

# Caught in Tangle<sup>1</sup>

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The intricacy of the conflict situation in J&K is defined not only by intermeshing of the external (India-Pakistan) and internal (Delhi-Kashmir) dimensions but also by the intra-state political divergence. The ethno-national Kashmiri identity politics that remains at the root of the internal context of the conflict does not extend itself to the whole of the state. Beyond the Valley, there are other expressions of identity politics which though operating at different plane, also impinge on the context of conflict. Of these, the most important is Jammu's identity politics which further complicates the internal context of conflict and adds the regional dimension to it.

The identity politics of Jammu is characterised by the demands for reorganisation of power-relations within the State on the one hand and contestation of the ethno-nationalist goals of Kashmiri identity politics, on the other. There is a strong feeling of 'political deprivation' due to its lack of parity with Kashmir region. There is also a deep-rooted perception of neglect due to the high visibility of 'Kashmiri identity politics' and its strategic implications. 'Kashmir' therefore, remains the reference point of the identity politics of Jammu region. The focus on this reference point has become all the more intensified during last two decades of conflict, not merely because of the implications of conflict on Jammu region but also because of political and ideological issues underlying the conflict. In the light of the issues raised and the claims made by the Kashmiri leaders, on behalf of the whole State, Jammu's politics represents the 'other' view point.

It is in this context of conflict, political divergence and the identity politics of Jammu region that the present paper is designed. It focuses on Jammu's relationship with Kashmir with a view to highlight the complexity of internal politics of the state. This is essential not only for a better understanding of the conflict situation but also for conflict-resolution.

## **Regional Identity of Jammu**

Unlike the region of Kashmir which is homogenous, Jammu is a cultural mosaic and represents diversities of varied kinds. These diversities based on religious, linguistic, cultural, tribal and caste categories are so placed that one can see a pattern of multi-layered and overlapping identities. Although the region on the whole has a larger population of Hindus, there are areas which have concentration of Muslims. Of the three geographical belts, two (the twin Poonch-Rajouri districts, and the Doda belt comprised of three districts of Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban) actually have a concentration of Muslim population.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter in Ira Pande (ed), *ATangled Web: Jammu and Kashmir*, Harper Collins, 2011. Pp 152-163 (India Quarterly, VOLUME 37 NUMBERS 3&4)

The religious divide, though important, is not the only basis of identifying people in the region. The linguistic-cultural identities are very significant and cut across the religious boundaries. Apart from 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', people here are also known as Dogras, Punjabis, Poonchi, Baderwahi, Kishtwari, Paharis, Gujjars, etc. Distinctions here are made on the basis of caste, tribe and linguistic categories. Caste is a pre-eminent category having continuity across the religious divide. Not only among the Hindus, but even among the Muslims, the Rajputs form the dominant caste. The Muslim Rajputs like the Hindu Rajputs are mostly endogamous and see themselves as different from other Muslims located in the region. (Malik: 2009, 9) The other distinctive identity of the region is 'tribal' - with fault lines being drawn between 'Gujjars' and 'Paharis'. A hundred percent Muslim community, the Gujjars recognised as Scheduled Tribes (ST) assert their distinct identity by claiming to be the third largest group after Hindus and Muslims. Paharis, both Hindus and Muslims meanwhile are demanding the ST status. (Puri: 2001)

What is remarkable about this region is its mixed society and its shared linguistic cultural bonds. It is these bonds which define the broader contours of the regional identity of Jammu and distinguish it from other two regions of the state – Kashmir and Ladakh. Mixed society is a way of life in this region with Hindus and Muslims sharing spaces – not only socio-cultural but also religious. Numerous Sufi shrines all over the region (many of them in Jammu city itself) that are thronged by people across the religious divide have interesting background narratives linking them to both the communities. (Dewan, 2007, 96) Apart from this, there is the linguistic and cultural bonding. Dogri, Pahari and Gojri and Punjabi – the four major languages of the region, though distinct, have a relationship of continuity. Speaker of any one of these languages can understand the other three languages. There are also common festivals as well as the marriage rituals.

It is this context of diversity and plurality on the one hand and common socio-cultural and linguistic bonds on the other, which makes Jammu distinct from Kashmir region. Both Hindus as well as Muslims feel culturally more bonded with each other rather than with their co-religionists of Kashmir region.

