



# **International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Technology (IJARETY)**

**Volume 12, Issue 6, November-December 2025**

**Impact Factor: 8.152**



# Six Years After the Abrogation of Article 370: Security, Democracy and the Myth of 'Normalcy' in Jammu & Kashmir with Special Reference to the 2025 Pahalgam Attack

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**ABSTRACT:** The abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganisation of the former State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into two Union Territories in August 2019 fundamentally altered India's federal structure and the constitutional relationship between New Delhi and Srinagar. In December 2023, the Supreme Court of India upheld the Union government's move, terming Article 370 a temporary provision and directing the restoration of statehood at a later date, thereby closing one major legal chapter but not the political debate.

Since 2019, the Union government has projected a narrative of "normalcy" based on declining militancy, increased voter participation, and an upsurge in tourism and infrastructure projects. Official data indicate a substantial fall in terrorist incidents since 2018, accompanied by assertive "zero tolerance" counter-terror measures.

At the same time, democratic processes have resumed: Lok Sabha elections in 2024 saw the highest turnout in J&K in over three and a half decades, and the 2024 Assembly elections recorded about 64% polling.

Yet the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 tourists were killed in Baisaran Valley, exposed deep fault lines beneath the surface of this "normalcy". It was one of the deadliest civilian attacks in Kashmir in nearly two decades, explicitly linked by perpetrators and sympathisers to post-2019 demographic and political changes. The incident disrupted booming tourism, triggered new security lockdowns, and invited domestic and international criticism of India's Kashmir policy.

This paper argues that post-Article 370 J&K is marked by a **security paradox**: macro-level indicators of improved stability and electoral participation coexist with the persistence—and in some ways transformation—of militancy and alienation. Drawing on government data, court documents, election statistics, think-tank reports and media analyses, the paper examines (i) constitutional and political changes; (ii) evolving security trends; (iii) democratic participation after 2019; and (iv) competing narratives of normalcy and dissent. It concludes that while important gains have been made in security management and electoral revival, the Pahalgam attack demonstrates that unresolved political grievances, cross-border dynamics and narrative warfare continue to undermine sustainable peace. The paper suggests that any durable "normalcy" will require not only hard security and development, but also meaningful political accommodation, rights-based governance, and sustained engagement with all stakeholders in J&K.

**KEYWORDS:** Article 370, Jammu & Kashmir, Pahalgam attack, militancy, federalism, security paradox, electoral participation, normalcy narrative

## I. INTRODUCTION

On 5 August 2019, the Government of India effectively abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution and bifurcated the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories—Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. A series of Presidential Orders and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, extended the full Constitution of India to J&K and removed its special status.

The move was celebrated in much of mainland India as the “full integration” of J&K, but it was bitterly opposed by most regional parties and segments of the population within the Valley. Hundreds of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the abrogation and the State’s downgrading were filed before the Supreme Court. On 11 December 2023, a five-judge Constitution Bench unanimously upheld the Union’s actions, holding that Article 370 was a “temporary” provision and that Parliament could legislate for J&K during President’s Rule, including altering its status.

## II. BY 2024–25, THE UNION GOVERNMENT HAD CONSTRUCTED A NARRATIVE OF SUCCESS AROUND THREE PILLARS:

- 1. Improved security:** a marked decline in terror incidents, a more proactive counter-terror grid and claims of dismantling the “terror ecosystem
- 2. Democratic revival:** District Development Council elections (2020), record voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and the first Assembly polls in a decade in late 2024.
- 3. Economic and tourism growth:** record tourist arrivals, new infrastructure and investment schemes, often presented as proof that the region had moved beyond conflict.

However, the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack powerfully challenged this narrative. It occurred in a heavily securitised region, at a time when tourism was booming and a new Assembly had just been elected. Yet militants were able to target a popular tourist meadow, segregate men from women, and execute 26 civilians in a matter of minutes. This paper therefore asks: What does the Pahalgam attack reveal about the nature of “normalcy” in J&K six years after the abrogation of Article 370? How should we understand the apparent coexistence of improved macro-security indicators with episodic but spectacular violence and enduring political discontent?

## III. HISTORICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Article 370 was originally conceived as a transitional arrangement following the accession of J&K to India in 1947. It limited Parliament’s legislative competence to specified areas (defence, external affairs, communications) unless the State government concurred, and allowed J&K to have its own Constitution.

