



Politics of Jammu and Kashmir state: A case study of 2014 assembly elections

Riyaz Ahmad Mir

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Abstract

Public participation in the electoral process of any given nation not just reflects the prevalence of democracy in that very country but also guarantees of securing and protecting the interests of its citizens. Govt. by the people of the people and for the people is the true hymn of democracy which still resonates a fresh in the ears and minds of one and all across the length and breadth of the world. Democracy equally stands about advocacy and prevalence of secular ideas and practices, whereby citizens of country have freedom to practice religion, perform social & cultural practices, without barriers of colour and language, and to participate in socio economic activities of nation without any fear or favour. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are observed with great interest as they are often regarded as a yardstick of normalcy in the state and acceptance of Indian democracy. The first elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in 1951 where Sheikh Abdullah came to power riding a popular wave. However, subsequent elections were often marred by manipulation and alleged rigging (except for the 1977 elections which were largely deemed fair and returned National Conference to power). The massive fraud in the 1987 elections was one of the reasons for the start of insurgency in the state and as a result, the electoral process was suspended till 1996. However, subsequent elections were largely seen as fair with power alternating between the National Conference (NC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) either independently or in alliance with Congress. Elections and violence in Jammu and Kashmir are synonymous, although the level of violence has receded significantly in recent times. The 2002 elections saw approximately 250 civilian casualties in the two months preceding the elections. This dropped by 95% in the 2008 polls, which was the first to witness zero killings of political office bearers. This Paper Examines That the results were surprising as there was almost a consensus amongst all political analysts and pollsters on at least one issue which party (PDP) is ahead in the electoral race of 2014 and National Conference would be defeated in these elections. The only question in debate was how big or small would be the victory of the PDP and BJP, will the party be able to get majority on its own, how short would be the PDP and BJP from the majority mark and will National Conference and Congress be able to win respectable number of seats.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir politics, parties' competition in election, right to vote, future development of state, assembly election 2014, election commission, national conference, peoplesdemocratic party, Indian national congress, bhartiya jantya party, independent candidate etc.

Introduction

Politics in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) poses a special problem for the student of Indian politics. Does the state stand out as an extra-ordinary case or is it comparable with other states in terms of party politics? It is difficult to place electoral politics of the state merely in the context of party political competition in the state. There are other well-known factors, which need to be taken into account in any assessment of the politics of J&K. To begin with, the historical trajectory of the state's relationship with the Centre is different from that of the other states not only in terms of the constitutional status but also in terms of the actual experience of the last half century or more. Secondly, in no other state of the Indian union has there been so consistent and strident a movement putting a question mark against the status of the state vis-d-vis the Indian nation-state. Thirdly, and following from the above two factors, the state has been witness to continued violence both by the terrorists and the State machinery. Politics has been unfolding in the shadow of violence and this has distorted the dynamics of party political competition in the state. An essay on the electoral politics of

Jammu and Kashmir has thus to adopt an analytical strategy different from that in any other state. Hence the unusual division in this essay of the political history of the state by the regions of the state. The unique situation has also meant a focus on non-electoral and often non-political developments while discussing the electoral politics of the state. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are observed with great interest as they are often regarded as a yardstick of normalcy in the state and acceptance of Indian democracy. The first elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in 1951 where Sheikh Abdullah came to power riding a popular wave. However, subsequent elections were often marred by manipulation and alleged rigging (except for the 1977 elections which were largely deemed fair and returned National Conference to power). The massive fraud in the 1987 elections was one of the reasons for the start of insurgency in the state and as a result, the electoral process was suspended till 1996. However, subsequent elections were largely seen as fair with power alternating between the National Conference (NC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) either independently or in alliance with Congress. The Jammu and Kashmir state had been

consisted of three political regions. Including Ladakh towards the east shearing its border with China, Jammu towards the south shares its border with the states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Pakistan, Kashmir Valley towards the west bordering with Pakistan occupied Kashmir as same with the other states of India, Indian controlled parts of Jammu and Kashmir have a multi-party democratic system of governance. The Main political parties in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are People's Democratic Party (PDP), Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), National Conference (NC), Indian national congress (INC). But in the assembly elections of 2014 the state of Jammu and Kashmir saw a good voter turnout of 65% (which is good indication of common people participation in the government by their political right) PDP remains at the top with 28 seats. The second largest party was Bharatiya Janta Party with 25 seats in the state legislature assembly of 87-member house. The formation of the BJP and PDP collation government with Mohammad Sayeed a 79 year old politician and the collation partner as a chief minister and with the two months of hard negotiations between the both political parties based on the common minimum program (CMP) The main objective of this alliance is the agreement which says would be best for making peace, harmony and confidence building within the state and across the LoC for full development of democracy through inclusive politics. Also the collation should create such type of conditions and platform which would facilitate resolution of all issues which are obstacles in the development of the state. So the hung government of Jammu and Kashmir will initiate a system of meaningful dialogue with all the separatist leaders irrespective of their ideological views which will seek to build a broad-based consensus on the resolution of all outstanding issues. Besides this the government has recently initiated several steps to normalize the relationship with the neighbouring country Pakistan, the present coalition government will seek to support and strengthen the approach. By developing the civil Society exchanges and by making a good system of trade and commerce and business across the LoC to the next level. The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections of 25, November, 2014 held in Jammu and Kashmir assume significance for a number of reasons. By bringing an end to dominance by a single party and ushering in an era of coalition politics, it had democratised the electoral space. The impact of such a democratisation made the Assembly elections an intensely contested election with each of the Eighty Seven constituencies witnessing quite a close contest. Unlike in previous elections, when a single party could register its victory comfortably in most constituencies, this time, the extent of competition was so intense that no party could take the outcome for granted. The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly election, 2014 was held in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in five phases from November 25 to December 20, 2014. Voters elected 87 members to the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly which ends its six-year term on January 19, 2015. Major political parties that contested the elections for the 87-member state assembly were- People's Democratic Party (PDP), Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Before December 2014, the JKNC and INC made up the majority in the state legislature,

