ABSTRACT

A modest attempt has been made in the thesis, "Politics in Jammu and Kashmir: A Study of National Conference Since 1987", to examine the Role of National Conference in Kashmir Politics in its historical and contemporary perspective. The present study has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the subject of thesis with its objectives and hypothesis. It also consists of a brief review of literature used for the study of this thesis. The second chapter covers the history of the region to locate the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Different dynasties and kings ruled it over a period of time. But it was during the last days of Dogra rule that exploitation and repression was resisted. It was in Dogra rule that the Muslim subjects, who formed bulk of the population, bore the heaviest brunt of the Dogra autocracy which was highly exploitative. The Dogra rule was responsible for disseminating in the minds of its subjects, the seeds of resentment against its very existence. Politically suppressed and economically exploited, the Muslims of the Jammu and Kashmir also suffered educational backwardness. The anti-Muslim attitude of the Dogra Raj further added to their miseries. The pleas and representations of the Muslim community for their betterment largely went unheeded.

The basic cause of people's unrest throughout the world has been socio-economic and political. The natural urge of a human being is freedom. Man loves his environment and his own way of life. When this equilibrium is disturbed he feels suffocated and it is the logical corollary that he tries to free himself from the fetters may be even the imposition of an alien way of life. In 1931-33 anti-feudal rising broke out in this state. The events in Jammu and
Kashmir assumed most menacing proportions. A mass movement against the colonial rulers and their puppets, the Maharaja, a Dogra by race and Hindu by religion had been in progress since 1931... The practice of exploitation was at its peaks. The largest of exploited were Kashmiris by race and Muslims by religion. This movement aims at a definite purpose, i.e., to secure justice for downtrodden and subdued humanity. The focus here was towards the point, as to how an organized and decisive freedom movement started against an autocratic ruler of Jammu and Kashmir under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. It goes to the credit of Muslim population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in general and the father of the Kashmir freedom movement, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in particular, that when they realized the dividing game of the Dogra ruler, they squeezed out and threw away religion and communal touches from the movement and adopted the banner of all Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (Blood red with plough in the middle) and not the Islamic banner (green with crescent in the centre) under which the movement was initially organized. The conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference, a changeover on broader basis symbolizing the secularization of politics in Kashmir, became an inevitable necessity owing to certain developments within and without the Muslim Conference organization. These developments and the appearance of factious politics among the leaders, the inimical role played by Hindu communities and the Government against the freedom struggle conducted solely by the Muslims and the consequent emergence of radical forces and their role in redirecting the movement which ultimately threw its doors open to non-Muslims.
With the transfer of power and partition of the subcontinent, new problems cropped up. As all the princely states were supposed either to join the Dominion of India or Dominion of Pakistan, the state of Jammu and Kashmir being the Muslim populated area and keeping in view the strategic importance of the state for Pakistan, Pakistan sent armed infiltrators to get the control of the state. The Maharaja feeling helpless to deal with the situation made frantic requests to India to help him. And in return of the help from India he signed the instrument of Accession. The Viceroy Lord Mountbatten while signing the instrument of Accession introduced a provision that the wishes of the people should be ascertained after normalcy is restored in the valley. Meanwhile India lodged a complaint in the U.N. which also favored a plebiscite in the state. Initially India agreed to hold the plebiscite, but nothing concrete emerged and the tension between the two countries escalated resulting into two wars and Kashmir became a permanent irritant between India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, at the initial stage of 1947, a section of Hindus from Jammu region in the event of transfer of authority from a feudal order to a democratic system in 1948-49 mounted a struggle against the National Conference which implemented Kashmir Manifesto. The communal parties started agitation against it. This movement accentuated communal consciousness and contributed to the scenario of ambivalence and confrontationist politics resulting in anti-India movement for plebiscite, self determination and secession.

