



Political Discourse Of National Conference And Praja Parishad On Special Status On Jammu And Kashmir

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Abstract: The discourse surrounding "special status" in Indian politics has been a contentious and multifaceted issue, particularly in the context of Jammu and Kashmir. This study conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the political narratives around special status, focusing on two pivotal movements: The *Praja Parishad agitation* (1952–53) and the positioning of the *National Conference* during key historical junctures. The Praja Parishad agitation, rooted in opposition to Article 370, sought full integration of Jammu and Kashmir into India, reflecting ideological tensions between regional autonomy and nationalist centralization. Conversely, the National Conference, under Sheikh Abdullah and his successors, oscillated between advocating for Kashmir's distinct identity and negotiating its political relationship with the Indian Union. The analysis highlights the interplay of power, rhetoric, and historical contingencies in shaping the political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir, offering insights into the broader dynamics of autonomy, integration and nationalist politics in postcolonial India.

Index Terms - Special Status, Discourse Analysis, Praja Parishad, National Conference, Article 370, Jammu and Kashmir.

I. INTRODUCTION

The political history of Jammu and Kashmir in the years following the end of Dogra rule represents a complex interplay of regional, communal, and national forces. The transition from monarchy to democratic governance under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and the National Conference marked a turning point for the state but also generated new conflicts. While Abdullah's land and social reforms were welcomed by the poorer sections of Jammu and Kashmir Muslim community while they simultaneously alienated large sections of society in Jammu, particularly the Dogra landlords and the Hindu majority who had regarded Maharaja Hari Singh as their protector [1].

In response to this alienation, the Praja Parishad emerged in Jammu in 1947 as a political movement representing the interests of Dogras, Hindu nationalists, and dispossessed elites. Founded by leaders such as Hari Wazir, Balraj Madhok, and later Pandit Prem Nath Dogra, the Praja Parishad gained organizational strength with the support of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and backing from traders, landlords, and refugees from West Pakistan. It positioned itself as the voice of Jammu's Hindus, advocating complete

integration of the state with India and rejecting the special constitutional position provided to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370.

By contrast, Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference defended Kashmir's special status, emphasizing limited accession restricted to defense, external affairs, and communications. They argued that full application of the Indian Constitution would erode the state's autonomy and create mistrust among Kashmiri Muslims. This divergence of political visions led to intense contestation between the two sides. The Praja Parishad raised slogans of "One Constitution, One Flag, One Leader" and spearheaded agitations, including a notable student movement in 1952, while Abdullah advocated for a distinct constitution, flag, and internal autonomy [2].

The conflict reached its peak during 1952–1953, with violent protests in Jammu, the arrest of Praja Parishad leaders, and the tragic death of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in custody. Eventually, political tensions culminated in the dismissal and imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah on 9 August 1953, marking a decisive shift in the constitutional and political trajectory of the state. Abdullah's removal alienated Kashmiri Muslims and led to the launch of the Plebiscite Movement, while the Praja Parishad, though it continued to operate as a political force, struggled to evolve beyond representing urban Hindu interests before merging with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1963. [3]

Thus, the early 1950s witnessed the crystallization of two competing narratives: The National Conference's insistence on autonomy under Article 370 versus the Praja Parishad's demand for complete integration with India. This struggle not only shaped the constitutional framework of Jammu and Kashmir but also entrenched regional and communal divides that continued to influence the politics of the state for decades [4].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Neha Sharma's (2021) study "Praja Parishad Movement and the Student's Agitation in Jammu (1952): A Study" explores the 1952 Jammu student agitation against the hoisting of the National Conference flag alongside the Indian Union flag during an official college event. The paper situates the agitation within the broader political conflict between the National Conference, led by Sheikh Abdullah, and the Praja Parishad, which advocated full integration of Jammu and Kashmir with Union of India [5].

