CHAPTER 5  
PEOPLE OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR IN THE PEACE PROCESS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter examines the views of the Kashmiri people on the peace process. It attempts to find out the basic problems of Kashmiri people, their expectations from the state and Central government and their various demands. It examines the extent to which the peace process can solve the basic problems of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It includes the findings and observations of the field work conducted in Jammu and Kashmir regions. The field work adopts a comparative approach while collecting the views of people from the Jammu and the Kashmir region.

Empirical research in the form of field work was conducted in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as a part of this study. Data was collected keeping in mind the representation of all age groups, income categories, level of education, religion, occupation and sex. In Jammu, camps of migrated Kashmiri Pandits namely, Mutti and Mishri camps were also included in the survey. A stratified random sample of 150 people was taken from the Jammu region and that of 200 people was taken from the Kashmir region. Data has been collected from Srinagar, Sopore, Baramullah and Jammu districts. Since Ladakh was not visited hence there is no data supporting Ladakhi point of view on peace process. Interviews were conducted with researchers, writers, academic scholars and experts on the J&K issue and media persons. In Srinagar representatives of civil
society organizations like Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, Indo-Global Social Service Society, Mercy Corps were also interviewed.

The deeply plural character of the Jammu and Kashmir polity and different aspirations of different regions have been reflected through the field work. Various factors have been explored to find out the reasons of discontentment prevailing in the state. Mostly people from both the regions have blamed Central Government for the erosion of democratic norms in the state. After Central Government, militants have also been held responsible for erosion of democracy in the state. Azaadi has been opted by the Kashmiri people as an option to resolve the discontentment but Jammu people have not supported it and have rather emphasized more on providing autonomy and good governance to solve the problem. So peace process has to be more inclusive to reflect the demands of different cross sections of the society. On being asked about the awareness of the peace process most of the people from both the regions are well aware of it and support the peace process in order to resolve the crisis. However people have demanded that the political interests of all the groups and all the regions should have a direct say in the negotiating process.

The historical circumstance under which Kashmir was acceded to India has till today deep impact on the psyche of Kashmiri people. 99% of the people who responded to the questionnaire feel that Kashmiris should have been given a chance to decide their future and by withdrawing the plebiscite option, central government has taken away their right to self-determination. For most of them, Kashmir could have survived as an independent nation, free from the domination of India or Pakistan. They strongly feel that
Kashmir was never a part of India and it can never become an integral part of India, which has been claimed by India since its accession.

Most of the people have given their views that Kashmir's economy is much better than any other state of India, so that have a potential to survive then own. Parvaiz Khurram, Chief of J&K Coalition of Civil Society said that "we are feeding so many Biharis in our state. It shows that our state is prosperous and we have potential to survive our own". State has most of the labour class from Bihar.

During my field work when I interacted with people, they constantly kept on referring me as an 'Indian'. Feeling of not being belonging to India is deep rooted in them. In fact most of the phone booths had written 'STD Codes of Indian States'. So, there is common feeling of not belonging to India and most of them have expressed this view that Kashmir is a forceful occupation of India.

On being asked that whether Kashmiris should be given freedom to form their own country, almost all of them said yes. (See Table 1) They feel that Kashmir is having its own independent history of five thousand years, so it should be given back its own identity and if India doesn't do so, conflict will go on and on. However people from Jammu have a completely contradictory opinion on this question. Majority of them are not in favour of granting freedom to Kashmir and would like to see Kashmir as an integral part of India.

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1 Interview with Mr. Parvaiz Khurram, 16 Feb. 2007. He is the Chief of J&K Coalition of Civil Society Organisation.
TABLE 1

"DO YOU THINK KASHMIRIS SHOULD BE GIVEN FREEDOM TO FORM THEIR OWN COUNTRY"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jammu</th>
<th>Kashmir</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>192</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>002</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>021</td>
<td>006</td>
<td>027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
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5.2 Ethnic Stereotyping

Emotionally also, they feel that rest of the India treats them as terrorists and not their own countrymen. One of the professor narrated his story that when he visited Delhi for some official work, he was unnecessarily checked several times despite of giving proof that he is a Kashmir university professor. He was forced to stay in a hotel which was selected by security guards, just because he happened to be a Kashmiri. Due to all these incidences Kashmiris have developed emotional detachment from the rest of India.

