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DEMOCRATIC EXERCISES AND PEACE PROCESS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Dr. Ashok Bhan

The year 2014 was marked by two credible democratic exercises of far reaching consequences in Jammu and Kashmir. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections were held in a reasonably peaceful environment. People of the State reposed their faith in democracy by a record turnout despite marginal increase in terror related incidents, poll boycott call given by separatists and escalation in border firing incidents and infiltration by Pakistan.

Election is often designated in peace processes as a mechanism for ending the post-conflict transition. However, in view of the complexity of the problem it will be naïve to assume that terrorist violence will completely end any time soon. It must also be factored that in Jammu and Kashmir the Indian State had never failed and there were Governments in place as per the constitution even while the conflict was on. Therefore, holding of elections did not necessarily require waiting for the end of the conflict. The security forces and Police were able to restore a semblance of normalcy. In such a scenario credible (free and fair) electoral exercises have allowed people of the state choices and created possibilities for conflict resolution itself.

The breakdown of constitutional machinery under the onslaught of Pakistan sponsored terrorism led to a prolonged spell of Governor's/ President's rule in the state. As soon as the security forces and Police brought the situation under control, the Central Government and Gen K.V. Krishna Rao, who took over as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in March 1993, began focusing on resumption of political process to reduce the democratic deficit by restoring power to the elected representatives. As terrorist violence had not abated and it was taking a heavy toll on political leaders and workers, it took a great deal of persuasion and assurance on security front to convince the mainstream political parties of the benefits of such an exercise. As the subsequent events have shown, this was a decision of far reaching consequences. The peace process had begun.

The first Assembly election after the current conflict began was held under the shadow of gun in the year 1996. In that year there were as many as 4499 incidents of terrorist violence resulting in killing of 1424 civilians including 61 political activists, 189 security force personnel and 1209 terrorists. Six year later in 2002 the security situation had worsened in the wake of the Kargil misadventure and pumping in of a large number of foreign terrorists by Pakistan. In that year though numerically number of terror related incidents had gone down to 3594, the encounters with terrorists had become fiercer and suicidal attacks were taking a heavy toll of lives of security force personnel. During this election year 1050 civilians including 104 political activists, 539 security force personnel and 1707 terrorists were killed. Despite high level of violence 2,975 public meetings, mostly small, were held. It goes to the credit of the Government, security forces and the people of the state that despite grim security scenario 53.9 per cent electorate exercised their franchise in 1996 and 43.0 per cent in 2002.

As compared to these two, the elections in 2008 and the recent Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2014 were held in much more secure environs. Only three political activists were killed in 2008 and seven in 2014. The number of political meetings/ rallies swelled to 6,783 and 8,997 respectively during the two election years. The poll percentage increased to 61.5 in 2008 (71.9 in Jammu and 52.3 in Kashmir province) and 65.2 in 2014 (77.1 in Jammu and 57.3 in Kashmir province). These are positive indicators of an increment in the peace process through reducing democratization deficit. Erasing of this deficit, which had accumulated over decades and attained dangerous dimensions in late 80s after 1987 Assembly elections, is by far the most important peace dividend in Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2008, following resignation by the then Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad the State was put under Governor's rule. It goes to the credit of Governor N.N.Vohra that he opted for holding the Assembly elections in due time despite a contrary view dominating his administration. Once again after unprecedented floods in the state in September 2014 there were once demands for deferring of Assembly elections. The Central Government and the Election Commission despite heavy odds decided to hold elections in due time. The timely holding of elections despite strong opposition indicates country's commitment to the process of democratization and avoiding proxy governance in the state.

Since the inception of the current armed conflict, in addition to the four Assembly polls there have also been elections to the Lok Sabha in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009 and more recently in 2014. A historic election to Panchayats as part of strengthening grassroots democracy with over 80 percent voter turnout was held in 2011 after a gap of nearly 30 years. Each one of these has helped build the peace constituency in the State.

