

# PDP-BJP Alliance: A Precarious Coalition

*A Study of the popular perception in Kashmir Valley*

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## Politics determine who has the power not who has the truth – Paul Krugman

The idea of power in itself could be so overwhelming that it could bring two headstrong ideologies on par, each trying to fit itself with the other. A manifestation of such a fact is revealed to us by the current juncture of J&K's new government formation. The new government has come up with an unfamiliar alliance between PDP and BJP. It is in this frame of reference that our organization, **Peoples Pulse, a Hyderabad based research organization** conducted a research in the last week of March 2015 to survey the prevalent political atmosphere amongst the masses on the emergence of the fresh alliance.

### Methodology

This section lays out a brief on how the study was designed and conducted. The research group probed 5 districts as its sample population, which covered North Kashmir, South Kashmir and Central Kashmir. The districts investigated include District Baramulla, District Kupwara, District Pulwama, District Anantanag and District Srinagar. The selection of survey sample was random with a diverse horizon of people across the age groups including daily wage laborers, traders, teachers, farmers, tea sellers, women, unemployed youth, bat sellers, tailors, students, drivers, advocates, engineers, political activists. The method of survey was built on a semi-structured questionnaire. The questions were constructed in a manner to keep them opinion based. Questions were kept close as well as open ended. The language used in the questionnaire was kept familiar to the respondent to make them feel casual.

### Introduction

#### What do elections mean in a conflict zone

To understand the electoral politics in Kashmir one needs to contextualize the election process as one embedded in a conflict-ridden place. A conflict-ridden state offers an open-ended platform for politics where political terrain is so dynamic that allegiances can switch effortlessly. Elections in Kashmir receive a lot of attention and scrutiny from India, especially from the political parties and the media, be it article 370, AFSPA, PSA etc. Year 2014 Valley voted again for the Assembly Elections from November 25- December 20 in 5 phases. However the fact that remains to be understood is this: what do elections stand for in a conflict place. Is the idea restricted to address the never addressed issues of water, electricity, roads, unemployment and this time floods. If yes then how do we frame the larger questions of Self-rule, sometimes Azadi, even election boycotts, demilitarization etc.

#### Facts and Figures of State Assembly Elections 2014

An intriguing question to open with would be the Alliance formation of PDP with BJP. In other words J&K state for the first time witnessed the entry of BJP in its power politics. In the election of December 2014, the verdict came out as a fractured one. While PDP emerged as the largest single party winning 28 seats, BJP positioned itself second in the row, winning 25 seats. It's not difficult to guess that BJP secured most of its seats from the Hindu majority Jammu region of the state. BJP contested 36 assembly seats from Kashmir

province, which includes 33 from Kashmir Valley, and 03 from Ladhak Division. However BJP lost all its deposit of seats it contested here. PDP won 03 seats from Jammu region, rest from the valley.

The recent elections offer an array of uncertain occurrences in the political terrain of Kashmir valley.

1. The **primary question** is what made the Kashmiris to vote in such large numbers. I quote Deputy Election Commissioner Vinod Zutshi, where he says that the over all polling percentage in J&K is *"historic and unprecedented"*. How would one explain the unexpected voter turn out in valley? Elections took place in the dismal state of affairs where the valley was hit by massive floods. Where the people of valley were largely left to themselves by almost all mainstream parties to grapple with the severe Jhelum waters; it was in middle of such an untimely rough patch that elections took place and surprisingly people came out in exceptional numbers to vote. How much the credit for the high voter turnout can be ascribed to the development and good governance agenda or to the idea of keeping BJP at bay in valley can be debated to a good deal. What type of issues prompted the masses to come out and vote in such vast figures needs to be considered to read through the 2014 Assembly election results.
2. **Secondly** an important question to ponder over is what made the separatist leadership to reconsider their election boycott call. Where eventually they withdrew much of their pressure for the implementation of the boycott call. The explanation forwarded by the Hurriyat leadership was that strictly holding to the boycott call as they usually do, this time might help BJP mobilize its support base from their Migrant Pundits voters more. The sizeable migrant population includes segments like Habba Kadal, Amira Kadal, Sopore, Tral, Bijbehara and Anantanag. Realizing that the boycott call would do more harm than good, by giving BJP an edge in elections, Hurriyat leadership finally decided not to implement it rigorously as they usually do.

