

Politics of National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir: An Overview

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Abstract

National Conference played a golden role in the politics of India and in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir. It had a glorious past and in future it has to play its role to make India a real secular State and bridge the gap between the people of India and the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu & Kashmir National Conference is one of the major political parties in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, headed by Sheikh Abdullah in 1947 at the time of Indian Independence. In Post 1947 it played a very significant role in shaping the politics both in positive as well as in its negative dimensions. Congress also played a very vital role in granting special constitutional position and abrogating the same. It has a very paradoxical role in both of promoting and undermining the democratic functioning within the state. After the death of Sheikh Abdullah the party was led by his son Farooq Abdullah and presently, it is headed by Omar Abdullah, son of Farooq Abdullah. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is a regional political party of India. Its mass base is primarily in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The National Conference operates on the ideology of Moderate Separatism, and the re-unification of Kashmir.

Key Words: National Conference, Coalition, Autonomy, Indira- Abdullah Accord, Militancy, PDP, Coalition, BJP

Introduction

The All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is one of the major regional political parties in India. The origin of the party can be traced back to pre-Independence rule of Maharaja Hari Singh, the last ruling prince of the Dogra house. It was during his rule that an organized political movement was born in the beginning of Thirties of the present Century in the summer capital of the State. The movement was conducted under the banner of the Muslim Conference which was duly formed in 1932. Within a couple of months, however, there appeared cracks and crevices in the pillars and walls of the Muslim Conference. The Muslim Conference was rent as under by factional politics. The Muslim Conference was also weakened by the role played by Non-Muslim organisations against its very existence. The policy of repression adopted by the Dogra ruler to crush the movement to death was another factor which contributed to the change that was brought about in the name of the Muslim Conference in 1939. The emergence of some radical forces and progressive elements in the State politics helped the redirection of the movement from communalism to the secular character. Thus, in special session of the Conference convened on June 11 and 12, 1939 at Panther Masjid Srinagar, a resolution which sought to change the name and Constitution of the Muslim Conference was passed by majority vote of the delegates present at the session. The Muslim Conference was changed into National Conference. The green flag of the National Conference was also replaced by a red flag with a plough in the middle of it. The National Conference was thrown open to all adult citizens of both the sex without any discrimination on the ground of religion, caste, creed and colour. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the father of the

freedom movement was unanimously elected the President of the National Conference. He nominated a working committee of twenty-one members and a General Council of fifty-one members.

The National Conference was personally supervised and guided by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was also instrumental in bringing the Conference in close association with Indian National Congress. The National Conference “worked in close cooperation with Indian National Congress and thus, formed an integral part of the nationalist struggle for freedom.” The Conference formed the Government in 1948 in the State and convened the Constituent Assembly in 1951, for the purpose of framing the Constitution of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It must be noted here that National Conference was vitally instrumental in getting the State acceded to Indian Union. When the Sheikh Abdullah formed the Government, the National Conference established the firm grip over the affairs of the State. It began to work for national building. Like the Indian National Congress, the National Conference had emerged as a dominant Muslim political party in the State. It had embarked upon a very revolutionary, progressive and radical programme of reforms and national reconstruction as a result of which the party had unhesitatingly fulfilled the promises it had made to the people of the State during the course of its struggle for freedom from the despotic rule and feudal curse.

From 1948 to August 1953, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah headed the Government formed by the National Conference. But soon unhappy developments took place which created strained relations between the Government of India and the Sheikh. These developments led to the Sheikh’s dismissal on August 9, 1953. He was arrested

and put in detention and then extended and imprisoned. The Sheikh and his trustworthy colleague, Mr. Afzal Beg had kept under detention for about eleven years. During this period, Mr. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad headed the Government of the State as the Prime Minister. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad was succeeded by Mr. Shamasuddin who occupied the office of the Prime Minister for seventeen months. With the exit of Shamasuddin ended the dominance of National Conference. The Prime Ministership passed on to Mr. G. M. Sadiq after Shamasuddin. Mr. Sadiq was the founder of the Congress rule in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. He headed the Government for about seven years from the date he had assumed his office on February 28, 1965. In order to present a bright image of the Congress rule to the people of the State, Mr. Sadiq adopted certain liberal measures. He fulfilled the wishes of the people who had been demanding the release of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his official political colleagues and workers. He released the Sheikh and his other political colleagues and workers withdrew the Kashmir Conspiracy Case; restored civil liberties and curbs on the freedom of press and speech. After his death in October, 1971, Mr. Sadiq was succeeded by Syed Mir Qasim who headed the Government as the last Chief Minister of Congress Party from 1971 to 1975 when he voluntarily stepped down in favour of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who had agreed to become the leader of the Congress Legislature party in State Legislative Assembly in the light of the Indira-Sheikh Accord on Kashmir. As per Kashmir Accord, The Union Government had committed to review some of not so important central laws and constitutional provisions which were applied to State after 1953 but Central Government did not honour this commitment and even the reminder of

