



Separatism is unacceptable

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In the past fortnight, several senior commentators have decided it is time to accept the separatists' demand for self-determination in the Kashmir Valley. One commentator has written, "As a liberal, I dislike ruling people against their will... Let Kashmiris decide the outcome, not the politicians and Armies of India and Pakistan... The parallels between British rule in India and Indian rule in Kashmir have become too close for my comfort."

Such reasoning is fallacious. To "dislike ruling people against their will" is not reason enough to let parts of India secede. Don't you think that the people of Arunachal Pradesh often feel neglected by the rulers in Delhi who decide their future without consulting them and 'against their will'? Any 'liberal' (if he/she is honest) will apply the same reasoning to the entire North-East. Should these States also secede? In the 1980s, the Khalistanis in Punjab also felt that Delhi was ruling them 'against their will'. Should Punjab have become independent? As for the 'promised' plebiscite, which is being resurrected by 'liberal' commentators, the UN resolutions of August 1948 and January 1949 were clear and specific. The proposed plebiscite was for all the regions of Jammu & Kashmir. Further it was conditional to the Pakistani troops withdrawing from all the areas it had occupied in the State; and, second, Pakistan withdrawing its tribesmen and nationals not ordinarily resident in these areas from the entire State.

For the UN, there was no question of first changing the demography of the occupied areas. To hold a plebiscite after the Kashmir Valley has been cleansed of its Hindu population will only encourage secessionists and terrorists to use similar tactics in other parts of India.

Another eminent columnist has written, "If you believe in democracy, then giving Kashmiris the right to self-determination is the correct thing to do... This is India's century. We have the world to conquer -- and the means to do it. Kashmir is a 20th century problem. We cannot let it drag us down and bleed us as we assume our rightful place in the world." This merits only one comment: If India is further dismembered, it is doubtful that the 21st century will be India's century. Allowing Kashmiris to secede is certain to become a precedent for others in India to 'democratically' ask for their right to self-determination.

Similar to the position taken by our 'liberals' has been that of the foreign media which has reacted to the recent troubles with its old prediction that 'Kashmir will soon be lost for India'. *Le Monde* quotes Ahmed, a young Kashmiri, as saying, "I prefer to die in the streets shouting 'Long Live Free Kashmir' than in an isolated confinement after being tortured (by the Indian Army)." Ahmed's friends, says *Le Monde*, threw stones at security forces while screaming, "Indians are dogs." Then, referring to Abhinav Bindra's gold medal, Ahmed says, "But it is in Kashmir that Indians are the best shooters."

Le Figaro, in an article headlined "Kashmir bye-bye?", its correspondent spoke of the "beauty of the Valley which nobody questions, though some in India have nonetheless begun to ask themselves if the future of their great democracy is to keep four million Kashmiris against their will. It is a new tune!" The correspondent, however, asked a relevant question: "Why has the

Government in New Delhi kept silent and inactive for so long when the tension had already started mounting in July?"

The problem is not only the poor leadership of the rulers in Delhi, though nobody can deny that the present crisis has been created by the inept handling of the situation, but also the wily leadership in the Kashmir Valley.

If one looks at the history of Jammu & Kashmir, one realises that whenever the Valley has been stricken by famine, war or invasion, it was due to the poor leadership and despotism of its kings, sultans and maharajas. The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang has described Kashmiris thus: "They are volatile and timid; they are good-looking, but deceitful."

The history of Kashmir is a succession of alternating periods when just and fair rulers made the Valley a 'Paradise on Earth' and times when "people were treated as grass", to quote the historian Srivara, one of the authors of *Rajatarangini*. He describes one of these periods during the 15th century when "accepting bribes was considered by the officers as virtue, oppressing the subjects was regarded as wisdom and the addiction to wine and women was reckoned as happiness".

Take the more recent example of Sheikh Abdullah, described by historian S Gopal as "Nehru's old friend, colleague and blood-brother." Sheikh Abdullah was chosen by Jawaharlal Nehru in January 1948 to plead India's case in the UN. Though a member of the official Indian delegation to Lake Success, Abdullah had a secret meeting with US Ambassador Austin, who reported to the US Secretary of State, "It is possible that the principal purpose of Abdullah's visit was to make clear to US that there is a third alternative, namely independence... He made quite a long and impassioned statement on the subject. He said in effect that whether Kashmir went to Pakistan or India, the other

dominion would always be against a solution... (Kashmir) is a rich country. He did not want his people torn by dissension between Pakistan and India. It would be much better if Kashmir were independent and could seek American and British aid for development of the country" Thus was the seed '*azadi*' planted by Nehru's 'blood-brother'.

Adlai Stevenson came to Srinagar to meet Abdullah in May 1953. The creation of an independent 'Sheikdom of Kashmir' was the purpose of the visit. This would perfectly suit American interests by checking the advances of the Chinese in Xinjiang and the Russians in Afghanistan. A 'non-aligned' Nehru could not be considered a reliable ally. At that time, *The New York Times* published a map hinting at an independent status for the Valley and a few days later, Abdullah asserted in a speech, "It is not necessary that our State should become an appendage of either India or Pakistan."

This habit of saying something one day and doing the opposite the next has been characteristic of most of the leaders of Jammu & Kashmir for the past 60 years. Sheikh Abdullah's grandson, Mr Omar Abdullah, recently said in Parliament, "We fought for our land and will continue to fight for our land till our last breath." This same person shamelessly sides with those who say that Hindus are trying to change the demography of the Kashmir Valley by erecting some temporary structures for pilgrims.

With a vacillating Centre, a weak Governor, a father-and-daughter duo always ready to pull the carpet from under their partner's feet and the secessionists back in the news after several years, the State of Jammu & Kashmir seems doomed. But not if India were to stand firm and resist those who wish to see the country disintegrate.