

Political Awakening and the Birth of Kashmiri Identity

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ABSTRACT

The identity formation in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has followed a uniform pattern. These identities which evolved over a large span of time may be located in the specific geographical and environmental spaces. They have the common characteristic feature of a common language spoken by a group of people with a common history of observing common traditions, rites and rituals. All these components have endowed these identities with an arena of primordiality. The prominent aspect of these identities has been their inclusiveness in absorbing new and sometimes even foreign influences of religions and cultures resulting in adding layer after layer in the formation of their distinct personalities. The incorporation of shared historical and cultural values shaped these identities in a mould in which the religious edges of the identity remained subdued or even dormant. Interestingly the capacity of absorption and accommodation of these identities resulted in two diametrically opposite consequences. On one hand these identities remained humane and inclusive, incorporating and reflecting broader human and universal values. On the other side, they acquired the traits of particularism which in the later stages of building multicultural and multi-ethnic nation states posed multi-faceted problems. Significantly as long as these identities remained and thrived in the domain of cultures, they cemented the social structures. However, once they moved into the political domain, their fragmentary characteristics came to the fore. Ironically in one domain these identities reflected equanimity but in the other they appeared to be fractious.

1. Introduction

Historically identities were utilized to mobilize people against colonialism, imperialism and played a vital role in galvanizing people to achieve their goals. Since the mobilization took place on the assertions of a shared cultural identity, the inclusiveness of identity became more prominent. However in post-independence era the role and status of identities became a contentious issue in view of the dilution of their inclusiveness due to varied factors. The process of politicization of identities resulting in the sharp contest between identities has been threatening the social cohesion of societies. The contest has assumed the forms of ethnic confrontation. Due to economic situation the fragmentation of traditional identities has sharpened the schismatic edges of the identities. The lingering Kashmir problem provides a prime example of the acuity of the ethnic dimension in modern South Asian politics and in its precedence over traditional religious brotherhood. The spread of European-inspired nationalism in many parts of the multi-ethnic British empire during the early part of the 20th century augmented many nationality formations as well as other groups, sense their of ethnic distinction and ignited their own traditional consciousness. However the root of present day Kashmiri identity anxiety preservation dates back to 1586 an 1846, though British connection gave additional fillip to it.

2. Geographical Factor & Culture

Geography has played an essential role in preserving the distinct identity of Kashmir and has also largely determined history, culture, living style and stages of development of this

identity. The extension of borders and trade relations of Kashmir with the exterior world largely influenced the native culture and language. A powerful force which explains the continuity of Kashmiri life is the love and devotion which Kashmiris have for their motherland. They has been referring to it as Mouj Kashir (Mother Kashmir) and this attachment for the homeland is reflected in folk and poetry which abounds in praise of the springs, rivers, gardens and the sacred shrines of their homeland. It is the socialization of Kashmir that imparts the deep emotions and sentiments which render Kashmiri identity so potent a social force. The Kashmiris self-awareness as a distinct ethnicity is rooted in history. The roots of Kashmiri identity has to be found in much earlier civilization than are otherwise being taken into account. May be it is the bone and blood of the very ancient Dravid civilization which has survived as the ethnic or cultural core around which the present edifice has been built in collaboration with the Aryans, the Ionian Greeks, the Konkans, Brahmans, the Gypsies and the Central Asians. The migrants had to attune this core and get themselves absorbed and assimilated when contributing towards the growth and vitality of this unique people or also be condemned to remain aliens.

In evolving the present day culture of Kashmiri identity, culture has played a significant role. The history of Kashmiri culture remains a colorful one. For about 2000years, Kashmir remained the home of Sanskrit learning and from this small valley have emerged masterpieces of history, poetry, romance and philosophy. The vast Kashmiri folk fore tells the story of Kashmiri ethnic development and gives a hope of future redemption. The concept of Kashmiri identity as a political

ideology emerged also in Kashmiri poetry in past and in contemporary times. Sometimes there were moments when the political strategy of various groups, including poets was to build bridges across religiously defined communities to evoke an older tradition of culturally based regional co-existence. Habba Khatoon, one of the Kashmiri poetic icons, is remembered as both suffering and resisting the Mughal Emperor Akbar's annexation of Kashmir in the 16th century. A peasant woman whom the last indigenous king of Kashmir fell in love because of her songs, she continued to sing lyrical poetry and wait for him after he was banished by Akbar.