### **Background to Jammu's relationship with Kashmir**

Jammu's relationship with Kashmir, though historically defined by the legacy of the Treaty of Amritsar has taken definite turn in the post-1947 period. The significance of the Treaty of Amritsar lies in the transfer of control of Kashmir from the Sikhs to the Dogra rulers and the formation of the modern state of J&K. Prior to that there was no common history of the two regions. However, even while administrative unity of the state was achieved during the Dogra rule, in political terms, the two regions continued to remain distinct. The evolution of the political consciousness in Kashmir that took the form of the political movement against the Dogra ruler remained, more or less confined to Kashmir region. Except for a brief period from 1932 to 1938 when the Muslims of both the regions were brought under the common platform of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, the political responses of the two regions remained quite different. With the conversion of Muslim Conference into the

National Conference in 1939, the Muslims of the two regions were politically divided between Kashmir-based National Conference and the Jammu-based Muslim Conference.

The Accession of the State with India on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1947 marked a shift in the internal power structure within the state. The dynastic rule of the Dogra monarch was replaced by the popular rule represented by the National Conference.<sup>2</sup> The National Conference, though a popular party of Kashmir, did not have similar base of support and legitimacy in Jammu as it enjoyed in Kashmir.<sup>3</sup> The anti-feudal movement that had captured the imagination of the mass of Kashmiris had not much impact in this region. There was, in fact, no political voice representing the impoverished and oppressed masses of Jammu mostly belonging to the dalit and backward classes.

Jammu's politics therefore came to represent the interest of those who were till now privileged and were now faced with the threat of loss of their position of advantage. Other than the official patronage, state employment and other benefits that they feared to lose in the changed political dispensation, it was the aggressive land reform programme of the National Conference that was a matter of grave concern to them. With a view to ameliorate the condition of the oppressed peasantry, the National Conference had decided to eliminate the intermediaries, abolish the big estates and place ceiling on the land holdings. It had also taken the decision to redistribute the land so acquired to the actual tiller without much financial burden.

Though the economic policies of the National Conference were based on the sound principles of economic justice to the oppressed sections of society, these had definite regional implications. Due to historical and political reasons linked with the process of acquisition of Kashmir by the Dogra rulers in 1846, most of the land within the state was in the possession

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<sup>2</sup> Jammu underwent lot of turbulence in 1947. Apart from the communal massacres, there was the tribal invasion and localised rebellion in parts of Poonch. The effect of all these developments was to be seen in the division of Jammu region; drawing of a long border in the form of Line of Control; and demographic change on both the sides. With a large number of Muslim killings and their migration to the other side of LoC and Pakistan, Jammu region on the Indian side now became a Hindu-majority region, though with substantial minority of Muslims. The region on the other side of LoC meanwhile was divested of its Hindu population and was soon turned into a fully-Muslim area. Jammu's population, especially in the areas close to the LoC now had a large number of Hindu refugees both from the other side of the LoC as well as from West Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Being the Muslim-majority region before 1947, Jammu's politics was dominated by the Muslim Conference which had its leanings towards the Muslim League. RSS was the other political formation that had its influence in the Hindu-dominated areas of the region. Though there was some presence of Congress as well National Conference, however, both these organisations lacked in their influence. Though, it was the proximity of the region with Punjab that both the Muslim League as well as the RSS could be entrenched in the region, there were local reasons for it as well. The Muslim elite was divided on regional lines in 1939 when the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was converted into the National Conference. Belonging mostly to the landed class, the Muslim leadership of Jammu was not very keen on the radical and secular goals of the National Conference and therefore soon revived the Muslim Conference with explicit allegiance with the Muslim League. The RSS also meanwhile found Jammu, especially the Hindu-dominated towns, a fertile ground for its politics – especially in the context of the support that it could find among the dominant landed elite and other privileged sections feeling threatened by the radical politics of National Conference.

either of the Dogra Rajputs or the Kashmiri Pundits. A small class of Kashmiri Muslims also possessed land, but most of Kashmiris were either landless peasants or the artisans. In the context of the regional divide in the land-relations, the Kashmiri Muslim peasantry was the largest beneficiary of the reforms while the landed class of Jammu had to bear the biggest loss. It is not to say that the peasantry in Jammu was not benefitted by land reforms. They also became the owners of land, however, there was substantial number of land owners who were dispossessed and were therefore resentful of the developments. What irked them the most was the absence of provision of compensation – a provision followed in most of other Indian states.

It was in this context that Jammu's vocal politics came to take issues with Kashmir's dominant politics. Article 370 guaranteeing Autonomy to the State was seen not merely as an arrangement to suit the interest of Kashmiris but also as an instrument for depriving Jammu of its share of power and economic resources. In the absence of any other kind of political mobilisation, Jammu's regional politics was appropriated by the entrenched sections. They sought to voice their class-based responses as the grievances of Jammu region as a whole. The inability of the National Conference to evolve a mass-base or an effective local leadership in this region, helped in this process.

