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Report – Seminar

“Hindu Nationalism and the Kashmir Dispute”

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The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a seminar titled “*Hindu Nationalism and the Kashmir Dispute*” on October 17, 2019. Speakers at the seminar included: Dr. Mujeeb Afzal, Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations at Quaid-e-Azam University; Lt. Gen. Asif Yasin Malik (Retd.), Former Secretary Defense and Ambassador Muhammad Saeed Khalid. Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, Coordinator Kashmir Cell, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also addressed the gathering as a Keynote Speaker. The panel discussion was chaired by Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI.

The Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, welcomed the guests. He stated that the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A by Indian Prime Minister Modi is the fulfillment of a long ideological yearning under the Hindutva ideology promoted by the RSS, to make a predominantly homogeneous Hindu nation to the detriment of Muslim and other minorities of India. It is an attempt by BJP government of establishing “Akhand Bharat”, and Kashmir seems to be the first step in the Hindutva ideology being promoted by Prime Minister Modi and BJP. In the lead-up to the August 5, 2019 move which stripped the Indian Occupied Kashmir of its relative independence and placed it under the direct rule of the central government in New Delhi, India sent thousands of additional troops to the disputed region, imposed a crippling curfew, shut down telecommunications and internet, and arrested political leaders. All this has put India’s secular credentials in question.

Ambassador Chaudhry stated that the implications of the August 5 actions by the Indian government can be examined from various dimensions; legal, demographic, economic, and military perspectives. Under International Law as embodied in the relevant UN resolutions and the bilateral agreements, especially Simla Agreement, India cannot change the status of the disputed territory. He stressed that the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A by the Indian government is a clear violation of UNSC resolutions on the Kashmir dispute and Simla Agreement. He pointed out that the abrogation of Article 35A has opened the door for Indians from anywhere in the country to settle in Kashmir. This seems to be a deliberate move to change the demography of Indian Occupied Kashmir and undermine the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination. The lockdown of Kashmir has severely hampered economic activity in the area. There are different estimates reported in the media that India’s actions in Kashmir have caused a loss of more than \$1 billion over the past two months.¹The lockdown has rendered more than 50,000 workers jobless in the carpet industry alone. As per industry experts, Srinagar’s almost 1,000 iconic houseboats have been running empty due to absence of tourists.²The complete lockdown of the Kashmir Valley has subjected the Kashmiris to immense psychological pressure in order to suppress their freedom struggle. India has moved thousands of its troops to Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) in addition to 700,000 troops that were already

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49956960>

² Ibid.

deployed in the region. He was of the opinion that given the scale of what's happening in India, the international reaction is far too little. This has emboldened the Modi regime to continue with its heavy-handedness in IOK.

Dr. Mujeeb Afzal, presented his views on 'Hindu Nationalism and the Myth of Secular India'. He stated that secularism is a materialist phenomenon in which human interaction should be governed by objective reasoning alone. In secularism, individuals are free when it comes to matters of religion, while states are neutral in religious matters and have the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to its citizens without discrimination. He pointed out that liberty, equality and neutrality is essential for any secular state. Indian culture consists of core Hindu values and a mix of traditions borrowed from other cultures. He explained that secularism by Indian definition was seen as religious tolerance and equal treatment of all religions. He informed the gathering that till 1976, the word 'secular' was not part of the Indian Constitution. It was made part of the Indian Constitution through the 42nd Amendment. However, secularism has been used as a tool by various leaders to pursue their own interests. Nehru used it by stating that Muslims and other minorities will be given equal opportunities – their honor and faith will be protected. But simultaneously, he promoted Hindu tradition, values and Hindi language over Urdu language and banned cow slaughter. So there was high level of secular narrative at the national level, but at constituency level, Hindu nationalists within Indian National Congress pursued the policy of Hindu communalism. During Indira Gandhi's period, a policy of both majority and minority communalism was pursued. Aligarh University was given the status of a Muslim university; Bharat Mata Mandir was inaugurated by Indira Gandhi herself to win over the hearts of nationalists. Her own assassination was the reaction of this dual policy. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi also continued this duality by promoting communalism on both sides.

