

ASSESSMENT OF PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES: COALITION GOVERNMENT 2002-2008

Yawer Gulzar¹, Layeeq Ahmad Sheikh²

¹ Senior Research Fellow, Department of Political Science,
School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, (India)

² Senior Research Fellow, Department of Political Science,
School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, (India)

ABSTRACT

At the outset, the issues that were aggressively articulated by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) are the release of jailed militants, alleged atrocities by the security forces, demilitarization, release of political prisoners, repealed draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), etc. PDP which participated as a mainstream political party in the electoral politics has also taken up the issues that have long been considered as separatist issues like human rights violations, demilitarization, repeal of draconian laws, opening up of link with Pakistan etc. This article will give an overview about the policies, strategies and programmes of PDP and its achievements during its first coalition government with Congress from 2002-2008.

Key Words: Coalition, J&K, NC, PDP, Policies

1. INTRODUCTION

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was founded in 1999 by a former Congressman, Janata Dal leader and Union home minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. It is now considered the closest rival to the National Conference (NC), J&K's largest political party. The PDP came into being after Sayeed quit the Congress the second time (the first was in 1987, to join the Janata Dal), in protest to the party high command's truck with his archrival, the NC. It is an ethnic Kashmiri party advocating self-rule for J&K. [1] To realize this goal, it calls for precise specific actions that must be taken and standards that must be set. It also aimed at "the formulation and implementation of proper policies for devolution of powers and distribution

¹ Senior Research Fellow, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, India. Contact Email: yawer143@gmail.com

² Senior Research Fellow, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, India.

of resources among the three regions of the state, equitable economic growth, and advancement of understanding and co-operation among the various communities and regions".

It participated as a mainstream political party in the elections also took up the issues that have long been considered as separatist issues like human rights violations, demilitarization, repeal of draconian laws, opening up of link with Pakistan etc. In other words we can say that it borrowed its issues from the separatist front and took into the mainstream politics. Their policies and schemes have been given main attention towards the basic problems of the society. Thus the party suggested 'dialogue' with the militants and separatists as a way towards solving the long standing conflict, easing out pressure upon people from the excessive presence of the security forces, and reducing drastically the number of cases of Human Rights violations. Finally, it was this 'people-oriented' strategy of PDP that helped bring an end the hegemony of National Conference (NC) in 2002 Assembly elections and gives staunch mandate to PDP particularly in the Kashmir valley.

II.BACKGROUND

Six years after the last Assembly elections, held in 1996, the state of J&K presents more dismal look, with all round deterioration. None of the promises made by the present rulers to garner votes in the 1996 assembly election has been fulfilled. There is a long list of broken promises, callous injustice, and ignored commitments, unprincipled compromises on our dignity and self-respect and grave acts of commission and omission which directly impact the quality of human life in the state. PDP being conscious of its responsibility seeks to rededicate it to redeeming the situation. The ruling party which in its 1996 election manifesto had shed tears over the fact that "blood of a Kashmiri has become cheaper than water" and that "Kashmiris cannot be left to be tackled by the army and the paramilitary forces" has out rightly betrayed the electorate. The ruling party has simply succeeded in achieving to make the blood of our people cheaper that of water. [2] PDP foremost concern is the restoration of the dignity, honor and safety of the lives of our people as indeed it ought to be for everyone who has the good of the people at heart.

The PDP's commitment made to the people in 1999 continues to impel it to devote its full strength to fighting for justice and rule of law. PDP believes that the Jammu and Kashmir today needs, more than ever before a caring public administration, which only a truly committed political party is capable of providing. But unfortunately the opposite has happened and the people have been at the receiving end of the diabolic game of double faced politics. For PDP the participation in the election is a commitment to a cause, the cause of fighting the system from within. [3] The NC went to the polls in 1996 on the autonomy plank but it had no compunction in battering that commitment to earn and retain the goodwill of their allies at the center, which strikes at the very roots of federal polity and states shining tradition of siding with the secular forces at all crucial moments of history.

