



Chapter-IV
Political Parties in Jammu and nd
Kashmir



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POLITICAL PARTIES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Democracy without parties is a myth. The representative system in the modern state is closely connected with the party system. That no political system whether democratic or authoritarian can function in the absence of a partyless democracy is a thought of Utopia.

A good party system is imperative for the proper and smooth functioning of a democratic setup especially for a federation. Co-operation and co-ordination between the different sets of government – federal and unit governments can be achieved only through a good party system. It is always the national political party which is “the most responsive instrument of restraint upon federalism’s centrifugal tendencies.”¹

The background and history of the development of political parties have varied from country to country, from culture to culture and from region to region. Political groups and parties in Jammu and Kashmir have had an extremely chequered history. Their origin and development in Jammu and Kashmir present a highly variegated picture, and seem to have remained greatly inhibited presumably because of the peculiar ecological influences of politics in Kashmir until around the second quarter of the present century.²

In the case of J&K the National Conference (NC) has dominated the political scene. However, no local party has been able so far to reconcile and represent the sharp ethno-regional diversity of the State of J&K. The major political parties that are functioning in the State are the NC, the Congress (I) and the BJP, the Janata Dal, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the LBA, the MUF and the Huriyat Conference.

Of all the existing political parties, the NC occupies the most important place in the politics of the state, not only because of its electoral victories to the State Legislative Assembly Elections and Parliament but also because of the great historical role it has played in the politics of the state during the last four and a half decade. It has been the most prominent party during the struggle for freedom to organise the people against the Dogra Rule. The party has won thumping majority in all the elections to the State Assembly from 1951 to 1987 except a decadal gap (from 1965 to 1975) when it was turned into a Congress unit by G.M. Sadiq in 1965.³

Jammu & Kashmir National Conference Party

The Jammu & Kashmir National Conference is a state political party in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Led at the time of Indian independence in 1947 by Sheikh Abdullah, it dominated electoral politics in the state for many decades. It has been led subsequently by the Sheikh's son Farooq Abdullah (1981–2002) and his son Omar Abdullah (2002–2009). Farooq Abdullah was again made the President of the party in 2009.⁴

The Pre-Independence Period

The Muslim Conference was formed in 1932. A convention of this Party was held on October 14-16, 1932, at the Pather Masjid under the chairmanship of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The arrangements for this convention were made by Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah, Maulvi Hamadani and Maulvi Abdullah. The leaders of the newly-formed party demanded the implementation of the recommendations of the Glancy Commission.

The 6th Annual Convention of the Muslim Conference was held at Jammu from March 25-27, 1938. In this convention, a resolution was

moved to change the name of Party from the Muslim Conference to the National Conference, so that non-Muslims could actively participate in its activities and also in the State People's Movement against the Dogra regime. It was also proposed to amend the constitution of the Party and adopt a new constitution by the name of "Naya Kashmir". But the resolution was opposed by Chowdhury Ghulam Abbas, Abdul Majid Qureshi and Sheikh Ahmaddin Banahali who later resigned from the party.

A historical convention of the Muslim Conference was held at the Pather Masjid, Srinagar, from June 10-11, 1939 under the presidentship of Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. In this special convention, Maulana Sayyid Masoodi again adopted the resolution for the change of the name of the Party which was unanimously passed and the party was renamed as "National Conference". Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was elected its President. Jialal Kilam and Kashyap Bandhu also joined the new party, which consolidated its claim for secularism, socialism and nationalism.⁵

The NC has always cherished and practised the ideals of secularism, socialism and democracy. The change from the Muslim Conference to the National Conference in 1939 was the vindication of the non-communal outlook of the leaders of the party. "Naya Kashmir", the bible of the party is nothing but an embodiment of democratic, socialistic and secular principles.⁶ The National Conference was affiliated to the All India States Peoples Conference. Sheikh Abdullah was elected its President in 1947. In 1946, the National Conference launched an intensive agitation against the State government. It was directed against the Maharaja. The slogan of the agitation was "Quit Kashmir".