It would be of interest to identify some important dividends to

Theme for next issue of Newsletter is "Communal Harmony is Integral to Good Governance".

the peace process from the 2014 Assembly polls. Increase in vote percent in Jammu or Ladakh is incidental to the peace process. However, defying the separatist's boycott call in the Kashmir valley and coming out to vote in big numbers in militancy affected areas as well as constituencies with sizeable separatist influence is a big increment to the peace process. Sopore constituency, which separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani has represented three times, gave mandate to a Congress candidate. This separatist stronghold and constituency with sizeable presence of terrorists polled 30 percent votes as against 20 in 2008 and 8 in 2002. Similarly, the eight constituencies in Srinagar city, most of which have under the separatists' influence been boycotting elections, have shown a sizeable turnout. Some of it may be to neutralize the impact of postal ballots of the migrant voters through which BJP had thought to open its account in the valley. The constituencies in south Kashmir still affected by residual militancy viz. Tral, Shopian, Pulwama and Pampore registered a healthy voter turnout.

Another significant dividend of the 2014 Assembly elections came from North Kashmir where J&K People's Conference led by former separatist leader Sajad Gani Lone won seats from Handwara and Kupwara. Though separatists have been participating earlier as proxy candidates it was the first time since 1996 that they have won seats under a party banner. They have realized the futility of violence and politics of agitations. The ballot has won over the bullet. This is a shot in the arm of the peace process.

The process of isolating the separatists has reached a crucial phase but their weakening influence must not be taken for granted. One or two indiscretions can take the clock backwards as separatists and Pakistan will capitalize on every such opportunity. This has been proved by recent events on the eve of cancelled NSA level talks between India and Pakistan. The marginalized separatists have returned to the headlines. The electorate had put their lot with Indian democracy after defying the gun and separatists. Those mandated must be allowed to work towards politically isolating the separatists.

The mandate and the opposing voices from the two regions expose communal fault lines which first raised their sinister head to alarming levels during 2008 land row agitation. The nature of verdict can help fulfilling regional aspirations by making institutional arrangement for equitable development and distribution of resources but it must not be allowed to further distance people on regional or communal lines.

In the absence of any possibility of resolving the internal dimension of the conflict politically or early resumption of talks with Pakistan, the peace process may have to be restricted for some time to an agenda of development and slow but definite ongoing process of 'integration' of the state of Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of India. There is a strong message in the mandate for such 'integration' from Jammu and Ladakh. The process must include rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, discussion on the reports of interlocutors and the Round Tables, security of students and those seeking careers outside the state, expediting the Rail link to the valley and uninterrupted movement on Jammu- Srinagar National Highway. There is an equally strong message from Kashmir against any attempt at "assimilation" which will be resisted.

The following issues emerge which need to be taken forward by the coalition Government for strengthening the peace process:

- The largely diminished democratic deficit of electoral nature must be guarded and nurtured. It can be strengthened by elections to the civic bodies and empowering of Panchayats.
- Despite heightened tension caused on the border on the eve of elections by Pakistan, the security forces were able to provide a secure atmosphere encouraging sizeable voter turnout. There must not be any let up in our anti-infiltration and anti-terrorism effort in J&K.
- The democratization process has to lead to demilitarization. The mandate for limited demilitarization of troops from IS duties in a phased manner must be pursued.
- The need for fulfilling regional aspirations is well reflected in the verdict as well as the CMP. Now institutional mechanisms need to be put in place to fulfill these aspirations.
- The process of integration between different regions within the state and integration of the State with the rest of the country must receive highest attention.
- A section of former separatists have joined the democratic mainstream. Weaning away of separatists must constitute an important ingredient of future policy. This will weaken the Pakistan's capacity to foment trouble in the state at will.
- There was sizeable turnout of voters in constituencies in downtown Srinagar, Sopore, and districts of Pulwama and Shopian which are known as support bases of separatists and the last three of them are not yet free from presence of terrorists. Lot of effort, both political and military, will have to be made to wipe out terrorism and diminish the separatist influence in these areas.
- Alienation and radicalization of youth and fresh recruitments of educated youth need to be attended to with measures including taking on board the clergy.

The focus of the coalition Government in the State is currently on development and good governance to achieve peace. These are important but have limited impact on the conflict resolution. These processes are time consuming and slow healers. And there is always danger of a relapse triggered by Pakistan or any provocative incident. The current border skirmishes, terror incidents in Gurdaspur and Udhampur and an increase in infiltration bids are indicators of such reversals. Within the limits set by the Constitution of India, it will be useful to explore political interventions to strengthen the peace dividends of a series of credible democratic exercises in J&K.

14TH VEERANNA AIVALLI MEMORIAL DEBATE COMPETITION 2015

The J&K Regional Branch of Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) in collaboration with the Department of Students Welfare, University of Jammu organized a 14th Veeranna Aivalli Memorial Inter-Collegiate/Departmental Debating Competition on the theme "In the opinion of the house, Social Networking is a boon and promotes freedom of thought and expression on October 9, 2015.