The majority of the people in the Kashmir valley belong to Islamic faith (94%) with Hindus (4.7%) and a tiny Sikh and Christian population as well. The Kashmiris ethno-cultural distinction is reinforced by their religious practices. They embraced several religions one after another, Naga worship, Buddhism, Brahmanism and Islam. All these religions produced in them blending cultures at once tolerant to others beliefs. Even after their conversion to Islam as a new faith, the Kashmiris have rarely renounced or abolished the old ethnic-cultural values and modes of life that their ancestors had cherished through thousands of years. A Kashmiri Muslim shares in common with the Hindu compatriot many inhibitions, superstitions, idolatrous practices as well as social liberties and intellectual freedoms which are unknown to Islam, for instance, Muslims in Kashmir have retained their old surnames such as Kouls, Bhats, Razdans, Dars etc. there also exist many similarities in the rites of death, birth and marriage between the two communities. The use of walnut and salt in the rites are some other features which are shared by both Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir. Even after their migration from Kashmir in the wake of militancy in 1989, Kashmiri Pandits have shown a preference for halal meat outside the state. Both the communities of Muslims and Hindus were historically at the forefront of preserving the Kashmiri identity. Jawaharlal Nehru regarded Kashmir as a definite historical, cultural and linguistic unit. He was proud of the fact that Kashmiri Pandits were more recognized in India as Kashmiris. Kashmiri Pandits were the first to raise the issue of Muliks (residents) and non-Muliks (non-residents) which resulted in the appointment of the state subject definition committee and its acceptance by the Maharaja in 1927. Another important feature of the Kashmir is the egalitarian character. The egalitarian character of society and an intimate level of political communication in a framework of the close-knit society significantly contributed to the emergence of Kashmiris as politically the most conscious community in the world.

3. Kashmiri Identity & its relationship with other Identities

Kashmiri identity and its relationship with other identities viz, national, regional and sub-regional, has to be related to the foreign formulations. Kashmir has the distinction of a recorded history of 5000 years. Its identity, popularly described as Kashmiriyat, evolved through a process of acculturation absorbing diverse cultural elements and accommodating different religious practices ranging from Buddhism, Shaivism, Jainism and Islam. During varied periods of history, these faiths incorporated local customs and traditions within their respective folds, providing Kashmiriyat with distinct, inclusive and plural

characteristics. The Muslim Saints and scholars from Central Asia who visited Kashmir to preach Islam permitted the observance of local traditions and rituals which nourished the cultural dimension of Kashmiri identity. This special concession equally enabled Kashmiri identity to maintain its historical continuity. With the advent of Sufi missionaries, Kashmiri society began to experience several changes of far-reaching importance. The philosophy of egalitarianism and philanthropy of Sufis reshaped and reoriented the indigenous mystic traditions in the Kashmiri Sufism, is what has now passed into the cultural heritage of Kashmir. Through the kaleidoscopic mosaic of the past, there is a glimpse of the growth of a common culture, a native pride, a togetherness and mutuality called Kashmiriyat, something unique to Kashmir. Again the special geographic location of Kashmir and a common language which bound the people of diverse faiths together and the social structure provided Kashmiriyat with a distinct form, content and personality. The accommodation and tolerance remained the hallmarks of Kashmiri identity. On the basis of this specific identity, both the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir distinguished themselves from their co-religionists in other parts of the country. In some respects, their religious practices also differ from those observed by their co-re religionists in other parts of India. This identity thrived within the domain of culture and provided a vital source for social cohesion. It withstood foreign invasions, the oppressive subjugation of foreign rulers and tyranny of a feudal autocratic socio-political order. It is a historical fact that religious bigotry and fanaticism was rejected by the Kashmiris.

4. Treaty of Amritsar and Formation of Modern Jammu & Kashmir State

Kashmir came under the suzerainty of Maharaja Gulab Singh by the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 between the Gulab Singh and British government. Gulab Singh became the first ruler of a new political entity of Jammu and Kashmir. Gulab Singh later annexed Ladakh and added some more principalities from Jammu to the new state. As a result of these developments, the state was formed with three distinct geographical regions, incorporating multiple distinct, cultural and linguistic identities. However, because of historical, geographical and political reasons, Kashmir identity remained the prominent and predominant identity of the state. The autocratic rulers devised their peculiar mechanisms of integrating the state. The relocating of feudal structures and creating a new exploitive system to suit their own interests aside, a new system of Darbar move was introduced after creating the two capitals for the state. Thus Srinagar in Kashmir was designated the Summer Capital and Jammu was to be the Winter Capital of the state. This move encouraged greater social interaction between the different communities in the state. The founding of Dogra rule in the aftermath of 1846 brought about the creation of a new system of agrarian exploitation with a parasitic urban growth based upon it. The land grants Jagirs and Chaks assumed institutionalized form. The new policy combined political authority with economic powers. However, the clash between Kashmiri identity and Dogra Usurpation was noticeable when the treaty met with an uprising. The political upsurge or reassertion of Kashmiri identity was against the backdrop of socio-economic and political conditions since 1586 at the time when political