The third chapter deals with the brief historical survey of the origin, growth and development of party system in Jammu and Kashmir including their ideologies, organization and objectives respectively especially the events leading towards the emergence of National Conference. Politics in Jammu and
Kashmir has been considerably influenced by deep seated historical, socio-
psychological and economic factors. Since independence the main issues in
Kashmir have revolved around its status, regional conflicts within the state and
the relationship between the state and the central governments, all of which are
inseparably interconnected. The contemporary world confronts a variety of
problems which are related to the socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects
of life. Among the various social divisions in the contemporary world, regional
divisions have raised some of the most complicated issues. Moreover, these
problems arise when there is a combination of factors as geographical isolation,
independent historical traditions, social, ethnic or religious peculiarities and
local, economic and class interests. The manifestations have been and are
varied and evocative of diverse response as the size, nature and demographic
composition/strength of the different regions and/or regional demands. Plural
societies contain subsystems that distinct from each other and one may acquire
an advantage over the other in the period of state and nation building one of the
most conspicuous paradoxes of today’s world is the simultaneous appearance
of centralization, regional and ethnic tensions suggesting a reaction against that
very centralization. On the widespread legitimacy of pluralist democracy
expands opportunities for ethnic and regional expression. Such consciousness
involves issues like autonomy and administrative decentralization. Regional
demands for autonomy may be said to assume the existence of regions and
coherent political units endowed with right to represent the aspirations of their
constituents and provides the existential basic phenomenon of regional identity.
So the sense of identity within a region develops regionalism. The application
of these generalizations to the empirical situations of Jammu and Kashmir, the
study of political crises of the state in a regional conflict becomes of utmost importance in arriving at a rational understanding of longstanding political crisis in the state. The party system in the state has been largely influenced by local conditions and factors of religion, ethnicity, region, family and personality of leaders. There is a clear cut demarcation between political parties of Jammu region and Kashmir region as far as their ideologies, aims and objectives and support basis are concerned. They channeled the People’s problems along ethno-communal and regional lines. There is hardly any party excluding National Conference, which could be considered as a cohesive body based on distinct ideological lines. In fact most of them happen to be ideologically amorphous groups. The political parties have no composite character; some parties have strong footing in certain areas but no support elsewhere. Most of them have remained factionalized and are held together by considerations of power patronage. Political parties in Jammu and Kashmir have invariably derived their support from considerations of community, caste, region etc. and have contributed to the growth of fissiparous tendencies rather than promoting the cause of nation-building and social reconstruction. Had the state continued the spirit of 1937-47 and adhered to the policy of toleration, the situation, perhaps, would have never come to such a sorry pass now. Factors such as personalized politics focus on individual rather than on institutions, ethno-regional chauvinism, misuse of religion for political gains etc. have caused an irreparable loss to this sensitive state where communal amity was a traditional hallmark. The development in the state during the last six decades have moved it from a secular nationalist orientation to a confrontationist, communal, anti-nationalist phase culminating, in the current spate of violence.
At the beginning the state was a native state under Dogras and the political system was based on the self rule of prince who used to be the centre of all powers. But as a result of political agitation which the Kashmiri people launched against the autocracy of Dogra rule, Maharaja was compelled to grant them the right to platform and to form associations. Accordingly, the first political party, All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was founded by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, which made people conscious of their rights by the means of imparting to them political education through the instrumentality of press, platform and electioneering. This Muslim Conference was converted into a secular organization in 1939 viz. National Conference which ideologically needed itself with (INC) Indian National Congress. There was also a non-Muslim organization, called Yuvak Sabha representing the Kashmiri pandits. Some progressive forces like Kissan Sabha, Mazdoor Sabha, Kashmir socialist party etc. had also cropped up in the political scene of Kashmir state, but all these forums and parties were impotent before National Conference. After independence the brunt of the forming government in the state fell solely on National Conference and had credit to rule the state from 1947 to 1965. The state was virtually under one-party dominance and rise of any other party was intentionally discouraged especially by the central government led by Nehru. This is one of the main reasons why the state could not see a free play of party politics during Nehru’s Prime Minister -ship. Nehru’s policy of appeasement was reserved by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The Sheikh’s long absence from active politics, the resignation of Baksh Ghulam Mohammad, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 and conditions created by it provided a comfortable excuse to the Prime Minister to permit her own party to establish its unit in the state of
Jammu and Kashmir. From 1965 to 1975 the Congress (I) enjoyed unchallenged monopoly of the political power in the state. However the entrance of the Congress party into state politics paved the way for other national parties to establish their units in the state and also opened opportunity for local leadership to enter into the political battlefield of their state.

