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Reach Out, Make Kashmiris Feel They are One of Our Own: M.K. Narayanan

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*Always volatile, the situation in the Kashmir Valley has taken a turn for the worse in the year since Burhan Wani, the Hizbul Mujahideen commander, was killed by the Indian security forces. Even as Wani got elevated to hero in death, the incident became the trigger point for a spontaneous mobilisation of people—men, women, and children—against the security forces and the government. The protests continue to this day, plunging the alliance government into a crisis deepened and complicated by the ideological divergence between the People Democratic Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Is there a way out of the impasse? In a candid interview, **M.K. Narayanan**, former National Security Advisor,*

tells **Saptarshi Bhattacharya** of *The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy* that the immediate need is to reach out to the people of Kashmir, irrespective of the provocations from their side. He suggests as a model, the United Progressive Alliance Government's Round Table meetings and working groups on Kashmir, adding that opening up to Pakistan would also soften the tempers in the Valley: "One thing is obvious, that you can't have a peaceful Kashmir if there is not a certain amount of cohabitation, if I may use the word, with the part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The people of Kashmir do feel that the whole of Kashmir, including the PoK, is part of their fiefdom."

Kashmir is on the boil again, and the situation is increasingly beginning to resemble the pre-1990 years. Neither the security establishment nor the political dispensation seems clear about how to deal with the situation. What is your reading of the present situation?

I think it would be too much to say that we are going back to the 1990s. The 1990s was a particularly bad period. I think the number of persons killed was in the thousands. They have come down into the hundreds. We should not overstate the case. The situation is difficult and is deteriorating in recent years. But I think we are far from the 1990s, and I hope that we don't proceed to the 1990s. In any case, the nature of the struggle or agitation is very different from what it was in the 1990s.

The killing of Burhan Wani, the Hizbul Mujahideen commander, seems to have provided the spark. Do you think this particular operation and the fallout of it was badly handled?

I don't think I am going to sit in judgment here. You can't sit in Chennai and pass a judgment over how a particular situation developed and how it erupted. It is very seldom that you can run a clinical operation under such difficult circumstances. At one level, you can say, considering what has happened thereafter, that the matter could have been better handled. It is only those who are on the ground who recognise what are the factors at play and what was done. I am not quite sure as to the exact circumstances under which Burhan Wani died. He probably died in an exchange of fire, which is not unusual in such circumstances. So, I don't think that it is possible for me to say this could have been or should have been better handled. It is very difficult for those who sit in air-conditioned rooms to understand the problems of the people who are actually dealing with situation on the ground. Yes, if Burhan Wani had not been killed, the situation would not have deteriorated in such a manner. I am willing to concede that. But I don't think anybody deliberately contrived to create a situation that led to the explosive scenario.

His death was followed by a spontaneous turnout at his funeral...

Yes, that was extraordinary. That only shows that there was something already happening. You don't have 200,000 people attending a funeral. Who was Burhan Wani anyway? After his death he has become a great hero. You can call him Che Guevara or all kinds of honorifics. It mirrors a kind of tension that is present. I think Burhan Wani became a symbol rather than the real cause for an agitation. If not for Burhan Wani, somebody else would have become or some other incident would have led to the same kind of explosion. What one should read into it is that it took just three years for the situation to turn difficult in early 2016. The year 2013 was one of the lowest points for militancy in Jammu and Kashmir ever since militancy started. In three years, we see a very fundamental difference. I am not blaming a particular government or a particular situation, but there is no denying the fact that between 2013 and 2016, there has been a sea change in the Kashmir situation.

The profile of those out on the streets pelting stones—13-year-old boys, school girls in uniform—conveys an image of seething anger. The killing of Burhan Wani sparked off the anger and brought people on to the streets. How do you tackle this kind of widespread anger? Where is it coming from?