The Post-Independence Period

In the elections held in September 1951, the National Conference won all 75 seats of the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah remained the Prime Minister until his dismissal in August 1953 on the grounds of conspiracy against the state of India. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad became the Prime Minister of the State and Sheikh Abdullah was arrested on 9 August 1953.

In 1965 the National Conference merged with the Indian National Congress and became the Jammu and Kashmir branch of the Congress Party. Sheikh Abdullah was again arrested in 1965 and sent to gaol till 1968 for conspiracy against the State. Sheikh Abdullah's splinter Plebiscite Front faction later appropriated the name of the original party when Abdullah was allowed to return to power in February 1975 after striking a deal with the Central Government. In 1977, the National Conference led by him won the State Assembly elections and Sheikh Abdullah became the Chief Minister. His son Farooq Abdullah succeeded him as the Chief Minister on his death on 8 September 1982. In June 1983 elections, the JKNC led by Farooq Abdullah again won a comfortable majority. In July 1984 Farooq's brother-in-law Ghulam Mohammad Shah split the party. Acting on the behest of the Central Government, the Governor dismissed Farooq as a Chief Minister and installed Ghulam Mohammad Shah in his place. His government was dismissed in March 1986 and the President's rule was imposed. In 1987 State Assembly elections, the JKNC which formed an alliance with the Congress Party won the majority and Farooq again became the Chief Minister and under Farooq's watch, genocide of Kashmiri Pandits took place. But he was dismissed again in 1990 by the Union Government and President's rule was imposed in the state. In Jammu and Kashmir State

Assembly elections in 1996, the National Conference led by Farooq made another political comeback by winning 57 seats out of the total of 87.⁷

In 2002 Assembly elections, the NC had lost its electoral hegemony and for the first time the party adorned the role of an opposition party. Unlike the earlier elections when it could invariably attain a predominant majority in the state and an unchallenged predominance in the Valley, it failed to attain a simple majority either at the level of the State or at the level of the Valley. Polling 28.23 per cent votes, it could register its victory only in 28 seats in a house of 87. It faced its crucial loss, however, in the Valley it could attain 18 seats. It had to share its political constituency with the PDP, a new regional party that had come into existence in 1998 as a breakaway group of the Congress Party. This party bagged 16 seats with 24.52 per cent votes polled in its favour.⁸

In December 2008 State Assembly elections, no single party was able to get the majority. The JKNC led by Farooq's son Omar Abdullah emerged as a single largest party winning 28 seats. After the elections on 30 December 2008, the JKNC formed an alliance with the Congress Party which had won 17 seats. Omar Abdullah became the Chief Minister of this coalition government on 5 January 2009.⁹

Congress (I)

Congress (I) is the second important party in the State which was formally launched in 1965, when under the leadership of G.M. Sadiq, the then Prime Minister of the state, the NC was converted into the National Congress.¹⁰ However, the NC was later on revived by Sheikh in 1975. The Congress ruled over the State for over a decade (1964-75) and emerged as the biggest opposition party in the State Assembly Elections of 1983 when it secured 26 seats out of 76.¹¹ In March 1987, the NC-

Congress (I) alliance emerged victorious winning 51 seats out of 76.¹² Ideologically, the Congress (I) stands for a composite national identity and to a secular ideal that brings the two – NC and Congress (I) closer in this respect. The Congress (I) has a strong foothold in the Hindu dominated Jammu region and has little base in the Valley where it has secured success only through electoral alliances with the NC. The party stands for the sustenance of special status of the state envisaged under the Article 370. The Congress (I) is led by the people representing the dominant interests in business and trade, transport, services, professions, landed class etc. Because of its growth out of the NC many of its leaders have also served the NC. Even the communalists of Jamaat and other groups also penetrated the Congress organization in the middle of the eighties.¹³

Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)

