

BEYOND 'AMARNATH'

Kashmir is burning. It has been burning for the last six decades with no prospect of peace returning to the valley of death anytime soon. With communal fire razing throughout the valley and Jammu region and Hindu-Muslim divide getting worsened further only communal forces on both sides of the divide stand to gain. The government's failures are failures of the impossible : to read the Kashmiri people's minds or to predict the future. The people of the troubled state are living in a social and psychic structure of the ghostly past, with their aspirations going unmet.

The issue of 'Amarnath land'—the source of current crisis—is a symptom. The malaise is much deeprooted. Harried at home and abroad over the stalemated Indo-US nuclear deal, prime minister Manmohan Singh seems to be pinning too much hope on the all-party meeting to resolve the present imbroglio. But dialogue between the deaf and the dumb makes little sense because fundamentalism of all shades can compromise with nothing, not even democracy. The saffron brigade has successfully communalised the 'Amarnath land issue' under the aegis of Amarnath Sangharsh Samity—an umbrella organisation spearheading the Jammu agitation with a communal bias. Maybe, the Bharatiya Janata Party has something to gain from the recent flare-up. The idea of separate statehood to Jammu with hindu majority is once again getting currency.

Quite expectedly Pakistan is back in business to project its hawkish stance in relation to Kashmir issue which in turn fuels communal passion further. Faced with uncertain political future Pervez Musharraf [at the time of writing he was removed from presidency] played the Kashmir card and raked up the issue by describing as 'martyrs' 21 people who died in the on-going violence in Jammu and Kashmir during the past couple of days. And Pakistan government authorities made it clear that they would soon go to the UN to internationalise the Kashmir question which provoked New Delhi to indulge in 'war of words', shattering the early resumption of peace process between the two countries. It's a grand utopia to expect a basic change in the battle for the mind-set of Pakistan foreign policy establishment. Meanwhile, Kashmiris have begun their new programme of agitation before the UN office.

But the so-called international community is unlikely to respond to Pakistan's Kashmir headache at this juncture. With NATO accusing Islamabad of clandestinely helping the Taliban to foil their operation along Afghan-Pakistan border and Bush making an oblique reference only the other day to reported ISI involvement in blasts in front of India's embassy building in Kabul, it would be a futile exercise to mobilise world public opinion against India, the new darling of corporate global capital.

Kashmir has been a staple for Pakistani rulers to divert public attention and silence the voice of dissent ever since the creation of Pakistan. The ruling dispensation in Islamabad looks too eager to make a deal with religious extremists because the parties in power think "election had endorsed peace with the Taliban". But Washington is unlikely to respect it. On May 14, US guided missiles killed fifteen in the Bajaur tribal area, including a child and perhaps an

Al Qaeda commander. More missiles are ready and Islamabad cannot do anything other than asking Uncle Sam not to hit tribal Pakistan which might be counter-productive in the long run. Not a single day passes without suicide bombers and religious militants attacking Pakistani security establishment to make things difficult for Pakistani rulers. Whether India-bashing and pro-Kashmir rhetoric can contain domestic violence is open to question.

Strangely enough, secularists of all shades have been silent on the recent communal turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir as if it is an isolated incident, having no impact on national polity. Communists are silent, socialists with different brands—Samata, Janata and all that—are silent. And Gandhians are trying to evade their responsibility by convening all-party meets without offering any plan to settle the dispute amicably. For the communists the difficulty lies elsewhere. Communalism in Jammu and Kashmir is not saffron-centric only. Blaming it on the eternal villain—the saffron establishment—cannot wash. Nor can it serve any meaningful purpose to ignore the perception of the Kashmiri majority. Congress is doubly embarrassed because the Amarnath issue was kindled by them in the first place and their coalition government also fell on this issue.

That Kashmir problem cannot be resolved through negotiations unless all three parties—India, Pakistan and Kashmiris—agree to deviate from their stated positions and make adjustments and re-adjustments, is a fact of life. Also, it is as clear as anything else that India and Pakistan cannot live in permanent peace. Hostility, overt or covert, is permanent; re-conciliation is temporary. Notwithstanding what they say in public, Pakistan is progressively losing its privileged status in America's strategic calculation. If America goes ahead with its idea of bombing tribal Pakistan bordering Afghanistan to the stone age in an apparent bid to destroy Al Qaeda bases, it might split the Pakistan army and political forces into pro-and anti-American lobbies creating a civil war like situation. And in that event it would be more difficult for New Delhi to tackle 'peace' in Kashmir and 'war' in Pakistan. □□□ 18-8-2008