An interesting side to this election process which brought some sort of engrossment amongst masses, political parties and media as well, was the fact that the elections were taking place in a quadrilateral space where NC was till that point, the three generation ruling party (though with much damage done by it to its popular claim of being liked in the state), PDP, as the main opposition party, Congress, losing all its appeal nation wide and BJP, the emerging party with a renewed popular charm across nation, all set to build itself up in the Muslim majority. It is in such a backdrop that one has to make sense of the numbers and then interpret the success and failure of the political parties.

### **PDP's sweep of votes**

PDP came forward first time on the political front of J&K politics in the 2002 Assembly elections, with Mufti Mohammad Syed as its leader. He has today gone a long way since he made his statement that *"Kashmiri militants don't need guns anymore because their representatives are in the assembly"* in early 2000. The point, which needs a mention here is that PDP under Mufti, is acknowledged with offering an alternative to meet the regional aspirations of the people of J&K. Some of the important features of his term from 2002-2005 include:

- Healing touch policy
- Self Rule, which includes softening of borders, trans Kashmir trade, Cross LOC trade, no passport requirement between two parts of Kashmir.

- Tightening of Special Task Force (STF) and Ikhwanis
- Reducing excessive bureaucracy etc.

This popular memory of PDP has played an important role in letting PDP grab the numbers it did in this assembly election. Another big reason that has accounted for PDP's victory is the failure of National Conference (NC). The floods not only devastated the valley but along with it was devastated the recently replaced party, NC. The non-performance of NC throughout its term especially during the unprecedented floods became a favorable moment for PDP to avail NC's weak leadership to its advantage.

### What was new in the 2014 State Assembly Elections

This was the appearance of the BJP. For the first time in the trouble torn state BJP had become so pertinent. BJP which has famed its name by being a part of RSS, seeks to achieve a Hindu Nation. Which has become more visible since the associated organizations of BJP have been vigorously taking up the communal projects as Gita being the national book, Godse being the nationalist, aggressive Ghar Wapsi campaign etc. Here the point of enquiry is how a Muslim majority state would take the coming in power of such a party. Also what is unusual is how a party like BJP comes to power in the Muslim majority state and how the Muslims of the state take it.

During the last Assembly elections in 2008, BJP had won 11 seats from its Hindu dominated belt Jammu. It's for the first time it has reached the number 25. BJP certainly has used some strategies to make inroads in the state this time. First, BJP soon after its landslide success at center launched its Mission 44+. Second, it was convinced of a favorable result from Jammu and Ladakh, the two regions that held their support to BJP during the Lok Sabha elections 2014. It therefore tried to move to the valley to capture its support base in form of Migrant Pundit voters.

Whatsoever be the reasons for the two remarkably distinct ideologies to come together in power, the crucial rather settling question, which now the valley struggles with is: *how the Alliance between the two parties will be judged by the people of valley and what deductions can be drawn in expectation of the future of the alliance.*

### Aim of the Survey

The Alliance, which is just a month old in J&K politics, is already exhausted by a series of contentious debates week after week, largely coming from PDP. Be it Mufti praising Pakistan, militants and the separatist leadership in valley for allowing free elections, return of Afzal Guru's remains, release of Masrat Alam or even the State Flag controversy, what remains to be seen is how the already strained alliance will overcome such controversies to ensure a stable government to the already trouble torn state.

The multitude of events cropping up in a time span as concise as a month has eventually amounted to a confused and conflictual feeling amongst the people of valley. To catch this *politics of the moment* within the people, Peoples Pulse decided to conduct the survey. The study focuses to bring out the grievances of people and how the government should address them. The research also intends to contribute to policy making.