In a competition among 25 teams from various affiliated colleges and University teaching departments who participated in the competition, the team from Government MAM College represented by Wahed Anjum and Sourabh lifted the Veeranna Aivalli Running team trophy. The first prize was won by Meenakshi Sharma from Department of Geography, University of Jammu; Wahed Anjum from Government MAM College

bagged the second prize followed by Sanam Khan from Department of Sociology, University of Jammu. The consolation prizes were won by Kritika Sethi, Law School, University of Jammu and Harmeet Singh, DDE, University of Jammu. Mrs. Swarna Aivalli and Sh. Girish Aivalli with his family were the special guests on the occasion.

Prof. Poonam Dhawan, Dean Academic Affairs, University of Jammu and the Chief Guest of the Prize Distribution function paid rich tributes to Late Sh. Veeranna Aivalli. Speaking on the occasion, she emphasized that although social media has come to rule our lives, yet excess of everything is bad and social media is no exception to it. She said that imparting values among the youth is of utmost important for the judicious use of social media.

In his address, Sh. Danesh Rana, IPS, IGP Jammu Zone who was

Dignitaries presenting trophy to the winners

also the Guest of Honor of the function highlighted that social media is here to stay but it is in our hands to use it for the betterment of the society. He emphasised that civil society should responsibly use this wonderful medium that not only facilitates timely communication but also promotes freedom of expression and speech.

Dr. Ashok Bhan, IPS (Retd.), Patron of the IIPA J&K Regional Branch in his presidential remarks said that this debate competition has grown in its stature as a celebration of healthy bonds between students, academia, IIPA, J&K Police and civil society at large. He urged the youth to question themselves regarding being socially responsible on the social media. He said that social media shall also effect the future of governance and the way this technology is utilized to connect with the communities and society at large.

Earlier Prof Alka Sharma, Director, Seminars, IIPA J&K Regional Branch formally welcomed all the guests to the prize distribution function. In the morning session Sh. T P Singh welcomed the guests while Prof. Pankaj Srivastava, DSW, University of Jammu declared the debate competition open. The adjudicators for the debate competition were Prof. Nandita Bhattacharya, HoD, Department of English, Central University of Jammu; Mr. Pradeep Dutta, Bureau Chief, TIMES NOW and Er. Madan Dogra, Former Superintendent Engineer, Government of J&K. Dr. Komal Nagar, Joint Director, Seminars, IIPA and Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary, IIPA conducted the proceedings during the day. Er. J B S Johar, Hony Secretary, IIPA J&K Regional Branch presented the formal vote of thanks.

The 37th Annual Meeting of General Body of IIPA JK Branch is scheduled for January 9, 2016 (Saturday) at 7 p.m. in the IIPA Complex.

SEMINAR ON "FUTURE OF JAMMU URBANIZATION VIS-A-VIS NEW MASTER PLAN"

The J&K Regional Branch of Indian Institute of Public Administration organized a seminar on "Future of Jammu Urbanization vis-a-vis New Master Plan" on May 30, 2015. Prof. Alka Sharma, Director, Seminars, IIPA (J&K) in her welcome address said that Urban Areas are engine of inclusive growth and planned transformation is critical in future. Sh. Vinod Malhotra, District Development Commissioner (Retd), Govt. of J&K laid down the background of the theme and during the course of the seminar, following observations were made by speakers Sh. Hamid Wani, Chief Town Planner, JDA, and Dr. S K Chadha, Deputy Project Manager, ERA :

- Urban transition has to be managed while taking full advantage of the centrally sponsored schemes.
- Gujarat and Haryana are examples of planning practices and the concept of land pooling and regulating the development by private colonizers can be adopted from these states for future development of modern cities in J&K.
- The Urban Development Act should be amended and the public private partnership in city development should be encouraged.
- Community engagement should be encouraged in the development of the master plans.
- Efforts are being undertaken to declare Jammu as the Jammu Metropolitan Area keeping in view the expected future growth of Jammu region.
- The service level benchmarks as envisioned by Ministry of Urban Development should be kept in mind while preparing the Master Plan.
- Transformation of cities requires reforms, capacity building, citizen involvement and political will.

