

Rapprochement between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims

Interaction with a group of Pandits: Jammu

Dt 11 February, 2012-02-18

About fifteen leading Pandits from different vocations represented a cross-section of those who had to leave their homes in the Kashmir Valley, suffered and witnessed terror, violence, displacement and communalization. The pangs of the severance of their umbilical cord with Kashmir, not with the land alone but with the people and social culture, is palpable as they talk with optimism of the possibilities of rapprochement between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits., almost as a statement of faith in their age-old relationship, the famed Kashmiri plurality, *Kashmiriyat*. At times their words convey more than what they speak – the undying urge to go back where the home is. Though many of them may have built their houses and settled out side of Kashmir, only Kashmir invokes the sense of home, roots and belongingness.

This group holds that rapprochement is possible and those who see it as an impossibility only exaggerate the fact of distancing between the Muslims and the Pandits of Kashmir. On the contrary, there has never been a break in interaction, communication and social relationship. The level of trust has gone up. Mutual family friendships and relationships on both the sides are evident at the time of social and family events and ceremonies. Two thousand odd Pandit boys and girls who got the jobs last year, in 2011, in Kashmir have, most of them, stayed in the families of their erstwhile Muslim friends or neighbours. Similarly, when the *Darbar* (the Government of J&K) moves to Jammu in the winter, many of Muslim government servants stay with the families of their Pandit friends in Jammu. Many a Muslims go to Jammu to see their Pandit friends; and, many a Pandits go to Kashmir to see their Muslim friends. Hurriyat leaders like Shri Gilani and Yasin Malik have welcomed the return of Pandits. There have been some efforts in the past, e.g in 2005. There is also PM's package, though some of them do have some strong reservations about it. Some of them feel that Pandits will go back individually, as individually they had come away, irrespective of GoI's schemes and packages.

The salient points:

- Closeness between both the communities of Kashmir is an underlying fact
- There are three aspects to the question of rapprochement between the Pandits and the Muslims of Kashmir: One, what are the apprehensions; second, the role of the Govt; and third, the role of civil society.
- There are apprehensions, and legitimately so. They are about both physical and economic security. Pandits being a miniscule minority, it is upon the majority community of Kashmir to make them feel physically, communally and socially

secure. The initiative must come from them. Pandits have no power to decide to go back and be secure

- Pandits also recognize that Pakistan is a de facto party to the whole issue.
- There is a sense of mistrust about “agencies” of the GoI, as off course about the role and ‘agencies’ of Pakistan
- The group recognizes that there are common sufferings. There are widows, half-widows and missing people on this side (Jammu region) too. “At least we can share our pains.”
- Pandits do feel that the historical baggage needs to be left behind in favour of creating conditions for reconciliation and rapprochement.
- It is a big problem as to how to motivate younger generation. There is a clear generation-gap on this issue, because the younger generation is settled out side, married in different communities and in different parts of the country. They don’t want to go back.
- However, beyond the practical and pragmatic aspects, there is a deeper cultural aspect. Only Kashmir gives meaning to being a Pandit. Pandit without the soil of Kashmir, its people, is anything but a Pandit.... He/she is just a Hindu. Loss of identity is unacceptable. The apprehensions about the eventual extinction of the community of Kashmiri Pandits is a nightmare to many.
- One of the impediments to progress in the direction of rapprochement is divisions within the Pandit community; politicisation and communalization of the problem and the process; and lack of leadership, or, rather too many of it. Pandits need to reduce differences among them if the future of the community matters.
- They feel that non-partisan civil society has an important role to play here.

The meeting was Chaired by Gen(Rtd) Dhar, an elder Kashmiri Pandit. The group was convened by J&K Thinkers’ Forum on behalf of Swarah Peeth. Sh Rajiv Vora, Dr Niru Vora and Sh Shibhan Koul of the Swarajpeeth Core Group for Gandhian Initiative in J&K held consultations with the group of eminent Pandits.



Meeting with Relief (Migration) Commissioner Shri Vinod Kaul took place in his office on the 13th Feb. He briefed us about the schemes for rehabilitation of displaced Pandits.

Meeting with Shri Yasin Malik (Chairman, JKLF)

13 Feb 2012



Shri Yasin Malik holds vital position in any process of rapprochement between Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, and in return of Pandits to the Kashmir Valley. Explaining various issues relate with the question, its sensitive dimensions, particularly the role of the Govts of India and Pakistan, he wished Swarajpeeth could play its role as a Gandhian non-partisan organization . Many of the points made by Shri Malik were coincidentally common with with the points made by group of Pandits. However, being what he is and the vital place that he occupies in the making and mending of the problem, what he said and suggested has a sense of authenticity. He has earned reputation for being the one responsible for the turn from violence to nonviolence within the rank and file of JKLF, the largest of the militant armed group. He presents himself as sincere promoter of the cause of the Pandits and their return; and, representing a non-communal liberal Islamic line of thinking. He has visited Pandit families in camps and gained positive appreciation of many of them he said.

Shri S K Koul (Shiban Koul) a leading advocate of rapprochement organized the meeting.

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