Not having much footing in this region, the National Conference could not evolve sensitivity towards the peculiarities of Jammu resulting in the discontent of many who were not necessarily the most affluent ones. Even within the landed class there were those placed in the infertile 'kandi' belt who were treated at par with the owners of the fertile land (mostly in Kashmir and a part of Jammu region bordering with west Pakistan). For them the ceiling limit which was kept in view of the fertile land of Kashmir, was too severe. There were also a large number of Dogra Rajputs who were earlier part of the State Army but were now demobilised. Additionally there were the local traders who had to face the brunt of new policies of control and regulations.

In this situation of wide-ranging feelings of discontent, the forces inimical to the idea of special constitutional status were able to problematise Jammu's relationship with Kashmir. The Hindu Rightist organisations active in the urban areas of the region, especially in the Hindu-dominated belt, contested Article 370 and launched a major agitation in 1952 under the banner of the Praja Parishad.

The contestation of Article 370 was to define one streak of Jammu's politics for the times to come. This streak of politics though did not necessarily incorporate the whole range of Jammu's political responses and remained limited to the urban centres of the Hindu-dominated areas of the region, however, reflected the deep-rooted political and ideological divide between the two regions.

This divide reflective of the different political legacies of the two regions, needed to be bridged in the post-1947 period. However, the conflict situation in which the state got engulfed right from the very beginning, made the process of bridging difficult. As Kashmir remained encapsulated in the issue of its own identity vis-à-vis the Indian State, the political

divide between the two regions continued to manifest itself in one form or the other.<sup>4</sup> While Kashmir's politics went through various phases of assertion of ethno-nationalist politics and contestation of Kashmir's relationship with Delhi, Jammu's politics continued to be defined by the inter-regional issues.

### **Regional Discontent and the Discourse of Regional Discrimination**

Throughout the post-Accession period, 'Kashmir' has continued to be the focal point of Jammu's dominant politics and 'regional discrimination' has remained its major political discourse. As per this discourse, popularised at the commonsensical level, there are regional imbalances within the State. While 'Kashmir' dominates, 'Jammu' is neglected.

The discourse of regional discrimination is so deep rooted in the political psyche of Jammu that it has become the basis of many agitations.<sup>5</sup> After the 1952 Praja Parishad agitation, Jammu witnessed two major agitations in mid-sixties and late seventies respectively. More recently, Amarnath land row saw eruption of Jammu in a major agitation.<sup>6</sup> Although this agitation took place around the issue of 'hurt sentiments of faith', the reason as to why this agitation gained popularity, led to unprecedented popular mobilisation and could be sustained for a prolonged period of more than two months – was mainly because of the deep-rooted feeling of 'regional deprivation'. (Chowdhary: 2008)

The politics of regional discontent is multi-layered and emanates from three kinds of issues: firstly, the developmental issues; the issues related to the power balances within the State; and the issues related to the conflict situation.

As regard the development issues, there is a general perception in Jammu that in the matters of planning, distribution of resources, state jobs and educational opportunities – the 'Kashmir-centric' governmental machinery of the state discriminates against the region. The feeling remains strong not only in the urban centres of the Hindu-dominated belt of the region which has often erupted over issues of regional discrimination, but also in the backward and far-flung areas where lack of development is attributed to the 'neglect' of the region by the 'Kashmiri rulers'.<sup>7</sup> There is, for instance, a very strong feeling in the Doda and Poonch-

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the period between 1953 and 1975 when Kashmiris were mobilised in favour of the demand of 'plebiscite' under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, Jammu was not impacted by it. Except for some areas adjoining Kashmir in the Doda belt, there was not much presence of Plebiscite Front in Jammu region.

<sup>5</sup> Many of these agitations have been followed by Commissions to enquire into the issue of 'regional discrimination'. Gajendargadkar Commission and the Sikri Commission are the two well known ones.

<sup>6</sup> The politics of regional divide has been boosted by the enlargement of the middle classes both in Jammu as well as in Kashmir. There is this peculiar context of the state's economy which while being flushed with money is simultaneously defined by its perpetual status of dependency with no source of employment other than the government jobs. The artificially enlarged state sector therefore not only becomes the source of intense competition but also a terrain for regional contestation.

