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JAMMU AND KASHMIR IN FLAMES

What can drench the fire and ease the situation

Jammu and Kashmir is burning in ignited flames. The serene splendour of unparalleled natural beauty is now splashed with blood, tranquility marred by wailing of the bereaved and tortured, dapples of bewitching light and shade doused under devouring darkness cast by paroxysm of communalism-fundamentalism, piety and fraternity replaced by suspicion and mistrust. Centring on controversial decision of transfer of land to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) by the erstwhile Congress-led state government, there has been an eruption of communal conflagration worsening the already volatile situation in the state torn asunder by continued violence, untold oppression, repression, communal polarization and killings. While the separatists-fundamentalists of different affiliations have been for decades together escalating their subversive and divisive activities by exploiting to the hilt the aggrieved and injured feeling of the valley people, the government of India instead of taking desired initiative to find out a just political solution to this agonizing Kashmir problem is trying to meet the situation with military might and unleashing worst form of state terrorism, causing thereby further resentment and apprehension among the people. Obviously, in such a volatile milieu, the precipitated row over the controversial land transfer has only provided a shot in the arms of reaction and accentuated the plight and peril of the common people. So every democratic-minded conscientious person cannot but feel extremely concerned at the way things are turning from bad to worse and sincerely seek an end to such restiveness not by any temporary patchwork but through an

appropriate course of legitimate action duly articulating the urges and aspirations of the suffering people. Obviously, the question that arises next is what concrete steps should be taken to realize this objective.

Controversy surrounding the Amaranth land transfer

First of all, let us briefly focus on the land transfer incident that has surcharged the already tense situation to such a scale. It was way back in 2001 that the Jammu and Kashmir government constituted the SASB for managing the affairs of Amarnath yatra (visit to the Amarnath cave shrine located in the Himalayan range in Kashmir by the

pilgrims every year during July-August considered auspicious for the purpose as per Hindu religious faith). A proposal of transferring 39.88 hectares of forest land to the SASB was doing the round for the last four years. There was also a brewing resentment over this transfer as it was feared that it would create ecological problem and run counter to the interest of the local people. Yet the erstwhile Congress-PDP coalition government headed by a Congress chief minister finally put a seal of approval to the proposal on 20 May, 2008. As soon as the decision was made public, the separatist, secessionist leaders like various factions of Huriyat

Conference, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Jamaat-e-Islami and others gave a communal twist to the same and demanded immediate revocation of the order. Violent protests engulfed the Kashmir region. There was definitely a communal-fundamentalist undercurrent in the agitations incited by the Islamic religion-merchants and pro-Pakistani elements. The government as usual resorted to the path of suppression by police-military. Seven persons were killed in eight days of protest. The PDP pulled out from the government dissociating itself from the issue while Congress

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People's will victorious at Singur

During the past three weeks, the movement of the peasants at Singur in the Hooghly district of West Bengal against forcible uprooting and eviction from their land, hearth and homes by the CPM-led state government to make space for the small-car project of the Tatas, has

intensified and drawn the attention of the whole country.

It may be recalled that two years back, the CPM government of the state, as per a secret agreement with the Tatas, took upon itself the "noble" task of forcibly uprooting the peasants from about 1000 acres

of rich agricultural land at Singur and offering the same to the Tatas for putting up a small-car (Nano) project there. Our party, the SUCI, took the initiative in organizing the peasants in a protest movement. The Trinamul Congress (TMC) joined the movement later on. The

Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee (KJRC) was formed of the local people irrespective of their political affiliations as a platform for conducting the movement. The resistance movement became so powerful that the government had to launch a barbarous attack to crush it. On 1 and 2 December, 2006, the police launched a full-

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Demonstration in New Delhi on 5 September on Singur Day

CPI(M) government in connivance with Tatas conspiring to break Singur movement

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scale operation to capture the agricultural land with a brutality that knew no bounds. Section 144 was clamped down and the boundary wall round the proposed factory site was forcibly put up with the police beating and arresting the protesters. Construction of the Tata factory began inside the walled up area under police protection.

It was the Singur movement that later on inspired the movement of the people of Nandigram to rise up against the conspiracy of the state government to hand over some 10,000 acres of land to the Salem multinational group of Indonesia in the name of industrialization by forcibly robbing the people of the vast area of their land and living. In Nandigram too, the SUCI took immediate initiative. A public committee was formed as the platform of resistance movement comprising workers and supporters of the SUCI, TMC and some other parties with sections of workers of CPI(M), CPI and Congress joining in. The Committee gave the call of movement and the people responded magnificently. How the heroic people of Nandigram stood up against repeated concerted onslaughts by the police, administration and organized criminals on the payroll of the CPI(M) and went on to resist all conspiracy and brutality to emerge victorious, is now history. The plot to hand over the land to the Salem Group was dealt a crushing blow. The Nandigram struggle widened the unity of action between the SUCI and the TMC. Later on, a state-level arrangement between the two parties was arrived at for jointly developing mass movement all over the state of West Bengal against the anti-people policies of Central and state governments. Success of Nandigram movement sent waves across the state. This strengthened the people's disaffection with the CPI(M) rule which was reflected in the recent panchayat and municipal polls despite all attempts of the CPI(M) to turn the results its way through money and muscle power and rigging. All this ignited anew the spirit of mass movement in Singur.

In Singur, a large number of peasants had refused to part with their land, totalling about 400 acres, and had refused to take the compensation offered by the

government. But they had been ousted from their land and the forcibly acquired land handed over to the Tatas. Movement on the demand for return of their land had been going on.

