

# OUT OF MY MIND: JUSTICE FOR KASHMIR

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The Pulwama attack has been countered by the attack on the Jaish-e-Mohammad camps. As expected, escalation followed. But as of now, the crisis seems to be over.

Of course, our reaction would increase unrest in Kashmir itself. The feeling of alienation among Kashmiris, especially the younger ones, is undeniable. This is a festering sore because of the failure in winning Kashmir (leave Jammu and Ladakh out for the moment) to India's side. This is again not a party, political issue. Over the last 70 years, India has failed to make Kashmir love it nor has it learned to love Kashmir. We say Kashmir is an integral part of India. Yet, the reaction against Kashmiris in mainland India showed that Indians do not like Kashmiris.

To be frank, this notion that these people living in peripheral lands far away from the Hindi heartland are strange and un-Indian aliens has hit the people of the Northeast as well, though not as violently as it does Kashmiris, but then they are not mostly Muslims. The Nagas and Assamese just feel neglected, not hated. The post-Pulwama reaction was quite clear in revealing how little Kashmir has been integrated into India's national life.

Time has come to change tack. Begin with the idea that Kashmir is a difficult part of India to govern, seek the reasons for this in the history of Kashmir. It is forgotten that relative to other princely states which went through accession and merger, Kashmir went through accession but never proper merger. Hyderabad and Junagadh held popular votes to approve the merger. Kashmir due to Pakistan invasion and UN ceasefire never had that process. Articles 370 and 35A stand witness to the unfinished nature of Kashmir's integration. Kashmiris have not forgotten this.

The hard line of many people is to do away with the transitional provisions 370 and 35A. What we should learn from Pulwama is that if that is done, Kashmir could become ungovernable. Notice that the US is about to leave Afghanistan. The Taliban have won. They will turn to India and terrorist attacks would redouble in Kashmir if there is local support. The sane and soft strategy would be to reaffirm that Articles 370 and 35A will stay in place until a proper referendum has been conducted in Kashmir. The referendum would be on whether 370/35A should stay as they are or be removed.

The referendum cannot be held as yet but the removal of 370/35A can be eliminated from immediate policy options. In the meantime, Kashmir should be treated as an autonomous part of India. It will give Kashmiris a sense of uniqueness, though connected with India. Whatever azadi may mean to the separatists, autonomy will secure the trust of Kashmiris.

How would autonomy differ from what is there now? It would require that elections be contested only by local parties. National parties should refrain from contesting. Tamil Nadu already has de

facto autonomy as no outside parties get elected there. Why not Kashmir?

India needs to make sure Kashmir loves it. On its part, it has to learn to love Kashmiris and not alienate them. It has to trust Kashmiris to be able to manage their affairs, to feel special.

Autonomy is urgent. It will save lives, Indian and Kashmiri.

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