<sup>7</sup> The Muslim-dominated areas of Jammu region share a kind of antagonism against the 'Kashmir-dominated' structure of power. For the backwardness and marginalisation that the people of these areas suffer, both the political elite of Jammu as well as of Kashmir are held responsible. Despite their identification with the

Rajouri belt that within the 'Kashmir-centric' tourism policy, the tourist potential of this belt is being totally undermined. (Chowdhary, 2010)

However, though development issues have often found central space in the political discourse of regional deprivation, it is actually the issues related to the power balance within the state that remain at the core of the regional identity politics. The power politics of the state till very recently had been so organised that it drew its support from the Kashmir region only. Due to the single party dominance on the one hand and the homogenised response of Kashmir in favour of the dominant party, the power has been mainly held by the Kashmir-based political elite with merely a token presence of Jammu's political elite. The exclusion of the regional elite from the power politics resulted in the perpetual politicization of the issue of regional discrimination. This position has recently changed with the era of coalition politics. Fragmentation of Kashmiri political responses and its regional politics being divided between two parties People's Democratic Party and National Conference has brought Jammu for the first time in the power scenario. Since 2002, Jammu's political elite have been having a greater share in power politics of the state. This however rather than subsiding down the feeling of regional deprivation has further sharpened the demand for regional parity.<sup>8</sup> Almost every political party having a sphere of influence in the region has been raising the issue of regional deprivation and demanding some sort of political re-arrangement.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the politics of regional discontent is related to the conflict situation. Conflict situation has two kinds of impact on Jammu's perceptions. First, it generates a feeling of 'political neglect' of the region. Since 1947 the Kashmir-specificity of the conflict has resulted in the national and international focus on the Valley. The political arrangements that are suggested by the Centre for the state are generally in response to the political demands being made from within the region of Kashmir. Though these responses have failed to satisfy the people in Kashmir, these have generated adverse responses in Jammu since these are seen to be imposed on the region irrespective of any sensitivity to the local demands. The lack of negotiability of the political elite of the region in the broader context of conflict or the Centre-State relations has gradually resulted in a perception that the region is being

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Kashmiri culture, the people even of the Kashmiri belt of Doda, emphasise their marginalisation by claiming their position within the words 'and' in the nomenclature of the state 'Jammu and Kashmir' – arguing that they fit neither in Jammu nor in Kashmir as they are ignored by the elite of both the regions.

<sup>8</sup> The urge for regional parity has led to the demand for delimitation. It is argued that Jammu is not appropriately represented within the Legislative Assembly and a fair delimitation would increase the share of seats of this region.

<sup>9</sup> The power-imbalance between the two regions has been acknowledged as the major reason of discontent by Gajendargadkar Commission. The Commission observed that "even if all the matters were equitably settled, we feel that there would still be a measure of discontent.... In fact, we consider that the main cause of irritation and tension is the feeling of political neglect and discrimination, real or imaginary from which certain regions of the state suffer." It therefore recommended that "a convention should be established that if the Chief Minister belongs to one region, there should be a Deputy Chief Minister belonging to other region. By another convention, the number of cabinet ministers belonging to the regions should be equal." The Report of the Jammu and Kashmir Commission of Enquiry, December 1968, pp. 96-102

politically neglected both by the power centre within the State as well as in the Centre. There is a feeling that in all political negotiations that are undertaken to address the Kashmir problem, Jammu is taken for granted and the political arrangements are imposed on this region.

Second, conflict leads to larger political and ideological issues related to the political status of the state. The Kashmir-specificity of conflict has strong political stance vis-à-vis the relationship of the State with India which is not shared either by the elite or masses of Jammu region. To begin with, this stance did not reflect antagonistic relationship between Kashmiri and Indian nationalism. Even so, the element of specificity generated antagonistic response in Jammu region which needed to be handled in a politically astute manner both by the political leadership of the State as well as the national leadership. The challenge at that time was big enough – to respond to the Kashmiri urge for distinct identity by providing the special constitutional status for the state and at the same time to help produce consent for this arrangement within Jammu region. The challenge has become bigger now since there is an aggressive politics of Kashmiri identity which seeks to place Kashmiri nationalism in an antagonistic relationship with Indian nationalism. In the interplay of competitive nationalisms, the regional response of Jammu therefore, is also informed by an emphatic assertion of Indian nationalism as a means for contestation of Kashmiri nationalism. The pronounced distance from Kashmiri political discourse – not only the discourse of ‘Azadi’ but also that of ‘Autonomy’, and a desire for proximity to the Centre – is a reflection of this response. The discourse of Autonomy, rather than being perceived in the ‘Centre-state’ paradigm, is seen within the ‘nationalist’ paradigm and therefore portrayed not merely as anti-Jammu but also as ‘anti-national’.

