

The Story of Neglect of Jammu Region: An Analysis

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Abstract- Since its accession to the Indian union, Jammu and Kashmir is facing several inter –state and intra –state upheavals. As an enduring inter –state problem between India and Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir attracted enormous international attention but comparatively its intra - state hostility got a lesser notice. This article, dealing with the historic debate of politics of regionalism, explores the Kashmir centric leadership and New Delhi’s calculated denial of Jammu and Ladakh regions genuine demands. This article argues that both governments approach of denial is the major reason behind Jammu and Kashmir prolonging intra – state dispute which, through, the internal chaos , has maintained the cycle of unbridgeable “regional paradox” . In this context, it examines that calculated rifts have been institutionalized in Jammu and Kashmir political system which constantly guides crises to recur. This discussion re-examines Jammu regional problem based on the historical record.

Index Terms- Region, Jammu, Crisis, Discontent, Agitation, Inter –state conflict, Politico –regional tension.

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary state is confronted of a variety of problems which are related to the socio – economic and political – cultural aspects of life. These problems are quite pressing and their impact in terms of mass poverty, deprivation, inequalities, alienation and violence is easily discernible. Among the various social divisions in contemporary era, regional divisions have probably raised some of the most complicated issues. Inter-provincial relations have profoundly affected the course of events in the state. In turn every political development has influenced inter provincial relations. In 1947, events in the sub-continent, independence of the country and its partition, affected different provinces differently, while divergent aspirations of the regions influenced the state’s future course. The geographical factors of a region influence the political life of the people both directly as well as indirectly in more than one way. Firstly the topographic, climatic, pedagogical, vegetation and the resultant socio- cultural attributes of the inhabitants of an area give it a distinct physical personality of a region. The regional identity of a place promotes regionalism among its inhabitants. Secondly, the inter- regional physical barriers , long distances between the two regions inaccessibility, climatic variations and sharp socio – cultural differences between two regions hinder the process of inter regional interactions and emotional integration among the people of such regions. Thirdly, the spatial distribution of human attributes such as ethnicity, language, religion, culture, caste, ideology etc in a regional pattern over an area gives its inhabitants a sense of distinct identity. The crux of regionalism

lies in the economic under development and coupled with the new development scheme that has generated a struggle among different groups and regions for acquiring more economic gains. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is comprised of three main regions Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The internal politics of the state, marked by inter regional tensions, has influenced the attitude of the people on the question of their external affiliations. In each of the three regions of the state, a different attitude on the issue of accession can be clearly noticed from the very day of state’s accession to India. A sort of local nationalism had developed in all the three regions of the state. People’s alienation from the national identity has been a constant problem in Kashmir since long. They tend to give more importance to ethno- religious and regional identities than to considerations of united state and the nation. In Jammu and Ladakh regions, regionalism developed as a reaction to the politics of Kashmir valley where the special status propped the accession of the state to India. The people of Jammu and Ladakh took special status of the state as a special favour to the Kashmir valley and therefore, to the majority community of the state at the cost of minorities.

II. JAMMU REGION

The clash between Jammu and Kashmir regions has apparently been communal and ideological. They are different not only in language and culture but also in their predominant religion. The National Conference essentially represented the regional patriotism of Kashmir valley. It had confined its activities to that region mainly, because it was inhabited by its basic philosophy, i.e. regional patriotism of Kashmir. Moreover Kashmir leadership did not have much contact with and trust in Jammu workers of their party, which functioned in an adhoc manner with repeated changes in the composition of its communities at various levels in the region. The growth of regional consciousness in Jammu after independence was sharp and fast. The political and administrative set up between the state and the Indian union brought about in 1947, proved conducive to regional tensions.

