

## Kashmir in the Times of COVID-19

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*As the major powers of the world look inwards to fight the coronavirus pandemic, Indian PM Modi exploits this “historic opportunity” to further his Hindutva-driven agenda in the disputed territories of Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K).*

There is a very perceptible method to the BJP’s madness to “annex and absorb” the territories of IOJ&K. It was always a part of its manifesto. Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution were abrogated to nullify the special status of the IOJ&K territories and allow Indians to buy and own properties in IOJ&K. The J&K Reorganisation Bill 2019 contained provisions to re-constitute the IOJ&K – a part of the larger Kashmir region which is under dispute between India, Pakistan and China since 1947 – into two Union Territories, J&K and Ladakh. The J&K Reorganisation Order (Removal of Difficulties) 2020 dramatically relaxed the criteria for domicile and employment for Indians in IOJ&K. These Bills set the stage for the Indianisation-Hinduisation of IOJ&K through forced Hindu settlements, converting the Muslim majority into a minority and to prepare for the UN-promised plebiscite, whenever it might take place. These blatantly illegal actions are in direct breach of relevant UNGA Resolutions, UNSC Resolutions 91, 122, 123, 126 and 2334 of 2016, Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention 1949 and Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 among other instruments of international law. Furthermore, they put an end to all bilateralism between India and Pakistan, trashed the Shimla Agreement and vitiated the strategic environment irretrievably.

The IOJ&K Muslims are now suffering under a triple jeopardy – the military occupation, lockdowns, curfews and being held incommunicado for close to nine months, the coronavirus pandemic and this “supposedly constitutional” assault on their majority status, their identity, culture, traditions and way of life. Their demographic, economic, social and political landscapes stand to be altered for good. Unabated Hindu settlements will eventually erase the Muslim majority in the IOJ&K legislature along with their freedom and capacity to legislate for themselves. These (mis)steps will polarise IOJ&K beyond redemption. The Hindu settlers, if and when they come, will find a volatile, unwelcome and hostile environment there. Life will be unbearable behind barbed wires, armed sentries and patrols, check posts, walled off compounds, gated communities, tight security cordons and veritable social seclusion. IOJ&K will remain restless and on edge for all times to come.

The indigenous resistance and freedom movement of the Kashmiris is bound to gain further traction, motivation and momentum from this sordid state of affairs. The Kashmiris already have precious little left to lose. They will come out fighting. The Islamophobic and genocidal

BJP Government is applying a two-pronged approach to suppress, dehumanise and brutalise the Muslims in IOJ&K as well as the Indian mainland. It would want to destroy both these centres of resistance, piecemeal. The Kashmiri and Indian Muslim struggles could potentially converge morally, intellectually, politically and even otherwise to ward off this existentialist threat.

These “constitutional” changes will transform the Indian Union, too. All eleven states who have been granted special provisions under Article 371 (A to J) will be apprehensive about their status. The other independence movements in Punjab-Khalistan, the Seven Sister States in the North-East and the Red Corridor in the East will gain further urgency and impetus. They will have learnt their lessons. The CAA, NCR and NPR have already polarised the Indian Union, irreparably. The BJP government is now further fracturing Indian society through deliberate screening, isolation and segregation of all Indian Muslims. This discrimination on religious grounds will affect Kashmiri Muslims too. (Will the Kashmiri and Indian Muslims be required to carry special identification and be treated differently, a la Jews in erstwhile Nazi Germany?) This discrimination will send strong signals to all other minorities, especially Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsi, Jains and Dalits/untouchables etc, and raise questions about their future, equality status and citizenship within the Indian Union. They will need to consider their options afresh or resign themselves to an ignominious fate in an exceedingly prejudiced Indian society. Next, the BJP government will religiously implement Hinduism’s caste system, putting each one of the other Hindu castes in its “ordained slot”. The autocratic Brahmins (RSS-BJP) will thus be singularly placed to rule India forever, with the rest of the populace serving, living and dying at their pleasure.

RSS-BJP combine’s megalomania is boundless!

Having supposedly “annexed and absorbed” the IOJ&K, the delusional Modi-led BJP government now has visions of “militarily conquering” Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) – Kashmiri territories under Pakistan’s control and administration. The Indian government and its military high command are erring on many accounts. First, it would be a strategic miscalculation of gargantuan proportions. The strategic and nuclear balance between India, Pakistan and China cannot be ignored or trifled with. Second, there is a serious mismatch between India’s real military capabilities vis a vis Pakistan and the geopolitical ambitions of the BJP. Both are mutually exclusive. Third, the religion and caste-based discrimination and segregation in the Indian society will eventually destroy the Indian military as it seeps down its command structure to its lowest ranks. It will systematically annihilate all morale, unity, cohesiveness, esprit de corps, and disintegrate the combat potential of the Indian military as a whole. It is inevitable. Fourth, the Indian military high command remains shamelessly prone to conceited bluster and rhetoric to please the incumbent BJP government. Fifth, it is also guilty of professional dishonesty as it fails to sensitise PM Modi’s government about the strategic implications of a serious skirmish/clash/war with Pakistan in true, real terms. Any (mis)adventure against a more than ready and willing nuclear Pakistan would be patently reckless and prohibitively costly. India must not start a war that it cannot possibly control or bring to a sensible, plausible closure. If it does then it will be Pakistan who will end it at a time and place of its own choosing, ruining India’s regional/extra regional ambitions in the process.

Regional countries and the world look on aghast, as the RSS, BJP, PM Modi and India frenziedly self-destruct.

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