

GREATER AUTONOMY NOT IN J&K PEOPLE'S INTEREST

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Although autonomy for J&K is being demanded on the grounds that the Kashmiri Muslims want it and has been promised by the Central Government in the hope that meeting such a demand of the Kashmiri people would put an end to militancy in Kashmir, a more rational consideration of this demand would show that it is not the Kashmiris who want autonomy but it is their leaders who are striving for it for keeping themselves out side the ambit of accountability. The bane of the Indian Government since the Nehru days has been that in its attempt to strengthen the nationalist forces in Kashmir, it has depended too much on individuals rather than the masses. These individuals have in turn used their position to black-mail the Centre for gaining a free hand not for doing good to the Kashmiris but for perpetuating their rule and filling their coffers through corruption. For fear of losing their support and supposedly harming the national cause, no one questioned their phenomenal rise from rags to riches, while the peasant remained where he was before independence: still unable to earn enough during summer to be able to pull through the winter months, which he continues to spend in the plains of Jammu and Punjab in search of work. Unfortunately the black-mail has worked again with the UG Government. One can only feel sorry for the Kashmiris.

Whatever J&K's position may have been on paper, the State is known to have always enjoyed a certain amount of *de facto* autonomy, which no other state has, due to the general policy of appeasement that the Central Government has been following with regard to the Kashmiri leadership. And how has this ruling clique put this autonomy to use with regard to the other regions of the State? The report of the Gajendragadkar Commission that was set up in 1967 to go into the grievances of the people of Jammu and Ladakh regions bears testimony to the blatant discrimination practiced by the State Government against these regions with regard to the development programme, recruitment policy and policy regarding admission to institutions of higher education, scholarships and loans etc.

One wonders how the people could benefit through autonomy which, if it is to be of the pre-1953 type, (as is being proclaimed by the National Conference), will take the State out of the preview of the Supreme Court and the Indian Election Commission, and leave the people at the mercy of unscrupulous politicians, whose past record contains nothing for one to feel assured about.

It appears most ironical that many people in Jammu who have been avowedly against the State's autonomy, or any attempt toward putting the clock back with regard to the process of the State's full integration with India, have thrown in their lot with the very forces that are proclaiming autonomy to be their goal. Evidently these people are being misled by their leaders who have managed to cleverly conceal the true and full implications of autonomy for the State. The unkindest cut comes from Dr Karan Singh and Mr. Ajatshatru Singh, the scions of the great Dogra ruler Maharaja Hari Singh. Their joining the National Conference and supporting the demand for autonomy has come as a great shock, particularly to the people of Jammu. It has left the people wondering as to what prompted the "Royal" family to join the forces that are determined to retrace the steps taken so far towards the State's full integration with the rest of the country. Various motives are being attributed to Dr Karan Singh for having acted the way he has done. The main one being that autonomy means the restoration of the institution of the Sadar-i-

Riyast and in some remote way a revival of the Dogra dynasty, even if titular. Let us hope that this is not true but if it is then it is matter of great shame for the dynasty that he may be trying to revive.

Let those Kashmiri Muslims who are harbouring sentiments of "Azadi" under the influence of vested interests understand that these sentiments are already enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Let somebody first point out in what way the Indian Constitution does not meet the aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslims before demanding autonomy for them. If this Constitution is good enough for crores of Muslims residing in other parts of the country, why should it not be for a few lakh Muslim of Kashmir. The Kashmiri Muslims may, like any other, fight for their rights under the Constitution, if these appear to have been denied to them and they will find the whole nation behind them. Where then is the need for Greater Autonomy other than for creating powerful dictators who would be accountable to none other than themselves.