

Islamism and Electoral Politics: A Case Study of Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (1971-87)

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Abstract:

Islamism and electoral politics are, theoretically, placed differently and in fact quite opposite to each other in the religious circles. However, practically, sometimes even the flag holders of Islam imbibe the 'antagonistic' electoral methods to achieve their goal of Islamism. The present paper substantiates the same concept with respect to Jama'at-i-Islami Jammu and Kashmir. Despite taking a strong confrontation against the modern concepts of democracy, secularism and their constituent element of electoral politics, Jama'at used electoral politics as a means for attaining the ultimate end i.e., Islamism. Through electoral politics Jama'at not only operated as a strong political pressure group, but also widened its base among people, thus, making its road towards Islamism more secure and guaranteed.

Keywords: Jama't-i-Islami, Islamism, Electoral Politics, Iqamat-i-Din, State

I. Introduction

Islam is just not a religion, but a way of life. It is not a set of rituals rather a system with socio-economic and political dimensions. Therefore, it cannot fit any other system, be it democratic secularism, socialism, capitalism or any other '-ism'. Amongst all the twentieth century Islamic ideologue and revivalists, Sayyid Abu A'la Maududi, founder of Jama'at-i-Islami, has been the most vocal in this regard. While presenting Islam a complete code of life and an absolute system,¹ he downgraded the prevalent ideologies of secularism, socialism and capitalism by highlighting their loopholes.² Maulana Maududi holds that, "the basic principle of Islamic politics is that, both individually and collectively, human beings should waive all rights of legislation and all power to give commands to others. None is entitled to make laws on own authority and none is obliged to abide by them. The right vests in Allah alone."³ Maududi, derives authority from the Quran in order to validate this concept:

"The decision rests with Allah only, who hath commanded that ye worship none save Him. This is the right faith".⁴

"They ask: have we also got some authority? Say: "all authority belongs to God alone."⁵

"Do not say wrongly with your tongues that this is lawful and that is unlawful. Who so judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed, such are disbelievers."⁶

As per to this theory, as Maududi holds, Sovereignty belongs to God only. He alone is the law-giver. No man, even if he be a prophet, has the right to order others in his own right do or not to do things.

"It is not (possible) for any human being unto whom Allah has given the scripture and wisdom and the prophet-hood that he should afterwards have said unto mankind: Be slaves of me instead of Allah; but (what he said, was) Be ye faithful servants of Lord."⁷

Thus, quoting from the Quran, Maulana Maududi tries to substantiate that Islam is not democracy: for democracy [as per Maulana Maududi] is the name given to that particular form of Government in which sovereignty ultimately rests with the people, in which legislation depends both in its form and content on the force and direction of public opinion and laws are modified and altered, to correspond to changes in that opinion. There is no such thing in Islam which, therefore, cannot be called democracy in this sense of the term.⁸

Despite this criticism, Jama'at could not hold itself back from the ingredient element of electoral politics associated with the system against which Maududi showed reservation. Not only JI Pakistan, but JJK also contested elections. Thus, there has been

¹For an elaborated study see, Sayyid Abu A'la Maududi, *Economic System of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd.); also see *Social System of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Limited, 1997); *The Islamic Law and Constitution* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Limited); *Ethical View Point of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Limited).

²For details see, Maududi, *Islam aur Jadeed Ma'ashi Nazariyat* (n.p., n.d).

³Sayyid Abu A'la Maududi, *Political Theory of Islam*, (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, May 2011) p. 19-20.

⁴Al-Quran (12:40).

⁵Ibid.: 3.

⁶Al-Quran: 5.

⁷Ibid. 3.

⁸Maududi, *Political Theory*, op. cit., p. 21

an interesting inter-play of ideological rigidity and methodological flexibility in case of Jama'at-i-Islami while pursuing its goal of Islamism. Beyond any doubt, platform of electoral politics has become an interesting tool for Islamism in recent times.