“ *The Agenda for the Alliance, to my mind, has been badly constructed or badly contrived and it has contributed to some of the problems. With the demise of Mr. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who was a seasoned politician, and his daughter Ms. Mehbooba Mufti, who has none of his skills, becoming the chief minister, I think the situation has gone down.* ”

Yes, you need to deal with anger. You are right. I think the main thing is that anger is the dominant sentiment today. And it is the combination of many circumstances. There is a feeling of growing alienation once again. In the four-five years prior to 2013, alienation had come down drastically. People had started to talk about normal things—our electricity supply is poor, we do not get WiFi. They were not talking about *azadi* or that kind of situation. Much of that has started coming back. Why did this take place? What are the circumstances that took place that led to bringing this back is something that needs to be looked at. I think one fundamental point is the number of unemployed people. There are so many young people who are unemployed and they are available for being used. Then I would say that, to some extent, the nature of governance is also a reason. You have two incompatible groups running a

government, and you realise that it looks good on paper. The Agenda for the Alliance, to my mind, has been badly constructed or badly contrived and it has contributed to some of the problems. With the demise of Mr. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who was a seasoned politician, and his daughter Ms. Mehbooba Mufti, who has none of his skills, becoming the chief minister, I think the situation has gone down. Then we have a skewed mandate—you have a Hindu Jammu with a Muslim Kashmir—that's the electorate you are dealing with. It is difficult to say which is the particular cause. I think it is a combination of all these that has led to the feeling of anger. "We are not getting what we deserve." There is always an undercurrent of anger that a Kashmiri has towards the rest of India. They feel that "we are not getting our due". Most Indians, however, think that they are getting more than their due. This gap in perception between the two sides, in some way, we are not able to bridge. It exists, and you can't just rule it out. The answer to all this has been more money being put into Kashmir, which is again like a parent who does not know how to deal with a recalcitrant child. You give him more money and buy him some more toys, buy him a car if he is a grown up, which I think is a bad model to follow. The point you made is right. There is anger, and that is the dominant sentiment. We are not able to overcome the anger. If you are not able to overcome anger, then of course it takes various forms. And I think one of the most lethal has been getting young children to start throwing stones at the security forces. It leads to a toxic situation from time to time. A few thought pellet guns would not be that harmful, but then you blinded a few children. You can't use heavier weapons because it would kill them and you will have a whole lot of martyrs on your hands. The security forces are greatly hamstrung by what they are confronted with.

The point you raised on unemployment, there is a huge gap, as you said. Nearly 25 per cent of people between 18 and 29 years are unemployed in Jammu and Kashmir while the national average is around 13.5 per cent. Investment for the year 2015-16 came down to Rs 267 crore, whereas between 2009-10 and 2014-15, this was close to Rs 1,000 year on year. With respect to centrally sponsored schemes, this year, nearly 10,000 crores is being pumped in, 70 per cent of which will be spent towards creating assets like roads. Do you get the feeling that the funds are not exactly being utilised the right way, which has led to increasing unemployment, and this anger spreading across the State? Is there a governance deficit?

“ *What many people are doing now is saying that if you are not with us, you are a Pakistani, you are an anti-national, which I think is wrong. Whether you like it or not, they are as Indian as any other part.* **”**

Yes, governance has been a major downside as far as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned. You are talking in terms of how much money finally gets into development. In Kashmir, it is probably lower than most other parts of the country. Yes, there is a great deal of money that is going into Kashmir but the return is much less than what you get elsewhere. So, that's one part of the problem. But it does not necessarily translate into the kind of anger (we are seeing). There are many other parts of the country where less money is put in and less development takes place, but you don't see the same kind of anger. You need to try to understand, try to assess why there is this amount of anger. Much of the situation that exists in Jammu and Kashmir is not unusual for at least the peripheral regions of the country—like the Northeast. But the deep-seated anger that you see in Kashmir is far greater or at much greater depth than that in many other places. That's what we need to understand. I don't think adequate concern is being shown here. What many people are doing now is saying that if you are not with us, you are a Pakistani, you are an anti-national, which I think is wrong. Whether you like it or not, they are as Indian as any other part.

