

FACTS *against* MYTHS

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A Disputed Legacy: The Myths Behind the Kashmir "Problem" — I

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COMMENT

Kashmir is a picturesque valley in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent. Part of the valley is under the control of Pakistan while the rest forms part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The inhabitants of Kashmir are known as *Kashmiris*. The situation along the border and in the Kashmir valley has been tense for a long time. Both India and Pakistan challenge the legality of the each other's claim to and presence in the territory. Kashmir was divided and partitioned between the two countries soon after Independence as a result of an armed conflict. The line of partition is the cease-fire line as agreed to in 1949, with some modification as a result of the Indo-Pak war of 1971. The line is now known as the Line of (Actual) Control (LOC). That part of the territory, which lies within India also, includes the region of Ladakh, and the plains of Jammu. The multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious region of Jammu and Kashmir has experienced unrest and conflict off and on since Independence and the accompanying partition. For the past decade or more, however, the conflict has taken the form of insurgency and armed hostility. Pakistan's open support to the insurgents has also made it an issue between two sovereign states. Both countries maintain that the main discord between them is over Kashmir. It is also an issue that can possibly spark off a war between the two countries.

This ramification has often overshadowed all other aspects of the Kashmir issue. It is often perceived in the contending countries as well as in the rest of the world as a territorial dispute between Pakistan and India. The citizens of Kashmir, the Kashmiri people - their identity, grievances, aspirations, and wishes - are usually forgotten in the discussions at formal levels of legality, international conventions and decisions.

In the past few years of insurgency, the Kashmiris have voiced their own opinion, and raised the issues of Kashmiriyat - the distinctive character of Kashmir and Kashmiris - and of their right to self determination, autonomy, and possible independent existence.

These two issues of FAM try to analyse and understand the entire question with the people of Kashmir at the centre of the discussion, as the principal players and subjects. To address the issue of Kashmir is to inevitably address the modern history of the subcontinent - the nature of the transfer of power from the British colonial regime to the indigenous rulers, and the effects it has left on the entire region in general and Kashmir in particular.

The main constitutional instrument for determining the future position of Kashmir was the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Section 7(1)(b).

The issue of accession is quite complex. The strict 'British' legal position was that with the lapse of the treaties and agreements with the British government, sovereignty of princely reverted to the princes. They were then free to accede, merge, and integrate with India or Pakistan (or technically even remain independent).

In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the ruler was Hindu, the population in Kashmir valley predominantly Muslim. The 'king' could not make up his mind about accession. He may have cherished dreams of ruling an independent principality. His hesitation and indecisiveness gave the opportunity for an invasion of the territory by the so-called 'Azad Kashmir Army' made up of regular soldiers and irregular volunteers from Pakistan. As a result, the ruler decided to appeal to India for help and subsequently acceded to India. The Indian army entered the State and stopped the advance of the army from Pakistan. The 'Line of Control' established as a result of this action formed the effective but forever disputed Indo-Pakistan border. It was actually the line dividing the territory of Jammu and Kashmir between the Indian and Pakistani jurisdictions. Ever since then, Pakistan has contested the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India. It has also maintained that the final destination of the territory remains conditional until the people of Jammu and Kashmir themselves have had an opportunity to determine their political destiny through a referendum or 'plebiscite'.

Jammu and Kashmir was subsequently to become a victim of the proxy war between the two States with the Kashmiris the main victims of this conflict. A UN sponsored resolution to hold a referendum in the territory around the issue of self-determination has never been implemented, with both Indian and Pakistani governments blaming each other for the lack of the necessary political will.

[The question of plebiscite today is, of course, not very simple. The three sub-regions, Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh do not share the same political history, trends of development, and aspirations. There are also religious and cultural differences in the people of the three areas. The presence of armed militant groups and security forces make a 'free and fair' ballot an odious if not impossible task. The results, whatever they are, may cause even greater disaffection and turmoil than exists at the moment.]

