

# WHITHER KASHMIR

It is one year since Jammu & Kashmir was stripped off special political status, divided and degraded into two Union Territories.

The BJP led Indian Govt. was well aware that its move will trigger protest and opposition from the people and democratic forces. So it took extra ordinary steps to scuttle the voice of Kashmir people and weave a rigorous repressive net around them well in advance. It kept in secret the Bill it proposed to introduce in Parliament abrogating the Article 370 and 35-A. It cut off the relations among the people within and from outside the Kashmir. It took steps to imprison the leaders and activists of political parties in Kashmir whom it considered as critical to the policies of Central Govt. It closed the media and all means of communication in Kashmir. It dumped Kashmir with massive military and para-military forces. It saw that the bill was adopted in a most arbitrary and dramatic manner in parliament.

The BJP boasted that it could complete a job firmly, courageously and with a stroke of pen what the Congress could not do in seven decades. It warned all those who oppose its move to be prepared to get branded as anti-national and face the consequences. It assured that the abrogation of Article 370 will soon set Kashmir on a high road of all round development. It consoled that the repressive moves are temporary in nature and the normal conditions would be restored soon.

But, even after one year, repression, prohibitions, bans and heavy deployment of armed forces are continuing in Kashmir. Many political leaders and activists are still languishing in jails and house arrests. The govt. is demanding written undertakings from the leaders not to indulge in anti-govt. political activity if they are released. Mehbooba Mufti, PDP leader, ex-CM of Jammu & Kashmir and Salauddin Soz, a veteran senior Congress leader continue to languish in House arrest. Soz has said: "I was not overtly asked to retire but I was presented with a bond that would have effectively, for the foreseeable future, ended my political career." "Because that bond said that I will not talk about anything that happened in Jammu & Kashmir after the August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, which is unacceptable to me."

Ban imposed on the communi-cations in Jammu & Kashmir has encountered criticism from every corner. But the Centre remained unmoved. It claims that Kashmir people are not bothered about the arrest of political leaders as they are most corrupt. But it fails to explain why it needed to arrest such 'discredited' leaders. Similarly, the BJP leaders try to make the people believe that the people of Kashmir are not opposed to the abrogation of Article 370 as they did not plunge into any massive protest action. It is a cruel joke as well as an illusion. They must explain then why they had to indulge in such a massive repressive action against the Kashmir people? Why they have resorted to additional prohibitions and repressive moves fearing protest actions in Kashmir on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020?

BJP Govt. has assured that its moves would herald great changes in Jammu & Kashmir. Nothing of the sort has occurred. But certain changes the BJP rulers are pushing through behind the back of Kashmir people are already revealing their dangerous consequences. Here we can see some of them:

BJP rulers wished that their act of cutting and degrading Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories will inflict a serious blow on the national and democratic rights and unity of Kashmir people. They wished that it will plunge them in communal hatreds and quarrels. The move of BJP rulers had, no doubt, pushed the Kashmir people into more difficult and disadvantageous situation in their fight for national and democratic rights.

The Article 35-A of the Indian Constitution has provided some special rights and protections to the people of Kashmir. The BJP rulers had not only revoked them, but also brought the changes in the law to widely open the Kashmir gates for outsiders with a view to seriously alter the demography and national character of Kashmir. The people of Kashmir already see the disturbing consequences of this move.

The Central govt. has imposed a ban on the observance of "Kashmir Martyrs Day" on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020 which was being observed by the Kashmir people (both parts) for the last 73 years. [On this historic day in 1931, 22 Kashmir people were brutally shot dead by the armed forces of the feudal king for rising in revolt and demanding an end to the oppressive rule of feudal kingdom.] BJP Govt.'s present move to ban the Martyr's Day was only a part of the move to forcibly wipe out even the traces of Kashmir people's proud historical heritage of struggle for their national and democratic rights.

In its massive onslaught, the Indian Govt. had targeted not only the “seperatists” and “Militants’ in Kashmir, but also the political parties which are known as the ‘mainstream’ parties. They include PDP, NC, INC and other parties. BJP’s strategy is quite clear here. It wishes to push these parties into a state of total inactivity and disadvantage; use the space and time to strengthen itself, grab the leaders, cadres and their mass followings to its own side; create the parties or sections who are prepared to collude and serve it. BJP is also using the methods of differentiation, division and buying over against the parties and leaders whom it has locked in House arrests or jails. Here we see a party in power which is so nakedly and shamelessly using its power and resources to destroy other parties and build its own political base on their ruins. It is most authoritarian political gamble.

