



Issues Shaping Political Discourse in 2014 Assembly Elections in the State of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

In 2014, the Assembly Elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held. The issues that took the centre stage in shaping the political discourse were identity, religion, hindutva supremacy etc. Broadly speaking, it had more to do with safeguarding of Article 370 of Indian Constitution, which ensured the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir a different relation with Indian Union. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) had come to power at the Centre with absolute majority, and their manifesto included abrogation of Article 370. So in response to this apprehension all regional parties like People's Democratic Party, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference etc started mobilizing people on the lines of defending the said article, which broadly encompasses identity. This paper looks into many issues that shaped the political discourse in 2014 assembly elections and moreover, examines which political party was setting the agenda and which one was responding to it.

Keywords: Assembly Elections 2014, Political Discourse, Issues, PDP, NC, INC, BJP.

Research Methodology.

Methodology of analyzing manifestos of political parties has been used. Moreover speeches in the election rallies, social media handles and other reliable reports have been examined to understand what exactly where the issues in this election and accordingly this paper has been written.

Introduction and Key Issues in J & K Elections (2014)

The Assembly Elections of 2014 was unique from previous elections due to various reasons. Previous elections were held in the shadow of militancy and political instability, but 2014 assembly election was held in the atmosphere of fear of intrusion of Hindutva politics into the state and the unprecedented floods that state had witnessed. The main issues in the assembly election of 2014 are outlined as under:

Development: Due to political instability and militancy, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has suffered a lot. The 2014 floods had caused great harm to the people effecting the infrastructure and economy. BJP won the parliamentary elections on the development card, and also started mobilising the people in the state to vote in their favour for speedy development and “*Acchay Din*”

The Modi Card: BJP had played Modi card in all poll bound states ever since it came into power at centre. Narendra Modi spent diwali with flood victims of valley. BJP also hoped on former separatist leader Sajad Gani lone who met with Narendra Modi and praised him and called him big brother. Union territory status for Ladakh regarding it development was also raised by BJP in election campaign.

Rehabilitation of victims of massive floods : Poor relief and rehabilitation measures in the wake of floods lead to anti-incumbency. Subsequently, the ruling NC wanted the elections to be postponed, but BJP knew that it was the time to reap the dividends by giving financial assistance to the people. Therefore this remained an important issue at the time of election.

Stability: In the 1996 elections, NC had swept the state, and after that all elections in Jammu and Kashmir have seen fractured verdict. Thereafter all the governments were formed with the support of congress. However, this time PDP and BJP raised the issue of stability and had been pursuing their goal of winning 44+ seats to form government without the support of other parties.

Cross- Border Firing: Due to continuous cross border firing, border residents had to face lot of hardships. It led to the displacement of thousands of people. It also became a major election issue as opposition criticized ruling NC of being incapable of rebuilding the lives of border residents.

Manifestos

The Election Manifestos play an important part in the electoral process and provide valuable insights for understanding of the policies and programme of the political parties prior to election. In the modern political, campaign, manifesto of political party is an important document which is reflective of the message of a party, representing their ideology and their stand on policy issues.

People's Democratic Party Manifesto:

The 2014 Manifesto specially talked about self-rule as a solution for resolution of Kashmir, besides effective governance to fight corruption and to rebuild the shattered economy of the state. Moreover, good governance and rebuilding of state economy also finds place in the manifesto. The manifesto released by Mufti Mohammad Syed also highlighted the need for the closer ties across the line of control, returning of Kashmiri Pandits and their integration with larger Kashmiri milieu. The manifesto also mentioned that the special status enshrined in Article 370 (of Constitution) is required to empower the people of Jammu and Kashmir and help deal with the issues of identity, borders and governance. It also talked about empowerment of women and minorities like Sikhs and Christianity.

