

Jammu and Kashmir: Some Thoughts on the Present Situation

Dr. Karan Singh*

[Dr. Karan Singh was born Yuvaraj (Heir Apparent) to Maharaja Hari Singh, the last ruler of the state of the Jammu and Kashmir. He was the head of Jammu and Kashmir state for eighteen years, first as Regent. He was later elected as Sadar-i-Riyasat (President of the State). Before the amendment of the state Constitution, head of the state was elected by the state legislature. This position was later altered, and the head of the state, i.e., governor, is appointed by the President of India. This is the position for all the states in India. Dr. Karan Singh also served as the Governor of the state. Presently, Dr. Karan Singh is a member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) from Jammu and Kashmir.]

*Dr. Karan Singh is a philosopher, political scientist and a well-known author. In a wide-ranging interview with **Journal of Peace Studies**, he reflected on varied issues and themes. The following are the excerpts from this interview, which are related to Jammu and Kashmir state alone and to which he has made certain updating modifications. (Ed.)]*

The Bonds

I have a deep emotional attachment with Jammu and Kashmir. Although these two regions are culturally and geographically different, my emotional attachment and memories stay with both these focal points of the state. I recall with nostalgia that I was most attached to the house known as *Taley Manzil*, which is now known as *Karan Mahal* (Palace) in Srinagar, Kashmir. This house was named by my father (Maharaja Hari Singh) after his dear friend Nawab Taley Mohammed Khan of Palanpur. I was appointed as the Regent of the state by my father at an early age of eighteen. Then I was elected as head of the state of Jammu and Kashmir as *Sadar-i-Riyasat* and lastly appointed as Governor. This involved extensive touring of the Kashmir Valley and Jammu and interacting with people of different shades of opinion, faiths and cultures. Later, I moved into national politics and now have become a global citizen in the sense that I travel around the world a great deal. I still continue to have special links with the people who come from the state. In fact, the people of Jammu and Kashmir have been interacting with me constantly irrespective of where I am located.

I have been working with the people ever since I was eighteen years old. There is no question of my feeling that I am in any way superior or a *Maharaja* (Ruler) and these people are my former subjects. In fact, I was never really a *Maharaja* in that I never actually ruled. I do not believe in that type of governance. I emerged on the scene when the transition from feudalism to democracy was already underway. I became, in some ways, a symbol of the transition from old order to new.

Autonomy

I am aware that there is still some resistance to the autonomy issue in India. I have analysed this problem to some extent as a political scientist. We have to recognise that there was a backlash in

the aftermath of the partition of the country on the basis of religion. The Constituent Assembly provided for a strong centralised system of governance for the country. The Constitution of India, no doubt, provides a great deal of autonomy for the states, but still, the centre is endowed with overriding powers. Article 356 of the Constitution, which empowers the Union Government to recommend the dissolution of state assemblies, is an illustration to the point. Be that as it may, we need to realise that partition is now far behind us. Fifty years after independence, the world has changed a great deal and there is a reassertion of ethnic, linguistic and cultural entities and identities all over the world. A country like India, with a population of one billion people, can no longer be ruled by an over-centralised structure. This is not to suggest that we weaken the country, but on the contrary, we need to recognise that India needs to have *creative federalism* at this point in time. More and more states in India are demanding it. The CPM leader and Chief Minister of Bengal, Jyoti Basu, had issued several statements demanding the abolition of Article 356; Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Karunanidhi, and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, are also demanding the same thing. There is a rising demand for more genuine federalism across the country. In fact, previous governments have not been entirely oblivious of this issue. The Sarkaria Commission has partially dealt with this issue. What we are trying to do in Jammu and Kashmir is keeping in tune and in harmony with the general mood, which is the right guide to the spirit of the time. We equally need to recognise that Jammu and Kashmir is a very special case.

Leaving the demands of other states aside, I think Jammu and Kashmir deserves a lot more. I know that some people will not accept this position. For them, any demand for autonomy is tantamount to a demand for secession. I would describe it as a knee-jerk reaction. In fact, some people are still locked in the confines of a unitary system of governance. I think that we need to initiate a process of public education to make the people realise that we are strengthening the nation and not weakening it. We need to realise that the necessary corollary of satisfied states means a satisfied nation. Thus we need a creative restructuring in India. I am not suggesting that we should not take all necessary measures to safeguard our territorial integrity and sovereignty. However, I may emphasise that as we are reaching the end of the century, we have to realise that in a country like India, with so many different religious, linguistic and ethnic groups, we have to start the process of decentralisation not only towards the states but from the states downwards, through the Panchayats, down to the villages.

We have been through a terrible crisis in Kashmir. The seven years from 1989-1996 were an unmitigated disaster for the people of Kashmir. We must help the people to heal their wounds and retrieve them from their sufferings. These wounds are the direct consequence of an unwise resort to militancy, insurgency, financed and equipped (by forces) from across the line of actual control, and counter-insurgency measures. With the restoration of democracy in 1996, there is now a new government in the state, which enjoys widespread support in all the three regions of the state. It is sincerely to be hoped that the normalisation process will continue and the shattered social, economic, administrative and political edifice in the state will be rapidly rebuilt. The government headed by Dr. Farooq Abdullah will try to get as much autonomy as possible for the State within India, and to restructure relations between Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh in such a manner that no region of the state feels any sense of deprivation or subordination.

Indo-Pakistani Relations

It needs to be recognised that India, demographically as well as geographically, enjoys a pivotal position in South Asia. We are extending the hand of cooperation to our neighbours. However, let us break fresh grounds in Indo-Pakistani relations. I have been persistently advocating the need for a detente between India and Pakistan on the lines of the Franco-German detente. We have been enemies for only fifty years, they were enemies for five hundred years and yet they have now overcome their enmity. They have come closer together to the extent that you can now virtually travel anywhere in Europe without a passport. We should not allow ourselves to be permanently in postures of hostility. However, we can overcome our differences only if Pakistan adopts a more realistic attitude on Jammu and Kashmir. This will help Indo-Pakistan relations in a big way, which will ultimately help the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Let me say frankly that Pakistan has not really helped the people of Jammu and Kashmir by what they are doing in our state. What have the people gained by taking resort to militancy? If Pakistan's leadership is matured in their understanding and if India also has stable leadership, we can hope for better understanding, co-operation and friendship in the future.