### Popular Viewpoint towards the New Alliance

***People as a whole in most parts of Kashmir valley are favorably taking the PDP-BJP Alliance on a constructive note.***

Framing the above viewpoint, a number of assumptions can be made like, the PDP-BJP alliance is an *unholy alliance* or as some may say the alliance is actually a *people's alliance*. However what matters on ground is how the alliance is perceived currently by the masses in the valley. How they see the subsequent years of the alliance needs to be interpreted.

## Srinagar

Srinagar evoked a resistant response as far as the alliance formation is concerned. People here don't seem to be giving much acceptability to the clubbed ideologies. Where an engineer from South Srinagar, which is also referred to as uptown, considering politics to be uninteresting and dirty, says, "*the Alliance is good for nothing*". Though admitting that much cannot be said about the government since its too early, people in this part of Srinagar mostly believe that the Alliance is playing a prank with masses. BJP cannot deliver good governance. The alliance in allocation of funds between Jammu and Kashmir will be biased towards the valley, giving more funds to Jammu. A Senior Law Officer in South Srinagar sees BJP not only as a Hindu Party but also as one which discriminates and dominates the minorities, therefore a potential threat to valley. People here seem to be giving acceptability to the alliance on two grounds:

- *It is accepted in valley since it is in alliance with a state party whose leader is the Chief Minister for the six year term*
- *People accept the alliance since BJP is also at the center, which would mean vis-à-vis BJP, PDP can maintain good relations with center for better development of J&K.*

Also what came through while probing the above questions amongst the masses was that many people felt that PDP has betrayed them by forming such an alliance. Recalling the Gujarat massacre, people feel that the Alliance is not good for Kashmir. Further a more rigid opinion comes from the younger section of society, especially students, from the North Kashmir, Downtown area of Srinagar. Here the youth though not firmly against the Alliance voice the fact that they in no sense feel related to BJP. A young student in her 12<sup>th</sup> standard expresses her dislike for the Alliance saying, "*BJP is a Hindu party. We share our Kalima with PDP. PDP-NC Alliance would have been the best for valley since they are regional parties and know our problems better*".

## South Kashmir

In South Kashmir, we surveyed District Pulwama and District Anantanag. The prevailing sentiment was that people mostly didn't support BJP but wouldn't mind to see it in alliance with PDP if it promises them a good governance and development. The commonly quoted understanding by people for not associating themselves with BJP, which further is explained by BJP not winning a single seat from Valley in the recent State Assembly Election, is the fact that BJP conducted massacres in Gujarat. People here often cite the social media be it Facebook or YouTube as the proof to show the activeness of the party in the Ghar Wapsi Campaign of RSS. People find the party to be Anti Muslim. However much of their acceptability comes from the fact that they find BJP good for development. A Kashmiri pundit from District Anantanag says, "*BJP has a communal image here. Since it is their first chance in Valley, to correct their perception amongst people they should focus on development*".

## North Kashmir

However a very striking response came from North Kashmir. The three districts we surveyed in the region largely seem to be not only liking the alliance but also are fairly happy with it. Indicating that the Alliance would do well with lesser chances of a major clash happening between the two blocs, people here want the alliance to sustain for its given six years so that it does address the grievances of people. People here do find the nature of alliance different, considering the fact that BJP is a Hindu party to them. But what steers this part of Kashmir more than the ideologies of the two parties is the fact that they want government, whichever ideology it holds on to, perform well for the masses. People want the alliance to engage with their disarrayed heaps of problems be it the crucial issue of youths unemployment, the fact that the state which supplies electricity to the North of India is left in darkness for greater part of the year, the issue of water, price rise, negligent attitude of government towards roads etc. However what also needs to be stated here is that most of the people though accept BJP in power but their acceptability rests on the big fact that people would credit BJP to political power only when it appears in an alliance with a state party.

## Kashmiri Pundits

As far as the Kashmiri pundits of the valley are concerned, all expressed their support to BJP'S coming to power. However what many Pundits especially the one's settled in Pundit Camps expressed was that PDP in power wouldn't help the Pundits at all.