The Dharna movement begins

In August this year, the KJRC announced a programme of continuous Dharna (stay-in demonstration) on the demand for return of land to the unwilling farmers, commencing on 24 August, to be staged by the side of the Durgapur Expressway near the small-car (Nano) factory site of the Tatas at Singur. Alarmed, the Chief Minister and other spokesmen of the government, the Tatas and the monopoly-controlled media started a synchronized campaign of deceit, threats and false propaganda in a conspiracy to denigrate the movement, to confuse and mislead the people to turn away from it, to cow down the people before the government and the Tatas. The KJRC had demanded that since the Tatas would require, at the most, 600 acres of land for their main plant and had earmarked the balance 400 acres for setting up the ancillary units, those 400 acres should be returned to the unwilling farmers by shifting the ancillary units elsewhere nearby. The government spokesmen, at the promptings of the Tatas, asserted that the ancillary units, forming an integral part of the project, could not be shifted and that return of land was not negotiable. The Tatas, too, harped on the same theme and went on to take a series of steps to pressurize the Singur movement and blackmail the people of the state. On 22 August, even before the Dharna agitation began, Tata Group chairman Ratan Tata threatened to shut down the Singur project and ruled out shifting of the ancillary units. As the Dharna went on, on 29 August, the Tatas suspended the work going on at the project site. On 2 September, they announced that they were considering shifting the project away from Singur. Work at the project site continued to remain suspended. A howl was raised in unison by the government and the industrial circles that if the Tatas left Singur, that would spell disaster through flight of capital away from the state. Although it was common knowledge that in its agreement with the Tatas, the

government had granted them huge concessions totalling hundreds of crore of rupees of public money from the exchequer, the government persisted in refusing to divulge details of the agreement as those, according to it, were "trade secrets."

Watching the growing mass support behind the Dharna, propaganda barrage in the media maligning the Singur movement and upholding the anti-people stands of the government and the Tatas was intensified.

True character of mischievous propaganda against the movement exposed

The main points highlighted in the media were that legally, it was not possible to return land once it had been acquired; that the Tatas are industrialists with a human face with commitment towards social well-being; that the Singur movement is against industrialization, and by scaring away the Tatas and other industrial houses from West Bengal, it would block the industrialization of the state to deny the resultant prosperity to the people; and that such movements were thus against the interest of the people of the state and should be opposed by them. And in order to press home this last point, the CPI(M)-controlled organisations started staging signature campaign, and processions by collecting some people at different places from the first week of September against the Singur movement, all being duly highlighted by the faithful media.

Our party launched a sustained campaign to expose the true character of such propaganda.

First, the argument that land, once acquired by the government, cannot be returned as the law does not permit it. But the fact is that it is quite possible to return the forcibly acquired land in Singur to the unwilling farmers. It is true that clause 48 of the Land Acquisition Act precludes return of land after the acquisition process is concluded, but in the present instance, the land can be returned as the owners have not accepted the compensation payment and the acquisition process is therefore not completed. Secondly, Clause 55 of the Act provides for amendment of any other clause. The Tamil Nadu government has already amended Clause 48 of the Act. So there is no

bar if a government has pro-people political will. Even the West Bengal government land acquisition manual prepared in 1991 has provision that if the acquired land is in excess of need, it can be returned. The contention of the Tatas that these 400 acres can not be returned as these are required to set up the ancillary plants feeding the main factory is untenable. At the most, if the ancillary units are relocated nearby, the Tatas' profits will be slightly reduced due to the added transportation cost but that is all.

Secondly, the charge that the Singur movement is against industrialization and such movements will block industrialization of the country and the growth of employment and prosperity following from it. We have shown time and again in these pages why, in the present era, unfettered industrialization is not possible under capitalism. Capitalism is now plagued with world-wide recession, ever-present market crisis. All over the world including the advanced countries of the West, the monopolists are now busy in maximizing profit through setting up capital-intensive hi-tech industries requiring far less work force compared to the earlier ones while they close down the existing factories employing much larger work forces. The whole world is thus afflicted with contraction of employment opportunities on an unprecedented scale. In India, for each new hi-tech factory that is put up in the name of industrialization employing, say, only a few hundred, several existing factories are shut down throwing thousands, out of employment. The whole country is full of such closed own factories. In West Bengal alone, over 55,000 factories and establishments of all sizes have been closed down during the past 15 years or so, throwing out of employment around 2 million persons. The proposed Singur plant has robbed about 35,000 people of their means of livelihood but at best provide employment to only a small fraction of this number. How many of these fortunate few will be from Singur? The present smokescreen about industrialization is being created motivatedly to maximize the profit of monopoly capitalists at the cost of the people.

Under the circumstances, we

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Democratic movement — only way to secure legitimate demands

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have been stressing that to generate employment, new factories be put up, preferably labour-intensive ones, in the vacant lands lying in the closed down factories, or in non-agricultural land. In West Bengal, there are large tracts of such fallow land in a number of districts.

Thirdly, as regards the assertion that the Tatas are industrialists with a humane face with commitment towards social well-being, messiahs out to bring about growth of employment and prosperity in the state, the truth is that a capitalist can make profit, thrive and prosper only at the cost of the workers by exploiting them. He is never really concerned about social welfare, well-being of the people. Otherwise, how does one explain the fact that although Jamshedpur in the present Jharkhand state has been the seat of Tatas' industrial activities and prosperity for a century, Jharkhand is one of the most backward states teeming with poor, oppressed people? During the recent years, the work forces employed in the Tata Group of companies including the Tata Steel, TELCO and the Tata Motors in Pune have been reduced drastically although the production figures and profits have leapt up thanks to the adoption of hi-technology.

And finally, about the alarm that has been raised that if the Tatas leave West Bengal, the other industrial houses will follow suit and so the state will be doomed. This is an attempt to blackmail the people of West Bengal in order to dissuade them from mass movement. The industrial circles have been raising this bogey over the past few decades because this state, being a citadel of leftism, has been in the forefront of democratic mass movement, militant working class movement which they fear. No capitalist sets up an industry in a state out of love and affection for the people there. He decides the location of an industry on considerations of its profitability. So long as the profitability is there, a capitalist will never leave the place. Today, mass movements against forcible land grab is intensifying from state to state. In the face of this, will the capitalists decide to leave those other states too?