Over time, a series of Presidential Orders significantly eroded this autonomy by extending numerous central laws and constitutional provisions to J&K. Yet, the existence of Article 370 and related provisions (such as Article 35A) sustained a perception—both within J&K and internationally—of a distinctive constitutional relationship

### In August 2019, the Union government combined several legal steps:

- Presidential Order C.O. 272, which reinterpreted the phrase “Constituent Assembly of J&K” in Article 370(3) to mean the “Legislative Assembly” and, in its absence (due to President’s Rule), Parliament.
- A statutory resolution in Parliament recommending that Article 370 cease to operate, followed by Presidential Order C.O. 273 giving effect to this recommendation
- The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, which split the State into two Union Territories and downgraded J&K’s status

Critics argued that this procedure effectively allowed the Union to act as both “consultee” and “decision-maker”, violating federal principles and the spirit of the original accession. The Supreme Court, however, upheld the move, emphasising parliamentary sovereignty and the absence of any notion of “internal sovereignty” for J&K.

The verdict closed the main judicial challenge but sharpened political debates about federalism, the rights of smaller units vis-à-vis the Union, and the long-term implications of downgrading a full-fledged State into a Union Territory.

## IV. POST-ARTICLE 370 SECURITY LANDSCAPE

### 4.1 Declining incidents, stronger state

Government narratives since 2019 stress a substantial decline in terror incidents and infiltrations. An MHA statement in Parliament highlighted that terrorist incidents in J&K fell significantly between 2018 and 2021, with corresponding reductions in infiltration attempts

Subsequent PIB releases in 2023–24 reiterated the Union’s “zero tolerance” policy and emphasised efforts to dismantle the “terror ecosystem” through property attachments, stricter enforcement of anti-terror laws and denying state benefits to individuals linked with terror networks

These measures, combined with tighter coordination between central forces and J&K Police, have been credited with improving security indicators. National-level data also suggest a sharp fall in extremist incidents, including jihadi terrorism, by 2023.

#### 4.2 Persistence and transformation of militancy

Yet the decline in the number of incidents does not mean the conflict has disappeared. Analysts point to a shift towards “hybrid militants”—locals who appear to lead normal lives but are activated for specific attacks—as well as the emergence of front organisations like The Resistance Front (TRF), widely seen as proxies of established Pakistan-based groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Even after 2019, J&K has witnessed periodic high-profile attacks and encounters. For example, in March 2025, four policemen and two militants were killed in a gun battle in Kathua near the India–Pakistan border, underlining the continued lethality of the insurgency despite overall decline.

From a conflict-studies perspective, the pattern resembles “low-volume, high-impact” violence: fewer incidents, but some sufficiently spectacular to shape national debates, media narratives and policy responses. The 2025 Pahalgam attack is the most striking example of this pattern so far.

### V. THE 2025 PAHALGAM ATTACK: A CRITICAL JUNCTURE

#### 5.1 The attack

On 22 April 2025, militants attacked tourists in Baisaran meadow near Pahalgam, a famous hill station in south Kashmir accessible only by foot or pony. Armed assailants opened fire on a crowded tourist spot, reportedly segregating men from women and children, and testing religious identity by asking victims to recite Islamic verses. Those who failed were shot at close range.

By the end of the assault, 26 civilians were dead, many more were injured, and harrowing images of panic and bodies in the meadow had spread worldwide. International media described it as one of the deadliest civilian attacks in India in nearly two decades

Survivors’ accounts and security officials suggested that the attackers used modern communication equipment and body cameras, indicating both tactical planning and an intent to weaponise visuals for propaganda.

#### 5.2 Targeting, symbolism and claimed motives

Reports indicate that the attackers primarily targeted non-local Hindu tourists, although at least one Christian tourist and a local Muslim pony operator who tried to resist them were also killed.

The shadow group TRF was widely suspected, and several analyses linked the attack to opposition against perceived “demographic change” after the abrogation of Article 370, particularly new domicile rules and land policies that enable non-locals to settle or invest in the region.

Symbolically, the choice of target was devastating. Pahalgam is a key node of Kashmir’s tourist economy and a route for the Amarnath Yatra. Attacking tourists—rather than security forces or political targets—sought to (i) damage the economic lifeline; (ii) undermine the narrative that Kashmir had become safe for visitors; and (iii) inflame communal tensions beyond the Valley.

#### 5.3 Immediate responses

The attack triggered intense national outrage. The Prime Minister cut short an overseas visit; the Home Minister announced a harsh response; opposition leaders accused the government of complacency after repeatedly claiming that militancy had been crushed.

The Cabinet Committee on Security approved a range of punitive and diplomatic measures against Pakistan, including steps aimed at signalling costs for continued cross-border support to terrorism. Security forces launched wide-ranging



operations, including what some analyses describe as “Operation Sindoor” and “Operation Mahadev” to target militant infrastructure across the Line of Control and pursue those responsible

At the local level, security restrictions were re-imposed at multiple tourist sites, and the 2025 Amarnath Yatra routes were declared “no-fly zones”, with bans on drones and other aerial platforms to enhance surveillance and control.

