

Suicide In Kashmir

The Suicide in Kashmir

M. Kaul

Human tragedies are caused, generally, by forces outside the victim's mind. Self-inflicted devastation on a mass scale is uncommon. That is why understanding the madness reigning over Kashmir is intriguing.

A revolution is a statement in action against an existing system which is contrary to a significant principle of human existence or value. Kashmiri Muslims are fighting to convert their Indian citizenship to a Pakistani one. Independent Kashmir is a hallucination harbored by the most feeble minded of the separatist zealots. Any declared Kashmir independence will not survive a week because Pakistan will trample it and replace it with its flag. Purity of motivation is not an issue in understanding the bizarre behavior of Kashmiri Muslims, it is the worthwhileness of the price they are paying to capture the prize they are after that is questionable. Once enjoined with co-religionists, Muslims will be humiliated and relegated to a second-class citizenship. The abandonment of the present secure and unhampered relationship with India to become an unequal and fragile part of an impoverished, undemocratic, and benighted Pakistan is an eclipse of mind and a stifling of the instinct to survive.

In an unthinking sweep of destruction, Kashmiri Muslims are erasing the centuries old finely tapestried culture and turning the decades old echo of historical tranquility into a nightmare of death and isolation, cruelly breaking the long bonds with the dominant inhabitants of the subcontinent, Hindus, and subjecting themselves to economic and political catastrophe. All this they are doing for the imagined bliss of cohabiting only with the fellow co-religionists. Giving up all the present life sustaining security and secular ideals for this fantasy is an obliteration of reality into extreme, a suicide without a redeeming cause.

Muslims have lived in Kashmir since the fourteenth century, before that it was predominantly a Hindu inhabited and ruled place, in fact, one of the resplendent centers of Hindu culture. Most of the Muslims in Kashmir converted from Hinduism. Frictions between the two, though ever present, have at times climaxed to murder, savage behavior, and most primitive hatred. But in the last several decades the two had learned to live with each other. Sharply different though Hinduism and Islam are from each other, the almost common culture, the

common language, the shared history, and the instinct to survive had woven the until- now durable web of co-existence between the two.

Continuing the momentum of coexistence with Hindus, the Muslims did not try for separation at the most opportune time, the Indian partition in 1947. During the integration of the Indian states and kingdoms in 1947, Sardar Patel and V.P. Menon, the architects of the project, did not try to capture Kashmir in the net, because of its odd Muslim majority and an independent and arrogant king, Han Singh. And, also, because their hands were full working on what was within their grasp. Not only did not Muslims try to part with India, but they did not express any feelings contrary to this. There were no debates, meetings, or protests to lay down the separation-with-India line of thinking. In fact, their greatest leader, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, assiduously worked to weld the Indian Kashmiri divide. That Kashmir Muslims offered themselves voluntarily and freely to India for an alliance between them is an often overlooked fact of recent history. It would have been easiest for India to part with Kashmir at that juncture and also easiest for Muslims to obtain such an annulment.

Post 1947 saw an upliftment of Kashmiri Muslims in economic, social, political, and educational levels from the decades of hovering at the bottom. This period of sea-change in their lives is one of the most significant in their six hundred year history. By the 60's they controlled politics, business, and culture. The "employer—employee" relationship between Hindus and Muslims was reversed. Additionally, Muslims benefited from the Indian Government's policy of ingratiation and appeasement with them. They were left undisturbed in the practice of their religion and culture. The protections provided by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution further strongly reinforced their security: economic, political and religious.

The insurgency of Kashmiri Muslims has roots in their psychological rather than political experience. The outward political aggression is a misplaced catharsis of their latent mental conflicts. We have seen Islamic "revolutions" around the world doing the same. Imprisoned by the antiquatedness and narrowness of their religion, as almost all the practitioners of religions are these days, Muslims unable to cope with the alienation and stresses of the modern life have forged an attack on its imperfections, yearning to recoil to the earlier uncorrupted and pristine state of the practice of Islam. Religions operate on a priori basis and can become a barrier to the questioning spirit needed for modern living. Fundamentalism is several stages further removed from the free questioning spirit than the normal level practice of religion. Religious fundamentalism is the

most charged and lethal large scale closed faith system in existence at this time. Its foundations lie in the repudiation of modern life tenets: secularism, scientific humanism, and non-religious spirituality. Islamic fundamentalism furthermore rejects women's equality with men.

The identity problem burdened psyche of a Kashmiri Muslim has, additionally, to bear the non-identity problem he has with India. In spite of sharing India's wealth and security, the Kashmiri Muslim has not cultivated an identity with India. This separateness has led to aloofness and mistrust.

A bomb is a mixture of explosive chemicals triggered by an ignition. To the Kashmiri Muslim state of mind seething with turmoil brought upon by the worldwide fundamentalist movement and buffeted by alienation with India was latched the ignition of Pakistan's Kashmir complicity.

Kashmiri Muslims are committing a physical, economic, and mental suicide. The combined destruction will affect their lives for several generations. The children going through the upheaval will nourish aberrant psyches for the rest of their lives and the trauma will hang heavily on the Kashmiri culture for a long time. It is not the religious restrictions, undemocratic politics, or the eccentric economics which form the underpinnings of the turmoil in Kashmir.

Historians, in future, will look upon the present crisis in Kashmir as an upheaval caused by its people due to their long and tortured struggle with their identity, expressed outwardly by a religio-political freedom movement, exploited and abetted fully by its neighbor, Pakistan, which was hungering for long to enclave it to help its internal political problems.