with 28 and 17 seats respectively. Both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) bagged three seats each. J&K has only six Lok Sabha seats, for which elections took place in five different phases. A low voter turnout was reported in all phases. The victory of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in all the three Lok Sabah seats in the Kashmir valley was seen as a positive sign for the party as it prepared for the assembly elections. The elections to the state legislative assembly took place in five instalments on 25 November, 2 December, 9 December, 14 December and 20 December, 2014. Before the election,, Indian National Congress broke its alliance with Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and contested on all seats in the assembly. Campaigning was done very aggressively before the elections. With a huge victory of Bharatiya Janata Party, in parliamentary elections of India, it centred its attention towards campaigning in J&K and tried to woo everyone with the promise 'development'. Even prime minister of India, Mr. Modi that comes from BJP went to J&K for campaigning the results were declared on December 23, 2014. Voter's turnout was more than 65% which is higher than usual voting percentage in other states of India. According to which, the PDP won number of seats with its tally reaching 28. The BJP emerged as the second largest party with 25 seats. The ruling JKNC settled for 15 seats, while the Congress had to be content with just 12 of the 87 assembly seats. Seven seats went to other. The PDP was the single-largest party with 28 seats, followed by the BJP with 25 seats. The assembly was hung. In the evening of December 23, The INC announced its intention of supporting the PDP, which the PDP refused. The following were the options for government formation:

- PDP + BJP = 28+25 = 53
- BJP + JKN + JKPC + Independents = 25+15+2+3 = 45
- PDP + INC + Independents + Others = 28+12+3+2 = 45
- PDP + JKN + INC = 28+15+12 = 55

Three days after the results, the JKN approached the BJP for a meeting for government formation. As part of the deal Nirmal Singh was to be the CM, and JKNC seniormost MLA Ali Mohd Sagar was to be his deputy, and the government was slated to take oath on January 6. The deal fell through after a revolt in the JKNC following which Umar Abdullah left for London. The BJP also rejected this deal, citing morality issues. In the following days, the JKNC also announced its intention to support the PDP from outside by submitting a letter to the Governor, after the dialogue with the BJP fell through. The PDP refused. A week after the results, the PDP and the BJP officially started talks for government formation. Both parties had a 2-member team to form a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The PDP was represented by Naeem Akhtar and Haseeb Drabu while Ram Madhav and Nirmal Singh represented the BJP. Minister of State in the PMO, jitendra Singh, supervised the dialogue.

The two parties are ideologically apart. The BJP was for the removal of Article 370 continuation of AFSPA anti- Hurriyat and against reconciliation with separatists and Pakistan, the PDP was the other way round. Critics of both parties feared compromise on their principles. There were many controversial issues to be dealt with, like Article 370. Meanwhile, Omar Abdullah resigned on December 24. The

Governor accepted his resignation, but asked him to continue as caretaker Chief Minister until the formation of the government. President's rule was imposed on January 2, 2015. After dealing with issues, both parties turned their focus to the composition of the Cabinet. The PDP was initially reluctant for a 3-year rotation of the CM's post, but later agreed, with both parties getting 3-3 years each. There were also issues related to the joining of the government by separatist-turned-politician Sajad Lone. In the run-up to the elections, he met PM Narendra Modi, and praised him by calling him "big brother". The BJP reciprocated, by not launching a candidate against Lone on the Handwara seat, from where he won, and got elected to the assembly for the first time. Both parties announced on February 25 that the CMP was almost ready, and was being given final touches, in a joint press conference called by BJP national president Amit Shah and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti followed by their meeting at Shah's residence in Delhi. They also stated that the ideological differences had been "ironed out", and both parties were now working on the Cabinet formation. The dialogue between both parties ended successfully on February 28 - two months and 5 days after beginning of talks. The new PDP-BJP government took oath in the afternoon of March 1, 2015, in the Zorawar Singh Stadium of Jammu, with Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as CM for the full term of 6 years, and Nirmal Kumar Singh as his deputy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi graced the occasion by his presence. 12 cabinet ministers from each party were also sworn-in. This also marked the first time in the history of the state that the BJP was a coalition partner in the state government. Sajad Lone and independent MLA for Udhampur, Pawan Kumar Gupta was also sworn-in as cabinet ministers from the BJP's quota. The CMP was released in a press conference by the newly-elected government, hours after the swearing-in ceremony. The CMP gave a vision of "all-round development of Jammu and Kashmir" and "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (Development for all, by everyone). Contentious issues like Article 370 and AFSPA would be referred to a high-power committee, with representation from both parties, and the civil society. The PDP also agreed to join the NDA government at the Centre, with Mehbooba Mufti's induction into the union Cabinet, at a later date, and also support the Modi government in both houses of Parliament. The PDP has 3 MPs in the Lok Sabha. It also contested the Rajya Sabha elections in partnership with the BJP (this election took place before the government formation). The PDP won 2 seats, and the BJP won 1.

