

What Will They Do to Kashmir Now?

The several 'formulas' for peace doing the rounds all require only the satisfaction of India and Pakistan and the approval of the US. The Kashmiris themselves have no formula to offer. It may be because of political fatigue, or perhaps there is a deeper reason, for, to Kashmiris self-determination is in terms of the whole of the old state of Jammu and Kashmir. But this old idea of collective self-determination has not been kept alive by the social and political leaderships of the ethnic/linguistic sub-regions. The voice of 'azaadi' inevitably sounds like Kashmiri particularism easily conflated by interested parties with Muslim communalism.

K BALAGOPAL

What will the US, India and Pakistan do to Kashmir? That is the proper order, the US first, India next and Pakistan last. What do they aim to do to Kashmir? For this time round, there is a certain apprehension (one can hardly call it hope) in the Valley and elsewhere in the state of Jammu and Kashmir that American interest in snuffing out the germinating grounds of Islamic militancy – rather than any Indo-Pak desire for peace – may well ensure some form of resolution of the 'Kashmir dispute'. Indeed the newspapers a few days ago reported an American official as having said that the Kashmir dispute would be resolved by December 2004. Whether that will be before or after finishing off Syria, the report does not clarify.

However, even granting the sense of urgency that affects the US, ruled by a coterie described as Christian fundamentalists by even matter-of-fact analysts, whose faith teaches them to beware of the visits the sins they have committed are liable to pay them in time, and who therefore have reason to hurry and disinfect the breeding grounds of Islamic militancy before a few more *fidayeen* are sent westward, it may nevertheless appear that the apprehension that some thing is going to happen by way of resolution of the 'dispute' in the near future is misplaced. After all, India's offer of talks with Pakistan is hardly serious. Has not the union

cabinet headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee set a record of sorts by way of double talk in the last few months in the matter of India's attitude towards Pakistan?

Consider: its foreign minister begins by declaring quite out of the blue one day that Pakistan is a good candidate for preemptive strikes and India should do an Iraq on Pakistan. Its defence minister defends him, while cautioning that it is not yet official to say so. The prime minister keeps mum, but suddenly goes to Srinagar and makes a speech offering a mouthful of what the Kashmir press has described as boons, including offer of a hand of friendship and talks with Pakistan without any preconditions. And for good measure he adds that if this effort fails there will be no further efforts. That could either be taken as an index of his determination to make the talks a success, or else as a threat that there will be just one effort and then the Sinha-Fernandes formula will take over. The ambiguity just adds variety to the confusion.

But as soon as the prime minister leaves the Valley for Hindustan, he adds the usual precondition to the offer of talks: that Pakistan should put an end to cross-border terrorism. That really takes it back to zero. But soon thereafter he gives an interview to *Der Spiegel* in which he dedicates himself to the success of the talks with such passion that he says he will quit if he fails. Just as one thought he was at last serious, he clarifies that quit does not mean quit and he will not say what it really means. A few

days later, back in India again, he reduces the offer to an absurdity: we have talked of Kashmir in the past, so why not talk of Azad Kashmir this time? Musharraf can respond by suggesting that we discuss the future of the Vaishno Devi shrine thereafter. Seriously, does Vajpayee want the people of this country to believe that he expects Azad Kashmir to join India? It is believed in the 'shakhas' of the RSS, we know, but nobody outside those benighted places thinks so.

So why should anybody hope/apprehend that anything at all is going to come of this offer of talks that vacillates between a nullity and a farce?

Other things being the same, nobody would. In the past, Kashmiris have expressed scepticism with their intellect and hope with their hearts every time talks have been proposed between the two countries. They greeted Agra with scepticism, but when Musharraf finally came over, 'glued to the TV' is how they describe themselves. In the end, the scepticism was justified, but the hope will probably never die.

But after September 11, 2001, things are no more the same. The US, for a variety of reasons, wants peace between India and Pakistan. Some of the reasons have to do with both the real and imaginary fears of the hatred it has wantonly fostered in the hearts of Muslim peoples all over the world and the monsters that have arisen therefrom, and the others stem from plain old fashioned economic rationality. In fact, from the time of the rise of militancy in Kashmir, a section of its political representatives, more particularly those in the Hurriyat Conference inclined to Pakistan, have believed that economic rationality will impel the US to solve the Kashmir dispute. The logic (in my language, not that of any Hurriyat leader) goes as follows: the US wants free access to Central Asian mineral wealth which, in the face of an unfriendly Iran and a backward Afghanistan, requires the sea ports that Pakistan offers. Effective utilisation of this facility requires that Pakistan be a stable and peaceful society and economy. And that can never be guaranteed until Kashmir becomes quiet and India becomes irrelevant so that the clerics and the mujahideen who have used Kashmir to impose their rule on the minds and the

streets (respectively) of Pakistan are rendered dispensable. The logic is persuasive, but it is remarkable that this rationality had to be supplemented by the dread of the Al Qaida to realise itself.

