

Evolution of Political Parties in the State of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Like the political history of other states of India, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a rich political history. It is rich in the sense that prior to its merge with the Union of India the political awakening has started in the state, particularly in the Kashmir region. However, after the Instrument of Accession, the political mobilisation in the state has widened its scope to a large extent, which results the formation of various political parties. The functioning of the political system of the state has been weakened due to the broke down of insurgency. The main objective of the paper is to explore and analyse the political history of the state of Jammu and Kashmir before the dawn of insurgency. The specificity of this study is to discuss the roots and ideology of these political parties of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. For this study, secondary data have been used. The data has been collected from the books, research articles, and government reports. The paper has been divided into three parts; one a brief introduction about the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Second, political parties in the state prior to insurgency. Third, Conclusion and existence of these political parties in the present scenario.

Key words: Jammu and Kashmir, Political Parties, Instrument of Accession.

State of Jammu and Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir State lays Indian subcontinent in the part of North- Western, it is surrounded by the Indian states of Himachel Pradesh and Punjab on the South; on Northeast by the Tibet; on the West by Pakistan and on the Northwest by Afghanistan. After the British India's partition, a major geographic and demographic change took place in the J&K State when Pakistan and India came into battle over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been divided the Kashmir into two administered regions i.e. Pakistan administered Kashmir and India administered Kashmir. From that time it has been became a big issue for both the countries and fought number of wars on it.¹

Political Parties Existence of the state from Accession to Insurgency:

The state of Jammu and Kashmir became the Indian part through the Instrument of Accession executed on 26 October, 1947 by Maharaja Hari Singh, ruler of the Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. By executing this legal document, the Indian Independence Act 1947 has been extended over the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard the various political parties were formed from time to time. The detailed description of these political parties is given below:-

1. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC)

National conference is a closely well purposeful party which has its units in every region of the state, predominantly in the province of Muslim majority of the state. The root of the JKNC dates back to the Dogra rule of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It was founded as the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference party by the Sheikh Abdullah and Chaudary Ghulam Abbas in 1932. In this regard, it was limited to the Kashmir region only. However, in the year 1939 the party organization has changed and extended to other regions of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. With this extension character, the name of the party was also renamed as the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. National conference party supported the Accession of the state with the union of India in 1947. It dominated the political power of the state since 1947 to 2016 with some breaks by the congress party and PDP in one form or another form. Its main political agenda is the Autonomy. The major achievements of the party are implementation of land reforms and formulation of the separate constitution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is the only state political party in the state whose Chief Minister was called the Prime Minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Later on, like the other states of the India this high titular post was also known as the chief ministerial post. This party has been presided and dominated by Abdullah's heirs; first Sheikh Abdullah's son (Farooq Abdullah) and second his grandson (Omar Abdullah) from 1982 to 2002 and 2002 to present respectively.²

2. Indian National Congress:

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir the history of the Indian National goes back to thirties of the 20th century when the party started to figure overtly in the politics of Kashmir in 1935. The strong wing of Indian National Conference was the State People's Conference, was active in determining the future course of the state politics in Kashmir. It has, in fact, convinced a major group of the Muslim Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to convert the Muslim Conference into a secular group so that the other non-Muslims could fasten together the freedom struggle in the state and could fight unitedly with their Muslim brethren in opposition to the rule of autocracy and despotism. This wish of the Indian National Congress was transformed into reality in June 1939 when the name of Muslim Conference was altered into National Conference. The major contribution of the Indian National Congress to Kashmir politics was that it gave nationalistic and secular character to it. Moreover it was triumphant in winning over the Sheikh Abdullah and his close associates to its side which ultimately had comprehensive consequences in the political life of Kashmir. It was this organization which assisted the state's accession to India and later on approved it. In this way that Indian National Congress became significant political force. However in the state the party was not seemed with favour particularly by Kashmiri people. As a solid believer in the power of the common masses, the party has for all time placed in opposition to all those elements and forces in the Jammu and Kashmir state who are either antagonistic to very framework of parliamentary democracy or are supposed to be vigorously busy inciting sectarian and parochial sentiments of one section of the people or other.