The BJP champions the cause of the Jammuites. However, since 1983, the electoral base of the party has been hijacked by the Congress by playing with the Hindu card against the dominant Kashmiri leadership. The Shiv Sena that was formed in the early eighties and which recruits from the RSS and the ABVP activists, has also cut into the support base of the BJP, the Shiv Sena that was formally launched during the Hindu-Sikhs riots in 1984, has of late, received extra-strength after the arrival of militancy in Kashmir. The Shiv Sena that initially remained non-political joined Bal Thackeray's group and fought 1987 Assembly Elections for 5 seats. It lost all the seats, however, its base has increased in business, trade and educational institutions of Jammu. Therefore, the BJP whose base has been eroded by the Congress (I) and the Shiv Sena has indistinguishable supporting from the congress and the Shiv Sena in

Jammu. However, the party enjoys much greater support among Kashmiri pundits.

The BJP that survives the Jana Sangh came into existence in 1980. Like its predecessor, the party is a staunch supporter of full accession of the state of J&K with India and the abrogation of the Article 370. The party has a foothold in the region of Jammu only.¹⁴

Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party

The Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party is a state political party in Jammu and Kashmir, India. It was founded in 1999 by the former Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and captured power in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in October 2002 Assembly elections. Since 2004, it has one member each in the Lok Sabha and in the Rajya Sabha. It was a member of the ruling United Progressive Alliance until the 2009 elections.

The People's Democratic Party is presently headed by Ms Mehbooba Mufti while Mufti Mohammad Sayeed who headed the PDP-Congress Coalition Government between October 2002 and November 2005 is the party's Patron.¹⁵

The Jammu Kashmir People's Democratic Party (JKPDP) is an ethnic Kashmiri party advocating self-rule for Jammu and Kashmir. To realise this goal, the JKPDP calls for very specific actions that must be taken and standards that must be set. The JKPDP calls for the free movement of goods between the borders of Kashmir. This would in essence render all borders around the valley "irrelevant" according to the JKPDP. Also essential to this goal is complete economic autonomy with self-authority over water and other resources within the Valley of

Kashmir. The JKPDP is also calling for a demilitarisation of the civilian areas.

To the JKPDP, self-rule is reliant upon a combination of intra-state measures with inter-state and supra-state measures rather than isolation. The party has been supportive of Kashmir-specific Confidence Building Measures undertaken by India and Pakistan and has advocated the resolution of the Kashmir conflict through a sustained peace dialogue.¹⁶

Jamaat-I-Islami Party

The Jamaat-i-Islami is yet another party that is more an ideological party and not merely a political or a religious or a social reform organization. It was found in 1942 at Shopian by Maulvi Ghulam Ahmed Ahar in collaboration with Syed Shahabuddin and other like-minded persons.¹⁷ The party is of the firm conviction that Islam is an all pervading and comprehensive order of life and the Jammat intends to promulgate and translate that order into action in all spheres of human life.¹⁸

The Jamaat not only commands influence in the urban areas, educational institutions, government employees, technocrats, lawyers, peasants, etc. but also maintains close relation with the Islamic fundamentalists abroad. It received financial assistance from Pakistan and certain Arab countries. Besides money, books and other literature worth lakhs of rupees, Jamaat has created a vast network of Mohalla Mosques in different parts of the state. It also runs a weekly the “Azaan” and other papers. The party runs hundreds of schools in Kashmir and has been found guilty of imparting anti-national education to the students, thus rousing secessionist tendencies in the Valley. All the educational institutions run by the Jamaat were banned by Governor Jag Mohan in March 1990 for brainwashing the Kashmiri youth against India.¹⁹

The Jamaat regards Kashmir problem as a living issue and does not consider the accession of Kashmir to India as final and irrevocable. At present there are a large number of Jamaat run militant outfits (Hizbe-Islami, Islami Tehrike Tulba, Allah Tigers Islami Jamate Tubla, Zia Tiger Force, Islamic Students League, Hizb-ul-Mujahiddin and several others) that are operating in the Valley. The object of these outfits is not independent Kashmir but Kashmir's accession to Pakistan.²⁰

Jammu & Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party (JKDFP)

In May 1998, Shabir Shah formed the J&K Democratic Freedom Party (JKDFP) which is almost identical to his AJKPL (All J&K People's League) brainchild. The JKDFP was created despite pressures to abandon the move from Pakistan through Shabir Shah's POK-based lieutenant, Mehmood Sagar. Sagar is Senior Vice President in the JKDFP hierarchy.

