

'Autonomy' in J&K  
The Forgotten Identities of Ladakh  
Navnita Chadha Behera\*

The entire debate on Kashmiri separatism, as also the recent resurgence of the controversy over 'autonomy' has substantially ignored the enormous plurality of the State of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). To some extent, the regional identity of Jammu and the plight of the exiled Kashmiri *pandits* have received limited - though entirely inadequate - attention in the media and in some of the ill-informed political debates on the subject. But the relationship between the Muslim dominated regional Centre at Srinagar and the complexities, conflicts and identities within the Ladakh sub-region have been entirely neglected, not only in the public debate, but also by the political executive both in Srinagar and in Delhi, as also by the various departments that were supposed to be monitoring the situation in this forgotten Himalyan hinterland. That there is even less understanding of the dynamics of sub-regional identities, such as Kargil's relationship with Leh, and Zaskar's with Kargil, is, consequently, entirely unsurprising within this context of general neglect.

Recent events in the State, however, have forced at least the transient acknowledgement of a problem in Ladakh. The J&K State Assembly's decision to pass a resolution seeking the restoration of Kashmir's special status to a 'pre-1953' position spurred the minority

---

\* Dr. Navnita Chadha Behera is Assistant Director, WISCOMP based at the Foundation for Universal Responsibility, New Delhi. She is the author of *State, Identity & Violence: Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh*, Manohar, 2000, and co-editor of *Perspectives on South Asia*, Konark, 2000.

communities in the State — the people of Jammu, the Ladakhi Buddhists and the Kashmiri *Pandits* — to revive their demands for autonomy and, increasingly, separation from the Valley. In June 2000, an agitation was launched by the Ladakhi Buddhists, led by the Ladakhi Buddhist Association (LBA), to press their demand for Union Territory status. The agitation brought an immediate — albeit passing — focus on their grievances. This paper traces the origin of their difficulties — political, economic and social — and of their demands for direct administration from New Delhi; and the political and strategic implications of these for the State as well as the central governments, especially within the context of the crisis scenario that emerged as a result of the conflict in Kargil.

The Ladakh region consists of a Buddhist-majority Leh district and Shia Muslim-majority Kargil, originally part of Baltistan, which has a small Buddhist minority concentrated in the Zaskar area. Its area of 95,876 square kilometres constitutes 60 per cent of the State's area, albeit sparsely populated (with 2.27 per cent of the State's population). LBA's demand for Union Territory status emanates from deep-rooted alienation and a widely shared perception among the Ladakhi Buddhists of having been treated as a 'colony' by the Kashmiris and, over the last five decades, they have launched several rounds of agitation to achieve this objective.

### **A Hegemonic Valley and the Politicisation of the Ladakhis**

Buddhist-majority Ladakh had strong reservations and insecurities with regard to the transfer of power from the Dogra Maharaja, Hari Singh, to a Kashmiri administration under Sheikh Abdullah in 1949. The Ladakhis did not identify themselves with the Kashmiris, and were further alienated by the iniquitous power structure and partisan policies of the Abdullah government. The Constituent Assembly (dominated by Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference) had created a unitary state with a clear concentration of powers in the Valley. The Constitution did not recognise the federal principle of organising political power to create equitable representation for the underlying social and cultural heterogeneity of society in the State. Sheikh Abdullah painstakingly constructed a 'monolith structure' that emphasised "one organisation (the National Conference) one leader

(Shiekh Abdullah) and one programme (*Naya Kashmir*)."<sup>1</sup>

What resulted in the name of 'majority rule' was, in fact, 'Kashmiri rule'. Ladakh had only two seats in the State Assembly and Sheikh Abdullah's five-member cabinet had no representative from the region. What followed was an unending succession of discriminatory policies that created an unbridgeable hiatus between the Valley and Ladakh.

Thus, in the wake of the Pakistani raiders' attacks in 1947-48, the Muslim refugees in the Valley had received substantial state aid, but no resources were sanctioned for rehabilitating the Buddhist refugees of the Zaskar area, nor was any financial aid granted for reconstructing and restoring the *gompas* — Buddhist temples that were the life and soul of the local religion and culture. The small relief provided by the Government of India never reached Zaskar; it was distributed among the Muslims of Suru Karste area in the Kargil *tehsil*.<sup>2</sup> The studied indifference with which the State government transferred Zaskar to the Leh *tehsil* was in marked contrast to the way Doda was readily carved out as a separate Muslim-majority district in the Jammu region. Land reforms initiated in the State were perceived as targeting the *gompas* and elicited strong criticism from the Buddhist clergy. Indeed, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had to intervene to persuade the State government to suspend the application of the Land Reforms Act to the *gompas*.

The decisions of the Shiekh Abdullah government to impose Urdu in Ladakhi schools, to discontinue scholarships for children of backward areas, and the termination of grants-in-aid provided by the Dogra regime for three primary schools run by Shias, Sunnis and Buddhists were also strongly resented. No allocation whatsoever was made in the first budget for Ladakh's development. Kushak Bakula protested in the State Assembly: "Read the Budget statement from one end to the other, you will not find Ladakh mentioned even once."<sup>3</sup> In fact, there was no separate plan for Ladakh till 1961.

