

Next Phases to Peace

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Abstract:

At present common Kashmiris are suffering at the both hands, Indian forces and militants and everyone is using the situation to malign other party. Though India is a democratic country, however, in case of Kashmir, it does not follow the democratic norms and has confined itself to political oratory. Kashmir is a conflict zone where everybody can't be trialed including militants for killings or kidnapping or for every Pandit claiming of being forced from his home and business. New Delhi has wrongly acknowledged that Peace would be restored only through money politics. It is a matter of political

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mistrust, economic deprivation and broken stalemates. In order to get peace back in Kashmir, India will have to play major role by showing magnanimity and policy of forgiveness towards Kashmiris rather than policy of revenge. Predominance of justice and democratic values can open up avenues for sustainable resolution of the Kashmir issue. This is the best way forward which can ease the prevailing situation in Kashmir.

Key words: Kashmir, India, political oratory, peace, democratic values.

Introduction

“Are all Kashmiris as angry as you are?” This was repeatedly asked to young Kashmiris during the height of summer agitations of 2008, 2009 and 2010. Most of them would say yes. Although everybody’s articulation of reasons was different, yet there was a marked harmony in these responses. “Yes we are all angry; in fact most of us are” the *Kashmiri* young men (also women) would reply. “We are angry with ourselves, angry that we have no control over our destiny and angry because any person who questions this state of affairs is either killed or jailed. Some are labeled as ‘extremists’ or ‘terrorists’ and some ‘enemy agents’ by those, who in turn are encouraged, supported and funded by New Delhi or Islamabad or both.

“Sometimes we even condemn the attractiveness of Kashmir, its enormous water and forest resources, its strategic location proved catastrophic for its dwellers. We see the incredible wealth our rivers have brought to India and Pakistan by irrigating their agricultural lands and generating cheap power for their industrial super engines. At another level, we see our own homes and schools craving for electricity to lit bulbs, we see children dying in cribs for want of medical-care; we see lack of irrigation forcing transformation of agricultural lands into residential colonies. People are struggling to lend

meaning to their lives in corruption infested systems.²

“Now what does a young Kashmiri do under these circumstances? They begin to hate their leaders and the systems that control their lives. They throw stones and cry burn everything down. “India depicts itself as a beacon of democracy and freedom but for the young people in the streets of Kashmir, it represents a soulless bully who would, instead of democratic principles rather rely on muscle, money and mind to maintain status quo.

“Pakistan, the ‘benefactor of Kashmiri interests’, will, as it always has, secure its own interests first rather than fend for Kashmir.

“Then there are those who sell ‘freedom’. The concept of ‘freedom’ has all along inspired millions but in Kashmir, the idea of freedom has lost much of attraction because its votaries couldn’t specifically define it as a strategic objective or what it meant. They asked for and engineered sacrifices from people but never really had any concrete and reasonably attainable goals in sight. (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994, 24) Thanks to conflict, even without any intellectual and educational capital these people have risen above the ordinary stations of life. They are conflict entrepreneurs, who benefit by piling up Kashmir’s dead.

Fiction aside but fact of the matter is that this is the reality in today’s Kashmir– widespread anger and frustration. Any initiative for understanding what should be the approach to peace in Kashmir has to begin from here. This is the take-off point.

Calm Is Not Peace

During a visit to a Sikh Gurudwara (temple) at Kalamazoo (Michigan, USA) and after talking to the Sikhs living there, it

² The idea of this passage comes from a similar passage in Saeed Akhter Mirza’s novel *The Monk, the Moor and Moses Ben Jalloun*. 2012. New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 173-174.

could be assumed that they still cherish the dream of independent Sikh nation State “Khalistan”, which is going to be a reality one day as India will crumble under its own weight. It has bullied and oppressed its minorities for too long now; it will go USSR way.³ While (Bhai) Dr. Amarjeet Singh, the eloquent spokesperson of the Khalistani Sikhs in the United States was speaking, I could feel passion and pain in his voice, and inimitable glitter lighting up eyes of other Sikhs who were listening to the discourse ardently.