#### 5.4 Impact on tourism and economy

Before the attack, J&K had experienced record tourist inflows—over two crore visitors in 2023—contributing significantly to the region’s GDP and providing livelihoods in hospitality, transport and handicrafts. The Pahalgam massacre immediately disrupted this boom: bookings were cancelled, tourists rushed to leave, and authorities temporarily closed or restricted dozens of popular sites.

Opinion pieces and economic analyses stressed that such attacks do not merely hit short-term tourism revenues; they also undermine investor confidence and reinforce perceptions of Kashmir as inherently unstable, regardless of constitutional changes.

Yet by mid-2025 there were signs of recovery, with political leaders once again highlighting tourism’s “bounce back” as evidence of public resilience and a return to normal. The deeper question, however, is whether these cyclical disruptions reflect a structural fragility in the post-370 order.

## VI. DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AFTER 2019

### 6.1 Lok Sabha elections 2024

The 2024 Lok Sabha election in J&K marked a watershed in terms of voter participation. Election Commission data described it as the highest turnout in a General Election in the region in 35 years, with an overall participation of about 58–59%, and particularly dramatic increases in Valley constituencies such as Baramulla.

#### This surge in voting was widely interpreted as:

- A sign that boycott politics had weakened.
- A pragmatic attempt by voters to use available democratic channels to express dissatisfaction or support.
- A rehearsal for the long-awaited Assembly elections.

A mix of parties benefited: the BJP retained its hold on certain Jammu seats, while regional parties such as the National Conference (NC) performed strongly in the Valley.

### 6.2 Assembly elections 2024

Between September and October 2024, J&K held its first Assembly elections in a decade and the first since the abrogation of Article 370. Polling was conducted in three phases with heavy security. Official figures indicate overall turnout of about 63.9%, with some phases recording nearly 70% turnout at polling stations and women’s participation exceeding that of men in several constituencies

International media and observers framed the election as a de facto referendum on the 2019 decisions. Early counts suggested that the NC, often in alliance with the Congress and supported by the PDP, was poised to emerge as the largest bloc, complicating the BJP’s plans in the region.

From a democratic-theory perspective, these elections represent both continuity and rupture: continuity in that electoral politics and competitive party politics are clearly alive; rupture in that they operate within a radically altered constitutional framework where ultimate authority rests more firmly with New Delhi.

### 6.3 Ongoing demands for statehood and special status

Despite high turnout, key regional actors continue to demand the restoration of statehood and, in some cases, the restoration of special status. For example, in late 2025, the NC’s working committee passed resolutions reaffirming its commitment to seeking J&K’s pre-2019 constitutional position and full statehood.

This illustrates a crucial point: participation in elections does not equal acceptance of the new status quo. Rather, many voters and parties appear to be using the available institutional channels to push for changes within the new framework, including possible legal and political pathways back to greater autonomy.

## VII. NARRATIVES OF “NORMALCY” AND DISSENT

### 7.1 Government narrative: integration, security and development

The Union government and supportive commentators present the post-2019 period as a story of successful integration:

- Terror incidents and infiltration have declined significantly
- Elections at local, district, parliamentary and assembly levels have been held peacefully with high turnout.
- Tourism and infrastructure have expanded, with new roads, tunnels and investment schemes aimed at bringing J&K closer to the national average.

Pro-government narratives also emphasise national integration symbolism—such as high-profile “Tiranga Yatras” in Srinagar’s Lal Chowk—to underline that the days of separatist dominance are over.

### 7.2 Critical narratives: federalism, economy and civil liberties

On the other hand, critics from within and outside J&K argue that the costs of the 2019 decision remain high and many promised benefits are unfulfilled. Several analyses note that J&K’s economic growth in the post-370 period has been slower than the national average, with the region’s share in national GDP actually falling.

From a constitutional perspective, scholars have argued that the Supreme Court’s Article 370 judgment weakens Indian federalism by endorsing a process in which a State under President’s Rule can be downgraded to a Union Territory without its elected representatives’ consent

Civil liberties organisations highlight persistent restrictions on protest, detentions under stringent security laws and limitations on media freedom, especially in the immediate aftermath of abrogation and around sensitive events.

### 7.3 The Pahalgam attack and the “burst balloon” of normalcy

In this contest of narratives, the Pahalgam attack has become a powerful symbol. Supporters of the government argue it underscores the continued threat from cross-border terrorism and thus validates a strong security-centric approach.