---

<sup>1</sup> Balraj Puri, "Jammu and Kashmir", in Myron Weiner, ed., *State Politics in India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 219. Korbel remarked that "no dictator could do it better". Joseph Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Shridhar Kaul and H.N. Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages: Towards a New Identity*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1992, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Finally, Maulana Masoodi's statements regarding the communal composition of Ladakh being a Muslim-majority district created grave misgivings that the government planned to officially relegate the Buddhists to complete political irrelevance.<sup>4</sup>

The biased and discriminatory policies of the Kashmiri leadership provided an impetus for the politicisation of the Ladakhi Buddhists. Being a minority community in the State and anxious to protect their distinct religion and culture, they wanted to take an independent decision about their political future. Ladakhi Buddhists were projected as a "separate nation by all the tests — race, language, religion and culture — determining a nationality."<sup>5</sup> They emphasised historical links with the Dogras of Jammu rather than with the Kashmiri Muslims. Two sets of arguments were offered. Since Sheikh Abdullah's case rested upon the Treaty of Amritsar, the Maharaja's transfer of power was valid for Kashmir Valley alone, as Ladakh's relationship with the Dogras was governed by a separate treaty resulting from the War of 1834, 12 years before the Treaty of Amritsar came into force, in which the Valley did not figure. Second, the arrangements which subjected the Ladakhis to the Dogras had ceased to be operative, like the Treaty of Amritsar, breaking the constitutional link tying the Ladakhis to the State of J&K, and they were morally and juridically free to choose their course, independent of the rest of the State.<sup>6</sup>

A memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Nehru on May 4, 1949, by Cheewang Rigzin, President, LBA, pleaded that Ladakh not be bound by the decision of a plebiscite, should the Muslim majority of the State decide in favour of Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> They sought to be governed directly by the Government of India, or to be amalgamated with the Hindu-majority parts of Jammu to form a separate province, or to join East Punjab. Failing all options, they would be forced to consider the option of reuniting with Tibet. The strategic and commercial importance of neighbouring Tibet and China, with Leh

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>5</sup> "Memorandum submitted by Cheewang Rigzin, President Buddhist Association, Ladakh to the 'Prime Minister of India on behalf of the people of Ladakh'". For full text of the memorandum, see Appendix III of author's book, *State, Identity and Violence*.

<sup>6</sup> Kushak Bakula as cited in Kaul and Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum submitted by Cheewang Rigzin.

as the nerve centre of the Central Asian trade, was underlined.

Empathising with the Ladakhis, the then *Sadar-i-Riyasat*, Dr. Karan Singh, acknowledged that,

...even more so than in Jammu, the Ladakhis were feeling uneasy and insecure under the Sheikh's administration. Forming as they did a distinct cultural entity, they felt that their position in the new dispensation with only two members in the State Assembly (on the basis of population) was extremely precarious and made them totally subordinate to the Kashmiris. They urged that instead of leaving them at the mercy of the Sheikh's government, an Administrator should be sent from the Centre to the Region.<sup>8</sup>

### **Sheikh Abdullah's Regime: Promises & Disappointments**

The National Conference government accepted Ladakh's demand for a Central Administrator, but never implemented the decision. While Nehru shared the Ladakhis' concerns, he persuaded the Ladakhi Buddhist delegation not to press its demands, since any constitutional or administrative action could weaken India's stand on Kashmir in the UN Security Council.

National Conference members from Ladakh then sought internal autonomy from the Kashmir Valley. Kushak Bakula demanded federal status for Ladakh in 1952.<sup>9</sup> The Ladakh unit of the National Conference called for the institution of an elected Statutory Advisory Committee, and demanded that no measures affecting the political, economic or religious life of Leh *tehsil* would be passed by the State's Constituent Assembly without prior approval of this body. The main demands of the Ladakhis included the formation of a Ministry of Ladakh Affairs headed by a popularly elected Ladakhi member of the Legislative Assembly; adequate representation in the legislature and civil service; establishing *Panchayat* and Rural Development Departments; development funds for constructing roads and canals and promoting agriculture and horticulture; and replacement of the Kashmiri police by local personnel. They wanted Bodhi, their mother tongue, to be made the medium of instruction for

---

<sup>8</sup> Karan Singh, *Autobiography*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 140-1.

<sup>9</sup> Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Kashmir Publishing Company, 1954, p. 553.

school education, and special provisions to be made for facilitating higher education and training in medicine, law, engineering, agriculture and forestry.<sup>10</sup> Kushak Bakula argued that Ladakh would bear essentially the same relationship to the J&K State as Kashmir to India, with the local legislature being the only competent authority to make laws for Ladakh.

Initially, Sheikh Abdullah and Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to the State Constitution granting limited regional autonomy to Jammu and Ladakh. The Basic Principles Committee of the Constituent Assembly was entrusted with this task and a plan was prepared to establish five autonomous regions: Kashmir Valley, Jammu, Gilgit, Ladakh and a region comprising the districts of Mirpur, Rajouri, Poonch and Muzaffarabad. Three provinces, namely, Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Poonch-Mirpur-Rajouri would each have an executive head and council of ministers responsible to the provincial legislature. The regional councils would administer Ladakh and Gilgit. The State legislature would be empowered to alter the area of these autonomous units and to establish new units.<sup>11</sup> However, this plan also perished on paper, since Sheikh Abdullah was not prepared to concede to Jammu and Ladakh the very rights and privileges which he himself had demanded from the Indian state. In the context of the Indian state's relationship with J&K, the Sheikh had argued:

Enlightened opinion in India recognised the vital human urges of Kashmiris and . . . afforded them opportunities of achieving their political and social objectives. This mutual accommodation of each other's viewpoint, which has been accorded constitutional sanction, should not be interpreted as a desire for separatism. After all in a democratic country, the ultimate factor which decided the relationship between various units is the measure of willingness of each of these parts to come closer to each other for the common good of all. *History has taught us that false notions of uniformity and conformity have often led to disastrous consequences in the lives of many nations*<sup>12</sup> (emphasis added)

---

<sup>10</sup> Kaul and Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages*, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-4.

<sup>11</sup> Vidya Bhushan, *State Politics and Government: Jammu & Kashmir*, Jammu: Jaykay Book House, 1985, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> Sheikh Abdullah's letter to Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, dated February 18, 1953. *Integrate Kashmir: The Mookerjee-Nehru-Abdullah Correspondence*, Lucknow: Bharat Press, n.d., pp. 95-107.

But when the leadership in Ladakh and Jammu argued that their status as a federating unit of J&K would be a healthy unifying force among different peoples of the State, the Sheikh backtracked.

