

The Future Of Kashmir

We stand today at a strange moment in Kashmir's ongoing drama. While we are not yet over with its recent tragic past, we are haunted by the questions of why did what happened there happen, and by what will happen there in the next five, ten years. Needless to say that the two questions are connected.

The tragedy of Kashmir is the tragedy of human nature; its blindness, its greed, its ignorance, its sheer stupidity.

Kashmiri Muslims did not find in 1947 their religious tug strong enough to have raised their hand for throwing their lot with Pakistan; but yet by 1989 they took a suicidal leap to do that, even though in the interim they lead a more prosperous time in their history than ever before. Strange are the ways of human psychology. Why would any people join one of the most rickety economies in the world, and one of its most politically benighted nations. While religion is the most imaginative and sublime of man's creations, but it has proven to be also the most stupefying and blinding.

What will happen to Kashmir in the next ten years? We do not have to depend upon the politicians on both sides of the divide to enhance the conditions for human living, the human instinct to survive and live peacefully has regained enough momentum in Kashmir to proceed its course in spite of their selfishness, greed, and narrow-mindedness. Humanness overcomes politics, as survival precedes faith. Kashmiris are getting out of the grip of terrorism and the instincts of life are gaining strength. The last eight years of their lives have to be reckoned as their brush with insanity. As individuals go through mental crisis, communities, even nations, go through mental crisis. Kashmiri Muslims thought their bliss was to be integrated with the Islamic State Of Pakistan, but the hard geopolitical realities would not allow that to happen. Having lost their homes and hearth, brothers and neighbors, their peace of mind and image, they have realized that they were better off in all aspects of life before their rendezvous with the fantasy of establishing a religious state. Do not reason with a people whose fantasies have just been shattered. Not only is this a period of economic, political, and infrastructure repair in Kashmir, but also of the minds of the people who risked almost everything they had to be the devil's advocate.

Indian Government's governing of Kashmir has been as colossal a failure as any had by a government. Much more than the failure of the nuts and bolts of the governing, it has been a failure to grasp the essence of the Kashmir and India integration. You can not develop and strengthen a relationship by money and guns. You can not isolate a people and still expect them to be a part of you. Human relationship, whether at individual or community level, is a dynamic condition. Leaving Kashmiris in a political, social, and economic freezer, their alienation turned to seeking security and strength in religious identification.

Much castigated nowadays is the legal and political condition called Article 370, which ties India with Kashmir. It is particularly the younger generation who is much troubled with it and angry with the Indian leaders who accepted it at the infancy of the Indo-Kashmir integration. They do not understand that Kashmir was not like any other state who had thrown its lot with India; it had remained a separate political and historical entity for hundreds of years. Sheikh Abdullah chose to integrate Kashmir with India over Pakistan, but he wanted to maintain Kashmir's historical autonomy. India could not have done anything about it; it had either to accept this condition or lose Kashmir. But much water has gone down Jehlum since the condition was consummated; time is overdue for its revocation. If India had understood the integration with Kashmir rightly, conditions of the revocation would have reached much earlier. Of course, it can not be done right now in the present seething political climate of Kashmir and under the glare of the international headlights, but three to four years from now it would be feasible.

Even Indian Government will have to learn from its mistakes. Kashmir has to be treated like another state of India, otherwise another civil war will be planted there by its arch enemy and neighbor, Pakistan. The son-in-law treatment of Kashmiris has gone in a long way to make them irresponsible citizens. India has to remove all its latent guilt of thinking that it is occupying Kashmir against the will of its inhabitants; the fact is that in 1949 Kashmiris made a willful decision to join India; and they profited immensely from that. When non-Kashmiri Indians can buy property in Kashmir, when Indian businesses can control employment there, the perspective of Kashmiris will be forced to change. When government subsidies are lifted and people have to compete for a living, survival instinct will overwhelm religious fantasies. Let any Kashmiri wanting to emigrate to Pakistan be allowed to do so, but only on no-return basis.

Certainly, the biggest problem for India in the Kashmir situation has not been its

inhabitants, but the ever evil-designing Pakistan. How many nations in the world would have reacted passively as India did, when Pakistan was destabilizing it simultaneously in two places, Punjab and Kashmir. Can you imagine Germany, France, Great Britain, U.S. practically doing nothing while its militarily comparable neighbors are undermining their security. If we can not make Pakistan realize the consequences of its weakening of India's integrity, then we might as well hand over Kashmir to them, sparing the blood of many innocents and the grief of the survivors.

Also if we can not seal the very porous border between Kashmir and Pakistan due to the weaknesses of our military personnel, then we are again better- off gifting Kashmir to Pakistan.

A gain has accrued in the tragic turmoil of Kashmir, that of the shattering of Kashmiri Muslims' fantasy that if they raised their hands for Pakistan, it would go to the great lengths to secure their integration with itself. Pakistan demonstrated quite unequivocally that it could only do so much for its beloved Kashmiris. Also the unrestrained violence of the militants has left a large number of Muslims cold. In two to three years Kashmir will grow into a stable and livable place, with the unshakable attendant stigma of destruction, violence, and tragedy hanging over the heads of its inhabitants for a long time to come. The culture of the place has been permanently altered. Many children will grow with aberrated psyches. The shadow of distrust between Hindu and Muslim communities will endure for several decades.

The above picture of the future of Kashmir is idealized. Actually Indian government will not be able to shake off all its inhibitions, apprehensions, and inertia about Kashmir rapidly; Kashmiri Muslims will not totally forget their inflamed religious passion for the vision of an Islamic state of Kashmir; Pakistan can not, both for its political and psychological reasons, cut itself off from Kashmir. Kashmir's return to normalcy will continue, but it will be laced with many setbacks, violent opposition, sabotages, and false-steps. The drama of the Kashmiri stupidity, Indian incompetence, and Pakistani greed will continue for a while, impeding the progress in Kashmir. In the long run Kashmir will regain its equilibrium and humanity; some of the illusions of all the major involved parties will be shattered.

Kashmiri Pandits, the tragic victims of the Kashmir war, will continue to remain

refugees in their land for a while. The militants see their return as ultimate defeat of their objective in Kashmir. Therefore, they will continue to indulge in activities like the massacres in Wandhama and Sangrampura to discourage the Pandit resettlement. Pandits will never inhabit Kashmir in the same way as they did before.