Then, a Sikh introduced me to his wife and she started talking in English. I interrupted in Hindi saying she could talk to me in Hindi. “To hell with Hindi,” she replied with a raised brow. Now I began in chaste Punjabi: “*Parjaijee Tusi Sadhe Naal Punjabi Wich Bhi Ghal Kar Sakhdeyo* (sister-in-law, you can talk to me in Punjabi).” And I could see love, friendliness, hospitality and warmth of a typical Punjabi woman. But there was hate and hate for Hindi and of course against “Hindu India” which aggressively militates Hindi language as part of its nation-building or ‘Hinduization’ campaign.⁴

How can people who believe love as the path to God (*Jin Prem Kiyoo, Tin He Prabhu Paiyo: Guru Gobind Singh, 10th Guru*) hate any country, and its inanimate language? Obviously my conclusion about Punjab was wrong. The separatist movement for Khalistan is not dead, militancy might out but Punjab is not normal. The quiet lull, the screeching silence, the uneasy hush in Punjab could well be the proverbial calm that precedes a violent storm!

Identities Matter

³ Dr. Amarjeet Singh, Spokesperson of the Khalistan, interviewed by one of the researchers, Kalamazoo (Michigan, USA).

⁴ As narrated by a friend who was part of the group that visited the Gurudwara in Kalamazoo with a batch of students pursuing Masters in International Peace Studies, at Joan B. Kroc Institute of International Studies at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA. It was actually he who had this encounter with the Sikh woman.

Another anecdote: “I am Mr. A, and am from Kashmir.” This assertion from a Kashmiri participant would go unnoticed, but then another Kashmiri introduced himself-“I am Mr. B, and I am from Kashmir.” And a third-“I am Mr. C, and I am also a Kashmiri.”

This was the last straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back. Tension, anger and frustration were palpable on the faces of participants from mainland India who had converged at a peace conference at a Dead Sea resort in Jordan. “How can you say so? Why didn’t you say that you are Indians? Look I am from Banaras but I said I am Indian, and so did all others from different parts of India. They introduced themselves as Indians,” a senior professor from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) went on and on as he fumed with rage.

“Respected professor,” retorted a Kashmiri participant very politely: “Why do you take upon yourself the extra burden of ensuring that Kashmiri people identify themselves as Indians? Kashmir is older than India, its history, its geography and everything that is *Kashmiri*, was there when India was yet to be conceived and put together as what it is today. We didn’t object to your choice about your own description, whether you describe yourself as someone from UP or from Banaras or an Indian; it is your choice and we respect it. You should also respect our choices,” *the Kashmiri* participant said.

But before the Indian professor could say more, *the Kashmiri* continued: “Even though all of us came here on Indian passports and are counted as Indians, but if we still prefer wearing our Kashmiri identity, I think *India* should have no problem with it. The largest democracy in the world must know those democratic ideal springs from the ideas of liberty, equality and freedom, from subscribing to multiple loyalties in matters of religion, economics, and politics rather than to a total loyalty to the State and that too as prescribed by a particular group of political elite.

“In fact it is India’s inability to acknowledge and

appreciate this distinctiveness of Kashmir and Kashmiri people, and reconcile their sub-nationalistic identity and aspirations within its own which is the cause of tensions between the two.” “Respected Professor,” continued *the Kashmiri*, “Identity is not a singular construct but rather a plural entity, for there is no single identity that a person has. We all have multiple identities, determined by varied factors and markers, including our place of birth, residence, language, religion, economic and social status, political affiliations and beliefs Identities are like concentric layers of an onion; if you fiddle with them, it will bring tears in your eyes.”⁵

Relationships

Today, Kashmir is drenched in a sea of tears. The ‘onion’ of its identities has been fiddled with so badly that everybody, including even those who fiddled with it, has been left with teary eyes. So, what about the “Next Steps to Peace in Kashmir”? By the way, where is (are) the ‘first’ step? The ‘next’ step comes in only after the first one has been taken but here we don’t see any beginning having been made anywhere by any of the stake-holders thus far.

Looking at the Kashmir conflict, as well as those brewing within its territory, there is so much one could write about. However, such an elaborate discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. For the sake of brevity, let’s overlook sub-regional cleavages and political and socio-economic tensions within Jammu and Kashmir. Let the take-off point be that the militancy has waned and violence is receding; that after three successive summers of unrest and civilian killings (2008, 2009 and 2010), Kashmir has finally seen a peaceful and calm summer (2011), and that the dialogue process between India

⁵ This anecdote has been paraphrased from a column ‘Wide Angle’ by Raouf Rasool, appearing in daily Kashmir Images on Jan 15, 2012, under the title ‘I think, therefore, I am’.

and Pakistan has resumed.⁶

Peace and conflict do not occur in vacuum; they are about people, about their relationships, and interactions. So, it is Kashmir's relationship and interaction with New Delhi and Islamabad which influence the choices of peace and conflict here. There are other important factors as well but they too, more or less but not necessarily, revolve along these two axes, and will automatically cease to have much influence once the larger irritants are addressed.

