



Lala Mulk Raj Saraf: As a veteran journalist

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Abstract: *In the early decades of the twentieth century, Jammu and Kashmir as a princely state was under autocratic rule of Dogra rulers (1846-1947). There was no freedom of Press, i.e. it was discouraged at every level of state administration. At that time applying for permission to bring out a newspaper was looked upon as an act against the State. However, a man namely Lala Mulk Raj Saraf (1894-1989) rightly called the “father of journalism in Jammu and Kashmir” was not merely a pioneer in the field of media but epitomized a set of values that made him an institution by himself. Anything done to commemorate Saraf is a service to the state and journalism. He started the very first newspaper entitled “Ranbir” in 1924. The editorials of ‘Ranbir’ were extremely energetic and fearless. The progress of this message was immense and brought about an awakening among the masses as it spoke to them in their own language. The present paper intends to focus on the teething troubles, trials and turmoil’s, successes and failures, as embodied in his auto-biography “Fifty Years As A Journalist.” He thought of introducing journalism in the State when the majority would not even comprehend what it meant. This paper will also throw light on the crucial role played by Mulk Raj Saraf as a journalist which he has written down in his autobiography, “Fifty Years as a Journalist”. The paper will also try to examine remembrance of Saraf not as a journalist but as historian too.*

Keywords: Freedom, Jammu and Kashmir, Mulk Raj Saraf, Newspaper, *Ranbir*, Political Awakening.

The Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir comprised of three regions Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It has the unique feature that despite its diversity of regional variations, cultural differences, it always maintained communal harmony. Though there was long subjugation of Kashmir by autocratic rulers, who were of distinct races, human ethos were persistently maintained throughout all the regions.¹ It was very fortunate for the State of Kashmir that during the chaos and uncertainty there was an emergence of dynamic, valour and well sprit personalities. Thus the wheels of history witnessed the good deeds of engines of change.²

Lala Mulk Raj Saraf appeared in such a faltered political situation, he nailed that with his dedication and the rhetoric trump of a pen, which could be substantiated by the statement quoted by Ramanand Sagar, *Lala Mulk Raj Saraf’s pen neither shiver nor slows down in defending the truth. He ‘Meri Pakistan Yatra’ is a*

¹ Sheikh, Gulam Rasool, *Pleasant Memory of Lala Mulk Raj Saraf* cited in *Fifty Years as a Journalist* by Mulk Raj Saraf p. 222

² Saraf, Mulk Raj, “*Fifty years as a Journalist*”, Raj Mahal Publication, Jammu, 1967, p. 222

*travelogue with a difference. It takes us along the highways of a brotherhood of man and through the innermost recesses of their hearts.*³

Mr. Saraf was a legend in his times, showed the noblest contribution in the field of journalism. He was man of word, farsighted and born journalist who took initiative to lay down the bedrock of journalism with most trying circumstances, teething troubles and feeble conditions in Kashmir. In order to reach a pinnacle of his life he always confronted his work as a challenge and struggle. There were ups and downs but he stands as a solid man, with strong determination, dedicated to his goals, never lost his aspirations and worked his way without compromising with his principles. However, after the continuous refusal of State Government to initiate journalism in Kashmir, finally, his truthful determination was coloured by creating history on 24th June 1924, when state government gave permission to start its first independent newspaper 'Ranbir' in Jammu and Kashmir.⁴

He initiated this newspaper with the intuition of social work. The political and educational condition was so worst that it was difficult in such an atmosphere to lay a foundation of a newspaper but did not lose his confidence for the establishment of peace in the State, which reveals that Saraf was a great nation builder.⁵

Although Lala Mulk Raj Saraf has expired from this world his immense contribution to the society of Jammu and Kashmir is so praiseworthy, whenever, we are going to the discuss history of press, contribution of journalism, his name is always on tip of the tongue of almost to every journalist, every political leader, legend personalities and especially in the mind of young blood of Kashmir who had the dream of survival of their state so-called heaven of the world. To make above lines more strong it better to quote here the saying s of the Ashwini Kumar, president of the Press Club of Jammu who has mentioned some fruitful words regarding the Mulk Raj Saraf. He says that Lalaji Mulk Raj Saraf was not only father of Journalism, but he imbibes taste of journalism among the vigilant youth and motivated them to come forward in this advantageous world which is termed as 'Fourth Pillar' because of responsibility and accountability entrusted upon the profession.⁶

