

## THE PRAJA PARISHAD MOVEMENT IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*From the very beginning when the state Jammu and Kashmir came into existence after the well known Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, there were political and emotional differences in the regions of Kashmir and Jammu. As the politics of National Conference was confined to Kashmir region, it was very essential for Jammu region to have party of its own. Therefore, it was the first political organization of Jammu region and was a product of the political context prevailing at that time. With its main objective to achieve full integration of Jammu and Kashmir with Indian union the Praja Parishad became the principal opposition party of Jammu region. Right from the inception the leaders of this movement opposed the idea of granting special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, popular agitations were launched by the delegates of this movement. It became a symbol of political aspiration of Jammu and had become a fundamental force of Jammu region. With its base in Jammu region the movement was also important for providing a symbolic balance between Kashmir and Jammu regions.*

**Keywords:** Movement, Region, National Conference, Kashmir, Integration.

### INTRODUCTION:

After the emergence of All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939, the appointment of National Conference leader Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as the head of the Emergency Administration and others succeeding political developments in the state of Jammu and Kashmir increased the feeling of alienation among the people of Jammu province. The “Quit Kashmir” movement of the National Conference launched with the aim of forcing the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir to transfer the power to people. The Dogras of Jammu viewed this movement as an attempt to eliminate their influence from Kashmir. The Hindus of Jammu still wanted that the Maharaja should be the Head of the State with wide powers because they had no faith in the fair play of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah’s administration and its doings. Unlike the Kashmir which had evolved its own regional party in the form of the National Conference, Jammu had not evolved any regional

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party which could speak and give the existing radical and political response. Therefore, the people of Jammu felt that it was a high time to form a political organization of their own which could speak in favor Jammu's people and fight for their grievances, reflect their aspirations and represent their view point.

Hence, the political transformation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir led to the emergence of Praja Parishad in Jammu region in November 1947. As a party, it had an aim of representing Jammu's interest as against Kashmir assertion. Its platform was limited to Jammu and few sub urban areas. Hari Wazir was the first President of the Praja Parishad and Balraj Madhok became its general secretary. Pandit Prem Nath Dogra a leader with towering personality held its office until his death.

### **HISTORIOGRAPHY**

If we analyze the historiography the work of Balraj Puri deals with the problems of Jammu region and argued that it was denial of justice to Jammu by the leaders of Kashmir, which facilitated the origin and growth of Praja Parishad movement in the Jammu region. Balraj Madhok in his work argues that due to the change in the State's administration and new constitutional set up the people of Jammu got scared with the transfer of power in the hands of Kashmiri leadership which led to its formation with its base at Jammu region which was welcomed by the masses of Jammu. M. K. Teng provides the detail description of the Praja Parishad agitation in 1951. Navnita Chadha Behera, argues about the discontentment among the people of Jammu against the policies of National Conference and also talked about the role of other organizations which opposed the article 370 and supported Praja Parishad for the demand of the full integration of state to the Indian Union. The different controversial issues on Kashmir politics since the beginning of the so called freedom of Kashmir is described in detail by Vidya Bhushan.

### **GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Though the activities of this movement were confined to the Jammu region, but its agenda affected the politics of entire state.

### **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The main objectives of this study is to examine the challenges before this movement, to explore the causes of resentment of the people of Jammu region, to analyze the agenda and the activities of the Praja Parishad movement and to examine thoroughly the impact of the this movement on the people and the government. The study of this paper depends upon the scrutiny of the relevant source material, which include both primary and secondary sources.

With the shift in the power structure of the state in 1947, the inter-regional relationships within the state underwent a drastic transformation. Since 1947, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had heralded as the Prime Minister of that Jammu and Kashmir.

(Schofield, 1997, 167) Various reforms introduced by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's government were opposed by the Dogras of Jammu because they believed that the changes would weekend the Hindu vested interest in the country. (Bazaz, 1954, 485) Maharaja Hari Singh was very popular and revered figure in the State and was always held by the people in great esteem; this was the main reason why Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was in a hurry to manipulate his removal from the scene. (Singh, 1973, 13) Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah gave a speech on the Martyrs' day in which he said that, "we have every right for the self determination, Kashmiris will only decide about Kashmir. Self determination is the motto of democracy. We regret that people of Kashmir have not been given the opportunity for self-determination." (Chand, 1953) For the people of Jammu, their new Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, was an absolute stranger. They had him as a communal leader of the valley and had looked upon him with suspicion. He failed to win the confidence of the people of Jammu. (Singh, 1973, 62) As an opposition party in Jammu region, Praja Parishad found its principal support among the majority of Non-Muslims who were increasingly worried about Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's tendency to draw the state of Jammu and Kashmir away from India. In the Jammu district alone, the Praja Parishad alone had 16,000 members while National Conference had 6000. (Korebal, 1992, 226) Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was loyal to India but he always wanted that Jammu and Kashmir should become an independent state. (Schofield, 1997, 169) Whereas, the Praja Parishad movement linked the state of Jammu and Kashmir with India, because they believed that for the safety and security of state, it is essential that state should be fully brought under the constitution of India. (Bamzai, 1994, 806) It was natural, that its formation was welcomed by the masses of Jammu and it began to spread very fast. It was essentially a reaction to the aggressive trends in the local nationalism of Kashmir and a protest of a region which felt politically ignored and condemned. (Puri, 1996, 33)

