

PEREGRINATION OF LADAKH FROM A HUNK OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE TO A DISCRETE UNION TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

“God’s house is late and not dark”

The above said saying is utmost suitable in case of the situation of the last long bearing patience of the people of Ladakh. Though it took not less than seven decades to grant justice and to get rid of the unfairly treatment of the Kashmir Government with Ladakh region, but at last the miracle of abrogation of the temporarily drafted “Article 370” of Indian Constitution and separation of Ladakh region from the Kashmir Government had been granted and the dream of Ladakhi people appeared to be true. The main focus of the paper is to discuss and highlight the problems faced by the two ignored districts (Leh and Kargil) of the then State of Jammu and Kashmir (now Union Territory). The filthy and cleaver attitude of Kashmir administration and politicians with respect to the Ladakhis from the seven decades and the causes of the backwardness of the region (Ladakh) should not be ignored by the researchers. Recent declaration of Ladakh as a union Territory has created a bundle of doubts in the mindsets of the people throughout the country. No doubt, the people of Ladakh had been mal treated, subjugated, ground downed and unfairly treated in every arena of political, economic and socio-cultural spheres. Therefore the paper will highlight the history of Jammu and Kashmir administration with regard to the way that the state administration kicked off the two districts from the welfare policies for the people unlike the other states of India attempts to do, be it political, economic, development, employment etc. To collect the information, secondary sources of information was used. The history of the region (Ladakh) when it was under the hunk of Jammu and Kashmir state administration to the independently (from Jammu and Kashmir state) governed by central government can only be discuss with highlighting the

[Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Review \(AJMRR\)](#)

ISSN 2582 8088

Volume 2 Issue 2 [April - May 2021]

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demands of the people of Ladakh in past few decades and the problems faced by the two districts of Ladakh under the state administration.

Keywords: Ladakh, Kashmir Government, Development, Unfair, Step Motherly Treatment.

INTRODUCTION

The Region of Ladakh is surrounded with the high mountainous peaks of Himalayan and Karakoram ranges creating many passes to be connected with the other states of India. Due to its high altitude of approximately 11000m above the sea level, the temperature remains cool for the whole years. The heavy snowfall in the mountains is the reason for the cutoff of the region from the other states of India for more than five months every year. Zojila Pass is the connecting pass of Ladakh region with Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. It was for a very long time, may be more than seventy years, the Ladakh region was administrated under the constitutional functionary of Jammu and Kashmir State. The demand of the people of Ladakh for the Tunnel construction, to cut the Zojila pass for the easy transport communication from Ladakh to Jammu and Kashmir and other world remained ignored for such a long time and this was the very basic and important demand of the Ladakhi people which could not reached to the deaf administrators of Jammu and Kashmir Government. Therefore the terrain land, rocky topography and cold climate might become a reason for the underdevelopment and backwardness of the region, but at the same time, the step motherly treatment and dirty politics of the Jammu and Kashmir politicians for such a long period of time had become remorseful for the Ladakhi people which led to the uprising of the Ladakhi people in 1980s, demanding the separate administrative setup for Ladakh region and get rid of the step motherly treatment of Jammu and Kashmir State administration.

GRUBBY POLITICS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR AFTER 1947 AND STEP-MOTHERLY TREATMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE ADMINISTRATION TOWARDS LADAKH REGION

Ladakh became an integral part of Jammu and Kashmir when the British government transferred the territory of Jammu and Kashmir including Ladakh to Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1846. The then state of Jammu and Kashmir (now Union Territory) comprises Muslim majority in Kashmir valley and Buddhist preponderance in Ladakh and Muslim in minorityⁱ.

In the wake of the partition of India and accession of Kashmir to India on October 27, 1947 the Government headed by Shiekh Mohd. Abdullah, the popular Kashmiri leader, had complete legal and moral sanction. The U.N resolution of August 17, 1948 accepted by both India and Pakistan required Pakistan to withdraw her forces from the occupied territory of the state prior to the holding of plebiscite, which the Pakistan never followed and still the areas of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir are illegally occupied by the country shamelessly, claiming of their ownⁱⁱ. as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir ruled over the area of Ladakh also, therefore when the time of submission or transfer of his power and territory to the government of India came, the constitution of Ladakh was also linked and connected to the Government of Jammu and Kashmir's national Conference. The pro Indian Ladakhis decided to stay as a part of the state because of their religious and cultural links with Indiaⁱⁱⁱ.