### **Bakshi's Regime of Handouts**

After Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal in 1953, his successor, Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi, started on a good footing with the Centre's support and the goodwill of the Jammu and Ladakh regions. He gave an assurance that rights and privileges secured for the State as a whole would be shared in equal measure by the people of different parts. Ladakh was better represented in this regime, both in the National Conference party leadership and the State government. Kushak Bakula, Deputy Minister of Ladakh Affairs, represented Ladakh for the first time. However, Bakshi shared political power with other regions only to neutralise their opposition. Kushak Bakula, for example, was inducted on the condition of locating his ministry at Leh, "effectively reducing him to the position of a District Officer."<sup>13</sup> Bakula had no powers to make changes in the administration, to create posts or to allocate funds.

Nevertheless, compared to the total neglect during Abdullah's regime, Ladakh now fared better. During the Second Plan (1956-61), Rs 8.665 million was invested in the region's development. However, no major agricultural, industrial or power generation projects were initiated during the ten years of Bakshi's rule. As a result, the people of Ladakh continued to nurse grievances against the Valley's dominance in the State's power structures.

Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, who succeeded Bakshi in 1963, withdrew the system of direct central administration - on the pattern of the North East Frontier Areas (NEFA) - that had been introduced in Ladakh after the Chinese aggression in 1962.<sup>14</sup> He tried, however,

---

<sup>13</sup> Another condition was that the deputy commissioner, Ladakh, was to function as the deputy minister's ex-officio secretary. This meant that the deputy minister's functions were to be carried out by the deputy commissioner, who, in theory, was subject to the former's control and supervision. See Kaul and Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>14</sup> Under this system, Ladakh was manned by the Indian Frontier Administrative Personnel. The deputy commissioner-cum-development commissioner of the district and the assistant commissioners of Kargil, Nubra and Nyoma were also drawn from the same service cadres. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

to make amends by constituting a ten-member Ladakh Development Commission with Kushak Bakula, the Minister of State for Ladakh Affairs, as the chairman, and Agha Ibrahim Shah, Member of the Legislative Council from Kargil, as the vice-chairman. The Commission was to advise the government on policies for good governance and speedy development of Ladakh but, owing to several limitations, it proved to be ineffective. Disillusioned by the discrimination against Ladakh by successive State governments, the District National Congress unit led by Kushak Bakula submitted a memorandum to the central government in 1967 seeking revival of a NEFA-type administration.

### **The Communalisation of Political Processes**

The State government responded to Ladakh's demands for regional autonomy by undercutting the political base of such groups and creating alternative political alignments, often along communal lines. Sadiq promoted a new leadership of *lamas* by supporting Kushak Thiksey against Kushak Bakula on the one hand,<sup>15</sup> and, on the other, favoured the Muslim leadership of Kargil against the Buddhist leadership of Leh. Political differences between Ladakhi Muslims and Buddhists were becoming public. In 1969, several incidents, including the alleged desecration of the Buddhist flag by a Muslim, the stoning of the Jama Masjid and Imam Bara by a Buddhist procession, and subsequent reactions in Kargil, progressively divided the two communities politically. The Buddhist Action Committee raised a number of demands, including the status of a Scheduled Tribe for the Ladakhis, the settlement of Tibetan refugees in Ladakh, construction of a rest house in Kargil, recognition and introduction of the Bodhi language as a compulsory subject up to high school, and the provision of a full-fledged cabinet

---

<sup>15</sup> In the 1967 Assembly elections, the Congress nominated Kushak Bakula's nominee Sonam Wangyal for the Leh seat, but unofficially his opponent Kushak Thiksey enjoyed the patronage of the State government. The relations between Ghulam Sadiq and Kushak Bakula were further embittered when Sonam Norbu, till then Ladakh's deputy commissioner, was nominated to the legislative council as a prelude to his inclusion in the State Cabinet. Bakula's supporters perceived it as an attempt to divide the Ladakhi Buddhists by ignoring the claims of the elected representative Sonam Wangyal. *Ibid.*, p. 231.



minister who would be the real representative of Ladakh.<sup>16</sup> The agitation leader, Kushak Tongdan, led a sit-down relay hunger strike in Leh bazaar and Nubra Valley. The State government did induct Sonam Wangyal in the Cabinet, but the other demands were not accepted, perhaps because they were opposed strongly by the Muslim Action Committee, which feared that the Buddhist demand for settlement of Tibetan refugees would upset the ethnic balance in the region.

This was a game of building political majorities. The Ladakhi Buddhists were suspicious and distrustful of the Kashmiri Muslim majority relegating them to a minority within Ladakh, and hence the demand for settling the Tibetan refugees. This was perceived as an attempt to build a Buddhist majority, arousing fear in the Shia Muslim minority in Kargil, which, in turn, tried to forge a political majority by joining hands with the Kashmiri Muslims, despite a complete absence of cultural and ethnic similarities. A vicious circle resulted, leading to the beginning of divisions among the Ladakhis into the Ladakhi Buddhists and the Ladakhi Muslims, along a communal faultline.

After his return to power in 1975, Sheikh Abdullah, once again, backtracked from his commitment to create federal structures and reorganise the constitutional set-up of the State. Nor was he willing to share political power equitably with the constituent regions of Ladakh and Jammu. The regional grievances of an inadequate share in the State's developmental allocations persisted. In a repeat performance of his first stint in office, all office-bearers of the National Conference party organisation came from the Valley. Deprived of their due share in state power, the people in Ladakh as well as in Jammu started a movement to assert their respective regional identities.

### **The Agitation for Regional Autonomy**

In 1980, the police firing and *lathi*-charge on Buddhist agitators protesting against the decision of the district authority to transfer a diesel generator from Zanskar to Kargil snowballed into a mass agitation in Ladakh. People of different shades of political opinion

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

closed ranks and set up the All-Party Ladakh Action Committee to express solidarity with the people of Zaskar and demanded regional autonomy from the Kashmir Valley. The State government was accused of treating them as slaves. Demanding divisional status for Ladakh, the people demanded that their 'homeland' be declared an autonomous region within the State. Following student demonstrations in Poonch, Ladakhi Buddhists, for the first time, resorted to violence. The protestors, including monks, held public meetings and pelted stones on being *lathi*-charged and tear-gassed by the police. Later, Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) units were flown in to the affected areas. On January 5, 1981, the Ladakh Action Committee launched a full-fledged agitation.

