



The Reasons For Pakistani Shrillness On Kashmir

Rhetoric About Internal Insurgency Holds No Water; Several Infiltration Attempts Thwarted By India

By T.C.A. Raghavan

What explains the intensity of Pakistani reaction to the changes in Jammu and Kashmir's status following legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament? This reaction rests on a tripod of three different sets of reasons. The first of these is human rights amplified by charged rhetoric about an 'occupied territory'.

The shrillness in the Pakistani polemic may seek to impart novelty but in truth the argument itself is an old one. It has been employed by Pakistan since the winter of 1947 when the detection of its troops in an invasion of Kashmir led India to approach the UN Security Council.

Until the fiction became untenable Pakistan had continued to insist that it had nothing to do with the fighting in Kashmir and what was taking place was an internal Kashmir revolt against human rights abuses. Similarly in August 1965 amidst a well-orchestrated plan to flood Jammu and Kashmir with infiltrators from its armed forces, Pakistan continued to maintain that what was happening was an internal insurrection in Kashmir.

In 1999 in Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir a similar fiction was propagated accompanied by high decibel diplomacy. In fact the Pakistani military had infiltrated deep into India.

Disguise and Denial

These historical parallels are of value also because they are illustrative of how deeply public opinion in Pakistan has internalized a narrative of Indian oppression. The Pakistani state also goes to considerable lengths to disguise and deny its own involvement in J&K especially to its own citizens.

To this day the 1965 India Pakistan war is represented as 'Defence of Pakistan' when in fact what had led to the war was a large and well planned infiltration by the Pakistan army. Its armed intrusion in Kargil in 1999 is similarly denied to the extent that even Pakistan soldiers killed in the conflict that followed are not acknowledged.

The Pakistani polemic about the current preventive measures in J&K obviously does not therefore ring true. But its intensity can be understood by contextualizing it with Pakistan's splintered polity – a former President in exile, and another in jail along with the last two Prime Ministers.

The second leg of the tripod is closer to the substance of the issue. The ending of 'special status' has been attacked by Pakistan officialdom and media as a decisive change for J&K and a unilateral measure by India to 'annex' Kashmir.

This stand is perplexing because Pakistan had never recognized the validity of any of the Indian Constitutional provisions regarding J&K. Why should it now be so exercised over a measure to remove a legal provision when both by words and deeds it never gave any importance to it in the past?

Creating Instability

Pakistan went to inordinate lengths to avoid any dealings with past J&K Governments, political leaders, official and public representatives.

Its focus remained was throughout to create conditions of violence and instability using religious extremists and terrorists as instruments of policy.

That its own record of democratic governance, where exile, execution or assassination are preferred modes of dealing with dissent, is so poor, makes a critique of Pakistan's position much more than an exercise of whataboutery.



Kashmiri Muslim devotees pray as a head priest displays a relic, believed to be a hair from the beard of the Prophet Mohammad, during special prayers on the death anniversary of Abu Bakr Siddiq, the first Caliph of Islam, at Hazratbal Shrine on the outskirts of Srinagar in Kashmir, Monday, Feb. 17, 2020. (AP Photo/ Dar Yasin)



IRRELEVANT PAKISTANI PROTEST: Students in Karachi take part in a photo-op rally to express their 'unwanted solidarity' with India's Kashmiris on Feb. 5, 2020. (AP Photo/Fareed Khan)

The administrative and security restrictions currently in place in J&K are an obvious enough departure from the norm in India. They are required in the government's view to prevent a possible loss of life which would follow terrorists and insurgents seeking to exploit the current situation of uncertainty and a sense of alienation which some of Indian citizens in J&K currently feel.

Even so these measures have been stringently criticized by many in India on the grounds that such restrictions are incompatible with the fundamental rights and freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution. Such criticism is inevitable and occurs elsewhere too in democratic societies from time to time.

In the end such arguments and debate will be settled by the judiciary and by the government reinforcing its compact with civil society. What is noteworthy however is the perception of even informed opinion in Pakistan which tries to use this domestic debate in India to substantiate wild and exaggerated claims.

This behavior is predictable but the point surely also is the complicity of silence which has accompanied the Pakistan army's military operations in Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Tribal Areas and elsewhere.

'Muslim Majority' Excuse

The third leg in the Pakistan tripod is that Jammu & Kashmir has been specifically targeted because it is a Muslim majority area. This particular argument, frequently aired in the Pakistani media, is bizarre be-

cause at no stage in the past seven decades has Pakistan ever acknowledged India's diversity or its secular credentials.

Every Indian Government since 1947 has been berated for being anti Muslim and Indian secularism has been consistently dismissed to be a sham.

It is, in fact, this element of the Pakistani polemic that is key to understanding its opposition to India's religious diversity and pluralism. Jammu & Kashmir's Muslim majority has to be seen in an all India context.

In terms of absolute size of Muslim population, J&K in fact would not even fall among the top 5 states of the Union of India. The Muslim population of J&K comprises only about 5% of the total Muslim population of India.

That there are almost as many Muslims in India as there are in Pakistan obviously exposes the Pakistani polemic and debunks it. India's diversity protects its pluralistic culture as strongly as does its Constitution.

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Indian paramilitary soldiers salute during a memorial service held in Lethpora in Kashmir, Friday, Feb. 14, 2020 to commemorate the first anniversary of a bombing that killed at least 40 soldiers. (AP Photo/Umer Asif)