Preface

The present work “Politics in Jammu and Kashmir: A Study of National Conference since 1987” examines the trends of politics of National Conference from its inception earlier under the banner of Muslim Conference in the Jammu and Kashmir state. It has been established that dominance of one political party under the leadership Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in all its phases- be it the freedom struggle launched in 1931 against the Dogra rule, by the National Conference, or the accession of Kashmir to the Indian Union after independence in 1947, coupled with the arrest of sheikh in 1953 and his release from the jail at many occasions with the conclusion of Kashmir Accord, 1987 elections, the politics of autonomy etc. the politics has practically been dominated by the National Conference at all stages. These are the core issues which are studied and analyzed in this work.

Historically the Jammu and Kashmir state is composed of three main cultural units and geographical divisions, namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The state of Jammu and Kashmir came into existence as a result of the conquest of the Punjab by the Britishers in 1845. The territories of Jammu and Kashmir which formed the part of Sikh state were separated from it. The provinces of Kashmir and Gilgit were handed over to Gulab Singh, for a cash payment of seventy-five lakhs of rupees by the British. Gulab Singh was recognized the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. He laid the foundation of Dogra rule in the state. Dogras retained the feudal structure of the society. The Muslim subjects
who formed the bulk of the population bore the heaviest brunt and burden of the Dogra autocracy which was restrictive, despotic and exploitative. The freedom movement led by National Conference was actually a vigorous struggle against the oppressive rule of Dogras. The present study also concentrates on the general economic and political conditions of the people and various other forces which were directly or indirectly involved in the freedom struggle against Dogras. The events which resulted in the birth and emergence of Muslim Conference later converted into a secular political party the National Conference and its role in the Kashmir politics in general and post 1987 in particular is also studied and analysed.

The thesis also studies the party system, their role, ideologies etc. and electoral politics in Kashmir and the role of National Conference as a main political party in the 1987 elections, and its impact on Jammu and Kashmir politics. The present thesis also takes thorough study on the achievements such as agrarian reforms, and failures of National Conference in the Jammu and Kashmir state. To give a historical continuity to the subject it has been found necessary to analyze the early historical background of the state- the political and economic structure in which the people of the state lived. The general uprising of Muslims against Dogras in 1931 was the culmination of a number of early political struggles and trends towards social and political reforms. The movement has also been examined in the larger context of the contemporary events in India. The freedom movement in Kashmir from 1931 to 1940 led exclusively by the Muslim Conference was never a communal in its character.
This movement found a secular-minded leader in the person of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. His leadership provided the movement both national and secular basis. The struggle for responsible Government and the forces and factors responsible for shaping the movement on broader principles of secular nationalism have been fully treated and thoroughly examined. It was the National Conference which preferred to go with Secular and democratic India and supported the instrument of accession of the state with the Union of India.

Since then the issue of autonomy is the main political agenda of its political activism and discourse in the state. The politics of autonomy which is the lifeline of National Conference ideology is the main concern of the thesis.

The present study has made use of the historical method. Data and facts collected have been processed and presented in their proper context. Both primary and secondary sources of information including Archival records, official reports and publications, constitutional documents, party documents, periodicals and newspapers both national and local have been consulted and relevantly used.

The scheme followed in this work is divided into six chapters supported with a conclusion. The first chapter consists of preliminary discussion of the research, dealing with the importance of the topic, aims of research, and the methodology used in the research work. It also throws light on the literature review of some key sources used in the present work. Chapter second deals with the historical background which includes the founding of the Jammu and
Kashmir state in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Amritsar. The socio-economic and political conditions of the people under Dogra rule, the character of its administrative system and its impact on the masses in general and the peasantry in particular, reveals the real cause of the political turmoil in the state.

The third chapter deals with the party system in Jammu and Kashmir with special reference to the events resulting into the emergence of National Conference as a major political party with its nationalistic outlook spearheading the freedom struggle against the Dogra rule. The chapter also involves an analytical study of different political parties with their ideologies and programmes.

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.

Sixth chapter deals with the role of National Conference in restoring autonomous character of the state. The last chapter surmises the thesis in the form of conclusions. Though the care has been taken to avoid the mistakes of grammar and otherwise but it could not be without some of them for which I am solely responsible. In carrying out this study I visited different libraries and institutes for the purpose of location and collection of the available literature. I pay my thanks to all of them.

Akhter Hussain Rather