In What Happened to Governance in Kashmir? Wani (2019) critically examines the transformation of governance in Jammu and Kashmir, especially the watershed events of the early 1950s. The author highlights Sheikh Abdullah's increasing suspicion of Delhi, which solidified after the Praja Parishad agitation. This agitation, backed by Hindu nationalists and supported by sections of the Indian National Congress, pressured Abdullah into conceding more powers to the central government under the Delhi Agreement of 1952. Author argues that the continued agitation even after the agreement, demonstrated that Delhi's commitment to Kashmir's autonomy was tenuous at best.

A major turning point discussed is Abdullah's dismissal and arrest on 9th August author identifies as a defining moment in Kashmir's political and constitutional trajectory. His replacement by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, under Delhi's influence, not only eroded the state's autonomy but also deepened Muslim alienation from India. This led to the rise of the Plebiscite Movement, which sought resolution of the Kashmir dispute through a referendum [6].

Balraj Puri (1996) emphasizes that the Praja Parishad emerged as a response to the perceived denial of justice to the Jammu region by the Kashmir leadership. Similarly, Balraj Madhok argued that administrative and constitutional changes following 1947 created fear in Jammu about Kashmiri dominance, which facilitated the movement's formation and mass acceptance [7]

Schofield, (1997) works have documented the discontent of Jammu's population with Sheikh Abdullah's administration. M. K. Teng provided a detailed account of the Praja Parishad agitation in 1951. Navnita Chadha Behera highlighted the resentment against the National Conference's policies and the alignment of other organizations in supporting Praja Parishad's demand for full integration with India. Vidya Bhushan has further outlined the broader controversies surrounding Kashmir politics and situates the Praja Parishad within

this discourse. The Praja Parishad found its strongest support among the Dogras of Jammu, especially Hindus, who were alarmed by Abdullah's reforms and his emphasis on Kashmiri nationalism [8].

(Bazaz, 1954) The movement opposed land reform legislation, particularly the *Big Landed Estates Abolition Act* of 1950, which angered the expropriated landlord classes in Jammu. Its opposition to Article 370 was central, as it regarded the provision as only "temporary and transitional" and therefore subject to abrogation once conditions normalized [9].

Puri (1996) The agitation gathered momentum beyond Jammu, with support from national organizations such as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj, and Akali leaders. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's involvement further gave the movement a national platform. Scholars like Puri argue that Praja Parishad became a symbol of Jammu's political aspirations, articulating the demand for full integration with the Indian Union through its famous slogan, *Ek Vidhan, Ek Nishan, Ek Pradhan*. In sum, the historiography converges on the interpretation that the Praja Parishad movement was not merely a regional opposition party but a political expression of Jammu's resistance to Kashmiri dominance and its insistence on the state's complete integration with India [10].

Shakti Kak (2009) "Hindutva, the crisis of the state and political mobilization in Jammu and Kashmir" highlights the early opposition of Hindu nationalist forces such as the Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, and later the Jan Sangh to Article 370 and limited autonomy. Their campaigns, framed through slogans like "*one constitution, one flag, one premier*", demanded complete integration with India. The Union Government often tolerated or even supported these communal mobilizations. Sheikh Abdullah, however, cautioned against the rise of communal tendencies in India, fearing their impact on Muslim interests, which contributed to his dismissal and arrest in 1953.

Regional grievances in Jammu, particularly over land reforms, assembly representation, and resource allocation, further deepened demands for full accession, while Nehru and Abdullah's proposals for regional autonomy were rejected by the Jan Sangh [11].

Ahanger, J. A., & Mir, A. H. (2023) Re-visiting Article 370: The politics of autonomy in Jammu and Kashmir. Authors note that Article 370, though initially seen as a step towards unity, soon became contested. Integrationists like the BJP and VHP opposed it, arguing that special status encouraged separatism, militancy, corruption, and economic dependency. They termed it a "historical blunder" of Nehru and demanded its abrogation. On the other hand, regional parties such as National Conference, supported by leftist groups and some scholars, argued for preserving and even restoring the autonomy promised under Article, which they claim has been diluted since 1953 [12].

3. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

To make a discourse analysis of politics around special status with focus on Praja Parishad agitation and National Conference.

To understand the evolution of Praja Parishad and their impact on the process of integration of J&K with the Union of India.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Origin of Praja Parishad movement

The political unrest in Kashmir Valley was an important event in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. One of the main movements started by the National Conference was the Quit Kashmir Movement. Its main demand was to cancel the Treaty of Amritsar and to oppose Dogra rule in the Valley. However, while fighting against the monarchy, Kashmiri leaders often referred to Maharaja Hari Singh as the last Dogra ruler. They forgot that "Dogra" was not only the royal family's name but also the name of the community living in the Jammu region. This created a sense of alienation among the Dogras of Jammu.

The National Conference could not expand its influence in Jammu, especially in Hindu-majority areas. People in Jammu saw Maharaja Hari Singh as their protector against the Kashmiri Muslim majority. When the Maharaja left the Valley on October 26, 1947, during the Pakistani tribal attack and came to Jammu, the Dogras' sense of insecurity grew stronger.

Their resentment further increased because of Sheikh Abdullah's revolutionary plans for social and economic reforms, which harmed the economic interests of the Jammu people. In response, the people of Jammu started a movement against Sheikh Abdullah's policies. Over time, this movement developed into a political party called the Praja Parishad [13].

Following the accession to the Indian dominion, the implementation of the Naya Kashmir Programme presented significant challenges for the National Conference. The processes of democratization and development within the state were obstructed by a multitude of domestic, national, and international forces. The influential coalition of landlords, predominantly comprising Jammu Hindus or Kashmiri Pandits who had experienced the loss of their Jagirs, expressed opposition towards the National Conference in a general sense and specifically targeted Sheikh Abdullah. This political resistance materialized in the establishment of the Praja Parishad Party [14].

The appointment of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as head of the Emergency Administration and subsequent political changes deepened alienation in Jammu. While Kashmir had the National Conference, Jammu lacked a regional party. Distrustful of Abdullah's leadership and still supportive of the Maharaja, Jammu's Hindus felt the need for their own political organization. This led to the formation of the Praja Parishad in November 1947 to represent Jammu's interests. Hari Wazir became its first president, Balraj Madhok the general secretary, and later Pandit Prem Nath Dogra emerged as its prominent leader [15]. The masses of Jammu, who were frequently accused of being communalists and growing resentful of the transfer of political power from Jammu to the valley, where the Maharaja of Jammu was reduced to a helpless head of state, welcomed the creation of the All Jammu and Kashmir Praja Parishad [16]. The situation was changing very quickly. Almost all the workers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) began working to expand the Praja Parishad party into villages. These particular RSS workers were not impacted when the RSS was banned after Mahatma Gandhi's murder. Because of this, they chose to give their full support to the Praja Parishad [17].

Regarding Praja Parishad's support system, "economically it represented that group of wealthy people who, as the Maharaja's supporters, enjoyed the privileged status of landowners but who have been dispossessed by the land reform, as well as of business people and government representatives. However, politically, it also found its main backing among the vast majority of non-Muslims who were growing more concerned about Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's propensity to separate India from the state of Jammu and Kashmir [18]. This party was also backed by the most prosperous members of Jammu's society, the Rajput's, as well as traders and business owners. Among The party's first backers were also refugees from West Pakistan and Pakistan's illegally occupied territory [19].

Thus, some well-known Jammu politicians joined the All Jammu and Kashmir Praja Parishad, which grew to be a strong and well-liked democratic force in Jammu. These figures included Hari Wazir, Balraj Madhok, Prem Nath Dogra, and Lala Roop Nanda (Advocate) [8]. Based on Indian culture, the All Jammu and Kashmir Praja Parishad party will create a political, social, and economic system where Jammu and Kashmir state is seen as an integral and indivisible part of India. Every man and woman would have access to the resources and opportunities for advancement, and there would be no discrimination based on caste, color, or faith [20].

