

Kashmir's Faultlines

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The Asian Age

The Kashmir Valley has been burning for three months. Over 100 stone-pelting youth have got killed. Thanks to a governance deficit, both in Srinagar and Delhi, the situation appears out of control.

Zia-ul-Haq Islamised Pakistan and this spread to Kashmir. In 1990 there was ethnic cleansing of over three lakh Kashmiri Pandits and several dozen Hindu temples were destroyed, but the plight of Kashmiri Pandits was glossed over and there was a virtual blackout of information about the vandalising of dozens of temples. In 2007, to appease the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the government took the bizarre decision of providing money for the families of terrorists killed in encounters with security forces. This does not happen elsewhere in India or anywhere else in the world.

To appease the National Conference (NC), the government is now considering its demand for autonomy — the Supreme Court, the Election Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General would not have any jurisdiction in Kashmir, there would be an elected governor from the state and no Central services, like IAS and IPS. The PDP, under the garb of self-rule, wants dual currency and a joint state legislature with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in Kashmir. Perhaps then the “misguided” young boys in terrorist camps in PoK would also be allowed to return. All this will severely undermine India's sovereignty in Kashmir.

Pakistan launched repeated conventional wars to grab Kashmir but failed each time. It also failed to do so through terrorism. Since 2008, religious frenzy has been aroused and mass upsurges organised on the basis of manufactured lies. In 2008, a 100-acre of barren land at Baltal, traditionally used as a base camp for Amarnath pilgrims, was diverted to the Shrine Board for ₹2.2 crore. Since ownership remained with the state, the board could put up only prefabricated shelters. This land is unapproachable and uninhabitable for eight months in a year due to snow and yet a canard was spread that Hindus were being brought to settle in Baltal and change the demography of the Valley, like Israel had done

in Palestine. A mass movement of gigantic dimensions erupted. To appease the agitators, the government cancelled the land diversion order and ordered the virtual disbandment of the Shrine Board. After three months of counter-agitation in Jammu, status quo ante was restored. In 2009, two women drowned in a river at Shopian. A mass movement was started on the basis of diabolical concoction of facts about the women being raped and killed by security personnel. Fraudulent medical reports were prepared and false witnesses produced. The Valley was held to ransom for two months. Ultimately the Central Bureau of Investigation unravelled the truth.

Having tested the waters in 2008 and 2009, the emotive issue of azadi was exploited for a mass movement in 2010. The agitation took the “peaceful” form of stone-pelting. Sympathy was aroused through portraying “young, innocent” boys being brutally killed by the police. Over 2,000 security force personnel have been injured due to stone-pelting. This is hardly known, nor is the fact that some 1,000 Baluchis have been killed by the Pakistan Army in the last one year. The religious card was used to extend the agitation outside the Valley. Protests were organised against an American pastor’s threat to burn the Quran, which did not happen. Nowhere else in the Muslim world did violence occur on this score.

The Kashmir problem has been communalised in the state, and by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference internationally. Hitherto Indian Muslims outside Kashmir had kept themselves aloof from the issue. But now the Jamiat-Ulema-Hind has announced a convention of 10,000 Muslims of all sects at Deoband on October 4 to express solidarity with Kashmiri Muslims. This can hold the most dangerous consequences in Muslim majority districts in West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Kerala.

Delhi sent a parliamentary delegation to Kashmir after three months. Some members called on secessionist leaders who had refused to meet the delegation. One of them, a former Cabinet minister who had campaigned in the election with an Osama bin Laden lookalike by his side, declared that the ongoing movement in Kashmir has no Pakistani connection.

The Army is being constantly demonised for human rights violations when its record is far superior to that of the US Army in Iraq and Afghanistan or the Pakistan Army in Baluchistan and Waziristan. Unlike them, we have never used airstrikes or artillery against militants in Kashmir. The Army has been prompt in action against human rights violators. Over the years, 1,514 cases against the Army were reported of which 1,470 were found to be false. Action was taken against 70 individuals, dismissing them from service and awarding imprisonment from

two to 14 years. India has also been humane in dealing with secessionist leaders. Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the veteran secessionist leader, suffering from cancer, was refused a visa by the US for medical treatment because of his terrorist connections. He went to Mumbai where Dr Sameer Kaul, a Kashmiri Pandit, operated on him, treating him with competence. On return to Srinagar, Mr Geelani said India is in illegal occupation of Kashmir and the international community should impose economic sanctions against her.

Gen. Musharraf ordered airstrikes in Baluchistan on the hideout of the veteran leader Akbar Bugti, who was killed. In Kashmir, instead of tough action, periodic troop withdrawals have taken place. Now there is talk of amending or scrapping the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. This brings to mind what Winston Churchill said: "An appeaser is one who feeds the crocodile, hoping that it will eat him last."

The writ of the state must run in the Valley forthwith and further communalisation checked. Without curbing the freedom of the press, we should ensure that the media does not act as the mouthpiece of the secessionists. The law on sedition must be enforced. Among Kashmiri Muslims, not all are secessionists, but those who are need to be politically isolated from the rest. A political solution acceptable to all should be evolved through dialogue but this must be strictly within the framework of the Indian Constitution.