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Review Paper

Origin of Main Political Parties and Their Role in Overall Politics in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Politics of Jammu and Kashmir Jammu and Kashmir is administered by the Republic of India within the framework of a federal parliamentary republic as a union territory, like the union territory of Puducherry, with a multi-party democratic system of governance. Until 2019, it was governed as a state administered by India. Politics in the region reflects the historical tension and dispute that the state has been a part of in the form of the Kashmir conflict. The head of state is the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, currently Manoj Sinha, while the head of government is the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, currently vacant. Legislative power is vested in the Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, although this was dissolved by the Governor on 21 November 2018. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature. Gulab Singh has been called the founder of the polity of Jammu and Kashmir. Following the 1860s, interaction with British India resulted in the region becoming a part of the geopolitical game between Russia and Britain. During the period of India's independence, the partition, up to and after India became a Republic, the question of Kashmir's future marked political decisions. However, after the Instrument of Accession, the political mobilisation in the state has largely widened its scope, resulting in the formation of various political parties. The functioning of the political system of the state has been weakened due to the breakdown 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 objective of this study is to discuss the roots and ideology of these political parties of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This paper is based on secondary data that have been used. The data has been collected from the books, research articles, and government reports.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir was a region that India governed as a state from 1952 until 2019, representing the southern and southeastern parts of the broader Kashmir area, which has been embroiled in a territorial conflict involving India, Pakistan, and China since the mid-20th century. This state is located in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, bordered by Himachal Pradesh

and Punjab to the south, Tibet to the northeast, Pakistan to the west, and Afghanistan to the northwest. Following the partition of British India, significant geographic and demographic shifts occurred in Jammu and Kashmir as India and Pakistan engaged in conflict over the territory, resulting in its division into two regions: Pakistan-administered Kashmir and India-administered

Kashmir. The underlying areas of this state were components of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, with its western districts, now referred to as Azad Kashmir, and northern territories, known as Gilgit-Baltistan, under Pakistani administration. The Aksai Chin region in the east, adjacent to Tibet, has been under Chinese control since 1962. In 2019, the Indian government revoked the special status previously granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, leading to the passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act by the Indian Parliament, which established two union territories: Ladakh in the east and the remaining Jammu and Kashmir in the west, effective from October 31, 2019. Notably, Jammu and Kashmir was the only Indian state with a Muslim-majority population. Abdullah, however, aimed to make Article 370 a permanent fixture and advocated for the state's secession from India, which ultimately resulted in his arrest in 1953.

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad then became the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The Constituent Assembly of the state passed a resolution in February 1954, extending some provisions of the Constitution of India and formally ratifying the accession of the state to India per the Instrument of Accession. A Presidential Order was passed on 14 May 1954 to implement the Delhi Agreement, drawing its validity from the resolution of the Constituent Assembly. The new Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir was adopted on 17 November 1956 and came into force on 26 January 1957.

1. Origin of Main Political Parties in Jammu and Kashmir and Their Role

1.1 Jammu And Kashmir National Conference (JKNC)

The National Conference is a significant political party with a presence in every region of the state, particularly in areas with a Muslim majority. Its origins trace back to the Dogra era in Jammu and Kashmir, having been established in 1932 as the All-Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference by Sheikh Abdullah and Chaudary Ghulam Abbas. Initially confined to the Kashmir region, the party expanded its reach in 1939, leading to its rebranding as the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. The party endorsed the state's accession to the Indian Union in 1947 and maintained political dominance from 1947 until 2016, with intermittent challenges from the Congress party and the PDP. Its primary political focus has been on autonomy, and it has achieved significant milestones such as land reform implementation and the creation of a distinct constitution for Jammu and Kashmir. Notably, it is the only political party in the state whose leader held the title of Prime Minister before it was changed to Chief Minister, aligning with the terminology used in other Indian states. The party has been led by the Abdullah family, first by Sheikh Abdullah's son, Farooq Abdullah, from 1982 to 2002, and subsequently by his grandson, Omar Abdullah, from 2002 to the present.