All this adds up to the apprehension that the Americans may force some solution this time round. With some, to be frank, the apprehension is in fact a hope because a sizeable section of Kashmiris have reached the stage where they feel it does not matter how the dispute is resolved so long as the guns fall silent and they can stop dreading each dawn for the dead bodies it may bring home. But only some. If India has hoped that it has by now reduced all Kashmiris to this state, it is mistaken. For many, the apprehension is not a hope, it is the negation of hope. They do not want any solution that will cheat the memory of the thousands who have died these 13 years. In particular they do not want any resolution that has not heard them and has not sought their approval.

But it is evident that the fixers who are active devising solutions are working with rulers and pencils drawing lines straight or crooked on the map partitioning the land one way or other to the mutual satisfaction of India and Pakistan, their proverbial rigidity rendered malleable under the weighty glare of America's eyes. 'Formulas' are already doing the rounds, and there are rumours that India and Pakistan have already come to an understanding on making the LoC the border. Nobody knows how true this is, but this is indeed the favourite solution of what these days is being described as the 'civil society' of both the countries. Whether one sees it as a just idea or not depends on what one is looking for. The well-meaning individuals who compose what is being called civil society are looking for peace and friendship between India and Pakistan. They are doing so for the sake of India and Pakistan. They are not looking for anything in particular for the Kashmiris, and are therefore unwittingly perhaps joining with the two governments in treating the region as a piece of mere territory. Nobody has as yet suggested putting this formula to vote in the affected region. On the contrary, Brijesh Mishra has been quoted as saying that 'when India and Pakistan sit down to talk there will be no third chair'. He is lying, of course, there will be an invisible third chair for George Bush or his appointee, but what that arrogant representative of India's Sangh parivar rulers means is that Kashmiris will have no place at the talks nor will their

approval be sought for any proposed resolution of the territorial dispute that their lives have been reduced to by the two countries.

Making the LoC the permanent border would have the consequence of forcing the Kashmiris of the Valley to reconcile themselves to India, in spite of the repeated expression of their unwillingness to accept that status. It would also mean permanently dividing the Pahari-speaking people between the Muzaffarabad region of Azad Kashmir and the Rajouri-Poonch region of India. That, surely, cannot be done behind their backs?

Another formula under discussion is that proposed by Sardar Sikander Hayat Khan, the prime minister of Azad Kashmir. Until recently a support of the official Pakistani position that the whole of the (old) J and K belongs to Pakistan, he has now come up with the idea of making the river Chenab rather than the LoC the dividing line. The right bank of the Chenab will go to Pakistan and the left bank to India. It is evident that he is mainly concerned with ensuring that all people of his own community – Paharis of Muzaffarabad as well as Rajouri-Poonch – get into Pakistan, and his plan assures that. But in the process it forces the Valley into Pakistan, whereas it is doubtful that more than a minority would prefer joining Pakistan unless the third option of independence is closed to them. And moreover, the right bank of the Chenab includes also the almost totally Hindu Akhnour tehsil of Jammu, whereas the left bank houses the Muslim-majority Kishtwar and Baderwah tehsils of Doda. These people cannot be thrown into Pakistan and India respectively without taking their view in the matter, merely because the Chenab happens to be a ready-made line that nature has already drawn on the map.

Then there is another 'formula' credited to Bill Clinton, among whose unsuspected assets was, apparently, this ability to solve problems at a distance. This formula hands over to each country the pound of flesh it demands, excepting the Valley which is made self-governing under the joint supervision of the friends-to-be: Pakistan and India, with Uncle Sam looking over the shoulders, of course. Poor Kashmiris! is all one can say.

Everybody has a 'formula', the common point of all the formulas being that they require only the satisfaction of India and Pakistan and the approval of the US. The Kashmiris alone have none. In a 10 days' tour of the state one was unable to elicit anything more specific from the Kashmiris than a determined reiteration that their right to self-determination shall be assured.

