

**Azad Jammu & Kashmir: Polity, Politics and Power-Sharing**

Javaid Hayat, (Pakistan, Oxford University Press, 2020), 327

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The existing academic and journalistic literature on Kashmir Conflict reflects on the defense, strategic and diplomatic relationship of India and Pakistan. An indigenous narrative is missing from the popular debates on Kashmir issue. However, to mention a few, the fictional account of Basharat Pir, Mirza Waheed and a very significant academic work of Chitrlekha Zutshi is an exception. It is, however, again from the Indian-Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan-administered Kashmir/ Azad Jammu and Kashmir is primarily missing from the larger debates on Kashmir. Javaid Hayat's perspective takes into consideration not only the history, genesis and current scenarios of local politics but is mainly focused on Azad Jammu & Kashmir, which is missing from the annals of the society.

Javaid has primarily focused on legal status, polity, politics and autonomy which he calls "power-sharing." The Interim Act Constitution of 1974 for AJK is a base for the relationship between AJK and Pakistan. It aims to provide a legal framework for local government, which guarantees some autonomy on certain matters. It has, however, not delivered auspicious conditions for better administration and self-governance. Poonch revolt against the Maharaja Hari Singh and subsequent turmoil, served as a cause for Pakistan to interfere and ascertain control over the territories, is now known as AJK. The United Nation's-implemented ceasefire line between India and Pakistan in 1949, was aimed at keeping interim constancy until the final resolution of the Kashmir conflict through a plebiscite. Regrettably, this could never happen because the two nuclear states (India and Pakistan) continued to claim over the entire region. Hayat's main question is, 'can more democracy and

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democratic governance transpire within the disputed territories amidst the absence of self-determination and statehood?' He gives a new insight to power-sharing by focusing on the 'internal self-determination' and goes down to the provisional and impermanent options of power-sharing intended to promote reasonable governance. The book is divided into six chapters, and each examines dissimilar but interrelated subjects with a focus on main research question.

With an introduction of what this book is about, it articulates the debate for the next chapters. Taking forward, it examines the historical context and genesis of the Kashmir conflict and its implications for the present ambiguous legal status of AJK and its odd governance structure.

According to the United Nations, "AJK is not a sovereign state nor a province of Pakistan. It is a local authority with the responsibility over the area assigned to it under the 1949 Agreement between India and Pakistan." It also talks about the contemporary theories and approaches of power-sharing, and their bearing for the AJK. Finally, it discusses substitutes and presents a structure of an alternative model under the principle of 'internal self-determination' for the resolution of governance anomalies and democratic discrepancy in the AJK.

There are multiple factors for politics and power-sharing. For Javaid, three principal factors condition the politics and power-sharing in the AJK. Firstly, it is informed by the larger Kashmir conflict, which has set the conditions for an ambiguous status of AJK and the interim and impermanent legal arrangements. Secondly, being a *de facto* dispensed unit of Pakistan, it has been overlooked from the mainstream, which makes it 'systematically' dependent upon Pakistan in almost all aspects of economic, political and social life.

Thirdly, internal dynamics, '*Biradri and Tabbar*' politics and regional divisions play an important role in its political developments. The interim and constitutional relationship between Pakistan and the AJK was built in post-conflict setting, it has now become a source of contention.

Status of the AJK, ownership of natural resources and autonomy of power has been discussed among political parties and especially

among the nationalist groups. They consider it unjust because these arrangements have left very little space for self-governance.

In this backdrop, Javaid argues that these legal arrangements cause friction of governance that needs to be changed with an alternative framework.

The author proposes constitutional and policy recommendations to resolve the odd power-sharing relationship between Pakistan and the AJK.

Javaid Hayat, in his ambitious attempt, has not concealed his ethnic background and his political aspirations. In fact, he considered it as a leverage to draw sound lessons from his intense field work, which consists of three years. It is based on primary and secondary resources, an extensive literature review, interviews of the political leaders, journalists, academics, civil society activists and legislators. In addition, it also includes panel group discussions and surveys.

The author fears that that the *Kashmiri* resistance movement has been confronted with the grand narratives of India and Pakistan. An indigenous narrative has been underestimated and could not translate itself into a movement.

Ironically, there has not been a single book written with a focus on the AJK explaining its governance structure and the interim constitutional arrangement in the last seven decades by any local belonging to the 'Azad' Jammu & Kashmir. Therefore, this book is an attempt to fill that gap.

In his book, Javaid Hayat has demanded many concessions from the State of Pakistan, and urges the people of AJK to involve in everyday resistance; raise a voice against the topical issues and get engaged on the debates centered on the indigenous issues. Given the current political situation in IIOJ&K, revocation/abrogation of Article 370 and 35A by the government of India, and the growing dissent among the people of AJK against the popular narratives on Kashmir issue, Javaid's attempt is a significant one in this regard.

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A debate has been generated now about the status of the AJK among academics, scholars and young activists. It can serve as an attempt to foster the alternative governance model for the AJK.

- The page numbers given in the text for reference are according to the ebook.