Agitational politics of Jammu region is mainly an elite response in the context of the power politics of the state. The power politics has been so organized in the state that the political elite of Jammu region did not get much opportunity to either share the political power or to influence the decision making process. Hence they often resorted to politics of protest and agitation tactic’s to overcome their invisibility. There is a perception about political dominance of Kashmir and Kashmir’s. There is widespread feeling that one comes across in Jammu region that political decisions in the state are Kashmir oriented and in the allocation of resources in the Jammu region remains perpetually discriminated and yet, there is another context of

perceptions about deprivations. As per this perception the real deprivation lies in the peripheral areas of Jammu region. The politics of discontent is not as much defined by the context of regional discrimination as much as by the sub regional neglect. The first kind of discontent is targeted against Kashmir as the center of political power. It is a regional level discontent that manifests the absence of parity within the state among three regions of the state. This kind of discontent is either expressed in terms of regional imbalances, in economic and development terms. The basic deprivation of Jammu region has neither been psychological nor material but it has been the political one. Jammu region could never get properly represented in the structure of power. The structure of power in the initial years of popular rule reflected excessive concentration of power in the hands of Kashmir's political elite gradually; it became a norm that Jammu would at best have nominal share in power.

The tale of Kashmir's total domination over the state's politics and economy began when in 1951 Sheikh Abdullah's valley centric and valley based National Conference dispensation delinked Jammu and Kashmir from the census operations conducted that year throughout the country ignored the 1941 census report as well as the sea change undergone in the state's demographic landscape owing to the migration of over one lakh refugees from the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and also the migration of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs from valley to Jammu region and delimited the constituencies for the legislative assembly in an irrational way. The Praja Parishad launched the first major agitation of Jammu in 1952. This agitation set the tone for protest politics of Jammu region. This agitation was a response to arbitrary nature of exercise of power by the political elite of Kashmir and gave vent to popular reactions against the anti Jammu attitude of power holders. The immediate factor, which led to the agitation, was the manipulation of Kashmir's political elite in electoral politics. The nomination papers of the candidates belonging to Praja Parishad for the first assembly elections were rejected on very trivial and flimsy grounds. This caused a lot of resentment against the power holders in Kashmir. Yet the actual protest was manifested against the Delhi Agreement of 1952 signed between the central government and state government led by Sheikh Abdullah. This agreement while accepting the special status of the state provided for the basis of its future relationship with the centre. The Praja Parishad launched the agitation under the slogan of "Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan and Ek Nishan" (one president, one constitution and one symbol). The main issue raised during the agitation was related to the status of Constituent Assembly of the state and the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution of India. It was therefore, demanded that there should be complete extension of Constitution of India to the state and there should be no separate flag of the state. The 1952 agitation may be considered important for a number of reasons for analyzing Jammu's regional politics. It was the first open manifestation of the political discontent of the region. With this agitation, a new dimension was added to Jammu politics, which was otherwise insignificant in the totality of state politics and which was eclipsed by an over sensitivity to Kashmir, came to acquire some significance. This agitation not only brought the political leadership of the region to a negotiating point with the central authorities but it also led to political visibility of the region. Most significantly, the

discontent of Jammu region and divergent political aspirations within the state came to be acknowledged.

The immediate fall out of the 1951 exercise was the emergence of dispensation under which no persons from Jammu and Ladakh could ever become Chief Minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The prime reason is that since Kashmir has more seats in the legislative assembly, the office of the Chief Minister is its sole preserve. A dispassionate scrutiny of all the reports which various delimitation commission submitted from time to time reveals that they did pass on the centre of political gravity to the Kashmir hands or they were designed to accommodate what may be termed as selfish contentions of a group of Kashmiri leaders and put the initiative for every aspect of the state's politico-administrative and economic structure on Kashmir. A Chief Minister depending upon the Kashmiri vote bank alone for gaining and retaining power was bound to cultivate the Kashmiri electorate by all sorts of administrative measures and do more and more for the valley. A policy of regional discrimination thus emerged. That is how a power structure came into being which ultimately led to regional imbalances. The Jammu region is inadequately represented in the state Civil Secretariat with just four commissioners cum secretaries out of about 35 and 10 percent in the rest of services. The proportion of Kashmiris and Jammuites in the regional services of Kashmir and Jammu is approximate 99:1 and 30:70 respectively. The youth of Jammu and Ladakh virtually find no employment in the 12 corporations whose headquarters are in the valley with 100 percent of their employees from Kashmir. These corporations include Jammu and Kashmir Forest Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir Agro Industries Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir Handloom Development Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir State Financial Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir Minerals Development Corporation, and Jammu and Kashmir Industrial Development Corporation and Jammu and Kashmir Horticulture Produce and Marketing Corporation. All the major industrial units such as HMT watch factory, the telephone factory, the television factory and cement factory are in the valley. The valley is not at all suitable for the cement factory because every kind of raw material needed for it has to be imported from Jammu region.