### **Political Divergence and the need for Consensus**

The political divergence between Jammu and Kashmir has become more perceptible during last two decades of conflict.<sup>10</sup> As separatist politics has emerged the dominant response of the Valley, it has sharpened the identity politics in Jammu region leading to three different kinds of discourses – all emanating from the consciousness of political divergence vis-à-vis

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9. Due to its ethno-nationalist basis, the conflict situation as it manifests in the Valley of Kashmir, does not extend it to the larger parts of Jammu. The only areas which show some political congruity with Kashmir’s politics are those adjoining to the Valley in the Doda belt, largely inhabited by Kashmiri-speaking people. But even here one can see a sharp difference in the political responses. Though armed militancy affected this area in a big way, as it did in the Muslim-dominated districts of Poonch and Rajouri, with proliferation of militant organisations with many local recruits, the separatist politics that swayed the Valley of Kashmir, was not to be seen here in the same manner. Though there remained a general sense of empathy in these areas for the sufferings of their co-religionists in Kashmir, yet the intensity underlying the politics of Azadi was generally missing.

For details see, Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Pathways to Peace*, 2003; Lov Puri, ‘Insurgency in Jammu Region’, <http://www.prembhatriatrust.com/Lov%20puri.pdf>

the goals of Kashmiri politics. At one level, the discourse of regional autonomy has sharpened. Simultaneously with the intensification of the demand for *azadi* in the Valley, there has been an intensification of the regional and sub-regional demands. The demand for 'regional autonomy' has gained ascendancy during the last two decades with almost all the political parties making commitments for it in one form or the other. Demands have also been articulated for sub-regional autonomy in the form of demands for Hill Councils.

At another level, the discourse for re-organisation of the state with the demand of separation of Jammu from Kashmir has gained ascendancy. This demand articulated in the form of 'trifurcation' of the state (with two states of Jammu and Kashmir each and Union Territory for Ladakh) is supported by RSS and has sympathisers among the local BJP cadre. It has an emotional appeal though quite limited to the urban centres of Hindu dominated areas of the region.

At the third level, the issue of representation has acquired greater salience. (Chowdhary, 2007) Despite the specificity and exclusivity of Kashmir's separatist politics, it seeks to make claims for the whole state. However, these claims are contested within Jammu region. What is however interesting is the assertion of multiple identities and articulation of multiple claims in this region. Besides the regional claims, there are sub-regional claims; the claims of various kinds of displaced people including the 1947 displaced from the Pakistan administered Kashmir, the West Pakistan refugees, the war-time border-displaced people and the displaced Kashmiri Pundits; the claims of the tribal communities like the Gujjars and Paharis. (Chandran: 2007)

In the context of these responses, Jammu provides a big challenge to the conflict resolution. Despite the fact that the roots of conflict lie in Kashmir, the solution cannot come unless an internal consensus within the state is evolved and Jammu is involved in the process. The other alternative is division of the state. However, division is bound to complicate the situation further – for the simple reason that such a division would unleash the communal forces and instead of ethnic-regional divide between Kashmir and Jammu region, it would end up being the religious divide between the 'Muslim' Kashmir and 'Hindu' Jammu. The communal fault line would be specially drawn in the Muslim majority areas of Jammu region – both the Doda belt as well as the Poonch Rajouri belt. Already there is an ongoing discourse which seeks to simplistically deal with the issue of political divergence by dividing the state on religious lines and merging the Muslim dominated areas of Jammu region with Kashmir. This would not only go against the plural ethos of the region as well as the state, but would actually create a partition-like situation particularly in the areas which are mixed and living harmoniously so far. (Sammadar, 2004, 96)

Keeping the state integrated is not only a politically expediency but also a political value in the state. Despite the political divergence, there is a general agreement within the state that the state should not be divided and religion should not become the basis of solution of conflict. The plurality of the state is treasured across the regional, cultural and religious divide.

However, to maintain the integrity of the state, it is important to confront the political divergence, acknowledge the limits of the exclusivity of any kind of identity politics and evolve some political consensus about the future of the state. This requires a much-needed internal dialogue involving the political actors in both the regions. Jammu as Balraj Puri argues is a 'clue to Kashmir tangle'. (Puri, 1966, 1983) Till the time the issue of Jammu's relationship with Kashmir is not sorted out, it may not be possible to resolve the Kashmir conflict. The peace process and internal dialogue may not attain much progress till the inter-regional layer is added to it.

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