Pakistan's Role

Although Pakistan has all along been a major actor involved in the political amphitheater of Kashmir, but right now the country is in disarray. If the changing geo-political dynamics and the way Pakistan has been and is being, named and blamed for its culpability in running "Jihad factories"⁷, are taken as pointer, it will take a good measure of time and efforts to salvage its sinking image and save the country from possible disintegration. Right now New Delhi is upbeat. It's growing economic ties and strategic proximity with the US and other western nations, or for that matter the dangerous insurgencies raging against Pakistan from within, as also Pakistan's waning and India's growing influence in Afghanistan, everything is very encouraging for Delhi. However, simple common sense has it that a weak and volatile Pakistan is in nobody's interest, least in India's, because its borders will be ever-vulnerable to the spill-over effects of every unrest in the neighbouring country.

Having said this, it also goes without saying that today

⁶ There have been several rounds of talks between two neighbours from March 2011- August 2012. They agreed amongst the other things to establish "Terror Hotline" between New Delhi and Islamabad for quickly communicating the terrorists' threats.

⁷ This term has been increasingly used to describe Pakistan's religious seminaries that are believed to breed religious extremism, and reportedly supply human resource for the militant training camps where these seminary students are imparted training in guerilla warfare.

Pakistan is certainly in no position to accord the kind of support and provocation to the insurgency in Kashmir that was there during 1990-2000. After 9/11, the armed insurgencies have largely lost their moral and material support. The killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan has dented the country's image internationally so much so that it could hardly afford public posturing in support of violent insurgencies.⁸ Moreover, the insurgent violence has broken loose in and against Pakistan itself. Its "thousand cuts theory"⁹ that worked against erstwhile USSR in Afghanistan has backfired against India in the absence of international support and legitimacy. Domestically also, there is growing intolerance for State support to militant groups.

Reintegrating the Wronged

This is what the militant groups operating in Kashmir. Now that Pakistan is forced to pull curtain on its material support to armed insurgency in Kashmir, the involved actors too are looking for an honorable exit to bid adieu to violent politics. The growing number of former militants opting for amnesty under the Jammu and Kashmir Government's Rehabilitation Policy for them is an encouraging indicator.¹⁰ This trend needs to be further encouraged and strengthened and rehabilitation of militants not only expedited but made honorable as well.

There are thousands of former militants in this part of Kashmir also awaiting rehabilitation. As the history of insurgencies and conflicts would suggest, no peace process will succeed unless it's armed with a well-thought and sincerely meant Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

⁸ Owen Bennett-Jones, "Pakistan: A failed State or a Clever Gambler?" May 17, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13318673>, Accessed at 5:30 PM, June 03, 2012.

⁹ The term was used for describing Jihad against erstwhile USSR in Afghanistan by Mujahideen with the backing and help of Pakistan, America's CIA, funded largely by Saudi petro-dollars.

¹⁰ Jammu and Kashmir Government adopted Rehabilitation Policy for surrendered militants in 2010.

policy. Government here has come up with one but its efficacy remains doubtful if the general mistrust between New Delhi and Srinagar is taken as pointer. Besides, so far we have seen the ex-militants being treated very shabbily by the State and its apparatuses. Their regular and mandatory visits to the police stations, army and paramilitary forces' camps where they are, at times, debased and humiliated, do not auger well for their reintegration into the mainstream society.¹¹ This has to go. The State has to show magnanimity of a parent to own its deprived children, or else their intellectual and security recession will only go from bad to worse and push them deeper into the morass of crime and conflict. The recycling of former militants back into the violent polity is but a sorry reflection on the State's ability to accept and embrace its 'wronged' children.

Mending Fences Within

While the dialogue between New Delhi and Pakistan continues and will proceed at its own pace, there has to be a sincere and concerted effort to mend fences within. Much has been written about the relational dynamics between the New Delhi and Srinagar, but not much has been done to arrest and address the alienation of the Kashmiri people. Leaving the constitutional and legal aspects for experts (Prime Minister's Working Group, Justice Saghir Committee, and J&K Interlocutors' report, etc.) to suggest measures of rectifying wrongs, the psycho-social or human paradigm of this relationship also needs serious attention.