Meanwhile political events overtook the UN resolution. The first war of 1965 between India

and Pakistan despite peace accords and treaties hardened positions. The second in 1971, resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. The Simla Agreement (1972) provided that two countries would, inter alia, attempt to resolve the issue of Kashmir bilaterally, with the Line of Control a de facto international border.

Pakistan probably looked at the Simla accord as an agreement forced upon it. (This is particularly true of the opponents of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. These opponents of Bhutto subsequently came to power.) India equally obviously considered it the document to rely on in all bilateral disputes.

Unfortunately for the Kashmiris, though part of the territory is of the kind "where not a blade of grass grows" Kashmir is of great geo-political and strategic importance, directly for Pakistan, China, and India. Indirectly it interests any and all super-power/s that have a stake in South Asia.

An open insurgency has come up in Kashmir since the late 80s. The response of the Indian State has been typical. It has relied on political noises but 'administrative' (read military) solutions. The situation has slowly but steadily deteriorated. Occurrences in other parts of the region have also had an impact. The advances of Taliban in Afghanistan, the availability of the erstwhile anti-Russian guerrilla fighters for engagements elsewhere, the disintegration of the USSR and the resultant availability of Central Asian mercenaries has increased the extent and intensity of the insurgency. It has also, as never before, acquired a character of a 'holy war' with tinges of Islamic fundamentalism. It is obvious that even the **Kashmiri** militant groups are confused over the development. The current multiplicity of the organisations with doctrinal, political, strategic, and tactical differences indicates the deep divide.

The insurgency has achieved one aim. The Indian response has been quite confused. The attempts to rule the state in 'national interests' with military might have given Indian rule the character of an occupation administration. 'Firm' efforts at rooting out 'secessionism, extremist militancy, and foreign mercenary infiltration' have held the civilian population of Kashmir - the Kashmiris - in a state of siege. There have been repeated allegations of abuses of human rights. The goodwill and the support of the Kashmiris have been lost. (They may be, in all probability are, equally fed up with and scared of the militant, mercenary groups.) India accuses

Pakistan of continuously fomenting the trouble, with funds, arms, and training to the militant groups. It has called it a covert or proxy war designed to destabilise India. The repeated breakdowns of talks have been one of the most significant features in the relationship between the two countries. The search for a lasting solution to the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir has so far been futile.

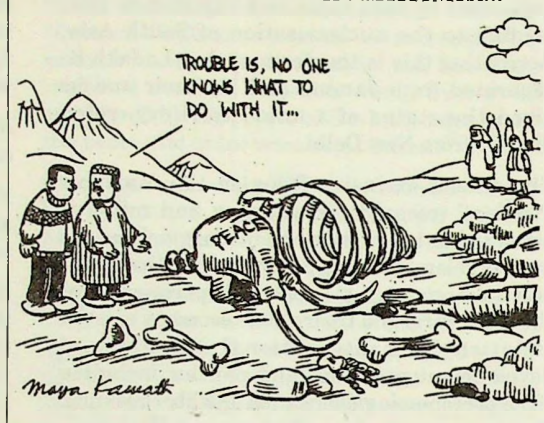
There have been different efforts to find a solution, including the recent 'cease fire' or 'cessation of aggressive advances and initiatives' by the Indian armed forces and a call to all groups to come to the negotiating table. Predictably, these have had paltry results. The hitch has been simple. Who is the representative of the Kashmiri people and of *Kashmiriyat*, is one fundamental question. The other, obviously, is whether any talks about a solution to the Kashmir problem can be effective at all without the participation of Pakistan. There is actually, a third critical question. Can Pakistan prevail upon the varied militant groups to accept a peace accord and a non-violent solution?

Demographically, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh has some of the most diverse peoples with the Muslims in majority in the Kashmir valley, while the plains of Jammu are dominated by Hindus, who make up the largest minority in the State of Jammu and Kashmir as a whole. The third largest group is Buddhist Ladakhis, who live in the mountainous, difficult, and ice-bound, near desert region of Ladakh.

