**Kashmir Symbol of multiculturalism**

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February 23, 2021

Kashmir is internationally recognised as a disputed territory whose final status is yet to be determined by the people. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons and have fought three wars during the past 73 years. This is a matter that urgently needs to be put on a road to find a just and viable solution.

Any effort to resolve the conflict requires confronting the issue directly and honestly, and that is something that seems difficult for the Government of India to do. India does not want to resolve the Kashmir conflict but to dissolve it. India wants the Kashmir issue to be buried under the rug when the issue is raised in the international community by alleging that it is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and no one else’s business. It could be strictly a bilateral issue if forthrightness was involved.

It may also be mentioned here that India presents a wholly false picture of the situation in Kashmir. The agenda of the Indian government and its various mouthpieces to mislead the public about the conflict in and about Kashmir continues unimpeded.

[Former Scotland defender Gordon McQueen diagnosed with dementia](https://nation.com.pk/24-Feb-2021/former-scotland-defender-gordon-mcqueen-diagnosed-with-dementia)

New Delhi has tried to weave a smokescreen with some unfounded myths, which seek to discredit the genuine struggle of the people. But these ploys will never be able to cover up the reality and sufferings of people in Jammu and Kashmir. India has particularly failingly tried to equate Kashmiri people with fundamentalism. I want to debunk this myth created by India that Kashmir is an issue of fundamentalism.

The term fundamentalism is quite inapplicable to the Kashmiri society. A hallmark of Kashmir has been its long tradition of tolerance, amity, good will, and friendships across religious and cultural boundaries. It has a long tradition of moderation and non-violence. Its culture does not generate extremism or fundamentalism. Its five chief religious groups; Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and tiny minority of Christians—have for centuries flourished in harmony and mutual bond: no religious ghettoes; no religious apartheid; no economic or sharp cultural divides. All religious persuasions rejoiced at each other’s holidays and times of joy, attended social gatherings together, lived as neighbours in harmony and treasured their mutual trust.

[Barca need to cut out errors to have title chance: Koeman](https://nation.com.pk/24-Feb-2021/barca-need-to-cut-out-errors-to-have-title-chance-koeman)

The various faiths of Kashmir eschew fanatical or extremist dogmas that distort and debauch their doctrinal origins. Tolerance and mutual respect are their watchwords. For example, Kashmiri Sikhs feature no antagonism towards other religions. Indeed, their trust in Muslims is so strong that they have refused bribes from the Indian army to blame Muslims for the killings of 36 Sikhs at Chittisinghpura, Kashmir on March 20, 2000 during President Bill Clinton’s visit to New Delhi that had been covertly organised by the Indian military itself.

Kashmir has been haloed as the land of saints. Its culture celebrates diversity, and Kashmir has been the confluence of a rich mixture of philosophies and ways of life that merge without losing their distinct identities.

Here are few latest shining examples of diversity in Kashmir.

Daily Kashmir Observer reported that Muslims helped a Hindu family in the cremation process of a man who died in the Maisuma area of Srinagar city on February 8, 2021. According to reports, one Rakesh Kumar breathed his last on Monday. Muslim neighbours arranged everything required for the cremation process. Locals said they arranged a priest and shouldered the dead body up to the cremation ground.

[Sardar Masood asks Pakistani youth to fight Kashmir case](https://nation.com.pk/24-Feb-2021/sardar-masood-asks-pakistani-youth-to-fight-kashmir-case)

India’s leading newspaper, Hindustan Times reported on May 1, 2020. Muslim men help Hindu man’s kin conduct his funeral rites in north Kashmir’s Uri. Due to the lockdown, the relatives of the deceased could not reach the place for his funeral and no vehicle was available to carry the body to the cremation ground. Members of the Muslim community helped in performing the last rites of their Hindu neighbour (54-year-old Shekhar Kumar) in north Kashmir’s Uri town amid the nationwide lockdown. Deceased’s son Ghautam Kumar said that the Muslim community has always helped them in tough times. ‘It was not possible to perform my father’s last rites without their support,’ he said.

India’s another daily, The Hindu, reported on June 5, 2020. “Local Muslims made special arrangements to perform the last rites (of Mrs. Rani Bhat—a Hindu). Firewood was arranged for cremation. The body was also shouldered by Muslims. “It’s our duty to ensure that we are with our Pandit neighbours in thick and thin,” Abdul Qadir, a Muslim villager, said.

[UK, US to achieve herd immunity in 2021, but not EU: Report](https://nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2021/uk-us-to-achieve-herd-immunity-in-2021-but-not-eu-report)

Joginder Singh Raina of the All Party Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC) said “Kashmir is about Kashmiriyat which means brotherhood…Sikhs settled in the city during the turmoil but never went away but now Kashmiri Pandits should also come and live together like us.”

I believe the best solution to this dilemma is that the Pandit brethren should return to the Valley and the majority community must open their hearts and minds in order to give them moral support and a sense of security. The rights and culture of Kashmiri Pandits must be respected and protected at all costs.

Dr. Syed Nazir Gilani, President, JKCHR has expressed the sentiments of the majority community in these words. “My teachers at the Higher Secondary School, College and at the University were Kashmiri Pandits. Men and women of great character and stature. Many close friends were Kashmiri Pandits. They would let me into their homes except their kitchen. It did not bother me. The trusting atmosphere was overwhelming and I did not have time to consider the merits of ‘kitchen’ being a no-go area. I felt sorry for their exodus in 1990. The sense of glee and emotion is uncontrollable, whenever a Kashmiri Pandit visits his or her home in Kashmir. Therefore, I raised the issue of their rights at the UN Human Rights Commission and Sub Commission in Geneva.”

[Pakistan to further strengthen bilateral ties with Sri Lanka: FM](https://nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2021/pakistan-to-further-strengthen-bilateral-ties-with-sri-lanka-fm)

The people of Kashmir are fully aware that the settlement of the Kashmir dispute cannot be achieved in one move. Like all qualified observers, they visualise successive steps or intermediate solutions in the process. It is one thing, however, to think of a settlement over a relatively extended period of time. It is atrociously different to postpone the beginning of the process on that account.

The people of Kashmir do not wish anybody to take a partisan side. Kashmiris are convinced, nevertheless, that impartial observers would support the Kashmir cause based on universal principles, democratic values, rule of law and international justice. It is high time that all concerned parties—India, Pakistan and the Kashmiri leadership—sit together and chalk out a strategy for the sake of peace and stability in the region of South Asia. Because ultimately, the negotiations, not violence, is the only way to resolve the Kashmir conflict, and that Kashmiris cannot be excluded from the negotiating table if a peace process is to be serious, meaningful and result-oriented.

The Biden administration faces two options with regard to Kashmir. First, it can continue the Trump administration policy of ignoring the Kashmiri dispute while warning India and Pakistan against going to war with each other. Besides condoning the atrocities being committed in Kashmir, this policy rests on a tacit agreement between India and Pakistan that war between them is unacceptable. With the growth of a fascist ruling party in India, however, such an agreement is extremely vulnerable. The prospect of a nuclear exchange in the subcontinent, which contains a fifth of the world’s population, cannot be dismissed in the event of an outbreak of hostilities.

The second US option is to play a more activist mediating role by initiating a new peace process for Kashmir. This could take the shape of a quadrilateral dialogue involving the US, India, Pakistan and Kashmir, or an appropriate use of the new mechanisms and abilities of the United Nations. In either case, the US would supply the necessary catalyst for a settlement.

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