4.2 Praja Parishad student's Agitation

Unlike other princely states, Jammu and Kashmir was not fully integrated three years after joining India. Article 370, a specific regulation, was developed to oversee this procedure. To avoid the need for frequent amendments to the main constitution, it granted the President of India the authority to gradually apply portions of the Indian Constitution to Jammu and Kashmir. There was also a clause in this article that allowed for its own removal.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the head of state, was opposed to the Indian Constitution's implementation. He instead called for a state leader to be chosen locally rather than by the Indian president, as well as a distinct constitution and flag. Abdullah was allegedly pursuing a course recommended by "external powers" in order to establish his own internal dictatorship. In 1952, this sparked a conflict with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who had to fight and give up their democratic rights inside India [21].

The state's full membership to the Indian Union was later supported by Praja Parishad, which first aimed to protect Dogras by maintaining the Maharaja as the constitutional head of state. Even Praja Parishad was against the adoption of Article 370 in the Indian Constitution, which granted the state a distinct position. It was also against the state Constituent Assembly meeting and creating a new constitution just for it.

In the 1951 Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly elections, the Praja Parishad contested 29 out of 30 seats in Jammu. But most of its candidates' nomination papers were rejected on technical grounds. As a result, the party boycotted the elections, and all seats went to the National Conference. Despite its popularity, Praja Parishad could not enter the Assembly. In response, it organized protests in Jammu, demanding "*One Constitution, One Flag, One Leader*" and complete integration [22].

On 15 January 1952, the National Student Association, the student wing of the Praja Parishad, held a protest at G.G.M. Science College in Jammu against raising the state flag alongside India's national flag. The protesting students were punished, which led to a hunger strike, violence, lathi charges, police firing, and disruption of normal life in Jammu city. The army had to be called in, and a 72-hour curfew was imposed. All the leaders of the Praja Parishad were arrested, as the government claimed that the protest was organized by them. Later, N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar the minister of state of India, visited Jammu in April 1952 to review the situation, after which the Praja Parishad leaders were released [23].

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee attempted to enter Jammu and Kashmir illegally in May 1953 with the help of thousands of activists. When he tried to enter, the government of Sheikh Abdullah barred him and detained him to arrive in Jammu and Kashmir's Lakhanpur. Members of Parliament were among the thousands of activists who were imprisoned in Jammu, Punjab, and other parts of India. Regretfully, on June 23, 1953, Shama Prasad Mukherjee passed away in Srinagar while being held captive. Consequently, a wave of anti-Nehru and anti-Abdullah sentiment swept through India, engulfing the entire country in great sorrow. Praja Parishad didn't think that the death was due to natural causes. Sheikh Abdullah's five-member government lost support when an abrupt conflict rose up in the National Conference [24].

Moreover, the Sadar-i-Riyasat called him who proposed that the government convene in his cabinet for an urgent discussion. Abdullah declined to go to the meeting, though. After that, Sadar-i-Riyast Karan Singh sent Abdullah to prison and removed him from his position as prime minister. When Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad took over as prime minister in 1952, he carried out all of the provisions of the Delhi Agreement and further ceded authority to the Union Government. The Praja Parishad, conversely, appeared to be appeased following the dissolution of the initial Abdullah Ministry and his subsequent incarceration. The Praja Parishad persisted as a political entity predominantly representing Urban Hindus and was unsuccessful in evolving into a mass movement, particularly within rural jurisdictions; consequently, in the legislative elections of 1957, despite contesting for 21 seats, it secured merely 5 seats. During the electoral process conducted in 1962, the Praja Parishad contended for 25 seats and attained victory in 3. In the year 1963, the Praja Parishad underwent a merger with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh [25].

4.3 Political narrative around special status by National Conference and Praja Parishad

After Dogra rule ended and power was handed over to Sheikh Abdullah (a Kashmiri Muslim leader of the freedom movement), a new struggle started in Jammu and Kashmir. This movement was led by the Hindu right-wing party Praja Parishad, supported mostly by Hindu Dogras of Jammu and also by other non-Muslim communities, like the Buddhists of Ladakh.