The religious factor obviously needs to be taken into consideration. The struggle for autonomy, identity, even independence of the Kashmiris has taken on an increasingly religious hue in the recent past. This is perhaps an inevitable, natural development given the extant religious divide of the population and a real or imagined perception of the Indian administration as a Hindu rule and government. The foreign (non-Kashmiri) volunteers or mercenaries (Afghans, Uzbeks, even Sudanese, according to Indian official sources) in the ranks of the militants in ever increasing numbers (if reports are to be believed) also strengthen and fortify the Islamic and 'Holy War' (*Jihad*) stances.

Such more or less fundamentalist positions would actually be quite paradoxical in Kashmir. The Islam practised in Kashmir is Islam as propagated by the local Sufi order of the *Silsila-e-Rishiyan*, the Muslim saints of Kashmir, whose progenitor was Sheikh Nuruddin (1379-1442) also known as Nuruddin Rishi or Nund Roishi,

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revered also by the microscopic Hindu community of Kashmir as a great saint.

The genesis of the Kashmir Problem is in the real and perceived grievances of the Muslim inhabitants. Since the time of Independence, Kashmir has remained an underdeveloped region. While most of the state's industry is concentrated in Jammu most of the development funds are spent in the Kashmir valley, where 60 per cent of the population is engaged in horticulture, although tourism used to also flourish around Srinagar and other tourist spots. The two areas compete for economic resources, and an attempt has been made to keep a delicate balance between them, reflected in the state administration moving to Jammu in winter and to Srinagar in summer. The lack of economic development has fuelled resentment against the Indian administration and has led to a hardening of view within the Muslim majority that they are discriminated against. Specific grievances include the fact that Urdu has not been made a nationally recognised language of India, that investment in education is among the lowest for the whole country, and that industrial investment has been virtually non-existent.

Politics in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has tended to be dominated by the central government in New Delhi, and this has added to popular resentment against the Indian State. Devolution proposals and moves towards greater autonomy have been limited, and have foundered on the intransigence of Indian politicians suspicious of Pakistani involvement in the secessionist movement in Jammu and Kashmir. The situation is further complicated by a) the general inefficiency and corruption of the

successive state governments and b) the nuclear explosions by both India and Pakistan in 1997 leading to the nuclearisation of South Asia. Acerbating this is the demand that Ladakh be separated from Jammu and Kashmir and be given the status of a union territory, ruled directly from New Delhi.

The almost exclusive focus on the 'Kashmir Problem' (meaning insurgency and militant activity) has to a certain extent marginalised the basic problems relating to people, their livelihood, and their economy. It is generally perceived that the Kashmiris and their whole economy exist in isolation from international and national development processes and policies including those of economic globalisation and liberalisation. Further, even the form of Islam most Kashmiris practice is the specifically Kashmiri Islam of the local Muslim Rishis, the most eminent of whom was Sheikh Nuruddin whose shrine at Chrar-e-Sharaief was destroyed on the night of May 10, 1995. It is necessary to therefore demystify the 'Kashmir Problem' and dispel the myths generated by both Hindu and Muslim communal forces. The latter even disapprove of the specifically Kashmir character of the Islam practised by Kashmiris.

It is obviously not possible to reduce the Kashmir problem to mere economic factors. It should nevertheless be remembered that social and economic forces have shaped the issue to a great extent. The 'secular' policies of the Indian state have had one interesting feature. The State has more often than not conceded 'cultural' meaning religious and symbolic demands of particular groups but left the political and economic grievances untouched. This has led to a perpetuation of non-integration and maintenance of separate (often religious/communal) identities in different ways. Firstly the material basis of integration, social-economic interaction and interdependence, is not developed. The groups remain under-developed, confined to specific professions, constrained in terms of access to resources, assets, credits, and opportunities, discriminated against and deprived in cultural and educational fields, as well as forced to adopt a different life style. The symbolic or token but visible cultural concessions overtly mark out the groups. Further, the very survival of the group depends on the nurture of this (superficial) distinct identity. Their demands and the articulation of their aspirations are also then focussed on the question of identity in a peculiar manner. This has so far always provoked a supercilious and contemptuous response from

the 'mainstream' Indian society. It further marginalises the peripheral group. This in turn facilitates the domination of the group by fundamentalist, essentially regressive elements who emphasize the separateness.

