

Full Length Research

One-Party Dominance and its Breakdown in Jammu and Kashmir

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The dominance of one party system in Jammu and Kashmir started with the dominance of National Conference since it came into power in 1947. Being the fore runner, in the freedom struggle against Dogra rule, since its inception the National Conference was able to dominate the political landscape of the state with its ideology of Secularism, Socialism and democracy. National Conference had established the dominance of one political party under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in all its phases: be it the freedom struggle launched in 1931 by the Sheikh Abdullah or the Accession of J&K to the Indian Union after independence in 1947, coupled with the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah 1953-1972. The paper has highlighted the dominant phase of National conference and its break down, the various factors responsible for it, and has also dealt with the emergence of People's Democratic Party as a strong alternative regional party. The paper had focused on the role played by PDP in changing the hegemonic discourse of National Conference by bringing an effective competitive party politics in Jammu and Kashmir since 2002.

KEYWORDS: Accession, National Conference, One-Party Dominance.

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INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir has seen many dispositions and subjugation for centuries together but the first decades of 20th century provide rejuvenation, galvanization in the thoughts and minds of populace and wrote a new socio-economic and political fortunes of the state by mixing outside world structural outcomes in terms of decolonization later by cold war politics to emerging trends of globalization. So it is safe to say that the period between 1925 and 1930 may be described as a dawn of democratization as number of factors contributing it, revolutionizing of the masses through 'Reading Room party', charismatic leadership and thought provoking

personality if initially highlighted only Muslim miserable conditions was none other than the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who founded an organization in October 1932 named as All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. Though enjoyed the support of Muslim intelligentsia, clergy, traders, industrial labors, artisans and peasants, it entered into the arena of state politics by becoming concrete ray of hope to get freedom from clutches of autocratic regime and secure socio-economic betterment of the people, upholding strong credentials, by hijacking the momentum and maximizing the base by changing its name to All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference.

Emancipation Promises

Like Indian National Congress in India, Democratic Politics in Jammu and Kashmir started also with hegemonic party system and electoral space was dominated by a single party that is National Conference as it assumed power in Legislative cum Constituent Assembly elections of 1951. The people of Jammu and Kashmir in their totality swung to the National Conference through the politics of Naya Kashmir Manifesto which was unanimously adopted on 29th and 30th September 1944 at Sopore session in Kashmir and declared it as the objective of National Conference as Sheikh Abdullah wrote in his Autobiography

“the Naya Kashmir document was not only revolutionary in the state but in the whole sub-continent New Kashmir Manifesto provides guarantee to rights of women, laborers and weaker section of the society”

The original document of Naya Kashmir declares J&K into an independent state follow is an extract from it, “we the people of Jammu Kashmir Ladakh, the frontier regions, Poonch and Chinaniilaqas (areas) commonly known as people of Jammu and Kashmir in order to unite ourselves in an atmosphere of equality and liberty..... people of the east and workers of the world to fulfill the historic task of making our country the shining jewel on the forehead of Asia do hereby adopt and solemnly pledge this socio-political and economic manifesto. The new Kashmir Manifesto was divided into two parts:

- The Constitution of the state
- The National Economic Reconstruction plan

From the constitutional perspective the manifesto declared” freedom of conscience and of worship shall be guaranteed for all citizens further laid no citizen may be arrested or detained except by decisions of court of law.¹ New Kashmir Manifesto from economic perspective envisaged and enunciated a radically new rural economy in which the existing land relationships were fundamentally changed as Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah concluded his introduction with this paragraph:

“Through the lean centuries of history the exploited sons of J&K have been the plaque bearers of Hindu monarchs and Buddhist rulers and Mughals. The peasant sons of this valley and the mountains have scratched only nine inches of top soil and cleared out a bare existence. Now the time has come when they must dig deep into the bowels of the earth and