The Ladakhis expected that the important interests would be protected in the new dispensation and that they would be treated better than what they had tasted in the Maharaja's autocratic rule. But nothing such could have happened unfortunately^{iv}. The condition of Ladakh region became worst as the area is isolated from the rest of the state of Jammu and Kashmir compounded by its climate rigors and difficult terrain additional to it its neglect at the hands of the new political set-up in the state for a long peregrination connected as part of Jammu and Kashmir State. But for not a single matter, by what problems the Ladakhi people are passing through, the administration of Kashmir did not appear to be bothered about^v. And the indifferent attitude of the Kashmir Government towards Ladakh was not appearing to be stop, which made the people of Ladakh restive. In the same era, Kushak Bakula was the Member of Legislative Assembly of Ladakh and the people sent a delegation led by Kushok Bakula, to New Delhi for ventilation of their grievances and the delegation called on the Prime Minister of India on May 20, 1949^{vi}.

The exasperated and indignant Kushak Bakula roused upon the State Government during the Budget session of the newly formed Legislative Assembly of the state and spoke

out that Ladakh was totally omitted from the budget list and not even a token provision was given to Ladakh by the Kashmir Government^{vii}.

On May 20, 1952 on the floor of the legislative Assembly, Kushak Bakula exposed this action of government and in mistakable words spoke about the apathetic and negative attitude of the government towards Ladakh. He compared the Ladakhis to slaves who were reeling under the unbearable weight of their shackles but suppressed their groans out of helplessness. He pointed out that the Ladakhis, could not be expected to remain unaffected at that juncture of world's history when the principle of self-determination had become a universal phenomena and when Kashmir itself was pulsating with new life. Bakula also made a reference to China as Ladakh's neighbour whose occupation of Tibet had lent a new dimension to the political scenario in Ladakh and the land around it^{viii}.

Criticizing the budget he observed, "read the statements from one end to the other, you will not find Ladakh mentioned even once much less will you find a reference to its economic and other needs which are urgent and pressing and cry for urgent attention and fulfillment."^{ix} The Budget speech of Bakula was covered by the national as well as international press. By trying to get the Head Lama's speech from the proceedings of the Assembly in which he criticized the Budget proposals, the State Government lent credence to the head Lama's charge that the need of the Ladakh region were completely ignored and it was not treated at par with the other two regions of the state^x.

But, in spite of the uncovered filthy politics of Kashmir politicians toward the innocent Ladakhis, Shiekh Abdullah, the then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir stuck on his decision and took a step toward the dirty politics again. With the title of Reorientation policy of Government towards Ladakh he deputed J. Dechan, a Christen of Leh Tehsil who has been serving as an Income Tax Officer in Kashmir as the Deputy Commissioner in Ladakh^{xi}. As usual the cultured corruption process worked again and The Deputy Commissioner was commissioned to adapt a divide and rule policy for the Buddhists by creating a faction hostile to Kushok Bakula which was to express lack of confidence in him and claim leadership for then minor Kushok of Hemis gompa^{xii}. This plan was intended to remove Kushok Bakula from the Presidentship of the National Conference in Leh and also from the membership of the Constituent Assembly and install the minor Hemis Kushok in these positions^{xiii}. A new

