

# Political Culture Of Kashmir

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In time Past, We were;  
In time future, We shall be;  
Throughout the Ages, We have been.

(Lalla-Ded)

I.

## Conceptual Framework:

A political culture is composed of the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values of a society that relate to the political system and to political issues<sup>1</sup>. Political attitudes and values in a society are symbolised by such things as the national flag and national anthem<sup>2</sup>. However, there are certain values or achievements of which a society feels proud of and this 'element of pride' brings a political continuity and stability. These attitudes may be consciously held, but may be implicit in an individual or group relationship with the political system. Political cultures are not necessarily amenable to rigid definition. Political cultures differ according to the degree to which they stress participation in the political process by the citizens of the political system. In some systems, individuals take more active role in the political process, possess a great deal of political information, and expect to influence decisions made by the government<sup>3</sup>.

## FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL CULTURE

- I. Historical Development
- II. Geography
- III. Social character—Homogeneity or Heterogeneity
- IV. Religion
- V. Socio-economic Structure
- VI. Identity

**TWO KEY ASPECTS OF A POLITICAL CULTURE**

1. Attitudes to the political Institutions of the State, and
2. the degree to which citizens feel they can influence and participate in the decision-making process.

**II.****Introduction: Perspective of History**

Kashmir is one of the few societies of the world which have maintained cultural integrity throughout the history without identifying itself with any of the civilizations or cultures or political centres that it has met with. It has interacted and encountered with many cultures and civilizations, absorbed some of their influences and yet it did not assimilate in any of the dominant or alien or colonial culture. The society, at large, was certainly successful in maintaining its autonomy even after being at a distance from the polity particularly during the colonial rule. It can be, therefore, argued that the essential identity of Kashmir is cultural; not political. Kashmir experienced such an extended colonial rule which only few societies in the world have survived. She got the lost sovereignty back after suffering for more than 360 years only in 1947. Prior to occupation by the colonial masters, some religious saints had brought different beliefs, cultures and languages with them which not only transformed the religious character of Kashmir society but, to some extent, also changed the demographic profile. It may be mentioned that the processes of conversions were peaceful and non-violent. But the newly so-called 'privileged' masters of *Mulk-i-Kashmir* had their own cultural agenda to fulfil their lustful desires in Kashmir. But Kashmir has continued its civilizational character owing its unity not to a particular political regime but to the properly institutionalised spiritual and secular cultural ethos. The dialectical interaction between the indigenous culture and alien or colonial cultures resulted in the evolution of a distinct and unique

culture characterised by peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding, shared values and practices, and, more importantly, respect, recognition and accommodation of diverse identities among the different communities—religious, lingual, ethnic etc.—within Kashmir and this exemplary peaceful and non-communal life has been looked as 'ideal' by many violent communal societies in the Indian-subcontinent. Referring to this unique secular living pattern of Kashmir, Salman Rushdie comments that the "words Hindu and Muslim had no place in their story....In the Valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred"<sup>4</sup>.

### III.

#### Themes of Political Culture

##### **Principles and Practices of Tolerance and Accommodation:**

Kashmir has a high degree of tolerance and accommodation. Historically and culturally, it has accommodated different value systems in shape of different religions and socio-religious movements, encompassed different contradictions and uncertainties and lived a life in entirely hostile political environment. The social institutions have managed these uncertainties through highly structured roles. Kashmir has produced profound saviours who have been looked as Icons of Kashmir culture and inspire generations of generations in every walk of life. Lalla-Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din are named in equal breath and respected and honoured irrespective of religious beliefs by one and all without transcending the respective religious spheres. Both taught the lessons of Self-realisation and connecting one's finite 'self' to infinite 'Absolute Self'. Not realizing the 'Self' and failure of relating the 'Self' with the 'Absolute Self', results in alienation not only from the 'Whole' of which it is a part, but also from the fellow-beings which, in similar fashion, are part of the same "Whole". Consequently, this alien-

ated man starts thinking in terms of "Self" and the "Other". A closer examination of our Sufi teachings reveals the meaninglessness of dichotomy between the "Self" and the "Other". Our spiritual gurus or rehbar (meaning Teachers) taught to cease thinking in such terms and instruct to limit the use of it to the levels of recognitions only not even to negligible degrees of discrimination. Let us see some verses:

**Lalla-Ded says:**

Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere  
Then do not distinguish between a Hindu and Mussalman.  
If thou art wise, know thyself  
That is true knowledge of the Lord.

