

Conflict Management in Kashmir Some Reflections

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The ongoing debate in the state of Jammu and Kashmir among the political parties of various hues and shades, including mainstream and separatist parties, on the processes of conflict resolution indicates a new trend in the state which has been tormented in a long spell of violence. The continuing debates on the proposals of 'de-militarization' and 'self-rule' in the state indicate growing emphasis on adopting peaceful political means to address the problem of Kashmir. The declining levels of militant violence in the state is yet another indicator of public support to peaceful political means as against militant and violent methods to deal with the problem. In this backdrop, India-Pakistan peace process on Kashmir appears to be gradually holding ground.

It is ironical that many an analysis on Kashmir(a brief term used for the state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh regions of the state) conveniently gloss over the cultural, social and economic dimensions of the society in the state. The ignorance on these vital and crucial dimensions has resulted in a distorted image of Kashmir. Moreover, the militant violence which sought to impose a smokescreen on these dimensions could not be sustained for long. Hence these dimensions have resurged with a vigor. Thus, certain existential realities need to be taken into account while analyzing the problem of Kashmir and seeking its resolution. Moreover, these dimensions have to be woven in the processes of peace in Kashmir.

Cultural Dimension :

Firstly, Kashmir is the only region in the sub-Continent which has a recorded history of five thousand years. This historical record, which provides a detailed chronology of rulers and the social developments of Kashmir and its linkages with the rest of India over the centuries aside; Kashmir has produced philosophers, Sufi-Rishi-saints and poets, of repute, in Sanskrit , Persian and Kashmiri languages, like Anand Vardhan, Mammata, Abhinav Gupta, Ghani Kashmiri, Lal Ded and Sheikh-ul-Alam (Nund Rishi). The legacy and the spirit of the contribution of these great masters has been continuously reflected in the creative works of poets, creative writers and devotees of Sufi-Rishi tradition of Kashmir, the militant phase notwithstanding. The reference to this aspect is relevant because it sums up the core of social values and ethos in Kashmir

society. Therefore, any initiative overlooking this cultural dimension would lack sanction at the social levels. The initiatives or processes perceived to be imposing alien cultural patterns and norms would, covertly, generate friction.

Frameworks:

Secondly, Kashmir has been guided by constitutional frameworks, national as well as regional, as provided under the Constitution of India and the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir state, for the last six decades now. The functioning of these frameworks, howsoever flawed, can not be ignored in seeking the resolution of the problem of Kashmir. That people have participated and voted in and voted out the governments in the state can not be wished away. One of the significant aspects of these participations on the part of the people has been the election won by the legendary Kashmiri leader Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1977 after signing an accord with the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It may be pointed out that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his faction of the National Conference party had remained estranged from the mainstream politics for about twenty two years. This event underlined the recognition of legal and constitutional frameworks in which Kashmir functions. This framework equally lays down the limits on the political expectatations and circumscribes the boundaries of political activism in Kashmir. These frameworks have to be kept in view in addressing the problem of Kashmir. It is equally important to mention that Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) is equally tethered to the Constitution of Pakistan and the constitution of that part of the state which was promulgated in 1974. It is interesting to note that any person contesting elections in PAK has to file an affidavit to support Kashmir's accession with Pakistan. Many a participant, ostensibly idealogues of an Independent Kashmir, who refused to file this affidavit, were barred from contesting elections to the PAK legislative assembly in February, 2007.

Developmental Issues :

Thirdly, the economic development of the state is central to many problems beleaguering Kashmir. The state, despite its geographical and climatic constraints towards rapid industrial development, ranked at the Eighth number in the All India Index of Economic Development in 1989. The state was pushed to the rank of Twenty Four in a span of five years in 1995, with the onset of militant violence in 1989. It may be mentioned here that historically the state enjoyed the facility of many routes to reach to its immediate neighboring state, Punjab and beyond for trade, commerce and labor. The Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road, which was an all weather road connected it to Lahore and Rawalpindi. The great Indian leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came through this road from Delhi to defend his close friend and comrade-in-arm, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who had been imprisoned by the autocratic ruler of Kashmir. Ironically Jawaharlal Nehru was not allowed to enter the state by the ruler.