PDP believes in supremacy of principles and ideals rather than of position and power. As honesty of purpose is the need of the hour, then PDP can humbly claim that it has tried its best, and fortunately succeeded to a large extent in upholding this norm. It stands for political power for the common good and not for the selective,

privileged few who are left free to make mockery of every rule in the book. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed argued that PDP if elected will work hand in hand with secular, democratic and progressive forces of the region, which form the bulk of the population, to set a new agenda of peace and prosperity. [4] Finally, in 2002 state assembly election, PDP won state assembly elections (16 seats out of 87) and formed the state government with Congress. After winning state elections, it had sent one member to the upper and lower houses of the Indian parliament. It was also a party to the coalition of United Progressive Alliance (I).

III.OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTY

The parties commitment in Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's words are; [5] First, my party will always try to convince the Government of India that bullets are not answer to the Kashmiri conflict and serious negotiations are needed to solve them. Second, our party would mobilize public opinion in the state and country in favour of persuading the Government of India to adopt a policy of understanding and reconciliation and initiate a comprehensive and unconditional dialogue with the people of Kashmir to resolve the Kashmir problem. Third, my party will find ways and means to ensure that innocent people languishing in jails are released, migrants are brought back and rehabilitated, and the healing touch is administered to the victims of the violent turmoil in the state. Last, my party will advocate the formulation and implementation of proper policies for devolution of powers and distribution of resources among the three regions of the state, equitable economic growth, and advancement of understanding and co-operation among the various communities and regions. Following are some significant objectives of the PDP of J&K; [6]

- a) To mobilize public opinion in the State and in the country in favor of persuading the Government of India to adopt a policy of understanding and reconciliation and initiate a comprehensive and unconditional dialogue with the people of Kashmir to the resolution of the Kashmir problem.
- b) To wage a struggle for the restoration of democracy, normalcy and Rule of law in the State so that human rights of the people can be duly respected and protected.
- c) To articulate the grievances of the people of the State and seek their redressal particularly through constitutional means.
- d) To advocate formulation and implementation of proper policies and programs for the devolution of powers and distribution of resources amongst the three regions of the State, (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh) equitable economic growth and advancement of understanding and cooperation amongst the various communities and regions.
- e) To formulate and implement proper policies for the restoration and protection of environment in the State.
- f) To find ways and means to ensure that innocent people languishing in jails are released, the migrants are brought back and rehabilitated and healing touch is administered to the victims of the violent turmoil in the state, and relief is provided to orphans, widows and other victims of violence.
- g) Universal education that would serve the needs of employment, economic and industrial growth.
- h) Providing an economic package of the State, industrial and tourism sectors, to compensate them for the loss and damage caused due to militancy during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

- i) Formulation and implementation of adequate policies to remove unemployment and poverty in the State.

IV.POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The policies and programmes of PDP were totally unique in character as compared to other mainstream political parties. Following are some significant policies and programmes of the PDP;

4.1 DEMILITARIZATION

Demilitarization became one of the prominent policy of the PDP. For them the policy of demilitarization is first about the mind set and then about the withdrawal of Army troops in the state. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed argued that the party could very well see a 'silver lining on the horizon' for demilitarization of the state. [7] There is no space for armed interventions in J&K. If there is one lesson that has come through in the last two decades of militancy it is that the gun is not a solution, be it in the hands of the Indian army or the militants. Hence the demilitarization was one of the reasons for the emergence of the PDP. The reliable estimates suggest that nearly 60 percent of the annual administration expenses of the state of Jammu and Kashmir are now devoted to security related activities. [8] Although, PDP threatened to withdraw supported to the government if demilitarization was not implemented, but centre's response has not been so positive. So there is a strong need to reduce the physical presence of the armed forces particularly from civil areas and reduce their influence in the decision making at a political and administrative level. It needs to be understood that a withdrawal of the troops from all civilian areas, will create and enhance the stakes of the people in the process of peace.