MYTH: *The Kashmir 'problem' is another example of Muslim separatism.*

FACT: There are several unresolved issues associated with the tragedy of Partition and accession of Kashmir to India.

Kashmir was one of the princely states without the direct rule of the British. King Hari Singh of the Dogra dynasty who ruled Kashmir at the time of Independence refused to join the Constituent Assembly under the Cabinet mission plan. Eighty per cent population of Kashmir valley was Muslim. The Maharaja had two options, one to remain independent, two either to merge with India or with Pakistan. Maharaja was tending to remain independent. The Hindu leaders of Jammu, from the *J & K Rajya Hindu Sabha* including those who later on joined *Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, the predecessor of present *BJP* supported the Maharaja. "He was supported by loyal Hindu leaders from Jammu who vociferously argued that a Hindu state, as Jammu and Kashmir claimed to be, should not merge its identity with secular India"¹. They later changed their stance and wanted the Maharaja to decide in favour of accession to India.

All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference also wanted Kashmir to remain independent with a new constitution. The Congress on its part had urged all the states to merge with one or the other dominion. Lord Mountbatten also took the same position urging all the princely states to merge with India or Pakistan, while Jinnah said that these princely states could remain independent if they so wished.

Maharaja Harisingh offered standstill agreement to both India and Pakistan. India refused this offer while Pakistan accepted the same. Under this, central departments of state coming under Lahore circle were to come under the jurisdiction of Pakistan. "Accordingly Pakistani flags fluttered all over the offices of the post and telegraph department all over the state."² India insisted on prior negotiations and so no agreement could be reached. The Maharaja appointed Bakshi Tekchand to formulate a new Constitution of Kashmir

Communal riots in October 1947 in the aftermath of Partition found the state machinery ill equipped to handle the crisis.

Around this time Pathan tribal invaders were let loose by Pakistan to invade Srinagar. The Maharaja fled away from Kashmir for personal safety leaving the security of Kashmir to *National Conference* and its leader, Sheikh Abdullah. The invaders were not welcome as Kashmiri psyche was far from communal. There were deep-set values of *Kashmiriyat*, which refused to give primacy to religion as the determining factor of political behaviour.

This is where lay the peculiarity of Kashmir. "Kashmir has been melting pot of ideas and cultures. It received every new creed with discrimination and enriched it with its own contribution, without throwing away its earlier acquisitions."³ G.M.D. Sufi in his monumental work says, "the cult of Buddha, the teachings of Vedanta, the mysticism of Islam have one after another found a congenial home in Kashmir."⁴ Due to this integration, people coming from distant lands so mixed with Kashmiri Muslims in culture, civilisation and through matrimonial relations that all non-Kashmiri traces were totally subdued.

Emperor Akbar annexed Kashmir and began the period of alien rule over the land. After many dynasties the Dogras became the rulers. Harisingh was thus a non-Muslim, non-Kashmiri ruler of Kashmir at the time of Independence. Parallel to the struggle of *Indian National Congress*, in Kashmir the *National Conference* began its movement against the King, which culminated in the *Quit Kashmir Movement*.