L to R : Dr. Komal Nagar, Prof. Alka Sharma, Sh. Vinod Malhotra, Er. J.B.S. Johar, Sh. B.R. Sharma, Sh. Soujanya Sharma, Sh. Hamid Wani & Dr. Anil Gupta during the Seminar

Sh. Soujanya Sharma, KAS, Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation made the following observations:

- Creation of smart city is the process which also requires behavioural changes as well as the change of mindset of the citizens of the state.
- One of the major concerns with reference to the planned and sustainable development of city is the phenomenon of land

encroachments especially on the areas earmarked for public infrastructure and utilities.

- The heritage of the cities should be protected while planning the modernizing of the urban cities like those of the city development internationally.

Sh. B R Sharma in his presidential remarks said that:

- It is critical to have a vision and mission and then the action plan can be worked in coherence with the vision.
- With increasing civic activism, the process of development and citizen involvement will accelerate in the future.
- Need is for the members to critically evaluate the proposed master plan and contribute suggestions to ensure that Jammu develops on the lines of smart cities.

During the interaction the members presented their views suggesting that Garbage management, Traffic Management, Easing of Slums, Coordination between various agencies and focus on sanitation should be stressed and strict enforcement of law is critical. The seminar was attended by officers of JMC, JDA, ERA, Town Planning, FCI, J&K Police,CWS, Members of IIPA and civil society.

Newsletter of J&K Regional Branch of IIPA was also released during the function. Dr. Komal Nagar, Joint Director (Seminars) conducted the proceedings of the function and Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary presented the formal vote of thanks. Er. J B S Johar, Honorary Secretary, IIPA J&K Regional Branch was also present during the function.

ESTABLISHING PEACE THROUGH RESTORATION OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN KASHMIR

Dr. Rekha Chowdhary

Though much of armed militancy and separatism in Kashmir can be attributed to the external factor of Pakistan sponsoring it and providing material, financial and emotional support to it but it was also a consequence of the fragile democratic processes. Such fragility was reflected in the political developments few years prior to militancy - the ouster of a government which was given popular mandate in 1984; imposition of an unpopular political alliance and the debacle of 1987 Assembly election. All these developments led not only to the disillusionment of people with the mainstream politics but also to the complete erosion of the democratic space.

It was with the 2002 Assembly election that the democratic process got a boost. This election was conducted at a time when the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had started taking steps in the direction of establishing peace in Jammu and Kashmir. Vajpayee had been committed to the peace process between India and Pakistan and had been making efforts in that direction for some time now. In 1999, he took the bold step of making bus trip to Lahore to talk to Nawaz Sharief, his counterpart in Pakistan. It was during this trip that Lahore Declaration was signed in which both India and Pakistan committed to resolve all differences through dialogue. Despite the fact that this effort of Vajpayee was disrupted due to strained relations between India and Pakistan following the Kargil Attack in 1999 and militant attack on Indian Parliament, he made a fresh start in a few years' time.

It was in April 2002 during his visit to Kashmir that Vajpayee re-started his peace initiatives. During his convocation address in University of Kashmir, he made offer of dialogue both to Pakistan and Kashmiris. It was this initiative of Vajpayee which was later on formalised in the Comprehensive peace process. What was peculiar about this process was that it sought to simultaneously address the external and internal aspects of conflict. This was one unprecedented process which had the promise not only normalising relations between India and Pakistan but also in bringing lasting peace to Kashmir.

At the internal level, the Vajpayee initiatives of peace building were two-fold: firstly, of engaging Kashmiris and secondly, of expanding democratic space in Kashmir. While the first initiative was quite fruitful and generated a positive political environment in Kashmir, it was the second initiative that left lasting impact in the process of peace-building.

Understanding that there was an acute trust-deficit in Kashmir vis-a-vis the democratic institutions, particularly the electoral process, Vajpayee committed to a 'free and fair election' in the state and the 2002 Assembly election that took place under the glare of international media was generally seen as a very credible exercise. Unlike the 1996 Assembly election, there were no allegations of coercion being exercised by the security forces. On the whole, it earned the fame of being quite fair and manipulation-free election.

What added to the credibility of the electoral process was the fact that for the first time in the history of electoral politics of Kashmir, a party in power failed to get majority of seats and therefore could not formed the government. In the Valley where there was a general feeling that elections are manipulated, this was a big development that the NC despite being in power at the time of election could not reach the halfway mark and a new entrant, the PDP could win a substantial number of seats in the Valley.

