

2nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOCATION OF ARTICLE 370

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*The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of
their history.*

-George Orwell

Truth never damages a cause that is just.

-Mahatma Gandhi

ABSTRACT

From militarised pseudo-autonomy to the winds of holistic development, 5th August 2019 has been a landmark event in the history of Jammu & Kashmir. Progressing from the erstwhile hyphenated identity, today Kashmir is experiencing the rights and development enjoyed by Indians elsewhere, after the removal of special status and the application of central laws to Jammu & Kashmir. Today Kashmir is finally on the right side of history.

For over 30 years, insurgency and nefarious cross-border support was the biggest hurdle for progress in the region. Be it governance, land, women or employment- nothing was free from the clutches of terror and paralysing fear. Countless youth in the region were victims of closely monitored and sponsored brain-washing by Pakistan. Countless parents lost their children to mindless violence over a failed idea of territoriality, over a bogus claim of authority, over a damned lie of ownership. The highlight in this is the ironic role of Pakistan- claiming to fight for the rights of the people and land of Kashmir, while itself bankrupt of the ideals of democracy, good governance and human rights. Not only is Pakistan's stance of human rights violation in the region hypocritical, but also gets undermined with their simultaneous double standards- after all, terrorism sponsored by them is undeniably a violation of human rights too.

What Pakistan has always used Kashmir for, is to win elections. That the people and their rights have always been secondary is understood- after all POK continues to be one of the most backward provinces in Pakistan, languishing in a purgatory of resource-crunch, indiscriminate violence and deep-rooted state violence. Even Gilgit-Baltistan, which was part of erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir before being occupied by Pakistan in 1947, is now synonymous with increasing suicides, sectarian violence, violation of human rights and militancy. In a reflection of the situation there, Abdul Hamid Khan, leader of Balawaristan National Front (BNF), a prominent political party of the region, in a letter to then UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on March 14, 2016, said: "There is no legal, constitutional, judicial mechanism in place in Pakistan occupied Gilgit-Baltistan to protect people from human rights violations."

India has always unequivocally considered Kashmir to be an integral part of India, even though for the longest time constitutional and other safeguards have been instituted to ensure no feelings of alienation developed in the region. All this led to, was increasing sectarian and fundamental violence in the region, especially under the influence of brain-washed mercenaries on the payroll of Pakistan. These mercenaries wanted to perpetuate an atmosphere where employment cannot be generated, where generation after generation of women in the region do not have fundamental rights over their body or their property, where all-round development of the region was sacrificed and the Indian government at large was portrayed as the convenient bogeyman. Today having lost face and credibility, Pakistan now tries to fund so-called secular outfits, including The Resistance Front and JK Pir Panjal Peace Forum.

What makes Pakistan's antics hollow is that Kashmir will always be the election-cow: milked conveniently by every party in power. After all, hard-line views on territoriality is the surest way to win the ballot war. Which will explain their increasingly symbolic gestures of support for Kashmiris: a song released with a catchy video prior to 5th August, legislators marching in Islamabad to denounce India's action, changing the country's political map, etc. A tyrant will scramble to clutch at straws if it knows it is sinking. Today the militants in Kashmir and their deep-pocketed masters across the border are in the same predicament: assuring themselves more than anyone that they are genuine about the Kashmir cause, to win votes and continue their unjust Jihad.

Today if questions are being raised about the legality of revoking Article 370 and 35A; here are two questions we will ask the detractors to ponder over instead:

1. How legal was the Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018? In effect, it brought about drastic changes, including authorizing the Prime Minister of Pakistan to legislate on over 63 subjects and the power to overrule any law passed by the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly etc.
2. How independent and equal is POK in comparison to the rest of Pakistan? AJK (POK) has the "trappings of a sovereign state, but it is only nominally independent." The AJK Council, headed by Pakistan's prime minister, formally has the power to override laws passed by AJK's elected legislature, and the AJK judiciary cannot review its decisions.

For generations, local politicians in the Valley have always used Article 370 as a bargaining lever and blackmail against the Central government. But with the historic revocation, the Central government has finally applied salve on the festering anger in the region: an anger born out of chronic underdevelopment and misgovernance. From a militant state of mind, today Kashmir aspires to walk on the path of development. In the very short duration of two years since the historic revocation of trappings that were holding back Kashmir, here are some of the paradigm shifts of development in the region:

1. Kashmiri Pandits will finally be able to come back to their homeland. The biggest casualty of militancy in the region has been the destruction of communal harmony. For generations, the Muslims and Pandits who cohabited the Valley, were torn apart by virulent and misguided religious intolerance. Today, they can finally return to their roots.

2. One of the biggest propagandas that was spread by Pakistan, was that people in the region would lose their lands. On the contrary, a proper blueprint for land acquisition and development has been created. As a result, new industries have started filtering in and setting their bases.
3. With more industries and entrepreneurs, more jobs have been generated. By 2022, over 25000 new jobs will come up.
4. Governance has long been sacrificed at the altar of geopolitics. But today, even the grassroots of Kashmir get to say how they will be ruled and administered, through an effective Panchayati Raj system and regular elections.
5. Long separated from the rest of the country, today infrastructural development will be the engine of development for the region. The Banihal tunnel is scheduled for completion very soon.
6. Today Kashmir is on the map of both healthcare and educational opportunities. IIT Kashmir has already started classes while an AIIMS is already being developed.
7. The Central government has allocated Rs 881 crore from the ministry of health under PMDP (Prime Minister's Development Package) to Jammu and Kashmir.

It is undeniable, despite contrary assertions by vested interests, that the development of Jammu and Kashmir is of paramount importance to the government of India. No matter which ends of the political spectrum one belongs to, the fact that even the Gupkar Alliance has finally reached out to talk with the NDA government is a clear indication that the best interest of the Valley lies in establishing stable political equilibrium in the region. Even as potential talks of restoring statehood and delimitation come up, let us give credit where it is due. That Kashmir has finally started walking on the road to development.

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