

Uncaging the caged: The Spirit of Kashmiriyat and the Amarnath Yatra

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ABSTRACT: The dawn of independence and the unexampled communal mass murder within the Northwest of India knocked the necessity for communal harmony throughout whole Country. However; the Spirit of Kashmiriyat- a centuries old secular thought of Kashmir- continually protected and preserved the Kashmir from such a diluting wave. The spiritual and cultural harmony of the mountainous valley inducts the sensation of brotherhood and toleration within its dwellers. The turmoil; pains angle, gun culture, exploitation and also the human rights violations since Eighties have beyond any doubt agitated the restless minds of Kashmiris to a good extent that made and labeled them as stone pelters, Mujahids and antinationals etc. This portrayal and label continually provides a distorted image of the Kashmiris and also the Kashmiriyat. During the time of Amarnath Yatra; Kashmiriyat comes into limelight as it spreads its wings to welcome yatri and protects the secular and social values enriching brotherhood and unification. The anti-human sources have continually threatened functioning of the yatra that many a times lead to its termination or deferment. However, the spirit and social consciousness of Kashmiriyat have withheld the sensation of brotherhood and compelled the inhabitants to produce a helping hand to non-Kashmiris, usually the religious tourists (Amarnath Yatries) besides other seasonal tourists. This notion of brotherhood is paving way for unity and integrity. The necessity of hour is to place correct efforts for the continuation and survival of Kashmiriyat in order to eliminate the anti-national seeds of bias and prejudice.

Key Words: Kashmiriyat ; Cultural Harmony; Turmoil; Mujahid; Amarnath Yatra; Gun Culture

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I. INTRODUCTION

The social and ethno-national cultural values of the Kashmiri's is termed as Kashmiriyat. It indicates a centuries-old secular, spiritual and cultural harmony, besides loyalty, nationhood and pride for their mountainous homeland. Kashmiriyat isn't confined solely to Muslims of Kashmir; however it belongs to all those who are residing inside the valley. Kashmiriyat is the notion of finding Hindu and Sikh women sleeping in place of worship of Muslims (Masjid) and Muslims having hunger in Gudawara throughout recent floods. Kashmiriyat is finding Sikhs hugging and holding Muslim religious Book Al-Qur'an once flood was about to collapse a masjid that was very near to them and Muslims receiving the Bharat of Pandit family during curfews besides performing last rites of minority Hindus and Sikhs.

However the word 'Kashmiriyat' has been raped throughout the past 20 years by outsiders and media to a great extent. Numerous definitions have been given to it ; however the concept still remains undefined. Some intellectuals have connected it to the tolerance Kashmiris have displayed since centuries whereas others regard it near brotherhood. Noted human rights counsel, Nandita Haksar claims that Kashmiriyat is a synthetic concept being promoted by the State that shows that Hindus and Muslims are living together very happily.

To understand the term in its right perspective one must have an in-depth study of history. Kashmiris are enthralled, tortured, humiliated and ruthlessly killed since the past few centuries. The perpetual occupation has modified their psyche. They have moulded their temperament accordingly due to which they have resisted external aggression. The whole of sub-continent accepted Mughal rule; however, Kashmiris fought them. They fought the Afghans and Sikhs although the resistance was terribly refined. However; since 1947, they have been providing sacrifices for self-determination. The brave Kashmiris defeated the Mughal army. Akber then resorted to cheating to annex Kashmir. The Kashmiri Muslims are tolerant from the very beginning. Kashmiriyat is all concerning resistance. It reflects the desire of the individuals to fight aggression. Tolerance is in their blood and they tend to fight the oppressors, and stand by weak. Kashmiris can't be tamed by weapon nor by sword. The soil of Kashmir hosts thousands of Chinars and the fire of these majestic trees shall never get cold.

Since late 80'S the onset of violence and also the rise of terrorist act and conquest disorder resulting in severe restriction within the exercise of civil liberties. This has lead to the post ninety generation of Kashmir to be nurtured on pure violence and exploitation.