Jammu Kashmir National Conference Manifesto:

The manifesto of JKNC highlighted that Article 370 cannot be abrogated. Besides it talked about restoration of autonomy and revocation of Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Bhartiya Janta Party's Vision Document:

BJP claimed to release not a manifesto but a Vision for better future. They said, Our vision is to make the state of Jammu and Kashmir a peaceful, progressive and developed state of the Union of India through holistic and inclusive development of all the three regions including Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It promised to initiate reservation for Kashmiri Pandits and reservation of three seats for them in Assembly out of Valley's 46 seats. The document also promised reservation of some Assembly seats to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir Refugees and 33% reservation to women in the Legislative Assembly and Legislative

Council of the state. It talked about ‘TIME model’ which would focus on Tourism, Infrastructure, Modernisation, Empowerment’.

In a news telecast by Aaj Tak on 21st November 2014, it was also said that “the Bhartiya Janta Party may change the name of Jammu and Kashmir to Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh in their election manifesto...and raise the issue of Article 370”. Rajnath Singh in the featured video says that the abrogation of article is necessary to ensure that panchayats are given administrative and financial powers properly..

Indian National Congress: The manifesto released by INC proposed two empowered regional Councils for Jammu as well as Kashmir. The Manifesto also talked about more Cross-LOC Confidence Building Measures and review of the cases of detainees who are not involved in any serious offenses. J&K has also seen heavy floods in 2014, so INC manifesto also talked about rebuilding process of the flood-hit areas.

Senior party leader Gulam Nabi Azad while releasing the Manifesto said that, Our party believes in equitable development of all the three regions of the state. A developmental path that is reflective of the inter-regional diversity of the state as well as Congress party’s vision of the inclusive and equitable development of all the regions and Sub-regions of the state.

Beyond the above mentioned parties, there were other national and state parties that contested the 2014 Assembly election. Among other national parties, it was Bahujan Samaj Party, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Nationalist Congress Party. Other State Party that participated in the elections was Jammu and Kashmir National Panthers Party.

Elections and the Aftermath:

Finally, elections were conducted and the result was a fractured mandate. No party got a clear majority which stood at 44 in the 87 seat strong Assembly. The PDP turned out to be the single largest party with 28 seats in its kitty followed by BJP with 25 seats, JKNC with 15 seats and INC with 12 seats .

The election result arithmetic threw a different challenge in the making of the Government as BJP somehow became unavoidable. The whole lot of campaigning by regional parties revolved around stopping of BJP from coming into power in the state. Even the arch rivals like PDP and JKNC together were not able reach the number of 44 seats, which was required to form the government. Though Congress leader G. N. Azad proposed 'Mahaghatbandhan' of PDP, JKNC, INC but that too could not be realized.

After hectic deliberations between PDP and BJP, government formation was announced. Mufti Mohammad Syed became the Chief Minister and a 'Common Minimum Programme' in relation to governance was announced in which the contentious issues were avoided. For people it was like mixing of North Pole and South Pole and accordingly it was viewed as a fragile government. With time number of issues popped up and PDD and BJP were having divergent view points about them.

Talking about the NC, Mint in an analytical video titled "Dynasty Politics-Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Elections 2014", mentioned that it was the worst performance of National Conference and has raised questions on the future of dynasty politics of the Abdullah's. Omar Abdullah tweeted that it was a enormous setback and sought feedback from the people in relation to this debacle.

On the account of Manifesto realization, it can be said that nothing much was achieved by PDP despite being in government for more than two years. It was finally on June 19, 2018 that BJP withdrew support to the coalition government and Governors rule was implemented. In 2019, BJP again comes to power at Centre and subsequently on 5th August they abrogated Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Statehood was withdrawn and erstwhile state was bifurcated into two Union territories- J&K and Ladakh.

Conclusion

The electoral politics of the state always carries with itself various issues that affect and shape the political discourses and processes. The imprints of communalism, adherence to various ideologies by citizens as well as the political parties play a vital role in the political discourse. In 2014, each political party came up with their Action plans, however, manifesto of BJP was quite different and all about changing the status quo of the state for it promised to abrogate the special status of the state. Other parties in their manifestos and campaigns were trying to respond to this manifesto. Since no party was able to cross the

majority mark in the assembly due to which PDP took the call to join hands with BJP. For many it was the coming together of North pole and South Pole in terms of ideology. Subsequently, the brief tenure of this coalition government was marred by various frictions and divergences on various issues. As a result, coalition government couldn't survive and state again witnessed Governors rule.

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