I gave up falsehood, deceit, untruth,  
I saw the one in all fellow beings, and  
Preached the same doctrine to the mind  
What then is the inhibition in eating?  
The food offered by a fellow human being.

**Sheikh Noor-ud-Din says:**

I uttered the Kalima, experienced the Kalima  
Converted myself into the Kalima  
Kalima permeated into every fibre of my being,  
I reached the abode of abodeless with Kalima.

**Another Sufi poet says:**

Kalima teaches, all are one  
Never injureth anyone,  
For it is thee, everywhere!  
Seek but remember O! Lover of God  
The Lord is within.

It is not only Lalla-Ded who is greatly respected; the Mehfilis of Muslim Sufis are also adorned by the Sufi verses of Non-Muslim poets like Prakash Ram. Similarly, Pandit community has equally been thrilled by the verses of Shams Fiqeer. It has evolved the practices of unity in diversity without subliming the sub-identities into the supra-identity. The syncretic culture has been maintained and developed in order to keep the society knit together and geographical location of Kashmir has made it intense and deep giving it a nationalist colour and fervour. The practice of peaceful co-existence of different religious, ethnic and cultural communities has had its reflections in the political cognitions and attitudes of the people. Taking the experience from the culture, religious and fundamentalist political ideology could not attract Kashmiris and, thus, one can argue that secularism is more a cultural legacy than a political orientation in Kashmir.

#### **Authority and Bargaining Culture**

By and large, Kashmiri social structure is based on the practices of Superior-Subordinate relationships with a clear allocation of rights and duties. The elite is specifically called in to arbitrate in the dispute over or the ambiguity between the rights and duties of an individual or group or community. This conception of Authority as arbitration is also carried over in the wider political system. Kashmiris look for the judicial functions as an essential feature of politics. Historically speaking, the chief role of king or his representative was to arbitrate in the disputes brought to him and this provided an opportunity to the society to live an autonomous life and limited the function of polity to conflict resolution only. In the like manner, in modern times the district administrators or executive magistrates called Tehsildars or politicians or priests and teachers are approached to look for the consensus. This unique trend of conflict resolution is reflected in "bargaining culture" when it comes

to settle down disputes at inter-party and intra-party levels.

### **Morality and Politics**

Alongside the role of elites, in general, and political elites, in particular, in the resolution of conflicts, there has been another role perception of the elite in society. This is its role as "morality-inducer" Politicians are looked not as power-seeker elements but as embodiment of virtues as well. People expect the politician as a moral man sermonising, making promises and giving assurances that almost everyone knows cannot be fulfilled. That is why it becomes highly difficult and undesirable to divorce morality and politics. It may be mentioned here that people even in the modern age believed Sheikh Abdullah of possessing spiritual power and regarded him not only a leader but pir and would enjoy his recitation of Quran perhaps more than his political promises.