There were some exceptions who said that they don’t want freedom from India, but their response was out of fear. They were holding government positions, so they didn’t even fill the questionnaire, but orally answered that like every Kashmiri, we also want freedom. Kashmiris want the right of self determination to choose their future under UN observation.
In contrast to Kashmiri people, Jammu people want to remain with India. Within Indian Constitutional framework, they want autonomy to govern themselves. Even they are not satisfied with the gradual extension of Presidential orders to the state, but they don't want freedom to form their own country.

Prof. Hari Om claims that discontent prevailing among Kashmiris varies for various reasons. There are different groups in the valley who have different aspirations and their demands are not conclusive. He believes that Kashmir is getting more funds and central assistance than Jammu and Ladakh regions. There are grievances from Jammu region time to time that they are getting lesser funds in comparison to Kashmir. He further mentions that, there are mountain inhabited people in Kashmir, who are demanding the ST status within Indian Constitutional framework. They want to access special provisions which are available to STs in other states of India. So, for him aspirations of different ethnic groups are not conclusive.2

Most of the people have lost faith in leadership. Anger has developed among people of Jammu and Kashmir against state and central political leaders. They are realising that their leadership is not representing their aspirations. The Head of Mercy Corps, a civil society organisation Mr. Wajahat questions, 'who is representing Kashmiris'? Local Kashmiri leadership is divided now. There are diverse demands from different leaderships.3 All Party Hurriyat Conference APHC, which is involved in the peace process, has two factions. One faction is pro-Pakistan which is under Lone and is not interested in peace talks. Other faction, which is under Md. Umar Farooq has shown flexibility in its talk with central government.

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2 Interview with Prof. Hari Om, 16 July 2006. He is the Head of the Department of History, Jammu University.
3 Interview with Mr. Wajahat, 16.2.2007, Head of the US based civil society organisation, Mercy Corps.
People feel that Hurriyat is sold to New-Delhi and Pakistan. For them Hurriyat is also not representing the real aspirations of people. It has lost the sincerity of representing the voice of Kashmiri people. Fouzia Bukhari, Head of Institute of Indo-global social service society says⁴, people have become disillusioned with the political leadership. There is a common sentiment that ‘Miswaiz Dilli ke haathon bik gaya’ among people. She asks, ‘who do common people to have faith in?’ No trust is left in Kashmiri people for mainstream politics. Jammu people are also equally disillusioned with the leadership.

As far as the performance of the state government is concerned, most of the people are not satisfied with the working of the congress-PDP government in the state. People voted for PDP-Congress government as it appealed to the sentiments of people for azadi. There were many promises in the election manifesto of PDP government which were never fulfilled after 4 years of governance. National conference lost its place in the region, when it joined NDA government at central level. People feel, after coming to the power PDP Government is not addressing the issue of ‘Azadi’ of Kashmiri people. National conference also as long as it ruled in the state was charged with the most corrupt government of the state. During its longest reign in the state National Conference could not fulfill the agenda of development of the state.

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⁴ Interview with Ms Fouzia Bukhari, 17.2.2007, Social Worker and Head of the Institute of Indo-Global Social-service Society.
TABLE 2

"ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CONGRESS-PDP GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE"

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<th>Jammu</th>
<th>Kashmir</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
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Kashmiri Pandits of the state are also still struggling for their rehabilitation. During visits to various migrants camps in the periphery of Jammu, Kashmiri Pandits expressed their anger that there have been no changes in their status in the past several years. They are struggling for their survival as their economic condition has deteriorated badly. There was a promise by the state government for the reconstruction of Pandit homes and their return to valley safely, but no clear-cut long term strategy was raised to achieve this objective. Sheshnag, the President of Migrants Community in Mutti Camp said\(^5\), ‘for us there is no meaning of peace talk or change in government as nothing has changed in all these years and nothing will change’. He said, ‘we have become an election agenda and parties fight elections by making Pundits migrants an issue. No body is sincerely trying to do something substantial for us. Before elections, all political

\(^5\) Interview with Shesnag, 5.7.2006, leader of Kashmiri Pandits migrants in Mutti Camp. Various other Camps such as Mishri camp etc were also visited during field work in the periphery of Jammu.
leaders visit our camps and promise for our rehabilitation but after elections nobody keeps its promises.'

