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By focusing on the themes of sovereignty, legitimacy and rights, this dissertation aims to explain how and why religion and politics became inextricably enmeshed in defining and expressing the protest of Kashmiri Muslims against their Dogra princely rulers. It examines the relations between the Dogra Hindu ruling house and largely Muslim subjects from the very creation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 by the British Indian colonial power to its dissolution in the aftermath of decolonization in 1947. A central contention of this study is that it was the irrelevance of Kashmir's Muslim subjects, despite their numerical preponderance, to the Dogra ruling house's search for legitimacy that left overwhelming numbers of them in the most abject state of helplessness and neglect. No small role was played by the colonial state in underwriting the sovereignty of the Dogra rulers while both encouraging and enabling them to derive their legitimacy from arenas that made no reference to their Muslim subjects in Kashmir. The Dogra's mandate to rule was derived from association with the Rajputs and, after 1858, as traditional Hindu rulers.

Under the aegis of colonial rule, the Dogras inaugurated a Hindu sovereignty, a novel political form characterized by an unprecedented degree of control by the ruler over a territorialized domain of Hindu religion and religious patronage. The Kashmiri Muslims, unlike the Hindus, were left out of the powersharing arrangements of the Dogra state not simply because they were Muslims but because, as Muslims, they became irrelevant to the legitimating devices installed by the Dogras and their British overlords. Therefore, the protest of Kashmiri Muslims represented not so much a defense of Islam, but rather of the rights of a community defined explicitly as Muslims by an equally explicit Hindu ruling hierarchy doling out or withholding patronage along religiously determined lines. This explains both the development of a consciousness among Kashmiri Muslims of religiously based neglect and, conversely, the emergence of a movement protesting a denial of rights that was unable to escape a religious sensibility.