consciousness started taking shape in Kashmir, the condition of both the peasantry as well as the artisans was pathetic. Most oppressive was the forced labour or Beggar. The oppressed masses suffered in silence, yet attempt was made to organize resistance from time to time. For instance, in 1847, shawl weavers went on strike protesting against heavy taxation policy of the state. In 1925, the Silk factory workers came out in the open on the streets against the oppressive working conditions. Kashmir witnessed a number of movements throughout the 20th century, especially in 1910s, 1920s and 1930s respectively. Representing the interest of the lower classes, these movements intensified Kashmiri yearning for fulfilling their emerging sense of national feeling and 1931 was the culmination point in this respect.

5. Early assertion of Kashmiri Identity & Dawn of Political Awakening

Kashmiri identity moved from political cultural to political domain during different phases of history. Kashmiri identity moved to the political domain in 1931 with the formation of Muslim Conference, the first organized political party of the state, which raised various issues like poverty, discrimination, low percentage of Muslim population in government jobs and employment opportunities for Kashmiri Muslims which were at the helm of affairs during Dogra period. By 1930, many Kashmiri Muslims had returned to Kashmir after completing their higher studies. The oppressive rule of Dogra leadership created in the minds of the people of the state an intense desire for self-government and independence. Kashmiris had not participated in any way in the governance of their state ever since Mughal rule. Hence the re-assertion of Kashmiri identity (Kashmiriyat) was a historical necessity. Initially, the Kashmiri political leadership invoked Kashmiri identity towards the mobilization and articulation of grievances of Kashmiri Muslims. However, within a short period of time, the political leadership declared that the objectives of their movement was to articulate grievances and restoration of rights of all the oppressed people belonging to different faiths and located in all the regions of the state.

As the political movement against the autocratic ruler gained momentum and people from different regions and faiths extended their support to the movement, it appeared that Kashmiri identity had become a bridge between different identities in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. With all its inclusive and plural characteristics, Kashmiri identity became an instrument of political mobilization leadership in the state with the Indian national leadership broadened their vision which resulted in the secularization of Kashmiri identity by transforming Muslim Conference. This change in the ideological basis of movement is regarded as a symbolic advance of the secular nationalist forces in the state and a stage in the radicalization in the middle class. This transformation reinvigorated the historical and cultural personality of Kashmiri identity which conveniently made it a part of larger national identity. Furthermore, Sheikh Abdullah used Kashmiri identity as a bridge and projected its inclusive and pluralistic characteristics in converting Muslim Conference with National Conference. During the initial phase of its political assertion, Kashmiri identity did not had to compete with any other identity in the state despite the fact that the political

leadership of the state often referred to Dogra rule in their flight against the feudal autocratic rule of the Jammu-based Maharaja. The identification of the ruling dynasty with a specific group of people did not automatically lead to the assertion of the identity of that specific group at that juncture in the history of Jammu and Kashmir.

Since 1931 Kashmiri identity underwent many vicissitudes when it became an instrument of mobilization against feudal-autocratic rule in the state. It also faced many problems from different quarters at different stages of history. These challenges resulted in blunting and sharpening its varied edges. Differences arose within the political leadership of Muslim Conference which resulted in the parting of ways between Mirwaiz Yosuf Shah and Sheikh Abdullah representing two different political schools of thought. In this contest of same identity with two dimensions, Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference emerged victorious as the inheritors of a composite, inclusive and progressive Kashmiri identity.

The period of 1940s to 1950s was the hey days of the articulation of Kashmiriyat by National Conference. The main objective of Sheikh Abdullah- led National Conference was to involve all Kashmiris in nation- building programme. The philosophy of nation, nationality and nationalism was invoked to fire the Kashmiris with local Kashmiri nationalism. Selected fragments from an imagined past were collected to construct Kashmiriyat that would draw in both Hindus and Muslims. This was evident in the periodization adopted Sheikh Abdullah and his associates in their recounting of Kashmir valley. Their reconstruction of the biography of Kashmir moved not from periods of Hindu to Muslim to Sikh rulers but from an age of Kashmir rule, through a long interregnum of the foreign dominance beginning with Mughals in 1586 before the end of Dogra hegemony marked a return to rule by Kashmiris. The espousal of secular ideology contributed to emergence of national awareness among Kashmiris which was above sectarianism. Votaries of Kashmiriyat never lost sight of their religious affinities, nor were these deemed incompatible with a regionally- shared culture.