The fact that the voter turnout in 2002 was not inflated also contributed to the credibility of electoral exercise. As compared to 1996 Assembly election which had a relatively high voter turnout in the Valley of Kashmir (around 46%) the 2002 Assembly election registered only 29.61% voter turnout. There were the districts which had even lower percentage of voter turnout. For instance, the voter turnout in erstwhile districts of Srinagar, Pulwama and Anantnag was as low as 11.18%, 23.68% and 24.06% respectively.. There were constituencies where the voter turnout was still lower - 3.06% in Amirakadal, 3.21% in Habbakadal, 4% in Batmaloo, 4.22% in Khanyar, 4.75% in Idgah and 4.78% in Zadibal. All these districts and constituencies were affected by the separatist call for boycott. However, there were certain districts and constituencies which showed a higher voter turnout - for instance, the erstwhile districts of Kupwara, Badgam and Baramulla registered voter turnout of 53.22^%, 45.92% and 39.94% respectively. On the whole one could see that the people in the districts which had faced maximum brunt of violence during the period of militancy were more keen to exercise their right to franchise.

Congratulations
Dr. Nirmal Gupta, Life Member IIPA
for taking over as Chairperson,
J&K State Social Welfare Board

An electoral process free from manipulation from above and an intensely competitive party politics helped expand the democratic space in Kashmir after 2002. By the time the 2008 Assembly election was to take place, this space was quite animated. In 2007, one year prior to the ensuing elections, the frequency of political rallies all over the valley had started increasing. This scenario was quite different from the post-1989 period when the mainstream political parties were not able to organise any public activity. Even the 2002 Assembly election did not see much of electioneering.

With the democratic space expanding the faith of people in the mainstream politics was restored to some extent. Though the separatist politics continued to manifest itself in many ways, but one could see that the people were responding to the mainstream politics as well.

That the expansion of democratic space was adversely affecting the separatist politics could be seen clearly in the post-2002 period. The mainstream parties, especially the PDP, had incorporated many of the issues which were till now raised by the separatists only. This party entered into the democratic politics on the slogan of 'healing touch' and had recognised the impact of conflict on the people. However, it was not only the PDP but other parties as well which started referring to the implications of conflict. These parties therefore redefining their political agenda started referring to those issues which till now were raised only by the separatists. For instance, the issue of Human Rights violations was till now the exclusive issue of the separatists, was now routinely raised within the Legislative Assembly. The relevance of the political parties therefore was increased and people started looking upto these for their day to day issues of governance.

That the democratic space had quite extended itself by this time was reflected during the 2008 Assembly election. This election, interestingly was preceded by massive separatist assertion over the Amarnath land order. Facing the crisis of relevance, the separatist leadership had succeeded in mobilising masses, especially the young people. As a result Kashmir witnessed massive upsurge echoing the slogans of azadi for months together. Such was the nature of the upsurge that the separatists like Geelani became very confident about the retreat of democratic space. And when immediately after the agitation the Assembly elections were announced, they gave a call for poll boycott. However, to the utter surprise, rather astonishment, of the separatists, the very call for boycott was rejected and Kashmiris came out to participate in large numbers. As compared to less than 30% voter turnout in Kashmir valley in 2002, the voter turnout in 2008 was 51.59%. There were certain districts which had still higher voter turnout than this - thus for instance the voter turnout was 68.04% in Kupwara district; 64.50% in Kulgam; 63.17% in Anantnag; 62.42% in Budgam, 59.80% in Bandipur; and 55.22% in Ganderbal.

That people's preference for democratic politics was getting increased and the democratic politics was gaining depth was reflected during the 2011 Panchayat elections. This election took place immediately after an intensive separatist agitation in Kashmir that lasted for five summer months if 2010. Again, the separatist forces were sufficiently animated during this agitation. However, despite this agitation, the voter participation in the Panchayat election when it took place in early 2011, was quite high. As many as around 80% voter participation was recorded during this election.