### BJP and the promise of development

***Much of the approval people of Kashmir have entrusted in BJP as a party to the current Alliance comes from the fact that PDP vis-à-vis BJP can maintain good relations with center, thereby creating development and better governance in the State***

## Srinagar

Nearly all the political parties turned up with statements about BJP making hollow promises to the people of J&K. With much of BJP's development slogan considered as a sheer rhetoric by political parties, the type of apprehensions people retain for the alliance in general and BJP in particular would be meaningful. The people in Srinagar line up with the remark that the alliance because it has BJP as a co-partner will sway in favor of Jammu. An important justification is that since majority of Kashmir didn't vote for BJP, the seats it garnered were from Jammu. Which would perhaps explain the prejudice of the party.

## South Kashmir

Moving towards South Kashmir, the viewpoint shifts a little with most of the people expecting the Alliance to function well and fulfill its agenda of development. People came up with grievances of electricity, water, and unemployment. They wanted the new government to provide them incentives.

## North Kashmir

Advancing North Kashmir we evidenced the growing confidence and trust of people in the new government. People here in advance have expressed their acceptance to the alliance by welcoming the new schemes and programs of the government. A person at a teashop in Uri, Salamabad, expresses his liking over the new budget saying that it is good for farmers. He further says, "*we have no problem with BJP, if it works for development. We like the schemes such as Kisan Credit Card for farmers*". Similarly the traders, laborers and drivers in Uri,

expected the new government to deliver good governance. One of them said, “ *Today people want work, development. No one is concerned with religion. If BJP works well, we will vote for it*”. According to these people the reason National Conference failed to make it in the elections was because they didn’t address the issue of unemployment, corruption increased during NC’s term, extension for two years in government service made NC lose core votes from the youth in the valley. Some farmers even said, “ *Since BJP has won at center, we think that it now represents not only Hindus but also Muslims*”. Many women in Watergam village, District Baramulla, expressed liking for the alliance by saying that they were happy with the alliance. The state government has given them money for embroidery/ sewing centers. In the same village some men told us that the new alliance was better than the previous government. In the new government they are seeing a lot of work being done. Daily wagers are being made permanent. For regularization of the servicing of 61000 daily wagers government of J&K has ordered formation of one high power cabinet committee under the chairmanship of Deputy Chief Minister. The committee has been given the powers to come up with the recommendations for regularization of services of these 61000 daily wagers. Also as far as child care is concerned, in the budget speech Finance minister Haseeb Drabu announced the welfare scheme for girl child under which the state government would contribute Rs 1000 per month on behalf of every new born girl child from April for the next 14 years. The people here expect the new Alliance to take up the issue of unemployment, which according to the people is the main issue. A common complaint was that being crucial for the power production in Northern India, our place is deprived of electricity. A Computer Assistant in Rafiabad, District Baramullah complained, “*I am a Computer Assistant but here we have no electricity, so I sit idle for the whole day. This leads to frustration*”. Accompanying on related note Sopore that is famed as Syed Ali Shah Geelani’s space too communicated their support to the BJP programs like Jan Dhan Yojna, Swachh Bharat etc. With a similar nature of problems as unemployment, price rise etc. Sopore too wanted the alliance to work for the stacked problems state is in.

## **PDP: Its Controversies**

***Popular perception mostly sees the issues raised by PDP not as controversies; rather people appreciated and justified most of the steps taken by PDP in general and Mufti Mohammad Syed in particular.***

A considerable share of the new governments first month in power was exhausted in a sweep of controversies week after week. Be it the fact that Mufti Mohammad Syed while taking the oath credited Pakistan, the militants and the Hurriyat for allowing peaceful elections in the state or the release of Masrat Alam, be it the State Flag controversy or claiming the remains of Afzal Guru.

