



## TEN RESEARCH DESK

In a region where the mainstream politics has always revolved around personalities rather than democratic institutions and processes, the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir have hardly evoked any major public interest, but in 2024 it is an entirely different story that matters to everyone.

Between the last Lok Sabha elections and the ongoing ones, Jammu and Kashmir has traveled from one world to another - a historical state of 178 years has been downgraded to a centrally controlled entity run by bureaucrats, its autonomy withdrawn, and legislature suspended to perennial uncertainty; a new delimitation has fundamentally changed political landscape. The upcoming elections are essentially a battle between the old and the new regime with factors skewed heavily in favour of the latter.

While the politics of Jammu and Kashmir is deeply divided along a number of fault lines, there is one common factor that unites a current dominant view - everyone wants to see an elected government replacing the direct central rule. The prolonged bureaucratic administration completing six years in next two months has left almost everyone fatigued. The election that everyone in Jammu and Kashmir is currently looking forward to is the one to the local Assembly. The Lok Sabha elections are a prelude, an exercise to set the stage for As-

# How post 2019 Jammu and Kashmir is looking at Lok Sabha Elections'24

sembly elections. Through these elections people are looking at what kind of an elected government they can expect when Assembly elections are held, possibly in June.

## Past elections

When the Parliament of India was constituted upon Independence, Jammu and Kashmir was allocated six seats. There was, however, no delimitation until mid 1960s, and, therefore, the members to the first three Lok Sabha -1952, 1957 and 1962 -were sent through nominations even as rules demanded indirect elections with members of the Assembly making the electoral college.

The delimitation of 1960s allocated three seats to Kashmir valley -Srinagar, Anantnag and Baramulla -two to Jammu

division -Jammu and Udhampur -and one to Ladakh. By the time of first direct elections in 1967, the National Conference had been merged into the Congress under leadership of G.M. Sadiq, the last Prime Minister and first Chief Minister of the state. As an unchallenged lone player, the Congress party dominated the Lok Sabha elections till 1977 when Sheikh Abdullah had revived the National Conference following the Indira-Sheikh Accord of 1974-75.

Barring a competition on one seat -Srinagar -where Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad won in 1967 and lost in 1971 to journalist Shameem Ahmed Shameem, all Lok Sabha elections until 1977 were entirely one-sided affair. Since 1977, the regional political parties, barring 1996, have always won all three seats in the Kashmir valley. Similarly, barring 2001 by-elections, the

national political parties -Congress and BJP -have always won the two seats of Jammu region.

No Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir have ever been people's elections. This has been an exercise by and for the political elites -nourishing kin of the powerful, rehabilitating a stalwart or removing someone from local political scene. Three Chief Ministers who succeeded their fathers in the top office -Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba -have had stints in the Lok Sabha. Constitutional head of Jammu and Kashmir for 18 long years, Dr Karan Singh went to Lok Sabha four times from Udhampur constituency after demitting the Raj Bhawan. Sheikh's wife and Bakshi's brother had two terms each.

As BJP fields its sitting MPs for the third term on Jammu and Udhampur seats, a look at the past suggests that rate of re-election to Lok Sabha has been highest in Jammu and Kashmir.

In this backdrop of limited opportunities, the general public has shown very little interest in the Lok Sabha elections. But this year everyone looks involved.

## Four elections and endless wait for Assembly

As Lok Sabha elections predate the long awaited, inordinately delayed and unjustifiably denied Assembly elections, it is a battle of nerves for all political players eager to occupy, retain or widen their share of space on a landscape shaken by tumul-