The turmoil; pains, gun culture, exploitation and also the human rights violations since Eighties have beyond any doubt agitated the restless minds of Kashmiris to a good extent that constructed and labeled them as stone pelters, Mujahids and antinationals etc. This portrayal and label continually provides a distorted image of the Kashmiris and also the kashmiriyat. Throughout the time of Amarnath Yatra; kashmiriyat always comes into limelight as its spreads its wings to welcome yatri and protects the secular and social values enriching brotherhood and unification. The anti-human elements have always tried to intrude the graceful functioning of the yatra which many a times leads to its termination or deferment. However, the spirit and social consciousness of Kashmiriyat have continually withheld the sensation of brotherhood and compelled the inhabitants to produce a helping hand to non-kashmiri religious tourists (Amarnath Yatries) besides seasonal tourists. Amid the close gloom of chaos and confusion maybe Kashmiriyat carries the solution.

Kashmiriyat was mirrored in 2007 poll that was conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in national capital- Delhi, that highlighted 84% support return of Kashmiri Pandits. The London-based Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) survey found that 92 % of respondents opposed the state of Kashmir being divided on the premise of faith or ethnicity; this is the real essence of kashmiriyat. The spirit of Kashmiriyat additionally helps to sustain and maintain the annual Amarnath yatra.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary and secondary data. The study has covered both the routes of Amarnath yatra-Phalgam and Baltal. The interview schedule and participant observation tools have been used for data collection. The number of respondents for the undertaken study is 150. Simple random sampling was used for getting the requisite number of respondents. Besides interview schedule the associated offices at both the base camps were visited. Local newspapers and dailies were also consulted for collecting the secondary data for the study.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Amarnath cave is a Hindu shrine placed in Jammu and Kashmir at an altitude of 12,756 ft. The cave is enclosed by snowy mountains. The cave itself is roofed with snow most of the year apart from a brief time in summer once it's open for pilgrims. Thousands of Hindu devotees pay annual visit to the Amarnath cave through difficult mountainous ways for performing their pilgrimage. During the time of Amarnath Yatra; kashmiriyat always comes into limelight as its spreads its wings to welcome yatri and protects the social and secular values enriching brotherhood and unification. The anti-human elements always try to negatively influence the smooth functioning of the Yatra which many a times lead to its termination or holdup. However, the spirit and social consciousness of Kashmiriyat have always withheld the sensation of brotherhood and compelled the inhabitants to produce a helping hand to Amarnath Yatries.

The study with regard to the real spirit of kashmiriyat highlighted that the local kashmiris were fighting in Anantnag District hospital for blood donation to those injured on the night of July 10, 2017, when a bus carrying pilgrims from Gujarat and Maharashtra, was fired upon by three terrorists. The bus was carrying 56 Amarnath pilgrims to Jammu from Baltal.

Although, the attack was condemned by Political leaders, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying India would not be "bogged down" by such "cowardly" acts and the Separatist leaders Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik also expressed grief by saying the incident "goes against the very grain of Kashmiri ethos". But we must salute kashmiriyat; as leaders have always to deliver and demand but people have to act in practice.

The study also highlighted that on July 13, 2016 Kashmir witnessed a display of humanity and religious brotherhood when local people of Bijbehara Kashmir rushed to the help of a group of Amarnath pilgrims after their bus collided and met with an accident in which two persons were killed. The bus collided with a truck at Sangam and lead to killing a pilgrim Pramod Kumar and local driver and injuring 23 others. When the same news of the accident reached the locals, they defied curfew and reached the spot and began vacating the injured pilgrims. That time curfew has been in force, particularly in south Kashmir, continuously as of protests which erupted after Hizbul Mujahideen militant Burhan Wani was killed in an encounter due to which 34 people have been killed in clashes between protestors and security forces, and hundreds got injured. But the Muslim locals of that area risked their own lives to save the pilgrims, who were taken to a hospital for treatment. Some Yatries exclaimed that, "Local kashmiris even ensured our treatment in the hospital. If you want to learn humanity, you may learn it from Kashmiris. We shouldn't talk evil about them rather we must understand them,".

