Violence in the Valley

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The anger. It has a history and we must understand it.

*It offers an opportunity to take a relook at the crisis and correct mistakes. The state*

The ongoing violence in Kashmir is seen primarily from a negative perspective as a tool to bounce back and become politically relevant, bleeding-heart liberal state and its (in)action, and security forces bouncing back with a ‘we told you so’ and discuss AFSPA’. What is forgotten conveniently in the blame game is the loss of achievements of the security forces in reducing the level of violence, tough bargaining parties and the slow process of normalisation.

Between 2010 and 2012, there was a clear window of opportunity for the state and the Kashmiri civil society. Violence had come down drastically, thanks to the state looking for a political opening, thanks to the civil society; and there was a movement for and fro led by interlocutors. It was a moment to be seized.
Some early action and few risks could have placed Kashmir politics in a different path with removal of security forces and AFSPA from the urban areas, at least from being a great beginning.

That moment was lost; and the civil society in Kashmir and the state are back to square one. The young lives that were lost should mean something for both the together. One cannot blame the other completely to go back to what they have. New Delhi has to think beyond having a BJP government in Srinagar.

The ongoing violence perhaps presents another moment again. Can we, as the again, and ensure that there are no more lives lost?

Wrong reading

First, the new development should make New Delhi understand that the end of conflict in Kashmir. Unfortunately, since 2004-06, we started believing ourselves to back our theory. We started measuring the ‘return of peace’ with ‘absence of violations,’ ‘number of foreign militants present’ and more importantly ‘number of tourists visited.

The last one was a self-defeating point in particular. All those who have been making pilgrimage to Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu region are counted as tourists visiting J&K. The equation then became simple - no violence, less foreign militants, high voter turnout, increased tourists — put together mean the end of Kashmir.

Second, the state should take political control and not fire from the shoulders of a South Asian trait, visible in India’s approach in J&K, and also in its northeast. The security forces cannot be the state in eliminating militancy and to an extent reducing the ‘physical’ violence.

But in the process, there is bound to be an element of ‘emotional’ violence built. This is not just collateral, but inevitable. The replacement of militant violence with expression of violence getting internalised. This internalisation of violence by the youth through politics. Perhaps, the time is ripe for a policy of Healing Touch-II.
Fourth, the Civil Society of Kashmir will also have to seize the moment. From parental crisis to the educational institutions — there are numerous reasons for the youths to pick up guns, even if it was for social media. Undoubtedly, none will deny the long pending political cause, but society not blame only the security forces and New Delhi. If the present situation continues, it may lead to further loss of lives. Let those lives lost during the last few days, as an eye opener to prevent any further loss.

New Delhi will only be willing to fire once again through the shoulders of the security forces, which may lead to further loss of lives. Let those lives lost during the last few days, as an eye opener to prevent any further loss.

The separatists in Valley — may come with further political slogans to revive their relevance. Both the civil society and the State should understand their narrow politics and fall into their traps.

**Don’t repeat mistakes**

Finally, New Delhi should take responsibility for what has happened in the last few years and ensure that the mistakes are not repeated again. It should have seized the moment during 2010-12 and taken some risks. Removing a few from few urban towns could have been a great beginning. There were substantial recommendations in the interlocutors’ report.

While the immediate priority for the State should be to address the violence, local political engagement. Let New Delhi and the BJP in the State encourage Mehbooba for a Healing Touch. Let there be a serious discussion in handing over security operations to local police in select towns and remove the military and AFSPA from those places.

The ongoing violence do present a moment. Let the state and society seize the moment and prevent the loss of lives — whether youths or security forces.

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