Under development in the Jammu region which has few rivals as far as scenic beauty is concerned and which is highly rich in charming values, fascinating waterfalls, springs and holly shrines is also evident in spheres relating to tourism, roads and electrification. Over 90 percent of the state's tourism budget is spent in the valley every year. Despite the fact that the number tourists who visit Jammu region every year is 10 times more than those going to the Kashmir valley. The same story of neglect is true of roads also. Inter regional disparities become all the more clear when one compares the percentage share of different regions in the length of roads. The same story of neglect is in rural electrification, irrigation facilities, power generation etc. Right from the day of state's accession to the Indian dominion, funds for development schemes have become the sole privileges of the valley alone, with Jammu and Ladakh getting crumbs.

The simmering volcano in Jammu erupted again when four demonstrating students were killed in police firing on October 16-17, 1967 against the evil designs of shifting Agricultural and

Ayurvedic College to Srinagar. Initially these colleges were to be established at Jammu. Another major agitation was occurred in 1978. It started from peripheral area of Poonch and soon assumed regional dimensions. This agitation started from Poonch district as a protest against irregularities in the appointment of teachers in Poonch. A couple of months after agitation started, it assumed serious proportions and got the support of all the parties except Congress (I). Protesting against regional imbalances, these parties demanded appointment of a commission by retired judge of the Supreme Court to go into the question of regional imbalances. Joining of almost whole of Jammu region in this agitation was indicative of prevailing discontent in this region. While analyzing the Poonch agitation, Balraj Puri pointed out: It was a spontaneous protest in the whole of Jammu region, which indicates a deeper problem. It was not merely a protest against loss of an innocent young life or against the alleged irregularity in the recruitment of primary teachers in the district. The intensity of popular reaction only indicates that the discontent was much deeper.

In order to look into the grievances of Jammu region, the central government appointed a commission of inquiry, the Sikri Commission which after making a thorough study of the prevailing situation in the state agreed that "there existed discrimination and favouritism in the field of development, employment and education in the context of different regions, which was giving rise to irritations and tensions among the people of state". The 1978 agitation was a purely regional response to Jammu's discontent. It was first such agitation of Jammu region which did not remain confined to core areas of Jammu region but on the contrary spread itself throughout the whole region.

The period of 1967 to 1990 witnessed the emergence of a number of outfits and all in the name of the people of Jammu region. These included Panthers Party, Jammu Mahasabha, Jammu People Front and Jammu Mukti Morcha. The state government set up with much fanfare four commissions to placate the people of Jammu as well as to look into the demand for the creation of more districts in the state. These were the Gajendragadkar Commission (1967), the Qadri Commission (1972), the Sikri Commission (1979), and Wazir Commission (1981). The commission constituted in 1967 and 1979 were to look into the complaints of the people of Jammu and recommend measures which could rectify the regional imbalances and harmonies in inter-regional relations.