II. Jama'at and Electoral Politics:

The Jama'at-i-Islami did not take part in the electoral politics of the state for about twenty years of its independent existence. During that period, it prepared a dedicated, trained and trustworthy cadre, besides it tried to strengthen its roots among the masses. Finally the party decided to participate in the electoral politics in early seventies. The first election it fought was the Parliamentary election of 1971.

Now the question arises "If any system other than Islamic was prohibited and If people owe their allegiance to Allah", which Maulana Maududi and Jama'at-i-Islami had been reiterating and asserting⁹, then was not it self-contradictory on the part of JJK to contest such elections under a (what they called) non-Islamic political set up?

The JJK defends its stand of participation in the state elections as a methodological tool or as a means to an end to reach their ultimate goal or *Nesb-ul Ain* of *Iqamat-i-Din*.¹⁰ They held that in a democratic and constitutional state, the only way to change the political leadership in order to facilitate the ways of *Iqamat-i-Din* is through elections. They further assert that using unconstitutional and undemocratic means in a democratic system to change the system is against the Jama'at's own constitution.¹¹ Further, JJK asserted elections can be used to generate political consciousness among the people. They held that JJK had participated in the elections for safeguarding the democratic rights of the people as Government has failed in fulfilling its promises done to people.¹² According to Syed Ali Shah Geelani, "JJK had two basic objectives behind participating in elections. Firstly, articulation and spread of JJK message and principles on ideological level and keep alive the 'Kashmir issue'. Secondly, to strive through democratic ways, in order to provide the masses their basic and fundamental rights".¹³

While using Maulana Maududi's arguments JJK articulated in Azan that 'Dawah and participation in elections should go hand in hand'. They assert that 'remaining away from elections will make *Tabligh* or *Dawah* (preaching) irrelevant, as unless the keys of political leadership do not come in the hands of *Din*, the goal of *Iqamat-i-Din* can't be achieved'; 'religion and politics are inseparable... such an articulation becomes quite insignificant if it didn't participate in elections... The non participation of elections will surely kill the ideological distinction of Jama'at-i-Islami with the rest of the Islamic religious organizations'. Moreover, 'election nonparticipation on the part of Jama'at can make people disappointed who have been so far kept hope on us... we would be killing the choice of voters... Plus non participation will give impetus to those forces which will always try to curb Islamic forces'.¹⁴

The JJK also advocates their ideological consistency and methodological changes and defends their stand on Islamic basis. In the words of Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, Amir-i-Jama'at, JJK :

Islam is a religion of *Hikmah* (Reason/logic). It permits logical strategical change as long as such methods do not contradict with Quran and *Sunnah*. Prophets of Islam including Prophet Muhammad (SAW) have changed their strategies as per demanding circumstances like for example Hazrat Yousuf accepted an offer to become financial minister of an un-Islamic system. Even there are many examples when Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) also made strategical changes as per demanding circumstances, for example in *Sulah Hudeibiah* (a peace treaty between infidels of Makkah on one hand and Prophet (P.B.U.H) and Muslims of Madinah on other hand). In this treaty Infidels displayed objection on the name Muhammad *Rasoolullah* (Muhammad the Prophet of God) to be written in treaty. Instead they demanded that the name be replaced by Muhammad bin Abdullah (Muhammad, the Son of Abdullah) because they do not accept him prophet. None of the companions of the Prophet dared to rub *Rasoolullah*. However, Prophet himself rubbed *Rasoolullah* and directed Hazrat Ali (R.A) to write Muhammad bin Abdullah rather than Muhammad *Rasoolullah*. That does not mean prophet's declaration of Prophet-hood went self-contradictory. It was in fact a methodological change as per demanding circumstances. Also other conditions of the treaty were apparently harsh for Muslims as in one of the conditions it was demanded by infidels that if any one accepts Islam among the people of Makkah and migrates to Madinah, he should be sent back. But if any amongst the Muslims of Madinah happens to come Makkah, he will not be sent back. Prophet (P.B.U.H) even accepted these conditions keeping in view long-term gains owing to which within few years The Prophet (P.B.U.H) successfully established Islamic state in the whole of the Arabia. Same has been the case of Jama'at-i-Islami --- it has changed its strategies as per demanding circumstances, keeping in view the longer benefits to prolong the movement in order to reach its goal of *iqamat-i-din*. So, there is no scope for the thinking that Jama'at has undergone ideological change".¹⁵