“ *Why did we meet with a great deal of success during the period 2004 to 2010-11? It is because I think people started looking at Delhi as far more responsive to their requirements. Mr. [Atal Behari] Vajpayee talked of *Insaniyat* and *Jamooriyat*. You can use the same words today but they do not have the same meaning.* ”

There is no denying the fact that for better or for worse, a large percentage of people in many of our peripheral regions think that they are not part of the Indian mainstream. You and I, who form part of the mainstream, are not able to understand why that should be so. It is so. You have to work towards it. Many things that you do in Chennai or in Kolkata may not work in Jammu and Kashmir or many parts of the Northeast. I think it is the sensitivity of governance that is missing in many of these areas. Why did we meet with a great deal of success during the period 2004 to 2010-11? It is because I think people started looking at Delhi as far more responsive to their requirements. Mr. [Atal Behari] Vajpayee talked of *Insaniyat* and *Jamooriyat*. You can use the same words today but they do not have the same meaning. He could do it because he was a remarkable orator and had a certain amount of honesty of purpose behind the words that he used. It also happened at a time when Pakistan was trying to reduce the degree of its interference in Kashmir, and, therefore, many of these [initiatives] succeeded. We were able, thereafter, to work out many things. General [Pervez] Musharraf was definitely willing to look at some of the issues that we could deal with. One thing is obvious, that you can't have a peaceful Kashmir if there is not a certain amount of

cohabitation, if I may use the word, with the part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The people of Kashmir do feel that the whole of Kashmir, including the PoK, is part of their fiefdom.

When we started the bus between Srinagar and PoK, when we started a number of initiatives that allowed people to move from Jammu and Kashmir to PoK, I think it brought down the temperatures, it brought down the anger. They got a feeling that Delhi wants to help them realise their ambitions. You must understand that both sides have ambitions. Today, we will say that we won't talk to Pakistan, we'll have nothing to do with them. You make a song and dance about what's happening in PoK. I don't think that the Kashmiri buys it. They say, "Alright, they are having these problems. So what?" They will say that they are also having the same problems. The question is how you approach the problem. You can't handle it by blaming the other side. I think that is what is happening today. That is, to some extent, why this situation is deteriorating rather than improving. You will have the Burhan Wanis or someone else coming up and we will still face the problem.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his outgoing speech had mentioned that "we were this close to finding a solution to Kashmir". One gets the feeling that somewhere here, we missed the bus and we are not willing to go back down the same lane. Why do you think Delhi has adopted that kind of an approach right now, despite having seen the good results in the past?

Well, I know Manmohan Singh's government because I was very much there. I was very much part of his plan. I don't think we were as close to a solution as is being always made out. But we were making the right kind of progress. I think that is very important. When you are making progress, then you should follow the same path. One of the things that the Manmohan Singh government did was that what had been started or initiated by the Vajpayee government, we decided to follow in toto. We did not say that useless things have been done in the past and we need to improve upon it. Rightly or wrongly, the general tendency sometimes for a new government is to say that a lot of things were done wrong. I think one of the major steps that we took was to follow the path that had been laid out and improve upon it considerably over a period of time. We were helped by the fact that we had the 2003 agreement, due to which the Pakistan Deep State involvement was much less than what it is today. Circumstances were different as well.

Those who live with history must understand the course of history. And history keeps changing, waxing and waning from time to time. This was a good period that we were at. I think we took full advantage of that. It was possible, as I said, to talk to people. We held

discussions with people across the board, whether it was the Hurriyat, whether it was Geelani's Hurriyat, whether it was Mirwaiz's Hurriyat, whether it was the Yasin Maliks or anybody, across the spectrum of people. It was easier then than what it is now. Geelani was as difficult as he always has been but we still did it. We gave Geelani all the help he wanted for medical treatment though he was fighting India and calling India names. He was looked after as a VIP in every sense of the term. It was part of the process of making people believe that we recognise that Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian mainstream. Yes, there are some difficult individuals. Sometimes you have an incident that goes out of hand. All these require mature leadership.