Why this all-out propaganda barrage? The ruling class and its subservient government have become alarmed. Their bitter

experience at Nandigram was that the people there stood rock-firm in the face of all attacks and the people of the whole state rallied behind their cause. The CPI(M) and the ruling class have learnt the lesson at Nandigram that they are unable to crush a popular mass movement through direct attacks just now. That is why this all-out conspiracy to denigrate the Singur movement through concerted propaganda in a bid to destroy the mass support behind the movement.

But they have failed. The mass support behind the movement, instead of weakening, swelled.

The victory and its lessons

The Dharna started as scheduled and went on calmly and resolutely in the face of all mischievous propaganda, threats and provocations. Massive demonstration of solidarity with the movement was expressed by day-long streams of people of all ages, sections and professions converging to Singur from all parts of West Bengal day after day ever since the Dharna agitation began. Our party, the SUCI, played an increasingly important role. We organized meetings and demonstrations in support of the movement all over the state. The movement was conducted basically under the joint leadership of the SUCI and the TMC. The TMC leadership accepted many of the advices and suggestions offered by our party. There is a growing appreciation that it is because of the SUCI's strong participation and role that the movement could be steered steadfastly in an organized and disciplined manner towards its goal. The role of the SUCI has deeply impressed and influenced the rank and file of the TMC.

The decisive role of our party has become a talking point among the people of the state. And yet, there has been a total blackout of any news at all about the SUCI's role in the mass media. Whatever scanty coverage of our activities that used to creep into the media earlier, is no longer there.

The swelling mass support behind the movement pressurized and ultimately compelled the arrogant chief minister who had repeatedly declared that no land would be returned, to bow down and come to terms with the KJRC. When the state governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi took the initiative to organize meetings

between the government and the KJRC, the government was forced to respond. The meetings started at the Raj Bhavan, Calcutta on 5 September. After a series of meetings and discussions, an accord was reached. Summing up the agreement, the Governor stated: "The government has taken the decision to respond to the demands of those farmers who have not received compensations by means of land to be provided to the maximum within the project area and the rest in adjacent areas as early as possible. Towards this, a committee will be constituted to ascertain the scope and settle the modalities within the period of one week." (The Statesman, 8.9.2008)

Thus the government was compelled, through pressure of movement, to agree in principle to return land to the farmers unwilling to part with their lands, and that too to the maximum extent from the land acquired for the project.

Thus, the Singur movement has won a notable victory. In a statement on 8 September, Comrade Provas Ghosh, member, Central Committee and West Bengal State Secretary of the SUCI, hailed the victory as a historic one that would embolden the forces of mass movement and proved once more

that in the present social system, it is not possible to secure any demand of the people, however legitimate, through parliament, state assembly, legal process and the court of law or the Constitution — it can be secured only through united, sustained, legitimate mass movement.

But ever since the accord was reached, the true character of the CPI(M) started to be revealed again. On the second day of functioning of the committee formed in terms of the accord, its two KJRC members, the MLA from Singur and a convener of the KJRC, after on the spot inspection, identified 300 acres of land within the plant area which could be returned. But the CPI(M) government, in utter disregard of the committee, suddenly declared a package of just 70 acres to be returned along with some cash payments, and the Tatas heartily greeted this package. It appears now that the government has again forsaken the path of negotiated settlement, and, in conjunction with the Tatas, is engaged in a conspiracy to sabotage and flout the accord. The CPI(M), by announcing the programme of a reactionary counter-movement, is moving towards a confrontation. So, the people have to watch out and get prepared to thwart this fresh conspiracy.

SUCI on Delhi serial blasts

SUCI Delhi State Organizing Committee in a statement issued on 14 September, 2008, expressed deep shock and anguish at the successive serial blasts in New Delhi on 13 September causing death of 40 persons and grievous injuries to over 100. Demanding adequate compensation for the victims' families, Committee urged upon the people to maintain peace and harmony and guard the unity of working people against all provocations. .

5th August observed in more states

In the last two issues of *Proletarian Era* we had published reports of observance of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Memorial Day in different states. A few more reports that reached us in the mean time are given below.

UP

Memorial Day of the leaders of the proletariat Comrades Frederick Engels and Shibdas Ghosh was observed in many places of UP. In the meeting held at Sultanpur on 5 August tributes were paid to the great leaders where Comrade V.N. Singh, UP State Secretary of the party was the main speaker.

In Kanpur the Memorial meeting was held on 5 August. At Jaunpur Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Memorial

Day was observed on 10 August in presence of Comrade V.N. Singh and others. Allahabad Unit of the party organised Memorial meeting to observe jointly the death anniversary of Comrades Frederick Engels and Shibdas Ghosh. Similar Memorial meeting was held at Patti in Pratappgarh on 10 August and at Moradabad on 8 August.

Krishnagar District Jail in WB

19 SUCI comrades falsely implicated and sent behind the bars with life term in Krishnagar District jail remembered the great leader of the proletariat on 5 August in a meeting inside the jail compound. Other inmates also attended the Memorial meeting.