“Conflicts do not ‘just happen’ to people; people are active participants in creating situations and interactions they

¹¹ This charge has been levelled and corroborated by scores of former militants whom this author have met as a journalist, and who claim being victims of this abusive practice. The charge is also confirmed by police and paramilitary forces' officials although for obvious reasons they wouldn't want to go on record. Moreover, it is a common practice particularly in Kashmir's countryside. There have been news reports even suggesting that many a times these former militants are forced into abusive situations.

experience as conflict.” (Laderach 1995, 9) Needless to say that the human relationships have come under tremendous and painful duress during past 23 years of political turmoil in Kashmir and they need to be healed. Myopic diagnosis disguising the widespread socio-cultural and politico-economic tensions as “clash of civilizations”¹² to be treated through the “shock and awe”¹³ have not worked anywhere in the world. Political elites’ vision of the ‘best possible solution’, the one that buys time to maintain status quo, too is not acceptable to the ‘have-nots’ reeling under the age-old structures of deprivation and violence; illiteracy, hunger, disease and death. The crude and ugly realities of life of the people of Kashmir, who have endured violence with all its structural and pornographic dispositions, need humane approach. What is not-so-pleasant, ugly and horrifying cannot just be wished away simply by pushing it into the oblivion by not talking about it. Reality, howsoever crude it is, needs to be confronted for what it is and what it means not only to those who have lived it but for the entire humanity in general. Then only can the ways and means be devised to tackle and counter it.

Truth and Reconciliation

New Delhi’s thrust has been on *buying* reconciliation with the Kashmiri people through financial and other doles. It hasn’t

¹² The Clash of Civilizations is a theory, proposed by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. This theory was originally formulated in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, which was then developed in a 1993 Foreign Affairs article titled “The Clash of Civilizations?”, in response to Francis Fukuyama’s 1992 book, ‘The End of History and the Last Man’. Huntington later expanded his thesis in a 1996 book ‘The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order’.

¹³ ‘Shock and Awe’ is a military doctrine based on the use of overwhelming power, dominant battlefield awareness, dominant maneuvers, and spectacular displays of force to paralyze an adversary’s perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight. The term was also used by George W. Bush when he waged war against Iraq and Afghanistan immediately after 9/11.

worked thus far, and one is not sure if it ever will. Human experience as also the hindsight of conflicts elsewhere suggests that it is the truth, amnesty and reparation that bring about healing for individuals and for the nations. In the words of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Our nation needs healing. Victims and survivors need healing. Perpetrators are, in their own way, victims of the apartheid system and they, too, need healing.”¹⁴

Now isn't this statement equally true in Kashmir's context as well? Here too everybody, the 'victims', the 'perpetrators', and 'the nation' needs healing. And this healing won't come about unless and until there is individual and institutional acknowledgement of the wrongs that have been committed. It's not only that the State and its institutions have committed wrongs; wrongs have indeed been committed by all sides, including the people themselves. All these must be accounted for. We may not be able to bring every culprit to book but by acknowledging their misdeeds, we could change the relational dynamics so profoundly that Kashmir might become an example of 'life with forgiveness'!¹⁵

A genuine reconciliation process has to be preceded by honest truth-telling. “In Kashmir there are plenty of appeals by mediators and experts for reconciliation, the 'moving on' lobby. But they insist that this happens without discovery. The moving on lobby wants to draw a line under the crisis, and step forwards. Nowhere in the world has absolution been possible without discovery.”¹⁶ This needs to be understood by all,

¹⁴ “Reconciliation: The Road to Healing? Collective Good, Individual Harm?”, CCR Vol -6, No.3/4, Dec 1997. http://www.ccr.uct.ac.za/archive/two/6_34/p24_winslow.html. Accessed on June 02, 2012 at 6:10 PM.

¹⁵ This has been motivated by the title of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's book “No Life Without Forgiveness.”

¹⁶ Interview with the authors of the recently released book “The Meadow: Kashmir 1995 — Where The Terror Began” by British investigative journalists Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark. The interview appeared in daily 'Greater Kashmir' on May 27, 2012.

particularly by New Delhi. “Wherever there has been absolution and reconciliation, it has been predicated on discovery.”¹⁷

No doubt it will be a painful process, but sometimes it is necessary to reopen old wounds [that refuse to heal], bleed and dress them afresh in order to catalyze the healing process. “Kashmir must be the only conflict zone in the world where academics and officials propose the opposite: a clean chit, while there cannot be a trial for every body dumped, or an accounting for every militant kidnapping and killing, or for every Pandit claim of being forced from homes and businesses, there has to be a broad and detailed truth-telling that encompasses acts criminal and conspiratorial or there will never be closure.”¹⁸

There are so many dark quarters in Kashmir’s recent history that need some light. Be it the issue of enforced disappearances, custodial killings and fake encounters, unmarked graves, or killings after labeling victims as ‘mukhbirs’ (police informers) or “Intelligence Bureau agents”, “National Conference workers” and what not, all these demand resolution. Until every atrocity is properly mapped and understood, and responsibility fixed there cannot be a proper closure, and no healing and reconciliation.