*yoke them a bigger and better morsel of daily bread”.*²

Since the assumption of power by the leaders of freedom struggle, the NC further dominated the course of state politics. NC not only administered the state at domestic level but it played a vital role at the national level of politics. At domestic front the first and foremost task of Sheikh Administration was to invite the peasants to cultivate rent free land they worked upon. This was in conformity with the declared policy of the NC that is “Land to Tiller.”³ The orders with regard to the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act were issued on 13 July 1950.⁴ The land reforms thus received a wide publicity at the National and International level and act was appreciated because it was the first Asia state to enunciate this golden act for the welfare of the people.⁵ On the other hand the provisions for establishment of the Constituent Assembly in the state were included in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and the State Government was given the power to convene a Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for the State and its government. The Assembly convened by a proclamation of Karan Singh issued on 20th April, 1951. Elections to the Assembly were held in 3rd September 1951. So the powers of the government were vested with the Council of Ministers. They did not only seek for Constituent Assembly powers to frame the Constitution for the state but also for the power to decide the final disposition of the State as the S.M. Abdullah talked about the three alternatives regarding the accession of the J&K:

“The Cabinet Mission Plan has provided for three courses which may be followed by the Indian States when determining their future affiliations. A state can either accede to India or Pakistan, but failing to do either, it can still remain independent.....these three alternatives are naturally open to our state.”

So, the special status was challenged by the Hindutva forces led by Bhartiya Jana Sangh and regarded it against the national integration. These trends created deep concerns in Kashmir Valley as well as in Indian Union because S.M Abdullah criticizes the communal politics on April 10, 1952 by highlighting the words as “we have not acceded to India as forced labors that we act as puppets in their hands. Our relationship is based on basis

² Ibid

³ Prem Nath Bazaz. 1954. *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, Delhi, p 496.

⁴ B.L. Sharma. 1971. *Kashmir Awakes*, Vikas Publication, New Delhi, P 105

⁵ Prem Nath Bazaz, op.cit, P.496

¹ Naya Kashmir Manifesto, pp. 26-27

of principles and India should respect those principles”.

This made simmering actions and reactions and various parleys took place in the capital. The consequence was the Delhi Agreement on July 24 1952 and it led to erosion of Autonomy but Hindutva forces remain adamant for Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan and Ek Nishan. The memorandum against S.Abdullah led by Hindutva elements and his three cabinet ministers indicating allegation against Abdullah's government that they have lost confidence in Abdullah's leadership led to the dismissal and imprisonment in 1953. whether inside or outside the jail S.Abdullah and National Conference continued to dominate the course of politics in the state. Meanwhile Mirza Afzal Beigh formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front on 9 August 1955. The dominance of parties cannot be measured through the government act or acquisition of power but the social and psychological basis are important so N.C came true on all perspectives, objectives and goals. The functionaries of Front maintained that the accession of J&K to India was Temporary and also emphasized that sovereignty belong to people and they should be given the right of self - determination to decide their futures. As, it was endorsed by S.Abdullah at Dargah Shrine Hazratbal wherein he admitted that the accession to Indian union was a mistake, while for a brief release period in 1958 he was rearrested for his hate speech against Union of India that came to be known as Kashmir Conspiracy Case.⁶

Due to changing political dynamics in subcontinent like war between Pakistan and India in 1971 ended in Shimla Agreement on 2nd July 1972 between the two leaders of India and Pakistan changed the political outlook of Plebiscite Front Leaders as Pakistan leader in above mentioned agreement endorsed that Kashmir issue would be resolved bilaterally. So S.Abdullah on 8 March 1972 in an interview to London times softened his stand by saying:

“There is no quarrel with the Government of India about accession. It is over the structure of internal autonomy. One must not forget that it is ‘he’ who brought the Kashmir to India”.

So Indira Gandhi responded quickly by stating in Parliament in these words *“we welcome the change in the thinking of leaders of Plebiscite who have accepted the finality of accession of Kashmir to India”*

So, the talks between S.Abdullah and Indira Gandhi swing from 'Pre-1953 position to popularly known as Kashmir Accord. The agreement was signed on 13th November 1974 between G. Parthasarthy and Mirza Afzal Beigh. With the Sheikh Abdullah at the helm of affairs NC was not only able to locate its politics in the regional context but restore its popular base of politics

⁶ Kashmir-Uzma.2009. *Kashmir the awakening*, 13 August, p 4.

