

## ***Dr. K.L.Chowdhury Presentation-***

Peace as a goal (Seminar organized by Youngs India) Jammu 19-1-2004

### **‘Kashmir Problem through Kashmiri Pandit Perspective’**

Your Excellency, Governor Sinha, honorable Finance Minister, Mr. Beig, honorable Minister of Health, Ch Lal Sing, honorable MLC, Dr. Mehboob Beig, President KOA, Sh. Sanjay Kaul, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an opportune moment to share with this wide cross section of opinion the Kashmiri Pandit perceptions about a problem that bedevils the whole subcontinent to the extent of having brought it to the threshold of a nuclear conflagration. I call it opportune because most of the time Kashmiri Pandits end sharing their perceptions within themselves in the community, for there are few outside who care, and who are willing to hear much less understand, and even fewer who are ready to offer succor. No doubt, the perceptions have changed drastically from the days when Pandits co-authored the ‘Naya Kashmir’ document and were a part, if not in the vanguard, of the struggle for a democratic dispensation in Kashmir, to the present time when they have been driven to seek a homeland within the valley.

To understand this metamorphosis it will be necessary to go into the genesis of the Kashmir problem, its evolution, nay degeneration, into the present complex form. The subject is vast but I will try to be as brief as is possible in my presentation, keeping the spirit of this debate (peace as a goal) in view.

**The Kashmir Problem:** Kashmir problem, on the face of it, began with the tribal invasion in 1947. But its seeds were sown much earlier through various events that vitiated the communal and political atmosphere in the valley right from the nineteen thirties. It started with the sharp ascendancy of Muslim majority aspirations, translating themselves from the Reading Room Party to the birth of Muslim Conference, to the first violent uprising against the Maharaja that accompanied loot and plunder of the minority community. Subsequent to this events followed in tandem with the partition of the subcontinent, the prevarication of the Maharaja about accession, and his standstill agreement which Pakistan lost no time in flouting by sending the tribal hordes backed by regular army to annex J&K by force.

**India Blunders:** Though it came late in the day, the accession of the State to India gave her the legal and constitutional right to throw the enemy out from her territory but India committed the first blunder by appealing to the United Nations against the invasion. Through the subterfuge and connivance of big powers, a complaint turned into a

dispute and the aggressor became a party and a claimant! The acceptance of cease-fire before wiping out the invaders from the whole territory was India's second blunder in Kashmir, thus allowing Pakistan the illegal occupation of nearly half of the State. The granting of special status to Indian part of Kashmir with a separate constitution and Nehru's promise of self-determination to her people added two more blunders in rapid succession and further complicated a simple issue.

**Secessionist and Radical Islamic Cultures:** Sheikh Mohd Abdullah did not make things easy as this undisputed leader of the Kashmiri masses was encouraged to give expression to his grandiose vision of independent sheikdom. His pronouncements and deeds planted the seeds of doubt in the finality of accession in the minds of Kashmiri masses. Accession to India became a question mark with the Sheikh's ambivalence and intransigence. The birth and growth of a secessionist culture was a natural corollary. And the successive State governments failed to halt the relentless march of these Pakistan-inspired separatists in the State. On the contrary they concurred and connived with the crusade of religious indoctrination through mushrooming maktabas, madrasas and mosques that became the breeding grounds for Islamic revivalism, giving birth to a radical Islamic culture in the valley.

**Parasitic Culture:** India, and everything that represented her, was projected as the villain, the usurper, the root of evil in Kashmir, at the same time as she was opening her coffers to Kashmiris for development, and showering largesse as food subsidies, grants and aids. The rulers of the state cried wolf and raised the bogey of self-determination, Azadi, autonomy etc. from time to time to exact maximum concessions and grants from New Delhi. A parasitic culture thus came to supplement the secessionist and radical Islamic cultures. The rapacious greed of the ruling elite grew as also their megalomania, unaccountability, rampant corruption, nepotism and favoritism. They and their surrogates and sycophants amassed wealth leaving the large sections of the people under-privileged, disgruntled and angry and therefore an easy prey to the radical Islamists touting freedom, economic prosperity and puritanical Islam. To fill in the vacuum created by, and the opportunity offered by, the misrule of successive State governments, Numerous religious and secessionist outfits spawned to fish in the troubled waters. They spared no efforts in stoking the fires of religious extremism, vying with each other in espousing the cause of Kashmiri Muslim identity, and of self-determination, and merger with Pakistan on the basis of geographical proximity and religious affinity to that country.

