

**Elections: An Alternative to Conflict Resolution**

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The world is rife with the conflicts, which are devastating the societies, apart from taking huge toll of human lives. The historical evidence leads us to conclude that use of violence and resort to arms has not solved any problem anywhere in the world. In fact, the use of arms to resolve conflicts creates a syndrome, which perpetuates the unending cycle of death and devastation. Instances abound; however, Afghanistan is the latest illustration to the point. Therefore, the search for alternatives becomes imperative in seeking resolution to conflicts. Since I am directly involved in the struggle to seek resolution of conflict in Kashmir, I shall be confining briefly to that area alone.

Jammu and Kashmir problem is basically a political problem, which is linked-up with the International intrigues and developments. Therefore, we have to see the conflict in Kashmir in the background of international imperialist designs and requirements. Unfortunately, the analysis of conflict in Kashmir has not been carried out from this angle. Therefore, all the studies and subsequent analysis on Kashmir conflict are lopsided, which do not provide us with the complete picture of the problem. An analysis of Kashmir conflict makes it clear that Kashmir conflict was created in order to serve the Imperialist designs and it has been kept alive with the same objective. In order to achieve this objective, the first step was taken which resulted in the division of Jammu and Kashmir State first into two parts; and then Pakistan further divided its part into two more pieces. And later by presenting a part of our territory to China, Pakistan further divided the state into three parts. It needs to be noted that deliberate efforts were made, by dividing the state of Jammu and Kashmir, with the objective of ultimately creating a division amongst the people of the sub-continent to meet the requirement of the cold war. It is no secret that the rulers of Pakistan became convenient surrogates in this imperialist game.

A deeper and objective analysis of conflict in Kashmir reveals that the division of Jammu and Kashmir was carried out in order to divide the working class of the entire subcontinent. Since division of Jammu and Kashmir kept the wounds of division of people on the basis of religion open, therefore it came in the way of unification of working class in the sub-continent. This was precisely the imperialist game. It also needs to be noted that such a grand design would not seek the resolution of the conflict, rather it would lead to further aggravation of the conflict in furtherance of the objective.

I take this opportunity to mention here that I started my political career with the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), during 1980s. I had joined this organization under the belief that it was a party of progressive people who believed in the re-unification of entire Jammu and Kashmir State and it was struggling for the poor, downtrodden and the wretched of the earth. I thought that this party would stand up in defeating the imperialist designs in the sub-continent. In early Eighties, substantial section of our party believed that the conflict of Kashmir was used by both Pakistani and Indian rulers to further the designs of imperialism in the sub-continent. Alas!

To our great surprise, we later discovered that our comrades-in-arm were being used by the imperialists in connivance with Pakistani rulers to divide our people. These very comrades were later used in creating religious divide in order to divide the people of Jammu and Kashmir State. What a pity that these very forces were and are being used to divide the working class even now in the name of liberation struggle. They mention about 'Independence' but never mention from whom? The only rhetoric they indulge in, is religion. What a better way of serving imperialist master!

As mentioned earlier, the players of cold war were in need of a strategic location, and Jammu and Kashmir was the best-suited area to play the game. Jammu and Kashmir State is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious State. It cannot be kept united without a secular democratic order. Its problems and internal conflicts can be resolved only through democratic means. In case the resolution to Kashmir is sought through dictatorial means as well as by applying theocratic principles, the State is further going to be divided into bits and pieces. This process will push our people further into deprivation and backwardness. Today, when the world is marching forward, are we going to take our people backwards! This is the issue, which deserves serious consideration. We have stood-up against fascism and religious dictatorship. I take pride in our position that the only way to seek conflict resolution is through struggle for democracy and pluralism, which has been vindicated by history. The forces that are furthering the religious agenda of division on the basis of religion are essentially anti-people. It is a ploy to divert the attention of the common people from their economic hardships and claims to democratic and human rights. It needs to be recognized that religious dictatorships and theocratic regimes are conveniently crushing the aspirations of working class people and safeguarding the interests of feudal aristocracies and capitalist elites. The violence has always proved counter-productive and history has proved that violent methods only aggravate the miseries of the people. It is well known that resort to arms has not solved any problem in the World. The peaceful struggles have always met successes. Therefore, the democratic means, and electoral process which is the essential part of democratic order, holds the key to the resolution of conflicts in societies, including Kashmir.