⁹ For more details see Syed Abul'ala Maududi, *political theory of Islam, Khilafat wa Mulukiyat, Islam ka Siyasi Nizam etc; Constitution of JJK, Articles 3 and 4.*

¹⁰ An interview with *Ashique Kashmiri*, Srinagar, 02.10.2013.

¹¹ The Constitution of JJK, Article 5.

¹² Azan, 11 & 17 June, 1975

¹³ Syed Ali Shah Geelani, *Deed wa Shanneed* (Srinagar: Tulu' Publications, 2006), p. 35.

¹⁴ For more details see Syed Abu A'la Maududi, *Tahreek-i-Islamika Aayindah Layhe Amal* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Private Limited, n.d, n.p), cited in Azan, 5-11 February, 1987.

¹⁵ An interview with Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, Srinagar, 14.10.2013.

The party for the first time participated in the Parliamentary elections of 1971. Since then it took part in every elections up to 1977 held in the state including the Assembly elections of 1972, Bi-election of 1975, Assembly election of 1977, and Assembly election of 1983. Subsequently, in 1987 it fought elections as a constituent of the *Muslim united Front (MUF)*.¹⁶

In the Parliamentary election of 1971, the Jama'at filed nomination for all the three seats in the Kashmir valley and one in Jammu for Doda constituency. The nominator form of Qari Saif-ud-Din from Srinagar was rejected. All the remaining three candidates of Jama'at were defeated by the *Congress* candidates. Jama'at-i-Islami alleged that their candidates lost because of large scale rigging in the elections.

In the Assembly elections of 1972, Jama'at contested 22 seats and won 5 of them. It polled 98985 votes out of a total of 139006 votes cast, which work out to be 7.18% of total polled votes in the whole state. The winners included, Qari Saif-ud-Din (who contested the election from the Jail) from Khanyar constituency (Srinagar), Syed Ali Shah Geelani from Sopore seat in District Baramulla, Ab. Razak Mir from Kulgam constituency (Anantnag) and A. M. Dar from Nandi constituency (Anantnag).¹⁷

In 1975 an important accord was signed between Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as a result of which Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah became the Chief Minister of state, however, with the support of the Congress majority in the legislature. For securing the membership of assembly, he had to contest Bi-elections in which the Jama'at was the only party to stand against him and his associate Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beigh (Deputy Chief Minister). The two were contesting from Ganderbal and Devsar constituencies respectively. In this Bi-election the Jama'at lost badly and both their candidates could not even save the securities. At the end, it accused the Government of mass rigging of votes and harassing Jama'at activists.¹⁸ Qari Saif-ud-Din, one of the prominent leaders of Jamaat said, "We were just returning from the electoral fields of Ganderbal and Devsar in the mid-night of July 4, 1975 and found that our offices were looted and locked up by the Government and our workers were rounded up. We could not account for this sudden development but soon we discovered the reason; we had been found guilty of challenging the ruling party in the electoral battle and as such we could not spare".¹⁹

The party could not fight the Parliamentary elections of 1977 because it stood banned. However, it fielded an independent candidate, Abdul Razak Mir, in the Anantnag constituency, who lost to the Congress candidate, Mohammad Shafi Qureshi, by a margin of 8331 votes. Another independent candidate fielded by the party from Baramulla constituency was Syed Ali Shah Geelani, while he was himself behind the bars. He got 100202 votes but lost to his rival Abdul Ahad Wakil of 'National Conference' by a margin of 47020 votes.²⁰

In March 1977, Indira Gandhi withdrew the emergency and called general elections. She was defeated. Now wearing the mantle of political martyrdom, the Jama'at sought to capitalize on the new situation. At this time Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq supported Janta Party. Jama'at fought this election on its own. Main contest was between Janta Party and National Conference, where as Jama'at was a peripheral actor.

