

Political Suffocation and the Kashmir Conflict: India's Shrinking Space for Dissent



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By: Dr. Waleed Rasool :

The Indian strategic approach in Kashmir has undergone a significant shift since the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019. This move was aimed at integrating Kashmir fully into India's constitutional framework, but in reality, it has exacerbated tensions and further alienated the Kashmiri populace. The design appears clear: maintain relentless pressure on the region, leaving no room for political or social breathing space. The suppression has been unyielding, suffocating the residents under layers of administrative, political, and legal constraints. The results of the 2024 elections, particularly regarding the National Conference (NC), remain in limbo. Despite expectations that some relief might come through democratic engagement, the NC-led administration under Omar Abdullah has only been granted limited municipal-level leverage. This reflects India's unwillingness to create even a semblance of political accommodation. Even the Indian constituency, which anticipated minor concessions, has found itself disillusioned. The successive bans on political parties indicate a strategic maneuver aimed at completely eliminating any space for dissent in Kashmir. As a result, the pressure continues to mount, with no avenue for political expression or redress. Adding to this suppression, the confiscation of properties by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has further deepened the crisis. This act not only strips Kashmiris of their material possessions but also sends a clear message that political allegiance to the freedom movement carries severe consequences. Those who remain committed to the Kashmir cause now face a stark reality: political space has vanished, human rights activists have been silenced, and even neutral observers dare not speak. In such dire circumstances, the only viable path forward is to explore alternative strategies to keep the Kashmiri voice alive. This marks a critical stage in the Kashmiri freedom struggle. While crests and troughs are an inevitable part of any liberation movement, Kashmiris must remain steadfast. History

has repeatedly demonstrated that freedom is never granted freely but must be fought for through resilience and determination. India's proactive strategy to link the Kashmiri struggle with terrorism, particularly by fueling instability in Pakistan, has further complicated the issue. This deliberate conflation seeks to delegitimize the indigenous Kashmiri movement by framing it within the broader global narrative of terrorism. In response, it is imperative to find alternative avenues to sustain the movement, even if at a slow pace. Given the gravity of the situation, convening an international conference at this critical juncture is essential. Such a platform can serve to explore the minimum possible options for engaging the global community under these adverse conditions. Hope must be built not just through resistance but also through strategic and geopolitical shifts that may create opportunities for liberation. History offers many examples where aggressors have attempted to suppress freedom struggles, only to be eventually defeated by changing political landscapes. When the League of Nations was founded, it had a limited membership, and when the United Nations was established in 1945, there were only 51 member states. Today, the UN has 193 members, many of whom gained independence in the last seven decades, often from powerful colonial rulers. This historical precedent underscores the idea that while oppression can delay freedom, it cannot suppress the will of a determined people indefinitely. Insights gathered from conferences and interactive sessions with scholars and students reveal a crucial pulse—the mindset of the emerging generation. Their perspectives, aspirations, and resilience are critical in shaping the future of the Kashmiri struggle. Similarly, those who were once actively involved in the movement now feel dejected. This shared sentiment of disillusionment is alarming, particularly for those who have sacrificed immensely for the cause. Yet, even in these darkest hours, survival with dignity remains the ultimate goal. Hope must remain alive because history teaches us that freedom movements are not solely determined by resistance but also by geopolitical transformations. India itself did not achieve independence from British colonial rule purely through struggle but also due to the shifting global order, as Britain sought to decolonize and refocus its priorities post-World War II. Likewise, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of 14 independent Central Asian states, not solely through their efforts but due to the USSR's economic and political decline. For Kashmir, similar geopolitical shifts could provide the necessary opening, but only if the sentiment of freedom remains intact. The struggle must continue, even at a slow pace, to ensure that when the opportunity arises, the people of Kashmir are ready to reclaim their rightful place. As the great poet and philosopher Allama Iqbal once said: "Sitaron se aage jahan aur bhi hain, Abhi ishq ke imtihan aur bhi hain." ("Beyond the stars, there are still more worlds to explore, The trials of passion are yet to be endured.") Kashmiris must embrace this philosophy and remain resolute, for history has shown that even the most oppressive regimes eventually crumble under the weight of justice and perseverance.