It is the same trend that has been reflected during the 2014 Assembly elections. One of the highlight of this election was its participatory nature and its rejection of separatists' call for poll boycott. From all angles it could be characterised as a 'normal' election which was intensely competitive and keenly contested. It went through a process of fierce campaigning and generated sufficient interest among the people. The animated electoral scenario was quite different from the one that existed a decade back when rather than electoral politics, it was the boycott politics that had its sway in Kashmir valley.The trend for voting was set during the first phase of election itself when more than seventy percent voter turnout was recorded in five constituencies of northern Kashmir. Of these, the Sonawari constituency had recorded as high voter turnout as 80.10 percent. As the polling entered into the next few phases, the enthusiasm for voting continued to be reflected. At the end of all the phases of polling in Kashmir, one could note that there were as many as 29 out of the total 46 constituencies in this region where voter turnout was more than 50%, 23 constituencies where it was more than 60%; 14 constituencies with more than 70% and two constituencies with more than 80% voter turnout. There were certain constituencies in central Kashmir where the polling percentage was relatively much lower. For instance, in the constituencies of Habbakadal, Amirakadal, Khanyar, Idgah, Zadibal, Hazratbal, there was less than 30% voter turnout. But even here, compared to 2002 and 2008 Assembly elections, the voter turnout was significantly higher.

That the electoral politics has been entrenched, could be clearly reflected in the 2014 Assembly election. Despite the fact that the state was devastated by the massive floods in early September, elections that were held only two months later, were quite participatory. The floods had inundated large parts of the valley, particularly the district of Srinagar and had resulted in huge loss of life and property. However, electoral process generated lot of enthusiasm in Kashmir. In the context of intense competition, the nature of campaign was quite aggressive. So upbeat was the electoral environment in the valley that the separatists, though gave a call for boycott but did not pursue it as seriously As the process of voting started, one could see that rather than the mood for boycott, the general orientation was to exercise the right to franchise.

Since the separatist politics had become the central political response in Kashmir due to the failure of democratic politics, and more particularly due to utter lack of credibility of the electoral process. Restoration of the electoral space therefore has a very important role in reversing the trends towards separatism and peace building in Kashmir.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON "ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA"

A panel discussion on "Environmental Governance in India" was organized on June 18, 2015 which was attended by delegates from RTIC, ERA, JKP, Forest Department, JDA and JMC besides members of IIPA, civil society. Dr C.M.Seth, IFS (Retd.) Former Chairman, J&K Pollution Control Board, Er V.N.Sharma, Member Regional Empowered Committee, Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Shri

P.P.Sharma, Ex Chairman, State Environmental Assessment Authority were the key panelists. They made the following observations during the discussion

- Sustainability in terms of environment, economic, social and cultural are key aspect of governance.
- A multi level interaction and political will is required to enforce laws in the interest of environment of the region and in alignment towards Green Economy.
- The role of Regional Empowered Committees is critical in regulating the conversion of forest land for other uses.
- Citizens have to be active so that government performs its duty to enforce regulations related to environmental governance.

Professor Alka Sharma, Director (Seminars), IIPA talked about the relevance of the theme and highlighted few cases regarding environmental governance in India. Er J B S Johar, Honorary Secretary was also present during the function. Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary, IIPA presented the formal vote of thanks.

Dignitaries on the dias during the panel discussion

TWO-DAY WORKSHOP ON "CONSUMER PROTECTION & CONSUMER WELFARE"

IIPA, J&K Regional Branch in collaboration with Centre for Consumer Studies, IIPA New Delhi organized a Two-Day Workshop on "Consumer Protection & Consumer Welfare" during September 11-12, 2015. Dr. Pawan Kotwal, in his inaugural address, emphasized on the fact that appropriate legal measures need to be established for civilizations to flourish. He said that trade has an important role to play in an economy and that trade should focus on the interest of consumers and work towards the welfare of society at large.

Prof. Suresh Misra, Chair-Professor & Coordinator, CCS, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi made a presentation on "Consumer Protection and Consumer Welfare-an Overview". The highlights of his discussing include:

- The problems related to consumers are multiplying and with consumers becoming more active, better safety and protection measures are required which shall be covered under the new legislation.
- Globalization and liberalization has a huge impact on consumers and new technological developments have given rise to consumerism.
- Only consumer education and awareness can empower the consumers.
- Proposed the establishment of consumer helpline and setting up of Grahak Suvidha Kendra which can act as a single window clearance for all consumer grievances.

Earlier Prof Alka Sharma, Director (Seminars), IIPA J&K Regional Branch in her welcome address said that consumer protection and consumer awareness goes hand in hand and it is essential to put appropriate mechanisms in place in the interest of consumers. Dr. Sapna Chadah, Assistant Professor, CCS, IIPA traced the development of law and policy relating to consumer protection. Shri Khan Roshan Khayal, Vice-President – Law, J&K Bank Ltd spoke on issues related to Banking and Consumers and Cdr (Retd) Kulbhushan Sharma, DGM, BSNL spoke on issues related to Consumers and Internet Service Providers.