Initially, the State government responded positively and appointed a ministerial sub-committee to look into their grievances. The Cabinet Committee held detailed parleys with the Ladakh Action Committee from January 12 to 15, 1981, on a wide range of subjects. They included plan allocations on a rational basis rather than on the existing population basis, commissioning of hydel projects, improved communications, adequate reservation of seats in professional institutions, marketing facilities, construction of small dams, industrial development, tourism, transport facilities, irrigation projects, development of culture and language and the status of Scheduled Tribe for Ladakhis.<sup>17</sup> The State government promised to request the central government to grant tribal status, but resisted sharing of political power with Ladakh. Citing the Sikri Commission Report, Sheikh Abdullah denied the regional imbalances and discrimination suffered by Leh district. The Ladakh Action Committee criticised the government's unrealistic yardstick for making development allocations ignoring the region's enormous size, scanty population, difficult terrain and general economic backwardness.<sup>18</sup> Sheikh Abdullah's claim that Ladakh's problems

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 291-2. On the basis of the yardstick adopted by the Gajendragadkar Commission and the Sikri Commission, the per capita expenditure on Ladakh during the Fourth and Fifth Plans and the first year of the Sixth Plan was Rs. 114, Rs. 323 and Rs. 569 respectively, against Rs. 35, Rs. 101 and Rs. 187 for Jammu, and Rs. 33, Rs. 88 and Rs. 147 for Kashmir. In terms of actual inputs, however, the Fourth and Fifth Plan allocations for Ladakh region were Rs. 60 million and Rs. 180 million, respectively, against State allocations of Rs. 1.62 billion and Rs 2.79 billion.

were being looked after by a separate Ladakh Affairs Ministry did not stand scrutiny, because, except for brief interludes, the Ministry was always headed by a non-Ladakhi and did not enjoy significant powers and responsibility in respect of Ladakh.

Frustrated by the State government's apathetic attitude and delaying tactics, the Ladakh Action Committee resumed its agitation on January 15, 1982. There were violent clashes between the demonstrators and police and Leh district experienced its first curfew for four days. In sub-zero temperatures, 10,000 people gathered to attend the funeral of their first martyrs. In a meeting with Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi, Kushak Bakula and P. Namgyal reiterated demands for regional autonomy and tribal status. They argued that one-member representation of Leh district in the State Assembly was inadequate and underlined the need for delimiting the district into four assembly segments — Leh, Nubra, Changthang and Sha — and a separate parliamentary seat for the Leh district.<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Abdullah's government did not concede any of the demands of the Ladakh Action Committee.

### **Sub-regional Variations**

Significant intra-regional political differences in Ladakh emerged during this agitation. Notwithstanding the nomenclature of the All-Party Ladakh Action Committee and demands for regional autonomy of the Ladakh region and tribal status for the Ladakhis, its predominantly Buddhist character was not coincidental. A parallel Kargil Action Committee constituted by the National Conference and the Congress raised a different slogan — 'provincial status for the two districts of Leh and Kargil' on the pattern of Jammu & Kashmir divisions.<sup>20</sup> The State government subsequently used the Kargil Action Committee's stand to reject the demand for regional autonomy on the plea that all Ladakhis did not want it.

---

During the Sixth Plan, the allocation for Ladakh was Rs. 345.9 million and in the Seventh plan, it was Rs. 884 million against the State's total outlay of Rs. 5.20 billion.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

## The Agitation for Union Territory Status

The secessionist movement in Kashmir that gained strength the late 1980s was once again followed by voices of separatism in Ladakh. An agitation was triggered by a scuffle between a Buddhist youth, Rigzin Zora, and four Muslims in the Leh market on July 7, 1989, at which time a coalition government headed by Farooq Abdullah was in power. The mishandling of the situation by the local police and the State government's refusal to appoint a commission of inquiry exacerbated the situation. J&K Armed Police (JKAP), was subsequently deployed, and fired at Buddhist processionists killing some protestors, forcibly entered Buddhists' houses, desecrated objects of worship, and resorted to indiscriminate beating of locals and looting of property. These actions led the LBA to embark upon a violent struggle, once again demanding the separate constitutional status of a Union Territory for Ladakh. The movement emphasised their poor and inadequate political representation in the State Assembly and total neglect and discrimination in the socio-economic development of the Buddhist-majority Leh district, and reiterated the general perception that the Valley had always treated Ladakh 'as a colony'.

As evidence, they cited the gross under-representation of Buddhists in the State services and the 'Kashmiri-run' administration. The J&K Secretariat had *only one* Buddhist employee. Out of 200,000 government employees, only 2,900 were Ladakhis, and there was no Buddhist among 18,000 employees of nine corporate sector units.<sup>21</sup> Rs. 250 million was spent under the World Bank-aided Social Forestry Schemes, but Leh district was ignored. It had no share in the funds disbursed by the Central Land Development Bank and the Khadi and Village Industries Corporation in the State. Between 1987 and 1989, the State government had received more than Rs. One billion from the Prime Minister's Special Assistance Fund, but Leh got only Rs. 2.1 million. For tourism development schemes in 1990, a sum of Rs. 5.9 million was earmarked for the Valley; Leh was given only Rs 700,000, while the neighbouring Kargil district received Rs. 1.7 million. Under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, the Valley was given Rs 72 million, while

---

<sup>21</sup> *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, May 14, 1992.

Leh received just Rs. 2 million.<sup>22</sup>

The State government was accused of adopting unrealistic norms for allocation of Plan funds to Ladakh, of neglecting the power sector, and of unimaginative planning of power projects. Srinagar refused the central energy minister's proposal for two National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) projects in Leh and Kargil in 1988. Micro hydel projects at Basgo, Sumur and Hunder were yet to be commissioned despite being launched a decade earlier. The State government had withheld sanction for the Domkhar Hydel project that had been technically cleared by the Central Water Commission years earlier. Work on the Kumdok, Tagtse and Bogdang micro hydel projects, had not progressed beyond perfunctory surveys for ten years.<sup>23</sup> Another case in point was the Stakna Hydel Project, which took over 25 years to build, cost nearly Rs 350 million, was operational for barely four months a year and produced just 2 MW electricity.