5.3 Human Rights Violations

Encroachments of civil liberties are also a big issue in the state. There are complaints of human rights violations in the state. During interaction with common people, a lot of stories came into focus when people narrated their experiences with the security personnel. The day to day life people have complained of severe interference by security forces. One of the professors narrated his story that, in the scuffle between security forces and militants, one bunker of the Army was destroyed by militants. Later common people passing by through that may were forced to put bricks to make bunker for army and that professor was also one of them.

In answer to the question “Whom do you blame most for the Jammu and Kashmir crisis?” almost all respondents from Kashmir blamed the Central government for the problem. However, people from Jammu held both the Central as well as the state governments equally responsible for the crisis. (See Pie Diagrams 1 and 2)

Similarly Fouzia Bukhari told that once she was driving a car and suddenly security forces van cane in front. Her car was hit by a wooden plank and she was threatened by them for driving cautiously. There were so many incidences of these types, faced by common people were told to me. Suppression of civil liberties has increased the gap between people and government more.
PIE DIAGRAM 1

"WHOM DO YOU BLAME MOST FOR THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR CRISIS"

89% 3% 5%

PIE DIAGRAM 2

"WHOM DO YOU BLAME MOST FOR THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR CRISIS"

Sumit Ganguly rightfully points out that this generation of Kashmiri people is more politically sophisticated and knowledgeable than previous generations of Kashmiris. Due to expansion in literacy and media exposure, new generation is far more conscious of its political rights and privileges. So, suppression of civil liberties might result in the violent expression of anger. As due to lack of political institutions to channelise their views, political decay is bound to happen. 6

5.4 Role of Media

Role of media which people call 'Indian media' is also questionable for them. They feel media has given this image to the world that all Kashmiris are terrorists and Kashmir is the most insecure place to visit. Media is not accountable to the people and hype has been created about the place and people of the valley. What actually is going on there, is never shown by the media, people claim. Many custodial deaths and other human rights violations are never exposed. Srinagar news sub-editor Shahnawaz Bashir says, 7 "There is no concept of democracy in the state. It is a dreamy utopia. Media and other democratic institutions were never allowed to grow in a few ways".

As far as awareness about the peace process is concerned, almost all the respondents from both Jammu as well as Kashmir had a fair idea about the ongoing peace process. (See Pie Diagram 3 and 4)

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7 Interview with Shahnawaz Bashir the sub-editor of Kashmir News on 17.2. 2007.
PIE DIAGRAM 3

AWARENESS ABOUT THE "PEACE PROCESS"

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The peace process initiated by central government is supported by majority of the people, but with a lot of reservations. Jammu people support the government's initiative to have a dialogue with Pakistan and separatist leaders. Majority of the Kashmiri people feel that up to some extent peace process is fine but this is not the right way to solve the
crisis of J&K. For them, views of various sections of the people are not taken into account in peace process. They feel representatives of all ethnic groups should participate in the talk. (See Pie Diagram 5 and 6)

PIE DIAGRAM 5

"DO YOU SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVE TO HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH PAKISTAN AND SEPARATIST LEADERS"

"DO YOU SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT’S INITIATIVE TO HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH PAKISTAN AND SEPARATIST LEADERS”

Though a majority of the respondents from both Jammu and Kashmir supported the Indian government’s initiative to have a dialogue with Pakistan yet people from Jammu were skeptical of trusting Pakistan as compared to the people of Kashmir. (See Table 3)

**TABLE 3**

**“SHOULD INDIA TRUST PAKISTAN FOR BILATERAL DIALOGUE TO RESOLVE THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR CRISIS”**

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<th>Kashmir</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>017</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>038</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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It was found during the field work that majority of the people felt that the Geelani faction of the ‘APHC should also participate in the talks. Mostly people suggested that Pakistani President General Musharraf’s proposal to solve Kashmir crisis should be accepted. Musharraf suggested that state should be divided into seven regions including

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PoK and each region should be given a choice whether they want to stay with India or Pakistan on the basis of their ethnic or linguistic affinities. Indian government responded to these proposals by saying that there should be a bilateral talk for any proposal.

5.5 Conclusion

In the opinion of Kashmiris there is a lack of sincerity in peace process from both India and Pakistan side. Kashmiri people’s views and their aspirations come at the third place after India and Pakistan. To make dialogue and peace process effective, all communities and sections of the state should be represented and their demands should be channelized to know what actually they want from the peace process. Factors responsible for democratic discontent have been analyzed through the questions related to performance of Congress – PDP regime and peoples expectations for good governance in the state.