While speaking at the valedictory function on day two of the

Jenab Ch. Zulfikar Ali, Minister of CAPD and Tribal Affairs speaking during the valedictory function of the workshop

workshop, Jenab Ch. Zulfikar Ali, Minister of CAPD and Tribal Affairs made the following observations:

- The government of Jammu & Kashmir considers it its duty to protect the rights of the consumers and thus has taken various initiatives to protect and promote consumer sovereignty.
- The state government is taking proactive measures to introduce new legislation that will ensure protection of consumer rights.
- A state level consumer protection authority shall be established in the near future and also a proposal to establish an independent directorate of consumer affairs has already been submitted.

Dr. Ashok Bhan, Patron, IIPA J&K Regional Branch in his address focused on capacity building programmes and said that IIPA can play a critical role in this direction. Dr. C M Seth, Vice-Chairman, IIPA JK Regional Branch in his welcome address emphasized on the strengthening the role of enforcement agencies and shared the genesis of IIPA. Prof. Suresh Misra presented a detail report on the proceedings of the two-day workshop and emphasized on the establishment of State Level Consumer Helpline and Grahak Suvidha Kendra. Mr. G S Chib, Director, CAPD, Jammu was also present on the occasion.

Congratulations
Prof. Mehraj-ud-Din, Life Member IIPA
for taking over as Vice Chancellor,
Central University of Kashmir

The seven sessions related to the theme of the workshop included:

- "Consumer Education and Awareness" by Prof Suresh Misra
- "Legal Metrology Department - Expectations of Consumers" by Shri Manoj Parbakar, Deputy Controller, Legal Metrology Department
- Drugs Food Safety & Standards-Consumers" by Smt Lotika Khajuria, Dy Controller, Drugs & Food Control Organization, Jammu
- "Medical Service and Consumers" by Dr Sapna Chadah
- "Electricity and Consumers" by Er D.S.Pawar former member J&K SERC
- "Consumers & Role of Consumer Welfare Association" by Er Vikram Gour, President, CWA
- "Working of Consumer Redressal Agencies" Shri D.K. Kapoor, Member, J&K State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.

The workshop was attended by over 100 delegates from various departments including Department of CAPD, Drugs & Food Control Organization, Legal Metrology, Health, Medical Care, Power Development Department, RTIC, JMC, J&K Bank Ltd, Private Nursing Homes, Co-operate Sector, Institution of Engineers, Institute of Dental Science, and ASCOMS. Er. J.B.S Johar presented the formal vote of thanks. Dr. Komal Nagar, Joint Director (Seminars) and Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary, IIPA conducted the proceedings during the two day workshop.

LECTURE ON "MAGNUM OPUS OF FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION"

A lecture on "Magnum opus of Free speech and Expression" was delivered by Prof K.L.Bhatia, Former Professor of Law, National Law University, Jodhpur on August 24, 2015 which was attended by delegates from judiciary, advocates, members of IIPA, civil society. Hon'ble Justice (Retd.) Shri J.P.Singh was also present for his views on the topic. The key highlights of the lecture included

- Discussion on the "Shreya Singhal v/s Union of India 2015, Magnum opus of Free speech and Expression" which is a landmark judgment by the Apex Court and can be termed as Judicial gospel of free speech and expression.
- The judgment clearly spells out that Sec 66A ITA 2000 (2009) is an inconspicuous and constitutionally infirm because it destroys the genesis of free speech and expression.
- The present system needs a relook and the corresponding mechanisms should be devised which not only provide remedy to the citizens in a time bound manner but also provides of an appropriate compensation to the needy.

Er J B S Johar, Honorary Secretary introduced the subject and formally welcomed the distinguished speakers. Dr. Komal Nagar, Joint Director (Seminars) conducted the proceedings of the function and Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary, IIPA presented the formal vote of thanks.

"SEPTEMBER 2014 FLOOD WAS A MAN-MADE CATASTROPHE?" DEBATE COMPETITION AT SRINAGAR

Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) J&K regional branch in collaboration with Department of Students Welfare, University of Kashmir and Central University of Kashmir organized a debate competition on the topic "September 2014 Flood was a Manmade Catastrophe?" on August 22, 2015. Students of various colleges debated the reasons for last year's flood which caused massive devastation of property in the summer capital. With forceful arguments and examples, the students tried to prove their point whether the flood was natural or man-made.