hope among the people of Ladakh aroused after the dismissal of Shiekh Abdullah on August 9, 1953 and appointment of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad as successor to Shiekh Abdullah. The people hoped for the restoration of communal and intra-communal harmony which had received a big jolt due to the policies in the region by the previous regime and the economic prosperity was also planned to usher during the period^{xiv}. They offered their whole-hearted support to Bakshi who had assured them that the rights and privileges that his Government would secure for the state as a whole would be shared in equal measure by the people of its different parts. A new hope was also kindled among Ladakhis by Bakshi's assertion that he would secure equal share of the State's beneficent programs to all the people. However, his plan was different as these were motivated to ensure his personal survival which was largely possible by winning over the Muslims of the State due to their predominance in the State's demographic profile. For the same reason, the Ladakhis who comprised the smallest and the weakest unit of the population in every respect hardly mattered for Bakshi's survival. As the Ladakhis extended the whole heartedly support to Bakshi, he had to re-orientate the government's Ladakh policy which resulted in setting up of some small scale industries, constructions of some link roads, setting up of some farms, plantation of trees, opening of some schools etc. though these schemes was a good beginning but these were too small and inadequate to meet the enormous economic needs of this backwater of the State^{xv}.

The Bakshi regime did take certain measures for developing the Ladakh region, but the schemes initiated were too small for developing the Ladakh region, but the schemes initiated were too small to make any substantial impact on the economy of the backward region. Kushok Bakula who was the only Buddhist leader at that time nursed a feeling that a section of the Muslim leaders of the National Conference created at Bakshi's prompting an impregnable barrier between the Buddhists and Muslims of Ladakh^{xvi}.

When Bakshi was asked about Article 370 which conferred a special status on Kashmir, he remarked, "let Article 370 (dealing with Kashmir) be scrapped. For all I care". The statement not only embarrassed the central authorities but gave them a rude shock as it was not in keeping with Bakshi's utterances harping on Kashmir's abiding ties with India^{xvii}.

Later, Bakula wrote a letter to the then PM J.L. Nehru where he spoke the volumes about the disgust of Ladakhis with Bakshi Gulam Mohammad and his Ladakh policy which seemed

intended to ignore the economic development of the region which was its desperate need and disturbing its tranquil and secular atmosphere^{xviii}.

The letter speaks volumes about the disgust of Ladakhis with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and his Ladakh policy which seemed intended to ignore the economic development of the region which was its desperate need and disturbing its tranquil and secular atmosphere^{xix}.

“It is unfortunate that despite these frank professions of sincerity, Bakshi took the Ladakhis for granted and played smart with them which convinced the Ladakhis that their salvation rested only with India and thence onwards strived for attainment of that goal”^{xx}.

The divide and rule policy of the government divided the Buddhist community into warring faction and set up a stage for Pakistan and China who were closely watching the situation and looking for an opportunity to strike and grab the remaining part of the sensitive region. The most important development in the region during the Sadiq regime was the attempt to do away with the influence of the lamas and to build up a new leadership of young laymen. This pernicious divide and rule policy pursued by the government in Ladakh shook the Ladakhi society to the marrow^{xxi}.

UPRISING IN LADAKH: A DEMAND OF UNION TERRITORY STATUS AND SCHEDULED TRIBE STATUS

The situation was more disturbing as the developments helped secessionist bodies like the Plebiscite Front to make a perceptible dent in the region. All these developments led to separatist feelings eventually leading to the people’s demand for a Union Territory status^{xxii}. The separatist feelings in Ladakh were also prompted by the idea of linguistic reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir thrown up by an Indian commentator in November 1965 and subsequently by Dr. Karan Singh, the then Governor of the State. The commentator contended that, “the independence urge of the Kashmiri-speaking people takes on a secessionist flavor because of the despair widely felt, that the Kashmiri will be denied a State within the Indian Union in which he is master”^{xxiii}.

The Sadiq Government did pay some attention to the economic development of Ladakh but the projects undertaken were too small to make a remarkable impact on the backward region's economic development. It was a laudable step for the Sadiq Government to have appointed the Ghendragadkar Commission to look in to the imbalances which the three regions of the State suffered from. The Commission was appointed in November 1967 and for the Ladakh region it made a few remarkable recommendations like for provision of a full-fledged cabinet minister in the State's cabinet belonging to the region, opening of a college at Leh and Kargil and raising the status of Ladakh by fibbing it a due place in the formal name of the State. The other equally important recommendations comprised development of roads, electricity etc. All these major and important recommendations were not implemented through Sadiq had assured Mrs. Gandhi that his government would implement "all reasonable, viable and, above all, those recommendations of the Gajendragadkar Commission which ensure maintenance of integrity of the State"^{xxiv}.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, was anxious to bring back the State of Jammu & Kashmir within the national mainstream and that, according to her perception, necessitated Sheikh Abdellah's return to power in the State^{xxv}. Sheikh Abdullah was aware of Ladakhis' unhappiness with him. All the same, during his 1973 visit to Leh, he assured them of his sincerity but they kept their fingers crossed. His effort to persuade the Ladakhis' leadership to give up the demand for Union Territory status did not cut any ice with it nor did it accept the Sheikh's offer for a berth in his new cabinet^{xxvi}.

