakistan government but when India suspended Pakistani flights over its territory and pressed Islamabad for action against them, the hijackers and hundreds of NLF activists including Maqbool Butt were arrested and interrogated in several infamous interrogation centres. Six of the detainees, including the hijackers and Maqbool Butt, were later tried in a special court under the Enemy Act 1943 of the Indian Penal Code and the case lasted from December 1971 to May 1973. The court eventually exonerated all but Hashim Qureshi from all charges, except dealing with weapons and explosives etc. As Hashim Qureshi puts it "The Pakistani government wanted us to sign a statement in front of the magistrate that the hijacking was planned by the Indians". In May 1976, Maqbool Butt once again crossed to Kashmir valley against the advice of many of his friends and comrades.

The reason for his crossing back to Kashmir was the dismantling of JKNLF and PF at the hands of Pakistani government. This time Maqbool Butt was accompanied by Abdul Hameed Butt and Riaz Dar. Within a few days of crossing to valley they were spotted and arrested by Indian security forces. In 1978 the Indian Supreme Court restored death sentence on Maqbool Butt and on he was transferred to Delhi's Tihar prison. It was on 03rd of February 1984 that 'Kashmir Liberation Army' headed by Amanullah Khan kidnapped the Indian diplomat Ravindra Mhatre in Birmingham London and demanded the release of Maqbool Bhat and on 06th of February 1984, the members of JKNLF murdered the Indian diplomat. After this, Maqbool Butt's petition for clemency was rejected and Butt was executed in the Tihar Jail in New Delhi on February 11, 1984 and buried in the Jail premises. The death warrants of Maqbool Butt were signed by Dr. Farooq Abdullah the then chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir who spent several days with Maqbool Butt in POK and Pakistan in 1974.

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