The Praja Parishad opposed Sheikh Abdullah's government, especially his land reforms, which gave benefits to poor Muslims and lower-caste Hindus, but took away land from Hindu Dogras and Kashmiri Pandit landlords. Calling Abdullah's government, a "Kashmiri Muslim government," the Hindu Dogras began a strong agitation against the state's special status, with support from Hindu nationalists in other parts of India.

This agitation created a cycle of conflict: Sheikh Abdullah was dismissed and jailed, after which he launched the Plebiscite Movement. This movement, supported by most Kashmiri Muslims, demanded a referendum to decide Kashmir's future. As a result, the state became politically divided: Hindus of Jammu wanted complete merger with India, while Kashmiri Muslims wanted a referendum to settle the Kashmir issue [26].

Then, a campaign was launched across the province of Jammu to gather five lakh signatures in favor of a memorandum that would be delivered to the Indian president [27]. The Praja Parishad's Executive Committee met in Jammu for four days, from June 17 to June 20. These sessions covered a wide range of matters, but the primary focus was that the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir was comprised primarily from one region and one party. A republic "within a republic" was created and the adoption of different flags which presented a challenge [28]. In the third week of June 1952, the leaders of the Praja Parishad submitted a long memorandum to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India. In it, the people of Jammu demanded the right to decide their own future. The memorandum raised several points. First, it stated that the people of Jammu strongly wanted the state to fully merge with India, just like other states had done. It also complained that the state government was restricting the freedoms of the people of Jammu by using Article 50 of the Defense of Kashmir Rules and the Public Security Act. Another issue highlighted was the students' protest over the National Flag [29].

On April 10, 1952, Sheikh Abdullah gave a remarkable address at Ranbir Singh Pura in which he said categorically.

"Limited accession at best, i.e. accession in the sphere of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Communications to ensure a sort of internal autonomy.... If our right to shape our 153 destiny is challenged and if there is a resurgence of communalism in India, how are we to convince the Muslims of Kashmir that India does not intend on swallowing up Kashmir... such developments might lead to breaking in the accession of Kashmir to India".

In a subsequent speech in Srinagar on April 18, 1952, he declared, "Those who are chanting the Indian Constitution's full application to Kashmir is undermining accession." In Jammu, they are the ones who massacred the Muslims. The slogan is natural to cause suspicion in the mind of Muslims in the state."

Additionally, Sheikh Abdullah stated in a different speech at Hazratbal on April 25, 1952, that the world was aware of their policy that the Constituent Assembly of the state would make decisions on three crucial matters: the constitution's drafting, the state's accession, and the future of the ruling dynasty [30].

The main source of support for Praja Parishad, an opposition group in the Jammu region, was from the majority of non-Muslims who were growing more concerned about Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's propensity to distance the state of Jammu and Kashmir from India. [31]. Despite his loyalty to India, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah consistently advocated for the independence of Jammu and Kashmir [32]. On the other hand, the Praja Parishad movement associated the state of Jammu and Kashmir with India because they felt that the state should be fully incorporated into the Indian constitution for the sake of its safety and security. The complete incorporation of the state within the Indian constitution is imperative [33]. Naturally, the people of Jammu welcomed its formation, and it quickly expanded. It was mainly a protest of an area that felt politically disregarded and denounced, as well as a response to the violent tendencies of Kashmiri local nationalism [34].

The integration and constitutional adjustment process that had been used in other states was not followed in the case of Jammu and Kashmir. Various discussions over the status of Jammu and Kashmir were held between the leaders of the central and state governments during the constitution-making process. Consequently, both the state leadership and the center agreed on a few concepts. The Constituent Assembly of India was finally presented with the draft of Article 306-A, which initially authored the clause providing Jammu and Kashmir special status. In the Indian Constitution, this special status was established as article 370. The right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to form their own Constituent Assembly and design their own constitution was also acknowledged by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. "This article proposes a special status for Jammu and Kashmir because of its special circumstances, the state is not in a position to merge with India," stated Indian Cabinet Minister N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar. Like the other states, we all hope that Jammu and Kashmir will overcome its obstacles and fully join the Union in the future [35].