When Mufti Mohammed Sayeed of the PDP was there along with the Congress party, the relationship was okay. Although Congress is a dirty word these days, I think the Congress in some ways understands India better than many other parties because they were part and parcel of the country's history. The moment we exchanged, for instance, Mufti's PDP with the National Conference, things became more difficult, though there is more affinity between the National Conference and the Congress than there was between the PDP and the Congress. You need to look at it like a chess board, where the kings are and where the pawns are and how you deal with the situation.

Among the five working groups that were in place when you were the NSA, one studied the cross-border relationship between Kashmir and PoK, and another studied the special status of Kashmir in the Indian Union. We don't hear of any working groups today. The continuum that extended right from the Vajpayee period down to UPA II was broken post-2014.

“ *I come back to it again: do you treat the Kashmiri as one of your own? I think we do treat them [as one of our own] but we don't make them feel that they are being treated [that way].* ”

Yes, I think you should not disrupt something when it is going on. It is the basic rule of governance. If you have a good thing, try and continue with it, even if you can't claim ownership. If you want to start everything from scratch, then you run into problems. And that's the crux of what I said. The working groups was an idea, it was an idea which some of us came up with. We were not sure how it would work. The working groups were more like expert groups working on issues, but we had these larger conclaves—the Round Tables—which I

think was a tremendous success. People haven't understood how. You can still have many working groups because all you require is somebody who knows the situation. But the Round Tables had a great deal of give and take. Attending those two-day Round Tables was a lesson in itself. There were people being harangued, there were complimentary references, a lot of abuse being traded—all kinds of things happened. I come back to it again: do you treat the Kashmiri as one of your own? I think we do treat them [as one of our own] but we don't make them feel that they are being treated [that way]. These are two different sides of it. That is what I think you need to do. I think Dr. Manmohan Singh was perceptive enough to recognise that you had to reach a *modus vivendi* with Pakistan, something that Mr. Vajpayee very much believed [in] as well. This is despite provocation. Pakistan was not a state, Pakistan was a military dictatorship.

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The fact of the matter is Pakistan exists. And whatever it is, the Kashmiris are wily enough to use Pakistan against India whenever they choose. I don't think any Kashmiri wants to go to Pakistan, which might have been the position in the 80s and the 90s of the last century. I don't think anybody wants that. Yet, they would like to play Pakistan against India. And there is a residual thing that they have the same religious identification or sympathy, despite the fact that there are far larger number of Muslims here in India than there are in Pakistan. I think in some ways, the Round Tables were even more successful than the working groups in bringing them together. In the working groups, people were working towards ideas. The Round Tables brought about a certain degree of stability and then the working groups were able to sell their ideas. The working groups had more ideas, the Round Tables had the people. I think that is how we worked it out.

A former colleague of yours, Amarjit Singh Dulat, wrote a book *Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years* a couple of years ago where he gave us a peek into the Kashmiri mind. Later, in an interview to us, he said that the favourite colour of Kashmir is grey, and that it is very difficult to win the trust of a Kashmiri. Why is that so? Is it because historically, they have been ruled for far too long by foreigners, whether it is the Afghans, the Sikhs, the Mughals or the British? He also mentioned that they have this feeling that Delhi never understands them. Do you think they are justified in thinking so?

“ A statement like the Army Chief’s that anybody who prevents me from doing my duty are terrorists, therefore, all the 13-year-olds and the 12-year-olds are terrorists, may look good in the army manual but certainly not on the ground in Kashmir or Srinagar or anywhere else. ”