Fourth chapter discusses about the role of National Conference in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir in its pre-1987 political scenario. The achievements especially the agrarian reforms etc. and failures of National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir politics are also analyzed in this chapter including the events leading to the 1987 elections in which sometime friend and sometime adversary both National and Conference and Congress (I) jointly fought. National Conference spearheaded the struggle in the state and performed an appreciable role in the political life of the state which made people conscious of their rights. In 1939 it thrown open its doors to all sections of the people of state. The new party ideologically found itself close to the Indian National Congress and henceforth, worked in cooperation with it against the British imperialism and other feudal forces within and without the state.

Initially, the National Conference benefited from the variety of factors such as charismatic leadership, unity of command, secular and progressive outlook and sound organizational structure. But when it assumed power, it became victim of intense in-fighting, authoritarianism and ethno-regional cleavages. The overbearing personality factor had trammeled the democratic process and often forced the dissidents to break away from the party resulting in the evolution of various splinter groups such as Kashmir Political
Conference with a pro-Pakistani line, mainly supported the revival of Muslim Conference, which had strong reservations about the move to secularize Kashmiri politics and vehemently resisted the attempts to fold the party into National Conference. One of the important and significant promises that the National Conference committed to the people was the agrarian reforms. These reforms in Kashmir have had a very special history in the state. Sheikh Abdullah and National Conference first in 1950 and later in 1978 were the vanguard for these reforms – this organization alone has a credit to provide a legislation whereby land has actually been transferred to tillers. First major and revolutionary land reform measure was introduced in 1950 by promulgating the Jammu and Kashmir Big Landed Estates Abolition Act (Act No. XVI of 2007). According to this Act ceiling of land was fixed at 182 kanals uniformly for all soils, tracts, irrigated or un-irrigated, single cropped or double cropped and expropriated the land owners of their land in excess of this limit without any compensation. This Act deprived the owners of their ownership of 45 lakhs of acres of land out of which 2.3 lakh acres were given to the tenants thereof in ownership free of cost. It may be admitted that this Act caused injustice to and dissatisfaction among the landlords hold land exceeding the ceiling limit. In order to pacify the grievances of such landlords, the government appointed “Wazir Commission” headed by Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir in 1953 and a land commission in 1963. In the year 1972 the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act was enacted to provide for comprehensive legislation relation to land reforms in the state and bring about a radical transformation in the existing pattern of land ownership. Whatever the magnitude of issues and pursuits, the fact remains that the National Conference since it assumption of
power after the Accord, had to face the problems of varied dimensions. The first, the Congress withdrawal of support in the legislature and the second was the politics of the regional imbalances by the Ladakh and Jammu. Though the regional imbalance claim is old one but its revival was to tease the government of National Conference. The promises of the National Conference reveal that the leadership tried to implement what it had promised in earnest but failed in many and touched success in few. It was successful in abolishing the subsidy on food in Srinagar and Jammu. It suppressed the unfair means and lawlessness in educational institutions and resorted confidence amongst college, University and school teachers. It streamlined the administration through single line administration trying to remove the imbalances amongst areas at district and tehsil levels. The operation and enforcement of the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act is commendable as it changes the agricultural semi-feudal system in which tiller is superior. The National Conference government also partially nationalized transport. The National Highway (Srinagar to Jammu) has already been nationalized and forests closed for public.

The failures of the government are also well known. The Sheikh and his government and his party (National Conference) failed in determining the relations between the state and the centre though the Sheikh-Indira Accord tried to delimit it. Consequently, the crises between the Centre and state have been persisting since the National Conference assumed power. Further the government failed to absolve the hegemony of the bureaucracy and the corruption in the administration. Though the vigilance commissioner’s office was given a wide rope in eradicating the evil, yet instead of giving a lesson to people at higher levels, the petty civil servants have been victims. Education
has been rendered a useless trade. There was anarchy in educational institutions at all levels. Further, the grave problem remained neglected – the unemployment of educated youth. This problem was aggravated on account of nepotism and favoritism. The public opinion since 1975 was subjected to hopes and illusions. It is difficult for the National Conference to claim that their rule was absolutely successful in its political and economic issues and pursuits. Politics is determined by the results it contrives.