The Buddhists obviously resented the neglect of the rich Bodhi language and the imposition of Urdu as the medium of instruction for Ladakhi children. Although 84 per cent of the population of Leh district is Buddhist, Bodhi teachers were provided in only 32 of the 252 government schools. Despite specific recommendations of the Gajendragadkar Commission, the State government had not set up a degree college for the 200,000 inhabitants of the region. Successive State governments were also accused of 'Islamising' Ladakh by encouraging Buddhists' conversion to Islam, with the ulterior motive of disturbing Ladakh's demographic balance. More significantly, the systematic dismantling of important forums for Ladakh's development, such as the Ladakh Affairs Department, the absence of Ladakhi representatives in Farooq Abdullah's coalition government and the Buddhists' one seat in Ladakh's share of four seats in the State Assembly, had resulted in simmering discontent among the Ladakhi Buddhists.

The Buddhists increasingly accused the 'Kashmiri Sunni Muslims' of practicing 'majoritarian politics' driven by communal considerations, and of dominating Leh's administration and economy. Kashmiri Muslims bagged the development contracts for

---

<sup>22</sup> *Hindustan Times*, May 15, 1992; and *Hindustan Times*, April 20, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> *Frontline*, Chennai, October 23, 1992, p. 35.

constructing buildings, roads and bridges in connivance with the Kashmiri-dominated bureaucracy. Kashmiri hotel-owners and traders called the shots in Leh's market. They had reaped most of the benefits from the influx of foreign tourists into Ladakh since 1975 and they, according to the Buddhists, were instigating the local Muslims — *Argons* — to flex their muscles in a way that 'the 15 per cent minority [of Muslims] wanted to dictate terms to the [Buddhist] majority'.

### **Social Boycott**

As a consequence of the agitation, the Buddhists boycotted the Kashmiri Muslims. Valley traders soon vanished from the Leh market and their hotels and restaurants were shut down. The entire Kashmiri officialdom fled Leh, Khalsi, Nubra and Zaskar areas. Violence was more severe in the villages, where Muslim houses were burnt and crops were damaged. Some Muslims were forced to convert to Buddhism. In retaliation, Ladakhi students studying in colleges at Srinagar and Buddhist pavement hawkers were sufficiently intimidated to leave the Valley.

Subsequently, the social boycott was extended to the local Muslims. The Buddhists avoided the Muslim areas and did not enter hotels, restaurants or shops run by Muslims. Farmers were prohibited from exchanging tools. All Buddhist houses sported brightly-hued flags and vehicles driven or owned by Buddhists bore yellow stickers. No inter-religious marriages were allowed and meetings among relatives of different faiths were stopped. Violators faced punitive action by the LBA. For example, its 'mobile magistrates' imposed on-the-spot fines on Buddhists buying goods from Muslim shops. Social boycott ruptured the centuries-old bonds of amity between the Ladakhi Muslims and Buddhists. Interestingly, even its proponents could not justify it except as a 'tactical move'.<sup>24</sup> At the peak of the boycott, LBA leader Rigzin Zora described it in the neutral terms of a 'non-cooperation' policy and later admitted that it was 'an exercise in arm-twisting... [and] was crude, uncivilised and unbecoming of us'.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, many stressed that though

---

<sup>24</sup> Based on interviews with Ladakh Buddhist Association leaders.

<sup>25</sup> *Frontline*, December 30, 1994.

unfortunate, it was *necessary* to drive the point home that the Muslims [local minority] should not bank upon the Kashmiri Sunni Muslim majority in the State to dictate terms to us [the local majority]. A common refrain was that 'It taught them (the Muslims) a lesson as they had allowed themselves to be instigated by forces in the Valley'.

The Buddhists launched a civil disobedience movement against the J&K government with an indefinite strike by Buddhist government employees from September 2, 1989. Government officials were not allowed to visit Buddhist villages and houses and contractors and labourers stalled work on State government projects. The government machinery was paralysed. Denouncing 'Kashmir's imperialism' and 'hegemonism', the LBA activists call was to 'free Ladakh from Kashmir'. The LBA president asserted that 'the Kashmiri rulers have been systematically eroding the Buddhists' ethnic and cultural identity for the last forty-two years and it can be saved only by making Ladakh a Union territory.' The Kargil Muslims (comprising nearly half the region's population) resolutely opposed this. The government agreed to negotiate with the LBA leaders in view of their threat to boycott the impending general elections.

### **Proposal for Autonomous Hill Council**

At the tripartite talks between the central government, the State government and LBA leaders on October 29, 1989, an agreement was reached whereby the LBA withdrew its demand for Union Territory status in favour of an Autonomous Hill Council on the lines of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. The LBA leaders realised that Union Territory status would require an amendment to Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which would be a virtually impossible task given the hostility of the Kargil Muslims and the Kashmiri leadership. The Hill Council was accepted as a compromise to provide a mechanism for self-governance by granting autonomy to Ladakh in administration, economy and planning.

After the Congress (I)'s ouster at the Centre, however, the tripartite agreement on the Autonomous Hill Council (AHC) remained on paper. V.P. Singh's and Chandra Shekhar's subsequent governments took no interest in Ladakhi issues, and the proposal was revived only after the Congress returned to power in 1991. The central government then impressed upon the LBA leadership to

secularise its political demands, and the then Union Home Minister, S.B. Chavan, insisted on the lifting of the social boycott of Muslims. Consequently, talks between the LBA and the Ladakh Muslim Association (LMA) ended the boycott. The Buddhists relented because they needed the LMA's support, and the latter acquiesced because its demand that 'concessions to Ladakhis should not be given in the name of a communal body' was conceded.<sup>26</sup> The two organisations joined hands to demand a Hill Council, and the Ladakhis gained the support of all the people of Leh. The Kashmiri leadership, however, strongly opposed the Hill Council and succeeded in deferring its implementation. The Centre backtracked to avoid 'rubbing the Kashmiri leadership on the wrong side' and jeopardising efforts to restore normalcy in the Valley. It was precisely this kind of Valley-centric thinking that had alienated the people of Ladakh, who believed that the Centre belittled and disregarded their aspirations because they had not challenged India's political and security interests nor 'resorted to the gun' against the state. The LBA leaders were at pains to explain that 'our religious beliefs of *ahimsa* and peaceful co-existence do not approve of violence... but we are being forced to lose our identity and fight for our dues.'<sup>27</sup> They reasoned:

While the government has conducted negotiations with the militant movement of Bodos and ULFA of Assam, Ladakhis have been neglected just because they have chosen to follow the ideals of *ahimsa* in redressing their demand. We fear we too will have to deviate from our cherished ideals of non-violence to drive home the point to the government that our demand is just, democratic and constitutional.<sup>28</sup>

With this opinion gaining ground, the LBA leaders and heads of Buddhist monasteries threatened a revival of the agitation and a possible recourse to violence. The LBA president, Thupstang Chhewang, warned that "the simmering passions of Ladakhis especially the younger generation might lead to establishment of their links with anti-social elements if the sentiments of Ladakhis are not respected."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Ladakh Muslim Association president Akbar Ladakhi.

<sup>27</sup> Based on conversations with LBA leaders.

<sup>28</sup> The LBA's letter to Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, dated June 8, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> *Times of India*, New Delhi, May 12, 1992.



In October 1993, the tripartite talks reached agreement on setting up the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council at Leh. The government assured enactment of the requisite legislation in three months, but nothing happened. Frequent deferment of the Hill Council disturbed the youth who revived the agitation in April 1995. They threatened to start a violent struggle if the Union government failed to introduce a comprehensive Bill on the autonomous status of the Hill Council, or if it did not honestly implement the agreed decision in the stipulated time.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Autonomous Hill Council Act**

The P.V. Narasimha Rao government finally relented, and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council Act was enacted on May 9, 1995. The Act provided for an Autonomous Hill Council each for Leh and Kargil, and an inter-district advisory council to advise them on matters of common interest to both districts, and to resolve their differences and preserve communal harmony in Ladakh. Councils were to have tenures of five years. The objectives of decentralisation and devolution of powers were clearly affirmed in the 'Reasons for Enactment' that conclude the official text of the Act:

Ladakh region is geographically isolated with a sparse population, a vast area and inhospitable terrain which remains land-locked (*sic*) for nearly six months in a year. Consequently, the people of the area have had a distinct regional identity and special problems distinct from those of the other areas of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The people of Ladakh have, for a long time, been demanding effective local institutional arrangements which can help to promote and accelerate the pace of development and equitable all-around growth and development having regard to its peculiar geoclimatic and locational conditions, and stimulate fullest participation of the local community in the decision-making process. It is felt that decentralisation of power by formation of Hill Councils for the Ladakh region would give a boost to the people of the said region. The present measure is enacted to achieve the above objective.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> *Hindustan Times*, April 18, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> "The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils Act of 1995", *The Gazette*

The Leh Council has twenty-six elected members and four nominated by the State government from among the principal minority (read Muslim), women and two eminent persons. The Council has an executive body of five councillors, including one Muslim. The sitting Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) are ex-officio members, but without voting rights. The Leh Council has 26 territorial constituencies whose boundaries were drawn in collaboration between State officials and local leaders so as to ensure adequate representation from the sparsely populated regions of the district, and to prevent domination by central Ladakh (Leh and surrounding areas in the Indus Valley).

The executive powers and functions of the Council included allotment, use and occupation of land vested in the Council by the government, formulation and review of development programmes for the district, budget (Plan and non-Plan), formulation of guidelines for the implementation of schemes at the grassroots level, special measures for employment generation and poverty alleviation, promotion of co-operative institutions and local culture and languages, management of un-demarcated forests and canals or watercourses for agriculture, desert development, tourism planning, promotion and development; and preservation of the environment and ecology of the area. The Council has extensive rights to collect State taxes and levy local taxes and fees of different kinds, including taxes on grazing, business, transport, entertainment and 'temporary occupation of village sites and roads.' The Council also has the power to hire and fire public servants of all but the very highest ranks, and all government employees except those in the judiciary and police are 'transferred' to the Council, although it remains at the discretion of the government to recall them. In theory, then, the Council enjoys considerable powers and freedom to formulate its own development plans. Yet, just five years after the enactment, the Council has lost almost all local support, has managed to achieve little or no change in development policies, and appears to be in disarray ideologically, politically and administratively.<sup>32</sup>

---

*of India*, May 9, 1995, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent analysis of the working and structural and political problems faced by Leh AHC, see, Martijn van Beek, "Hill Councils, Development and Democracy: Assumptions and Experiences from Ladakh", *Alternatives*, New Delhi, 24, 1999, p.

## Voices From Kargil

While Leh's Buddhist minority (in the State) felt insecure about the Muslim-majority Valley dominating Ladakh, the Shia Muslims of Kargil believed that Buddhist-majority Leh overshadowed Kargil's identity. The people of Kargil strongly resented the Leh-centric conception of the Ladakh region, which, until the 1980s, had all the district headquarters and central government offices. Keeping in mind the religious affinity, close economic links and political alignments with the Valley, Kargilis traditionally have identified with the Kashmiri leadership, although they did not support the secessionist movement in the Valley. The Centre is blamed for Kargil's backwardness, lack of an airport and discriminatory policies in recruitment to the Ladakh Scouts.<sup>33</sup> Compared to Leh, the political equations are clearly reversed in Kargil.

That is precisely why the Kargil Muslims did not accept an Autonomous Hill Council, although its leaders across the political spectrum supported the idea in principle. Stressing that 'they have not rejected the Autonomous Hill Council but only postponed the decision' until the turmoil in the Valley was resolved, Kargilis did not wish to antagonise the Kashmiri leadership, respecting the latter's denouncement of an Autonomous Hill Council as 'amounting to Kashmir's territorial disintegration'. Many shared the view that "Kashmiris have always stood by us... We owe it to them."<sup>34</sup>

Another complicating factor in this political equation is injected by the Buddhist minority in the Zaskar area of the Kargil district. A small Buddhist community of 18,000 in Zaskar feels neglected and discriminated against by the Kargil Muslim-majority administration. Their long-standing demands for a monastery, *serai* and cremation ground in Kargil town are cited as examples. Kargil leaders, on the other hand, are indignant about Zaskar's demand for a separate sub-hill council when they themselves have not accepted an Autonomous Hill Council for Kargil district. Echoing the LBA's

---

441.