The JKDFP has not made any significant impact so far on J&K politics-especially if its 'J&K' means the pre-1947 princely State. The road to this goal is long, tortuous and treacherous. It has faced criticism because of its willingness to start a dialogue with the Indian government before considering any participation in the Assembly elections of September 2002. The Pro-Pakistan elements and The KJHC (Kul Jamaat Hurriyat Conference) leaders have expectedly painted Shabir Shah and the JKDFP as identifying themselves with the Indian government policies.²¹

Jammu & Kashmir People's Conference (JKPC)

The J&K People's Conference (JKPC), a Kashmiri political party headed by Abdul Ghani Lone fought elections in 1987 and 1988. The party derived its cadres from the Gujjar belt of Baramulla and Kupwara.²² The J&K People's Conference was originally floated by Abdul Ghani

Lone to strengthen the cause of greater 'international autonomy' for J&K as provided in the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Later, it adopted an anti-government line by demanding restoration of the pre-1953 position with regard to residuary powers enjoyed by the State. A.G. Lone has espoused a 'pro-independence' policy. The JKPC has been sympathetic towards the JKLF and has organised demonstrations against the death sentence of the JKLF leader Maqbool Butt in 1984. Bonhomie between these organisations is due to the common 'pro-independence' stance.

Over the years, the JKPC's activities have declined in magnitude. Its activities are now mainly carried out from the KJHC (Kul Jamaat Hurriyat Conference) platform. Lone was assassinated on 21 May 2002 while attending a function organised to commemorate the death anniversary of Maulana Mohammed Farooq, the founder of the Awami Action Committee (AAC) and father of Umar Farooq, the current leader of the AAC. He is reported to have evolved a more accommodative attitude towards Assembly elections to be held in J&K in late 2002. Sajjad Lone son of A.G. Lone took over the leadership of the JKPC after the death of his father.²³

Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front

The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was founded in the 1960s with the ambition of forming an independent state of Kashmir through the reunification of Indian-administered Kashmir with Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The JKLF enjoyed much support in the Valley during the 1980s and is largely credited for leading the insurrection that began in 1989. The organisation announced a unilateral ceasefire in 1993 and gave up armed struggle as a means to achieve its political goals. After 1993, the JKLF was transformed from an underground guerrilla

organisation into a political organisation committed to fighting for Kashmir's independence through non-violent means. This change was largely attributed to the end of Pakistani material and moral support to the JKLF after the organisation refused to support Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and continued its advocacy for an independent and united Kashmir.²⁴

By the mid-1990s there was a division within the organisation when ideological disagreements led to a split along Pakistani and Indian-administered lines. The leader of the Indian-administered wing, Yasin Malik wanted to halt all militant activities but the leadership of the Pakistan-administered wing refused to renounce violence. This rift would break up the organisation.

The JKLF in Pakistan-administered Kashmir is headed by its President Sardar Saghir. Amanullah Khan, one of the oldest living and foremost ideologues of the JKLF continues to function as its chief patron. The faction remains committed to the creation of a greater and independent Kashmir through peaceful means.

Yasin Malik remains the head of the JKLF in Indian-administered Kashmir. Under Malik, the JKLF remains a key Kashmiri nationalist party in the region. The party supports the inclusion of Kashmiris as a principal party in India-Pakistan peace negotiations on Kashmir.²⁵

All Jammu & Kashmir Patriotic People's Front

All Jammu & Kashmir Patriotic People's Front, a political party in Jammu and Kashmir is a group that is a pro-Indian faction linked to the so-called *counter-insurgents* (paramilitaries). The Muslim Mujahedin was an Islamist guerrilla group that turned into the government in 1995 and developed cooperation with the Indian army. The Muslim Mujahedin had

been formed as a splinter group of Hizb-ul-Mujahadin in 1993. The Patriotic People's Front was formed by the Muslim Mujahedin as a structure for contesting elections. The forces of the Muslim Mujahedin were demobilized around 1997-1998 but later, parts of the group reorganized.