Several demonstrations were held by the Praja Parishad against Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's government; and his policy of estrangement from India. (Korebal, 1992, 227) Early in 1949, there was the first clash between the National Conference and the Praja Parishad movement. There was repression and hundreds of Dogra workers including the 70 years old its President Pundit Prem Nath Dogra was arrested. (Bazaz, 1954, 486). For the first time Dogras forgot the caste distinctions and stood together under one banner. Among the arrested were Brahmins, Harijans, Rajputs, Khattris and Mahajans. Men as well women joined the Satyagraha and court arrest. This movement becomes the one popular political party of the Hindus of Jammu (Schofield, 1997, 167) as a political party; Praja Parishad came to represent the feudal interests of Jammu region. Its pro feudal character came to revealed very early as among the initial task that it set before was to oppose the land reforms. The National Conference had made a commitment in its New Kashmir manifesto to bring about revolutionary change in the agrarian structure of the society. In the pursuance of this commitment that on the assumption of power, the most stringent land reforms of Jammu and Kashmir were introduced. Therefore, on October 17, 1950, the Big

Landed Estates Abolition Act was passed. So far as the grant of compensation of expropriated landlords was concerned, Section 26 of the Act provided that it would be settled by the 'Constituent Assembly' or Legislative Assembly of the State. (Assembly Debate, 1951, 1) This legislation thus aroused resentment among the expropriated classes belonging to Jammu region. (Assembly Debate, 1951, 60) This movement actively opposed the land reform legislation. It raised the issue of compensation at various forums and intensely lobbied for it. (Assembly Debate, 1952, 1)

The process which had been adopted in other states regarding the integration and constitutional adjustment was not followed in the case of Jammu and Kashmir. During the process of constitution making, various negotiations were take place between the leaders of Central and State government regarding the status of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore certain principles were agreed both by the center and state leadership. Finally the draft of Article 306-A was placed before the Constituent Assembly of India in which the provision of granting special status to Jammu and Kashmir was firstly drafted. This special status was finalized as article 370 of the Indian Constitution. The article 370 of the Indian Constitution also recognized the rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to assemble a Constituent Assembly of their own to draft the constitution of state. N.Gopalswami Ayyanger, the cabinet minister of India said, "this article proposes a special status for Jammu and Kashmir because of its special circumstances, the state is not in a position to merge with India. We all hope that in future that the state of Jammu and Kashmir will get over the hurdles and completely merge with the Union, like the rest of the states".(Schofield, 1997, 170)

Article 370 was anathema to most of the most of people of Jammu and the abrogation of article 370 was anathema to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and to Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was strongly against the communalism of the entrenched Praja Parishad in Jammu. the incorporation of Article 370 and its application to Jammu and Kashmir was strongly objected by the leaders of Jammu.

Referring to the 'temporary and transitional' nature of Article 370, Praja Parishad leadership was of the opinion that it was a temporary article in Indian Constitution which was created due to the special circumstances prevalent in the state at that time. They believed that when normalcy would restore in the state, the President of India could abrogate this article. Thus this article as well as special status to Jammu and Kashmir was not a permanent nature.

On August 13, 1950, there was General Council meeting of Praja Parishad took place in which the following resolutions were passed:

- (a) Section 50 of the Kashmir Security Rule in Jammu should be abolished immediately so that all the organisations can function in a democratic manner, otherwise it would be impossible for any organisation to do its work.

- (b) The state government has stopped granting grants to all schools run by social institutions, while all students are admitted in these schools without any discrimination of caste and creed. The courses offered by the state government are taught in these schools. This step of government will make hundreds of teachers unemployed and the future of students will be bleak.
- (c) The Tehsils of Doda and Bhandarwah should be incorporated into the district of Udhampur.
- (d) People from far flung areas have great difficulty in obtaining permits to go to other parts of the country. For permits, they have to travel a long way, including children and women, to the Tehsil headquarters; because the attendance of all those who need permits has been mandatory before the concerned officer. For the convenience of the people, the condition of personal attendance should be abolished. (Organizer, 1950)

On November 1951, the Praja Parishad organized a meeting of its delegates. Pundit Prem Nath Dogra gave his presidential address in which he argued that there is no need for a separate constitution for Jammu and Kashmir. So, Pundit Prem Nath Dogra gave a call for the deletion of the provision for special treatment of Jammu and Kashmir incorporated in the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Therefore, in 1951, the delegates of Praja Parishad leaders started a popular agitation. Various political organizations across the India like the Bhartiya Jan Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Ram Rajya Parishad, the Punjab Arya Samaj and some of the Akali leader provide a proper support to the Praja Parishad and demanded for the abrogation of the Article 370, full integration of the State into the Indian Union. . Therefore, for complete merge of Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of India, the Praja Parishad issued a rallying cry of *Ek Vidhan, Ek Nishan, Ek Pradhan* that is, one constitution, one flag, and one premier.

## CONCLUSION:

The agitation started by the Praja Parishad showed no signs of abating and major political organization of India including the Bhartiya Jana Sangh pledged their support to the Praja Parishad movement. Dr. Shyam Prasad Mukherjee, the leader of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh took up the cause of Jammu with an active support and decided to launch a Satyagraha on all India bases. Even after the Praja Parishad agitation had been called off, Pundit Prem Nath Dogra continued to oppose the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir. So far, this movement has been making efforts to change the narrow outlook of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah which was limited only to Kashmir, it wanted that the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah should take steps to take the people of all the divisions of the state with him and also help in building democratic institutions there. The members of Praja Parishad movement wanted the emergence of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union like the other states of India. In this direction it was ready to cooperate with the National

Conference. According to Balraj Madhok, “*Kesari* of Jammu Pundit Prem Nath Dogra and *Sher-e-Kashmir* Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah work together for the same purpose, it will be good for the state.” But perhaps Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was not ready for this. He had chosen a different route for the National Conference and he was pushing the entire Princely state on it.

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