Vested interest set to buttress ulterior agenda by raking up emotive issues

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accused it of backtracking. National Conference (NC), the party once headed by late Sheikh Abdullah, the most venerated leader of the valley people, also asked the government to take back the land. However, sensing public mood and as a last ditch attempt to save ministry, Congress announced revocation of the transfer order. But that was of no avail. PDP stuck to its guns and the government collapsed ultimately to make way for president's rule in the state on 10 July. But the RSS-BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal-Shiv Sena combine of Hindu-fundamentalists waiting in the wing for an opportunity to whip up Hindu communal sentiment, seemingly to gain electoral mileage in the imminent assembly poll by creating communal polarization particularly in the Hindu-dominated Jammu area, launched a counter agitation asking for annulling the revocation. In fact, L K Advani, BJP's prime ministerial candidate, is on record to have said in Bhopal that Amarnath Land issue would be major national electoral agenda for BJP. To spearhead the agitation on communal line, Shri Amarnath Yatra Sangharsh Samiti (SAYSS) was formed by the Hindutva zealots. The Samiti announced blockade of Jammu and Kashmir highway, stoppage of petrol supply to Kashmir region and gave call for boycotting Kashmiri handicrafts such as carpets, kurtas (apparel), scarves, shawls, Kashmiri saffron (Kesar), Kashmiri Apricots (Akhrot). In protest against this economic blockade, the Huriyat leaders announced that fruit vendors and other traders would undertake a march to Muzaffarbad in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK). PDP announced that it would join the march. Violence spread further. Curfew was imposed in most parts of the state. Death toll has so far mounted to 50. Two were killed and hundreds injured in the clashes between the police and the agitating mobs in several parts of Jammu. BJP activists were reportedly seen setting residential houses ablaze and attacking scores of members of the Muslim community in Badarwah and other places. Complicity of the administration was glaring when 15 government officials were suspended for inciting public by their provocative statements and

triggering communal clashes. To fish in troubled water, the Pakistani rulers wanted UN to intervene and shed crocodile tears for the hounding of Muslims. Rattled a bit by the situation and fearing isolation from both the Muslim and Hindu masses on the eve of elections, Congress-led central government called an all-party meet to broker peace.

After initial dilly-dally, demands and counter-demands, finally an agreement was reached giving exclusive right to the SASB on 800 kanals (approx. 40.46 hectares) of forestland at Baltal and Domail areas adjacent to the shrine only for use during the pilgrimage season. The proprietary status of the land, however, did not undergo any change. The agreement drew predictable reaction. The *Sangh Parivar* including BJP hailed it with their supporters breaking into impromptu jigs after the announcement. On the contrary, the Huriyat and others rejected the accord stating that it did not concern the Kashmiris who want "*azaadi*". National Conference welcomed the agreement saying that it would bridge the divide between the people of the two regions. But PDP opined that the accord over-ruled the sensitivities of the state's majority community and was "imposed at gunpoint". Thus, though the dispute is posed to have been resolved, emotions still run strong in the entire state with incidents of protest and violence continuing. Police and paramilitary forces continue to use bullets and batons to quell agitators. The Coordination Committee of the separatist-secessionist forces including pro-Pakistan groups had on 8 August last announced a month-long agitation programme. While the situation continues to be explosive, the vote-based political parties instead of addressing the burning problems of life of the valley people with due seriousness are now engaged in a tussle over the schedule of election. BJP, bolstered by the success in fanning up Hindutva sentiment in Jammu over the shrine land question, and the CPI (M) are against any delay in holding the polls. On the other hand, NC and PDP are in favour of postponement of the elections till the situation cools down. Congress who, according to some observers,

hurried through the decision of land transfer to gain in competition with communal BJP over wooing Hindu sentiment, particularly in Jammu area, is now treading middle path by leaving the decision to the Election Commission.

The parties who might have an eye on power by encashing on communal polarization or seeking self-aggrandizement or political career by sustaining tension and keeping people divided might well like to focus on election or secession as the solution of the Kashmir issue. But does the solution really lie in either of that? Is it that the current commotion over shrine land controversy is an isolated one and peace will return to the valley if the said row dies down? No one conversant with the facts of history will be convinced of such easy remedies. They know that the scar created over the years on the Kashmiri psyche through a series of wrong handling and impetuous floating of contentious issues like the present shrine land dispute will not heal with such quackery. That is why, our Central Committee alongside condemning the wanton killings and violence and demanding immediate resolution of the precipitated controversy through intense discussion amongst all political parties and other contending forces and the government, stressed the vital fact that the present conflagration in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be correctly viewed delinked from the unresolved Kashmir problem. Until and unless the fear of the Kashmiri people of losing their autonomy as well as identity and being dispossessed of their rights and land is removed once and for all, the danger of outbreak of such communal conflagration by way of raking up emotive issues can not be wiped off.

Background of the Kashmir problem

To trace the origin of this lingering problem, it is necessary to recollect in brief the history of accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Indian Union and the important happenings thereafter. Jammu and Kashmir, it may be recalled, was accessed to Indian union on 26 October, 1947. Prior to that, it was one of the 562 princely states of different sizes and categories in

undivided Indian sub-continent under British paramountcy. Though a Muslim majority state, it was under the rule of a Hindu king, popularly known as the Maharajah. While under the British colonial rule, the people of various provinces of India in spite of speaking different languages and having cultural diversities were in course of their struggle for independence developing as a nation, the people of Kashmir were not connected with that process. So the sense of oneness that developed among the people inhabiting the Indian territory did not grow among the valley people.

The Jammu and Kashmir people under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah were then fighting the feudal autocracy ruling there. In course of that anti-feudal struggle, a kind of Kashmir identity sense that came to be known as *Kashmiriat* developed in them. This feeling was neither similar to the sense of Indian nationalism nor compatible with the so-called two-nation theory based on religion put forth by the proponents of Pakistan. Rather it used to bear an admiration for the ethos underlying Indian freedom movement. Sheikh Abdullah was man of democratic principles and secular values. He spearheaded the movement for democratic rights of people, founding the Muslim Conference in 1931. He agitated against the rule of the Maharajah and was frequently imprisoned from 1931 for urging self-rule in Kashmir. In order to ensure that this anti-feudal movement of Kashmir people did not get any kind of religious tinge, Sheikh changed the name of his party from Muslim Conference to National Conference (NC) in 1931. While he himself came to India quite a number of times and shared dais with the then Congress leaders to express solidarity with the Indian freedom movement, he also invited the Indian leaders to Kashmir for inspiring the valley people in their fight against feudal autocracy. Thus he maintained close liaison with Indian independence movement and wanted his people to imbibe that spirit. So he could not concur with the concept of a theocratic state that marked Pakistan following vivisection of the country. When the question of accession of Jammu and