Mr. Saraf a well-known journalist of the 20th century has a lineage of educated family, a whole family of writers, journalists and production experts. The sun of journalism his birthplace was Samba (District Jammu) on 8th April 1894. Graduated from the Punjab University in 1919, he was a student of Law College, Lahore, 1919-1920, discontinued his law studies and trapped himself in the bloom of freedom

³ Singh, Dr Karan, "Yet another first in the name of Father of Journalism", Daily Excelsior, Jammu, 23th October 2017,

⁴ The Kashmir Time, Jammu, 24th October 2017, P.3

⁵ Weekly *Ranbir*, 7 hard (name of Dogri month), 1932, Jammu, p. 5

⁶ The Kashmir Time, Jammu, 24th October 2017, P.3

struggle and joined as a sub-editor of Lala Lajpat Rai's newspaper daily "Bande Mataram".⁷

A short but a very informative description of Mr Saraf has been given by M. M. Khajooria, former director general of police. He says that Saraf was their close neighbour, generally known as 'Akhbar Wallas', and all boys called him 'Chacha Ji.' He was a man of kind-hearted, always respond to greetings with a faint smile, there was kind of twinkle in his eyes that radiated affection. Lalaji was always immaculately dressed in pure 'Khadi'. He exuded a special kind of dignity, a rare blend of pride and humanity due to this high mark of greatness and humble behaviour many people were eager to meet him.⁸ Once Mr Khajooria asked Lalaji the secret of his good health, he was then past eighty-five, his reply was "Positive thinking, long walks, drinking lots of water and above all spreading the message of life".⁹

Apart from a survival of a cause of journalism for over 60 years, he was President of the State Unit of All India Working Journalists Federation. He got an experience of a good journalist by his contributing nature for decades or we can say his constructive affiliation to newspapers like "Statesman," "Hindu," "Hindustan Times," "Tribune," and "Bombay Chronicle." It seems that his touch with the good fame nationalist newspapers made his exposure of journalism very broader, fruitful, comparative and comprehensive etc.¹⁰ It can be more authentic by this argument that the World Conference of Journalist, held in Helsinki (capital of Finland) it is a moment of great honour that Mr Saraf was the member of the Indian delegation, who participated in this conference and later visited different countries like France, the Soviet Union, China, Korea, Hong Kong etc.¹¹

Shri Saraf's long career as a journalist proves the significance of journalism that in its early stage it was not a profession or business, but a courageous and a revolutionary mission. He expresses a number of events from his life which go to show the strength of his moral fibre and his courage to face adversities which arise out of a free and fearless expression of one's own views. There is no doubt that Mr Saraf has taken up social and economic grievances of common masses. Through his tool of expression that his paper Weekly Ranbir, which became later on a daily newspaper he advocated the elimination of corruption, removal of rural indebtedness and abolition of forced labour.¹²

From his autobiography, it seems he persistently struggled for freedom of the press in Jammu and Kashmir. He had motivated and inspires the young generation to

⁷ Saraf, Mulk Raj, "Insaniyat Abhi Zindah Hai, Meri Pakistan Yatra", Published at Digital Publications, Jammu, 2004, p.1

⁸ Saraf, Mulk Raj, Op. Cit, p. 220

⁹ Ibid. p. 221

¹⁰ Saraf, Mulk Raj, Op. Cit, p.1

¹¹ Ibid. p.1

¹² Saraf, Mulk Raj, Op. Cit, pp. 123-124

be ready, dedicate their life to face the hardships and hurdles which freedom fighters of the country had to face during the long struggle of independence.¹³