The Following party wins different seats Party Win Previous

Peoples Democratic Party	28 21
National Conference	15 28
Bharati Jantya Party	25 11
Indian National Congress	12 17
Peoples Conference	02 0
Others	05 10
Total	8787

Political Measures of Collation Government of BJP and PDP

The central Government of India had initiated some measures

to normalise the bitter relation with the neighbouring country Pakistan. The present Hung government will follow the union government and also supports the measures which should be taken by the union government to create such type of environment that will build stakes for all in the peace and development within the sub-continent. The political development of the state is only possible if both the collation partners will take confidence building measures including, people to people contact on both sides of the LoC and opening of new routes across all three regions of Jammu and Kashmir to improve the connectivity. The present collation government will also keep its eyes on the process of dialogue with all political groups, including the Hurriyat Conference, in the spirit of "Insaaniyat, Kashmiriyat aur Jamhooriyat. This political measure will seek to build a broad based consensus on resolution of all the remaining issues of state Jammu and Kashmir.

Highlights of PDP-BJP Government Agenda in Jammu and Kashmir

- In order to make the political development of the state it is important for both the collation partners to create an environment of peace, certainty and stability.

The present government should be transformed in to smart government which would be transparent as well as accountable

- It is also the mission of the collation government that Jammu and Kashmir should be ethical rather than a corrupt state
- The present government of the state look overall economic policy which will align the economic structure of the state
- The present government must ensure the autonomy of institutions of probity which include the state accountability commission, vigilance commission and also gives rise to Right to information act.
- The government should follow the principle of insanity, Kashmirit and Jamhooriyat which was laid by earlier prime minister of National Democratic Alliens (NDA) Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The state government will also make a meaningful dialogue with the internal stakeholders which include political groups irrespective of their ideological views
- The collation government of the state will examine the need to see the disturbed areas which will as a consequence enable the central government to take the final decision on the continuation of Arms Force Special Power Act in such areas
- As per the current collation government Article 370: the present position will be maintained including the special status.
- The collation government will also facilitate the dialogue with the Hurriyat Conference irrespective of their ideological views
- The lands that are acquired by the security forces in the state without any lease and licenses under the provision of the Land Acquisition Act will be returned to the rightful legal owners, except in a situation where retaining the lands is absolutely imperative in view of a specific security requirement. In any case, monetary remuneration, be it in

the form of rents or compensation should be made fairly at market rates

- The coalition government will work on the refugees of the Pakistan occupied Kashmir of 1947, 1965 and 1971 respectively and gives one time settlement.
- The coalition government will also take the suitable measures for the livelihood of the western Pakistan refugees
- The government will also extend the benefits to those people who are living on line of control (LoC) and people living on international borders.
- The government will secure the share of profit of National Hydro Power Project (NHPC) emanating from Jammu and Kashmir's water to the state government.
- The coalition government will reserve all royalty agreement with NHPC.

Conclusion

The third experience with coalition government began in Jammu and Kashmir after 2014 elections. It was Peoples Democratic Party that joined their hands with state Right Wing party BJP (Bhartiya Jantya Party) to start a new coalition experience in the state. This was the appearance of the BJP. For the first time in the trouble torn state BJP had become so pertinent. BJP which has famed its name by being a part of RSS seeks to achieve a Hindu Nation. Which has become more visible since the associated organizations of BJP have been vigorously taking up the communal projects as Gita being the national book, Godse being the nationalist, aggressive Ghar Wapsi campaign etc? Here the point of enquiry is how a Muslim majority state would take the coming in power of such a party. Also what is unusual is how a party like BJP comes to power in the Muslim majority state and how the Muslims of the state take it. To be a coalition maker or become coalition able, parties compromise on their stated agenda. A non-polity-wide party may have an agenda particular to a state, in a coalition with a polity-wide party its goals are constrained by the objectives of the coalition, especially when the polity-wide party is in power at the federal level. Similarly, a non-polity-wide party may want to have a say at the national level even if its objectives are limited to only wants to focus on the sub-national level given the huge power differential between the two levels of government, may be forced to compromise. Given this can state politics in India be an autonomous domain. The current political alliance might have to settle many more scores as far as the ideology of the two camps is concerned. However what needs to be seen is the simple straightforward fact of how despite the major disagreement of position on some of the major issues, the two associates to the Alliance, by abiding the details of Common Minimum Program (CMP) give stable governance and better development to the people of J&K.

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