### **Democracy: Trust and Distrust Dichotomy**

Kashmiris fought for their democratic rights in an organised manner only after 1931 and expected the realization of dreams ensured in Naya Kashmir Manifesto adopted by National Conference in 1944. But for the unexpected turn of the situation and de-facto division of the erstwhile Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. With the formation of Interim Government by the National Conference in October 1947, the long cherished dreams of democratic rights were thought to be so near yet they were too far for common Kashmiris. People, including Maharaja Hari Singh, started smelling the evil-designs of the Government of India as early as 1948. It became evident only after the unjustified dismissal of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah and subsequent installation of Bakhshi Ghulam Muhammad as the Prime Minister of J & K. On the one hand, Jawaharlal Nehru was time and again reiterating the promises of conducting Plebiscite not only to the people of Jammu and

Kashmir but to the International Community as well yet on the other hand the terms and the conditions of Instrument of Accession and the special status guaranteed under Article 370 was being eroded through undemocratic norms. A. G. Noorani refers to such a violation as the "most illegitimate acts but legally done". The elections which were held in post-1950 Kashmir are a "cruel joke" for democracy. In 1951, the National Conference 'won' all 75 seats uncontested which was, in words of Sumantra Bose, the "first instance of Indian Administered Kashmir's sorry history of utterly farcical elections"<sup>5</sup>. The National Conference was running a virtual Party State for Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah "preferred the Soviet Model in which the party controlled every branch of administration"<sup>6</sup> which they had followed during emergency government. In subsequent elections in 1957 and 1962, the NC won 95 and 97 per cent of seats and "there was no contest at all in 43 and 34 seats respectively of the total of 75"<sup>7</sup>. M. J. Akbar makes a fine comment and quotes Jawaharlal Nehru asking Bakhshi Ghulam Muhammad to lose some seats to save the image of India:

"The government of Jammu and Kashmir gave up even pretending to be democratic. Elections, of course, had to be held under the law; but they were blatantly fixed to prevent Pro-Abdullah candidates from winning. In a letter, which has acquired some fame, Nehru himself wrote to Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad after his National Conference had won almost all the seats in the 1962 elections: 'in fact, it would strengthen your position much more if you lost a few seats to bona fide opponents'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1965, the ruling national Conference of G M Sadiq was "instantly and miraculously" changed into the Jammu and Kashmir wing of the Congress Party. The whole system turned such undemo-

cratic that Jayaprakash Narayan wrote a confidential letter to Mrs. Indira Gandhi on June 23, 1966 pleading to end the coercion, constrain the Hindu rightist elements and arrest the mass "discontent" in Kashmir. It reads:

We profess democracy, but rule by force in Kashmir....We profess secularism, but let Hindu nationalism stampede us into trying to establish it by repression. Kashmir has distorted India's image for the world as nothing has done..... There is no nation in the world, not even Russia, which appreciates our Kashmir policy, though some of them might, for their own reasons, give us their support.....That problem exists not because Pakistan wants to grab Kashmir, but because there is deep and widespread political discontent among the people.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, the trend of nominal elections continued and in 1967, 39 out of 75 seats went uncontested. In the same year, Bakhshi Ghulam Muhammad revived the National Conference and posed a serious challenge to the ruling congress party partly because of an emotional appeal of regional party and partly because of unpopular integrationist measures by Sadiq<sup>10</sup>. Showing no respect at all to peoples' aspirations and rights, the Union government sought the defeat of opposition in, what they called, 'national interest' by high degree of rigging and duplication of ballot papers as was told to Balraj Puri who was then member of Sarvodya team of observers deputed by Jayaprakash Nayaran that "Bakhshi had to be defeated in the national interest"<sup>11</sup>. Surprisingly, the Chief Election Commissioner of India, K. Sundram, had the same position on the issue of mass frauds in elections in Jammu and Kashmir. And Mrs. Indira Gandhi went to the extent of saying that there was no



need of opposition party in Kashmir. In 1972, the Plebiscite Front had to face a heavy wrath of the State for it decided to participate in the elections. It was perhaps not in the so-called national interest that they be allowed to take part in elections because Front had a mass support for known reasons notably Sheikh Abdullah was a "living symbol" of Kashmiri pride and he had carried historical Land Reforms. Syed Mir Qasim records in his Autobiography, *My Life and Times*, that "if the elections were free and fair, the victory of the Front was a foregone conclusion"<sup>12</sup>. In order to cut size of the Plebiscite Front and keep its opposition alive, a very unusual plan was devised, which showed its repercussions decade and a half later, that Jamaat-i-Islami received "constitutional recognition and political legitimacy" for the first time in its history as State allegedly guaranteed success of Jamaat in five constituencies.