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Valley people joined India expecting progress along secular democratic line

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Kashmir with either India or Pakistan arose, he opposed joining Pakistan based on the criteria of the religion of the majority populace. Spurred by liberal democratic values, Sheikh felt natural inclination towards India which declared adherence to secularism. "Secular Democracy..." he reasoned based on his own conception, "...is the bedrock of modern democracy. This should meet the argument that the Muslims of Kashmir cannot have security in India, where the large majority of the populations are Hindus. Any unnatural cleavage between religious groups is the legacy of imperialism, and no modern state can afford to encourage artificial divisions if it is to achieve progress and prosperity. The Indian Constitution has amply and finally repudiated the concept of a religious state, which is a throwback to medievalism, by guaranteeing the equality of rights of all citizens irrespective of their religion, colour, caste and class... The national movement in our State naturally gravitates towards these principles of secular democracy. The people here will never accept a principle which seeks to favour the interests of one religion or social group against another. This affinity in political principles, as well as in past association, and our common path of suffering in the cause of freedom, must be weighed properly while deciding the future of the state. ... Naturally, if we accede to India, there is no danger of a revival of feudalism and autocracy." (*Flames of Chinar*) "Appeal to religion constitutes a sentimental and a wrong approach to the question. Sentiment has its own place in life but often it leads to irrational action.... Any unnatural cleavage between religious groups is the legacy of Imperialism, and no modern State can afford to encourage artificial division if it is to achieve progress and prosperity." (Speech in Constituent Assembly) "So far as Kashmir was concerned, it wanted to preach the mission of secular democracy, both to India and Pakistan".... "There is no Hindu or Muslim question in Kashmir. We do not use such language", said Sheikh way back in 1948. Refuting a third proposition that Jammu and Kashmir should

emerge as an independent state like India and Pakistan, Sheikh in his famous 1951 speech in the Kashmir Constituent Assembly said, "...in considering independence we must not ignore practical considerations. Firstly, it is not easy to protect sovereignty and independence in a small country which has not sufficient strength to defend itself on our long and difficult frontiers bordering so many countries. Secondly we must have the goodwill of all our neighbors. Can we find powerful guarantors among them to pull together always in assuring us freedom from aggression? I would like to remind you that from August 15 to October 22, 1947 our State was independent and the result was that our weakness was exploited by the neighbour with invasion. What is the guarantee that in future too we may not be victims of a singular aggression?"

Thus he could convince the valley people that their betterment lies in accession to India and overcoming strong religious appeal of Pakistan as well as discarding Mounbatten criteria of accession based on religion of the majority of the people, he succeeded in materializing the same. Detailed history apart, Maharajah of Kashmir (that included Jammu as well) at a certain stage of development signed the 'Instrument of Accession' under which the state was granted complete autonomy in deciding all areas except areas of defence, external affairs and communications which were vested with the Indian government. This act of Maharajah was fully and whole-heartedly supported by the National Conference headed by Sheikh Abdullah, the then accredited representative of the valley people. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly held thereafter gave NC absolute majority and Sheikh Abdullah became the Chief Minister. The elected representatives of the Constituent Assembly ratified the accession. So legally, juridically and morally, Jammu and Kashmir became an integral part of India. But Pakistani rulers visibly enraged at this decision, launched military aggression to annex Jammu and Kashmir. But the valiant freedom-loving Kashmiri people under the acclaimed leadership of Sheikh Abdullah were first to resist the

invasion by forming 'people's militia'. They considered this attack to be an attempt to subvert their *azaadi* (freedom) and hence developed strong inhibition against Pakistan. After the invaders were beaten back, affinity towards India became yet stronger. In order to safeguard the special status and autonomy of the state as envisaged in the 'Instrument of Accession' to the fullest extent, allow the valley people to build up their state according to their best traditions and culture, offer fullest cooperation to and seek all necessary assistance from the Indian Union reflecting true spirit of federalism, Article 370 was subsequently incorporated in the Indian Constitution. The special status became synonymous with *azaadi* to the valley people who held that while Pakistan wanted to enslave them, India came forward to defend their freedom. But the trail of events that followed had, instead of honouring the special status in right earnest by providing equal opportunity to the valley people to develop their culture and language and putting in motion the correct scientific process of gradual development of sense of identity with Indian nationality, which was in embryo at the time of accession among the valley people, to facilitate voluntary integration with Indian nation, reversed the direction altogether. Emboldened by the surrender of all residual powers to the Government of India by all other former princely states and their complete merger with the Indian state by either gradual integration with neighbouring provinces or formation of an union of several of them, the Indian ruling class and its most trusted political agent, Congress, tried to force Jammu and Kashmir to accept status of an Indian province forthwith. There was increasing interference with the rights and liberties of the Kashmiris in an unjust, arbitrary and unabashed manner. Naturally, this was resented by Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference. The provisions of Article 370 were being eroded systematically. As trusted representative of the ruling class, Congress was also not free from communal bias and that also worked behind dilution of the special status of Muslim-dominated Kashmir as contained in Article 370. Obviously, this caused grave resentment among

the valley people who began to think of having been let down and betrayed.