6. 1947 & the Formation of Nationalist Identity

On the eve of partition, Kashmiri identity asserted its historical role and Kashmir remained completely free from any communal violence when the entire subcontinent was caught in the fire of communal passions. National Conference led by Sheikh Abdullah fought against two- nation theory which gave birth to Pakistan, with the instrument of Kashmiriyat. He successfully mobilized and organized the people of Kashmir against communalism and religious fanaticism. The small group within National Conference which perceived Kashmiri identity in a religious perspective was marginalized and its thesis was rejected on the issue of states accession with the Union of India. During this period, Kashmiri identity got a fillip with the land reforms and cancellation of debts which brought about structural changes. With Kashmiriyat as its basis ideology, the State Constituent Assembly embarked on the task of reordering social, political and economic structures of the society. The Assembly paid attention to other linguistic and cultural identities in the state as well .However in this pleasant

emerging social scenario, Kashmiri identity was placed under great strain when Praja Parishad started a violent agitation for the abrogation of special status granted to the state of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the constitution of India. The agitation evoked sharp reaction from the National Conference party. In the turn of events, Sheikh Abdullah was arrested and dismissed in August 1953. During this period a streak of state politics was hankering for closer federal integration of Kashmir with the Union of India and clamor for greater federal autonomy for the state. National Conference had repeatedly claimed to be the guardian of Kashmiriyat and Sheikh Abdullah had been a great votary of Kashmiri identity. He had invoked Kashmiri identity to challenge the autocratic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh in 1931. He had equally made Kashmiri identity a shield to defend the state from the flames of communalism that had engulfed the northern part of India on the eve of independence. He had fought Two-Nation Theory with the instrument of Kashmiri identity. However in the new and unexpected circumstances of his estrangement with the Union of India, he invoked the same identity in leading a separatist movement in the state. He later claimed that his quarrel with the Union of India was not the issue of accession but on the quantum of autonomy of the state with the Union of India. The Plebiscite Front that was formed in mid- 1950s replaced the National Conference in providing a political vision to Kashmir. For a prolonged period of twenty years, when the people of Kashmir were under the spell of the Plebiscite Front, the Kashmiri identity was defined through assertion of Kashmiri nationalism which in essence was based on the idea of contestation of Indian claim over Kashmir.

7. Post- 1953 Phase: Erosion of Federal Autonomy

In the wake of political developments in Jammu and Kashmir after 1953, Kashmiri identity found two patrons and guardians. Sheikh Abdullah and his faction of National Conference invoked political dimension of Kashmiri identity for mobilization and assertion. However this faction of National Conference strictly guarded against sharpening the religious edge of Kashmiri identity. Bakshi-led faction of National Conference equally claimed the guardian of Kashmiri identity. In this contest of guardianship, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad concentrated on sharpening the cultural edge of the Kashmiri identity. He paid special attention in reviving and promoting other identities particularly the Dogri language spoken in Jammu region. The impact of new initiatives launched by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad resulted in the dilution of the political edge of Kashmiri identity to a large extent. However over a period of time strains started appearing on the overall personality of Kashmiri identity politics. The secessionist political phase in the state created a space for sharpening its religious edge. On the other side, the emergence and assertion of other linguistic and cultural identities, in absence of a mechanism of a harmonious relationship, accelerated the process of sharpening the religious edge of the identities leading occasionally to communal mobilization and ultimately polarizing at the social levels in the state on religious lines.