Dr. Afzal stated that BJP describes secularism as a western concept that is alien to the Indian tradition and is a process to re-enslave India to the West and they call it "pseudo secularism". They believe that it is an attempt to deprive the rights of the majority community in order to appease the minority and develop a minority vote bank for the Congress. So this pseudo secularism was made part of the Congress policy and appeasement of Muslims minorities was promoted. While RSS through Sangh Parivar initially as Bharatiya Jana Sangh later as Bharatiya Janata Party and its leaders like Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal came up with an alternative policy of creating a Hindu majoritarianism that is sensitive to the Hindu causes and responds to the Hindu demands. He believes that BJP wants to replace the Indian majoritarianism secular state that has relative space for the minorities with a Hindu majoritarian state. He then went on to explain how India is moving towards Hindu majoritarianism which now is being supported by the rising capitalist class of India.

He pointed out that under the BJP rule, minorities especially Muslims, are being marginalized. They are accused of cow slaughter and are attacked by vigilantes. Forced

conversions are being promoted under the scheme of Ghar Wapsi. BJP has appointed Hindu communalist like Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister, and similarly heads of other important institutions are appointed from the RSS. Modi himself is the *parcharak* of RSS. He highlighted that the BJP government is actively involved in rewriting the history; it is changing the names of cities with Muslim names like Allahabad to Prayagraj, made triple *Talaq* illegal, and recently revoked Article 370 and Article 35A depriving the Kashmiris of their special status. Hence, if this process continues, even Congress will be marginalized and Indian secularism will be a victim of it. More essentially, India has constructed an identity that exists in duality. That duality is under threat. If you accept it you will be part of it, if you do not accept you will be subordinated to this larger identity of Hindu India.

Lt. Gen. Asif Yasin Malik gave a presentation on 'Fascist Leaders: Future of BJP?'. He stated that India was never a secular state it was a veneer that came off. While discussing the origin and history of BJP, Gen. Malik stated that BJP advocated *Hindutva* ("Hindu-ness"), an ideology that sought to define Indian culture in terms of Hindu values, and is highly critical of the secular policies. The RSS presents itself as a cultural, not a political organization that nevertheless advocates a Hindu nationalistic agenda under the banner of *Hindutva*. The RSS has historically played a major role in the Hindu nationalist movement. On several occasions, it has been banned by the Indian government, led by the Congress Party, for its alleged role in communal violence. Some of the major political leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party like Narendra Modi were or still are members of the RSS.

While discussing the future of BJP and India, he stated that all radical concepts and thoughts have a limited shelf life and do not develop into a sustainable practical system. In fact, it transforms into a counter-movement. He was of the opinion that BJP's hardline policies will unite opposing forces and create political space for them to contest elections and in better numbers. It is likely that 2023 elections may turn the tables. He was of the view that the BJP/RSS/Modi movement has already laid the foundations for disintegration of the Indian Union.

Gen. Malik stated that the August 5 move of the Indian government will transform the peaceful political struggle of the Kashmiris into an 'Intifada'. He said that Kashmir's history can be divided into three phases. Phase I - 1947-1970s, Phase II – 1970s-2000s, and Phase III- 2000s-2019, and with the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A Phase IV has just begun. He pointed out that 60% Kashmiri population is under 35 years of age and is educated. This is the lot who led and undertook the peaceful stone pelting struggle against a million strong security forces. They have been forced to review their struggle in view of blatant rape, murder and plunder in the streets of Kashmir.

He was of the opinion that the emerging environment post lifting of curfew, will set the tone for an armed struggle which in turn will lead to a Palestine like situation or even

worse. Such a development will have greater consequences for Pakistan than for Kashmiris, as it will unleash a campaign against Pakistan on a well-beaten track of being sponsor of terrorism and instrumental in physically supporting violence in Kashmir. He stated that most of the global community is likely to stand with India on this issue. This will challenge Pakistan's capacity to meet such a hostile onslaught and present a plausible, realistic counter narrative absolving us of such allegations.

Gen. Malik opined that as far as the rest of India is concerned, there is likelihood of a fillip to nearly 17 trouble spots out of which five are conducive for and are facing separatist struggles. He was of the view that Pakistan's diplomatic and information campaign should not only cater to Kashmiri struggle, but also play a role in those five separatist movements going on in India. For this purpose, a Kashmir Cell should be established in the PM Secretariat. This cell should have a broad spectrum constitution from various concerned parts of the government, as well as representatives of Kashmiris and civil society.