One can put it down to fatigue, but it is also a fact that the Kashmiris have come to look to the Hurriyat Conference for all political responses on the supposition that it represents all shades of opinion that dispute their accession to India; the Hurriyat in turn, being in fact dominated by a few shades of opinion, has lent its political support to Pakistan's manoeuvres and is perforce tongue-tied when Pakistan is in a fix; and Pakistan is truly in a fix not knowing how to simultaneously please George Bush and the armed and unarmed clerics who have established a hold on its society by dint of their disruptive capacity if not actual mass following.

There is another and a deeper reason too. The Kashmiris, when they talk of self-determination are inclined to think in terms of the whole of the old state of Jammu and Kashmir ruled by the heirs of Gulab Singh. So long as the discussion is centred on the UN resolutions, it is bound to be so. But after 55 years, that region has not remained what it was on October 26, 1947. And it cannot be said that the social and political leadership of any of the ethnic/linguistic sub-regions of that very diverse state (including the Kashmiri leadership) has striven to reach out to the others and keep alive the old idea of the right of collective self-determination for all of them. As a consequence, there is a certain ambiguity today regarding the meaning and indeed the very referent of that right. When Kashmiris talk of 'azaadi', the referent easily and unconsciously slides from the whole of the old J and K to the Valley and then to the Valley plus Muzaffarabad and back again to the whole of the old J and K. And the other regions are either indifferent or suspicious of the Kashmiris. Among those who still regard the old state of J and K as a meaningful political entity, Balraj Puri has been almost alone in pointing out to the intellectual and political leadership of the regions their failure to reach out to the other linguistic and ethnic groups in a spirit of mutuality and equity leading to the structuring of a federal and secular order that can help keep alive the historical sense of oneness of the state. This failure has meant that the voice of azaadi inevitably sounds like Kashmiri particularism, easily conflated by interested parties with Muslim communalism and separatism.

Not that the Kashmiris carry upon themselves the moral burden of cajoling everybody else to join the movement for self-determination and thereby disprove the

abuse of communalism thrown at them. They are under no such obligation, and their demand for self-determination, even if reduced to the Valley, makes perfect sense, but without such an effort from all sides the old state of J and K can no longer be a single collective referent for the demand of self-determination. As things stand today, why should anyone expect the people of Baltistan and Kathua to see themselves as co-citizens of a single state?

A proposal suggested by the JKLF leader Amanullah Khan of Islamabad is significant in this background. Writing in the *Kashmir Times*, May 6, 2003, he has suggested letting the whole of the old J and K area be a self-governing entity of a democratic, secular and federal character for 15 years, at the end of which a plebiscite may be held to decide whether they would like to join India or Pakistan or be independent. Perhaps the period of 15 years is meant for recreating the lost links between the regions and ethnic groups and recover the almost lost identity. As well as try out the experiment of coexistence within a single state of diverse ethnic/linguistic groups on the basis of a secular, democratic and federal polity. It is an attractive idea, especially coming at a time when such inclusivist idealism has become old fashioned and the narrowest exclusivism is the most rebellious attitude. Even so, it is doubtful that the Kathua-Jammu area will ever want to leave India, or the Mirpur area Pakistan. A one-point plebiscite to be determined by an overall majority may not be able to do justice to all. Too much has changed in the last 55 years for that. Amanullah Khan's proposal would however carry genuine meaning for Rajouri-Poonch, Muzaffarabad, the Valley and probably Doda as well.

However, who is listening to Amanullah Khan? Or to anyone from the 'disputed area'? It is this and not the correctness of any formula for resolving the 'dispute' that is primarily at issue today. Those who would resolve it do not even accept that the real 'dispute' is not between India and Pakistan. It began as a dispute between the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the contending states of India and Pakistan. Time may have reconciled some of the people to the disputed situation – the accession and its aftermath – but not all are reconciled to it, and the dispute today remains between those who disagree with it and the two beneficiary states. By pretending that the dispute is between them, the two states are able to ignore the people

and talk of settling it between themselves. And now they have the assistance of the world's primary rogue state which believes

in no democratic principles beyond its shores. This is today's problem in Kashmir: and we have no solution in sight. [\[27\]](#)

Table: Himachal Pradesh Education: Important Indicators

Number of Primary Schools	10633
Middle/High Schools	2892
Percentage of dropouts in primary schools	Less than 1 per cent
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	23
Number of teachers in Primary/Middle/High Schools	35500
Single Teacher Schools*	7-10 per cent
School building requiring major repair	20-25 per cent approx.
Schools without their own buildings and running in hired premises*	8-10 per cent
Gender equity Ratio	100 per cent

Note: * -The situation varies from district to district.