Contrary to Jinnah's stand that sovereignty belongs to Maharaja, Gandhi and Nehru held that sovereignty belongs to the people. Jinnah's opinion and Pakistan's actions were polar contrast to the secular democratic opinions of Gandhi and Nehru and no wonder that the latter along with the principles of the Indian state were more in tune with the thinking of Kashmiri people and their leadership in the form of *National Conference* and Sheikh Abdullah. The Maharaja under pressure and due to his inability to protect Kashmir requested the Indian Government to bail him out. The Indian Government wanted the state to accede to India before it could send armed forces to ward off Pakistan's aggression. The accession treaty was signed with the provision of article 370. It was not a merger. India was to look after defence, currency, foreign affairs, and communication while Kashmir was to have its own constitution, flag, *Sadar-I-Riyasat* and Prime Minister. Justifying this action Pandit Nehru in a

broadcast to the Nation on Nov.2, 1947 said, "Both the Kashmir Government and the *National Conference* pressed us to accept this accession and to send troops by air, but made condition that the accession would have to be considered by the people of Kashmir later when the peace and order were established."⁶

India approached the UN with a request to get the aggression vacated and to supervise the process of plebiscite. The issue was referred to the United Nations Security Council for a peaceful settlement. The accession was to be subject to the ratification of the wishes of Kashmiri people. Lord Mountbatten, Governor General of India wrote, "Consistent with their policy where the issue of accession is under dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of people of the state. It is my Government's wish that, as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and its soil cleared of invaders, the question of state should be settled by a reference to the people."⁵ Linking the two issues created a new problem and plebiscite was postponed *sine die* since the aggression was never vacated.

Kashmir was also multiethnic and divided into five regions. Though there was good deal of intermingling, there was also some specificity of each area. There were the vast northern areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, which are now directly administered by Islamabad; the predominantly Punjabi Muslim strip on the western side which we call POK, the huge, sprawling region of Ladakh with its Tibetan and Central-Asian cultural influences; the Jammu region and, finally the Kashmir Valley with its unique cultural and historical heritage. Two of these five regions have been under Pakistan control for over half a century.

An emergency Government under Sheikh Abdullah took over in Kashmir. In 1951, elections were held in Indian part of Kashmir and *National Conference* came to power. As pointed out above in the accession treaty J&K was granted a special status under Article 370 of the Constitution. Another point to be noted here is that in 1952 talks between Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, there was a proposal to grant regional autonomies to different areas within Kashmir but it was never implemented. By now *Praja Parishad* a close ally of *Jana Sangh*, the predecessor of *BJP* pressed for total merger of Kashmir with India.

The crucial factor in the process of alienation of Kashmir from India began with *Jana Sangh*

Chief Shyama Prasad Mookerjee's insistence, supported openly by the *Jana Sangh* and covertly by some bigwigs in Congress as well, for the total merger of Kashmir with India. At this point Nehru was under the external pressure of *Jana Sangh* and internal pressure from some of his colleagues in the cabinet to totally integrate Kashmir with India. However, Nehru with his wisdom could say "We have to be men of vision and there has to be a broad minded acceptance of facts in order to integrate really. And real integration comes from mind and the heart and not of some clause, which you may impose, on other people."⁶ Nehru despite his own beliefs could not hold on to the policy of trust in the popular Kashmiri leadership and the same mistake was to be repeated by successive Prime Ministers resulting in intensification of alienation of Kashmiri people over a period of time. Asghar Ali Engineer sums of the beginning of the process of alienation of Kashmir very well, "The original sin was committed by the Congress Government during the Prime Ministership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru was emotionally attached to Kashmir and it is difficult to say whether he was genuinely disposed towards letting Kashmir have autonomy as laid down under the article 370. After the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, the Centre was more than anxious to water down Kashmir's autonomy and wanted to retain State's grip on Kashmir. With pliable Chief Ministers succeeding Sheikh, it was not difficult. The Kashmir Assembly passed resolutions to slowly surrender its autonomy. First, it abolished the posts of *Sadr-e-Riyasat* and Prime Minister, replaced them with Governor and Chief Minister, and then asked for jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to be extended to the state. By the time Sheikh Abdullah was released state assembly surrendered all these autonomy measures voluntarily."⁷

After the death of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, these elements become more assertive in opposing the State-Centre relations. Sheikh Abdullah, who was so far hailed as a patriot was dubbed a traitor and a Muslim communalist. Sheikh who so far felt that threat to Kashmiri identity came from Pakistan started feeling the threat of suppression of Kashmiriyat from India. "Giving vent to popular sentiments, he started equivocating on the issue of accession. Some more factors aggravated the situation which eventually led to his dismissal from power and detention on August 9, 1953. The year 1953 thus symbolised the emotional rupture of Kashmir from rest of India."⁹