How the political parties in Kashmir are responding to this situation?

What the National Conference leader Farooq Abdulla has said in an interview on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 is interesting:

He said:

“August 9, 1953 was the first blow to the autonomy of the state. My father was arrested and was taken to the Udhampur Palace.”

“Our own Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers have betrayed the people. The erosion of Article 370 had taken place by our own people. Delhi was behind it but we were the instruments of theirs to do that.” “..... We sought guarantees from the Prime Minister of the day, P.V. Narsimha Rao. On the floor of Parliament, he announced that ‘we will restore autonomy of the State to the sky, sky is the limit but no freedom or azadi’. We never asked for azadi but for our rights to be returned.” ..... “I always thought they would increase our degree of autonomy. We never revolted against India. My people died, my Ministers and workers died holding the tricolor....”

This is a pathetic experience of those political forces and leaders who consented Jammu & Kashmir’s accession to India and its becoming a part of India, of course, together with the special political status as promised in 1953 and provided in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Their situation had become more worse with BJP taking the reins of power at the Centre. Farooq Abdulla said: “This time.....the change was that they did not find our people to betray. They tried with the PDP but could not do it. That is why this lady [PDP president Mehbooba Mufti ] is suffering as they want to punish her. Yes, they tried to persuade a splinter group of the PDP to implement changes on the ground. They failed. Thus they took this thing [revoking J&K’s special status] to Parliament and their own Governor, with no Assembly or Chief Minister to back it. The people governing Delhi believe in no Constitution. I am sure one day if they have their way, they will throw the Constitution into Ganga or Jamuna. There is every possibility. These fascists can do anything.”

Now, the BJP Govt. had inflicted a crude blow by formally abrogating the Article 370. This act, no doubt, has placed the parties like NC in a “difficult” situation, because the situation demands them to face the realities in a straight forward manner and with honesty. There is no need for them to get reduced into “objects of ridicule” if they come out clearly and unwaveringly in support the just national and democratic rights and aspirations of Kashmir people and stand by them to the best of their ability. There is no middle path for them.

Recently, six political parties of Jammu & Kashmir namely, the National Conference, the PDP, the Congress, the Jammu & Kashmir People’s Conference, CPI (M) and the Awami National Conference, met in Sri Nagar and adopted a Gopkumar Declaration spelling out their decision ‘to fight jointly for the restoration of Article 370 and 35-A’. Two more parties, the Jammu & Kashmir Peoples Movement and the Peoples Democratic Front also extended their support to it.

The aim of this Declaration is limited as compared to the larger question of Kashmir. It seeks to restore pre-August 5<sup>th</sup> united Jammu & Kashmir state with truncated rights. This may be a part of the attempt on the part of these parties to restore themselves in the political life. Yet, it too is not that easy to realize with the given politics and attitude of the present Indian Government. What course of struggle these parties propose to adopt and how consistent they would be in realizing their aim is to be seen.

There are the political and democratic forces in Kashmir who had been hoping against hope that one day wisdom may dawn on the Indian rulers and they may take a serious note of the genuine rights and aspirations of Kashmir people and find a peaceful and reasonable solution acceptable to the Kashmir people. They see the Kashmir question as a question of genuine national and democratic rights and all round development of Kashmir nationality and Kashmir people. They oppose the attempts of some to see the Kashmir question as a dispute between the Indian and Pakistan rulers and as an

issue to be resolved over the heads of Kashmir people or on the dictates of imperialist powers. The Kashmir people also made it abundantly clear through their countless protest movements and sacrifices that the Kashmir cause is not the concern of a few bands of militants, but the concern of entire people of Jammu & Kashmir. All moves which had culminated in recent abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, division and degradation of Jammu & Kashmir had inflicted a serious setback to the struggle of Kashmir people.

Thus the Kashmir people today are passing through most difficult days. The experience teaches them to distinguish the real friends from the real enemies. It also teaches them how to tide over the present difficulties and carry the struggle forward. The lives, livelihoods of Kashmir people and Kashmir's economy stands seriously crippled and ruined under the worst repressive regime, restrictions and lock downs associated with the onslaught of covid-19. The people have no other way except finding a way to unite and assert themselves to win back what they lost and lead a life of self respect and dignity. The toiling and oppressed masses of Indian people and democratic forces always stand in solidarity with their just cause and struggle. They demand that all forms of restrictions, bans, repressive actions and curbs on the political and democratic rights and activity imposed on Kashmir people must be lifted forthwith and the people must be free to express their views on the policies that affect their lives and ventilate their grievances.

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