## **Srinagar**

In Srinagar people mainly think that the rationale for Mufti Mohammad Syed to air such heated borderline debates was to tone down the anger and annoyance amongst people who felt let down when PDP formed an alliance with BJP. Mufti touched the contentious questions of Alam’s release; Afzal Guru’s remains to regain the earlier confidence people had placed in him and his party, especially the youth. People think that the release of Alam was a good move in way of peace. One of the respondents came up with the view that why and how is India so much bothered about a non-issue of release of Masrat Alam. How does it change anything, be he in or out of the jail. According to the person, India has only fooled Kashmiris. One of the students from downtown considers Alam to be innocent. Further expresses her opinion by saying “*We Kashmiris are always targeted as terrorists. For me India is a terrorist*”. On the issue of Afzal Guru principal of higher secondary school in Srinagar says, “*It was a tragedy. Everything in it was wrong. BJP*

*has an important role in pressurizing Congress to hang Guru". Largely people hold the view that hanging Guru showed the double standards of Government of India, saying, "Bechara beghuna phansi chad gaya".*

### South Kashmir

Going through South Kashmir one could acquire an almost similar position on PDP and the controversies it hit immediately after being in power. Where a Qahwa seller expressed his support for Mufti raising such controversies, few farmers on the other hand denied the fact that it was a controversy raised by Mufti. Believing that Mufti credited Pakistan with praises was placed in the larger reason of Mufti wanting a peaceful dialogue with Pakistan and Hurriyat, as part of his policy rather than hitting a controversy to increase militancy. The simple reason the people here felt was behind Mufti's mention of Pakistan and militants, on the oath taking ceremony was that Pakistan, Militants and Hurriyat didn't create any trouble in the election process this time. As far as Alam's release and claiming of Afzal Guru's remains is concerned, the people were sure in saying that it was the right thing to do.

### North Kashmir

Surveying in North Kashmir we figured out that people here consider Mufti as a political master man. Making a reference to the controversies the people here say that these were brought up by PDP to keep people happy. Mufti praised Pakistan, Hurriyat and Militants because they didn't intrude in the election process this time. People seem to justify the logical basis of such an act by Mufti, by saying, *"what is wrong in it"*. According to people it doesn't justify that the CM is pro-Hurriyat or such a statement would lead to increase in Militancy. One of the respondents in Sopore said, *"what leads to strengthening of Militancy is not Mufti's crediting militants but it is the presence of Army here"*. The anger within people over the issue of Afzal Guru was more evidenced here. With people coming up with statements like, *" If India doesn't consider Bhagat Singh a terrorist (after his attack on Parliament), why Guru?" "They did same to Maqbool Bhat". "Why was Guru hanged when he was 28<sup>th</sup> on the list, why wasn't his family informed?" "India would never give us justice"*. Similar views were expressed on release of Alam, who seems to be largely supported by people. People here also registered their view by saying that other political prisoners should also be released.

### Kashmiri Pundits

Pundits on the issue of Afzal Guru said, *"uski body wapis nahi milni chahiye kyuki aisa karna terrorist feelings to bhadhawa dega"*. They further said they had a similar opinion on Afzal Guru as larger part of India would hold on him. They concluded the Afzal Guru controversy by saying, *"Afzal Guru is Kashmir's Bhagat Singh, and Hurriyat is their Religious Guru"*.

### Debating differences: Article 370 and AFSPA

***The people of Kashmir had an unshakable confidence that Article 370 can never be removed. On AFSPA the widespread sentiment was that it should be operative in border areas, which are vulnerable to militancy.***

The above issues have never failed to kindle a stir in J&K. Be it the Modi government on the very first day in office coming up with a statement, *"process of repealing article 370 has begun"*. Or Omar Abdullah losing no time, as has been his norm tweeting in response saying, *"Mark my words and save this tweet-long after*



*Modi Government is a distant memory either Jammu & Kashmir won't be part of India or Article 370 will still exist ".*