Jammu had close connectivity to Sialkote and Amritsar and beyond. The partition of the sub-Continent and the cease-fire line of 1948 which was drawn as a consequence to India-Pakistan war over Kashmir which divided the Jammu & Kashmir state closed all these roads. The Pir Panjal road through Jawahar tunnel remains the only road connecting Kashmir valley with the outside world. The shrinking of trade and commercial routes had tremendous adverse impact in Kashmir Valley. The Indus-Water Treaty between India and Pakistan in 1961 which gave Pakistan exclusive rights over the three rivers flowing through Kashmir further squeezed the opportunities of industrial development of the state.

Creative Approach :

The foregoing dimensions of Kashmir have made the problem and its outright resolution a complex affair. Thus, creative approaches need to be adopted in addressing the issue. In this regard, the ongoing dialogue between India and Pakistan which among other issues has paid considerable attention to address the Kashmir issue appears to have developed a consensus on the 'processes' rather than outlining any black and white formula on the resolution of the problem. These processes hold a great promise of managing the conflict and easing tensions between the two countries which may ultimately lead to the resolution of the problem. The cease-fire across the line of actual control (LOC) in which the armed forces on both the sides decided to abstain from firing each other's posts has so far, with some minor violations, been holding ground. In fact, it has proved to be one of the most successful Confidence Building Measure (CBM) so far. The opening of Srinagar- Muzaffarabad road which was followed by other five points in the state to allow the people to travel across has been another CBM which has added to the optimism of conflict management in the state. It has been reported that the discussion on opening the route connecting Kargil in Ladakh region with Skardu in the Northern Areas under the control of Pakistan has been finalized. The announcement in this behalf is expected soon. Recently Pakistan has proposed a helicopter service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad.

Trade and Cultural Relations:

The members of the business community from both the sides of Kashmir, who have been interacting informally or through other forums, have designated their delegations who would be visiting the capitals of both the Kashmirs. It is also reported that these visits are awaiting official clearance. It is expected that trucks carrying goods to and from would soon start plying on Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road. The visits of journalists, academics and activists between the two Kashmirs has been taking place regularly for the last more than two years now. All these measures have eased the tensions to a great extent. It may be noted that these CBM's have been recognized by the political parties across the board and across the border. In a meeting of political parties and activists held in March, 2007 in Mirpur in PAK, the meeting adopted a resolution, which among other issues had a consensus that 'cross LOC economic activity should be encouraged'

and also' enabling the cross LOC cultural and educational exchanges'. In the meantime Pakistan has proposed to hold sports competitions in the capitals of two Kashmirs. It may be pointed out that CBM's on Kashmir have heightened the expectation levels across the LOC and the demands to accelerate the pace of implementation of these measures are getting louder and louder.

Growing Expectations :

It is expected that in due course of time the sphere of these CBM's would be expanded and its pace would be accelerated. It may be mentioned here that in the positive atmosphere generated through these measures, the PAK Prime Minister announced that his government would consider providing surplus hydro-electric power and gas to the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir. At one level, all these measures are a part of the globalized world in which growing economic activity is rendering borders less relevant. The increase in trade and economic activity between the two Kashmirs coupled with frequent educational and cultural exchanges would recreate their historic ties without disturbing the borders. In this regard, the noted Pakistani Economist, Shahid Javid Burki, as reported in Daily Times (31st March, 07) has said that a regional trade arrangement under SAARC can lead to a 9.5 percent annual growth rate in both parts of Kashmir. According to him, both India and Pakistan should spend \$20 billion over ten years to develop the Kashmir region which has enormous tourism potential. He justifies the expenditure in comparison with the enormous budgets allocated by both sides to military mobilization in Kashmir. According to Friday Times "Last time Pakistan tried to get Kashmir in Kargil it spent \$2 billion in short order; India must have spent more responding to the challenge."

Word of Caution :

It needs to be recognized that conflict situations produce conflict entrepreneurs who would make every effort to disrupt the processes of peace. This danger looms large on the peace process in Kashmir. India and Pakistan have been intermittently asserting that peace process is irreversible. However, resumption of violence hold the potential of slowing down the pace of this process. Be that as it is, violence and militant methodology has lost its legitimacy in Kashmir. The prominence of civic issues, greater concern over developmental and environmental problems and inconveniences caused through *mal* functioning of governmental institutions at the level of people indicate changing priorities. This is happening across the LAC as well. This situation augurs well for the peace process in Kashmir.