

Intra-communities peace, amity and co-existence – steps necessary towards strengthening the rich Kashmiri heritage!

The focus of this effort is to highlight the fact that peace, co-existence and socio-cultural bonding are integral to paving the way for normalcy in Kashmir and completeness of the Kashmir's plural ethos.

Let us first revisit the background of Kashmir and Pakistan's role in fomenting terrorism.

Background:

Ancient Kashmir was home to a majority Hindu and Buddhist population for thousands of years and was renowned as a center for Hindu and Buddhist learning. Islamic invaders from Central Asia took control in the 14th century. Under Islamic rule, Hindus faced periods of persecution, resulting in mass migrations from the region roughly once a century, until the late 1700s. In the early 1800s, Sikh rulers controlled the region, followed by a Hindu dynasty from the mid-1800s through 1947.

Regarding the independence movement, some Kashmiris say that Kashmir was always independent. As has very correctly narrated that this is historically incorrect. Kashmir was only independent till 1587 when the last independent ruler Yusuf Shah Chak was deposed and exiled by Mughal Emperor Akbar who incorporated Kashmir into the Mughal Empire. Later, it passed under Afghan, Sikh, and Dogra rule, and ultimately came under the British. Maharaja Hari Singh was only nominally independent, but like other princely states in India, the real ruler of Kashmir was the British who had their army there.

When the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir became part of the Republic of India in 1947, shortly thereafter, Pakistani armed forces and Pashtun tribesmen invaded the area, forcing the largest Kashmiri political party to approve the accession. Indian forces were deployed to counter the attacks by Pakistan. In

1948, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 47 requiring all Pakistani military personnel to be withdrawn from the region before a plebiscite—which would have confirmed the people’s wishes to join India. Instead, Pakistan increased its military presence, and no plebiscite was held.

At the time of partition, the new Nation-State of Pakistan, a place created for Muslims, claimed that Kashmir was an unfinished task of division. The founder of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah described Kashmir as an unfinished task of division. Bhutto took it further by proclaiming a thousand-year war with India. If this was not enough, Gen.Zia ul Haq’s doctrine of thousand cuts to bleed India fostered and nurtured separatism, terrorism, and fundamentalism thus making Kashmir what it is today. Consequently, Pakistan became a player by supporting this deep-seated separatist agitation with finance, training, and alleged boots on the ground.

To completely Islamize Kashmir, Pakistan was able to capitalize on this by financing, arming, and training militant groups across the border and ethnic cleansing of the Kashmiri Pandits was undertaken on January 19, 1990. Many secular Muslims and intellectuals who didn’t become part of this were also killed.

Pakistan’s Proxy War in Kashmir began in 1989. An insurgency sponsored by Pakistan’s military and intelligence service engulfed the Kashmir Valley. Former Pakistani ambassador to the US, Husain Haqqani, said the ISI-supported jihad in Kashmir was “rooted in the ideology of Pakistani Islamists, carefully nurtured for decades by the Pakistani military.” Since then, thousands of civilians have been killed in militant-related violence.

Alas, the beautiful valley of Kashmir became a bed of Islamic terrorism and the campaign of intimidation and harassment worsened in the late 80s with the growing influence of the strait-laced interpretation of Islam propagated through “Wahabism”.

A Version of Islam was created where supporting those who are fighting in the path of Allah were considered as fighters giving birth to the concept of mujahedeen. This is a Pre-planned meditated manner by adversaries like Pakistan

and terror groups across the world. Lately Conflicts in Middle East and Afghanistan, Religious radicalization has added another worrying dimension to it.

The current generation of Kashmiris has been brought up under an environment of strife between the religious and political narratives leading to violence by terrorists.

Over the years through a planned lecture series at places of worship through books and through pre-planned one-page pamphlets, a version of religion that is twisted enough to immune a human being to his natural tendencies of mercy of goodness, is converted into a killer.

Terrorism in Kashmir is a combination of societal religious causes. There is an increase influence of religious indoctrination which is feeding into the narrative of victimhood, which is further used by terrorist groups to recruit them into various groups.

Social media and internet have provided access to both education and propaganda. Young vulnerable minds have become a victim of social media propaganda.

What are the steps necessary to be taken to promote peace?

The most important step is to educate young Muslims to combat the increased influence of religious indoctrination. They should be told that that haqooq-ul-ebaad (social responsibility) always took precedence over haqooq-Allah (divine/religious responsibility). One cannot fulfil religious obligations without fulfilling obligations to fellow humans in the first instance.

There is a strong need for promoting Pluralism in the State so that all communities can live together as they did before Pakistani trained militants forced Kashmiri Pandits to leave Kashmir valley. Intra-Kashmiri dialogue, exchanging programs of students, writers, artists to offer their strengths in all the regions will definitely help in reconnecting and reintegrating hearts and minds of the people. Another recommendation is of inclusion of teachings of Lal Ded,

Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani and other Sufi scholars as well as Key Vedic and Buddhist texts as are other recommendations like promotion of art, culture, modernizing libraries by providing internet connectivity and modern education aids to turn children into a productive asset for the community.

Additionally, we see that steps are being taken for implementation of more progressive local laws which shall empower women and provide a platform for their crucial voices.

Finally, we see curtail of terrorism in the valley. Proactive measures of added security, restrictions, and internet regulation placed by the Government of India are crucial to countering terrorism and preventing the loss of civilian lives by militant groups to give the community an opportunity to work on creating a peaceful and plural society. The Government and the civil society must continue to strive to let the Citizens create harmony and live within confines of law.

The numbers of sane voices among majority community of Kashmir, who are truly secular and not “pseudo-secular”, who don’t support such “Nizam-e-Mustafa” movement, is on the rise. Let their voices not be curbed by the religious bigots!

Through constant education, the numbers must continue to increase exponentially. No culture can survive if it is uprooted from its place of origin. There is eternal link between people and their land.

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