The special status of Kashmir was given by India under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was a long-time and trusted friend of Sheikh Abdullah. However, despite his strong belief in Nehru's friendship, Sheikh Abdullah began to doubt Nehru's hidden intentions right from the time Article 370 was introduced. He showed his disagreement with calling it a "temporary provision [36]. Due to pressure from the Praja Parishad's movement, which was backed by Hindu nationalists and even those Congressmen who sympathized with them, Abdullah's mistrust developed into a firm belief [37]. The Praja Parishad's continued agitation for abolishing Kashmir's autonomy, despite the Delhi Agreement, and the covert backing it received from Delhi, strained Abdullah's relations with the Indian leadership. His resistance to full integration led to a split in his cabinet, and on 9 August 1953, he was dismissed and replaced by his deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad. This marked a turning point in Kashmir's political and constitutional history, as Abdullah's removal alienated Kashmiri Muslims from India and prompted the National Conference to launch the Plebiscite Movement, demanding a referendum on Kashmir's future [38].

Between 1949 and 1953, the Hindus of Jammu (who were the majority in Kathua, Udhampur, and Jammu districts) supported the Praja Parishad and launched three major agitations. They demanded the removal of Article 370 and full integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India, or at least the merger of Jammu and Ladakh with the Indian Union. Later, even though the central government gradually weakened Article 370 with help from governments in Kashmir, Hindu nationalist groups in Jammu continued their protests, focusing on Article 370 and complaints of "regional imbalance [39].

Among the Bharatiya Jana Sangh's agenda items were the demands for the complete constitutional unification of the state with India and the repeal of Article 370. Also, the demand served as the foundation for Jana Sangh-sponsored agitation in 1952 of the Jammu-based Praja Parishad [40]. The National Conference's ideological stance was disapproved of by the Praja Parishad from the beginning urged the state of Jammu and Kashmir to become more closely integrated with India [41]. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who was a member of Nehru's cabinet, also agreed with it, but he later fiercely opposed it and started a nationwide campaign to remove Article 370. However, it's generally accepted that at the time, Article 370 was seen as a win for Indian unity rather than as a barrier to future political conversation in India and Kashmir [42].

The leaders of Praja Parishad raised the slogan "ek Vidhan, ek Pradhan, ek Nishan" ('one President, one Constitution, and one Symbol') in order to demand the state's unconditional accession to India. The active backing and involvement of the Hindu Mahasabha, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, RSS, and other Hindu rightist groups intensified the agitation. Despite being denounced by Nehru as communal, the rhetoric of the Hindu right-wing parties would subsequently impact the relationship between the center and the state [43]. Following Sheikh Abdullah's overthrow, enough focus was put on "integrating" the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. An attempt was made to eliminate the constitutional distinctions between this state and the other Indian states. This "integration" approach essentially meant that the fundamental autonomous principles, including those established in the Delhi Agreement, were being undermined [44].

5. CONCLUSION

The contest over Jammu and Kashmir's special status in the early 1950s crystallized two competing narratives. The Praja Parishad, rooted in Jammu's Hindu Dogra elite and supported by Hindu nationalist forces, rejected Article 370 and demanded full integration with India under the slogan "*One Constitution, One Flag, One Leader.*" In contrast, the National Conference, led by Sheikh Abdullah, defended Kashmir's autonomy under Article 370, insisting on limited accession to safeguard Muslim trust. This clash culminated in violent agitations, the Delhi Agreement, and ultimately Abdullah's dismissal in 1953. The outcome deepened communal and regional divides: Jammu Hindus aligning with Indian nationalism, and Kashmiri Muslims attracting towards the demand for plebiscite and autonomy. These opposing political discourses around "special status" set the trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional erosion and prolonged conflict within the Indian Union.

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