With the ongoing state of Alliance it would be interesting to assess how people foresee the two positions on Article 370 and AFSPA. Nearly every person we met in Central Kashmir, North Kashmir and South Kashmir held a steadfast perspective on the issues. With most of them saying that article 370 though has been hollowed but is relevant since it carries a lot of *emotional appeal* to people, cannot be scrapped under any possible conditions. They equally registered their point that BJP has no capacity to touch it, and if they do they will lose all support from J&K. The Chief Minister of the state is from Kashmir and has promised the people not to tamper with it. Traders and laborers along the border line expressed their vulnerability of losing their own land if they lose article 370. People in Sopore said, *"there will be massive blood shed if they touch article 370"*. However what was rare to imagine and also surprising was a 12-year-old boy from the same area while supporting article 370 said, *"we won't allow Hindus to buy land. We can't mix with Hindus. They will drive us out"*. On a similar note a middle-aged person from downtown said, *"Duniya ki taqat article 370 ko hata nai sakti. Jo ye hatayeingay, us waqt inquilab aayega"*. Another voice coming from North Kashmir believed that if Article 370 was tampered Kashmir would face a time worse than 2010 **"ragdo ragdo"** movement. The movement actually embarked by the youth, who are popularly referred as the *"conflict children"* of Kashmir, during the 2008 Amarnath Land Row uprising, was a new way of registering dissent. The movement got popular by the cry **"Ragdo Ragdo"**. The youth while encircling each other would raise the slogan **"Ragdo Ragdo Bharat Ragdo"** trampling the Indian Flag. The key message of the slogan was not to shame the Indian Flag but by doing so demonstrate how Kashmiris feel that they are not associated and will never merge with the idea of being Indian.

While on AFSPA we saw some difference of opinion. With Srinagar underscoring the point that AFSPA needs to be removed at any cost and from all areas. North and South Kashmir kept the opinion that though AFSPA should be removed since militancy has gone down. However it should be removed only in areas, which are relatively stable. The most likely explanations we came across for removing AFSPA were the simple facts that Army treats them like dogs. One of the people from Sopore said, *"On our own land we have to carry I-Card. Violence hasn't gone down by army. Here in Kashmir in contrast to Jammu, Army captures an area and reduces it to ashes. Army cannot take the fact that Kashmiris stay in peace. They loot our forest wood (Deodar) in Army convoys and sell it in Delhi. Here in this land, Army controls everything- police as well as administration"*.

However there was some non-conformity in the opinion of Kashmiri Pundits who didn't migrate and ones who did. While talking to a Pundit, teacher from Mattan, District Anantnag, he told us though how redundant article 370 has become, but still it should not be scrapped. It would continue till the conflict in Kashmir continues. When asked on AFSPA he said, *"it should stay but on border areas only"*.

Juxtaposing it with the view we got from Pundit camp is interesting. In the camp we noticed that the evident way of thinking of Pundits was inclined towards the fact that Article 370 has to be removed. The pronounced reasoning given was that the Hindu population will come here and Pundits therefore will not feel vulnerable. One of the pundits from Veerwan Camp, District Baramulla said, *"Our culture is being eroded in Kashmir. We don't even have havan samaan available here at the local shops"*. We are teased saying, *'Oye! Pundit yahan kya karnay aaye ho'*. When asked on AFSPA, the view amongst the migrant Pundits across Camps was that it should stay. They felt that Army is for protection of both Pundits and Muslims. They further said, *"Army is very good and supportive here. During floods they provided us with water filter"*.

plants. They provided us with Volleyball ground. They sometimes provide water tanks." When asked why then Army is considered as a source of breach and violation. They said, "Why doesn't army suspect or detain any Pundit (as they wont be knowing who is a Pundit or Muslim), why only Muslims, because we don't do anything like that".

What comes across is the plurality of imaginations and inferences in the same community of Pundits. Which is to say, a community like Kashmiri Pundits, which one largely would presuppose to be homogenous in its views on some of the contentious issues be it Article 370 or AFSPA, too splits off. Where the split is not essentially coming from religion but from the simple fact that staying back or migrating has a considerable impact on ones idea of the other community. Perhaps that was the reason the Pundit camp in Nutnussa, District Kupwara despite accepting the fact that the Muslims there don't trouble them say, "*ab who apna pan nai lagta. We can't fill the 25 year old gap*". How would one possibly explain a sentiment as empty as this in the migrant camps? Possibly one of the explanations for the persistence of blank space between the two communities, Migrated Pundits and Muslims, can be the fact that during migration the presence of Muslims as a majority community holding back the idea of trust and the community responsibility towards the minority community was absent. This is not to say that Muslims being in majority were well secured and sheltered. But the simple fact is that Pundits who were a minority were even more defenseless and unshielded. So the idea is not to say who was more wrong than whom, but the simple fact is that when a community is in majority numbers then by nature of such a situation the onus of taking care of the minority sensibilities fall on the majority. Kashmiri Sangharsh Samiti President, Sanjay Tickoo said, "*As far as the community relations are considered we didn't have much cordial relations with the Kashmiri Muslims, throughout. However on the individual level we had the best relations*".