also without even backing from the Centre. As, one of the credible elections before 2000 had given party an over whelming mandate in 1977 through changing seat from Congress to Janta Party in Parliamentary elections. Consequently led to withdrawal of support of Congress from Sheikh's Government and paved the way for new assembly elections of 1977 where NC managed to win 47 out of 75 seats of which 39 from the valley. Sheikh Abdullah declared his successor Farooq Abdullah after he succumbed to prolonged heart ailment on 8th September 1982. The autonomy of NC and location of its popular support could not be sustained after the death of S.Abdullah. The elections in 1983 again resulted in NC's favor but lasted only for 13 months as this Centre managed a split in the NC. So, new government was formed led by S.abdullah's son-in-law Ghulam Mohammad Shah (Khalida group) with outside support from the Congress. Farooq concluded the power which flowed from Delhi. His aspirations to become strong regional player in an anti-Congress alliance had resulted in the fragmentation of NC and the ouster of the Abdullah's from the state.⁷ G.M Shah was installed in place of Farooq Abdullah. His government acted as a puppet in the hands of central government G .M Shah's government had been dismissed in March 1986 and the Governor's rule again had been implemented. However, following the death of Mrs.Indira Gandhi on 31st October, 1984, Dr. Farooq Abdullah diluted his Centre-State relations and anti-congress (I) utterances and moved towards the reconciliation with the congress (I) and the new Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.⁸ This change of attitude led to an Accord between Congress (I) and the National Conference in November 1986 and the coalition government under the Dr. Farooq Abdullah was re-installed on 7th November 1986. It was stated that main plank of the Accord was fighting subversive, fundamentalist and pro Pakistani forces and to bring about an all-around development in a state. The coalition had evoked protests in valley but Farooq Abdullah had been able to announce the Prime Ministers Promise of Rs 1000 crores of Special Central Assistance to the state which had never received. Next Legislative assembly elections were to be held on March 23 1987, which had been contested by the Congress (I) and the National Conference in coalition. Before the elections various secessionists and fundamentalist forces joined hands to form a Muslim United Front (MUF)⁹ which included Jamat-i-Islami who had rejected the accession from the very beginning and Umaat-i-Islami Mahaaz-e-Azaadi and

⁷ Indian Express2014, *JK Politics*, December 9, p 3.

⁸Sumit Ganguly.1997.*The Crises in Kashmir- Portents of War, Hopes of Peace*, Cambridge University Press,p 96.

⁹ Victoria Schonfield. 2004.*Kashmir in Conflict- India Pakistan and the Unending War*, Viva Books Pvt Lmt New Delhi, p 137

many others which demanded more Democratic rights for the people.¹⁰ These elections were preceded by arrests of many MUF leaders and election agents; this paved the way for persistent charges of rigging. The National Conference secure thirty six seats a sharp drop from forty six it had won in 1983. The Bhartiya Janta Party registered its presence with two seats and MUF with four seats. MUF began a widespread campaign insisted that it could had done better but because of rigging it could not.¹¹ Votes had been in favor of MUF but results had been declared in the favor of National Conference as said by Syed Abdul Aziz. The manipulation of the election disappointed the Kashmiri's that was one of the reasons for the militancy.¹²

Since 1988, the insurgency in the valley gained momentum. The acts of sabotage increased in frequency and intensity. In 1989 many militant organizations started armed struggle against Indian forces. Jagmohan had been appointed as Governor on 19th January 1990 by V.P Singh government. Dr. Farooq Abdullah resigned as expected, and Jagmohan was back in full control. Governor's rule had been imposed in state of Jammu and Kashmir.¹³ In the weeks that followed, security forces had opened fire on crowds of unarmed demonstration. Jagmohan was called back after the assassination of Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq and subsequent massacres of more than 60 people near Islamia College, Hawal. On May 25, Jagmohan resigned and G.C Saxena took over as Governor¹⁴ and Presidential rule had been implemented on July 1990 which continued till October 1996 when Assembly elections were held for the first time after the eruption of militancy.¹⁵ The year 1996 had seen renewed efforts on the part of the Indian government to normalize the situation in the valley. The Centre tried to win over the local people with the objective of holding elections to the state of J&K Legislative Assembly. However, after a certain amount of prevarication the Farooq Abdullah and NC agreed to participate and elections had finally scheduled for September 1996. His manifesto was for the 'Maximum Autonomy'. Farooq demanded his *volte face* on the ground that something is better than nothing.¹⁶ The said elections brought back NC to the power, the political party that had governed