The composite Ladakh district was bifurcated by the Sheikh Government on July 1, 1979 into two cultural districts of Leh and Kargil. While Zanskar, a Buddhist majority area, should have thus formed part of Leh district, it was attached to the predominantly Muslim district of Kargil for so-called administrative convenience. The bifurcation eroded the centuries-old cohesiveness of the region besides generating bitterness and separatist tendencies between the two communities which had coexisted for centuries past. Such action also lent a new dimension to the politics of the region which is not quite so happy^{xxvii}.

After assumption of office the Sheikh in his first broadcast to the people assured them, among other things, that on his part, "I shall make a sincere effort to ensure that the three regions not only have equal opportunities for full and speedy development, but that the people in every

part of the State have a full sense of participation in the political affairs of the State.” The extent to which this solemn pledge was honoured by the government regarding its three regions is reflected in its official brochure for the period 1975-79 and need not, therefore, be repeated here. It may, however, be pointed out that equal opportunities for development were not provided to the three regions, as promised^{xxviii}.

The biggest blunder which the successive State Governments committed was to take the Ladakhis for granted all the time despite their exposure over the year. For that they have to blame themselves and not brand Ladakhis as separatist. The people’s pent-up emotion and frustration exploded in 1980 at long last over a trifle provoked by the government in distant Zaskar which found a sympathetic echo in Leh where an All-Party Action Committee was formed. The main demands of the Action Committee were grant of regional autonomy and Scheduled Tribe status to the Ladakhis. As pointed out above, the autonomy demand was intended as a substitute for the long standing Ladakhis demand for Union Territory status and should have as such been welcomed by the authorities. The other demand for Tribe status was intended to alleviate the backwardness of the people and should not have as such been looked upon as something extra ordinary and non-negotiable^{xxix}.

The failure of subsequent talks between the Action Committee and the Cabinet sub Committee resulted in an open confrontation between the people and the government in January 1982 whose momentum exhausted only after the 1989 in famous communal agitation^{xxx}.

The Ladakhis brought their grievances to the notice of the centre for its intervention and redressal. But despite the chief minister’s personal assurances to the prime minister in this regard, no positive action was taken and peace continued to elude the region indefinitely^{xxxi}.

On September 8 1982 Sheikh Abdullah had named his son Farooq Abdullah as his successor to chief minister ship in preference to his son-in-law Ghulam Mohammad Shah^{xxxii}. The Ladakhis were not sure about the new government’s thinking about their problems particularly the demand for Tribal status and grant of autonomy in economic and financial matters. The Ladakh Action Committee discussed these matters with the new State Cabinet during its visit to the region in October 1982. As a result of the cordial discussion, it was decided that the issue of conferment of tribal status would be recommended to the Centre for favourable consideration and the autonomy demand was to be jointly discussed by the Chief Minister,

Kushok Bakula and P. Namgyal with the Prime Minister whose decision was to be binding on the two parties. The Action Committee, accordingly, suspended the year-long agitation on the Chief Minister's assurances and the faith of Ladakhi leadership in the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, the said meeting of the three leaders with the Prime Minister never materialized and the matter got consigned to cold storage^{xxxiii}.

SUBSTITUTION OF THE MECHANISM OF AUTONOMOUS HILL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL GOVERNANCE IN LADAKH ADMINISTRATION

In the Legislative Assembly on July 20, 1983 the Chief Minister retracted from his commitment to the Ladakhis regarding grant of tribal status to them saying that "he would not grant tribal status to people living in Ladakh until those of Kargil, Zaskar and many others in Jammu were also declared so"^{xxxiv}.