It was in 1984 that one of the most disastrous undemocratic dismissals was experienced by the State of Jammu and Kashmir when Farooq Abdullah was unjustifiably dismissed and was not given even the constitutional right to prove the majority in the House and his plea to conduct the elections afresh was out rightly rejected by then Governor, Jagmohan. Ghulam Mohammad Shah, the newly installed Chief Minister had to depend on the coercive machinery of the State for the very survival of his regime "for seventy-two of his first ninety days in his office the valley was under curfew to pre-empt protest demonstrations"<sup>13</sup> carried out against both Union as well as State governments. Some analysts trace the origin of present crisis and beginning of Alienation in these episodes of Kashmir history. The worse was yet to come, politically speaking. It was Rajiv-Farooq Accord which created a "vacuum in opposition that lasted for about two years"<sup>14</sup>; an unthinkable situation in democracy. It gave an opportunity to some disintegrated groups to consolidate and manipulate the situation to their own favour who forged Muslim United Front though had no clear and

common ideology. It was this group who later after it "manufactured" defeat in highly unfair and rigged elections spearheaded the separatist movement in Kashmir. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had realised his blunder as he told Vir Sanghvi, the then editor of Sunday Weekly, "It was important that the Congress and the NC remained at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The protest vote would end up going to extremists"<sup>15</sup>. Farooq Abdullah's mistake of unconditional support to Rajiv Gandhi and his several statements made after the 1987 elections wiped off the belief of the people from democracy and complicated the problem. He said: "Anyone who wants to form a government in Kashmir cannot do so without sharing power with New Delhi"<sup>16</sup>. "I will bury these people alive who are trying to exploit religious feelings. I could break the legs of my political detractors. I can send lakhs of people to jail. I have the backing of the Indian government"<sup>17</sup>. "I will send them (arrested people) to Delhi where scorching heat will melt their fat. Anybody seen carrying a gun will be shot dead. I will throw out Anti-national elements into Pakistan"<sup>18</sup>.

During 1987 Assembly elections, an eye witness report in India Today, 15 April, 1987, drew attention to the degree of rigging and strong arm tactics all over the Valley; to entire ballot boxes [being] pre-stamped for NC; to massive booth capturing by NC gangs; to numerous citizens simply not being allowed to vote and to government nominated supervisors stopping the counting as soon as they saw opposition taking a lead. For being arrested for the crime of taking a lead over his rival NC candidate, Peer Muhammad Yousuf Shah, present day Salah-ud-Din, was put away for nine months without any charge or trial which fairly convinced him that, as he said, slaves have no vote in the so-called democratic set up of India"<sup>19</sup>.

It was not only B.K. Nehru, who was the Governor of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, in his book *Nice Guys Finish Second* laments that the governments in Jammu and Kashmir are not elected

by the people but installed by New Delhi, but, even a stalwart politician of L.K. Advani's stature who in his autobiography, *My Country My Life*, discloses that the biggest challenge before NDA government in 2002 was to conduct free and fair elections in Jammu and Kashmir which had never been done before during any of the Congress regimes. It may be mentioned here that for 2002 elections many independent observers observed elections as fair but not free.

Such practices of denial of democracy or democracy of denial have created a "trust-distrust" dichotomy among the masses of Kashmir. On the one-side, they demand a fair play of democracy and on the other the history makes them sceptical about a particular democratic set up which stigmatised democratic values and norms over the last six decades.