Ambassador Muhammad Saeed Khalid expressed his views on 'Kashmir: Dealing with Hindu Colonialism'. Ambassador Khalid said that soon after the BJP government in India launched its full-fledged onslaught against the Kashmiri people in early August, Prime Minister Modi felt he owed an explanation for his action that was in clear violation of bilateral agreements and the UN resolutions. Sadly, his rhetoric made matters worse. Modi blamed Kashmir's ills on its autonomy and boasted to bring economic prosperity and development to the region under direct rule from New Delhi. However, this is India's way to consolidate their colonization of Kashmir in the name of development. He pointed out that there lies a basic problem with the *Hindutva* mindset upheld by Modi and many others like him. Kashmir has to be developed - one could say exploited - as envisioned by the Hindutva brigade, never mind the rights and wishes of the Kashmiri people. He quoted one of India's renowned lawyer, A. G. Noorani, who believes that by declaring Kashmir as Union territory amounts to reducing the territory to a colony of India. He agreed with Nitasha Kaul that the Modi government's recent action is a constitutional coup in Kashmir and a project of violent and coercively enforced Hindu supremacy that will drive India ever more toward the early years of fascism.

Ambassador Khalid stated that this colonial enterprise in Jammu and Kashmir is perpetrated through military occupation and enforced by extreme cruelty. It is also a matter of great concern that Modi's Kashmir policy is characterized by methods like fascism and ethnocide, with the possibility of genocide. Reflecting upon former Indian Supreme Court judge, Markandey Katju's work, Ambassador Khalid stated that modern techniques of propaganda are used to poison the minds of cultured and intelligent people. Markandey Katju draws a parallel between Nazi Germany and the BJP and states that just like Nazi Germany, the BJP has unleashed huge communal propaganda against the minorities, particularly the Muslims. He calls the BJP a right wing Hindu neo-fascist party. Ambassador Khalid said that BJP's war hysteria against Pakistan was whipped up

by a pliant media, turning most Hindus into jingoists, leading to a landslide victory in the recent parliamentary elections. Justice Katju and some others argue that the BJP government has failed on its economic promises, and in order to divert the attention of the people from real problems, a scapegoat has to be found. And as Hitler found that scapegoat in the Jews, in India, it will be the Muslims.

Furthermore, Ambassador Khalid added, that Kashmiri Muslims are the prime target of the racist Hindutva brigade. Their actions in revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, and their colonial methods, in some instances worse than colonial practices, have raised fears of genocide and ethnocide. He stated that Genocide Watch, an organization based in Germany, has issued Genocide Alerts for Kashmir and Assam basing its findings on the specific definition of genocide under the Genocide Convention of 1948. Then, there is the National Register of Citizens, a tool of segregating people on communal lines to deny citizenship to Muslim refugees.

Moreover, Ambassador Khalid stated, it seems that in this 21st century, our world is not immune from ethnocide on religious basis. The BJP government is pursuing a plan whereby not just in the Indian Occupied Kashmir, but non-Hindus are being targeted in other parts of India as well. In this regard, 1.9 million Assam residents, mainly Muslim were denied Indian citizenship, and made liable to detention and expulsion from India.

He said that some observers feel that the efforts aimed at ethnocide will lead to resistance in areas with significant pockets of Muslim population, and there is a possibility that RSS has factored this in their calculations. He was of the opinion that any Muslim reaction will be further exploited by them to foment tensions on communal lines to keep their ultra-nationalism alive to help the BJP win more elections down the line. He suggested that a robust campaign by international humanitarian organizations and the international media may persuade the Indian fanatics to relent on their tendencies toward ethnocide and genocide. It seems unlikely that the Hindu nationalists ruling India will review their colonial policies towards Kashmir in the face of resistance from the Kashmiris and pressure from the international community?