The valley people were further hostile when they found Sheikh Abdullah, their most revered leader and architect of the valley's accession to India receiving a raw deal from the Congress government of India. In 1953 when he asked India to grant the promised autonomy to the Kashmir people, the Indian ruling clique understood that with him at the helm of affairs, things would not move as per its design. He was dismissed as Chief Minister by the Central Government in Delhi, replaced by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, one of its stooges and jailed for eleven years, accused of conspiracy against the State in the infamous "Kashmir Conspiracy Case". Immediately after this replacement, Constitution Order 1950 relating to distribution of legislative powers and the three lists (State, Union, and Concurrent) were amended several times in quick succession to enlarge scope of Indian Parliament in framing laws applicable in Jammu and Kashmir. One after another elections were rigged and puppet governments installed. So the valley people started being disillusioned about credibility of the Indian government and a process of alienation set in among them. This encouraged the hitherto subdued communal politics practised by the Islamic fundamentalists and clerics to slowly raise their ugly head. Also a separatist-secessionist tendency that the pro-Pakistan and other subversive forces were fomenting for long gradually began to take root. The slogan of *azaadi* (freedom) floated by the separatist elements many of whom had link with Anglo-American imperialist bloc started finding takers.

Finding the Kashmir problem assuming alarming proportion, the Government of India dropped all charges against Sheikh Abdullah and released him after 11 years of incarceration. After his release, Sheikh instead of militating against the Indian government urged upon it to see reason, honour the dignity and aspiration of the valley people expressed through the status of special autonomy and restore Article 370 to its original form. He also initiated a movement of the

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Kashmir problem aggravated because of neglecting due political process

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Kashmir people on this demand. In an effort to resolve the Kashmir dispute amicably between India, Pakistan and the Kashmiri people, Pandit Nehru, the then Indian Prime Minister tried to enter into some kind of reconciliation with him and sent him to Pakistan in 1964 to hold talks with President Ayub Khan of Pakistan to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution of the Kashmir dispute. But while he was in Pakistan news came of the sudden death of Nehru which halted the process. In 1965, the Pakistani rulers backed by Anglo-American imperialism determined to make this strategically important territory a perpetual trouble-spot, made a second attempt to invade the valley by pushing armed infiltrators through the border and precipitating civil war with their participation. But the brave Kashmir people inspired by Sheikh Abdullah once again stood firm, repelled the attack and foiled the machination.

Our party's analysis of the then situation

At that time, there was an express opinion of many quarters that there should be a legal solution to Kashmir problem. Under the guidance of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our leader, teacher and guide and one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of the era, the Central Committee of the SUCI, refuted this legalistic view on the anvil of logic and reason and taking due cognizance of the 'existing reality'. Our view was categorical. There was no denial of the fact that legally and juridically, Kashmir was an integral part of India. But to accept this position did not ipso facto mean that there could not be any such problem as 'Kashmir problem'. No patriotic and progressive individual, not to speak of the revolutionaries could approach social and political problems strictly in terms of legality alone. We held that it is the political consideration that primarily acts as a driving force in the matter of application of any legal decision. To allow legal position supersede political consideration means refusal to act in conformity with the changing situation and acting as a brake on the course of social progress. So in order that Kashmir problem did not assume alarming proportion in the days to come and

tended to go out of control and above all, in order to act in conformity with the genuine and patriotic interest of the valley people, it was, we felt, highly desirable that government of India should come forward and approach the problem politically, getting completely free from bureaucratic interests. We went on adding that when the existence of a working class party or working class leadership in Kashmir was a far cry even to that day—the only force of that period whose political opinion should be valued most with respect to Kashmir's accession to India was National Conference led by Sheikh Abdullah because it had to its credit the record of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic movements in Kashmir. We stated categorically that from the way Sheikh Abdullah posed the question of self-determination of Kashmir, after he had been freed from jail and before he met Nehru, the then Prime Minister, with the hope of getting the matter solved during Nehru's life time, one thing was apparent. By self-determination he, unlike the separatist forces viz. 'Kashmir Liberation Front', certainly did not mean secession, but meant extension of regional autonomy and a special status for Kashmir within the framework of Indian Constitution and for that matter, if necessary, carrying out certain amendment to the Constitution. He wanted to really depend on the patriotic forces of Kashmir and was ready to solve the problem in consultation with them on the basis of regional autonomy, remaining within Indian Union. Prompt initiative on the part of the Indian government with full confidence in Sheikh's proposal could only disarm Pakistan and the Anglo-American imperialist bloc politically. It was our firm opinion expressed way back in 1964 that restoration of complete autonomy as agreed upon in the Instrument of Accession by Jammu and Kashmir to India and enshrined in the Article 370 of the Constitution of India should constitute the basis for bringing about a just political solution of the Kashmir problem through intense discussion and dialogue among all concerned, and the government of India must pave the way for that by abjuring the path of political as well as military suppression. We urged

upon the Indian government to give up their short-sighted narrow-minded attitude and act with calm confidence to allow the government of Jammu and Kashmir enjoy extended regional autonomy consistent with the principle of self-determination remaining as an integral part of India.

Denial of self-autonomy to valley people

But the scapegrace will never heed to reason! The government of India persistently went on betraying an intransigent and arrogant attitude towards Kashmir issue and resorted to muscle power to tame the valley people. It completely ignored the suggestion of Sheikh Abdullah and did not refrain from harassing and coercing him. Incidentally, even at a convention in 1970, he scolded a member, Ali Shah, for advocating accession to Pakistan. "He must be prepared to concede the same right to his Hindu neighbour if he believes his salvation lies in joining with India." There must be no partition. "Kashmir is homeland of us all, whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Buddhists." While consistently fighting all such hostile and separatist-sectarian views, he in 1972 repeatedly voiced the opinion that restoration of Article 370 to pre-1953 form should be the focal point to be recognized for resolving Kashmir problem. Without having even slightest of antipathy, he wrote, "My comrades felt that we could not continue to hitch our wagon to a country in which we were treated so badly. I told them that we were wedded to certain ideals; so long as India propagated those we could not snap our ties. The ideals of socialism, secularism and democracy have no place in Pakistan. We must stay with India and continually work towards our goals." (*Flames of Chinar*) Yet good sense did not prevail over the Indian rulers. For normalizing the situation in the region, he came to an accord with Indira Gandhi, then India's Prime Minister, in 1974 for granting the valley people the right to self rule by a democratically elected government as envisaged under Article 370 rather than the puppet government which till then ruled the state. In this agreement also, a substantial portion of original Article 370 was not restored. He assumed the position of Chief

Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately the Central Government and the ruling Congress Party withdrew its support, so that the State Assembly had to be dissolved and mid term elections called. The National Conference won an overwhelming majority in the subsequent elections and reelected him as the Chief Minister. He remained as Chief Minister till his death in 1982. During his brief tenure as Chief Minister he tried to develop close ties between the three regions of the state namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

What happened after the death of Sheikh Abdullah in 1982 was further damaging to the prevailing psyche of the Kashmiris severely aggrieved over the sordid state of affairs. Farooq Abdullah, his son who took over the leadership of NC, departed from the line pursued by his father, adopted pro-capitalist outlook and began toeing the line of the Indian government. So he became a tyrant in the eyes of the people and the valley people began distancing from NC. He also entered into a coalition with the Congress. The election to the State Assembly that followed was rigged in favour of the Congress whose leader Indira Gandhi even managed to secure the backing of the RSS. Forces like National Conference which once had almost sway over cross section of the people, could not carry the people with them and began to lose base. So whatever little scope the valley people had to reflect their voice on the floor of the Assembly through their elected representative was severely curtailed, if not scuttled. Thus all democratic means to ventilate their views, ideas and opinions were virtually closed before the valley people.

Factors that helped things to worsen

So we have seen that by constantly refusing to give due cognizance to the aspect of ensuring full autonomy to the valley people as envisaged in Article 370, the Indian bourgeois government trampled underfoot the most legitimate aspiration of the valley people. On the contrary, by making a mockery of the political process and somehow forcing them accept the status of a full-fledged province

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Ugly rise of rabid communalism made menacing impact on valley situation

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of Indian union, the valley people were pushed to a feeling of having been thoroughly betrayed. Their disillusionment in this regard was further amplified when they found that the government instead of a peaceful political solution of the problem opted for a militarist approach to handle the situation. Indian military and para-military forces in the name of combating terrorism, controlling militancy and suppressing insurgency, have practically unleashed a reign of terror killing and torturing innocent people, torching villages after villages, raping and molesting women and looting properties. As stated earlier, a brutal state terrorism has been let loose to bully the people to submission.

The next factor that has menacingly impacted the Kashmir situation and contributed significantly towards its rapid deterioration is the unabashed rise and spread of rabid Hindu communalism throughout India since independence. Owing to definite historic-political reason, the process of democratization of Indian society through necessary social and cultural revolutions was left incomplete. So though politically the Indian people have achieved independence, they have remained divided, socially and culturally, into different communities centring religion, caste, language, race, ethnicity and so forth. This has provided a fertile ground for the anti-people forces to carry out their sinister activities in the post-independence period. And the worst victim has been the Muslims. They were subjected to harsh political discrimination, tormenting social persecution and utter neglect by the ruling class and its servitors. Their desolation was further enhanced and security seriously threatened because of the heinous role of the Hindutva zealots. Under the umbrella of RSS and its associate outfits, these arch communalists have been on a spree to administer communal venom particularly anti-Muslim hatred in the minds of the majority people. As a result, there have been repeated attacks on the life and livelihood of the Muslim minorities under this or that pretext. There has not been a single year when planned attacks including killings were not perpetrated on

them. The country has been witness to horrific carnages like the widespread anti-Muslim violence in the post-Babri Masjid demolition period and the recent Gujarat pogrom. Hardly any culprit responsible for such attacks and massacres has been arrested and punished. The role of the Congress-led Indian government has been despicable in this regard. On one hand, it did not adopt necessary measures to foster desired economic development of the relatively backward Muslim community. On the contrary, it practically remained an indulging onlooker to if not on many occasions conniving with all such criminal activities of the communal Hindutva brigade. In fact the strategy of Congress has been to exploit the sense of insecurity and fear so generated among the Muslim minorities by posing itself as their messiah and using them as vote banks.

Obviously, these have had grave impact on the people of Jammu and Kashmir who expected that Indian authority would guarantee the equality of rights of all citizens irrespective of their religion, colour and class. They once heard from Sheikh Abdullah that to realize "fullest equality and self-determination to raise ourselves and our children forever from the abyss of oppression and poverty, degradation and superstition, from medieval darkness and ignorance, into the sunlit valleys of plenty, ruled by freedom, science and honest toil, in worthy participation of the historic resurgence of the peoples of East, and the working masses of the world, and in determination to make this our country a dazzling gem on the snowy bosom of Asia," they have to be "proud to have their bonds with India," whose Constitution is 'bedrock of modern democracy' and "The Indian National Congress has consistently supported the cause of the State's peoples' freedom." That is why, overcoming religious affinity with Pakistan, they had consented to accession to India. Now when they find things moving the other way, it can well be imagined what pernicious effect it could have on them.

Though the exact character and modalities of capitalist exploitation are not very clear to the valley people, yet it is a stark reality that

they like the toiling masses of other parts of the country are crushed under the grinding wheel of that. Over and above, they are plagued by growing military assault and rising communalism and above all crest-fallen because of a shattered dream. Accumulated effect of all this has made them increasingly feel a sense of alienation from India. In desperation to seek some relief, some abatement, they, in absence of correct socio-political guideline, are falling into the clutches of divisive-parochial-chauvinist forces. What could be more tragic than this particularly for a section of people who once resolved to progress along secular democratic path braving all odds and foiling all intrigues of reaction.