The National Conference and politics of Jammu and Kashmir since 1974-75 was mostly vitiated by Centre-State relations. The politics of state-centre relations, usually takes the forms of complete merger or full integration and as against it full autonomy on the part of Kashmir leadership. Praja Parishad and mostly non-Muslims population from Jammu have been demanding full integration of the state with India. The National Conference has emphasized the preservation of Article 370 or internal autonomy. The process of integration by Government of India continues, the slogan by the Jammu people still persists and the resistance to the complete merger of Jammu and Kashmir with India also holds out. This politics, naturally dominates, at least at the domestic level by National Conference. But the autonomy proposal is not favored by all Kashmiri people. After the death of Sheikh in 1982, the situation remained strained due to confrontation between the centre and Sheikh’s successor, Farooq Abdullah. However this confrontation was lowered with an accord between Rajiv Gandhi and Dr. Farooq Abdullah in October 1986. It was the third historic accord as far as the relations of Kashmir and Delhi Government at that time was concerned. The first two were signed in 1952 and 1975. All the three accords were signed by two ruling families in Srinagar and
Delhi. But the Accord failed to prove as effective as expected. It was considered as opportunistic and a sellout of the state to Delhi by the fundamentalists. With the result, situation went on sliding down and reached a position in the wake of the March 1987 elections which as a matter of fact is regarded as the precursor of the current turmoil in the Jammu and Kashmir state. This turmoil gave birth to various militant organizations with different manifestos.

Of all the existing political parties in the state, the National Conference occupies the most important place in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir state and has remained central to the politics of the state ever since its inception in 1939. Evolved as a political movement challenging the feudal and autocratic rule, it traversed a long period of its political existence taking on various forms. After entering the power politics in 1947, it occupied the hegemonic space in Jammu & Kashmir. However it resumed its place of dominance after it was resurrected in 1975. Having enjoyed a position of pre-eminence for almost a quarter of century it however faced a serious crisis of credibility in 1987 elections.

Fifth chapter discusses about the electoral politics in Kashmir with special reference to 1987 elections and role played by National Conference in this election and also the impact of 1987 elections on the post political scenario of Kashmir have proved very useful in understanding the dynamic relationship between the fast changing socio-economic reality and the existing democratic processes. Indian society is “severely segmented”, in which people are encapsulated within the small world of caste, creed, community and region.
A vast majority is still below poverty line, illiterate, and socially backward. In addition, in the caste and religiously impregnated areas, local groups with deep religious roots have established their firm holds on the general masses. By making frequent appeals to the parochial feelings of the people, particularly during the periodic elections, they further consolidate and tighten their grip on the helpless masses. As a matter of fact, most political parties, including those claiming to be secular, progressive and nationalist, tend to hasp on the emotive ties of people for achieving electoral victories. On occasions, such “cynical exploitation” of socio-psychological factors has led to disastrous consequences, resulting in the fragmentation and destabilization of the entire socio-political life of the country. This reveals that ‘elections may also enhance the power of disruptive and reactionary social forces and teardown the entire structure of public authority as is evident in case of Kashmir. This makes it imperative to explore the problems and intricacies of electoral politics in Jammu and Kashmir where electoral malpractices are believed to have caused enormous harm to the entire political fabric in the state in general and National Conference in particular; especially as far as 1987 elections are concerned.

Kashmir and elections share a tense and confusing history. It is a history were some men take to opportunist politics, some are reluctant to participate. The Kashmir politics is a peculiar species and what may be seen as a democratic value elsewhere does not translate the same way for the people of this conflict ridden region. Hence elections universally seen as democracies in action do not mean the same in Kashmir. In this situation transparency and accountability remain a distant dream. In this quagmire of dubious polity, Kashmiri people, no doubt politically aware, are disenchanted with politics.
The process of election in Kashmir has historically entailed rigging and suppression of dissent, which even well known Indians have criticized. Though it is true that election rigging is not specific to the state Jammu and Kashmir, it has taken place in elections elsewhere in India. It becomes necessary to analyze elections in Kashmir, given the fact that the Indian state continues to argue that such elections are a substitute for the promised plebiscite. It is noteworthy that Mr. B.K. Nehru, former governor of Jammu and Kashmir has acknowledged public that elections in Kashmir have indeed been rigged in the past. “From 1953 to 1975, Chief Ministers of that [state of J & K] had been nominees of Delhi. The Appointment to that post was legitimized by holding of farcical and totally rigged elections in which Congress party led by Delhi’s nominee was elected by huge majorities”. Prem Nath Bazar a prominent Hindu Kashmiri journalist and activist summarized the political process in Jammu and Kashmir as follows: After 1947 rulers of Jammu and Kashmir were not the representatives chosen by the local people. Whether they were the leaders of National Conference (NC) as in the early years (1947-53) and during 1975-77 or belonged to Congress as in the intervening period, their source was New Delhi. Not even once the elections were fair and free. It was taken for granted that so long as the ruling party was in the good books of the Central Government, it was sure by hook or by crook to win the majority of the polls; most of its candidates were declared elected without contest”.