All along, it was the Sunni Muslims of the valley that held the reins of power. All along, the chief Ministers, the ministers with major portfolios, a large chunk of beurocracy, and administrators of vital departments were picked from this select section of the population. They ruled with an iron fist to the detriment of other communities in the valley and the other two regions of the State viz Jammu and Ladakh.

**Double Speak:** All along they indulged in double speak. With one breath they spoke of accession to India being final and irrevocable, with

another of Kashmir as a disputed State and, therefore, in need of a separate status, a separate identity and autonomy of various shades and dispensations. This strategy of the rulers was to hold India to ransom, to keep her on tenterhooks while at the same time to keep themselves in the saddle of power, and to cover up their misdeeds and failures. The previous NC-led government, in a shameless haste, pushed the autonomy bill in the State legislature to put New Delhi in discomfiture even as she was fighting terrorism with her back to the wall. The recommendations of this bill, fall just short of Azadi! The present government, under its so-called healing policy, is in also in great haste to rehabilitate the perpetrators of terror, leaving their victims high and dry, and is desperate to open the borders from where terrorism has access to Kashmir, literally opening the floodgates to this scourge.

**Hartal or No-work Culture:** The faulty perceptions and policies and the vacillation and waywardness of New Delhi always gave the impression that India lacked the courage of conviction in holding on to Kashmir. This gave ample cause and opportunity to the separatist elements and their mentors in Pakistan to pursue their goal of forcible annexation of the State. India failed to contain the repercussions of unfettered communal propaganda unleashed by these forces in J&K. She bestowed a larger than life status to phantoms like the Hurriyat. This amalgam of disparate groups with their disparate secessionist ideologies, not only help keep the fires of terrorism ablaze but have also bestowed the fourth culture to the valley, the 'hartal' or no work culture.

**Grab Culture:** No wonder the average Kashmiri is confused and perplexed with such a barrage of diverse political and religious contentions impacting his psyche for the last 5 decades. Add to it the brutalization of 14 years of terror and what you have is an alienated, traumatized people, angry with their past, confused about the present, fearful of the future. Their psyche is drastically metamorphosed resulting in loss of belief. They don't believe in India, which they have been taught to hate, not in Pakistan, which they fear, not in their politicians, whom they mistrust. Therefore, they are busy fending for themselves, queuing for jobs that the State Govt. created during the last 7 years, annexing land left behind by the exiled Pandits, or buying their properties for a song by circumventing the 'Prevention of Distress Sale of Migrant Properties' Act, and busy raising unauthorized constructions. A grab culture has impaled itself on the other four cultures mentioned above.

**Muslim Problem or the problem of Ethnic Cleansing of Pandits?** Another major problem with Jammu and Kashmir is that the problem itself is being projected as one of the Kashmiri Muslims, by the Muslims and for the Muslims. In real time this appears to be so because the valley at present is a de-facto Islamic enclave, what with the cleansing of seven hundred thousand population of the minority Kashmiri Pandits from their ancestral habitation, who are represented now in the valley by their deserted, desecrated, defiled, dilapidated temples, by their burnt down houses, by the ghost mohallas where their culture once thrived. Ever since the rampaging hordes unleashed the first wave of terror in 1947 against the Kashmiri Pandits the community has been living a life of fear and been

victims of ideological, cultural and religious terrorism in various forms and manifestations from multiple levels of civil, bureaucratic and political functioning. Three and a half Lac of the community is estimated to have moved out in what is now accepted as the slow and invisible exodus over the last five decades due to a policy of exclusion and isolation, of denial and discrimination by the successive regimes in the State. Forty years down, the highly motivated youth of the valley who returned from training camps in Pakistan, again backed by mercenaries and intelligence agencies of that country, have been on a rampage that is going on unabated for the last 14 years. The rest is history –shameful and sad - as another three and half Lac Kashmiri Pandits posted with threats, abductions and executions have been forced to flee from the valley in 1990-91, in what is widely accepted as genocide and religious cleansing. Sangrampora (1997), Wandhama (1998) and Nadimarg (2003) were the follow up cleansing operations of the residual 5 thousand and odd Pandits who are braving it in grave conditions in the valley.

Now refugees in their own country, this 5000-year old ethno religious community stands dismembered and disenfranchised, deprived of their basic rights, living in exile in sub-human conditions, suffering from numerous physical and mental afflictions, dying prematurely and unnaturally and threatened with extinction.