While highlighting Indian atrocities in Indian Occupied Kashmir, Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi stated that for 11 weeks now, eight million people of the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, of which majority are Muslim, are living in a surreal state of complete cut-off from the rest of the world and from one another too. Internet has been shut down, cellular network has been disabled and even landlines went dead. Public assembly is banned and the citizens are under curfew. Children and women are being kidnapped during night raids. With around 900,000 troops present in the Occupied State, the militarization ratio is 1 to 8. Even in some villages, one soldier has been stationed outside every house. Pharmacies are running out of medicines, households are low on food, and hospitals are clogging up with injured protestors. Narendra Modi insists that all this is for the good of the Kashmiris and development of Kashmir.

He pointed out that by seizing Kashmir, Modi has mollified votaries of Hindu Nationalism and established himself as the father of what they call the “New India”. In Modi’s view, it is a way of conveying to the rest of India – a union of diverse states – that none is exempt from the Hindu power paradise he wants to build on the Subcontinent. Modi wants to make Kashmir both a warning and a template: any state that deviates from this vision can be brought under Delhi’s thumb in the name of “unity”. The question of the hour is: Can India, one of the most heterogeneous societies on earth, survive the accent of the fanatic majority over many defenseless minorities? Particularly focusing on Kashmir dispute, the question arises whether the occupied Jammu and Kashmir would survive this culmination of Hindu nationalism? An equally important question is what should be Pakistan’s strategy in the face of these new developments?

Ambassador Tirmizi stated that with all other parties boycotting the upcoming block elections in the occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP candidates would likely receive a walk over. But the calm currently imposed on the region conceals a deep rage that is waiting to erupt. The abuse of Kashmir justified by Modi as “integration” may, if it is not confronted and reversed, be the beginning of the end of India’s unity.

Ambassador Tirmizi informed the audience that the population of India today is approximately 1.37 billion. Of this, Muslim population is around 200 million (14%). Predominance of Hindu nationalism is promoting nothing but violence and terror. He stressed that *Hindutva* in all its facets (ideological, political, social, cultural, religious and militaristic) is against the ideals of secularism. Its intensification is a threat to regional peace and security. Attempts to colonize Kashmir through brutal force are a testimony to its ill design. If state policy being crafted by BJP is not checked, the world peace in general and regional peace in particular will be jeopardized. Ambassador Tirmizi gave some notable suggestions that Pakistan, besides its traditional stance on Kashmir dispute, must consider:

- Take Kashmir issue at international level to expose true designs of India in terms of its *Hindutva* policies.
- Expose *Hindutva* through broader dialogue at national and international level through research, seminars and media platforms at regional and global think tanks.
- Develop clear information policy to propagate our narrative of Kashmir dispute and counter Indian propaganda against Pakistan at national and international level.

A panel discussion was followed by a question and answer session.

While addressing a question about whether the rise of right wing in India is linked to the rise of nationalist right wing political parties in US, Germany and South America, Dr. Mujeeb Afzal stated that the rise of the right wing internationally is a backlash of the

enhanced globalization and multiculturalism, while that in India is a result of Indian elite transformation in which the urban elite and middle class is taking over India. He stated that RSS and BJP should not be taken lightly as they are going to take deep roots in Indian society – aiming to unify the Indian society and build an image of a hard India instead of Congress's soft India policy. He further stated that the revocation of Article 370 and Article 35A is a dangerous move on part of India as they have united the Kashmiris. He was of the opinion that Pakistan should highlight the Kashmir issue at international forums and reduce Indian capacity to suppress Kashmiri movement militarily. The BJP government has reduced the space for any peace process.

In his answer to a question, Ambassador Muhammad Saeed Khalid stated that Indian government is following the policy of divide and rule by dividing the Hindus and other communities on a pattern similar to the one followed by British during their rule over Subcontinent after the War of Independence in 1857. He stated that India's relationship with Kashmir can be divided into 2 phases from 1947-2019 it was an occupation; and from August 5, 2019 it is a policy to colonize Kashmir.

Answering a question, Lt. Gen. Asif Yasin Malik stated that Pakistan has always been very clear that there is state sponsored terrorism going on in Kashmir.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman BOG, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, pointed out that Hindu nationalism is multifaceted. In recent decades, there has been a marked upsurge in Indian atrocities; it is particularly displayed in the Modi government's aggression to quell Kashmiris' self-determination efforts. What is deeply troubling is how disenfranchisement of minorities in India is now institutionalized in India, he said.

PICTURES OF THE EVENT