The history of elections held in Kashmir from 1951 to 1999 is the history of state supported rigging and misuse of power. The Central Congress government controlled the ruling parties in the state (NC from 1953 to 1965) and Congress party from 1965-1975 with its handpicked nominees running the
government. The top opposition stalwarts like, Mohammad Yusuf Shah and Ghulam Abbas had fled to other side of the border in 1947. Their exit decimated the rival Muslim groups in the state. The ‘Plebiscite Front’ which represented the increasingly assertive Kashmiri nationalism had boycotted the path of elections. The Fronts anti-India stance and demand for self determination further helped the (NC) National Conference to perpetuate its monopoly over state power. We cannot endorse that elections have signified democracy in practice. In fact the ways elections have been held in valley have played a critical role in the alienation of Kashmiri people from India. It is a reality that elections are not irrelevant to the state and would be once again held. The way elections have been held or are being planned, have made it irrelevant. The process to defraud the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the name of elections began in 1950 when they were asked to elect 75 member house of the Constituent Assembly though its prelude had been written in the limited type of elections during the autocratic rule of Maharaja. This fraud culminated in the elections of 1987. The first fraud was written jointly and consciously by the two Prime Ministers – Nehruji and National Conference patron Sheikh Abdullah. Its concluding verdict was drawn by their respective legal and official successors - Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abudllah. With this result, frequent electoral malpractices have taken place resulting in gradual erosion of democratic process in the state. Even the state’s strategic and sensitive position has often been used as a cover for such malpractices. Moreover frequent suppression of democratic process at the hands of ruling elite (through electoral subversions etc.) has not only perverted the entire fabric of public life in the state, but also helped the fundamentalist forces and
subversive forces to acquire ominous proportions. As a result, the seeds of militancy were sown which remained dormant until the state Assembly elections of 1987 ... which were allegedly rigged on a massive scale providing favourable climate for the seeds of militancy to sprout. It is also true that till the Sheikh was the patron of the National Conference, the public opinion was to some extent with the party. But after his death Farooq is considered as the unsuccessful leaders due to his untoward attitudes and anti-people policies and their inability to redress the grievances of the people and their indifferent approach of politics and policies made them unpopular among public opinion. His political tactics guided by his political insecurity, which he experienced right in the beginning of his political career, alienated the people from the party. This also had the impact of hallowing the party of its ideological contention on the one hand and making it more dependent upon the personality of leader, on the other hand. Driven by contingencies of real politics, Farooq Abdullah often took politically inconsistent positions leading to diminution of the very ideological stance of the party. That explains as to why the discourse of autonomy, though being the most relevant one for Kashmir, did not attract much popular attention. However, notwithstanding the ideological decline, the NC remains one of the few parties still having an ideological direction of politics. The 2002 assembly election that ended the era of hegemonic politics of NC has a healthy impact both on the politics of the state as well as that of the National Conference. With NC as the single party dominating the political scene, politics did not acquire competitive character. This adversely impacted on the process of democratization process, especially in the valley where the presence of the opposition was almost negligible. In the absence of the
democratic channels, the process of articulation expression of discontent was blocked and was routed through the only available space of oppositional politics. The mainstream politics, meanwhile lost its regional character as the National Conference, ensured of its return to power election after election, had tended to become complacent about the need for maintaining its linkage with its local constituency, the people of Kashmir. Now with the NC facing competition from PDP and other political parties, the Kashmiri mainstream politics has become more vibrant. Such transformation of politics is particularly beneficial for the National Conference as it has been forced by the compulsions circumstances to find its bearings, once again, in the local politics. That is the reason that the party has been finding means to respond to local issues and reflect the sensitivity of the party to local sensibilities.

