

What makes the Hurriyat Conference untouchable?

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The threat issued by the Sangh Parivar that the Hurriyat Conference delegation will not be allowed to set foot in the State of Kerala is perhaps understandable, but the fact that the CPI(M) State unit of Kerala has echoed the sentiment is less understandable.

However, the attitude is symptomatic of a general malaise that afflicts Indians when it comes to thinking about Kashmir. We want the 'problem' to some how just vanish on its own without forcing us to look it in the face.

In fact the Hurriyat Conference has over the years perceptibly changed its attitude. Ten or even five years ago it would have been inconceivable that the Hurriyat Conference would take the trouble to send a delegation to each and every State in India to explain their view about the Kashmir issue. When Human Rights activists suggested to them in the past that their best friend in India was democratic public opinion and not the US embassy, their response was a polite smile. But experience has taught them, and we should appreciate their willingness to learn from experience. But we will not, because on our part we refuse to learn any thing from experience.

The attitude of the Sangh Parivar is that Kashmir is an inalienable part of 'India' as defined by them, and so there is no question of listening to a different view. You are of course not permitted to ask them who gave them the right to impose their definition of reality on all others by force. And the attitude of the rest of us is that India is so superior to the benighted land of Pakistan that Kashmiris should be grateful for the opportunity to live here. The corollary that follows is that those who do not think so are such perverts that they cannot reasonably claim any right to a hearing. Perhaps all Indians, or at least those who claim to be opinion makers by virtue of having newspaper space at their disposal, should make a trip to Kashmir to talk to the ordinary people – the college student, the taxi driver, the farmer, the housewife.

No, not all of them will fully agree with the Hurriyat Conference, but they will say much that the visitor will find disagreeable. But the only alternative to listening to them is to go on killing them, and how long will Indians continue to have this blood on their conscience?

The paranoid unwillingness to hear them is reflected in the refusal of the mainstream political parties to even meet the Hurriyat Conference delegation in its trip outside Kashmir. Neither Jayalalitha nor Karunanidhi would meet them at Chennai. At Kolkata Jyoti Basu met them but the Chief Minister refused to meet them. In Andhra Pradesh too Chandra Babu has refused the appointment they sought. Considering that these leaders (the A.P and T.N leaders at any rate) have no qualms about going around with the most rabidly fundamentalist Hindu outfits, this

reluctance is difficult to comprehend, even if one is to treat the Hurriyat Conference as a 'communal' organisation. But the Hurriyat Conference is not uniformly this or that. It is a conglomerate of more than twenty organisations with the single common understanding that they do not accept Kashmir's accession to India as final, and hold that only tripartite dialogue between India, Pakistan and the people of J&K can resolve the issue democratically.

Why should such an organisation be treated as untouchable and unspeakable? In any case, when India is willing to talk to Pakistan, why should Indians be unwilling to talk to the Hurriyat Conference? The only reason is that we cannot countenance even the suggestion that Kashmir's accession to India is not final. Indians will never understand that nobody in the world appreciates this stand of India, including those who respect India as a functioning democracy. After all, if democracy is what they respect about India, why should they appreciate this attitude that holds a widespread sentiment of common Kashmiris in contempt ?

What should be obvious to us after the last decade's experience in Kashmir is that unless we agree that Kashmiris in sizable number dispute the accession, and listen to their voices, there is no way that an honourable resolution of the issue can be crafted. And until it is resolved honourably, there will be no peace between India and Pakistan, however many 'summits' the two countries may hold. And as long as there is no peace, the two countries will go on draining each other's resources in perpetual preparation for war.

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