Accusing Sheikh Abdullah, responsible for the accession of Kashmir to India, was in due course to become the seed, which later grew in to the tree of alienation. The post Nehru era was to worsen this alienation by extending more provisions of Indian Constitution to Kashmir. This was to provoke hostility and anger amongst Kashmiri Nationalists. "The wave of anger provoked by fresh threats of identity of Kashmir tempted Pakistan to send thousands of armed infiltrators to the state. They got no response from Kashmiri people, as though anti-India, they did not prefer Pak 'Liberators'."¹⁰ The 1971 war and break-up of Pakistan led to fresh dialogue between Abdullah and Indian leaders. Abdullah returned to power after his demand for restoration of pre-1953 status of state was conceded while he, in turn, conceded the right to region's autonomy. In one of the fairest elections ever to be held in Kashmir the Sheikh proved his popularity at the hustings when he literally swept the polls. In the elections in 1983, Sheikh's son who inherited the mantle of leadership of *National Conference* won the elections but Rajiv Gandhi illegally superseded his government and he was restored as the CM only in 1986 when he agreed to share power with Congress leaving the void in opposition. This void in the opposition was gradually filled by *Muslim United Front*, which tried to capitalise on the feelings of deep humiliation caused by Farooq's coalition with the party that had dismissed him in a humiliating way. "They manipulated elections of 1987 and blocked the democratic and secular outlet of discontent. In sheer desperation a group of young men, including some candidates, whose elections were manoeuvred, their polling agents took to gun."¹¹

This gave a good opportunity to Pakistan to use the liberation of Kashmir as the cause for which, it systematically started training volunteers under the aegis of *Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front*. Taking advantage of the alienation of local people from the Indian State, Pakistan gradually intensified the training of militants. Pakistan Government having realised the anti-India sentiments of Kashmir people turned the Independent Kashmir option into Pro-Pakistan option. This caused disillusionment amongst local people so Pakistan increasingly started recruiting external militants who were ruthless in death and destruction of property and lives of Hindus as well Muslims.

The militants, most of whom were trained and recruited from neighbouring countries; especially

Pakistan did maximum damage to the communal amity. So far the local militants could never think of Hindu-Muslim divide, as both these communities stood together, as Kashmiris. It is worth noting that in the 1996 elections to the state assembly, the *National Conference* contested the elections on the basis of autonomy within India and autonomy of regions within the state, it won all the seats barring one. Farooq kept shifting his loyalties to the party in power at the centre, giving the message that Kashmir does not have the option of opposing the ruling Government at the centre, confirming the perception of its status as a colony of the Centre.

There have been repeated dismissals of the democratically elected Governments in Kashmir in order to extend provisions from the Indian Constitution to Kashmir. Every such attempt has widened the gulf between India and the people of Kashmir. There have been four major attempts to patch up the peace and restrict the autonomy

- a. 1952- Agreement between Sheikh and Nehru, Indian Government agrees to provide autonomy within India.
- b. 1974-Agreement between Parthasarthy (Indira Gandhi emissary) and Afzal Beg affirm right of Jammu and Kashmir to have its own laws on matters mentioned in state constitution.
- c. 1995 Narsimha Rao declares that short of Azadi, 'sky is the limit', but within Indian constitution.
- d. Deve Gowda promises 'maximum autonomy' to J&K, as it is a special state needing special treatment.¹²

Kashmir is a state where the democratically elected Government has been superseded maximum number of times. Practically every Chief minister has been terminated by the Central Government indicating its attitude, A major blow to the sentiments of Kashmiris, however, came in 1984 when Governor Jagamohan dismissed the duly elected Farooq Government giving a clear signal to people of state that forget right to secede from India, Kashmir can not even have its own democratically elected government in power. This led to the further alienation of the Kashmiris and erosion of their Kashmiri identity and progress towards the sectarian Muslim identity. The discontent is exploited by vested elements and shaped into an anti-India campaign.