Acknowledging Wrongs

“What can be done for peace in Kashmir?” This question regularly rocked many a brains in India’s mainstream intelligentsia at the height of summer agitation in 2011. The situation was so overwhelming for New Delhi that Kashmir seemed an utter bedlam, which had the political establishment spinning in frenzy. They knocked at the doors of whosoever they thought could help. “Please tell us what could be done

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/May/27/-finding-the-truth-in-kashmir-is-very-difficult--4.asp> Accessed on May 27, 2012 at 7:00 PM.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

right now” was the plea. But as has always happened, once the situation calmed down of its own, everything was forgotten and New Delhi yet again became content with its containment tactics. Even though Kashmir is calm now but any slight provocation has every potential to explode restive calm into a full-blown chaotic civil strife once again.

Delhi’s diagnosis of problems in Kashmir has not changed. In the shape of central interlocutors, it did attempt to reach out to the aggrieved people but the initiative did not generate much hope. In fact Delhi itself displayed lack of initiative when it took over seven months to make its report public; and that too without saying a word about it. The separatists had already ignored interlocutors’ pleas to meet them; now they have also rejected their report, which has otherwise also failed to generate any hope or heat. There is a genuine dejection in Kashmir with Delhi’s “time-buying tactics”; and this popular belief is buttressed with each passing day and every new development.

Beyond Moneyed Thinking

Mixing up economics with the issues of hardcore identity politics plaguing Kashmir is a cruel joke. At a time when Delhi should have been putting soothing balm on the physical and psychological wounds of the Kashmiri population, it is attempting to barter away economic standard operating procedures. Instead of identifying with the pain and agony of the aggrieved people who have lost and are losing their young and old to the conflict, Delhi still believes that its promises of doling out some “hush money” would buy it peace.

Instead of talking in ‘moneyed politics’, it would be better if Government of India takes a humanitarian view of the Kashmiris’ unease. No doubt Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and his predecessors have once in a while “grieved” at the loss of life in Kashmir, but such assertions don’t go beyond rhetorical overtures. Instead of trying to buy peace, the

institution of the Prime Minister as well as Dr. Singh's personal image and stature would be better off if he confesses the horrible wrongs committed by the State against the people of Kashmir.

Living up to its claims of being the world's largest democracy, the Government of India has to show maturity, abandon childish vanity and admit "we were/are/have been wrong". If such an admission ever comes about, it would not only shake up its Kashmir policy concepts but also open the door to a new relationship between New Delhi and Srinagar, the most important step for durable and genuine peace in Kashmir. Imagine Prime Minister of India, in a public meeting in Lal Chowk, apologizing for the wrongs committed to the people of Kashmir, and imagine how it is going to influence the Kashmiri psyche vis-à-vis India! This could be the best possible beginning of healing the wounded hearts and building broken relationships.

Any peace initiative has to focus on three immediate goals: increased justice, reduced violence and restoration of broken relationships. (Laderach 1995, 23) Owing to varied factors, including of course the military ones, the violence has steadily but considerably ebbed down in Kashmir. However, justice still eludes people. Even today it is no easy to get police register an FIR (First Information Report) for a lost mobile phone, not to speak of difficulties people face when reporting death or abduction of a kin at the hands of Government forces or even unknown perpetrators. As for the restoration of broken relationships goes, the State is yet to show even any intent on this count.

Conclusion

Shrouded by the sound and fury of political rhetoric, a dangerous conflict is still raging in Kashmir, and many a grave questions staring right into the people's faces. "What is to become of us?" young Kashmiris, who have seen the turbulent

2008, 2009 and 2010 summers and State's brutal response to these situations, together with complete lack of concern since, ask today. They have more disturbing questions as well, which do not find expression in words but are evident in their behavior nevertheless. Doubt and bewilderment cloud their eyes; they have seen horrible episodes of bloodletting, have been shaken by the acts that ran contrary to their faith in a just world. Mature nations are armed with intellectual and institutional wherewithal to battle this uncertainty among their young. But in Kashmir, which has been left adrift by an obsessive pre-occupation with its political status, everything remains so over-politicized that nobody cares.

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