Islam, leaders of the National Conference insisted, would be in danger if the Jama'at-Janta alliance came to power. Mirza Afzal Beigh, Abdullah's key deputy, would often open a green handkerchief containing Pakistani rock-salt as opposed Indian sea salt signaling support for that country. National Conference cadre administered oaths on Quran to potential voters, while clerics were imported from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to campaign in Muslim majority areas of Jammu.²¹ These were the methods adopted by National Conference for their vote bank as the general atrocities in the emergency period had raised a kind of wave against National Conference. The green handkerchief symbolized color of Islamic flag and also of Pakistan and showing Pakistani rock-salt was a move to pretend their Pakistani inclination against India for which an attempt was made by National Conference to use the sentiments of the people in their own favor.

It paid off: the National Conference won 47 out of 75 seats in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly, a decisive majority. Moreover, the National Conference secured over 46 percent of the popular vote, an exceptionally high proportion in Indian elections. By contrast, the JJK could secure just one out of 19 seats it contested and received only 3.59 percent of the statewide vote, this was a performance poorer than even that of the fledgling Janta Party, which picked up 13 seats in Jammu and secured 23.7 percent of the popular vote.²²

The election manifesto of Jama'at-i-Islami reminded its struggle against undemocratic trends in the state and reiterated that "Jama'at wants to ensure the freedom of press and platform within moral bounds and considers democracy meaningless without fundamental human rights being guaranteed to the people, without any discrimination."²³

The Assembly elections of 1983 in the state uprooted the political image of the Jamaat-i-Islami. It fielded 26 candidates for the assembly elections, but all of its candidates were defeated. The prominent leader of the party Syed Ali Shah Geelani lost to Hakim Habibullah of National Conference nominee from Sopore constituency, a stronghold of Jamaat in the state. In four constituencies the candidates of Jama'at got second place the other important leader who lost was Gh. Nabi Nawshehri from Idgah (Srinagar) constituency, Gh. Mohammad Sofi (Safi) from Baramulla constituency, Ab. Razak Mir and S.G. Hassan from

¹⁶V.B.Singh, S.Bose, *State Elections in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections* (New Delhi: Stage Publications, Vol.1, 1987), pp.161-165.

¹⁷ Ghulam Nabi Lone, "The Role of Jama'at-e-Islami in the Politics of Jammu and Kashmir (1972-1989)" (M. Phil. Dissertation, 1993, Political Science Department, University of Kashmir), p.82

¹⁸ S.N. Kaul, *Dynamics of Kashmir Politics* (New Delhi: Rajat Publications, n.d), p.306.

¹⁹ Singh, op. cit., p. 517.

²⁰ Praveen Swami, "Jamaat in retreat" in *Frontline*, Vol. 25, Issue 05, March 2008, p. 42.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Azan, 22 June, 1977.

Anantnag District. Though no candidate of the party won the election but the percentage of its votes increased to 3.88% of polled votes which was more than the percentage of 1977 Assembly elections, in which it had won one seat.²⁴

The 1987 Assembly elections were different from the early elections held in the state, that election was fought between two different alliances i.e. National Conference (F) Congress (I), combine and Muslim United Front (MUF) – a combination of many religious oriented groups. The important constituents of the Muslim United Front were, Jamaat-i-Islami, Umat-e-Islami of Dr. Qazi Nisar, Jameit-i-Ahl-i-Hadith, and a faction of *Shia* Muslims led by Maulana Abbas Ansari.

During the election, the Muslim United Front got as much as 18.9% of the total votes polled in state. Interestingly, in the valley it secured as high as 31.9% of the total valid vote's cost.²⁵ In terms of seats the Muslim United Front (MUF) won only four seats.²⁶

However, JJK could not do well in any of the elections it contested. JJK alleged election rigging on the part of the ruling Government responsible for it. The last election it fought was under Muslim United Front (MUF) – a combination of many religious oriented groups. The important constituents of the Muslim United Front were, Jama'at-i-Islami, Umat-e-Islami of Dr. Qazi Nisar, Jamaat-i-Ahl-i-Hadith, a faction of *Shia* Muslims led by Maulana Abbas Ansari.