The commissions dealing with regional disparities and inter regional animosities, particularly the Gajendragadkar Commission, candidly admitted injustice to the Jammu region and recommended several steps to ensure Jammu's and Ladakh's effective and real participation in the state's political and economic processes. The Gajendragadkar Commission, recommended creation of a statutory development board at state level and statutory development regional boards, one each for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Some of the other recommendations of the Gajendragadkar Commission included division of the functions of each head of department on a regional basis, creation of regional recruitment boards, establishment of full fledged university for Jammu region, opening of a separate medical college at Jammu, introduction of

a uniform prices of food grains throughout the state and uniformity in the quantum in the food grains rations issued.

However, what were most significant were the observations of the Gajendragadkar Commission that "the main cause of irritation and tension was the feeling of political neglect and discrimination from which certain regions (Jammu and Ladakh) of the state suffer. Even if all the matters are equitably settled, we feel that there would still be a measure of discontent unless the political aspirations of different regions are satisfied". It's yet another significant comment was that "although the Jammu and Kashmir state has been a single political entity for over hundred years, it cannot be denied that geographically, ethnically, culturally and historically it is composed of three separate homogeneous regions namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

The governments bid to rationalize the century old durbar move again kicked up regional passions in Jammu region. The people of Jammu region protested against this order describing it as part of conspiracy to divide the state government between the two regions of Jammu and Kashmir. They maintained that the linking of two regions of the state was through the durbar move. They charged that the government's decision was blatant discrimination against the people of Jammu region and reflective of perpetuating Kashmiri's domination over the people of Jammu. The Bar Association of Jammu also condemned the government's decision and called off its 37 days long agitation. Meanwhile Jammu Mukti Morcha launched an agitation on March 2, 1990 to achieve the objective of forming a separate Jammu state. The leaders of Mukti Morcha believe that with the backing of the central government, the Kashmiri rulers have always manipulated their permanent dominating positions in all walks of life and thus denied Jammu its due share in political power and economic development. They have come to the conclusion that no halfway measures like Regional Development Boards, Regional Autonomy, the Jammu sub-state within the framework of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, can provide a durable solution. They, therefore, believe that the only remedy of all ills of inter-regional relations of the state is its trifurcation. In February, 1998 the peoples of Jammu region again felt alarmed over the percentage of students from Jammu region selected in the MBBS/BDS list of Jammu and Kashmir State which was comparatively very low as compared to the preceding years. This selection list however was not solely responsible for the agitation, there was always hue and cry over selection of candidates in MBBS/BDS and other professional courses. The resentment among the people engulfed the entire Jammu region. Notwithstanding the number of agitations of whatsoever nature, Jammu protests politics reveals the generally available apathy as well. The apathy becomes significant when one notes the intensity of discontent that prevails in this region. Discontent at the sub-regional level is the manifestations of the deprivation and marginalization faced by these areas. Discontent at the sub-regional level is a very complex phenomenon. It is defined by both by peripheral situation of the sub-regions within the Jammu region as well as by its peculiar ethno cultural basis.

III. CONCLUSION: THE ROAD AHEAD

To embark on the path of regional peace and harmony the state government and New Delhi must first understand the

pursuit of monolithic state system which is not accommodative. Therefore, it is not congruent to the regional aspirations of Jammu and Ladakh also. On their part, both of these regions look at Kashmir region as a client to the central government. Undoubtedly, Kashmir strengthens India's secular character as well as acts as hedge to Pakistani's "two nations theory", thus it surfaces heavily in New Delhi's decision making. These political and strategic calculations favour the majoritarian Kashmiri community and diametrically act against Jammu and Ladakh's genuine demands. In the name of national interest, New Delhi pushed three regions into a prolonged protracted zero sum game in which Kashmir enjoys superiority within the state and outside support from New Delhi. Now the uphill task before the decision makers is that whether Jammu and Kashmir three regions will be able to recover from six decades old preservative political system in which Kashmir centric leadership had triumphed. A recent three member team of interlocutors however is a good move in this direction. By having a multi focal attitude to resolve various issues, interstate and intra-state, will uplift confidence level of the people that will strengthen institutionalization of the state.

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