After 1997 the PPF supported Farooq Abdullah's Jammu & Kashmir National Conference government in Kashmir. In the Lok Sabha elections 1999, the leader of the PPF Ghulam Nabi Mir was a candidate in the constituency of Anantnag. He got 1500 votes. In 2001 the PPF leader and the Muslim Mujahedin Chief Commander Ghulam Nabi Mir was killed.²⁶

Awami Action Committee

The AAC, (Awami Action Committee) of Maulvi Farooq originated in the early sixties after the issue of the holy relic theft. Initially being a pro-Pak organization, it later contested the State Assembly Elections of 1977 (in alliance with JP) in 1983 and 1988 (in alliance with NC (F)). The AAC also suffered splits in 1970 and 1972 when the J&K Muslim Conference and the New Awami Action Committee were respectively formed by dissidents. The AAC members came from the wealthy families of the Srinagar city and the influence of Maulvi Farooq being a religious leader was enormous on it. The AAC has remained quite effective in certain Assembly seats of Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency. The AAC leader Maulvi Farooq was assassinated on May 21, 1990 for his moderate attitude. Maulvi Farooq's son Umar Farooq heads the group now.²⁷

J&K People's Political Front (JKPPF)

Due to personality clashes with the leadership of the J&K People's League (JKPL), Fazl-ul-Haq Qureshi, one of the JKPL's founders floated the J&K People's Political Front (JKPPF) in August 1993. Ghulam Mohammed Jaikoo of the Tehrik-e-Jihad-e-Islami (TJI) joined him and became the General Secretary of the organisation. The party spelt out a three-point programme for an amicable and peaceful solution of the J&K issue:

- Seeking cooperation from the people and the political parties in J&K.
- Mobilising public opinion in other parts of India, and
- Launching international campaigns to pressurise both Islamabad and New Delhi.

Since its inception, the JKPPF has remained largely inactive and its activities have been confined to the press statements. Ghulam Mohammed Naikoo welcomed the Indo-Pakistan talks held in January 1994. He also said that to make such talks meaningful, both the countries should recognise Kashmiris as a party to the talks. He appealed to the KJHC (Kul Jamaat Hurriyat Conference) leaders to reconsider their decision on *Kafan Bandho* (sacrifice call for the *jihad*) and Operation Hurriyat Programme announced in connection with the Hazratbal siege. Initially, the JKPPF leadership was in contention with the KJHC for providing an integrated 'peaceful solution' platform.

The organisation staged a *dharna* before the Srinagar based UN Observers Group on 24 October 1994 and presented a memorandum asking the UN to intervene.²⁸

J&K People's League

The J&K People's League (JKPL) was floated in 1972-73 by Nazir Ahmad Wani, a prominent leader of Al Fateh, a pro-Pakistan subversive *tanzeem*, defunct since 1970.

The pro-Pakistan youth groups which merged together to form the JKPL were: the Youngmen's League (student's wing of the Plebiscite Front) and the Students and Youth League (pro-J&K Jamaat-e-Islami [JKJEI]).

Nisar Khan, Ayoob Bhatt, Shobhan Bhatt, Janhar Sheikh, Farooq Rehmani and Younus Tak were other prominent leaders of the league. Most of these leaders were the residents of Anantnag, so the JKPL had some influence in this district. In its formative years, the JKPL had close ties with the Jammat-e-Islami (JEI) but these weakened over the years.