Nevertheless, it is an established fact that 1987 was rigged election. Former National Conference leader and Member Parliament Abdul Rashid Kabuli said on 29 September 2013 that the 1987 Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir were rigged. Kabuli, who was the former election campaigner of the National Conference, said, "The Muslim United Front participated in the elections. But the elections were rigged. I am witness to the fact that today's biggest militant commander (United Jihad Council Chief) Syed Salah-ud-Din who participated in 1987 elections had won his assembly seat but he was forced to accept defeat".²⁷ A leader of the Congress Party at the time, Khemlata Wukhloo, recalls: "I remember that there was a massive rigging in 1987 elections. The losing candidates were declared winners. It shook the ordinary people's faith in the elections and the democratic process."²⁸

During the election, In terms of seats the Muslim United Front (MUF) won only four seats owing to the massive rigging in the elections.... This disappointed those who so far had high hopes from elections..... The rigging of election in 1987 changed the entire political discourse of Kashmir. This thing brought a paradigm shift in the political climate of Kashmir and had a direct impact on the politics of JJK as well. The impact it had on the JJK and its policy and politics vis-a-vis Kashmir issue goes for a totally new study and not the field of study in present research, keeping in view the time period of the present research.

III. Jama'at's Role through Electoral Politics:

The JJK acted as a strong political pressure group against the ruling state Government (especially post 1970s) by highlighting the Government failures while meeting out the democratic and fundamental necessities of the masses. JJK highlighted such things in their various conventions, meetings, public conferences, resolutions, Azan and even inside state Legislative Assembly. Few instances are as follows.

The JJK Assembly group leader, Qari Saifuddin in a written press note on 14th May 1975, while criticizing State Government's policy of rising prices of commodities asserted that Government should before hiking the prices keep in view purchasing power of the people of the state.²⁹ On 7 June 1975, *Amir-i-JJK*, Sa'uddin in his press release asserted that the Kashmiri masses irrespective of their religions should support principles rather than persons and added that the present State Government has failed in its promises of curbing corruption.³⁰

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the then M.L.A Sopore of JJK on 25 June 1975, in his written press release criticized the state Government for mishandling the food problems faced especially by poor or middle class people in District Baramulla, which he had observed after visiting its various areas such as Lolab, Kupwara, Trigam, Kralpora, Ramyal, Baramulla, Sopore, Bandipora and Sonawari. He also exerted a serious concern on the sorry state of affairs pertaining to Government reaction in dealing such crises as the affected masses of Baramulla who had gathered in procession to draw the attention of masses were severely dealt with by police by using 250 tear gases. Geelani appealed to State Government to distribute rice and other necessity food stuff to affected area.³¹ Similarly, on 9th July, in a one day public conference of JJK at Dooro, Syed Ali Geelani criticized State Government for promoting corruption.³² Syed Ali Geelani while speaking on the bill of illegal constructions, in the Assembly, criticized ruling party's policies in curbing it.³³

On 16 August, 1988, in a Monthly meeting of District Baramulla Management of JJK at District office Sopore, under *Amir-i-Zillah* (Head of a District), while discussing the State Governments negligent and favoritism policies pertaining to

²⁴ Singh, op. cit., p. 151.

²⁵ S. Bhatnagar, Pradeep Kumar; *Geo-Regional Political Parties in India* (New Delhi: Ess Publications, 1988), p.19.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Greater Kashmir, Srinagar, Monday, 30 September, 2013.

²⁸ "Kashmir's Flawed Elections," BBC News World Edition, South Asia, Saturday, 14 September, 2002.

²⁹ Azan, 15 May 1975.

³⁰ Ibid, 8 June, 1975.

³¹ Ibid., 26 June, 1975.

³² Ibid., 10 July, 1980.