<sup>33</sup> The Kargil Muslims have a meagre 5.5 per cent representation in the Ladakh Scouts in comparison to their nearly 50 per cent population share in the region.

<sup>34</sup> Based on conversations with political leaders, the Islamia School representatives and the members of the Youth Voluntary Forum at Kargil.

arguments in Leh's context, they argue that the "minority [Buddhists] must live according to the [Muslim] majority's considerations and support Kargil's interests."<sup>35</sup> This, however, did not deter the Zaskar's Buddhist Youth Association President, Tsewang Chostar, from sitting on a *dharna* in May 1995 to demand a separate State Assembly constituency for Zaskar, because it remains totally cut off from the rest for the State for eight months in a year.

### **The Kargil Crisis**

The present agitation, launched in June 2000 by Ladakhi Buddhists, can, consequently, be seen as the revival of their long-standing demand for direct administration from New Delhi. In the current context, however, this movement also has far-reaching implications for India's security, as well as for the political future of the State of J&K. After a gap of nearly forty years since the Chinese aggression in 1962, the Kargil crisis in May 1999 once again brought home the political and strategic significance of the Ladakh region.

Kargil is the only sector on the Line of Control where the Pakistan Army enjoys the advantage of higher positions. In capturing the heights at Dras, Kargil and Batalik, Pakistan's military planners had exposed the Achille's heel of the Indian Army, catching the latter napping in a strategically important area. Pakistan's scheme sought to establish dominance over the captured high ridges, so that the Indian army would find it impossible to dislodge it, and would consequently acquiesce to the loss of territory just as Pakistan did to the seizure of Siachen Glacier in 1984. However, the Atal Behari Vajpayee government's decision to unleash the Air Force and bombard enemy posts in Kargil and, the Indian military victories on the ground in the recapture of the Tololing heights, followed by the strategically important Tiger Hill in the Dras sector and Jubar Hill in the Batalik sector, backed by international pressure, forced Pakistan to withdraw its troops.

While the intruders were thrown out of Indian territory, Pakistan has succeeded in turning Kashmir into India's festering wound. The cost of manning the Kargil border alone has been estimated at Rs. 18

---

<sup>35</sup> Based on interviews with political leaders and activists at Kargil in August 1997.

billion a year. That is a huge drain on the exchequer, even higher than the defence of Siachen.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, there were indications that Pakistan was trying to extend its proxy war through infiltration and dumping of arms and ammunition in the hitherto 'clean' Ladakh region. In the 'first ever arms seizure' in this region, Leh police seized a large cache of sophisticated arms and ammunition, including 25 AK-47 and-56 rifles, one LMG, one MMG, plastic explosives, one rocket launcher, three rockets, fifteen hand grenades, three batteries, fuse wire and a sniper rifle, and arrested 24 people from the border villages of Thang, Tyakshi, Pachathang and Turtuk. They also discovered that several young men of the border villages had been crossing, over several weeks, to Skardu in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) for arms training. On their return, many infiltrated the armed forces as well as civilian agencies. For instance, the Leh police arrested two constables — Mohammad Ali and Ahmed Shah — from Thang village. Significantly, Ibrahim, an undercover agent working for the Intelligence Bureau (IB), had switched sides and turned out to be the major conduit for arms and ammunition dumped in the upper-Ladakh region to foment insurgency.<sup>37</sup>

The local Shia Muslim population of Kargil district, though sympathetic to the Kashmiri cause, had generally refrained from joining the ranks of the militants. Nevertheless, the massive scale and an uncanny accuracy of the Pakistani artillery shelling that resulted in the destruction of an ammunition depot worth Rs. One billion and a television tower, followed by the shelling of the district and military administration headquarters in the nearby Baru area, led the security forces to suspect that Pakistani artillery was being directed from the Kargil area by an enemy agent with a high frequency wireless set.<sup>38</sup> The Indian Army's recovery of Indian cement bags (purchased from Dras for casting slabs to fortify bunkers), receipts of payments made to a mason in Dras and the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ranjit Bhushan, 'The Diffusion Bomb', *Outlook*, New Delhi, August 2, 1999, p. 26; and Raj Chengappa, 'Holding the Heights', *India Today*, New Delhi, August 16, 1999, pp. 46-54. Chengappa quoted Lt. General Krishan Pal, Commander 15 Corps that "our forces in Kargil would have to be twice as much... probably more" and "by May 2000, the army would have spent Rs. 24 billion just to maintain troops there".

<sup>37</sup> Rajesh Joshi, "Double Jeopardy", *Outlook*, June 28, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *India Today*, 21 June 1999, p. 29.

Pakistan Army's 'out-passes' to Srinagar from the intruders' bunkers in Dras, also indicated a possible and substantial collusion between some local citizens and Pakistani intruders.<sup>39</sup>

