

Indian Empire's Move to Reduce States to mere Colonies: A Collective Response

Seven decades ago in the month of August, as this region was being ripped apart geographically and demographically, our forefathers trusting the words and promises of Indian nationalist leaders put their faith in the 'Idea of India'. An India which would be a secular democratic republic, committed to securing for its citizens social, economic and political justice; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship.

This August that promise of the 'Idea of India' which has been shattered time and again lies buried. All this carried out by the very people who were meant to uphold that 'idea'.

Though revoking of Article 370 was first articulated by the Bengali politician Shyama Prasad Mukherjee - the founder of a right wing Hindu political outfit, the Jan Sangh, its seeds lay in the age-old Brahmanical ideology which aims to dominate, and is responsible for the exploitation of subaltern groups and minorities by decimating their self-esteem.

The spirit of Article 370 had been considerably diluted by the so-called secular Congress party and was by now no more than a hollow edifice. The Bharatiya Janata Party - the ideological successor of the erstwhile Jan Sangh, exhibiting typical Brahmanical character, revoked Article 370 as well as Article 35A.

The spirit of equality and democracy was crushed by massive military might. Those in power showed scant regard for the Constitution, the Indian Supreme Court and even the United Nations. They threw parliamentary rules and norms to the winds. The destructive might of Hindu totalitarianism was on display in the region as the charade of democracy, federalism and unity in diversity, lay exposed.

This Indian nationalism started taking shape in Bengal in the late 19th century with the support of the British. It was Brahmanical Hinduism wrapped up in the Western 'Nation-State' concept that made it even more potent. It is militant, appropriating and assimilating in texture, manner and character with an objective to confront, decimate and atomize minorities. It found its

expression in the famous slogan of “Vande Matram” - a war cry against Muslims.

The 5th of August, 2019, will go down in the annals of history as a black day for Jammu and Kashmir. On this day in the summer of 2019, the citizens of Kashmir were downgraded as subjects, the state was sliced in two, its democratic institutions downgraded, and its powers usurped. With the revoking of Article 35A, the hopes of Kashmiri youth to find meaningful employment were dashed as the mainland conquerors will rush in hordes to feed on the scant resources of the state. The demographic alteration due to migration from the mainland will deprive the people of the region of their natural resources and alter its culture and cultural moorings forever.

Generally, until now, the Hindutva forces of India have whipped up anti-Muslim sentiments prior to an election - State or Union - but this time the urgency seems to have stemmed from an external stimulus, arising out of changes materialising in the power dynamics of South Asia.

The region is close to the theatre of turbulence and conflict between global powers. It overlooks prospective international energy and trade routes and lies sandwiched between nuclear powers.

It is a place that is critical to the prosperity of global economies and so unfolding events here are likely to have a role in shaping the impending global order. Hence any unilateral action in this region is bound to result in an adverse international fall out.

For minorities and other socially disregarded sections of society, what is most worrisome is the crude way this change has been executed. Today the Kashmiris stand traumatized and humiliated. The local population has been locked down, cut-off completely from the world, and presently resides overawed by a massive military build-up. The decisions taken by the Governor at the behest of the Union Government, lowering the status of the state to a Union Territory and further slicing a part of the state without taking the consent or even the opinion of the population is emblematic of the autocratic attitude of the rulers of this Indian empire.

Notably, Jammu and Kashmir was the only Muslim majority state in India and was the only state whose status has ever been reduced from state to Union Territory. The way they have been deprived of their rights is a matter of great concern for all the subaltern marginalized groups and minorities residing in this country.

The statements uttered by some elected public representatives in mainland India coupled with the narrative circulating on the social media circuit about Kashmiri land and women being up for grabs by 'victorious' invading hordes, dovetails into the general Hindutva narrative built across the country against minority communities. It is as if to send a signal to other nationalities in South Asia and the world at large that finally Hindu imperialism has arrived resplendent with the full might required to dominate the subcontinent.

Kashmir is central to the interests of many international forces specifically nuclear-armed Pakistan and resurging China. India's brinkmanship has put a question mark on recent positive developments in the region. It puts Punjab once again at the forefront of a probable war between two nuclear-armed rivals and casts black clouds on the future of the Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, which finds a strong emotional connection amongst the Sikhs worldwide.

The present crisis in Kashmir comes with its own learning, especially for the Sikhs of Punjab, as to how a fragmented, insincere, corrupt leadership pushes its people into the quagmire of violence, humiliation and oppression at the hands of dominant groups.

In these dark hours of sectarian oppression, let's recall the supreme sacrifice of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, which finds even greater relevance in the present context. Sikhs worldwide as per the Sikh values and teachings of Gurbani should stand with the oppressed, lending their voice against this oppression, and seek a quick resolution of the issue as per the aspirations of the people of Jammu-Kashmir. Once again let the leaves of Chinar set the valley ablaze in the myriad colours of the Creator, and not the fire that stems from the muzzle of the gun.

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