

VOLUME 30, ISSUES 1&2, JANUARY - JUNE, 2023

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

VOLUME 30, ISSUES 1&2, JANUARY - JUNE, 2023



PUBLISHED BY INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

Journal of Peace Studies

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PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY

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International Centre for Peace Studies

Office Address:

157/9, Block 4, Second

Floor, "Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj, New
Delhi-1110070

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C-11 Jangpura Extension

New Delhi - 110 014

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<http://www.icpsnet.org>

Email: cpsndjps@gmail.com;

Printed at:

A.M. Offsetters

Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi

PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

OVERSEAS OFFICES**UNITED STATES**

7541 N.WESTERN AVENUE

CHICAGO,

IL 60645-1510, USA

UNITED KINGDOM

196 CHURCH ROAD

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UB5 5AE U.K.

PHONE: 0181-845, 8828

SUBSCRIPTION**In India**

Single Copy: Rs. 150.00

Annual

(Individual) Rs. 600.00

(Institutional) Rs. 1200.00

Overseas (Air Mail)

Single Copy: US\$ 7.50

UK£4.50

Annual: US\$ 45.00

Journal of Peace Studies

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Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the footnotes. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, (Ms Word 2003 or above format) also. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

Journal of Peace Studies Research Section

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OPINION

Kargil - The Post Amendment Scenario

Ali Mohmad Rather*



Kargil has been geographically part of Ladakh but administratively and politically has been mostly influenced by the politics of Kashmir. It has the history of having close association with Kashmir. This association is as old as the time of annexation of Ladakh to Kashmir by the Maharaja Ranjit Singh's General Zorawar Singh. In the aftermath of independence of the country, Kargil became part of Ladakh administrative district, while it was a component of Baltistan before that. The political parties in Kashmir were dominant in this region as well.

Historically, the politics of Kashmir has influenced the political scenario of Kargil to a great extent. The political leadership of Kargil has been created and sponsored by the Kashmiri political leaders. With the

emergence of national conference after 1947, the leaders of Kashmir gave opportunity to people of Kargil to join the political system and among them were mostly the religious leaders like Syed Mehdi Siliskoot, Aga Ibrahim Shah from Chaskoor during Bakshi Ghulam Ahmed's regime. In the 1970s, Mohmad Ali Kacho of Pashkum, became the representative of the Congress party from Kargil. During the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's rule, Munshi Habibullah joined him (in 1976), then Qamar Ali Akhoon (in 1980). Abdulla's National Conference held sway in Kargil. At that point of time, Commander Hassan Khan of the Congress party represented Kargil in the parliament. Thus, two political parties were active, one at the national level and the other at the state level, pretty much similar to the state of affairs in Kashmir.¹

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based in Kargil*

In the later stage also, this divide in the politics of Kargil continued. In the meanwhile, two religious parties, Islamia school and Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust (IKMT), were operating at the backdrop. The National conference was represented through Islamia school by Qamar Ali Akhun and the National Congress through IKMT by Asgar Ali Karbalai. The divide between the two groups decided local politics. This divide made it easier on the part of Leh - Buddhists to always win the parliamentary seat, although Kargil has more voters than Leh.

The rise of the People's Democratic Party (established 1999) further divided the politics of Kargil.

Abrogation of Article 370

When in August 2019, the Constitution was amended and articles 370 and 35 A were abrogated, political scenario of the state, as a whole, changed dramatically. The immediate impact of the abolition of the articles of the constitution is being discussed in this article now.

As a result of abrogation of the article 370 and 35 A, Kargil became part of the new Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh which was carved out of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) State. The statehood of J&K was withdrawn with J&K becoming the other UT. The

people of Kargil, long used to the politics of Kashmir, looked at it from the local lens. Three top leaders of KDA, have challenged the Central government's 5 August 2019 move in the Supreme Court.²

They were facing several difficulties and Kargil was markedly backward compared to the other part of the region, i.e. the Leh district. When, the people of Leh, who had been demanding the UT status for Ladakh, celebrated the event for their success, the people of Kargil protested the abrogation. The people of Kargil believed, much like Kashmiri people, that article 370 was had kept their region safe and secure. They could hardly think of politics without Kashmir, as reported by news agencies.