1.2 Indian National Congress

The historical involvement of the Indian National Congress in Jammu and Kashmir dates back to the 1930s, particularly

gaining prominence in the region's political landscape by 1935. The Indian National Conference, a significant faction of the Congress, played a crucial role in shaping the political trajectory of Kashmir. It successfully persuaded a substantial faction of the Muslim Conference, led by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, to transition into a secular entity, thereby enabling collaboration among various religious groups in the struggle for freedom against autocratic rule. This aspiration of the Indian National Congress materialized in June 1939 when the Muslim Conference was rebranded as the National Conference. The Indian National Congress's pivotal contribution to the political scene in Kashmir was its promotion of a nationalistic and secular ethos. Furthermore, it succeeded in aligning Sheikh Abdullah and his close associates with its objectives, which had far-reaching implications for Kashmir's political dynamics. This organization played a vital role in facilitating the state's accession to India and subsequently endorsing it. Consequently, the Indian National Congress emerged as a significant political force; however, it did not enjoy widespread support among the Kashmiri populace. Firmly committed to the empowerment of the common people, the party consistently opposed elements within Jammu and Kashmir that were either hostile to the principles of parliamentary democracy or actively engaged in fostering sectarian and parochial divisions among the population.

1.3 Praja Parishad Jammu and Kashmir

Following India's independence in 1947, Jammu and Kashmir was integrated into the nation, with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah assuming the role of Prime Minister of the state. The long-standing Dogra rulers were displaced, leading to the National Conference gaining political control. Consequently, the state was granted special status under the Indian Constitution. However, this special status was met with discontent among the residents of the Jammu region, prompting the formation of an agitation known as Praja Parishad. In 1947, Balraj Madhok established the Jammu Praja Parishad political party, which criticized Sheikh Abdullah's policies. The central theme of their agitation was encapsulated in the slogan 'Ek desh mein do vidhan; ek desh mein do nishan; ek desh mein do pradhan nahin chalenge', meaning 'in one country, there cannot be two constitutions, two flags, or two prime ministers'. Eventually, this party merged with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in 1963, which laid the groundwork for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Jammu and Kashmir. The BJS voiced opposition to Article 370, advocating for the repeal of the special status it conferred, while seeking greater autonomy for the Jammu region. Currently, it serves as a coalition partner with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the state.

1.4 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

The Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party, a prominent political entity within the state of Jammu and Kashmir, was established in 1999 under the leadership of its founding member, former Union Home Minister Mr. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. The party achieved significant recognition

in 2006 when it successfully won the State Assembly Elections, leading to the formation of the state government, with Mufti Mohammad Sayeed serving as Chief Minister until 2005. During this electoral victory, the party was part of the United Progressive Alliance. Its ideological framework is centered on the concept of self-rule as delineated within the Indian constitution, positioning it as the principal opposition party in Jammu and Kashmir.

2.5 All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front (PF)

Following the Instrument of Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Union of India, Jawaharlal Nehru initiated a plebiscite in the region. Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg, a prominent leader of the National Conference and a close associate of Sheikh Abdullah, seized upon the concept of a plebiscite and leveraged the Muslim identity within Jammu and Kashmir. He founded the Plebiscite Front (PF) on August 9, 1955, which was officially launched in 1958. The establishment of the PF saw Pakistan extend its support to the organization in its opposition to India. The Plebiscite Front dedicated itself to advocating for the self-determination of Muslims in the region and the execution of Security Council resolutions that called for a plebiscite under United Nations supervision. Consequently, the primary objective of the PF became to conduct a referendum or plebiscite, aimed at granting sovereignty to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah was designated as the Patron of the Plebiscite Front, despite his lack of direct involvement with the organization. In contrast, Muhammad (2013) provides an analytical perspective on the party, asserting that its political stance was more transparent and straightforward compared to many other contemporary groups advocating for the right to self-determination or the resolution of the Kashmir issue.

The political position was significantly more transparent and clearer than that of the Hurriyat Conference, which simultaneously advocates for the right to self-determination in line with the UN Charter and the resolutions of the UN Security Council, while also discussing an ambiguous negotiated settlement without specifying a definitive approach to achieve it, thus leaving the matter unresolved. Conversely, the demand for a plebiscite had two implications: it contributed to the boycott of elections in the state during the 1960s, while simultaneously the union government supported Sheikh Abdullah's continued leadership. This situation fostered a pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian sentiment, resulting in the prohibition of the Plebiscite Front under the Prevention of Unlawful Activities Act. Sheikh Abdullah, G.M. Shah, and M.A. Beg were subsequently removed from power. Later, Afzal Beg, the leader of the Plebiscite Front, stated that the organization would no longer insist on holding the plebiscite. This positive change was acknowledged by India's Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who engaged in discussions with Sheikh Abdullah. To maintain India's sovereignty over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, an agreement known as the Indira-Sheikh Accord of 1974 was established, which granted self-governance and autonomy under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Following this accord, Abdullah integrated the Plebiscite Front into the National

Conference in 1975. However, in the Kashmir region, it continued to sow the 'seeds of communalism in the hearts of the Kashmiri Muslims, a legacy that persists to this day.