It doesn't matter if they are justified or not. If they are thinking so, they are thinking so. That's the point I am making. It may not be justified. You may ask why. Kashmiris are not the only people dominated by outsiders. There are communities in India which feel that they are dominated by northerners or southerners. Much of what Amarjit Dulat said is true, but there are large parts of India which have also been similarly ruled for many generations by outsiders, and many of them don't nurse the same kind of feeling. The point is that because they have had to play possum of one kind or the other, in some way they ended up being more wily. They play various forces against each other, which is the way all those who face difficult situations do. The reality is that they are feeling that they are being shortchanged. Why? That is for the government to find out. You can't say that it is not your business to find out. If you are to deal with Kashmir, you have to understand the reality of Kashmir. And let me tell you that it is equally true of the Kashmiri Hindu as it is of the Kashmiri Muslim. But the Kashmiri Muslim, since they are a majority in the Valley, try to make it into a big issue that they are being neglected because Hindus are a majority in India. I don't think they themselves believe it, but that is the reality that they try to project. From the point of view of a government, it may be a false assumption. But how do you remove it? I think that's where we are failing. We are not able to understand that. A statement like the Army Chief's that anybody who prevents me from doing my duty are terrorists, therefore, all the 13-year-olds and the 12-year-olds are terrorists, may look good in the army manual but certainly not on the ground in Kashmir or Srinagar or anywhere else. That's the point I am making. It may be justified. If you talk to the armed forces, everybody is united on this point. The answer to your question is that there is a problem. You have to recognise that there is a problem. It is your task to find an answer to that problem. And the answer is not easy. Merely rationalising this in one form or the other is not adequate. The situation is not as bad as 1990 but the situation is definitely far worse than what it was in 2013. In fact, if anything, it seems to be becoming worse and not improving. The last two years have been particularly bad. So let's do something before it becomes even worse than this.

This is an interesting point that you raised that the feeling of alienation they get because they are predominantly Muslims in the Valley while the rest of India is Hindu majority. We have also noticed that there has been a certain amount of Islamisation, or even radicalisation, in the Valley in course of the past few years, intensifying in the wake of Burhan Wani's killing. Is that something serious according to you?

I don't think that's part of Kashmir alone. I think the tendency towards Islamisation or radicalisation is growing across the world to some extent. Kashmir is a part of that thing. My own view is that it will vary. In some other parts of India, I think, there is a more Islamised attitude towards religion. I think it is tied to Wahhabism. What we had previously was Sufi Islam in Kashmir, [which is] very moderate. I think in 1989-90, they (the Wahhabis) destroyed that. That's when Wahhabism came in following the Afghan Jihad. Then the whole pattern started changing. So, there was already a certain amount of Islamisation. Now, worldwide, Wahhabism or Salafism has become such an important factor. I suppose wherever you have a large Muslim population this is a problem. I think Kashmir is suffering from the same syndrome. This is separate from the ISIS phenomenon, which is even more drastic. I think today there is a level of Wahhabi Islam that has, in a sense, put down Sufi Islam. A beef issue will become more important. There is a moderate element in Sufi Islam which is absent in Wahhabi Islam. This is not a peculiarly Kashmir problem, it is a problem the world over. I think there is across the world a greater tilt towards Islamisation amongst Muslim communities and many other communities which fall within the ambit of their influence. And this is apart from the ISIS element, which is different and actually foreign to Kashmir in that sense of the term and would need to be dealt with in a different way.

“ *I do think that even the Burhan Wani episode would not have taken on this proportion without social media; the power of Twitter, or whatever you want to call it. The role that they are playing is very self-defeating as far as Kashmir is concerned.* ”

Coming back to the current scenario in the Valley, what role do you think the social media has played in giving rise to the situation we face today?

I think the most tendentious role that one could think of. I am a great critic of social media. That's the point. I think if we talk in terms of strategic falsehood, the term which [US President Donald] Trump used, Kashmir is a classic example. I think nobody knows where the truth is,

where the reality is. And the whole thing is exaggerated on social media within the Valley and even more probably from across the border. I do think that even the Burhan Wani episode would not have taken on this proportion without social media. The power of Twitter, or whatever you want to call it. The role that they are playing is very self-defeating as far as Kashmir is concerned.

Experts like you have said that the Kashmir conundrum is layered and it is difficult to simplify the issue and look at it from one perspective or another. What we have noticed, increasingly over the past three years, is that the popular narrative being narrowed down to a binary—good or bad, nationalist or anti-national.

Aren't you people responsible for it? The press is largely responsible for this binary.

Where does this stem from?