After the intensive study of his autobiography “Fifty Years as a Journalist” it can be said that he served a great portion of Kashmir history by his newspaper daily “*Ranbir*” apart from that he has written several significant books, like "Jammu and Kashmir Encyclopedia," Kashmir Year Book, *Insaniyat Abhi Zindah Hai, Meri Pakistan Yatra* and a biography of Hans Raj Ji. For his unforgettable contribution State Government of Jammu and Kashmir had honoured in 1976 with the highest civil award “Padamshri” by the President of India. He was a kind-hearted man, got too much love and respect not only from the civil society but from the State as well as from the Government of India. His family was comprised of his wife, five sons and a daughter.¹⁴

Mr Saraf’s autobiography, *Fifty Years as a Journalist* has recorded his valuable experiences in the field of journalism. He was not only been a pioneer in the field of journalism, but also a distinguished public man, and has always maintained a high standard of behaviour. His reminiscences are so mellifluous that hopefully would not only benefit the young generation and aspiring journalists but will interest all those who have a stake in a clean and purposeful public life. It deals with an important period in the history of Jammu and Kashmir State, and this autobiography constitutes a valuable source of information and reference for serious students of contemporary history.¹⁵

This book was not left wholly on the government expenses, but some financial aid might be given to him and the matter of bringing out the book entirely left to Shri Saraf. Later on, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir awarded him on the Republic Day (1968) at a special function a cash reward of Rs. 3000 and a “robe of honour.” award of Rs 3000.¹⁶

Actually, the Government of India has started a practice of giving awards to the best-produced newspapers; this practice was introduced here in order to the growth of healthy and responsible journalism in the state.¹⁷ Its main motive was journalists for good and responsible reporting, it clearly seems that father journalism in Kashmir was a great example, a legend, a role model in the field of journalism for the present journalists in the in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

¹³ Ibid. p. 124

¹⁴ Saraf, Mulk Raj, Op. Cit, pp.1-2

¹⁵ F. No. Nil, 1966-67, Information and Broadcasting Department, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives Repository, Srinagar, p. 5

¹⁶ F. No. Nil, 1966-67, Information and Broadcasting Department, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives Repository, Srinagar, p. 1

¹⁷ F. No. Nil, 1966-67, Information and Broadcasting Department, Jammu and Kashmir State Archives Repository, Srinagar, p. 1



A figure is taken from the autobiography of Lala Mulk Raj Saraf, *Fifty Years as a Journalist*.

Nevertheless, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah his autobiography, “Atish-i-Chinar” has made a critical analysis of the Saraf’s newspaper *Ranbir* that this Hindu paper was an agent of autocratic Government of State.¹⁸ Mr Saraf has agreed that he would not display any news related to the political field, there would be a focus on the socio-economic arena.¹⁹ But the truthfulness and his social intuition has fostered opponents or what we can say overshadow their criticism, they became praiseworthy of Saraf’s work, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah himself accepted the reality and says later on that *The Ranbir has been leader of the thought highly of him as would be evident from the following observations of some of them.*²⁰ He proved to be a social, secular and a man sign of communal harmony, which can be seen by energetic articles

¹⁸ Sheikh, Muhammad Abdullah, “*Atish-i-Chinar*” (autobiography), Delhi, 1986, p. 55

¹⁹ Khalid, Bashir Ahmad, “Kashmir Exposing the myth behind the narrative”, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2017, p. 319

²⁰ Singh, Dr Karan, “*Yet another first in the name of Father of Journalism*”, Daily Excelsior, Jammu, 23rd October 2017

displayed in his newspaper *Ranbir* and only a fountain of journalism but a great historian, his autobiography is a great example of that.

In conclusion, it can be said that it fascinated an author to read the autobiography of Lala Mulk Raj Saraf, *Fifty Years as a Journalist*. It seems that Saraf a star of the town of Samba district Jammu did not care of odds and teething troubles he continued his mission to become an advocate of common people and express their miseries through newspaper *Ranbir* despite the absence of enlightenment in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. He got credit to lay the foundation of local journalism in the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, thus a platform of journalism was established by him. It could be said that dream of a foundation of a regional newspaper could have been belated further if Saraf would have not shown his energetic dedication and abilities to lay the foundation of newspaper in Kashmir in 1924. It is fact that he reconstructs and consolidated the history of journalism in Kashmir, as his autobiography covers the major portion of Kashmir history.