2.6 The Jammu & Kashmir National Panthers Party

The political entity known as the Panthers Party operates within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is characterized by its socialist and secular principles. Established on March 23, 1982, by the couple Prof. Bhim Singh and Jay Mala, the party's mission is to eradicate corruption, communalism, criminal activities, and drug-related issues, while striving to achieve genuine democracy through a transformative revolution. For over forty years, the Panthers Party has retained influence at both the assembly and local levels, particularly in the Udhampur constituency, which is home to approximately 5.9 million tonnes of lithium reserves—ranked as the seventh largest globally and valued at an estimated \$500 billion, a discovery made in February 2023. The party has long advocated for the repeal of Article 370 and Article 35A, seeking to eliminate the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and fully integrate it into the Republic of India. This objective was ultimately realized through a presidential decree in August 2019 that revoked the region's special status. Furthermore, the Panthers Party is campaigning for the further division of the Union Territory, proposing the establishment of a new state for the Hindu-majority Jammu Division. In 2017, Ankit Love, the offspring of Bhim Singh and Jay Mala, declared his intention to run for Prime Minister of India in the 2019 general elections, subsequently assuming leadership of the party on May 28, 2017. On June 23, 2021, Prof. Bhim Singh, the party president, was mentioned in media reports as a potential candidate for the vice-presidential election in 2022, following a recommendation for nomination by Ankit Love, just before a significant meeting with Prime Minister Modi concerning the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. Notably, in 1996, the party played a crucial role in petitioning the Supreme Court and the Election Commission to restore democratic processes in the militancy-affected region, leading to the resumption of elections after a nine-year suspension.

Following the 2002 elections in Jammu & Kashmir, the party became part of the coalition government alongside the Congress and PDP, securing all seats in the Udhampur district. Harsh Dev Singh was appointed as the education minister, while Yash Paul Kundal took on the role of minister for animal and sheep husbandry. The party staunchly advocates for secular principles in Jammu & Kashmir, a region affected by terrorist insurgency. Additionally, the women's wing of the Panthers Party actively promotes women's rights, focusing on safeguarding them from domestic violence and combating female foeticide. The Women Panthers have also advocated for a 33% reservation of seats for women in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly.

2.7 Jammu And Kashmir Awami Ittehad Party

The Awami Ittehad Party (abbreviated as JKAIP) is a political entity in the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, established in 2013 by Engineer Rashid. The party has been engaged in local political activities, including participation in the

2024 Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly elections. While it positions itself as a viable alternative to established political entities in the area, some analysts have suggested potential connections to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), raising concerns about its independence. Nevertheless, the leadership of the party has repeatedly refuted these allegations, emphasizing its commitment to regional matters. The AIP was initiated by Sheikh Abdul Rashid, known as Engineer Rashid, who previously served as an independent member of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly for the Langate constituency. Rashid is recognized for his perspectives on the Kashmir issue and his promotion of peaceful solutions to the region's political challenges. The AIP aims to provide an alternative to both mainstream parties, such as the National Conference (NC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), as well as separatist groups. Central to AIP's ideology is the advocacy for the right to self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, as per United Nations resolutions. The party demands a plebiscite to enable the region's populace to determine their future, whether in union with India, Pakistan, or as an independent entity. Furthermore, AIP calls for demilitarization, the repeal of laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), and the cessation of human rights violations by security forces. The party also prioritizes enhancing the socio-economic conditions of Kashmiris, tackling unemployment, and safeguarding the political rights of the region's inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the evolution of political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, only a few managed to maintain power before the onset of the insurgency. It has been observed that smaller regional parties either temporarily allied with larger parties, as seen with the Praja Parishad, or ceased operations entirely, like the Muslim United Front and the International Democratic Party. The predominance of the National Conference party has overshadowed these smaller entities. Nevertheless, these political parties continue to exist within the state's coalition framework, and it is anticipated that their representation will grow as this coalition process develops.

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