During 1979-80, the leadership passed to the younger people like Shabir Ahmad Shah, Abdul Rehman, Mukhtiar Ahmad Waza and Imtiaz Ahmad. The JKPL extended its influence to Pulwama, Tral, Sopore, Doda, Bandipur, Srinagar and Badgam in the 1980s.²⁹

J&K United People's League (JKUPL)

In its chequered history, the JKPL split into two polarised groups: one led by Farooq Rehmani, the other by Shabir Ahmad Shah. Shabir Shah's group broke away from the JKPL due to Farooq Rehmani's refusal to hold organisational elections and accommodate Shabir and his supporters.

Shabir Shah's group came to be known as the J&K People's League-Shabir Shah (JKPL-S). It comprised dedicated cadres with a history of anti-India activities. Compared to Rehmani's faction, the

JKPL-S was better organised and has remained in the forefront over the past two decades.

In December 1991 under pressure from the ISI, both the Shabir Shah and the Rehmani factions merged to form the J&K United People's League (JKUPL).³⁰

Praja Parishad Jammu and Kashmir

The Praja Parishad Jammu and Kashmir (Popular Association Jammu and Kashmir) is a political party in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The PP was floated by dissidents of the Bhartiya Janata Party in January 2005. The name is taken from the Praja Parishad which fought against the special status of J&K (Article 370 of the Indian Constitution). The Praja Parishad had merged with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1970.

The new party is led by Chandermohan Sharma. The party works for autonomy of the Jammu region within J&K.³¹

The main objective of the Praja Parishad Jammu and Kashmir is to provide autonomy of the Jammu region in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It walks on the path of other political parties following the Hindutwa line. However due to its stress on national integration, it has earned support from other communities also.³²

Democratic Janata Dal

The Democratic Janata Dal (Jammu and Kashmir) is one of the eminent state parties in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The party coalesced with the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference in the year 1998. But this alliance was to last only for a year. On 3 February 1999 the DJD emerged as a separate and independent party.

The current President of the Democratic Janata Dal (Jammu and Kashmir) is Ghulam Qadir Wani while Yograj Singh holds the elite

position of the party's General Secretary. The Democratic Janata Dal is at the moment trying its level best to ensure complete political stability and harmony in Jammu and Kashmir.³³

Muslim United Front

The Muslim United Front (MUF), a conglomeration of about 12 organizations (Jammat-e-Islami, Umaate Islami-1986, Anjumane Ittehadul Musalmeen, Islamic Study Circle, Muslim Education Trust, Muslim Welfare Society, Islamic Jamaate Tulba, Majlis Tahagazul-ul-Islami, Jamait-ul-Hadis, Shia Rabita Committee, Idara Tahqiqat Islami, etc.) was launched in 1986 as a result of the communal riots of February 1986, the NC-Congress alliance and the rise of communalist forces in Kashmir.

Panther's Party

Then there is Panther's Party of Bhim Singh formed in 1982. The party champions regional interests of Jammu against the dominant Kashmiri leadership and has a foothold in a few Hindu constituencies of the Jammu region with sizeable votes of the Rajputs.³⁴

All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC)

The All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) ever since its formation in 1993 has boycotted all the elections held in the state despite calling itself as the "sole and genuine representative" of the people in the state.

The APHC, an amalgam of more than 20 parties and groups has never been uniform in its reasoning for not participating in the elections. Three groups could be identified within the APHC on the issue of participating in elections. Syeed Ali Geelani, who was recently arrested by the Indian government leads the first group. He is totally against any elections and wants Kashmir to accede to Pakistan. Inside the APHC a

sizeable percentage supports Geelani's views. Some of the former militant leaders who are now associated with the APHC also support Geelani. Moderate leaders such as Professor Abdul Ghani Bhat and Mirwaiz Omar lead the second group. This group is willing to participate in the elections but with certain conditions.³⁵ Abdul Ghani Lone, who was assassinated recently, leads the third group. It is believed that this group was having a dialogue with the Union government and was willing to participate in the elections if they would be held in a free and fair manner.³⁶

The party politics in the state has been the indulgence of political parties in vicious communal and anti-national propaganda techniques. Political parties play a crucial role in educating people about the political institutions. Therefore, the party propaganda becomes an important instrument of determining popular inclination towards or discontent from the system.

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