The process and portrayal of Kashmiriyat also lime lighted heart felt stories of yatries and the associated help of Kashmiri dwellers. The Amarnathyatries revealed that after completing Darshan (Pilgrimage of Cave) because of prevailing turmoil situation they were stuck at Baltal base camp for two days as the Yatra was suspended. Yatries revealed that after two days they left Baltal along w other vehicles in the form of a convoy. They ill-fated mini-bus met with an accident, and some of them managed to sneak out of the wreckage and sought help from the other vehicles carrying pilgrims with which they were travelling, but nobody stopped to help them. They narrated that even the army and police personnel in the area did not come to their help, but the human nature of local Kashmiris came to their rescue. Instead of one, more than 60 people came rushing to help them and broke the window panes of the bus and saved them, otherwise they would have died.

Supporting Kashmiriyat at par with true essence of humanity some yatries also revealed that Kashmiri Muslims have saved them and their families from starvation as they had their first proper meal after three days at the langar run by them at Dalgate.

A group of yatries from Gujrat, clamins that evilimprints are being rumored by some vested elements regarding the tense situation in Kashmir but coming over here, knocks the mind about the hospitality of the Kashmiris as they usually provide us food and blankets to yatries during amaranth yarta.

While sharing their views on the role of Muslims during Amarnathyatra, a group of sadhu's reveals that it is due to the cooperation and support of the Muslims that the religious pilgrimage has been successful since few decades. They uphold that the Muslims have played an important role by providing food, clothing, shelter and other necessities to pilgrims all along the route to the cave during thick and thin besides they offer their horses, as the trek is challenging.

This is not the first time that Kashmiris have come to the rescue of Amarnath Yatries. In 2010, once a severe crisis was sweeping the state, Kashmiris opened their hearts and houses to the stranded pilgrims. They provided them food and accommodation, and even ferried them to the cave shrine. That year in June, Kashmiris launched an agitation against the state government's decision to transfer 40 hectares of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB). This agitation was to protect Article 370 which specifically prohibits the sale of land to non-Kashmiris, due to which people came out to the streets in protested in masses.

Although the order was later withdrawn, followed by the resignation of GhulamNabi Azad, Jammu and Kashmir's chief minister, the situation turned volatile in Kashmir valley and claimed six lives and injured hundreds. At the peak of militancy, due to sudden snowfall on Yatra route more than 200 Yatries died, but the life of more than thousands of Yatries was saved with the quick efforts of local Kashmiri Muslims. Shelter in Kashmiri Muslim homes food, warm woolen clothes and money was arranged by local Muslims for the Yatries.

There were no proper facilities for food and stay but again Kashmiriyat embraced Pilgrims by providing necessary help during that times when govt. paid a deaf ear to them. Although hotels and eateries were closed on account of the conflict, pilgrims didn't have to look far to find food and shelter. The Muslims opened community kitchens and began making arrangements for their overnight stay in the valley. Locals established such kitchens at various places besides Dalgate and Boulevard, the volunteers set up community kitchens at the Tourist Reception Centre in the city and places on the way to Pahalgam and Baltal.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the last many years communalists have been cooking up stories about Kashmiriyat and Kashmiris, who have been the main support for the Yatra. Additionally, some anti-Muslim elements try their level best to polarise the Yatra and link the Kashmir issue with religion.

Undoubtedly some other agencies are also patronizing adverse propaganda which has led to decline in the number of Yatries since few years. However; there has not been a single unpleasant civil incident during that yatra over the years. There are some vested interests that spread rumours about imminent threats to yatra from not only through militants but by locals also, but when yatries return home after pilgrimage, they praise Kashmiris for their hospitality and humanity always and approve the fact that why Kashmiris are famous for their hospitality worldwide. Besides all odds Kashmiri Muslims are supporting the Yatra, for which they need to be praised, not condemned. This notion of secular attitude is still prevalent and is paving way for unity and integrity between different resident religions of the valley. The need of hour is to put proper efforts for the continuation and survival of Kashmiriyat so that the anti-national seeds of bias and prejudice may be discontinued.

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