The 1990 general election being round the corner and the image of the ruling Congress (I) party having badly suffered impairment coupled with the LBA's announcement to boycott the election, left the Congress (I) with no choice but to cajole the LBA. The Central Government hastened to issue the much-awaited notification on October 7, 1989 conferring tribal status on eight ethnic tribes of first round of Tripartite talks between the Centre, the State and the LBA was fixed for October 29, 1998 at Leh. However, against the LBA's demand for Union Territory status, it was agreed to settle for an Autonomous Hill Council for Leh district. The Autonomous Council which was ultimately set up amidst usual birth pangs, is now functioning^{xxxv}.

AUTONOMOUS HILL COUNCIL (AHC)

The oft-repeated demand of Ladakhis for a Union Territory status was, in course of time, substituted by them by 'Regional Autonomy' in larger national interest.^{xxxvi} Autonomous Hill Council was finally approved and announced on October 9, 1993 whereas a similar Council though approved in principle for Kargil^{xxxvii}. The peace in Ladakh got disturbed whenever the

people genuinely nursed the feeling of alienation or step-motherly treatment towards their economic development^{xxxviii}.

The setting up to the AHC infused a fresh hope in them and revived their sagging spirits. They look upon the Council as the culmination of their long struggle for realization of their cherished goal of managing their affairs and shaping their destiny^{xxxix}.

The Autonomous Hill Council is a two-tier structure comprising a General council and an Executive Council. The General Council has 30 members, four of whom are nominated by the Governor to ensure representatives of minorities, women and specialists while the Executive Council has five members one of whom is from the principal minority group (Muslim). The Chairman of the Executive Council is elected by General Council. This dispensation did not require any amendment to the State's Constitution^{xl}. It is expected to provide some measure of autonomy to the frustrated Ladakhis to manage their affairs. The exercise of determining priorities and allocation of funds done by the Ladakh Development Board previously, is now undertaken by the Council. The appointments, transfers etc. of non-gazette officers fall now within the competence of the Council whereas recruitment, transfers etc. of the gazette officers continue to fall within the competence of the State Government. The most important feature of the Council is the satisfaction it has given to the people's cherished aspiration and their active involvement with its functioning^{xli}.

DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT IN LADAKH COMPARED TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR FROM THE YEAR 1948 TO 2019

The AHC has identified the core areas for development with emphasis on education and employment which are intimately related to development. It is, therefore, imperative that top priority is accorded to education which has not so far received the attention it deserved^{xlii}. The grant of autonomy can become meaningful when the three regions comprising the State and the minorities and ethnic groups inhabiting them receive equal attention in their march towards progress and prosperity^{xliii}.

Therefore, in the event of the Autonomous Hill Council experiment in Leh district faces uncalled for interference in its functioning, the Ladakhis will not hesitate to raise the slogan

of the Union Territory status for their homeland again for the last time with avoidable devastating consequences^{xliv}.

In 1947 when whole of India rejoiced over its independence, naïve Ladakhies believed that it was the beginning of a new era for them too, a dream of being equal respectable partners in the shaping of its own destiny and that of the state of Jammu and Kashmir where it fell. It did not take long to realize that they had only been out of the frying pan into the fire, that rather than becoming free sons of free India they were left at the mercy and step motherly treatment of the Kashmir Government^{xlv}.

A story of operation through calculated discriminatory policies towards the region and among different communities within the region^{xlvi}. Today Ladakh, once an abode of peace and harmony is fast turning into a hotbed of communal frictions and unrests as the political frustrations of the people are tactfully given communal shapes to divide and rule^{xlvii}.

Looking back at the last few decades of Ladakh one can easily discern the Kashmir Government's deliberate campaign for the overall destruction of the culture and soul of Ladakh, its only fault being that it is predominantly Buddhist populated region^{xlviii}.

The following facts speak clearly of their discriminatory attitude.