³³ Ibid., 18 August, 1988.

common issues of the people, a resolution was passed demanding solution of increasing unemployment from the state Government.³⁴

JJK also highlighted the responsibilities and lapses on the part of Government through the editorials of official organ Azan in which failure of State Government's policies in curbing dishonesty, corruption, unemployment, starvations at the time of floods; ruling party's election rigging and its tactics of favoritism and partiality towards their own agents and followers; and its malfunctioning in fulfilling basic necessities to the masses like drinking, electricity etc used to be highlighted.³⁵

Thus, Jama'at used electoral politics as an effective tool to sanction for itself an effective political place for pursuing its goal of Islamism.

IV. Jama'at: A Political Threat for State:

No doubt, participation in electoral politics did fetch certain fortunes for JJK, but, it was not always a bed of roses. As a result of Jama'ats' basic ideology of *Iqamat-i-Din* (establishment of an Islamic state), advocating Islam as a system and emphasizing that Islam and politics are inseparable, and for vehemently rejecting and opposing all political models other than Islam, JJK was always considered a threat by the state. As a result, JJK had to face State repression from its very inception.³⁶ As in the words of Syed Ali Shah Geelani (who became the member of JJK in 1949):

From 1947-1953, When Sheikh Abdullah was busy in crushing those who challenged state's accession towards India and those who supported accession towards Pakistan, JJK was no exception to his atrocities as JJK stand on the Kashmir issue from the very beginning had been that it was disputed. Sa'duddin was suspended from his Government post and deprived of gazetted post which he deserved. Further, When Sheikh Abdullah was put behind bars in 1953, then Bakshi Gulam Muhammad tried to bribe JJK members including me, which I totally denied and when JJK members supported plebiscite movement we were jailed on several occasions for example in 1962 and 1965.³⁷

However, JJK became the more target of the state as well as central Government especially after they came in the electoral politics. According to Qari Saifuddin, before JJK participated in the elections Sheikh Abdullah used to speak highly about the educational programme of the Jama'at which included mainly the network of its schools. But once JJK participated in elections he considered them as his political rival.³⁸

The Government of India has regarded Jama'at-i-Islami as a major challenge to its position and principles in the state. From time to time the state government at the instance of Central Government tried to contain the activities of Jama'at-i-Islami. The party was banned in 1975 and in 1990. The JJK was banned at the time of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi and its schools were also banned on the pretext that sectarianism is propagated. Finally, the state sponsored election rigging in 1987 election acted as the last nail in the coffin. No doubt, the betrayal through State sponsored election rigging forced Jama'at to leave the arena of electoral politics, but who knows; in the impending times they may again switch to electoral politics to chase their goal of Islamism.

V. Conclusion:

Thus, it can be concluded that theoretically there may be disharmony between Islamism and electoral politics, but on realistic grounds there seems concordance between them. The case study of Jama'at-i-Islami vividly proves this point. Despite, categorically criticizing the modern secular democracy and its ingredient of electoral politics, Jama'at, practically, did adopt the 'antagonist' system from 1971-1987. Electoral Politics was used by them as means to end i.e., Islamism. Through this method, they not only acted as political pressure group against the ruling Government, but also widened their base among the people, thus, trying to make their road towards Islamism more secure. Even though mass election rigging forced Jama'at to detach from electoral Politics, however, their chances of adopting it in the demanding times cannot be ruled out.

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³⁴ JI District Baramulla Resolution, 16 August 1988, quoted in Azan, 18 August, 1988.

³⁵ Azan, editorials, 25 Jan. 1975; 13 August, 1977; 11 September 1980; 23 Feb. 1984; 19 Apr. 1984; 15-21 Oct. 1987; 22-28 Oct. 1987; 19 Jul. 1988; 27 Aug. 1988 etc.

³⁶ The details of initial State repression of the founders of JJK have already been discussed in Chapter 2, while discussing the biographies of its founders.

³⁷ Syed Ali Shah Geelani, *Deed waShaneed*, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

³⁸ Bisati, op. cit., p. 40.