In 1965, the congress party of Jammu and Kashmir joined hands with the National Conference. The 1987 Assembly election gave the rise to first the coalition government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. An alliance was formed through rig elections between the congress and National Conference parties. However, this alliance lost its credibility in a short span of time³ has taken a brief description of the state politics in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, she states “the 1987 elections results in an impasse. Though Farooq Abdullah formed the National conference-Congress government, it didn’t enjoy any legitimacy. The elections were perceived to be totally rigged and there was a general sense of disillusionment not merely with regard to the elections but also for the political process”. With the 20 MLA’s it made an alliance with the newly regional political party of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, PDP in the year 2002.⁴ In 2014 Assembly election it won only 12 seats and sits as the opposition party.⁵ In recent parliamentary election of 2014, the state political system comes into the hands of two major pre-alliances. One, led by Congress party and NC and second, by PDP-BJP alliances. Earlier one lost and later one (PDP and BJP) won three-three seats out of total six seats.⁶

3. Praja Parishad Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir became the part of India shortly after the independence of India in 1947. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah became the prime minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Dogra rulers who were ruling the state since long time came to an end and the political power went to the hands of National Conference. In this regard, the state got the special status under the Constitution of India. The people of the Jammu region were unhappy with the special status of the state. They formed an agitation in the Jammu region which was known as Praja Parishad. During this agitation a political party was formed, known as Jammu Praja Parishad in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the year 1947 by Balraj Madhok.⁷ They attacked Sheikh Abdullah’s Policies and their “main plank of the agitation was 'Ek desh mein do vidhan; ek desh mein do nishan; ek desh mein do pradhan nahin challenge' - "in one country, two constitutions; in one country, two flags; in one country, two prime ministers", would not be tolerated”.⁸ Later on it merged with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in the year 1963. The BJS formed a base for the BJP party in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It raised its voice against Article 370 and is for the repeal of special status prescribed in article 370 from the Indian Constitution. It wants autonomy for the Jammu region. It is presently a coalition partner in the state with the PDP.⁹

4. Peoples Democratic Party (PDP):

One of the numerous State Parties of Jammu and Kashmir that are lively in the state political circumstances, the Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party holds a high-flying place. In 1999 the party’s foundation was came into existence. The leading founding member was the Ex Union Home Minister of India - Mr. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

In 2006 the high position of the party came into being, when it got succeed to win the State Assembly Elections and formed the state government. The chief minister of the state was appointed the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and stayed in the chair till 2005. When it won the state elections, the Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party was a part of the alliance of United Progressive Alliance. Its ideology was based on the

principles of self-rule within the realm Indian constitution. It is considering the chief opposition party in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

5. The All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front (PF)

The Jammu and Kashmir's Instrument of Accession with Union of India, after that the Jawaharlal Nehru carried out the Plebiscite to the Jammu and Kashmir state.¹⁰ The then National Conference's senior leader or "a trusted aide of Sheikh Abdullah",¹¹ Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg, take captive the word plebiscite and played the Muslim card in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. He established the Plebiscite Front (PF) on August 9, 1955. However, it was officially inaugurated in the year 1958.¹² With the creation of PF, Pakistan "extended its support to the Front in its struggle against India. The Plebiscite Front committed itself to the demand for the right of self-determination of the Muslims in the State and the implementation of the Security Council resolutions envisaging a plebiscite under the aegis of the United Nations".¹³ So its main purpose became the referendum or plebiscite to be held under the patronage of the United Nations to give sovereignty over the people of Jammu and Kashmir. So called Sheikh Abdullah became the Patron to Plebiscite Front (PF) even though he not at all attached the PF. On the other hand, Muhammad (2013) has taken the analytical view of the particular party and states "looking analytically at the political stand of the organization it was more candid and clear than many other contemporary organizations espousing the cause of right to self-determination or resolution of the Kashmir 'dispute'/problem... Its political stand was more transparent and even clearer than that of the Hurriyat Conference that simultaneously talks of right to self-determination in accordance with UN Charter and the resolutions adopted by the UN Security council and about some vague negotiated settlement, without delineating a clear-cut modus operandi for achieving such a settlement- and leaving it open ending". On the other hand, this plebiscite demand had two descriptions – on the one side it led to the stayed away from of elections in the state in 1960s while as on the other side union government backed Sheikh Abdullah to remain in a power. It became Pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian, which led to ban on the PF under the Prevention (Unlawful Activities) Act. Sheikh Abdullah, G.M. Shah and M.A. Beg were taking in to leave from the state. Later on the Plebiscite Front chief Afzal Beg affirmed that the Plebiscite Front would no longer be adamant to hold the Plebiscite. This optimistic shift was recognized by the prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi and hold discussions with the Sheikh Abdullah. To keep on sovereignty of India over state of Jammu and Kashmir and in return self government and autonomy would be authoritative under Article of 370 of the Indian Constitution, declared by an agreement called Indira-Sheikh Accord 1974. After this accord Abdullah amalgamated the Plebiscite Front into the National Conference in 1975. On the other hand, in the region of Kashmir, it propagated the "the seeds of communalism...in the Hearts of the Kashmiri Muslim and remained so even today".¹⁴