Kargil witnessed a huge number of locals coming out on to the streets with black flags. As part of the ongoing protest, the markets remained shut. "This is murder of a democracy. People of Kargil will never support bifurcation of the state and degradation of the entity of their state"³ people told the media.

"The decision has been imposed without the consent of the people and we will keep fighting till the Centre hears us out. *Hum sadkon pe utarte rahenge aur sarkar ke liye*

sardard bante rehngge jiss tarah se Gandhi ji bane thay uss zamane mein (We will keep coming out on to the streets and will cause government a headache—the way Gandhi had done in his time),” said Munshi Nasir Hussain leader of the Congress party from Kargil.⁴

The Kargilites were thus more shaken than the people of Leh after the abrogation. The Kargilites have closer link with the Kashmiris and the region is geographically and religiously more aligned to Kashmir. Over the years, many a people from Ladakh, i.e., both Leh and Kargil, had built their winter houses in Kashmir and Jammu. This process of migration to J&K, particularly during winter kept the links with J&K alive.

The new political scenario of Kargil

The Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), an amalgam of different political and religious parties based in Ladakh’s Kargil region, reiterated that it does not recognize the Union Territory status of Ladakh. The KDA has demanded complete statehood for Ladakh and the Alliance has accused the BJP government of disempowering the people of the region by taking away legislative and governing powers from them. Hitting out at the Centre’s move of making Ladakh a Union Territory

last year, the KDA alleged that the government had imposed autocracy in the region.

However, on the day when article 370 was revoked and J and K was bifurcated into two UTs, the joint action committee (JAC) Kargil, comprising social, political and religious groups, called for a complete shutdown. People took to the streets, chanting slogans of “*na-insaafi nahi challegi* (we will not stand for this injustice)”. Twelve protesters were reportedly detained, roads to the main town from areas such as Sankoo and Minjee were blocked, mobile internet was snapped— services were restored only earlier this week on 27th December, after a shutdown of over 140 days.⁵

“The people of Kargil have never demanded a UT or abrogation of Article 370; we have already seen so many divisions in the past 70 years. We have been divided from Baltistan in 1947, then after that we saw so many divisions in the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan,” says Sajjad Kargili, independent politician and social activist. “We feel the pain of separation and are connected and dependent on the Kashmir valley.”⁶

Buddhist opinion

The Buddhists inhabiting Kargil, immediately after the abrogation and

declaration of Ladakh as a UT had a positive opinion about the move. It was held that removal of Article 370 and 35A was good for them. They had complained that earlier the funds used to go to Kashmir and Ladakh never got its due share. Now there was hope that that they would get funds directly from the Centre and the region would develop. It had been their demand since 1949, for inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule to protect their land, jobs and identity.”⁷ The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution contains special provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the four north-eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. This is partly out of their fear of being swamped by big businesses from outside who might get into Ladakh in the name of development and promotion of tourism and take away their land and jobs.

View of the people of Drass

The people of Drass region, are mostly *Shina* speaking of *Nurbakhshia* and *Sunni* persuasion. It is the second-coldest inhabited place in the world and was the epicenter of the Kargil war in 1999.

On the 5 August 2019 on the eve of the bifurcation of state into UTs they felt the deepest impact of the change.

It being only 140 km from Srinagar, many of its residents have relatives in the valley, their children study in schools there and they get their stock for the winter from Srinagar. One of the inhabitants, 71-year-old Haji Ismail Mohammad Baji said: “For our private or government work, we had to travel to Kashmir previously. It was close, our children study there. Now we will have to go all the way to Leh, about 300 kms away from Drass. We can’t afford it.” Another respondent reportedly said “We are far more patriotic than the people of Delhi and Nagpur. When the Kargil war happened, we put our lives at risk to help the army, and now we have been rendered stateless, our internet was shut down and we are cut off from the world.”⁸

Formation of KDA

In order to fight for the redressal of their grievances after the abrogation of the articles of the constitution giving special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcation of the state into two UTs, the political and religious parties of Kargil formed an alliance and named it as Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA). Reportedly, it is a grouping of regional parties and local seminaries, who had always held that the 2019 decisions were “illegal and unconstitutional”.⁹

As mentioned above, the alliance is an amalgamation of different political and religious groups, who dominate the Kargil district. The members are as follows: Qamar Al Akhoun(National Conference, NC), Haji Asgar Karbalie. (Congress), Nasir Munshi (Congress), Haji Hanife(NC), Sheikh Bashir Shakir (IKMT), Aga Ahmed Razvi, (Anjumani Sahibi Zaman), Aga Mujtaba Mosavi, Sajad Kargili (Islamia School Kargil), Syed Mohammad Shah (Noorbakhshia Community), Haji Nabi War (Ahle Sunnat Community), Murtaza Ali (student leader).

