

Fury In Kashmir

The eruption of turmoil in Kashmir has uncovered one more Islamic wound in the world. The Muslims there, who almost make up the entire population, would like to form an Islamic republic, or join an established one: Pakistan, which is conveniently a contiguous neighbor.

Forty years of support, care, and pampering by India has not dulled the Islamic propensity of Kashmiris to live in a pure state of their ethos, unmixed with other religious communities.

Muslim communities round the world would like to do the same. They want to go back to the old ways of Islamic life and Koranic laws, while most of the rest of the world is trying to find a new social understanding, a new way to live. Muslims see evil in science and technology, freedom of women, and irreligious enjoyment of life. Finding a lot of world holding different visions of life, they want to recoil back within their own group, insulated from change. They find scientific thinking threatening to their secure world. Their half-hearted attempts to go along with the modern life have produced enough confusion in them to want to go back whole heartedly to the ancient way of living. Bars, movie halls, and video parlors in the recent fury in Srinagar (capital of Kashmir) have been closed, as they are considered the means of moral ruination. Women are being forced to cover their faces to let men keep their lust in check.

Kashmiris are an independent minded people. Timid but egotistical, sensitive but proud, non-conformist but practical. In 1948, when this predominantly Muslim state threw its lot with India, the rulers in New Delhi knew they had acquired a beautiful though a perilous gift. They could not let go the prize, but did not know the price they will have to pay to keep it. The strategy was to keep Kashmiris economically protected, not interfere with their religion and way of living, and to keep the borders with Pakistan secure. Indian government paid heavy bills for it and passed a special amendment in its national constitution to

protect Kashmiris further by disallowing outsiders to buy property in Kashmir. Kashmiris prospered immensely in the four decades that followed.

This strategy worked most of the time but extracted a heavy toll from India. By pampering Kashmiris all the time, they became terribly spoiled. They remained bereft of the sense of responsibility a citizen owes its state. Greed stifled their development as equal partners with the government in the progress of their state. Though enjoying the attention they were getting, they never renounced their desire to form an Islamic state or join one. In fact, there was always a veiled threat to revert to their desire if Indian Government did not continue the son-in-law treatment of them. This sordid relationship of purchased loyalty is the essence of the problem.

After the passing away of their one and only leader, Sheikh Abdullah, and with the proliferation of Islamic upheavals in the world, the separatist movement found a good climate to grow in. The last Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah's chaotic and permissive leadership provided a strong catalyst to it. The victories of the Sikhs fighting their cause in the neighboring Punjab provided further encouragement. What was merely an excitement triggering sport for a few unemployed youth, only two years ago, due to local government's negligence, in fact permissiveness, mushroomed into a force to be reckoned with. The recent meeting of the terrorists' demands by the government in exchange for the freedom of federal Home Minister's kidnapped daughter was the spark which ignited the movement's powder-keg.

What should a nation do in such a situation? There are hundreds of separatist movements round the world, some have gone public, others are still under cover. Each has a unique history and present circumstances. We can not let every separatist group's call be met under the reasoning that freedom is better than forced co-existence. Each case has to be evaluated on its merits. We can not let nations be dismembered because of identification problems of one group with the rest of the community of groups. In the long run, such separatist movements may do more harm than good to it people. Discipline required to co-exist, difficult and

even painful at times, may be rewarding.

In Kashmir, the present rebellion is not even aimed at democracy, which exists at the same superficial level as it exists in the rest of India, it. is pointed toward gaining identity, through a religious way of living.

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