36 students from various insitutions participated in the competition. Government College for Women, MA Road Srinagar, lifted the winning trophy. In individual category, Najamus Saqib from Government Degree College Ganderbal, Nisheet Zehbi from Women's College MA Road, and Syed Areej from Women`s College MA Road bagged the first, second and third prizes respectively. Muhammad Taskeen Sofi and Hannan Momin from KU's Department of Law won the first and second consolation prize respectively.

Winners of the Annual Debate Competition

On the occasion, Vice Chancellor of the University of Kashmir, Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi, stressed on the protection of environment. Chairing the valedictory function, Prof Andrabi emphasized that the importance of environment cannot be underestimated. We as people need to be conscious of the importance of protecting our environment for the welfare of ourselves and our future generations. He urged that whatever may have been the reasons behind devastating floods last year were, whether natural or man-made, we have to be cautious with our actions vis-à-vis environment.

In his address, Prof Mehraj-ud-din Mir, Vice Chancellor- CUK reflected that it is debatable whether the deluge of 2014 was natural or man-made, but we as humans have definitely multiplied our problems by our unwarranted interventions and actions with nature. He announced that CUK in collaboration with IIPA is soon undertaking a research project into "causes and reasons" of September-2014 floods.

Sh. A. M. Watali, Vice Chairman IIPA (J&K Regional Branch), Prof Neelofar Khan Dean, Students Welfare KU and Prof SM Afzal Qadri, Director Seminars IIPA (J&K Regional Branch)

also spoke on the occasion. The debate completion was coordinated by SGM Andrabi, Joint Secretary IIPA (J&K Regional Branch and Shahid Ali Khan, Cultural Officer DSW KU. Showket Shafi, Deputy Director DIQA, KU and Suhaib Hassan (System Engineer IT&SS, KU) were the judges for the competition. Sh. Ozair Nissar, Liaison Officer KU, presented a brief report of the debate on the occasion.

BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON "HIGHER EDUCATION AT CROSSROADS"

Indian Institute of Public Administration, J&K Regional Branch organized a brain storming session on "Higher Education at Crossroads" as a prelude conference on the theme chosen by the IIPA for Annual Members Conference held on October 17, 2015 at New Delhi. A galaxy of speakers were invited to deliberate on the subject - Prof Lokesh Verma, Dept. of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, Prof Mubarak Singh, Dean Dept. of Education, University of Jammu, Prof Renu Nanda HoD Dept. of Education, University of Jammu, Prof Darshana Sharma, Professor of Education, Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, Prof Rajiv Rattan, Dept. of Education, University of Jammu, Dr J.S.Warwal, Sr. Assistant Professor of Education, Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, Dr J.N.Baliya, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, Maj Gen (Retd.) S.K.Sharma, AVSM Principal of Model Institute of Engineering and Technology, Dr Kaushal Smotra, Principal, Govt. College of Education, Jammu, Dr Madhu Singh, Principal, M.C.Khalsa College of Education, Jammu , Prof Twinkle Suri, HoD, Functional English, Govt. MAM College, Jammu

The panelists made key observations on higher education which is at crossroads and emphasized the need for greater autonomy and financial independence of institutes in higher education. They proposed that to make higher education vibrant in today's knowledge and information based society, the system must become global competitive so as to enable the youth to compete at the global level. Also the system should be capable to creating knowledge which can be put into practice and has social relevance. Also the focal agenda of Higher education is the holistic development of students' personality. They were of the opinion that there is a need to change the paradigm of research to include more field based and socially relevant studies which can help to put the research findings into practice. There is also the need to establish stronger public private partnerships and to integrate foundational and secondary education with the higher education.

The function was attended by representatives of public and private institutes of higher education, members of IIPA and civil society. Er. J B S Johar, Hony Secretary, IIPA presented the formal welcome address, Prof Alka Sharma, Director (Seminars), IIPA created the foundation for the discussion and Dr. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary, IIPA presented the formal vote of thanks and Dr Komal Nagar Joint Director Seminars, IIPA coordinated the proceedings.

Speakers on the occasion

Panelist for the discussion

Congratulations
Sh. B.R. Sharma (IAS),
Chairman IIPA JK Branch
for his elevation as the
Chief Secretary of
Jammu & Kashmir

Editorial Team

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Prof Alka Sharma, Director (Seminars)
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