

KASHMIRIS – A PEOPLE CHEATED BY THEIR LEADERS

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The history of Kashmir after Independence is, in fact, a story of continuous bungling by the Central Government of its policy and the present situation in Kashmir may clearly be seen as the direct result of such bungling. First it was the conditional acceptance of the accession when no such condition was necessary and then the uncalled for reference to the UN at a time when every thing was going India's way – both the wishes of the people as also the military situation. These, more than any thing else, have contributed towards creating a sense of uncertainty and the consequent keeping of the issue of the State's accession to India open to dispute. The position was perhaps, made worse by India offering to discuss the issue of accession with Pakistan. While India may have initiated the dialogue in the interest of Indo - Pak amity, this appears to have given an impression to the pro-Pak element in Kashmir that the issue was negotiable. India's repeated and forceful assertions to the contrary, during such talks, do not seem to have had the desired impact. But the most damaging streak that runs all through the Government of India's Kashmir policy, especially during the Nehru and Indira Gandhi days, is that in what was intended to be an effort to strengthen the nationalist forces, too much dependence was made on individuals rather than the masses. These individuals, helped by the air of uncertainty, (in the fanning of which they themselves had a big hand), acquired a position which they could use for blackmailing the Central Government into giving them a free hand in managing the affairs of the State. A free hand these leaders did get but this they used not for doing good to the people, as promised by them, (during what they eulogised as their freedom struggle), but for securing their seat of power and perpetuating corruption for filling their personal coffers. Having acquired impunity on the grounds of their "national outlook" and assured 'loyalty' for the country, the new ruling class was not made answerable to their people by those who put them in power. For fear of arming the "national cause" no one questioned their phenomenal rise from rags to riches. Nor were these individuals asked as to why, even after they had received billions and trillions of rupees as aid from the Central Government for the economic uplift of the people, the poor Kashmiri peasant was still poor and still unable to earn enough during the summer months to be able to pull through the winter months, which he is even today forced to spend in the plains of Jammu and Punjab in search of work. Obviously the policy of the Central Government was to reward "loyalty" rather than proficiency and honesty. It turned a blind eye towards the notoriety that the State Government earned in rigging elections even if to ensure that the "loyalists" retained power. The occasional display of confrontation with the Centre by the Kashmir leadership was made only to maintain the hero image to improve personal prospects of political power.

The Central Government policy on Kashmir took a turn for the worst under Rajiv Gandhi. Henceforth individuals in the ruling elite were to be favoured not only on the basis of their loyalty to the country but also on the basis of the extent to which they were prepared to share power with the ruling party at Centre. The story of the removal of Farooq, installation of GM Shah and return of Farooq is now part of history and needs no repetition. The point to be noted, however, is that under the Farooq-Rajiv Accord the ruling clique in Kashmir ceased to look like the heroes who could stand up to the domination of the Centre. The loss in the popularity was then sought to be made up by allowing rigging in elections on an unprecedented scale, even by Kashmir standards. Any one opposed to these "nationalists" even he had sworn by the Indian Constitution while standing for the elections, was shamelessly prevented from gaining

entry to the State Legislative Assembly. No heed was paid to the people outside the ruling clique who agitated for fairly elected governments in the State as against the ones that were being thrust on them by New Delhi, or those who innocuously demanded basic amenities and a greater share in Central Government services. All this generated a feeling among the people that they were not being treated with dignity and honour like the other citizens of the country and that they were at times being unnecessarily maligned as suspects and foreign agents. Evidently loyalty towards those in power had been made synonymous to loyalty towards the country.

This is not to say that all the grievances of the people were genuine or that all their demands could have been met even with the best efforts of the government. No doubt many of the grievances are the result of some misgivings, but the Central and State Governments rather than working for the removal of such misunderstandings have been, more often than not, contributing towards them. With the manner in which the elections in the Valley were conducted last time, who could, for instance, blame the Kashmiris if they felt insulted and humiliated.

Whatever the grievances, however, they cannot in any way justify the start of an insurgency. After all in a democracy there is a large number of courses open to the people for getting their grievances redressed. The Kashmiris have not been insulted or humiliated any more than the people of India as a whole under the previous government at the Centre and through the democratic process the people have already avenged the indignities that they were made to bear in Kashmir and elsewhere. What is more, the National Front Government at the Centre now is quite appreciative of the feelings of the Kashmiris and the injustices that they may have been made to suffer. So where is the problem?

Apparently the problem in Kashmir is that of Pakistan. Having unsuccessfully fought three wars with India for the acquisition of Kashmir, Pakistan seems to have realised that an armed revolt by the Kashmiris themselves, or a war through proxy as it may be termed, would be a better alternative for achieving its objective. While the chances of success for Pakistan would be more than in an open war, it would be the Kashmiris who would be paying for it with their lives rather than the Pakistanis themselves. The financial burden also would be many times lighter. After all what is the cost of a few thousand Kalashnikov or AK 47 rifles that Pakistan is required to supply to the insurgents when compared with the expenditure of a full-fledged war. Fortunately for Pakistan, the angry mood of the people and the non-performance and ineffectiveness of the Farooq government fitted perfectly with its plan for engineering a revolt in Kashmir.

It must be understood that Pakistan is no friend of the Kashmiris and its motives in Kashmir, far from being philanthropic, are purely selfish. Apart from its design of territorial expansion, the survival of its central government itself seems to depend on its ability to create trouble in Kashmir. How many Kashmiris get killed in the process is of little consequence to it. And what does Pakistan have to offer to the Kashmiris in return? Its own political setup that is yet to find its feet even 43 years after Independence?

The tragedy of Kashmir has been the extreme simplicity of its people, which makes them very vulnerable to exploitation by the cunning, both within and outside the State. The Kashmiris are deeply religious minded and exploitation of their religious susceptibilities have, more often than not, formed the basis for the various political movements that have been launched by their leaders from time to time since 1931. No matter what the real motives behind these movements may have been, they were presented to the masses as a struggle in the name of Islam. In 1931 itself they were made to struggle for a cause that turned out to be not really their own. Both the British and the British Indian Muslims, who had instigated the Kashmiris to continue the

struggle, even after the Maharaja had agreed to consider their demands, withdrew their support to the agitation as soon as their own interests had been served. Consequently after an year of turmoil during which the poor among the Kashmiris suffered tremendously and made the supreme sacrifice of many lives, they were, at the end of it, more or less, at the same position from where they had started. It was, in fact, this realisation on the part of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah that resulted in his ultimate parting of ways with the Indian Muslim League. The present situation in Kashmir is nothing but an action-replay of the situation in 1931. The same simplicity of the Muslim masses, and similar exploitation by Muslims outside the State, for a cause that is not the Kashmiris' own. The only difference today is that the Kashmiri Muslims are being made to get killed in greater number. The future of the movement is also destined to be similar to the one after 1931 – back to square one and all the sufferings and sacrifices going waste. The Pakistanis know that most of the “freedom fighters” whom they are supporting are not in favour of joining Pakistan but for becoming independent, which proposition is as distasteful to them as it is to India, as it would involve the vacation of the illegally occupied Kashmir territory by Pakistan. Pakistan's aim in Kashmir cannot, therefore, be anything more than embarrassing India and in some sadistic way avenge its defeat of 1971. Consequently Pakistan is unlikely to risk a war with India just for making Kashmir independent. In all probability Pakistan will back out as soon as things get too hot to handle, leaving the Kashmiris to fend for themselves. This would again present a scenario comparable to the one in 1931. We cannot but feel sorry for our poor Kashmiri brethren.