6. International Democratic Party

R. P. Saraf became the Kashmiri politician in 1952, when he was elected to the constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. Saraf had served his early years of the politics in the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). However, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) had been joined by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. With this event Saraf was chosen for the central committee at the CPM (ML) party in the year 1970.¹⁵ However, after more than a decade, Saraf founded his new party, known as International Democratic Party in the year 1986 in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Krishan Dev Sethi and Abdul Kabir Wani, were the two former members of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Jammu and Kashmir who joined with the International Democratic Party. It has been a political party of India, working in Punjab and Rajasthan besides the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The party ideology is based on peace politics in the state and favours Joint Indo-Pakistani control over Kashmir as a means to achieve peace. Besides this, it also favours regional autonomy for the Jammu and Ladakh regions from the Kashmir region.¹⁶ In December 2015, the party's chief met the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party Founder Shabir Shah and hold a dialogue on the current issues in the state. In this regard "DFP spokesperson severely condemned the policy of the Food Security Bill saying the government is pushing people to starvation." "On one hand, they shower bullets in people and on other, make anti-people policies," the spokesperson said and termed the people's protest against the Act as "justified". The spokesperson also expressed sorrow over the government's anti-Urdu policy saying this all is done at the behest of people sitting on Nagpur".¹⁷

7. International Democratic Party

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spokesperson also expressed sorrow over the government's anti-Urdu policy saying this all is done at the behest of people sitting on Nagpur".²⁰

OTHER KASHMIRI ORGANISATIONS

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir there are various political parties which are functioning. But JKLF is the only group that operates in all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir under the same name, leadership, organizational structure, constitution, policy and flag. In administered part of India the JKLF is alienated into two groups. One group is under the leadership of Yasin Malik. The other is Jammu and Kashmir People League which positions for unregulated right of self- rule of Kashmiri people. Among other Kashmiri groups, some of whom had formerly contested election under Indian constitutional suzerainty but now stipulate execution of UN resolutions on Kashmir, have produced an alliance named All Parties Hurriet Conference (APHC) which is measured as a pro-Pakistan organization. High-flying among APHC members are, Ittehadul Muslimeen, Peoples Conference, Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim Conference, Awami Action Committee and a renegade group of JKLF led by M. Yasin Malik. There are some other groups. A coalition of a number of these organizations called JK Liberation Alliance (JKLA) situates for free-for-all right of self- rule but is not very active.

This study shows that there are different and diverse political parties working in the Jammu and Kashmir State following different objectives and agendas ranging from independence to integration with India. These parties at diverse times have inclined the political discourse of the state having effects which continues to have an effect on the political scenario.

Conclusion

During the developmental process of political parties in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, few political parties remain in power prior to Insurgency episode. It has been seen that the small regional political parties either merged with the other political parties for some time or completely like Praja Parishad or close down their shutters permanently like MUF and International Democratic Party. Due to the dominance of single party, National Conference party the other small parties simmered. However, the other political parties are still in existence through the coalition system of the state. The existence of small regional parties of the state of Jammu and Kashmir share is expected to increase in this coalition process.

Endnotes

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