It does not stem from the media, but the media purveys it. That is the problem. After all, we are all human beings, we all have our individual dislikes. I am talking of particularly the electronic media and social media. You should watch some of these 24x7, 365-days channels. Nowadays, nobody wants to listen to a rational explanation, nobody is willing to listen to the other man's point of view. It is happening not only in Kashmir or in India but all across the world. I don't know whether you read my article on [US President Donald] Trump the other day. I think Trump should be applauded for what he did. You travel by air, all of us travel by air, whether on work or otherwise. If there is information that the ISIS is able to put an explosive inside, mask an explosive into a computer, you should share it widely, allow it to be part of intelligence. It is Saptarshi who gave me the intelligence and I will have to protect Saptarshi but I don't mind a million people being killed as a result of not sharing the information. Trump is bad therefore whatever Trump says is wrong. That's the attitude that you take. The answer to the question is that we have allowed our better sense to be clouded by strategic falsehood, post-truth or alternative facts.

How has the Kashmir narrative in the rest of India been shaped by the social media?

What has really happened is that over a period of time the narrative has been taken over by the extreme, what we call the extreme right, drowning out the voices of reason. Those who are willing to take a more [contrarian stand] are labelled as anti-national. You are either nationalist or anti-national. Anybody who says anything contrary to what is being done at a particular moment is anti-national. They are not even willing to question: is it possible that it is

the Pakistan army who [that] beheaded and mutilated the bodies [of Indian army personnel] or is it somebody else?. You dare not open yourself to even question these. After all, the Pakistan army is an army, whatever 24x7 channels may say. They are as rational as the Indian army is, subject to the fact that they are very much in power and, therefore, they are far more aggressive and unrestrained. But they respect soldiers. A soldier respects a soldier, whether you are Pakistani or Indian. We'll never know the truth of who beheaded these people. Somebody has beheaded them. But you have taken for granted and the media has gone to town. Somebody has fed it to the media and the media has gone to town, social media has taken it up. You have painted the Pakistan media in the worst colours. They will paint India equally. Therefore, you land up in a situation where there is no hope that the two sides will reconcile. One of the things that we did achieve during the 2005-09 period of Dr. Manmohan Singh was a certain amount of, I would say, understanding on both sides as to the nature of the problem. Pakistan also has a problem with PoK. But it is easier for them because they have resettled the place with Mirpuri Muslims. Even then they have problems, both sides are anxious to reach some kind of a *modus vivendi* to some extent. It's clouded over by other factors—politics plays a role. The fact of the matter is that on both sides of the Line of Control, there are problems. Their problems are as bad as ours. Some say it is worse, it may or may not be the case. I think we need to be able to deal with it. And that's why you arrive at some kind of relationship with people across the border as part of efforts to reduce tensions here. People moving across the border on both sides, the bus traffic as I said before, are part of efforts to soften the ground before things go out of hand.

You are talking of softening the ground but the narrative is getting more and more vitriolic. Not very long ago, a senior member of the ruling dispensation, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, even tweeted that Kashmir should be depopulated and Kashmiris should be put in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. The common refrain is that Kashmir is an integral part of India but Kashmiris are anti-nationals. The Prime Minister had begun well by maintaining friendly ties with Pakistan. His sudden trip to Pakistan on Nawaz Sharif's birthday was welcomed by many of his critics as well. Do you think he is being weighed down by the narrative of his own party?

I do not think you can separate Mr. Modi from his party. The point is that Mr. Modi seeks quick results. Many of us want it as well. However, dealing with Pakistan, with Kashmir, and with most political problems, a longer gestation period is required. The Prime Minister is very anxious, instead, to come out with quick results. He is anxious to do many things and wants to do them in quick time. I do not think this is something that happens in politics and, in particular, when we are dealing with intractable issues.

