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THE POLITICS OF REBELLION IN KASHMIR

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**RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDIES
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Introduction

This paper examines the role of Indian politics in fuelling separatist rebellion in Kashmir. It argues that between 1947 and 1987, arbitrary shifts of patronage by New Delhi alienated the Muslim population of the region. As long as these machinations were confined to ensuring that Kashmir did not secede from India, they were tolerated. However, during the years 1983-1987, the scope of Indian interventionism widened to include subordination of the regional political elite to New Delhi.¹ This transformation was effected for purely partisan reasons, and arose from the ruling Indian government's own political vulnerability. It boomeranged, converting passive resentment among Kashmiris into an armed rebellion, which continues to this day.

Understanding the interaction between Kashmiri and Indian political elites is crucial to explaining why, after 40 years of living within India, the people of Kashmir rose up in revolt. If they wished to secede, why did they help repel Pakistani invaders in 1947 and 1965, whose ostensible mission was to 'liberate' them? How did Pakistan, long perceived by Kashmiri politicians as a retrogressive feudal autocracy, morph into being an ally vis-à-vis democratic India? Was it because Indian politics had themselves regressed into feudalism and medieval intrigues, blurring the difference between New Delhi and

¹ Sten Widmalm, 'The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir', *Asian Survey*, Volume 37, Number 11 (November 1997), pp. 1007-1023

Islamabad? This paper suggests that such was the case. Over the years, a shambolic practice of democracy had converted Kashmiri separatism into a mass movement.

The paper begins by describing the political geography of the Kashmir region, and the background of Indo-Pakistani conflict over it. Thereafter, it proceeds chronologically through the main events which have shaped the political evolution of Kashmir. This fall into four distinct time periods: the autonomy phase (1947-1953), the integrationist phase (1953-1977), the populist phase (1977-1983) and the interventionist phase (1983-1987). Finally, the paper fast-forwards from 1987 to the present, and examines the current state of relations between Indian and Kashmiri elites. It argues that, by introducing representative government to Kashmir in 2002 and subsequently persisting with a policy of electoral transparency, New Delhi has undercut the legitimacy of separatism.

A Backgrounder to the Kashmir Conflict

The region popularly described as ‘Kashmir’ is in fact, an amalgam of three demographically distinct sub-regions (see map). They are: the Hindu-dominated Jammu area, the Muslim-dominated Kashmir Valley, and the Buddhist-dominated Ladakh plateau. Together, they make up the Indian state (province) of Jammu & Kashmir, often simply referred to by its acronym, J&K. Separatist rebellion is largely confined to the Kashmir Valley, where it has the greatest quantum of local support, although Jammu has also seen a number of atrocities by terrorist groups. Ladakh, for all intents and purposes, is unaffected by separatist violence.²

² Thomas Marks, ‘Jammu & Kashmir: State Response to Insurgency – The Case of Jammu’, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, Volume 16 (2005), pp. 10-12

Kashmir Region



Source: www.wikipedia.org. The regions marked Northern Areas and Azad Kashmir were part of the kingdom of Jammu & Kashmir prior to 1947, and have been occupied by Pakistan since that year. The term J&K, as used in this paper therefore refers only to the regions in the centre of the map namely, Jammu, the Kashmir Valley (shown as the 'Vale of Kashmir') and Ladakh.

Ever since 1947, when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned into Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan, the status of J&K has been contested. Though ruled by a Hindu monarch, the majority of its population was Muslim. Logically, this suggested that the region would accede to Pakistan when British paramount over the subcontinent lapsed on 15th August 1947. However, as per the partition agreement, the Hindu ruler had the prerogative to choose between acceding to India or Pakistan. After dithering, in October 1947 he chose to join India. The decision was not voluntary: it was taken under the weight of a Pakistani invasion of his kingdom. Having lost patience with

the monarch, who was contemplating independence from both countries, Pakistan decided to simply annex J&K by force.³

Its move backfired: to preserve his regime, the Hindu ruler of J&K swiftly acceded to India. With his kingdom becoming sovereign Indian territory, the Indian Army was deployed to repel the invaders. It did so with considerable support from the local population.⁴ During their brief rampage through the kingdom, the Pakistani forces, who consisted primarily of Pathan mercenaries from the North West Frontier Province, had committed horrific atrocities.⁵ What started as a military campaign soon degenerated into a raid for plunder, as Hindu and Muslim settlements were pillaged without discrimination.⁶ Consequently, the re-conquering Indian troops were widely perceived by Kashmiris as liberators. For the next few years, their presence in J&K was regarded as a welcome deterrent against any further Pakistani adventurism.

Fighting between Indian and Pakistani forces ended in early 1949 with the erstwhile kingdom of Jammu & Kashmir divided almost evenly between the two sides. As per a United Nations-brokered truce, it was agreed that a plebiscite would be held across the entire region to determine the wishes of the population, regarding accession to either side. However, before this plebiscite could be held, Pakistan would have to withdraw from those parts of J&K under its occupation, since the whole kingdom was *de jure* Indian territory. Its subsequent refusal to do so voided the commitment to hold a plebiscite. Since 1947 therefore, both countries have staked a claim to the territory of J&K in its entirety, while actually holding only half of it. An attempt in August-September 1965 by Pakistan to capture the Indian-administered half escalated into war. As in 1947, the Pakistani offensive was defeated with the help of local Kashmiri Muslims, who had not yet forgotten the atrocities committed by the Pathans.⁷

While their hostility towards Pakistan had remained unchanged, between 1947 and 1965, a significant transformation came over the attitude of Kashmiris towards India. The reasons for this shall now be discussed.