1. Ladakh, the third most important region forming the state jammu and Kashmir does not have a single representative in the states's 30 membered council of ministers.
2. Although in area it is far larger than both Jammu and Kashmir but , it has only two members in the state assembly of 75.
3. Due to the state's apathetic and unsound educational policies 95% to 98% of the students fail in the matriculation examinations.
4. The massive region does not even have a degree collage.
5. The Government has systematically dismantled all the important forums of development such as the Ladakh development board.
6. The meager funds allocated to the region are wasted on ill-designed works like stakna project a 4 M W hydel project that took 25 years and crores of rupees, only to prove a failure in the end.

7. Apart from such general discrimination the Kashmir Government tries and has succeeded in dividing the people on communal grounds through various vicious policies of favouring the Muslims at the cost of the Buddhists^{xlix}.

The Kashmir Government's economic policy and planning in Ladakh can, at best, be termed as lackadaisical. Misplaced priorities, faulty planning and pale green attitude to implementation of schemes characterize the Government's performance^l.

Competent local officials with proper perspectives of priority-sectors are deliberately kept out of deliberations on important issues. The net result has been a terminally declining economy^{li}.

- Traditionally a farming society, with agriculture as their mainstay, Ladakh has received scant attention in the agricultural sector. Although a department for agriculture has for long been in existence, there is nothing that it can be complimented for.
- Irrigation, which is entirely dependent on the perennially flowing streams, has been grossly neglected. No effort whatsoever, has been done to repair and broaden the age old canal; nor reservoirs built to store the stream water. As a result, the entire farming community to suffer enormously from lack of irrigation facilities.
- The power sector, despite figuring on the priority list of the Government, is said pointer to the Government's non performance^{lii}.

The machination of the state government has not been confined to subversion of development projects alone, rather it has been extended to deprive Ladakh from every source of funds, including the centrally sponsored schemes^{liii}.

ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370 AND DETACHMENT OF LADAKH REGION FROM JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE: FORMATION OF THE EIGHTH UNION TERRITORY (LADAKH) OF INDIA

Finally, the people of Ladakh was given a big surprise on 05 of August 2019 by fulfilling their desire and dream. The demand of Union Territory status to Ladakh region was given and the

temporary Article 370 was abrogated from the Indian Constituency, as sooner or later it would have to be happen. The Jammu and Kashmir State was converted into two Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir UT and Ladakh UT. It was the end to the dirty and shameful politics and discriminatory and undemocratic policies pursued by an entrenched elite for seven decades. Now, the Indian constitution and all the 890 Central laws are fully applicable to J&K^{liv}.

The response of people of Ladakh to the formation of the Union Territory, as it has manifested was analyzed after one year. After an initial sense of satisfaction to their long-pending demand for UT status, people in Leh have become as restless as the people in Kargil to the change resulting from their UT status, and there are a lot of anxieties related to lack of representation and concerns related to jobs, land, environment and heritage^{lv}.

One year after being granted the status of union Territory, Ladakh has been passing through a phase of anxiety. The first anniversary of UT that fell on 31 October 2020 was marked by protests in Kargil district, with leaders calling it “Black Day”^{lvi}.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the whole political scenario of the history of Jammu and Kashmir with respect to Ladakh, ‘the ignored Land’ can be concluded with the unfortunate remarks that the unfair and step motherly treatment or attitude of Kashmir Government were taking its breath for a very long periods of time. The people though tried their best to convey their grievances and problems to the Center Government through agitations and dissatisfied behaviors and they kept their demands to the central government for the separation of Ladakh from the Jammu and Kashmir administration, but that was very unfortunate to depict here that they were failed. At the very last, the crying people were given the Autonomous Hill Council as a substitution of the administration for maintaining peace on the land of Ladakh. But as far as development and employment is concerned, still it can be said that no kind of momentum had been begin with. Because still the area is been one of the backward area of India and the students are studying outside their hometown as there are no colleges and no university at all. But as of now, if the region has become autonomous in itself, it is expected that justice will be granted to the Ladakhi

people by making the region more developed, and it will not be ignored as early State Government did.

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