The most important thing, if you are practicing politics, is to be able to think matters through. That comes only through a patient approach. This is even more true of Kashmir than of most other areas. You may have a good idea, you may have all the right words, but there are some spoilers all the time. You have to guard against that possibility. For example, when the security forces used pellet guns, they did so since pellet guns were viewed as far less harmful. It so happened, however, that a few children were injured in the eye through pellets. This then led to a hue and cry. Sometimes you tend to be over enthusiastic like tying up a Kashmiri to an Army jeep and driving through a crowd to avoid more harm to others, but this got out of hand. If the police were to face a mob, and pulled out three people from the mob and put them in front to carry out a march, you can well realise the kind of issue that it would raise. There can be reactions and over reaction to situations. It is only a question of what you can do best in the circumstances.

You had mentioned the Major Gogoi incident. There was another incident that was even more shocking—the killing of the Indian soldier of Kashmiri origin, Lt. Umar Fayaz. This has never happened in the past and is something that is perhaps more alarming than anything else happening in Kashmir. I would invite your comment on that.

Yes, I think it means that the movement is going in a direction that we never expected in a long, long time. We thought we had overcome all that. I don't think they have ever picked up a soldier from a civilian ceremony in the full glare of publicity, abducted him and then killed him. It is almost an act of defiance. One would have normally expected that there would be a tremendous reaction to this in some form or the other. Nothing happened. These are the danger symbols. Of course, it is a danger and we should be looking at that. Why has somebody felt emboldened enough to do that? He is not the first Kashmiri who has been part of the Indian army. There are several of them. They have chosen a young boy who has just joined, symbolically at a wedding with a lot of people to see that. It sent shock waves across the entire spectrum of opinion in Kashmir, not to talk of the rest of India. It was meant to do what it did. What is it that is provoking people to do this?

Every now and then, there are statements released either officially or otherwise that the entire movement is being funded and pushed from across the border. How much of truth is there in this?

Today, most of the people are unattached militants. They are not all Lashkar's or Jaish's people. I don't think many of them have any Pakistani connections. They are not linked to any of the groups. They may have some connections with the Hizbul [Mujahideen]. So, you have

anger amongst your own people, that is if you accept that Kashmir is your own. The majority believes that Kashmiris are our people, the Kashmiris who live on this side of the Line of Control. They are the ones who are going out on to the streets, they are the ones under attack. They are not paid by Pakistan. Okay, Pakistan may be sending in some money, fine. But that's because they are available and these people want some money from somewhere, and they are using it. But they are not like the ones that we had two years ago. This is a new phenomenon. They are coming out on to the streets, and many of them are young children. They are coming despite their parents. This is kind of a completely different situation than what existed even a few years ago. I think we need to look at this phenomenon. The answer is not what the army chief has said that "anybody who obstructs me, I treat as a terrorist". What do you do next? If he is a terrorist, then you will have to deal with him like a terrorist, which includes the ultimate act of killing him.

So, what do you do next?

“ *Some of the ideas exchanged between Dr. Manmohan Singh and Gen. Musharraf, such as creating opportunities for greater people-to-people contact, allowing people from both sides of the Line of Control to meet, easier access for them without restrictions such as visas or other documents, bringing people together etc., should be revived.* ”

The answer is that you have to reach out to the people of Kashmir, irrespective of all the provocations that are being made. I think this isn't a good time to talk to Pakistan, otherwise, I might have said so. I have no great love for Pakistan. I am not expecting Pakistan to support us, but I think opening up to Pakistan gives a certain amount of softening of tempers in the Valley, at least among their leaders. This is not the right time because things are going from bad to worse. I think we should, however, get back to the Round Table syndrome as early as possible. We need more people to talk and express their views, to shout at each other, even abuse India perhaps from time to time in their meetings.

Some of the ideas exchanged between Dr. Manmohan Singh and Gen. Musharraf, such as creating opportunities for greater people-to-people contact, allowing people from both sides of the Line of Control to meet, easier access for them without restrictions such as visas or other documents, bringing people together etc., should be revived. Increased intra-Kashmir travel has also to be encouraged—all things that would bring people together could help in finally

producing a solution, though I cannot be sure. At the very least, it is an experiment that is worth considering.

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