Had the democratic norms not been frequently subverted, local administration made accountable and responsive and some efficiency achieved, the people’s alienation would have not reached such a sorry pass.

Sixth chapter discussed about the National Conference and its policy of restoration of Autonomy to Kashmir.

The idea of autonomy for states in Indian policies came prominently into limelight during post-independent era, especially after fourth general elections held in 1967. The results of 1967 elections changed the entire picture when in nine of the states non-Congress government came into power. For the first time, there appeared a vibration in the stagnant oceanic waters of Indian politics. The regional parties in the states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir came to power and became
more active in their respective areas. This process led the regional governments to demand more and more power for the states, with the result that relations between centre and state could not have a smooth sailing. The desire of the people of Jammu and Kashmir for an autonomous state had figured in politics of Kashmir long before the state acceded to India in 1947 that is why the ‘Hari Singh’ the then ruler of Kashmir had surrendered only Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications to the Government of India. This accession made by Maharaja was in consonance with the desire of the people it was endorsed by them through their recognized leadership. Also the ideological marriage of Kashmir National Conference (NC) with (INC) Indian National Congress had prepared the masses in general and Kashmiris in particular to live in a secular and nationalist India on the condition that the state of Jammu and Kashmir must have fullest autonomy “so that the Muslim majority in the state may feel assured that Hindu dominated India was not going to interfere in their internal matters. A new twist was given to the issue of accession. Thus when the Kashmir Constituent Assembly ratified the State’s accession to India, the Government of India declared that the people had exercised their right of self determination through their Constituent Assembly, who were to finally determine the Constitution of the state and jurisdiction of the Union of India over the State. All these promises and declarations made by Government of India were a clear cut commitment to the fact that the state of Jammu and Kashmir was going to be treated in accordance with the federal principles in its relationship with the Government of India. The accession of Kashmir was followed by the Delhi Agreement between National Conference (NC) led by Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru whereby autonomy was guaranteed to the state by
providing that Indian parliament could legislate only on three subjects of Defence, Foreign relations and Communications, and vest residuary powers in the State, conferred special citizenship rights for the ‘state subjects’, and abolished hereditary rulership. But ironically both the instrument of accession and Delhi Agreement were fragrantly violated and laws were passed by the Union infringing the autonomy of the state. The Article 370 of the Constitution has become a dead letter.

The National Conference which makes autonomy to Kashmir as its life line proves otherwise to different sections of Jammu and Kashmir. The National Conference was not prepared to concede to Jammu and Ladakh those very rights and privileges which he demanded from Indian state. While insisting upon an autonomous status for Kashmir, within its boundaries he created a unitary state which is a clear concentration of powers in the valley, which is the reason there exists the question of separate statehood for Jammu and Ladakh. This had a crucial role to play in ensuring that the problem remained unresolved. All the measures taken by National Conference (NC) failed to restore the provision of autonomy for Kashmir. Its manipulated policies angered the entire citizenry of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Sheikh Indira Accord (Kashmir Accord) 1975 had no attraction except that the further erosion in the special status ‘shell’ be arrested and the erosion already made might, to a great extent, be reserved. But the Accord failed to prove its validity in this regard. It did not and could not even help to the eradication of the issue of “autonomy” from the state politics. People were conscious that on borrowed legislative support he could not do much, but the
1977 elections, which gave him two third majority created genuine expectations that he would annul all post-1953 constitutional amendments particularly the most controversial sixth Constitutional Amendment Act of 10 April 1965. Instead taking a cue from the 42nd Amendment, of the Indian Constitution, through sixteenth Amendment Act, of 17 February 1977, Sheikh Abdullah amended section 57 of the Jammu and Kashmir constitution raising the life term of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly from 5 to 6 years. The Janata party Government greatly did undo the 42nd amendment to Indian Constitution, but Sheikh or his successor son did not undo the mischief perpetuated under 16th Amendment Act. Had National Conference Government taken such a step it would have dispelled the common impression that Sheikh Dynasty was interested in safeguarding its rule rather than in the restoration of state’s special status. So after 1975 till his death Sheikh Abdullah did not consider it worthwhile even to nominate an expert committee (even on organizational level) which could have examined all such constitutional amendments made after 1953 under section 147 of the J & K Constitution which could be annulled, modified, amended or retained. The election manifesto of the National Conference issued for 1996 elections was either just to confuse its own cadre or to have a distinctive character against other Indian parties in the fray so, it stressed for restoration of autonomy. People had since dismissed this political gimmick of Sheikh Dynasty led National Conference as they had been disappointed by their duplicity when both of them (son and father) enjoyed two third majority, but instead of reversing the process of erosion in internal autonomy, accelerated it. However as a Gimmick immediately on his reinstallation as Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah appointed two committees to
discuss autonomy issue, Regional Autonomy Committee (RAC) and State Autonomy Committee (SAC) whose recommendations were bluntly rejected by Union government. This politics of centre-state relations proves beyond doubt that National Conference is determined to play a game for the retention of power. To what extent this organization would be able to retain its power is for the future to determine.