The Autonomy Phase (1947-1953)

According to the terms of accession, the kingdom of Jammu & Kashmir joined the Republic of India while retaining maximum autonomy in policy-making. What this meant in effect was that the central government, based in New Delhi, could only legislate on three issues: national security, foreign policy and communications.⁸ All other issues were

³ Narendra Singh Sarila, *The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 343-351

⁴ Afsir Karim, *Counter-terrorism: The Pakistan Factor* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1991), p. 141

⁵ Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 76-78

⁶ S.K Sinha, *Operation Rescue: Military Operations in Jammu & Kashmir 1947-49* (New Delhi: Vision, 1977), pp. 17-20

⁷ Ved Marwah, *Uncivil Wars: Pathology of Terrorism in India* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 33-46

⁸ P.A Sebastian, 'Kashmir Behind the Propaganda Curtain', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 31, Number 6 (10th February 1996), p. 320

handled by the J&K government, which was based in the town of Srinagar, in the Kashmir Valley. Jammu & Kashmir would also be the only state in India where the locally elected head of government would be called *Wazir-e-Azam* (roughly translated as Prime Minister). All other state government heads in the country merely had the title of Chief Minister.

Understanding how estrangement set in between New Delhi and Srinagar requires examining the relationship between Jawarharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the *Wazir-e-Azam* of J&K. Both men were veterans of agitational politics, who had risen from being dissidents to decision-makers. They had parallel experiences of resisting oppression (Nehru against British colonialism and Sheikh Abdullah against the despotic Hindu monarchy in Jammu & Kashmir). Moreover, their ideological moorings were similar: both were committed to secularism, socialism and democracy. This ideological affinity was sufficiently powerful to overcome the religious affinity which Sheikh Abdullah, a Muslim, had with Pakistan.

During the Pakistani invasion of 1947, his National Conference Party took the lead in organizing a popular resistance movement to the marauding Pathans.⁹ At the subsequent United Nations debate on Kashmir, he argued powerfully against equating the aggressor (Pakistan) with the aggressed (Kashmir, and by extension, India). Finally, he was the most influential leader of the Kashmiri Muslim community, and unequivocally favoured J&K's accession to India. On all these counts, he was lauded as a patriot by the Indian political elite. Internationally, he had a unique status for being the biggest power-broker in a region that was both part of India, and yet distinct from it. Sadly, this political dichotomy could not be sustained indefinitely.

After 1947, the J&K monarchy was abolished and Sheikh Abdullah became the sole leader of the state government. Although he sought to maintain a broad-ranging support base, encompassing Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, his core constituency remained the Kashmir Valley. Neither the Hindus of Jammu nor the Buddhists of Ladakh were pleased about the new power dispensation in the state.¹⁰ Both communities were wary of the growing influence of Kashmiri Muslims. Hindus in particular, felt threatened since they had traditionally wielded power disproportionate to their numbers. Some were big landowners, accustomed to exploiting the Muslim peasantry with the connivance of corrupt bureaucrats. Others enjoyed preferential treatment while applying for government jobs – at that time, the only route to socio-economic betterment.¹¹ When the National Conference came into power, it set about correcting these historical wrongs. Massive land reforms were introduced. Fearful that they would henceforth be subjected to the same imperialistic treatment which they had meted out to Kashmiri Muslims, the Hindus of Jammu began to demand that the state be fully integrated into India.

⁹ Ajit Bhattacharjea, 'The Answer Lies in Autonomy', *Tehelka*, 4th October 2008

¹⁰ Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 55-57

¹¹ Humra Quraishi, *Kashmir: The Untold Story* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004), pp. 39-41

Until 1952, the delicate balance of Hindu-Muslim relations in J&K was preserved. That year, differences between the two communities led to a schism emerging on the issue of the state's autonomy within India. Sheikh Abdullah, mindful of his constituents in the Valley, wanted to preserve the autonomy granted by Nehru at the time of J&K's accession. He saw in the demands for greater integration with India, an effort to undermine the special status of Kashmir and reduce it to being just another administrative region. Further doubts were sown when Jammu Hindus launched an agitation for the abolishment of the 'permit system'. According to this system, residents of other Indian states needed special permission to enter Jammu & Kashmir, even as tourists. After seven years of sustained protests, the entry controls were done away with in 1959.¹²

At the root of these doubts was the basic difference between Nehru's long-term perspective of Kashmiri autonomy, and that of Sheikh Abdullah. Nehru regarded the 'special status' of J&K as a temporary arrangement, intended to smoothen the region's transition from independent country to province. Between 15th August and 26th October 1947, the kingdom of Jammu & Kashmir had actually been an independent political entity, since British rule over the subcontinent lapsed on the former date. It was only on 26th October that the kingdom legally acceded to India, thus giving up its sovereign status. However, the prospect of a plebiscite, while it remained viable, seemed to suggest that even accession to India might only be temporary.

Thus, J&K needed to be treated differently from other Indian states at first, but only on an interim basis. Eventually, Nehru expected that the process of nation-building would allow for the abolishment of the unique privileges extended to the state. Sheikh Abdullah however, had a different view. The autonomy provisions, as he regarded them, were not open to revision with the passage of time.¹³ Jammu & Kashmir had been promised full freedom to run its own affairs within India, and it would settle for no less. This created a problem for New Delhi, since indulging one state while forcing all others to integrate into the Pan-Indian mainstream would lead to an awkward question: was J&K being treated differently because it was Muslim-dominated?

Officially, the Government of India was committed to secularism, even if many of its citizens and political leaders remained wary of the concept. Thus, it could not afford to make a permanent exception of Jammu & Kashmir from the process of national integration, purely on religious grounds. Yet, it was precisely in expectation of such a privileged status for J&K that the National Conference had supported the accession. Sheikh Abdullah had said as much in 1951, when he outlined the rationale for joining India, rather than Pakistan.

Basically, the Sheikh argued that on both political and economic counts, India simply had more to offer the Kashmiri people than Pakistan. India was committed to secular democracy, while Pakistan was a feudal state. Socio-economic reforms of the kind

¹² B.G Verghese, 'A Jammu and Kashmir Primer: From Myth to Reality', *Centre for Policy Research Occasional Paper* (June 2006), p. 19

¹³ Vernon Hewitt, *Towards the Future?: Jammu and Kashmir in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Granta, 2001), p. 143

introduced by the National Conference in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir would not have been tolerated by the landowning classes of Pakistan. Furthermore, India was the more industrialized country, and provided a bigger market for Kashmiri exports. Indian technical expertise and capital offered Kashmiris the promise of rapid development, something Pakistan seemed incapable of. Most of all, during the previous four years (1947-1951), the Indian government had made no effort to undermine the autonomy that had been granted to Jammu & Kashmir.¹⁴

This last point is telling: it reveals that Kashmiri goodwill for India was conditional upon the permanence of autonomy. Complete integration with the rest of the Republic was unacceptable. However, as has been mentioned above, such integration was precisely what the Hindus of Jammu were pressing for. Thus, the origins of the Kashmir rebellion can be traced to the historic power shift which took place with the abolition of the Jammu-based monarchy and the rise of the National Conference in the Valley. Like the conflict in Northern Ireland, the rebellion actually began as a power struggle between two local communities, before broadening out to assume secessionist dimensions.¹⁵

The Integrationist Phase (1953-1975)

Faced with an increasingly assertive Hindu right-wing movement in the state, Sheikh Abdullah began considering a re-adjustment of his relations with New Delhi. The option of independence was alluring, since it would give Jammu & Kashmir an equal status alongside India and Pakistan. Accession to Pakistan itself was out of the question.¹⁶ First, the country remained as reactionary as it had been in 1947, and was therefore not an appealing alternative vis-à-vis India. Second, any such move would splinter J&K along religious lines, with the Hindus and Buddhists resisting any move to bring them within the folds of a theocratic state. To preserve the political unity of Jammu & Kashmir, as well as compel Pakistan to vacate those parts of the state under its illegal occupation, independence seemed the best option. Hopefully, the newly-independent region could act as a bridge between India and Pakistan, and prevent any further conflict between the two.

This Utopian world-view was strengthened in 1953 when Sheikh Abdullah met American emissaries, and sounded them out on the idea of an independent state. His meetings were keenly watched by the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), whose chief Bhola Nath Mullik had developed an intense suspicion of Abdullah. During the summer of 1953, IB reports about the political situation in Kashmir grew increasingly alarmist. They were corroborated by prominent National Conference leaders, who were discontented with Sheikh Abdullah's autocratic style of functioning. Moreover, these leaders openly disagreed with his stance on Kashmiri independence, preferring instead to press for

¹⁴ Navnita Chadha Behera, *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), pp. 320-323

¹⁵ John Newsinger, *British Counter-insurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 152-160

¹⁶ Even Pakistani scholars (those who are inclined to be objective in their treatment of the Kashmir issue) admit that Sheikh Abdullah only wavered between Kashmir's continued existence within India and the possibility of independence. He did not entertain the prospect of accession to Pakistan. Iffat Malik, *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict, International Dispute* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 151

greater integration with India. Their view was that only by such integration could the Kashmiri economy prosper.¹⁷

In any case, Sheikh Abdullah had begun to make blatantly provocative statements about the accession to India being a temporary arrangement which would end soon. Based on the information he received, Nehru reluctantly concluded that his old friend and comrade-in-arms could no longer be trusted. On 8th August, the Sheikh was dismissed from office and arrested the following day. His deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, was appointed *Wazir-e-Azam* of Jammu & Kashmir. The ‘coup’, as it came to be viewed among ordinary Kashmiris, led to large-scale disturbances and several score casualties in police firing.¹⁸

Subsequently, historians have identified 1953 as the year that Kashmiri alienation from India took root.¹⁹ This is a reasonable view, but only up to a point. While it is true that Sheikh Abdullah was very popular with the Muslim peasantry of the Kashmir Valley (largely because of the land reforms he had introduced) he also antagonized many of the state’s political elite. Over the past six years, his National Conference regime had contrived to prevent the emergence of a credible political opposition, through electoral malpractice.²⁰ Subsequent National Conference governments in the state only built on the political culture inherited from him. However, because these governments were appointed from Delhi and not through free and fair elections, it became customary for Kashmiris to blame the Indian government for the lack of democracy in J&K.

Bakshi’s regime lacked popular support when it assumed office. It sought to get around this through a large-scale developmental program, funded by the central government. Over the following decades, Indian policy towards Kashmir sought to contain the spread of separatist ideas by offering the local population prosperity in exchange for loyalty. This approach was partially successful. Although there remained fringe elements within the Valley who advocated secession from India, they were unable to acquire mass support. However, the sudden infusion of aid money into the region had created unparalleled opportunities for official corruption, which sapped away much of the intended effect of developmental activity. Thus, the resentment generated by Sheikh Abdullah’s dismissal was contained but not eliminated. The Bakshi government only gained some time to slowly continue with its integrationist agenda.

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 introduced a new sense of urgency into the integrationist mission. Part of the conflict took place in Ladakh, where Chinese forces had already seized large swathes of unguarded Indian territory and had attempted to occupy more. In anticipation of further hostilities with its giant neighbour, India began tightening its control over J&K. A number of central government provisions were extended over the state, with the compliance of the Bakshi government. These amounted to renegeing on the

¹⁷ Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*, pp. 100-101

¹⁸ B.N Mullik, *My Years With Nehru: Kashmir* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971), pp. 35-46

¹⁹ Ajit Bhattacharjea, ‘Jackboots over Kashmir’s Spring’, *Tehelka*, 13th October 2007

²⁰ Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of war, hopes of peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 28-29

terms of accession, as had been agreed in 1947. However, the changing geo-political power equation in the subcontinent, with India now sandwiched between two hostile countries (Pakistan and China) left little option. Between 1962 and 1965, Bakshi and his successors Khwaja Shamsuddin and Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq oversaw the near-complete end of J&K's special status within India. The bulk of the changes occurred under Sadiq's government, following Nehru's death in May 1964.²¹

Pakistan meanwhile, had misread the popular mood in the Kashmir Valley. In late-December 1963, massive disturbances broke out following the theft of a holy relic from the Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar. Although IB operatives swiftly recovered the artifact and the agitations subsided, for a brief while they paralysed the government of Indian-administered J&K.²² Pakistani strategists interpreted this event to mean that Kashmiri Muslims were eager to rebel against India, and thus launched their ill-fated military campaign of 1965. Although the offensive was repulsed, it provided encouragement to those in the Valley who continued to regard secession from India as a viable prospect. They now began to see Pakistan as a potential ally in their own domestic quarrels with New Delhi. Sheikh Abdullah was prominent among these individuals. Despite being in political exile, he remained ambiguous on whether Kashmir was a part of India.

What forced him to abandon this stance was the comprehensive defeat which India inflicted on Pakistan six years later, during the 1971 Bangladesh War. The war had itself been precipitated by a state-sponsored genocide in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). West Pakistani soldiers (predominantly Punjabis and Pathans) killed anywhere between 300,000 and 3 million Bengali Muslims over a six-month period.²³ Ultimately, Indian intervention became necessary to halt the slaughter. To Kashmiris, these events brought back memories of the 1947 raiders. They also highlighted the fact that religious solidarity did not automatically protect Muslims from oppression by fellow Muslims. In any case, the sheer one-sidedness of the 1971 War suggested that Pakistan lacked the strength to pose a serious challenge to India, and therefore, could not protect Kashmiri interests. Accordingly, Sheikh Abdullah began to explore the prospect of a settlement with New Delhi that would lead to his re-instatement as head of government in J&K.

The Populist Phase (1977-1983)

Meanwhile, there was a new personality to contend with in Delhi. Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi had become Prime Minister of India in 1966, a post she would hold for 11 consecutive years. Unlike her father, she was no sentimentalist. Neither was her political position as secure. Shortly after she rose to the top job, the ruling Congress Party began to lose its popular support base to regional parties in the various Indian states. In part, this was a natural process, owing to the growing democratic awakening that was percolating

²¹ Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-determination and a Just Peace* (New Delhi: Sage, 1997), pp. 33-35

²² Mullik, *My Years With Nehru*, pp. 119-142

²³ Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 306

downwards through the Indian electorate.²⁴ The Congress however, responded by pursuing an interventionist policy vis-à-vis state governments that did not toe its line. Using special powers intended primarily for crisis situations, it toppled democratically elected Chief Ministers and imposed direct federal rule, or installed puppets in their place. Through such a process, Indira Gandhi had Sheikh Abdullah made J&K Chief Minister in 1975 (the post of *Wazir-e-Azam* having been abolished ten years previously).

Rehabilitating the Sheikh was a calculated move on Mrs. Gandhi's part. She knew that he still had the potential to sway Kashmiri opinion in a firmly pro-India direction, and that his negotiating position had weakened after the 1971 War.²⁵ Accordingly, she insisted that as a price for regaining political office, he accept the changed status of Jammu & Kashmir within India. That is to say, he could not press for removal of the additional controls which the central government had exercised over the state after 1953. Instead, New Delhi would consider repealing some minor laws which had been applied to J&K between 1953 and 1975. Actually, even this modest commitment was not fulfilled and the Kashmiris were left with no loosening of central government influence over their affairs.²⁶

New Delhi had understood that over the years, integration with India had ceased to be a contentious issue for most Kashmiris. Thus, even the Sheikh's virtual capitulation to Indira Gandhi would not reduce his popularity in the Valley. This assessment was amply borne out when elections to the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly (the state-level legislature) were held in June 1977. Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference Party won a resounding victory, bagging 47 seats in the 75-member Assembly. Their nearest rival was the J&K unit of the Congress Party, with 11 seats. Since the 1977 elections are widely perceived as the first genuinely free elections held in Jammu & Kashmir, its results are illustrative. Previously, all elections to the state Legislative Assembly had been rigged to favour New Delhi's preferred candidates.²⁷

Perhaps the most significant result of the 1977 Assembly election was to reveal just how marginal separatist forces were in Kashmiri politics. The Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party, known for its pro-Pakistani sentiments and rejection of J&K's accession to India, was humiliated at the polls. It won just a single seat in the Legislative Assembly.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) subsequently became the ideological spearhead of the separatist rebellion in Kashmir, and therefore some examination of its origins is necessary. The party began as a branch of the Indian Jamaat-e-Islami, which had been created in 1941. Its purpose was to purify South Asian Islam of the local influences that had permeated religious practices over the centuries. After the creation of Pakistan, most of the JeI's top

²⁴ Paul R. Brass, 'India: Democratic Progress and Problems', in Selig S. Harrison, Paul H. Kreisburg and Dennis Kux eds., *India and the Pakistan: The First Fifty Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 26-30

²⁵ Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 97-101

²⁶ Gul Mohammad Wani, *Kashmir Politics: Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi: Ashish, 1993), pp. 84-85

²⁷ Balbir Singh, *State and Politics in India: Explorations in Political Processes in Jammu and Kashmir* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1982), p. 85

leaders emigrated there, hoping to establish a theocratic state.²⁸ Owing to their activities, the Pakistani branch of JeI grew far more militant than its Indian parent body. The Jammu & Kashmir branch was in turn influenced by this militancy during the 1950s, owing to the easier physical access its cadres had to Pakistan, vis-à-vis India. They began to propagate the idea of Kashmiri accession to Pakistan, based on the concept of pan-Islamic unity.²⁹

The J&K Jamaat-e-Islami first contested elections in 1972, and won five seats in the state Assembly due to covert support from the Congress. Senior Congress activists had calculated that JeI could eat into the votebank of the National Conference in the Kashmir Valley, where the Congress had virtually no support. They therefore tacitly encouraged the Islamists, expecting that without patrons, JeI would remain a marginal factor in the state's politics. For his part, Sheikh Abdullah also recognized that JeI could serve his interests. Its pro-Pakistan agenda would remind New Delhi that his National Conference party was the closest that India had to a friend among Kashmiri Muslims.³⁰ Thus, while decrying the fundamentalism of JeI, Sheikh Abdullah refrained from suppressing it (although admittedly, he did impose a short-lived ban on it between 1975 and 1978).

For its part, Jamaat-e-Islami avoided confrontation with the state government during the 1970s. Its priority was on education. As part of a program of cultural assimilation, India had begun to secularize the school curricula of J&K. Many saw this process as one of covert 'Hinduization', intended to degrade the Islamic character of the Kashmir Valley. Their suspicions were strengthened when Indian state-owned television began broadcasting serials based on ancient Hindu texts, such as the *Ramayana*.³¹ The JeI declared itself opposed to such indoctrination, and set up a parallel education system of *madrassas* (religious schools) in response. These *madrassas* propagated the notion that Islam offered not just an ideal way for life of the individual, but also the ideal style of governance. Under their influence, the Islamic character of the Valley became Islamist (ie. politicized on the basis of Islamic tenets).³²

While all this was going on, momentous developments were taking place in the rest of India. Indira Gandhi had lost a general election in March 1977, and her arch-nemesis Morarji Desai became Prime Minister. Desai drew a considerable amount of his support from militant Hindu parties. Mrs. Gandhi watched the growing power of the Hindu Right in Indian politics, and guessed that it would henceforth be the biggest rival to her centre-left Congress Party. After being elected as Prime Minister once again in 1980, she appropriated the anti-Muslim discourse of Hindu revivalists.³³ This was not a paradigm shift from the official Congress stance, which espoused secularism, but merely a tactical ploy to prevent the Hindu vote being cornered by her opponents. It soon assumed a momentum of its own however, and led to the final blow which soured relations between

²⁸ Narinder Singh, *Political Awakening in Kashmir* (Delhi: H.K Publications, 1992), pp. 76-84

²⁹ Jagmohan, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1991), pp. 174-183

³⁰ Wajahat Habibullah, *My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects of Enduring Peace* (Washington D.C: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), p. 57

³¹ A.H Suharwardy, *Kashmir: The Incredible Freedom Fight* (Lahore: Jang, 1991), p. 53

³² Malik, *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict, International Dispute*, pp. 270-271

³³ Hewitt, *Towards the Future*, p. 136

New Delhi and Srinagar. Specifically, what happened was that the Congress first polarized Jammu & Kashmir along Hindu-Muslim lines, and then dismissed a popularly elected, *pro*-Indian National Conference government in July 1984. This event, more than any other, alienated Kashmiri Muslims and set them down the road to rebellion.

The Interventionist Phase (1983-1987)

Upon returning to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi was much less sure of her political strength than previously.³⁴ Her years in the Opposition (1977-1979) had been marked by vindictive harassment from Desai's government. She also found many of her confidantes deserting her. Consequently, she developed a siege mentality about threats to the stability of her government. In order to pre-empt these threats, she adopted a policy of political interventionism, seeking to install Congress-supported governments in any state that did not have one. Jammu & Kashmir was one such state.

Sheikh Abdullah died in September 1982, having anointed his son Farooq as his successor to head the National Conference (and thus, become Chief Minister). The arbitrary manner of the appointment, which was more akin to a feudal succession than a democratically decided matter based on intra-party consultations, was unremarkable. India has always remained at root, a deeply conservative country where hierarchy is venerated and society organized according to the dictates of the caste system. The latter mandates that sons follow into their fathers' profession, since they can benefit from years of cumulative experience.³⁵ Thus, Farooq Abdullah's entry into politics on dynastic grounds was widely accepted, just as that of Indira Gandhi herself had been.

What displeased Mrs. Gandhi however, was that the younger Abdullah did not accept feudalism in its totality. Despite being a mere Chief Minister, he resisted pressure from her to forge a National Conference-Congress alliance in J&K. Farooq had correctly perceived that such a move would cost him popular support, as he would be seen as Delhi's stooge. However, Mrs. Gandhi felt that he was behaving like an upstart, and needed to be reminded that he ruled in Srinagar only at her pleasure. She therefore decided to throw the full weight of her formidable party apparatus against the National Conference in the forthcoming Assembly elections.

The June 1983 Jammu & Kashmir Assembly elections were marked by an unprecedented degree of slandering and inter-party abuse. In the best traditions of Third World-style democracy, both sides (the National Conference and the Congress) resorted to scare-mongering in order to mobilize their core constituencies. Congress workers depicted Farooq Abdullah as anti-national and incited fears of Muslim dominance among the Hindu population of Jammu. Meanwhile, the National Conference forged an alliance with a known Islamist party, the Awami Action Committee, to capture Muslim votes in the

³⁴ Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 450-451

³⁵ Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), p. 238

Kashmir Valley. The latter tactic proved successful, but also lent credibility to Congress propaganda that Farooq harboured pro-Pakistani sympathies.³⁶

In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth. Unlike his father, Farooq Abdullah demonstrated no ambiguity on the question of accession to India: he regarded it as final, and described himself as an Indian citizen. However, the mere fact that he trounced Indira Gandhi's party in the 1983 elections, winning 46 seats to the Congress' 26, intensified Mrs. Gandhi's hostility towards him. Farooq also gave her ample cause to feel resentful. Flush with his electoral victory, he began cavorting with her political opponents in the Indian Parliament. To Mrs. Gandhi's fury, he ignored her warnings and hosted a three-day conclave for the Parliamentary Opposition in October 1983. That, as far as Mrs. Gandhi was concerned, was the last straw. She resolved to topple his government by any means.

The irony of these developments was that they proved how well Kashmiri integration with India had progressed. By hosting the Opposition conclave, the National Conference had brought Jammu & Kashmir one step closer into the Pan-Indian mainstream.³⁷ Yet, in the wake of deteriorating inter-personal relations between Mrs. Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah, all that counted for little. On 2nd July 1984, 13 Members of the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly announced that they were withdrawing support for Farooq's government. Their shift of loyalties was allegedly lubricated by bribes of Indian Rupees (INR) 300,000 per person – equivalent to \$6000 in today's terms. They were also promised ministerial appointments in the successor government.³⁸

Farooq protested when the Governor of Jammu & Kashmir called on him to resign, and insisted on holding a show of strength on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. Although he was perfectly within his rights to do so, New Delhi gave him no chance. The Governor, who had been sent to J&K weeks before specifically to arrange his ouster, proceeded to dismiss Farooq from the office of Chief Minister. Thereupon, he installed a puppet government led by Farooq's brother-in-law and political rival, Ghulam Mohammad Shah. In a matter of hours, Kashmir had regressed from being an equal political entity within the Indian Union, on par with other provinces and sub-regions, to a vassal state.

Kashmiris were outraged by the anti-Farooq coup. Their resentment did not stem so much from affection for the man himself, as from the casual manner with which New Delhi had cast aside a popularly elected government. For the first three months of G.M Shah's rule, curfews were imposed virtually round-the-clock, eventually totaling up to 70 days' length.³⁹ The new regime was also hideously corrupt, even by the standards of Kashmiri politics. In February 1986, it was dismissed and Governor's Rule (a form of federal rule) was imposed on the state.

³⁶ Tavleen Singh, *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996), pp. 24-44

³⁷ Balraj Puri, 'Understanding the Kashmir Problem: The beginning of the Present Phase', in Shri Prakash and Ghulam Mohammad Shah eds., *Towards Understanding the Kashmir Crisis* (New Delhi: Gyan, 2002), pp. 137-138

³⁸ Habibullah, *My Kashmir*, pp. 52-53

³⁹ Noor Ahmad Baba, 'Origins and Dimensions of the Crisis in Kashmir', in Shri Prakash and Ghulam Mohammad Shah eds., *Towards Understanding the Kashmir Crisis* (New Delhi: Gyan, 2002), p. 54

By now, Indira Gandhi had fallen to assassins' bullets and her son Rajiv, in true dynastic fashion, had succeeded her as Prime Minister. Although his government was virtually unassailable, having won a four-fifths majority in Parliament on the basis of sympathy votes, he persisted with his mother's policies. Accordingly, negotiations were once again opened with Farooq Abdullah, with a view to forging a National Conference-Congress alliance in J&K. The reward for Farooq would be immediate reinstatement to the Chief Minister's post, pending Assembly elections in March 1987 which would confer a veneer of legitimacy to the alliance.

Farooq took the bait; a move he later described as his biggest political mistake. His brief period in political exile had forced him to confront the brutal reality of the asymmetric power equation between New Delhi and Srinagar. If Jammu & Kashmir was to prosper, it needed Indian money, and the only way to get this money was to ingratiate oneself with the rulers in Delhi. As a sweetener, it was agreed that the state government would receive developmental aid to the tune of Indian Rupees 10 billion. Like most such promises, this one was forgotten by New Delhi once the alliance had been forged and Farooq reinstated.⁴⁰ He was now cast drift and expected to deal with the Kashmiris' anger at his capitulation.

One of the ways this anger manifested itself was in the formation of the Muslim United Front (MUF) in late 1986. The MUF was an ad hoc alliance of 13 Islamist parties led by the Jamaat-e-Islami. It opposed the Rajiv-Farooq power sharing agreement, and campaigned against it in the run-up to the Assembly elections. In all fairness, the Islamists never stood a chance of winning, since their political agenda was confined purely to oppositional tactics, and lacked any long-term vision for governance. However, the state government, now led by the National Conference and supported by the Congress, was not even prepared to concede their right of peaceful dissent.

The March 1987 elections were blatantly rigged – a stark contrast to those of 1977 and 1983, which had generally been perceived as free and fair. They marked a throwback to the methods used by New Delhi in Kashmir since the 1950s. Only this time, what was at stake was not Kashmir's right to secede from India but a much smaller, more reasonable demand: the right of ordinary citizens to register their discontent through the ballot box. The National Conference-Congress alliance won 66 of the 75 seats in the Legislative Assembly while the MUF won just four. An intelligence assessment produced before the results were announced had estimated that the MUF would win at least ten seats.

The disparity was due to partisan behavior shown by officials at polling booths. MUF candidates were manhandled and thrown out while counting was being done, and some votes were deliberately left uncounted.⁴¹ Protests by senior Islamist leaders were ignored, since India's electoral system is inherently slanted in favour of large, well-entrenched

⁴⁰ Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B Tauris, 2003), p. 138

⁴¹ Nayana Bose, 'Kashmir: at Perennial Crossroads', in Shri Prakash and Ghulam Mohammad Shah eds., *Towards Understanding the Kashmir Crisis* (New Delhi: Gyan, 2002), pp. 64-65

parties. Prior to any election, regional or national, these parties ensure that officials posted on polling duty are in some way indebted to their candidates, so as to ensure that the results declared are in their favour. India's independent Election Commission can do little to combat such rigging, since local-level bureaucrats cover up any traces of fraud.⁴²

MUF activists began planning for an armed struggle within weeks of the elections. They were convinced that the Indian political and judicial system would not offer them justice, and realized that they would need help from foreign governments. The most logical choice was Pakistan, since it was already enthusiastic about stirring up a revolt in Kashmir. Sometime in February 1988, a group of eight Kashmiri youths secretly crossed over from the Indian-administered portion of Jammu & Kashmir to the Pakistani-administered one, to receive arms training. Thousands more followed them over the next two decades. All had a common objective: to fight for Kashmir's secession from India.

Back to the Future: A Return to Representative Government in Jammu & Kashmir

Kashmiri alienation from India derives from three important dates: 1953, 1984 and 1987. The dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah had conveyed a message that the people of Kashmir did not have the right to secede from the Republic. Although this message was hardly welcome, it did not by itself push them towards rebellion. What it did however, was emphasize that their status was less than that of other sub-nationalities within the country, and that their political institutions were the most easily tampered with. So long as such tampering was confined to combating pro-Pakistani conspiracies, of which there were some, the Kashmir Valley remained relatively quiescent.⁴³ The lack of any serious disturbances between 1953 and 1984 is evidence of the fact that integrationist efforts were not unpopular, even if they also did not enjoy massive support.

Matters changed only after 1984, when Kashmiri politics regressed from popular governance to medieval court intrigues on the basis of New Delhi's interventionism. India in general was already afflicted by a 'crisis of governability' whereby political elites were too busy safeguarding their personal interests to bother with public issues.⁴⁴ Installation of loyalists in key positions, election-rigging and ego-clashes between local party activists had become the core concerns of elected decision-makers. This trend was introduced in Jammu & Kashmir as well, and eroded all the hopes that had been raised by the state's fledgling experiments with democracy between 1977 and 1983. Instead of benefiting from an enlightened and liberal political system, as Sheikh Abdullah had hoped, Kashmiris found themselves gripped by a feudal vise similar to that they would have found in Pakistan.

During this time (1947-1987), Pakistan had indeed turned out to be the nightmare that the Sheikh expected it to be. The country's military first usurped political power in 1957, and

⁴² Sulakshan Mohan, *Kashmir: Is there a Solution* (Delhi: Indian Publishers, 2000), p. 165

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of pro-Pakistani conspiracies in Kashmir prior to 1987, see Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Kashmir 1947-2004* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005)

⁴⁴ Atul Kohli, 'Crisis of Governability', in Sudipta Kaviraj ed., *Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 383-388

held on to it until the Bangladesh War of 1971.⁴⁵ After a five-year interim period, it once again intervened in politics, deposing and subsequently executing a democratically elected Prime Minister (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto). Only the death of the military dictator, General Zia-ul Haq, in an aircraft crash in 1988, ended military rule in Pakistan. These events had significant implications for Kashmir because the Pakistani Army officer corps was (and is) dominated by personnel from wealthy landowning families.⁴⁶ Having subverted democracy and resisted socio-economic reforms in their own country, they were unable to offer anything to Kashmir. That is, beyond the embrace of Islam.

As long as India remained democratic and secular, Kashmiris did not see Pakistan as an attractive alternative to it. Only when Indian politics grew polarized along Hindu-Muslim lines during the 1980s, and New Delhi began blatantly propping up sycophants in the Valley, did favourable views of Pakistan develop. Since the National Conference-Congress alliance had closed off legitimate channels of protest, Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami became the voice of political opposition in Jammu & Kashmir. These parties naturally tended to gloss over Pakistan's own flaws and focus only on its Islamic credentials, vis-à-vis India. Suddenly, the raiders of 1947 and the 1971 genocide in East Pakistan were forgotten. By rigging the 1987 elections, India had lowered itself to being at par with its military-ruled neighbour. Kashmiris thereafter sneered at India's democratic credentials, arguing that its electoral process was as farcical as that of Pakistan.⁴⁷

They also pointed out that India did not live up to the economic expectations placed on it. Indian capital had not flowed into J&K after 1947, although the blame for this lay partly with the Kashmiris themselves. Under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, non-residents of the state were forbidden from buying property in J&K. This created a disincentive to investment, since Indian capitalists were unwilling to pour money into a region from whence they would get no returns.⁴⁸ Virtually all political parties in the Kashmir Valley, including the National Conference, insisted that Article 370 remain applicable to the state. They wanted this particular legislation to be preserved, since it was the last remnant of the autonomy that Kashmir once enjoyed within India.

While their views were understandable, by retaining Article 370, they ensured that the J&K economy grew stagnant. The state became aid-dependent, surviving on massive grants from the central government merely to meet its own administrative costs.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Pakistan luxuriated in foreign aid money (provided mainly by the United

⁴⁵ Ayesha Siddiq, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 69-76

⁴⁶ Veena Kukreja, 'Pakistan's Political Economy: Misplaced Priorities and Economic Uncertainties', in Veena Kukreja and M.P Singh eds., *Pakistan: Democracy, Development and Security Issues* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p. 139

⁴⁷ Anand Mohan, 'The Historical Roots of the Kashmir Conflict', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume 15, Number 4 (1992), p. 302

⁴⁸ Reeta Chowdhari Tremblay, 'Nation, Identity and the Intervening Role of the State: A Study of the Secessionist Movement in Kashmir', *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 69, Number 4 (Winter 1996-1997), p. 479

⁴⁹ Edna Fernandes, *Holy Warriors: A Journey into the Heart of Indian Fundamentalism* (London: Portobello, 2007), p. 43

States, in return for its cooperation in the Cold War). Seeing that in per capita terms, India was poorer than Pakistan, some Kashmiris began to reassess the tangible benefits of remaining with the former. Not until 2002 did India's per capita income grow to exceed that of its rival, thereby neutralizing the economic rationale for separatism.⁵⁰ In the interim, the central government worked assiduously to promote Kashmir as a tourist attraction – a near impossible feat, given the ongoing terrorist violence. Over the years, growing numbers of domestic and foreign tourists began visiting the state. Their presence brought much-needed revenue to the Kashmiri economy, and created a vested interest for the local population to contain violence levels.⁵¹

2002 marked a turning point in another respect as well. That year, elections to the J&K Assembly were held under international supervision. Although India was in no way obligated to allow foreign scrutiny of its electoral process, it chose to do so as a matter of good faith. The international community (with the obvious exception of Pakistan) responded by endorsing the elections as free and fair, as did most Kashmiris.⁵² By then, fifteen years had elapsed since the start of the rebellion, and the goal of secession from India was nowhere in sight.

From a very early stage of the conflict (around 1990) New Delhi had opted for a strategy of attrition. It rotated troops through Kashmir in batches, with the intention of grinding the separatist groups into oblivion. Given the sheer size of the security forces available to the Indian government, and the relatively tiny population of Kashmir, the result was a foregone conclusion. War-weariness set in amongst the population of the Valley by the mid-1990s. Observing this trend, in 1997 the Jamaat-e-Islami distanced itself from the rebellion, arguing that violence would not provide the solution to popular grievances.⁵³

Consequently, when the 2002 Assembly elections were held, 44% of the electorate voted.⁵⁴ In doing so, they defied threats from separatist groups, who wanted to discredit the elections by forcing a boycott. The incumbent National Conference government was defeated, and replaced by its main rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP had previously established links with some of the separatist groups, as part of its effort to build up an alternative power base to the National Conference.⁵⁵ Few Kashmiris therefore expected that New Delhi would permit it to form a government in Srinagar. Yet, to its credit, the Indian government did nothing whatsoever to influence the election result, and

⁵⁰ Verghese Koithara, *Crafting Peace in Kashmir: Through a Realist Lens* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), p. 96

⁵¹ V.G Patankar, 'Insurgency, proxy war, and terrorism in Kashmir', in Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler eds., *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 74

⁵² Rekha Chowdhary and Nagendra Rao, 'Elections 2002: Implications for Politics of Separatism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 38, Number 1 (4th-10th January 2003), p. 15

⁵³ Praveen Swami, 'Jamaat in Retreat', *Frontline*, Volume 25, Number 5, (1st-14th March 2008), accessed online at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2505/stories/20080314250504100.htm>, on 10th June 2009

⁵⁴ K. Santhanam, Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena and Manish, *Jihadis in Jammu and Kashmir: A Portrait Gallery* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), p. 45

⁵⁵ Praveen Swami, 'J&K: Democracy Without Freedom', *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Volume 2, Number 44 (17th May 2004), accessed online at http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_44.htm#assessment1, on 10th June 2009

the popular mandate was felt. The return of democracy to Jammu & Kashmir was marked by widespread jubilation in the Valley.

After 2002, violence in Kashmir fell steadily and by 2008, had reached negligible levels. That year, far more people were killed by Islamist terrorists in the rest of India, than in Kashmir. In November 2008, Assembly elections were held once again, as scheduled according to the electoral cycle. Having repeated their call for a boycott of the polls, separatist groups were stunned when a 63% voter turnout was reported.⁵⁶ Like the 2002 elections, those of 2008 were generally perceived as free from New Delhi's interference and the results, a reflection of the popular mandate. On this occasion, the PDP was voted out of power and the National Conference voted back in. Heading the party was a new leader, Omar Abdullah. Son of Farooq Abdullah and grandson of the Sheikh, Omar currently enjoys a substantial measure of popular support, being untainted by accusations of corruption. Under him, the state of Jammu & Kashmir has its best chance in decades of re-engaging with the Indian mainstream. Although the risk of terrorist activity still exists, at present it originates primarily from Pakistan, due to the deteriorating security situation in that country. Within Kashmir itself, politics appears to have mitigated the level of popular alienation, despite having inflamed it in the first place.

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⁵⁶ 'Jammu and Kashmir Assessment – Year 2009', *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, accessed online at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/index.html>, on 10th June 2009