Jammu and Ladakh: Then there is the issue of alienation of Jammu and Ladakh regions, which have received a shabby, shameful, step-motherly treatment from the rulers from the valley during the last five decades and created serious regional issues. Both these regions have also been facing a demographic metamorphosis with Ladakh becoming the hub of religious conversions and Jammu a destination for colonization.

The Prospects of a Solution: How do we go from here? What prospects hold themselves for possible solutions to these complex problems? Given the success at SAARC earlier this month we can at best take the ongoing cease-fire across the borders and the present atmosphere of détente as a respite. The buzzword is peace. But can we call it peace? If yes, it is an uneasy peace, a fragile peace. The Jehadi groups have sworn to carry on with their agenda. Infiltration across the borders goes on, albeit on a lower scale, more because of the winter season when the borders are impassable and because of the fencing of the borders and alertness of the army than an embargo by Pakistan. The terrorists in the valley and Jammu province who, contemptuous of the offers by the State Govt. to woo them, have shown no let up in their depredations.

Secondly, we can ill afford to ignore the viles and guiles of our neighbor who seems to have been pushed into the present stance less out of conviction and more in response to international pressure. She might also have woken to the adage that terror consumes its own masters in the end. Three unsuccessful attempts on the life of the Pak dictator during a short span could not but mellow and mollify the architect of Kargil. Yet, this apparent change of heart could only be a ploy to gain time and relieve.

Therefore, India can no longer afford to project itself as a soft state

if Kashmir has to be retrieved and retained as an inseparable part of the nation. She has to reorient her perceptions, rephrase her policies, reinvent strategies and rediscover the will and courage to survive as a nation. If Kashmir goes it will be the beginning of the end for India's sovereignty and integrity.

External Dimension: In my opinion there has to be a simultaneous two-dimensional approach to the Kashmir problem, the external and the internal. The external dimension calls for a settlement for durable peace with Pakistan. This will need a very delicate handling in view of the past experience of insincerity and intransigence of Pakistan, be it from their elected prime ministers, be it their military dictators; be it in Tashkent, Simla, Lahore or Agra. However, the first breakthrough in this direction has taken place with the thaw in Indo-Pak relations earlier this month during the SAARC meet. The modalities on the composite dialogue are being worked out. This is going to be a long and tenuous journey with roadblocks and pitfalls but if good will prevails, if emotionalism gives way to realism and if the two parties sit together in the spirit of give and take, a solution should present itself.

Internal dimension and three streams of Action: The second or the internal dimension in Kashmir calls for three streams of action.

One, not merely of rolling back but rooting out of terrorism, for terrorism is not something to be brushed under the carpet but to be stamped under an iron heel, not something to stop in its tracks but to be wiped out of existence. Two, to embark on a reconstruction of the J&K - a moral, spiritual and socio-economic reconstruction to set the State on road to progress and prosperity. And three, to initiate a serious political process in the whole J&K which may warrant some bold initiatives, not the least of which is the reorganization of the state. To fight terrorism I feel a new paradigm has to be devised something akin to a clinical situation that a physician battling against cancer does.

For, I believe terrorism is as lethal for the society, for the body politic, for a nation as cancer is for the patient. If we decide to fight this cancer, as I hope we should, then it has to be a total kill. The origin, the roots and the sources of sustenance have to be destroyed. For terrorists, as they have amply proved, understand no other language but their own.

Similarly all those political organizations that preach secession, that incite violence, that support terrorism have to be banned. Their leaders should be charged with sedition, their offices sealed, the source of their funds inquired into and all illegal channels snapped. Terrorism can not go for long on hungry stomachs and empty pockets. Side by side with this, the moles, sympathizers, and the activists of terrorist organizations in the bureaucracy, in police and in administrative departments, have to be identified and punitive action taken against them. The intelligence network has to be beefed up and a multi layered intelligence put in place.

In the reconstruction of the State of J&K the battle against terrorism can not be won if we don't fight the ideology of terrorism and the psychology that wins terrorism its adherents, and advocates, and the

incentives that swell its ranks.

We already spoke about the role of madrasas and places of worship, which have turned into breeding grounds for militant Islam. They are still operating in the valley clandestinely in spite of the ban. Their operation has to be dismantled. A de-conditioning of masses and a de-radicalization of Islam can be got underway with a re-education in the essentials of all religions, which preach peace, equality, and harmony. They have to be enlightened and educated about some hard truths about Pakistan. By now they should realize that Pakistan does not have any love or sympathy for the Muslims of Kashmir but has her eyes on territory. They should know that Pak has denied its own Muslim nationals, the Mohajirs, the Sindhis and the Bauluchis even their basic human rights, and that the conditions obtaining in POK are worse than what they were fifty years ago. The choice between a suffocating, medieval, theocratic Pakistan and a generous, secular, democratic and forward-looking India has to be driven home. The choice between religious extremism and exclusivity as opposed to multi-cultural and multi-religious syntheses. The choice between intolerance to other faiths as opposed to the tolerant sufi-rishi heritage of Kashmir.