The conclusion tries to highlight a few problems in Kashmir Politics and options for the resolution of the Kashmir’s political problems. The policy of discrimination pursued over decades and lack of timely action to redress the grievances of the people had landed the state in the present mess. Suppression of rights and exploitation of people over decades, adhocism, political clichés and empty promises by central governments and National Conference at ground level have done irreparable damage to the state. Lopsided politics and politics of convenience and manipulation on the part of New Delhi and National Conference towards Kashmir and repeated rigging of elections coupled with unprincipled compromise created a dismal mosaic of national and secular life in the state. What is therefore required is a sober approach, free from political overtones, to the problems. The problems and grievances of the people have to be identified. The lapses on part of the Government in addressing to these problems ought to be examined in right perspective. Mobilization of public opinion in favour of Governmental policies, through persuasion rather than coercion will go a long way in building confidence among people.
A consensus among various political parties and groups on the basic problems of the Kashmir is called upon. There should be free play of party politics. The old guards have failed miserably to provide the lead. A new leadership with a band of sincere and dedicated workers seems to be an imperative.

Kashmir known for its long traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism right form the times of Syed Ali Hamdani and Sheikh Noor-ud-din in 14th century, presents a totally different picture today. Militancy and terrorism have made a sizeable population of the valley to abandon their homes. It is important for the militant groups and also to state government to bring them back to their homeland, for the moral legitimacy of their movement depends on pluralism in Kashmir. The problem can be solved only through meaningful dialogue. It is often suggested that a change in the demographic profile of the state, meaning thereby that more and more Hindus should be persuaded to move into the valley to restore back the secular culture. But much water has been flowed since 1947 and the chasm between the two communities has become more and more wide. Only a Herculean task can bring back the pristine glory to the valley, which judging form the performance of the government seems to be a distant dream. It would be more proper if this move is initiated by the Government with the help of prominent Muslim leaders, who still retain credibility in the public. Such a step would surely generate an atmosphere of peace and goodwill, which is always lacking at the moment. At the local level it is now the responsibility of ruling National Conference to review its political policies in Kashmir.
The 1987 elections, however, marked a clear shift from the earlier elections. This became an election which generated an environment which ultimately turned up into an anti-India mo, pro-Pakistan or pro-independence movement causing a loss of faith among a large section of the populace in the democratic and electoral process leading to the birth of various militant/separatist organizations indulging into violence. At the same time people are fed up with violence and also their anger against the existing politico-administrative system continues to persist. Had the democratic norms not been subverted, local administration made accountable and responsive the people’s alienation would have not reached such a sorry pass. The National Conference though held responsible for this situation continues to remain a dominant political party of the state which has made the restoration of pre-1953 autonomy as its electoral agenda. It is on this issue that it has played politics in the state and gradually getting marginalized due to non-restoration of that status to state of Jammu and Kashmir paving way for anti-India forces. But in the politics of the state it still has a crucial role to play to resolve the issue of autonomy which is in the interest of India. The autonomy has substantial appeal to end alienation in Kashmir. Autonomy is essential for healthy Centre-state relationship and the only possible option to fulfill the aspirations of people and only mechanism to resolve the tangle. The autonomy discourse had the potential of changing the terms of political discourse in Kashmir alienation in Kashmir. At the national level, New Delhi must move towards restoring Kashmir’s compromised autonomy’.