Tracing the path of a just solution

This in brief is the perspective in which the situation of Jammu and Kashmir has taken such serious a turn. The problem no doubt has become awfully complicated and delicate warranting extremely careful handling. May be it will take much time to resolve it fully. But efforts must continue for that with utmost patience. But in order to ease the volcanic situation to a certain extent, it is imperative to undertake certain measures without any further delay keeping in mind of course the backdrop and taking due cognizance of the current state of affairs. It obviates to say that given the condition obtaining now, any incorrect step, adventurism or flexing of muscle will not only not beget any redress but allow the problem to aggravate further. Since things have turned so serious because of the wrongdoings and wrong handling by the Indian government, the primary responsibility of remedying the problem lies with it. And if there is a will on the part of the government, rolling out the remedial process is no difficult a task.

To begin with, the government of India apart from immediate restoration of Article 370 in its original form as stated above, must stop state terrorism, must take upon itself with due sincerity and seriousness the task of creating an atmosphere conducive to ending all military operation in the valley and restoring normalcy by way of initiating meaningful dialogue

involving all concerned and making honest endeavour to win back confidence of the valley people nurturing injured feeling and mired in disillusionment. They must be assured that their legitimate economic and political rights will not only be curtailed any more but the lost ones will be reinstated. Their fear of being dispossessed of land right must be removed. They should also be convinced by demonstration that the administration not only in Jammu and Kashmir but throughout the country will function in a non-partisan way reflecting true secular outlook. Administrative neutrality must be ensured. Everywhere, the government must take stern measures to stop the heinous activities of the arch communal-fundamentalist elements of all hues that are holding the whole country into ransom.

However, it should not be that difficult for any discerning person to understand that the Indian bourgeois government will not concede to these demands so easily. Hence, it is essential to create strong public opinion in support of these demands and build up powerful movement to compel the government accede to the same. As we have discussed above, to control and mitigate the unrest engulfing the entire valley, the growing communal frenzy tearing apart the country must be stopped. But that cannot be done simply by expressing some pious wishes, issuing benign statements or temporarily preventing known communal parties from assuming power as is sought to be impressed by the pseudo-Marxists and other compromising political forces. It requires concerted people's action, powerful assertion of people's power. To respond to this call of the hour in right earnest, we exhort the people of India to come forward and release on the edifice of higher ethics and culture a mighty united democratic mass movement on the burning problems of life stemming from the decadent moribund capitalist system in operation. This movement will foster a spirit of cooperation and friendship among the toiling masses irrespective of caste, creed, religion or ethnicity and generate a sense of oneness in them. The cultural milieu of this

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Solution ought to be found through dialogue in congenial peaceful environment

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movement will be conducive to eradicate all kinds of warped mindset and divisive mentalities that the ruling class and its servitors are increasingly injecting. Alongside this, a fierce ideological struggle must be released right from the grassroots level against communalism. These twin movements will work as a bulwark against all shades of communalism-fundamentalism disturbing growth of desired unity of the oppressed against the oppressor and facilitate development of common cause among the exploited people irrespective of their geographic location.

Our fervent appeal to the suffering people of Jammu and Kashmir is that they should also join this movement and extend the same to their state as well so that the communal-fundamentalist forces who are disrupting people's unity there, can be thwarted and crushed. Again it is also pertinent to realize that if communalism is not inflicted a decisive blow, it will also not be possible for the valley people to preserve the unity among themselves. Moreover, it may endanger even the geographic integrity of Jammu and Kashmir. At the same time, they also need to understand that like the Indian people, they are also victims of ruthless capitalist exploitation. Hence, they ought to make common cause with the anti-capitalist movements wherever and to whatever extent surging forth in India. We also like to add in this regard that history or historic reality cannot be wished away. Historically, as matters stand now, Jammu and Kashmir is very much an integral part of India. Hence, as it is of importance for them to forge stronger unity with toiling people of India, it is also equally important for them to understand that in realizing all other legitimate demands of theirs raised from the perspective of bringing about a peaceful solution of the Kashmir problem, securing support and sympathy of the Indian masses is *sine qua non*.

In this connection, we would like to say a few words about the slogan of *azaadi* being raised by different quarters in the valley. *Azaadi* in true connotation of the

term is emancipation from all sorts of exploitation, whether feudal, capitalist or imperialist-colonialist. The valley people are well aware that the people of the sub-continent fought bravely against foreign imperial domination to free their motherland. So many precious lives were sacrificed, so much blood was shed, so many mothers lost their children, so many women embraced widowhood. The objective was to be freed from the shackles of all exploitation. But the desired freedom did not come about. Instead, one exploitative regime was replaced by another in both parts of the partitioned country. It happened so because the fighting people of Indian subcontinent were not in possession of necessary political

consciousness that could unfold the true concept of freedom to them and guide them to conduct their struggle along the correct course to achieve that. The lesson of this tragedy demands forestalling any more recurrence. So if *azaadi* from all exploitations of man by man is to be achieved, then all the toiling masses irrespective of religion, caste or ethnicity are to be united on the platform of struggle fostered by correct political consciousness and in course of that, appropriate leadership must be developed to take the struggle to its logical culmination. Otherwise, it will not be possible to avoid another tragic end of the endeavour. We would urge upon the valley people to seriously ponder over this

question.

Similarly, the toiling people of Pakistan should also understand that the Kashmir problem can not be remedied by pursuing a military approach which only leads to bloodbath, precipitation of disaffection and disharmony and is doomed to failure. We urge upon them to exert necessary pressure on their government to give up hawkish militarism and come forward to arrive at a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir problem. As vanguard of the Indian proletariat, SUCI is committed to stand by the just struggle of the valley people in fraternity with the legitimate class and mass struggles of the toiling people of both India and Pakistan.

Singur Day observed on 5th September in different states



KARNATAKA



TAMIL NADU



UTTAR PRADESH



ANDHRA PRADESH



GUJARAT



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