Of course, there is no short cut to good, effective, equitable and responsive governance, which includes developmental works and reconstruction of the destroyed socio-economic fabric of the State and eradication of rampant corruption.

Finally, the third stream of action is the political process, which should start on full throttle and involve the people of all regions, and of all streams of thought and not be dominated by valley-centric aspirations alone. We have to acknowledge that Jammu and Kashmir comprises of three geographically, linguistically and ethnically distinct regions which suffer from imbalances, anomalies and discrepancies and is therefore a fit case for reorganization so that the hegemony of one region over the other, and of one religious group over the rest is put to end. Governance of smaller units becomes easier and elimination of terrorism equally so. Jammu and Ladakh are crying for their identity and the granting of autonomous council to Ladakh and Kargil is a first welcome step in this direction.

That would leave the valley of Kashmir. As I said earlier, the politics there has been dominated by the Sunni Muslims leaving a large population of the Gujjars and Bakarwals, the Shias, the Ahmedeys and the Sikhs in the sidelines while the Kashmiri Pandits are totally out of the reckoning. The return, repatriation and resettlement of Pandits assumes greater urgency in view of the dangers of letting Kashmir remain an Islamic enclave, as it is at present. The forces that have achieved the religious cleansing of this segment of the population have tasted blood. They will become more ravenous the longer Pandits are allowed to stay in exile. This will only embolden these forces in their nefarious design of carving out greater Muslim Kashmir by driving the Hindu minorities out from Doda, Poonch and Rajouri, a process that has already begun. Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits: Therefore, Kashmir being a test case, even if it takes the whole Indian might, the Kashmiri Pandits

have to be resettled back in their homeland in the valley. Not under any sinister plan for a ghetto existence in makeshift colonies in different locations as worked out by the previous National Conference-led Govt. Nor the PDP-led coalition's outrageous plan of building a few blocks of buildings in Badgam and Mattan. That will be like sending the refugees from the proverbial frying pan into fire. The Govt. has not been able to ameliorate the lot of the few thousand residual Pandits in the valley. Therefore its intentions are suspect and its claim that Pandits are ready to return to this despicable arrangement are as hollow as they are insincere. It may succeed with coercion and allurements to send a few hundred of the most indigent and downtrodden across the Banihal tunnel but this can at best be a symbolic return, merely for getting more funds from the Central Govt. in the name of the refugees. The Pandits have rejected all these halfhearted and insincere moves, they have rejected any attempts at piece-meal return, they reject any carrot and stick policy of the Govt., they reject any return without the proper framework for a total rehabilitation – geographic, political, economic, socio-cultural and religious. This can not be achieved without taking the Pandits into confidence and without involving them in the process.

Down these fourteen years in exile the Pandits have found no sympathizers in the State. They have been forced into distress sale of their properties in order to sustain and survive in exile. They have not received any share of the healing touch that is being dished to the very people who are responsible for their present plight. On the contrary, they have been hurt and humiliated at every juncture by every ruling dispensation, be it the governors' rule, the previous elected Govt. or the present one. Having burnt their boats, having tasted the bitter poison of exile, having sacrificed a generation in exile this vibrant community is learning the hard way the art of survival through her own enterprise. Proverbially rising from the ashes they have graduated from the somewhere people of the valley to the nowhere people in exile to the everywhere people of the globe. They will therefore not want to go back under any conditions where they continue to exist as stepchildren and whipping boys of mother Kashmir; as pariahs and outcasts; as orphans, unwanted and unrepresented; as political and cultural non-entities, living in fear and subjugation at the mercy of others. They need to be resettled in a compact, secured, homogenous existence, in an area in the valley where the Indian constitution has full flow, where the values of freedom democracy, secularism and religious tolerance and peaceful ambience are allowed to prosper and thrive. For, if autonomy or Azadi is an expression of the Muslim sub-nationalism homeland is a soul cry of the Kashmiri Pandit aborigines of the valley for their roots. There can be no true peace in the valley unless and until the exiled Pandits are resettled honorably. And if peace has to be a goal it should not be a mirage but real, it should not be temporary but lasting, and it should not be at the cost of one or the other section of the population but equitable. Let us cherish peace and work for it. (End)