4.2 HEALING TOUCH

Since its emergence, PDP identified itself with the concerns of the people caught in the situation of conflict and gave the slogan of 'Healing Touch', which became quite popular in Kashmir. [9] It was a policy to help those who had suffered due to militancy and violence, and to stop the custodial killings, absorption of SOG into state police, and the release of innocents in the jails. The healing touch philosophy had been instrumental in changing the mindset of the people and contributed towards over all relaxation and normalcy in the valley. [10] People of valley would always remember the PDP for ending the "reign of terror" that was unleashed by the pro-government gunmen during 1990's. Besides disbanding SOG, Mufti took bold steps like doing away with cumbersome security barricades, frisking, nocturnal raids, crackdowns and making forces accountable. [11] So Mufti's government was committed to a healing touch policy, colloquially called GoliNahi, Boli, means only dialogue not bullets. [12] In short we can say that the PDP led coalition government with Congress succeeded with its unique policy of healing touch, to restore much awaited peace and normalcy in the valley build trust among masses and win the minds and hearts of the common masses. The PDP led coalition government tried enough to put above policies into practice and began a peace process in the state.

4.3 EMPLOYMENT

PDP genuinely claimed that it created more jobs in the government, despite various hindrances during the period it headed the administration. The mission of PDP is to Educate, Empower and Employ the youth of the state and let them decide the future of the nation. It will be our endeavor to make J&K a hub of international finance in the sub-continent. For this there is a need to set up an International Finance Centre. It will have its own legal, regulatory and judicial environment based on best practices. It will provide a platform to list and trade in financial instruments. It will offer services like asset management, Islamic finance funds registration, reinsurance and captive business processing operations. This industry has a great potential of providing lakhs of jobs.

PDP promised to work out a programme of employment insurance which will provide regular benefits to individuals who lose their jobs because of shortage of work or seasonal layoffs etc. PDP also promised to set up a Youth Opportunity Fund that will be provided for each local authority over two years. [13] The spending of this fund will be focused on youth and not as a replacement for core funding of youth work.

4.4 YOUTH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

As we know that the militancy in J&K was overwhelmingly led and driven by the youths of the state. From this it is obvious that the state and central government did a poor job of responding to the needs of their young citizens. It is in this context that the J&KPDP is putting forth its Youth Development Policy that seeks to address issues affecting the State's young people. PDP outline strategies that will provide them with equal opportunities to maximize their potential. [14] The approach of PDP to youth development recognizes youth as resources in rebuilding the state of J&K. The State's youth must be now at the forefront of the change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for the State's development and peace process.

In any case, in J&K, people aged from 15 to 30 years old account for a staggering 38.6 per cent of the total population, compared to approximately 30 per cent normatively. No thinking society can afford the marginalization of its young people who account for 40 per cent of its population. Even in a limited electoral sense, the age group between 20 and 30 years, account for 57 per cent of the population eligible to vote. Thus, notwithstanding anything, the sheer demographics make youth the most important segment in the political economy of J&K. No society can afford the marginalization of its young people. [15]

The PDP President, Mehbooba Mufti said given its immense natural and water resources, the full potential of J&K can be harnessed only through opening it up and empowering all the three regions to benefit from the new market economy growing in the region. The rich intellectual capital that the State has in the shape of thousands of trained professionals should be utilized to achieve a turnaround in living standards and making J&K economically self-sufficient. She argued that the Youth Development Policy of the party is a step towards bringing the State's youth on the radar of focused development so that our young men and women get similar opportunities as their counterparts are enjoying in other parts of the country. [16] Mehbooba Mufti reiterated her

party's resolve to realize the unfinished agenda of dignified political peace and sustainable economic prosperity for the people in all the regions and sub-regions of the State. She assured that the PDP would realize this noble dream under the leadership of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

The mission of the PDP is to “Educate, Employ and Empower” the youth of the state and let them decide the future of the nation”. PDP will launch a process, which will prepare young people to meet the challenges of future through a series of coordinated, progressive programs and activities. These will help the youth of the state to become politically empowered, ethically aware, socially responsible, and economically independent citizens.

