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Name of the Topic: The Paradox of Participation: Self-Determination Movement and Electoral Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir

Keywords: Elections, Jammu and Kashmir, Conflict, Separatists

Abstract:

In classical liberal scholarship, elections are considered as one of the major pillars of modern democracies. Elections reinforce legitimacy of government in a democracy and serve as a medium to change political parties from power. In case of India, most of the leaders of Indian National Movement opted for ideas and institutions of modern world, democracy being one of them. Outside western world India became an example of success story of democracy. Certainly Indian democracy started as a typical example of procedural democracy judging by the regularity of elections held. However it is argued that overtime, elections have helped certain underprivileged castes to assert themselves both at regional and national levels. However, election dynamics have unfolded differently in different states. Most of the studies on elections in India have neglected the dynamics of elections in conflict areas. In conflict areas, like the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the contours of India's democratic success need to be revisited. Perhaps elections serve a different purpose in conflict situation i.e. of *legitimation and de-legitimation*, not only of mainstream political parties who participate in elections, or of State, but of *Separatist Politics* (not Separatism). Indian state and Separatists, both consider elections as litmus test for their respective stands on Kashmir issue. While as, India presents higher participation as vindication of its claim, Separatists always support election boycott to assert theirs. There is perceived alienation within the Kashmiri people (against the State), at the same time electoral participation has increased in the region. In absence of representation and proper channels of dissent in Separatist politics, how do people negotiate with Separatists? The thesis looks at whether electoral participation is related with legitimization and de-legitimation of Separatist Politics (not Separatism) in Kashmir, and this may or may not hold true of the State.