When a separate constitution was being drawn up for the internal governance and for regulating the constitutional relations between the state and the Union of India, the State Constituent Assembly, in recognition to the linguistic diversity

of the state recognized the seven regional languages of the state. In fact these languages represent different regional and cultural identities in the state. The special social engineering measures and welfare programmes aimed at the amelioration of their conditions has gradually led to their political and cultural assertion. This led to an expanding universe of identities in the state. The host of linguistic and cultural identities represents a rich diversity in the state of Jammu and Kashmir which in many ways represents the sub- continental diversity and plurality. In a healthy competition, these identities have the potential of complementing and enriching each other. But they have equally the potency of creating dissensions and frictions. The process of assertion of other regional or sub- regional identities in Jammu and Kashmir, although gradual, did not take off on a positive note. These identities asserted themselves with the claims of disparities in the allocation of resources towards their economic development. These claims of regional disparities pushed these identities towards exclusive enclaves. This exclusivity at times appears to threaten the cohesion and integrity of state. The process of drift and exclusion of identities in Jammu and Kashmir started from Ladakh region. Ladakh represents an identity of shared history, cultural values and traditions. Initially the people of Ladakh genuinely suffered neglect and faced hardships. Moreover the agrarian reforms 1951 hit the Buddhist monasteries hard since they had to surrender lands allotted to them by feudal rulers. Historically the kings and rulers had been granting lands to temples and monasteries for their maintenance. This led to the emergence of Aghara and Dharmaths. The Brahmans and Monks sustained themselves and their families on these institutions. The agrarian reforms adversely influenced a large number of Buddhist monasteries along with the monks who sustained themselves on these institutions. This resulted in a perception of persecution which was aggravated with the practices of neglect and apathy on part of successive governments of the state towards Ladakh. The harsh climatic conditions furthered the frustration of the Ladakhi people. The culminate impact of these developments should have resulted in the political assertion of Ladakhi identity shared by the people living in different parts of the region. On the contrary, a process of ethno-religious assertion emerged with a major section of Ladakhi Buddhists in Leh demanding the status of union territory for Ladakh. Hence Ladakhi identity was truncated into Buddhist and Shia Muslim identities.

8. Sheikh- Indira Accord 1975

By the time Sheikh Abdullah returned back to the mainstream after Indira- Abdullah Accord 1975, the process of fragmentation of Kashmiri identity had started. The emergence of new identities viz bureaucratic, professional and commercial added new dimensions to Kashmiri identity. Due to regional, national and international factors, the mechanisms to reconcile the new components did not emerge which led to the denudation rather than enrichment of Kashmiri identity. In the meanwhile the gradual process of sharpening the religious edge of the identity was set in. A new political group of Jamaat-i- Islami, whose earlier activities were confined to the field of education, emerged asserting the Muslim edge of Kashmiri identity. In the presence of Sheikh Abdullah the religious edge of Kashmiri identity by and large remained dormant. Though the process of assertion was slow. It became evident when

Jamaat-i- Islami leaders introduced Shariah Bill in the Legislative Assembly elections and was rejected in 1997. The bill was aimed at abolishing the institutions of adoption, deemed to be un-Islamic, from the state. During this period, the sub- text of Kashmiri identity politics changed and the contestation of Kashmir's relationship with the Union of India remained the reference point of Kashmiri identity. However the basis of contestation was changed from the issue of accession to the issue of federal autonomy.

In the post- Sheikh Abdullah period of Kashmir politics, National Conference which claimed to be the guardian of Kashmiri identity, for both internal and external factors, remained indifferent to the process of chipping of the cultural components of the Kashmiri identity. Again, the Kashmiri language which provided a succor to the survival and nourishment of Kashmiriyat was being abandoned gradually by the people in Kashmir. Since the framing of the separate constitution for the state, the efforts to make it a medium of instruction even at the primary level, met with little success.

9. Birth of a New Era

The death of Sheikh Abdullah completely changed the reference point of identity politics in the state of Jammu and Kashmir at one stroke. In the wake of dismissal of the legitimately elected government of Farooq Abdullah in 1984, imposition of National Conference- Congress alliance in 1986 elections and the rigged elections of 1987, the identity politics in Kashmir changed its course back to the contestation of India's claim on Kashmir. With the massive protests with slogans of azadi (independence) and armed militancy respectively. The contestation of India's claims over Kashmir and contestation of the centre- state relationship, though forming Kashmir, two different moments in that the identity politics of Kashmir reflects the range of expressions of the Kashmiri identity. The two manifestation of Kashmiri identity are not to be seen as two different poles, reflecting two opposite contexts of identity politics in Kashmir. The two are so closely related that these can be seen to be operating in continuation with each other as well as operating simultaneously. For instance much of the azadi politics has emanated from and has substituted the politics of autonomy. However at the same time, while the dominant expression in the present phase of Kashmiri identity politics remains azadi in the present phase of separatism and militancy, there is definitely a streak of autonomy politics even in the present phase which is reflected not merely in the political position taken by National Conference within the mainstream politics, but also in the common perceptions of Kashmiris swayed by the sentiments of azadi. Since much of the azadi sentiment is a reflection of the failure of Indian state to accommodate Kashmiri aspiration for autonomy, this sentiment is quite fuzzy and can acquire any meaning within the broader range of identity politics with autonomy at the one end and azadi on the other.