First and foremost, in our current situation, PDP wants to underscore the importance of youth development in peace and conflict resolution. We take young people as the driving force of future development, and their development as the guarantee of social transformation. Youth development as envisaged by us will help institutionalize a peaceful culture and foster the structures and values of civil society.

4.5 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

As we know all sections of the society in general have suffered because of the insurgency in the state, women specifically have been the worst sufferers of violence. PDP said that it would launch a special programme for the empowerment and employment of women. It has already achieved the milestone in the empowerment of women by granting them 33 per cent reservation in the urban local bodies. PDP reiterated to fight for adequate reservations for women in the state legislature. [17]

4.6 RETURN OF KASHMIRI PANDITS

PDP reaffirm its stand that the resettlement of Kashmiri Pandits in their Motherland (Kashmir Valley) is an essential ingredient of Kashmiriat. PDP promised to initiate positive steps to create a secure atmosphere for their honorable and dignified return to the valley in accordance the wishes of the Kashmiri Pandits. [18]It believes that the return of Kashmiri Pandits to their native places in Kashmir Valley with dignity and honour, is must to maintain the ethnicity and diversity of Kashmiri culture. So there is a strong need to facilitate thehonourable return of the Kashmiri Panditcommunity.

4.7 TOURISM

PDP believes that the tourism potential of all the three regions of the state (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh) is unrivalled. The revival of tourism has had a phenomenal implication and all the three regions witnessing tourist arrivals. It will be our priority to work at national and international levels for complete revival of tourism and improve infrastructure at new tourist spots. [19] French type boats will be introduced in the Dal Lake to be run on wind power thus saving the lake from pollution and ensuring supply of electricity throughout the year in the area. Duksum-symthen Tourism Development Authority shall be constituted for bringing the hinterland of District Anantanag and Doda District on tourism maps which shall serve as an attraction for tourists.

V.POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

As a first step to focus intensive attention on the youth of the state, PDP declares that the coming year, i.e. 2008 shall be the “Year of the Youth” in J&K. All programs and initiatives outlined in the policy will be kick started next year. The main focus of activities during the Year of the Youth will be to create a conducive environment for young people and ensure a smooth transition between the educational system and employment market.

PDP will work out a system wherein we make institutional connections between school and work, identify career skills, develop or refine personal goals, and explore possible career paths. PDP will create a Youth Leadership Network, starting at the block level, dedicated to developing the next generation leaders by promoting leadership development, education, empowerment and employment.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) argued that the youth are the worst victims of the wrong policies of the government. [20] Youth wing Vice President Rajinder Singh Manhas said that the educated youth are the worst victims of wrong policies being propagated by incumbent Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. Under the Youth Employment Strategy Service, the government will be urged to offer a series of programs, like; [21]

5.1 CAREER FOCUS

Will provide funding for employers to help post-secondary graduates obtain career-related work opportunities in the state to support their development of advanced skills, to help them make career-related links to the job market, and to assist them in becoming leaders in their field.

5.2 SKILL LINKS AND SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE

Will provide funding to community organizations to help youth facing barriers to employment particularly of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, young persons with disabilities, backward classes, youth living in rural and remote areas and high school dropouts. So that they can develop the broad range of skills, knowledge and work experience they need to participate in the job market. It will provide wage subsidies to employers to create summer employment for secondary and post-secondary students, and support the operation of summer employment offices.

