

SOLVING THE KASHMIR TANGLE AND TAMING THE YOUTH

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Come summer of 2008 and every summer after that in the valley has been ridden with prolonged street protests where willy/nilly youths have been the foot soldiers of the cruel war mongers. Patron Saints of anti India and pro Pak tirades manage to trigger an emotive incident or an inflammable issue which puts youth on the path of self destruction. In 2008 the trigger was much hyped slogan of Hindu Culture invasion on Islamic Kashmir following allotment of 99 Acres of govt land to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board for facilitating Amarnath Yatra. In 2009 it was a red- herring of alleged rape and drowning of two young girls of Shopian by local police officials. Now it is Sopore. Kashmir spends yet another summer in blood bathed hopelessness in which youth get engaged in standoff with security forces.

The agitating youths are from the generation born during late 80s and early 90s when the militancy was at its peak. This generation is virtually born and brought up on bloodshed. During their youth, they have seen terrorism, blasts, bandhs, agitations, corruption, misgovernance, false hopes, broken promises, death and destruction. This generation is a deprived generation which is very angry and frustrated. The anger and frustration is more prominent amongst poor, middle and upper middle class segments. They missed the opportunities of good education, fun & frolic of childhood. With the inherited gloomy past; desperate present, they don't have a future either. Their childhood was destroyed at birth. In the present agitation it is this angry generation in early twenties which is pivotal to the call for Azaadi and provides manpower for protests. While fighting the curfew they fight the security forces and attack their habitat during which some fall victim to their bullets.

“We want Azaadi” is the war cry of street protests. Frustrated youths fight with the stones unlike militants who fight with guns. This is an imaginative tactics because stone throwing can neither be branded as an act of militancy nor terrorism and hence a stronger mode of protest. New method of protest even if under the guise of Azaadi; is directed against political leadership, bureaucracy, security forces and India. The trails of recent turbulences are linked to the past of the youths and a stark reminder of consequences of 2 decades of strife full of violence, bloodshed and deprivations unleashed from within and across the borders. *Who is responsible for this generational tragedy and who is responsible for the present stand off?* Is it Srinagar, Delhi or Rawalpindi or all of them? This is what must be debated by this generation itself before jumping in to the blind well.

Kashmiri leadership has an important role in determining the future of Kashmir and the deprived generation. History will judge them by the role they play in restoring normalcy in the valley and in securing a bright future for the unemployed youths. Youths will also be judged by their contributions in minimizing sufferings of poor and innocent masses. There are many ways of protest. Let them know that ex servicemen of Jammu carried out a silent protest march in 2007 from Rajinder Chowk to Mubarak Mandi under the leadership of Maj Gen GS Jamwal, AVSM, President of ex services league and presented charter of demands to the Divisional Commissioner. Most of their demands were met by a single silent protest march. Should they emulate the ex servicemen, being Kashmiris they will be heard more.

Disillusioned with militancy people liberally turned up for voting in 2008 election to elect a govt which could provide them peace with dignity. Nearly 2 years down the line, what to talk of peace with dignity, what they have is insurrection of worst kind. This impasse is because the politicians lost the focus, ignored the aspirations of the people thus forcing the disillusioned

youth, who is now a hopeless voter, to catch the bull by the horns. The state govt failed in its obligations to the public and hence let the gains of security situation and goodwill of masses pass on to the opponents of peace. Alienation of masses under the arrogance of the power allowed the initial euphoria to evaporate in the thin air. Views of Army Chief were verification of neglect of masses and inability of the govt to reap the rich harvest of normalcy so painstakingly sowed by security forces prior run up to the 2008 election. Unfortunately this reality has not found favours with Dr. Farooq Abdullah; making other politicians more callous. Govt cannot escape the responsibility for the recent agitation and consequential deaths as well as human rights violations. Internal factors such as unemployment and cash for stone throwing and external factors such as Pak handlers can only be called catalysts.

Delhi's policy towards J&K is influenced by Pak factor which has its roots in partition on religious lines. Religious factor, ethnic division, inters regional tensions and the periodic regional insurrections handicap center's pro active involvement / interference in any political issue. Moreover Kashmiris hate central intervention and that is why they seek autonomy/self rule. Unless the politics of kind of run up to elections takes centre stage and engages people directly in the process of governance; as suggested by Mr. Chidambaram, any significant change in the mind set of agitators and improvement in law and order is unlikely. The trend of addressing large public gatherings from a distant elevated dais, surrounded by security staff and a quick escape after speeches will have to be abandoned. Small public gatherings which afford an opportunity to the public, particularly youths to interact with leaders should be practiced.

When PDP, the main opposition party, Panther Party as well as the separatist leaders spearheading the agitation are unwilling to talk/listen and in the absence of elected Panchayats / local bodies direct talks with youth is a solution to the tangle of Kashmir. Unless the politicians reform themselves, see the things through the prism of masses and abandon the petty party politics, they will continue facing the wrath of angry and agitated youths. God forbid, should the angry youth tread on the path of Maoism, none other than the Kashmiri leadership will be responsible. Please rise above the party politics and be a public representative.

The strategy of Pak Army and ISI to promote unrest and instability by fueling sectarian violence need to be tactfully handled by political leadership from Delhi. Internal turbulences should be left exclusively to the discretion of Kashmiris. In Kashmir, issues of politics are more pronounced than bread and butter. That is why financial and economic packages are just not working. The current tangle can only be resolved by the combined effort of (i) politicians (ii) public (iii) bureaucracy (iv) administration and (v) the security forces working together in harmony for the welfare of public. Whatever is left of the discredited govt can still be retrieved. Redressal of grievances of youths and assuring them a brighter future with respect and dignity is key to the present tangle. A pragmatic, transparent, honest and pro people approach may instil hope and faith in the govt. Though the past remains destroyed and the future is uncertain, the patience should not run out. Luckily we have a young Chief Minister at the helms of affairs. He is expected to rise to the occasion rather than be captive of insecurity of his job. He is privileged of vast opportunities in his youth and must Endeavour to afford similar opportunities to other youths particularly to those whose youth has been destroyed by no fault of theirs. He is reminded that public sentiment is everything. With it nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. ***A great CM is the one who gives greatest happiness to the largest number of his masses and not to his party workers alone.***