With a continuing battle raging in the highest and most inhospitable terrain in Siachin and Pakistan opening a new military front in Kargil, the military and strategic significance of the Ladakh region cannot be over-stated. While the Indian Army has launched a drive to procure sophisticated military equipment for effective surveillance, no borders can be secured without the support of the local populace. Notably, both during the 1965 War and, according to some accounts, the intrusions in Kargil, first reports of intrusions were received from local shepherds. There is, clearly, a great deal of popular antipathy to the Pakistani position in this region, and this needs to be consolidated. The Indian Army has already initiated several steps in this direction. A new Corps has been raised, and this will generate more employment and give a boost to development activities in the areas across the Zojila Pass. Ghulam Hassan Khan, the National Conference MP from Kargil, pointed out, "till yesterday, the representation of Kargil (read Muslim instead of Kargil) was not even one per cent in Ladakh Scouts, ITBP, ITBF, SSB, Railways and nationalised banks because it was a Congress decision to deny these rights to Kargil. Army's transport contracts and vegetable supply orders would go to Leh 'come what may'." The situation has now changed and, without prejudice, Khan does concede that over 300 persons have been recruited from the area (community) into these institutions in the post-Kargil days. "The SSB has set up a unit in Kargil. Over 70 youth were recruited into the ITBP and the Ladakh Scouts. The Army has given enough contracts to the Kargil transporters for the first time in the history." The importance of recruiting locals was realized at the time of Kargil crisis, when the Indian Army required substantial numbers of soldiers and porters who were well acclimatised and familiar with the mountainous terrain, as also for translating the intercepts of infiltrators' communications in the Pushto, Persian, Balti, Ladakhi and Skardu dialects of Kargili.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Indian army officers felt that if Pakistani intruders had succeeded in cutting off the Srinagar-Leh highway, then their supplies would have come the Indian side and not from across the LOC. *Hindustan Times*, August 5, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 3 June 1999.

A more serious challenge, however, is for the State and central governments to arrest the communalisation of political processes in the Ladakh region. In this context, the Regional Autonomy Committee (RAC) Report's recommendations subjecting Ladakh to an 'undisguised communal cleaver' needs to be seriously reviewed.<sup>41</sup> The Report recommended breaking up the mountainous region into two new provinces consisting of just one district each — predominantly Buddhist Leh and predominantly Muslim Kargil. Ladakh had already been sundered by its division into two districts (Leh and Kargil) by Sheikh Abdullah in 1979, and Kargil had been excluded from the Ladakh Autonomous Council set up in 1995. The transfiguration of two districts into two provinces would serve only to sharpen communal and ethnic boundaries.

The RAC Report has failed entirely to provide a logical, cogent and uniform rationale for restructuring the State into the eight proposed provinces, except a brief and sweeping statement that "the prevailing classification of provinces/divisions is hampering the process of social and human development and that it was coming in the way of democratic participation at the grassroots level within the state."<sup>42</sup> Yet, the Report also recommends that "the government may consider setting up of District Councils as an alternative to the Regional/Provincial Councils."<sup>43</sup> Such district councils were clearly irreconcilable with the assertions of the preceding paragraph, since they would work within the existing provincial arrangement. Also, while the Committee rightly questioned the administrative inclusion of Ladakh into the Kashmir region, it failed to rectify this anomaly by granting independent provincial status to Ladakh.

It is also important to note that while the J&K Legislative Assembly had unanimously passed an identically worded State Act to replace the Autonomous Hill Council Act of the central government in October 1997, Farooq Abdullah made it clear that the measure was 'a temporary one'. The introduction of the Panchayati Raj Act in J&K further complicates the issue. All this illustrates the temporary and precarious nature of Leh's newly won autonomy. It is the uncertainty of the political future of the Leh Hill Council and the

---

<sup>41</sup> Praveen Swami, "Towards Greater Autonomy", *Frontline*, July 30, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> For details see, *Regional Autonomy Committee Report*, Jammu, April 13, 1999,

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-7.

State Assembly's resolution adopting the State RAC's Report without instituting political mechanisms for equitable sharing of political power with the constituent regions of Jammu and Ladakh, that provides the context for the revival of the LBA's demand for Union Territory status. In a week-long stir in June 2000, LBA President Tsering Samphel said "we (Ladakhis) have always been treated with contempt, be it employment, education or infrastructure. The only way out is to let Ladakh assume a Union Territory status."<sup>44</sup> He threatened that, if this demand was not met, "the Ladakhis... would seek the option of looking for a mass asylum in some foreign country... but certainly not with China which has ravaged our culture in Tibet... we would approach the United Nations pleading to somehow protect our cultural identity".<sup>45</sup> While Samphel reiterated that the LBA "would continue to abide by the Buddhist religious codes even while taking an agitational path", Goy Lobxang Nyantak, the youth-wing leader of the LBA, sought to caution the state government as well as the Centre that "the God-fearing folk of this region would be forced to take up arms if their long-pending demand remained ignored...[and] it will only be for the administration to blame if we happened to resort to a warpath. It (violence) may appear anti-religious, but the motive, nonetheless, is to protect our identity."<sup>46</sup> While the demand for Union Territory status enjoys support from across the political spectrum of the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) in the Leh district, its prospects are not bright, since it is vehemently opposed by the Kargilis who comprise nearly half the population of the region.

The best course available to the Farooq Abdullah government is to strengthen the Leh Autonomous Hill Council (LAHC), especially now, since Kargil is also seriously rethinking the idea of a development council, an offer which they had turned down in 1995. There are three main reasons in support of such a course of action. First, the funds for the LAHC do not lapse. Second, the latter has the power of recruitment as well as the power of postings at the local level. Third, development has significant local participation. As Ghulam Hassan Khan, the National Conference M.P from Kargil, put

---

<sup>44</sup> *Kashmir Times*, Srinagar, June 20, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



it, "when the Plan money will come in September, we will have just a month or so for spending it, unlike Leh where they would keep it in the account and spend it at the proper time with interest."<sup>47</sup> With a growing realisation of the significance of an autonomous hill council, the people of Kargil are seriously reconsidering the prospects of accepting the hill council offer, which will help the district grow.

## Conclusion

Prime Minister Vajpayee's decision to initiate the peace process with Kashmiris by opening the doors of dialogue to the Hurriyat Conference as well as the militant leadership of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, within the larger framework of *insaniyat*, is a momentous step in the right direction. While this is, no doubt, critical to bringing peace to the Valley, the coalition government at the Centre, must not lose sight of the political aspirations of the people of Ladakh and Jammu. The simmering passions of Ladakhis must be creatively channelized into processes of political participation and the development of the region. The peace process must encompass a dialogue with *all* the people of the State because a just and lasting peace in J&K can only be brought about by creating a set of political mechanisms that provide a sense of belonging and participation to all sub-national and sub-regional communities and group identities.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Kashmir Times*, July 3, 2000.