10. Homogenized Exterior of Kashmiri Identity

The homogenized exterior of the identity politics of Kashmir is colored by various internal tensions, one being the relation between the political aspects of the identity and the religious question. This situation is built in the context of the

evolution of the Kashmiri identity and its identification with the Muslims of Kashmir. Though many Kashmiri Pandits identified themselves with the Kashmiri identity and contributed to the process of broadening its contours and secularizing its agenda, yet they as a group remained more or less outside this identity. The externality of Kashmiri Pandits became clearly pronounced with the contestation of India's claim on Kashmir in the post-1953 period. Significantly it is to be highlighted here that the identification of Kashmiri identity politics with only the Muslims of Kashmir did not necessarily take it to the communal direction. The predominant expression of the identity politics of Kashmir remained secular in character though there were always assertions from within to define it from the religious perspective. These assertions remained at the fringes till the very recent times. It was with outbreak of armed militancy that fundamentalist forces came to the forefront claiming the independent, pro- Pakistani and Pan- Islamic nature of Kashmiri identity. The involvement of some ideologies like Jaishi Mohammad, Harkatul Ansar, Lashkari Toyyiba etc gave a severe boost to these claims. As these claims became more or less sharp and explicit, generating a debate about the nature of the movement and its indigenous political character.

11. What is Beyond Kashmiri Identity?

Beyond the Kashmiri identity politics, there are various other manifestations of identities and their politics in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. However much of the identity politics outside Kashmir valley is generated either in response to the specificity of the Kashmiri identity politics or in response to the predominance of Kashmir in power politics of the state. Thus there is an analysis of the regional politics of Jammu and Ladakh. Though much of the identity politics revolves around the issue of power and inter-regional relations, the context of Kashmiri nationalism also has an effect on the identity politics of Jammu and Ladakh. In many ways, the regional politics can be seen as a terrain for the interplay of competitive nationalism. Much of regional assertion is manifested in a manner that reflects a pronounced distance from the political positions of Kashmiris, which is manifested through the politics of azadi and politics of autonomy and a declared proximity to the Indian Union respectively. The demand of Ladakhi Buddhist Association (LBA) for union territory status for Ladakh is a classic case in this respect. In Jammu there is always a reflection of this tendency in the opposition to Kashmiri demand for autonomy. Thus it is the political divergence within the state that gets reflected in the identity politics of Jammu and Ladakh. Unlike the Kashmiri identity politics, political concerns in Jammu and Ladakh do not revolve around the states relationship with the Indian union but revolve around the Kashmir- centric politics of the state and inter-regional and intra-regional relationships. Both in Jammu and Ladakh the political discourse revolves around the issues related to regional deprivation and neglect. It is on this basis that the popular perceptions have been articulated around the notion of regional imbalances and a number of agitations have been organized both in Jammu as well as Ladakh. The politics of regional discontent is multi-layered and encompasses the developmental issues, issues related to the power balances within the state and the larger political and ideological issues related to the political status of the state. It is the ideological stance around the final status of the state that provides

emotional substance the identity politics. In response to the emotive identity politics of Kashmir, an equally emotive response is generated and sought to be presented as Jammu's response representing its divergence from Kashmir politics, which in this context gets linked with the opposition of the Kashmiri identity politics. A reflection of this kind of politics was seen in 1952 agitation launched by Praja Parishad in which the politics of autonomy was opposed under the slogan of *ek vidhan, ek pradhan, ek nishan*. These issues can be singled out in the context of regional politics of deprivation and discrimination, yet very often these overlap with each other.

12. Conclusion

To conclude we can say that identities in Jammu and Kashmir have survived many a challenge and they have co-existed over centuries. However the new challenge remains to reallocate them mainly in their cultural domain. This formulation does not deny them a space in the political domain to play a healthy and progressive role. Thus the political dimension of identities cannot be wished away provided they do not assume divisive political roles. In this respect a big challenge has been before Kashmiri identity due to ongoing turmoil and violence. The accommodative and assimilative edges of Kashmiri identity have been reduced to a state of dormancy. In case these edges are not restored to their original pristine and position, the identity issues are bound to explode in a larger conflict.

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