this pledge was dubbed as an undesirable act. S. M. Abdullah returned to office on 9 July, 1977 by winning thumping majority in 1977 Assembly Elections and his main issue in election was restoration of autonomy. The relations between S. M. Abdullah and Janata Party led Central Government remained stressed mainly due to Jan Sangh which was advocating abrogation of Article 370. The relations did not improve after the return of Mrs. Gandhi to power at Centre in 1980 mainly due to differences on issue of passing of Resettlement Bill of 1982. The bill passed by the State Assembly provided for return of the State subjects who migrated to Pakistan 40 years ago and had since become Pakistani nationals. S. M. Abdullah died in 1982 and was succeeded by his son, Farooq Abdullah. Thus Sheikh Abdullah up to end of his life fought for genuine rights of his people. He was neither power thirsty nor he became a puppet of Central Government after assuming power but he was a determined and charismatic leader of common masses who fought for their cause irrespective of whether he was in jail or was at helm of affairs. The Sheikh during his Chief Ministership revived, reorganised and reoriented the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. The vital and the most important thing for the Sheikh were to ensure his own safeguard and security of his position against all possible dangers so that 1953 episode could not be repeated. He did it very cautiously and prudently. He acted rather ruthlessly to protect his political interest even at the cost of losing his most trustworthy and confident colleague in politics, Mirza Afzal Beg whom he expelled from the party. Although Farooq Abdullah got the Resettlement Bill reconsidered and passed by the Assembly but confrontation with centre was avoided by agreeing to refer the Bill to Supreme Court.

In Assembly Elections of 1983 in which National Conference got majority, Farooq made an alliance with Molvi Farooq and focused mainly on Muslim- centric issues while Congress raised issue of Resettlement Bill in Jammu thus these Elections further worsened the relations between Central Government and National Conference. Mrs. Indira Gandhi never forgave Farooq Abdullah for these acts against Central Government and a conspiracy was launched to dislodge Farooq Abdullah from the Government. G. M. Shah, Farooq's brother-in-law was encouraged to show dissidence and he claimed support of 13 legislatures. When Governor Brij Kumar Nehru refused to dismiss Farooq Government, he was transferred to Gujarat and was replaced by Jagmohan, a trusted agent of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who dismissed Farooq Government on July 2, 1984 and G .M .Shah was installed as Chief Minister of the State. People in the Valley felt very much cheated by this toppling and protests against this decision were held throughout the Valley and this event had the impact of renewing the memories of Sheikh's dismissal in 1953.

In 1986, the Congress was faced with the prospect of losing control over the Valley so rapprochement was sought between Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah. This agreement was called Rajiv-Farooq Accord and coalition Government was formed under the Chief Ministership of Farooq Abdullah. Farooq was charged with betraying his father's fifty years legacy of pride. It created a vacuum where the National Conference had existed and extremists stepped into the vacuum. Farooq Abdullah later admitted openly that the 1986 accord with Congress was his most serious political mistake.

During 1987 State Assembly elections was held, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, which formed an alliance with the Congress Party, won the majority and Farooq again became the Chief Minister and under Farooq's watch, Genocide of Kashmiri Pandits took place. Farooq Abdullah resigned from office of Chief Ministership in 1990 in protest against appointment of Jagmohan as Governor of the State. Legislative Assembly Elections were held in 1996 in which National Conference emerged as the single largest party in all three regions of the State and won 57 seats though the poll turnout was low in Kashmir due to boycott call. National Conference passed the State autonomy Bill in Assembly on June 26, 2000 which sought greater autonomy for the State but Centre rejected it outrightly. But in 2002 state Assembly elections, it won only 28 seats. The two decades of National Conference power was brought to an end by popular mandate in Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections, which brought a rival ethnic Kashmir party, the People's Democratic Party to power. But again in 2008 the National Conference made the coalition with Indian National Congress and formed the Government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. At present Dr. Farooq Abdullah's son Omar Abdullah is the Chief Minister of the coalition Government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In December 2008 state Assembly elections, no single party was able to get the majority. The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference led by Farooq's son Omar Abdullah emerged as a single largest party, won 28 seats. After the elections, on 30 December 2008 the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference formed an alliance with the Indian National Congress Party which had won 17 seats. Omar Abdullah became the Chief Minister of this coalition Government on 5 January 2009.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude we can say that in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir there were some positive changes that have been initiated and which were likely to contribute a positive element to the politics and governance of the State. National Conference is a regional political party operating in Jammu and Kashmir; it not only strives for the Muslims but also for the rights of all oppressed sections of the society. The National Conference is in complete support of attaining a lasting negotiation to solve the problems between India, Pakistan, and the State of Jammu and Kashmir, making all the 3 regions equally competent in progress and development. The National Conference has continually worked for the restoration of internal peace between the different factions within the state. It strongly objects the formation of any barrier between the two halves of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It may be remembered that National Conference always wanted to act as the bridge between Central and State Government. National Conference envisages the Valley's future as his own future, he look beyond Jammu and Kashmir. National Conference played a golden role in the politics of India and in the politics of Jammu and Kashmir. It had a glorious past and in future it has to play its role to make India a real secular State and bridge the gap between the people of India and the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

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