

**The** Union Home Minister Amit Shah had a two day visit to Kashmir in the last week of June 2019. Following this, he unleashed a campaign for an end of special political status to Kashmir.

An interesting debate has taken place in Parliament. Amit Shah and other BJP leaders alleged that Kashmir problem is a product of mistaken policy of Jawaharlal Nehru and Congress party. They said that compromising and ineffective handling of the question by Nehru and Congress had complicated it. BJP boasted itself as a consistent champion of total and unconditional integration of Kashmir in India. Congress leaders like the senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad strongly and with all emotion defended the policies and actions of Congress and Nehru in Kashmir. Their entire defense boils down to this: Congress and its leadership had taken many steps in the face of all odds to integrate Kashmir with great success. All allegations or criticisms of BJP on Nehru and Congress are, therefore, most unreasonable, unkind and not backed by the facts.

We know for most part of last 70 years, Congress was in power at the Centre. It was Nehru Govt. which signed the Declaration of Kashmir's Accession to India in 1948. With this, the responsibility had come upon the Indian Govt. to develop the confidence and trust among the Kashmir people that their national and democratic aspirations and rights would be respected and the Kashmir people would have democracy, peace and better future in India. But, instead of trying to win the hearts of Kashmir people, the Indian rulers sought to woo the accepted leadership of Kashmir people by the methods of manipulation, pressure and repression. The Indian govt. had resorted to series of unilateral as well as back door methods to dilute the special political status of Kashmir in practice, without of course doing away with Article 370 of Indian Constitution. It had turned elections, democracy and making and unmaking of governments in Kashmir into a drama. Kashmir was made into a vast dumping ground for central armed forces with special powers and an experimental ground for the methods of suppression. While a few frustrated youth took to terrorism, the vast masses of youth and people, who were striving to live their own life and taking part in protest movements for the redressal of their problems and against the police atrocities, were subjected to various forms of repression. Brand or suspect the innocent youth as terrorists and enact fake encounters had become a part of the policy of Indian rulers.

BJP had extended silent and all out support to all these policies and actions of Congress governments. At the same time, it sought to project itself of being more firm than Congress in championing the immediate and total integration of Kashmir in India. It made every attempt to divide Kashmir communally. But once it was in the race or cradle of power, it was constrained by practical difficulties. It may be strongest advocate of the withdrawal of Article 370. But it could not make it a point of NDA's agenda and also NDA Govt's aim in 2014. BJP had to take into view the strong opposition its proposed move may encounter from Kashmir people and democratic forces in India and had to act in a practical manner. BJP's urge to gain a stronger foot hold in Kashmir compelled it to enter into a coalition with PDP which was opposed to the withdrawal of Article 370. Now, in power at the Centre with enhanced strength in Parliament, BJP seems to feel in a better position to push through its agenda. But it is sure to encounter opposition.

Respecting the national and democratic aspirations and rights of Kashmir people; honoring the commitments and promises made by the Indian rulers to the people and ensuring democratic, free and peaceful conditions where the Kashmir people can decide their political future has never been the essence of Kashmir policy for either Congress or BJP. There is no basic difference between them on Kashmir policy. Their quarrel over the claim of 'wise' or 'firm' handling of the Kashmir question is nothing but an exercise of cheating and shadow-boxing. Kashmir people can understand this and they have a long and difficult struggle before them.

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