## Democratic State or an Islamic State: Choosing a way out

### ***The larger trend especially in North and South Kashmir indicated a swing towards the islamisation of the state in the popular imagination***

Exploring the alternatives on the idea of state in which Kashmiris would want themselves to situate in, should in essence begin from their outlook of how free rather 'Azad' they think are. Most of them believe that PDP will certainly not lead to increase in militancy or spark out a Pro Pakistan feeling. However many want PDP to think about the question of Azadi. Most of the people admit the fact that they think they are under India's occupation. When asked why they need Azadi, some frequently stated responses were:

- **In Srinagar:** "*Though the idea of Azadi is a debatable question, but I want Azadi because of the insecure mindset, India has created amongst the people of Kashmir*".
- **In North Kashmir:** "*If India can get Azadi from Britishers, we too can get from India*".
- **In Sopore:** "*We are 100% supporting Azadi and Hurriyat. We vote only for sadak, bijli, pani, for the tax we pay. We want Azadi from India for we know it can never deliver us Justice*".

What also needs to be mentioned here is that the people of Kashmir do want Azadi but to them Azadi now doesn't mean bridging their unfinished task of integrating with the bordering country. Settled on the fact that religion ties them with Pakistan, they vitally believe that religion ought not to be the reason to be with Pakistan. According to me, a possible reason may be the fact that Pakistan's future in itself is vacillating under Army, how can it then be then a shelter to a land for which much of the agony has surfaced from Army itself? Some of the drivers close to LOC in Uri said that Pakistan is no option

for them, "*Foj ki marzi mai jo hoga, wohi hoga wahan (in Pakistan)*". They further said "*Since we are drivers, we cross LOC, we observe Pakistan, there is nothing left to that country. The more the trade across LOC shows up, the more people here will get to see real Pakistan. We LOC people know realities better*".

Neither slanting with India nor with Pakistan, the frame within which Kashmiris place themselves is the idea of having an **Independent Kashmir**. However the idea of Independent Kashmir while we surveyed was little intriguing. The people who cite religion as not being one of the reasons for integrating with Pakistan, while formulating their idea of 'Independent Kashmir' largely were seen resorting to the same idea of religion, thereby conceptualizing a homogenized place balancing on idea of Islam. Giving a potential argument that Quran is the solution to all our problems, with justice being an important pillar to Islam people largely showed credence to the idea of Islamic State.

Asked on how would the minorities in the state reside under the idea of Islamic State, many people across regions said that they may follow their own religion and they will be safe. What came across from these statements was the simple fact that for the people upholding the idea of an Islamic state (which was seen to be more prevalent amongst the younger generation) the dividing line between religion and their idea of a state is not settled at one point. Islam rather by promising to be the solution of all their problems becomes open ended hence arrests all possible socio political spaces of the place. However the earlier generation appeared to be in support of a democratic Independent Kashmir. One of the persons, who was in his sixties, expressing his idea of Independent Kashmir said, "*We want friendly relations with India. We want a Secular democratic Kashmir, where people across all regions come here. Neither we want a Taliban state nor a Saudi regime here*".

However taking the perspective of Pundits, they express their vulnerabilities imagining the idea that many Muslims of Valley would like the idea of having an Islamic State. While interviewing the Veerwan Camp, District Baramulla, one of persons who works as a teacher says, " Muslims in Kashmir especially Sunnis want Azadi. Even their imam in mosque would uphold the essence of Azadi to Kashmiris".