MYTH: Kashmir is a Hindu Muslim Problem.

FACT: Kashmiri politics does not divide its history into Hindu and Muslim period, as both Hindu and Muslim communalists have always done, but into Kashmiri and foreign periods#.

Contrary to this myth, the subjugation of Kashmir did not begin in 1947 when the last Dogra ruler acceded to India nor when the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh of Jammu first acquired Kashmir from the British in 1846. It began way back in 1586 (ibid.) when Emperor Akbar extended his domain to the Kashmir valley, and later continued through the Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rulers down to the "secular" government of India!

Although Sheikh Abdullah did prevaricate and vacillate considerably between 1943 and 1953, his own understanding of his role and the Kashmiri aspirations was contrary to the misconception spread about him. In his inaugural address to the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly he explained the reasons why the Kashmiris had preferred India to Pakistan. India's secular Constitution, he stressed would allay the fears of those who believed that the Muslims of Kashmir would not be secure in a Hindu majority country. The national movement in Kashmir "naturally gravitates towards these policies of secular democracy because the people will never accept any principle that favours one religion or social group over another". (ibid.) Besides, the accession of Kashmir to India, Sheikh Abdullah felt would help defeat the Hindu communal forces by setting any example which would counter the logic of communalism. In short, in Kashmir itself the movement of *National Conference* led by Sheikh Abdullah was founded on secular principles.

India's anxiety to integrate the state in the Indian union overruling the democratic process resulted partly in the gradual alienation of the people. The further suppression of Kashmiri identity led to the emergence of Muslim identity. Yet, remarkably, communal riots failed to erupt. The then Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru had made it abundantly clear in Constituent Assembly on March 5, 1948 that "We would not have gone there (Kashmir) in spite of the invitation of the Maharaja of Kashmir, if that invitation had not been backed by the representatives of Kashmir."¹³ Despite the lucrative offer of powers to the Maharaja and the predominant Muslim population, which was

free to go to Pakistan, they did not do so mainly for the aspirations for secular syncretic values that they wanted to preserve.

It began to look like a Hindu-Muslim problem mainly because of erosion of *Kashmiriyat*, the Kashmiri ethnic identity. The identity, which filled this gap, was that of Islam. This was the golden opportunity for the nefarious designs of Pakistani Military- Mullah regime to give the communal colour to the whole issue. The mistrust of the popular leadership played the role of an ideal foil to this ruse.

MYTH: Kashmiris are unreasonable, treacherous, deceitful, and pro-Pakistan people.

FACT: Kashmiri people had enough opportunity to opt for merger with Pakistan. Jinnah had promised more powers and acceptance of his sovereignty to the Maharaja who also tilted towards Pakistan for a while. Pakistani flags were also hoisted on the buildings of Post and Telegraph departments. The Kashmiri people, majority of them Muslim, however, never wanted to be a part of Pakistan. They spurned the lures and the military aggression too. They steadfastly opposed Kashmir's merger with Pakistan.

Despite the severe alienation due to the policies of Indian rulers, suppression of their ethnic aspirations, repeated dismissal of popular governments. by the Indian Governments Kashmiri people even today are not opting for Pakistan as the alternative. Their main demand has been to preserve their autonomy as promised in the treaty of accession, their main aspiration is to preserve the ethnic character of Kashmir and to be able to live the life away from the crossfire. One of the recent opinion polls conducted by **Outlook** (Oct. 16, 2000) reveals that any assumptions to the contrary are quite baseless. According to 74% of the respondents separate identity of Kashmir is what is required, 16% favoured greater autonomy and only 2% wanted merger with Pakistan. 39% still felt that a solution could be found within the framework of Indian constitution. [It should however be remembered that today the demand has taken on the form of secession from the Indian Union. The demand now is for "azaadi" or independence.

(All references at the end of Part II of the article.)

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