The aims and objectives of the KDA are the following:

Statehood for Ladakh; constitutional safeguards as per the sixth schedule of the Constitution; separate seats for Loksabha and Rajyasbha; early recruitment from the region.¹⁰

As per the Alliance, the demand for restoration of Article 370 is currently being heard by the Supreme Court, and added that if the court decides to restore Article 370 and unify J&K and Ladakh then, the Alliance would be satisfied.¹¹

In response, the union government invited the leaders of

Kargil to discuss their issues. On 24 June 2021, Union government sent a letter to KDA leaders to discuss the developmental issues with the Centre. On 1 July 2021 the leadership met union minister and the went smoothly. It was only after that meeting that the two bodies KDA and apex body at Leh decided to meet and fix a joint agenda for discussion with the union government¹².

On 26 October, in a recent development on four core issues of Ladakh, the Apex body Leh and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) announced a future course of action after a meeting between the veteran leaders of the two bodies.

The meeting was attended by Apex Body leader of Leh and leaders of etc. After the meeting, the formation of a core coordination committee consisting of leaders from both Apex Body and KDA.

In the earlier meeting, it was decided to stage a sustained movement for the four-point agenda of Ladakh including constitutional safeguard on the pattern of the Sixth Schedule, demand for Statehood, separate seats for Leh and Kargil in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and employment for people from the region. The other issues were:

- ➔ Roadmap for a sustained movement in the year 2023-24
- ➔ Support for the massive protest on 29 October, for recruitment and unemployment-related issues.
- ➔ 31 October, the foundation Day of the current Union, to be marked as a black day.
- ➔ Gonpa Issue in Kargil was amicably resolved by the two bodies after peaceful deliberations.
- ➔ The two bodies decided not to compromise on any of these issues.
- ➔ 02 November to be observed as a protest day after which a sustained movement was to be carried on by the KDA and Apex Body till 2024.

The leaders of both districts also announced support for the Students' Unions, whenever they give a call for strike and protest in Ladakh¹³

As per the decision taken in the meeting, street protests were organised in the twin districts of Kargil and Leh on 2 November 2022, as the region completed three years of Union Territory (UT) status. The KDA organized a protest in November 2022 against the Union Government's attitude and policies and demanded fulfilment of their demands. A procession was taken from Islamia

school and Jamia masjid throughout the whole town. The main demand was incorporation of Ladakh into the Sixth Schedule on the lines of rights granted to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram to safeguard local culture, language and demography¹⁴


Conclusion

Kargil, situated at a strategic locale, has been internally divided politically but it has always wanted to stay within the constitutional territorial limits of the country. Local sentiments against the abrogation stems from its age-old geographical, religious and cultural relations with the Kashmir and Kashmir society. However, in spite of their so close links with Kashmir, the people of Kargil had no role in the secessionist movement of Kashmir. They would not expect any step motherly treatment from the governments at state or central levels. However, the abrogation of the constitutional rights guaranteed to the region through 370 and 35A and the bifurcation of the state with the separation of Ladakh, as a separate UT, was an abrupt move that shocked these people. In the aftermath, they felt that they were being treated like the Kashmiris and their condition did not improve much. This perception

perturbed them. That is why, they rose against the union government. It also led to integration of the rival political parties and unity among different socio-religious groups.

Interestingly, although initially, the majority of the people from Leh did not show any sign of disagreement with the initiative taken by the union government, and they were not favouring the attitude of Kargilites, later, they perhaps realized the

gravity of issues which emerged due to the new political scenario and made common cause with the leadership in Kargil to some extent. Thus, a united forum of Leh and Kargil has started a movement to get their demands fulfilled. In the meanwhile, the focus is not so much on the abrogation as on laying down their genuine demands in front of the local and central government based on the realisation that they have to adapt to the changing circumstances.



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