

THE TRAGEDY OF KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

The Kashmir valley was burning under the chants of azaadi (independence) and was subsequently suppressed by the forces. Beyond the oppositional calls for right to self-determination by the Kashmiris and the rightful control of India or Pakistan, an important issue hitherto goes unnoticed. It is the compulsion to demand a nationhood and identity for oneself. This article argues that the coercion of modernity 'forces' a people to project themselves against others and fall to the game of the very opposition they seek to rebuke. The point here is not about the correctness or the problems with Kashmiri struggle. It is about the reasons for it. The causes if traced to economic, social and political factors would be grossly insufficient to account for the movement. The main factor should be reasoned as the processes that are characteristic to modernity. The apparent antagonism of Kashmir vs. India is demolished when this case is considered.

KEY WORDS: Kashmir, Art 370, Autonomy,

In the mainland India, those who do not take the Kashmiri struggle favourably accuse the 'handlers' of this movement to have brainwashed many of them. But this misses the main point. This call for emancipation follows every rule that it could have followed. The people of Kashmir really have no option but to demand nationhood, not because they are tired of India, but because they cannot escape the process of becoming a 'people'. Whether this process is against or for India is not the concern of this article. The main issue here is the trajectory that history follows and contradictory processes it gives birth to.

The selfhood of Kashmiris includes certain watertight categories, which exclude others. Their cries for nationhood are marked by rise in religious extremism and resistance to 'outside' control. The 'us' and 'them' categories are neatly created; and historical processes have enabled them to be so. The desire for nationhood and self-definition is, of course, not a 'modern' phenomenon, but the meanings attached to it are. A nation is an "imagined community" as Anderson wrote, its people have a common history, culture, economic interest, shared territory etc. This 'commonality', is historicised and often needs an opposition. In the case of Kashmir, the movement has strong religious underpinning that serves as a benchmark for this imagined nationality.

For these shared aspirations to materialise, the idea of state has to be instilled. Following Foucault's description about the evolution of state as a distinct "art of government", it can be said that Kashmir is undergoing a

similar process. The construction of a 'population' as the governed, means and techniques of governance has evolved with the particularistic conception of a state in recent modernity. The idea of governance is at the heart of Kashmiri struggle, about who should have the right to control them. Questions like the identity of the state, its source of legitimacy, methods of governing; posits an understanding of separation between the governed and the governor. The population as a homogenous mass seeking their right to be governed and by the authority they wish to is clearly identifiable in the struggle. Now the question about the state being a religiously motivated one or not should not come as a surprise because after all, such a state would follow the "art of government" in a very 'modern' fashion.

The tragedy of the valley is that it had sought to oppose the paternalistic attitudes of India and Pakistan, and to call for its autonomy. But this fight has fallen prey to the categories it was opposing. Or maybe it always was a prey since the beginning itself? Can it be said then that self-determination movements do not mark a break but a continuation of the present discourse? Of course, demanding a separate nation does not mean rejecting the idea of 'nation' itself. But whatever that this movement is asking for stands in contradiction to what a Westphalian state look like. It is the irony of our times that the resistance has to subscribe to the game of power it wanted to overthrow. It can be argued that despite using the categories like statehood and nationhood, the meaning that is implied to them by freedom movements is different. But

the structures of power that are resisted notoriously find their way back, often hideously in the opposition. Only the faces of authority change, the means and ends of governance remains the same. In technocratic fashion, a state is supposed to “govern” a population using certain techniques that the people find legitimate. The source of power of control can be derived from any authority (whether rational, traditional or charismatic). The main issue here is who, how, what and where to govern. This essentially, is a fundamental question central to modernity. It is not to say that these questions were not asked before, but their separation from other important domains and creation of ‘politics’ is a recent phenomenon in history. It can be contended that such statements can be made in the western context only, but effects of colonialism and absolute hegemony of Westphalian conceptions disproves the point.

It would, not be incorrect to maintain, that Kashmiri struggles along with its counterparts is not in opposition to the control of a nation-state. The categories of ‘India’, ‘Pakistan’ and ‘Kashmir’ have to be seen different from the power structures they represent. They do not represent the actuality of the conflict, they are simply names that are used for identification and hardly mean anything for the power struggle. Of course these names are

necessary but not overriding over the reasons they are used for. The causes are to be located in history and ‘India’ and ‘Kashmir’ are simply the victims of it. The argument of pure power struggle underlying these struggles will also miss the point of it. The control of resources is a time immemorial desire but its specificity in modern contexts is an important distinction to be made. Now the man, the territory he lives in, what he produces, his relationship to others, his ways of ‘conduct’; are all matters of ‘governance’. Now, it is no more about forcing men to behave the way the authority wants them to, but rather authority and the men becoming the parts of the same machine which has no centrality and remains pervasive and yet elusive.

To conclude, Kashmir may be fighting its battles for freedom and demanding azaadi from the hegemons. It is a matter of another debate whether all these calls are the part of the dominant discourse itself where no one is the winner or looser or perhaps everyone is one or the other. If one has to find victims after all, then the power itself is the perpetrator and victim itself.

REFERENCE

Foucault Michel, 2007, ‘Security Territory and Population’, Palgrave Macmillan.