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No J&K mandate for autonomy

Sir,

Apropos “Autonomy after J&K poll” by B. G. Verghese (September 26), while the sincerity with which Verghese has pleaded the cause of “maximum autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir must be appreciated, his assumption that it is a demand of the people of the State is not correct. In fact, Jammu and Kashmir does not mean Kashmir alone and any independent observer of the State’s politics would confirm how the majority of the people of Jammu and Ladakh are against it.

The reason is not far to seek. It is known that whatever the State’s position may have been on paper, it has always enjoyed a certain amount of de facto autonomy which no other State has. This has probably been as a matter of 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? The report of the Gajendregadkar Commission, set up in 1967 to go into the grievances of the people of Jammu and lakakh regions of the State, bears testimony to the blatant discrimination practised by the State Government against these regions with regard to development programmes, recruitment policy, admissions to institutions of higher education, scholarships, loans, etc. The discrimination against these regions is not likely to diminish under conditions of the proposed “maximum autonomy” to the State.

It would not even be correct to say that the Kashmiris as a people want autonomy. It is only the Kashmiri leaders who want it to keep themselves outside the ambit of accountability. The bane of the Central Government over the years has been that, in its attempts to strengthen the nationalist forces in Kashmir, more attention has been paid to individuals than to the masses.

These individuals to this day have, in turn, used their position to blackmail the Centre for gaining a free hand not for doing good to the Kashmiris but for suppressing them and perpetuating their rule to fill their coffers through corruption. For fear of losing their support and supposedly harming the national cause, no one ever questioned their phenomenal rise from rags to riches, while the Kashmiri peasant remained where he was before Independence.

Although the National Conference made autonomy an issue in the latest Jammu and Kashmir poll, the outcome cannot be treated at the peoples’ mandate over the issue since neither has the quantum of autonomy been specified nor have its implications been explained to the people.

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