Kashmir for maximum years since 1951. The Farooq's ministry brought nearly seven years of governor rule to an end. On the political front Farooq had attempted to make good pledge to restore the state to its pre-1953 autonomy as according to the recommendations of the Kashmir Autonomy Report.¹⁷ Meanwhile at the Centre, in 1998 Gujral's United Front government had fallen after Congress withdrew its support. For the first time in India's political history, a coalition government of Hindu nationalist, Bhartiya Janta Party assumed office with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the Prime Minister.¹⁸ The BJP had staunchly opposed to any special status for J&K. Farooq who had learned in 1984 the importance of being in Delhi's good books promptly aligned with BJP. With the result his political position within the state became even weaker.¹⁹ On a whole, National Conference's alliance with BJP led NDA did more harm to the NC than benefit. The association did not help the NC either in its process of governance or legitimizing in its politics. On the contrary the NC was politically humiliated by a contemptuous approach of BJP towards the 'Autonomy' discourse. The association of the NC with the BJP and the impact it had on NC's image in Kashmir became one of the major cause for the decline of its electoral fortunes of the 2002 assembly elections.²⁰ During the end of the decade of nineties, there had been the emergence of another Kashmir based political party the People's Democratic Party. It introduced the factor of competition in mainstream politics of the valley. It was formed by splinter group of the Kashmiri based Congress Party led by Mufti Mohammad Syed and his Daughter Mehbooba Mufti. On political front Farooq Abdullah had passed a resolution in 2001 in State Legislature that attempted to make good of his pledge to restore the state to its pre-1953 autonomy. According to the recommendations of the Kashmir Autonomy Report, New Delhi's authority should be once again restricted to *Defence, Foreign Policy and Communication*, as was the case before 1953. The report had also suggested that state should have its own Prime Minister and Supreme Court. But Central Government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee rejected the resolution.²¹

Mainstream politics gained further momentum in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Mohammad Amin Malik.2010. *The Role Of National Conference In The Politics Of Jammu And Kashmir*, Tehzeeb Publication, p379

¹² Ibid, p 379.

¹³ Malik, op.cit, pp 381-382

¹⁴ Kashmir-Uzma.2008. *Kashmir politics*, July 11, p 4.

¹⁵ Surveillance and Sorrow, Continuing Saga, Report to the people of India.1997.*Civil War and Uncivil Government*, November, p 1.

¹⁶ Schofield, op.cit, Pp 192-193.

¹⁷The panel of experts was convened in October 1996, the report was finally presented before the State Assembly in June 2000.

¹⁸ Koithra,op.cit, p 205

¹⁹Varghese Koithra. 2004.*Crafting Peace in Kashmir: Through a Realist Lens*, Sage publication, New Delhi, p 64.

²⁰Rekha Chowdhary, V Nagendra Rao.2004, *National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir-From Hegemonic to Competitive Politics*,p 1524.

²¹ Schofield, op.cit, p 30.

Kashmir after the 2002 Assembly elections offering a free and fair elections was a part of the confidence building measures which the then P.M Atal Bihari Vajpayee had initiated to assuage the feelings of Kashmir's. National Conference won twenty eight seats, People's Democratic Party won sixteen seats and Indian National Congress won twenty one seats.²² The People's Democratic Party and Indian National Congress formed the coalition and in turn formed the government.

CONCLUSION

Jammu and Kashmir has a variety of coalition as the main vehicle for grand coalition was the cabinet under the dominance of Congress. As Rajni Kothari has analyzed the one-party dominance provided a good fit because Indian one-party dominance, quite unlike the authoritarian dominance as in Ghana was in reality an euphemism for an umbrella party or coalition. The Jammu and Kashmir national conference location at the Centre meant that few parties surrounded it on all sides. These Parties as characterized by Kothari were 'parties of pressure', which performed the role of preventing the ruling 'party consensus from straying too far from the "balance of effective public opinion". It was due to this system that despite never winning a majority of the popular vote in state election the National Conference party has been balanced in the political Centre and has encompassed "all the major sections and interest of society" For the first time in the electoral history of Kashmir, an incumbent government has been changed, not through central intervention but due people participation, the participation of people though had been uneven in Kashmir due to several factors. Nevertheless, despite such unevenness, the 2002 elections attained greater credibility and consequently, the dominance of National Conference broke down with the emergence of People's Democratic Party.

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