

PRESS RELEASE BY SWAMI AGNIVESH

KASHMIR SHOULDN'T NEED EXTERNAL CERTIFICATION

It is embarrassing that the plight of our sisters and brothers in Kashmir has to be certified by a cherry-picked menagerie of overseas MPs. Common sense tells us that Kashmiris themselves are in the best position to tell the rest of the world whether they are doing well or ill. This exercise is not dissimilar to death being certified by doctors; for in this case the object concerned is unable to make a statement for itself. The old dictum still holds, "The victim knows the truth."

Assuming that Kashmiris are too subjective to tell the unvarnished truth, the right thing to do is to allow a group of responsible citizens of India, drawn from diverse backgrounds, to ascertain the ground realities in Kashmir, with one of the former Kashmir interlocutors as the coordinator.

There is a compelling reason why the step adopted by the Shah-Modi dispensation is unwise. It, in effect, 'internationalizes' the Kashmir issue. If the 'normalcy' of Kashmir –and by extension, the welfare of the people of Kashmir– has to be verified by an international team, no ground is left for resisting international mediation in respect of Kashmir. So, this step contradicts our stated position that "Kashmir is an internal issue of India." An internal issue should not need international certification.

I am sternly opposed to separatist advocacies. Even so, I cannot be indifferent to the prolonged trauma of the people of Kashmir. It is hard to believe that this de facto lock down, if not lock up, of Kashmiris is for their good and that they are happy that their civic rights and democratic entitlements are in suspended animation. It should concern all of us that the prolongation of this trauma will spawn wide-spread psycho-somatic diseases induced by trauma. As it is, the stress of daily life is nudging individuals over the edge of sanity. What could happen, if the present traumatic situation is continued further in Kashmir, is unthinkable.

I deem it my duty to draw the attention of my fellow citizens to this issue especially for the reason that a tendency to think of the Kashmiris as 'the other' has been fostered over the last three decades. In the present climate, 'the other' is, vis-à-vis Kashmir, a nuisance or head ache to be settled with an iron hand. This inhibits compassion on our part. Howsoever this may be justified ideologically, it presents a worrisome prospect that the same treatment can be meted out to any other group. Today, Kashmiris -like human rights activists and defenders of the rights of adivasis - are made a no-people. We do not know whose turn it will be tomorrow in the wake of the NRC.

So, we need to be vigilant sentinels of the freedom, dignity and welfare of all our fellow Indians. What happens to one, happens to all. The idea that one group can thrive at the expense of another, or that a tiny minority can be sacrificed to serve the convenience of the majority is a dangerous idea. At the end of the day, we are all individuals; the tiniest, most vulnerable minority. That is why Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom."