
Elections in J&K: Yearning For Change

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Introduction

The J&K Assembly elections 2014 has produced a fractured mandate in which no political party has got an absolute majority to form the government on its own. This situation has raised a curious debate on the coalition, which is going to be formed to assume the power in the state.

The scenario, which has emerged projects that Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party, (J&KPDP), is the leading party with 28 seats followed by the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) with 25 seats. The outgoing ruling party J&K National Conference (NC) got 15 seats followed by its coalition partner Indian National Congress (INC) that got 12 seats. A new political party, J&K Peoples Conference (PC), won two seats in this election. It may be mentioned that the single party rule

whether in the states or even at the Central level of the Union ended more than two decades ago. Thus, the formation of coalition governments is order of the day. The same is true about J&K. The coalition mode of government in J&K came into vogue with the National Conference-Congress alliance after the Rajiv Gandhi-Farooq Abdullah Accord of 1987. The convention was followed in the subsequent elections in the state.

The Coalition Dogma

Theoretically, the coalition formation between the two parties or among many parties takes place either on the basis of convergence of ideologies or on the basis of the proximity of their respective manifestoes. In case such a convergence is not either feasible or plausible then the parties have an option of chalking out a minimum common program to form the

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coalition and run the government.

In case of J&K, the different political parties that have the numbers have the option to form a coalition. In fact, as reported in the media, different parties have been offering support to one or the other party to form a coalition government in the state. Such approaches should be viewed or weighed on the basis of the past experiences of workability. Moreover, the election results in J&K should not be cursorily or superficially interpreted one way or the other. In the same manner the issue of coalition should not be addressed on the basis of rhetoric on the part of one or the other party. It needs to be recognized that purple prose of one or the other political grouping has to stand the test of performance and accountability.

The Diversity of the State

The recent election results in J&K state should be analyzed in the backdrop of the diversity of the state. In case this diversity is ignored, the conclusions would remain superficial.

The J&K state comprises three distinct geographical, cultural and linguistic regions. These three regions have further sub-regions - linguistically and ethno-culturally. It has rightly been observed that J&K state represents the sub-Continental

diversity. It needs to be recognized that these regions and sub-regions have their respective urges and aspirations. It would be an oversimplification to club these diverse regions as uniform entities on the basis of over projection of one or the other dimension of the identity of the region. A close analysis of the voting pattern reveals the assertion and recognition of the diversities in the state. Since the election arithmetic results are based on the numbers, even one vote here or there would tilt the balance in favor of a candidate or a party. But that does not provide a holistic picture.

The Electoral Verdict

In terms of election results, the PDP has emerged the single largest party followed by BJP. The PDP has won the seats, apart from Kashmir Valley, in the Jammu region also. The BJP got all its seats from the Jammu region. Be that as it may, the voting behavior of the voters in the state has been quite unconventional.

The statistical data provides intriguing highlights of this behavior. This behavior indicates that no political party is a pariah for the voters.

The PDP won the majority seats from Kashmir. The party lost five

seats in the valley with a margin of around one hundred fifty to five hundred votes. It lost Kupwara seat by one hundred fifty one votes, Kulgam seat by three hundred and thirty votes and Sonwari seat by three hundred and thirty votes. The party lost some other seats by a margin of around a thousand votes. The PDP was in fact competing with another regional party NC which resulted in the division of votes.

In case the vote share in Jammu region between the PDP and NC is combined together the BJP and Congress would get less seats than what these parties have bagged from the region.

The following Table provides an illustration to the point:

The overall vote percentages from the state provide the figures that indicate that the regional parties got more votes than the national parties. The following Table provides illustration to the point:

TABLE - 2

BJP+Indian Naional Congress	41%
PDP+National Conference	43.15%

(This does not include the votes polled by Peoples Conference and Independents including those who exercised the NOTA option)

In order to comprehend the choice of the voters in the state, it would be appropriate to locate the status of the major political parties in the electoral

TABLE - 1

	PDP+National Conference	BJP	Congress
Kishtwar	31634	28054	
Kalakote	27372	2522	
Banihal	26324		17671
Surank Kote	30810		30584

contest. In order to avoid the generalization, this status would be determined on a scale of One to Four in terms of the votes obtained (preferences) by these parties. The following figures are provided in this behalf.

PDP

The PDP emerged as the single regional party that has shown presence in both the regions of the state. The party won three seats of Rajouri, Darhal and Poonch Haveli of the Jammu region. The party emerged as Second and Third choice in the following constituencies of the Jammu region.

Table 3

Second Choice	Third Choice
RS Pora	Kishtwar
Nowshera	Inderwal
Mendhar	Gandhi Nagar
	Bhaderwah
	Surankote
	Jammu East
	Bishnah
	Chamb

BJP

The BJP won all the seats from Jammu region. The Peoples Conference, which won two seats in Kashmir, declared its alliance with the BJP. However, in Kashmir valley the party has set its feet for the first time. In terms of the vote share (preference of voters) in Kashmir, the status of BJP in terms of the scale mentioned above is as follows:

Table 4

Second Choice	Habbakadal
Third Choice	Amirakadal, Bijbehara, Hazratbal
Fourth Choice	Anantnag Charat-i-Sharif Devsar Dooru Homshalibugh Khanyar Kokernag Kulgam Kupwara Pahalgam Pampore Shopian Tral Uri Wachi

The foregoing data indicates that the voters across the state have expressed their choice and preference of the political parties. These figures equally bring forth the fact that the voting has not been uniform. This state of affairs leads to the conclusion that the next government in the state would be a coalition government. In the alternative the state has to go for a new election. However, there is no guarantee that the fresh election would throw up a party which would be formed on its own strengthen. It needs to be underlined that the voters have voted for a *change*. The entry of BJP in Kashmir Valley indicates the urge for the change.

The electorate in the state particularly in Kashmir appears to have grown mature enough to realize the significance of electoral system. Their preferences indicate that they had weighed the candidates according to their performance before exercising their vote. This healthy trend and pragmatic approach was first reflected in the Parliamentary elections which were held in June, 2014 in which all the three PDP candidates won with an impressive majority. One of the candidates who is comparatively young in J&K politics defeated the National Conference Patron and the former Chief Minister of the state from

Srinagar constituency. In the Assembly elections, the PDP candidates from Amira Kadal, Sonawar, Baramullah, Amirakadal and Batmaloo constituencies who were contesting for the first time, won with impressive margins. The NC candidates from Khanyar and Uri constituencies were able to sail through on the basis of their images in the public. Same holds true of the Independent candidate from Langate and CPI(M) candidate from Kulgam constituencies. The independent candidate from Udhampur constituency who won with an impressive majority provides another illustration that the voters go by the image a candidate holds in the public mind.

Ideologies, Manifestoes, Performance

The political parties approach the electorate on the basis of their respective manifestoes reflecting their ideologies and the initiatives they took to realize their objectives. In J&K, the perceptions formed by the people in both the regions, which have been promoted by politicians of different hues and which may not be related to the realities, have resulted in misgivings and antagonism. Thus, it has delayed the process of government formation in the state this time. The issues of

ideologies have become a hot debate in the state. These issues are being debated and articulated in the local media of the state.

The issue of restoration of autonomy has been a constant theme of the National Conference which is the historical party in the state. In retrospect, the maximum erosion of autonomy in the state took place during the former Chief Minister G.M. Sadiq's rule in 1964. However, the 1975 *Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah Accord* legitimized this erosion. Ironically, Sheikh Abdullah, who had denounced the Congress Party, few years before Accord was elected by the same very party as their leader after the Accord.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, after assuming power in 1977 did constitute a committee headed by Mr. Devi Das Thakur to identify the areas in which the autonomy of the state had been eroded. The committee submitted its report and mainly recommended that the Centre should consider the exemption of Article 356 of the Indian Constitution in J&K state. (The Article lays down the Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in State). This unresolved issue had been a constant theme during pre Accord parleys between Mohammad Afzal Beigh (Representing Sheikh

Abdullah) and G. Parthasarthy (Representing Mrs. Indira Gandhi). Be that as it may, Sheikh Abdullah did not pursue the D.D. Thakur report. In a lighter vein, the report got stuck somewhere on the shelves of the Chief Minister's (Sheikh Abdullah's) office. However, it may be recognized that Sheikh Abdullah concentrated on governance in the state. He introduced the single line administration and promoted the intra regional harmony which created a stable and peaceful environment in the state. Post 1996, the NC government came out with another Autonomy Report which it submitted to the Central government for consideration. The BJP led NDA government, of which the NC was a coalition partner, rejected this report. The NC did not even protest and its representative continued to be the Minister of State in the Central government. The NC has been a coalition partner apart from BJP, with the Congress party, as well.

The Congress party at the national level has been moving, ideologically, from the center to the right depending upon its convenience. The noted political scientist, Rajni Kothari, long back analyzed that Congress party gradually lost its ideological sheen and it got transformed into a *machine party*. Its main preoccupation remained the distribution of

privileges and largesse. This practice was later followed by its alliance partners as well. In case of J&K, Congress followed the twin trajectory of greater Constitutional integration of the state with the Union and later on an alliance with the regional party. Post 1983, after the demise of Sheikh Abdullah, Congress adopted the methodology of manipulation in order to enter the political arena in the state. In 1984, Congress manipulated the down fall of Farooq Abdullah government. The entire opposition spectrum of India rallied behind Dr. Farooq Abdullah and pledged to fight this manipulation. That was the healthy course of political action and if followed would have enhanced the prestige of NC leadership, apart from saving the people of Kashmir from many a tragedy which befell on them later. However, Farooq Abdullah mysteriously vanished and resurfaced after two years with Rajiv Gandhi- Farooq Abdullah Accord of 1986.

Challenge and Opportunity

In the back drop of the present

political scenario, post Assembly elections, it is indeed a challenge to form a government which in view of the numbers has to be a coalition government. However, in view of the foregoing appraisal of the developments and political stance of the political parties, presumed to be secular/progressive, it would be futile to look to the ideologies in the formation of a coalition government. Such an argument is a farce which is aimed at creating confusion that suits the vested interest. It may be underlined that J&K state poses three important challenges which need to be addressed. These challenges are: Transparent and effective governance, the creation of employment opportunities for the educated young people and inter-regional harmony and cooperation.

The present political situation in J&K, apart from throwing challenge, equally provides an opportunity. A pragmatic approach is needed to bring the people out of desperation, despondency and chaos. ■