

# Captivity of Mutual Hatred

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Over several decades, India and Pakistan have built their politics regarding Kashmir on one or the other legal instrument though none of the countries used those instruments to initiate arbitration. Pakistan emphasised the right to self-determination and called Kashmir its life blood. India decried cross-border terrorism claiming the territory was its integral part. The arguments from both sides rested on territorial claims and aggression on other's part more than their engagement on principles of ethics, human rights or well-being of the people of Kashmir. Even when these higher principles got mentioned, the indulgences of both countries delegitimised them before the world conscience and independent opinion which ultimately treated both with equal dismay.

In the recent experience, India lost moral ground due the atrocities in Kashmir valley though the situation hardly strengthened Pakistan's position. Because the struggle in Indian-controlled Kashmir is partly armed, politically, a losing strategy. (The maximum that armed struggles in contemporary times produced was illusionary independence). Secondly, Pakistan's internal power dynamics and policies have left Pakistan with a few allies, which is unfavourable for an amicable settlement.

Kashmir may have been a starting point in the conflict(s) between India and Pakistan however the gravest of issue today may be that the public opinion in both countries has become subservient to mutual hatred which blocks any healthy policy initiatives.

The officially patronised inter-country hostility in both countries is woven into intra-country hostility towards the minority communities. While India can boast of maintaining secular laws and no restrictions on religion, Pakistan has loads of legislation that discriminates on the basis of religion hence the Indian apologists continuously accuse Pakistan of being the epicentre of religious intolerance in the region. On the other side, the marginalisation of religious minorities in India suggests that social hostility against the smaller groups must have been driven by factors as gruesome as official discrimination. A parallel exists in the fact that loyalty of Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India is questioned frequently.

Anyone watching the situation closely would know that this social hostility on the basis of religion has a ping-pong effect that has generally increased since independence. Incidents of violence in one country provoked similar reactions in the other country, which inspired poet Fahmida Riaz to question whether these were two different nations at all? (Poem: Tum bilkul hum jaisy niklay).

Religio-nationalistic sentiments cultivated through propaganda organs, textbooks and media in both countries have turned the political constituency of the past into agencies in the form of organisations that specialise in mongering religious hatred. Now, there are economic and political gains attached to social discrimination against smaller religious group which Kashmiris happen to be in India. The incentivised hatred formed a demand and supply relationship, thus became self-sustaining.

No surprise that the two countries have found containing violent religio-political groups difficult. The capacity of these organisations to inflict violence against common citizens remains to date.

So, how will the miseries of the people of Kashmir, India and Pakistan end? It will depend on the quality and amount of efforts put together by the politicians, intelligentsia, civil society and media to alter the course of enslavement to hatred. Otherwise, the current crisis might deepen the hostility that sustains sufferings of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and human rights abuses in both countries.

Now and then, the leaders in both countries seem to realise the gravity of the situation. While in opposition they are tempted to benefit from cultivated hatred but find themselves its hostage when in power. The politicians need to befriend empathetic and independent opinion to find a peaceful resolve to the issue of Kashmir which has since long been instrumentalised to cultivate communal hatred on both sides. The leadership of Kashmiris, the main victims of a dangerous enterprise of the religio-ethno-nationalistic hatred, need to stand up and condemn violence in their name besides the violence against them.

Nations that progressed on the ladder of democracy, prosperity and respect for rights, had to enable themselves simultaneously to live with religious, racial and ethnic diversities. South Asians also need to open their hearts and minds to offer hope to the people suffering from hatred and forms of violence in the region. A mindset change alone can bring peace, particularly in Kashmir which has bled, cried and mourned enough.

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