Critics, however, contend that the massacre “burst the balloon” of the normalcy narrative: if J&K were truly settled and secure, such a devastating attack in a flagship tourist destination—years after abrogation, with a new Assembly in place—should not have been possible.

Thus, Pahalgam functions not only as a tragic event but also as a discursive turning point, re-opening questions about whether constitutional engineering and top-down security measures are, by themselves, sufficient to resolve deeper political and social grievances.

## VIII. DISCUSSION: THE POST-370 SECURITY PARADOX

Putting these strands together, we can describe the situation in J&K six years after the abrogation of Article 370 as a security paradox with three key dimensions:

### 1. Fewer incidents, higher stakes:

The overall number of militant incidents and infiltration attempts has decreased, and the state’s coercive capacity has expanded. Yet when attacks do occur—like Pahalgam—they are designed to produce maximum psychological, economic and political impact, sometimes overshadowing years of incremental gains.

### 2. Democratic participation amid unresolved status questions:

Record voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections signals that people are willing to engage with democratic institutions, but major regional parties simultaneously campaign on restoring statehood and special status. Participation, therefore, coexists with contestation of the very framework within which that participation occurs.

### 3. Development and tourism gains versus structural fragility:

Rapid growth in tourism and infrastructure projects suggests positive change, but the economy remains vulnerable to shocks from security incidents and lockdowns. Each major attack does not merely cause temporary losses; it re-inscribes the idea that underlying political and regional tensions remain unresolved

From a broader peace-and-conflict perspective, this paradox indicates that stability built primarily on hard security and administrative restructuring can be brittle. Durable peace requires a blend of:

- Security guarantees;
- Political accommodation and genuine dialogue;
- Economic justice and equitable development;
- Symbolic recognition of identities and historical grievances.

## IX. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The abrogation of Article 370 and subsequent developments have undeniably transformed J&K's political landscape. There has been a significant decline in militant incidents compared to the pre-2019 period, the electoral process has been revived, and the region has seen impressive tourist inflows and visible infrastructure upgrades.

At the same time, the 2025 Pahalgam attack demonstrates that violent actors retain both intent and capability to inflict mass casualties and disrupt the narrative of normalcy. It also reveals how ongoing cross-border dynamics, contested identity politics and local grievances can converge to undermine security gains.

Based on the analysis, the following broad policy recommendations emerge:

### 1. **Move from event-driven to structural security thinking**

- Avoid allowing episodic attacks—however brutal—to entirely dictate policy swings.
- Invest in long-term human intelligence, local policing capacity and community-based early-warning mechanisms, especially in tourist hubs and pilgrimage corridors.

### 2. **Deepen political inclusion and federal accommodation**

- Implement the Supreme Court's directive to restore statehood at the earliest, thereby addressing a major symbolic and practical grievance.
- Engage systematically with elected representatives across party lines on contentious issues such as land, domicile and resource allocation.

### 3. **Address economic fragility and regional disparities**

- Diversify the economy beyond tourism, strengthening agriculture, handicrafts, small industry and services so that a single attack does not paralyse livelihoods.
- Ensure that local communities, especially in conflict-affected districts, see tangible benefits from new investments and industrial policies.

### 4. **Rebalance security and civil liberties**

- While retaining robust counter-terror capabilities, gradually normalise the use of emergency laws and reduce blanket restrictions on communication and movement.

### 5. **Support independent media and civil society research to build credible data and narratives, reducing the space for disinformation and extremist propaganda.**

### 6. **Re-centre dialogue in India–Pakistan and intra-Kashmir relations**

- The Pahalgam attack and subsequent escalations in cross-border rhetoric highlight the need for wider regional engagement on terrorism and border stability.
- While domestic policy must not be held hostage to Pakistan's actions, calibrated diplomatic, military and back-channel efforts remain essential to reduce the incentives and opportunities for cross-border militancy.

In short, six years after the abrogation of Article 370, Jammu & Kashmir is neither the peaceful, fully “normal” territory portrayed in some official narratives nor the unchanging, hopeless conflict zone sometimes depicted by critics. It is a complex, transitional space where genuine gains in security and participation are offset by episodes of severe violence and unresolved political questions.

The 2025 Pahalgam attack is a reminder that **constitutional change alone cannot settle deeply rooted conflicts**. Sustainable peace will require a long-term, patient mix of security, democracy, development and dignified dialogue—anchored not only in strategic calculations in New Delhi and Islamabad, but also in the everyday aspirations and anxieties of the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

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## International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Technology

ISSN: 2394-2975

Impact Factor: 8.152