VI.ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PARTY

PDP has done some specific achievements during its first term in government from 2002 to 2008. There are number of achievements by PDP-Congress Government. The PDP led coalition Government create a conducive atmosphere for initiating peace process and taking Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to normalize relations between India and Pakistan. Actually it was the aim of PDP to “persuade the Government of India to initiate an unconditional dialogue with Kashmiris for resolution of the Kashmir problem”. It helped in the beginning of cross LoC trade, opening of Srinagar-Muzafarabad and Poonch-Rawalakote roads which in turn helped the Kashmiri people to meet their relatives living in Pakistan administered Kashmir. PDP had also favoured the release of militants and as a middle path agreed with the Congress for "screening" that might lead

to freedom for youth held in minor cases. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) also includes a promise "to encourage militants to rejoin the mainstream and ensure justice according to law." According to the CMP, the state government would cooperate with the Centre in its attempts to restore normalcy in the militancy-torn state. [22]

In the field of education this Government has establish two State universities in Jammu and Kashmir, Baba Ghulam Shah University and Islamic university and number of colleges and Higher Secondary Schools have been opened in the state. It has become the first ever Government in the State that introduce the Post graduate courses in all major colleges of the State. Apart from this it has established the BibiHaleema Nursing College, first of its kind in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the construction of Indian Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM) at Rajbagh Srinagar.

The tourism and tourist industry was badly hit by the militancy during the decade of 90's. Revival of tourism in 2003 had most profound impact on Kashmir and its economy. The emergence of PDP in the state was in other words a revival of tourism in the state and helps in boasting the state economy. Appealing to the people to visit J&K to reaffirm their confidence in the State, Mufti Sayeed said the Kashmiris have now geared up to welcome tourists from all over the country. He argued that he was not making the appeal as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir but on the behalf of the common people of the State who were largely dependent on tourism. He appeals to the people that the overall situation in the State is not bad and the people in general want peace. [23] In order to boast the tourism a special package for tourism industry of Rs. 40 crore rupees (forty crore) was given for hoteliers, shikarawallas and houseboat owners, as they are the main motivators of tourists. It was this Government which set up the Asia's second largest Tulip Garden in the summer capital of the state and it helps to bring tourists towards the valley. Apart from this the beautification of Srinagar City was started by this government in order to boast the tourism sector in the Kashmir Valley. Restoration of Nigeen Club, improvement of Nigeen bank areas, historic Aali Masjid, Harparbat Fort, Shalimar-Nishat gardens and the beautification of Jhelum and other water ways with rehabilitation of encroachers was other achievements of this Government. [24]

PDP-Congress government also helps in the vacating of hotels occupied by the security forces in civil areas particularly in the summer capital of the state, Srinagar. And the construction of international airport at Srinagar and the up gradation of Airport road at a cost of Rs. 10 crore (rupees ten crores) was also their achievement. The first ever Hajj House was established in the state. It was the PDP government that constructs the first ever historic fly over at Jehangirchowk, the center of Srinagar city. Another fly over promised to construct at Hyderpora. Six laning of Bypass road was completed which is now the main artery of Srinagar city. And reconstruction of bridges on the bypass, Ashaibagh, Telbal, Nallah Amir Khan, etc. have been taken up seriously. The famous North South corridor (90 feet) road was also completed by this regime. Establishment of Craft Development Institute (CDI), Common Facility Centre (CFC) and Indian institute of Carpet Technology

(IICT) at Nowshera for development of handicraft sector. New Museum was established in the State under the governance of PDP was established in the State under the governance of PDP. [25]

VII.CONCLUSION

Under the PDP government the social collaboration, political reconciliation, and democratic participation, through innovations have been revived and indeed this has been the historic. Be it the opening of the Srinagar - Muzafarabad Road or Poonch - Rawalakote road, or allowing of travel on permit and not passport basis. The major breakthrough was to engage the civil society of J&K in the process. The cooperation between the civil society and the state has increased and resolution of the problem is no longer only the responsibility of the state government, be it the centre or state. The involvement of the principle stakeholders – people was gaining ground. The PDP led coalition government has done remarkable development in several sectors like tourism, education, agriculture and so on. There were several sectors where government could build confidence among the common masses like anti-corruption measures, release of political prisoners, dialogue with all stake holders and protection of human rights. As for as the rehabilitation policy was concerned a very little was done in terms of the return of Kashmir migrant Pandits, rehabilitation of militants and their families.

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