### **Kashmiri Muslims on Kashmir Pundits**

***Almost all of the Kashmiri Muslims express their wish for the Pundits to come back to their homeland. However how tolerant their idea of minority rights would be, considering their engrossment with the idea of Islam, is arguable.***

Twenty-five years have slipped by since the original inhabitants of the Kashmir valley are absent from the scene. Whether a forced exodus or a programmed migration is a critical argument that can be considered and further debated. Unfolding the doubts and contestations encumbered on the question, *if Pundits were forced to leave or if it was a self-taken decision* ruptures considering the conflictual impressions the two communities have of the 1990's. However what is the present day conceptualization of Kashmiri Muslims in absorbing Kashmiri Pundits as intrinsic to their idea of *community* and *association* as it was in the heydays of Kashmiriyat is a compelling question. Not only in terms of the possible clashes the present political alliance may face but also in discerning the line of reasoning Kashmiri Muslims would put to use for a community, which is not quintessentially associated with them through Islam.

Almost all Kashmiri Muslims we interviewed unhesitatingly stated the fact that that Pundits were not pressurized by the locals to leave the valley. A commonly cited answer from Kashmir Muslims is that

Pundits left the valley because the then Governor Jagmohan asked them to leave for the moment till he conducted a large-scale massacre of the Kashmiri Muslims. A woman in her sixties in Srinagar said, *"There was no selective targeting of Kashmiri Pundits, agar militant ne grenade phenka wo pundit kay ghar pe bhi phenka aur musalman ke ghar pe bhi"*. Which would mean that the people in Kashmir largely hold the view that during Militancy neither the Muslims nor the pundits were spared from violence.

Also what came across while talking to people was a collective sentiment in Muslims for the Pundits to return back to their own houses in particular and homeland in general with a common expression, *"We are incomplete without Pundits"*. Citing the reasons about their native origin, land, houses and property being in Kashmir, people wanted them to come back. However bordering such a viewpoint we also in places like Sopore came across alternate sentiments which largely were expressed by the younger section of the society. Here some students expressed their view on Pundits saying, *"Pundits should go to their land, their country which is Jammu. Kashmir belongs to Kashmiris (which was meant to be understood as Muslims)"*.

With PDP-BJP Alliance coming up with the proposal on 9 April to create separate zones for the Kashmiri Pundits under the name of *Composite Township*, an interesting thing now comes off. Which is the call for complete shutdown in valley on Saturday, 11 April, from different factions of the Separatist leadership. Opposing the move of the Alliance tooth and nail, the Separatists call it as an RSS ploy to create a divide by producing a *'State within a State'*

Everyone seems to be having a narrative of his own which seems to be well placed in the person's historicity. While the elder generations would give you a testimony to the yesteryears of Kashmiriyat, at the same time some sections of the younger lot through their sweeping imagination of Kashmir as Muslim land would tell you how the imagination of a Sufi Islam is slowly being metamorphosed into a religion which is so comprehensively self-absorbed and inward looking.

## Conclusion

The current political alliance might have to settle many more scores as far as the ideology of the two camps is concerned. However what needs to be seen is the simple straightforward fact of how despite the major disagreement of position on some of the major issues, the two associates to the Alliance, by abiding the details of Common Minimum Program (CMP) give stable governance and better development to the people of J&K.

Condensing the popular perception towards the present Alliance:

- People in most parts of Kashmir are happy with the Alliance. Especially border areas of North Kashmir like Uri etc. see the Alliance more optimistically and confidently. With mostly traders along the border area, the *Azadi sentiment* was largely low in strength when equated to South and Central Kashmir.
- Much of the approval to BJP in Kashmir especially is coming from the fact that people in the valley want to see the development.

- People don't see the controversies raised by PDP as controversial, rather people justify them. Which shows the popularity of PDP in the valley.
- There was unanimity in voice of people across regions, age, class and gender on the issue of article 370 and AFSPA. All the sections support article 370 and want AFSPA to be removed.
- While the idea of syncretic Kashmir evoked by the concept of *Kashmiriyat* was seen in the older generations, among the new generation, there was a lean towards the idea of islamisation of the state
- Most sections of Kashmiri Muslims want Kashmiri Pundits to return to the valley. The Pundits who stayed back are largely having cordial relations with the Kashmiri Muslims. But the ones who migrated from valley and are now staying in camps in Kashmir, their closeness and bond with the homeland has come to a standstill.

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