### **Mauj Kasheer (Mother Kashmir): Symbol of Pride**

The people of Kashmir have been deeply and strongly attached to Kashmir and long history of alien rule (1585-1947) has made them more conscious of their national identity. It was primarily for the safeguard of this identity that Maharaja of Kashmir firstly was indifferent to accede to either of the dominions of India or Pakistan and secondly under the stirring circumstances acceded to the union of India. With the passage of time and given the highly crucial strategic and vulnerable location of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian leadership thought of metamorphising, what they regarded, the sub-national Kashmiri identity into Grand National identity as had happened in other states of the Indian union. Some analysts suggest that the two different civilisations joined hands together to defeat the orthodox religious ideology and kept the flags of universal brotherhood high. However, the relationship between them deteriorated in 1984 with the unjustified dismissal of Farooq Abdullah and the subsequent fall out of his de-throning and State

coercion during G. M. Shah' regime. Silently, it talks about a bridge between Delhi and Srinagar i.e., Sheikh Abdullah whose death made the bond became fragile and cracked during the play days of "Little Boy with Toy". This alienation after gaining ground because of some serious mistakes committed by both State mainstream politicians and leadership at national Levels culminated in separatism and took an ugly turn in shape of organised armed struggle. Balraj Puri is one of the Chief exponents of this set of opinion.

In against to such a line of thinking, there are writers like A.G. Noorani who argues that alienation occurs only when it is preceded by special affection or love. When two objects or bodies or groups enjoy a special relationship based on and grounded in love, their separation from one another or voluntary distancing is referred to alienation. He argues that since such as never been the case between New Delhi and Srinagar, therefore, debate about alienation becomes absurd in case of Kashmir. Sumantra Bose makes a fine observation when he says, "Unfortunately, the Indian state appeared to interpret popular opposition to Pakistan" as special love for India. Even this premise of popular opposition to Pakistan is contested by A.G. Noorani.

S.M Abdullah in interviews to the correspondents of States Man and The Times in 1951 and 1952 made it clear to his people and world that "independence option is still open".

In May 1953, NC set up 8 member committee to consider possible solutions for Kashmir which constituted of Sheikh Abdullah, Maulana Masoodi, Miza Afzal Beg, Bakhshi Gh. Mohd, GM Sadiq, Sardar Budh Singh, Pandit Girdarilal Dogra and Shamlal Saraf.

It proposed following solutions:-

- a. Overall Plebiscite
- b. Independence of whole state
- c. Independence of whole state with joint control of India and Paki-

stan of foreign affairs and defence

d. Dixon plan with independence of plebiscite area.

We shall meet again, in Srinagar, By the gates of Villa of Peace, Our hands blossoming into fists Till the soldiers return the keys And disappear Again we'll enter, our last world, The first that vanished!

[ Agha Shahid Ali ]

**Foot Note:-**

1. Kavanagh, D; Political Culture; London: Palgrave Macmillan; 1972;p—7.
2. Ball, Alan R. & B. Guy Peters; Modern Politics and Government; New York:Palgrave Macmillan; 2005; p—77.
3. Ibid, p—66.
4. Rushdie, Salman; *Shalimar the Clown*; p—57
5. Bose, Sumantra; *the Challenge in Kashmir*; New Delhi: Sage Publications; 1997; p—31.
6. Puri, Balraj; *Kashmir: Insurgency and After*; New Delhi: Orient Longman; 2008; p—47.
7. Bose, Sumantra; op.cit.; p—34.
8. Akbar, M J; *India—the Siege Within*; New Delhi: Roli Books; 2003; p—258.
9. Quoted by M.J. Akbar; *India—The Siege Within*, p—267.
10. Puri, op. cit.; p—53.
11. Ibid.
12. Qasim, Syed Mir; *My Life and Times*; New Delhi: Allied Publishers; 1992;p132.
13. Bose, Sumantra; op. cit.; p—43.
14. Puri, Balraj; op. cit.; p—56.
15. Hindustan Times, 02 November, 2005. Quoted by Balraj Puri; op. cit; p—57.
16. India Today, 10 November, 1988.
17. Kashmir Times, 04 April 1988.
18. Hindustan Times, 07 May 1989.
19. Quoted by Sumantra Bose.