

A YEAR ON, ARTICLE 370 AND KASHMIR MYTHMAKING

The August 5 decision has led to a state wherein the very basis of a potential step of conflict resolution has been undone

While the long-standing ideological commitment of the Bharatiya Janata Party to undo Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is why Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was stripped of its special status as well as Statehood making it a simmering cauldron of discontent, our collective mythmaking about Kashmir is the deeper reason for what the former State has become today.

Kashmir has been a favourite site of our national mythmaking; myths that have over the years assumed larger-than-life manifestations in our collective psyche. Kashmir has most things that popular myths are made of: mesmerising beauty, cross-border terror, deep states and their agents, war and heroism. Clearly, myths about Kashmir are not created by the right wing alone but by successive Indian governments over several decades, enthusiastically embellished by a vibrant, popular culture.

Demonising Kashmir:

The most prominent among them is regarding the ills of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution. Home Minister Amit Shah's statements last year on the floor of Parliament that Article 370 was the root cause of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is a widely accepted sentiment notwithstanding the fact that there is little material basis to it — neither was Article 370 responsible for terrorism in the Valley nor has its removal ensured a reduction in terrorism. If anything, Article 370 continues to remain very much a part of a solution to the Kashmir conundrum. The constitutional provision is also held responsible for ruining J&K, stalling its development and preventing proper health care and blocking industries. Once again, these arguments lack merit and evidence.

J&K, as a matter of fact, has been doing much better than most other Indian States and one of the reasons for this was the land reforms carried out in the State in the early 1950s which was possible precisely because of the presence of Article 370. For sure, the educational and health sectors in J&K should be further improved (as should be in the rest of the country), but the reason for the underperformance of the educational and health sectors in Kashmir is not Article 370. While private enterprises could set up industries in the former State on leased land, as they have over the years, acquisition of land by public sector enterprises from outside the State was never a problem. Private investors do not set up shop in Kashmir due to militancy which is a product of an existing conflict; not because of Articles 370 or 35A. In any case, Articles 370 or 35A did not start the Kashmir conflict; if anything, they played a role in containing it.

Funding truths:

The oft-cited counter-argument is that if J&K is doing better than the other Indian States, it is because of the massive amounts of funds provided by New Delhi. That is the second myth. How subsidised by New Delhi was J&K? Did 'our' taxpayer money actually go into sustaining J&K's relatively better position among the Indian States? Well if it did, it would weaken the argument that 'Kashmir needed to be developed'.

The argument is not that Kashmir did not receive funding from New Delhi. It did, but not massive funds as it is often made out to be. Economist and former State Finance Minister of J&K Haseeb Drabu makes a distinction between funds that went to the J&K government and those that went into economic development in the State. The J&K government's revenue deficit has traditionally been taken care of by New Delhi: J&K, for historical reasons, has had a bloated bureaucracy in comparison to other States and their salaries and pensions have been financed by the central government. But that does precious little for the State's economy or the general population. Then there are routine transfers of funds from the Centre to J&K just as transfers take place from New Delhi to other States. Finally, J&K also received funds thanks to its status as a special category State which again is a case with several other Indian States. Put differently, J&K's better performance in comparison to most other Indian States is at least partly because of Article 370, and its well-being is not necessarily a result of New Delhi's economic packages.

Let us take the third myth about Kashmir, one that is repeated by politicians and scholars alike: 'Development can defeat militancy and insurgency.' Notwithstanding the fact that a cash-strapped country such as ours has inherent limitations on how much development assistance it can provide to J&K

over other States, the reality may well be that development may not lead to pacification of the conflict in Kashmir. The Kashmir conflict is a function of complex historical grievances, politico-ethnic demands, increasing religious radicalisation, and Pakistan's unrelenting interference in the Kashmir Valley. It would be simplistic to imagine that such a multi-layered and complex conflict can be resolved by the stroke of a pen effecting a constitutional change or providing an economic package. A cursory reading of the vast literature on conflict resolution would testify to that.

The deep impact:

This overwhelming mythmaking on Kashmir has had unfortunate implications on how we understand and treat Kashmir and Kashmiris. The rare political unity in the rest of the country supporting the August 5 decision, especially on Article 370, was a function of this mythmaking. The popular cultural articulations about Kashmir and Kashmiris in the media, films, music and other cultural representations have further strengthened these myths. That "Kashmir needs to be reunited with the rest of India" has been a powerful claim made by such representations and political articulations: no matter Kashmir was easily India's most securitised State with various central institutions and agencies undermining not only what was left of Article 370 prior to August last year but also impeding the elected government's power in the former State.

Yet another popular perception about 'Kashmiris as troublemakers and sympathisers of terror' has led to a noticeable increase in the mistreatment of Kashmiri Muslims in the rest of the country. How little empathy exists in the country today towards the plight of the Kashmiris (including mainstream politicians) is a direct outcome of such mythmaking.

Hard realities:

This mythmaking about Kashmir has today led us to a situation wherein we have undone the very basis of a potential process of conflict resolution in Kashmir. If indeed Article 370 was a stumbling block in bringing Kashmir closer to the rest of India, a source of extremism and separatism in the Kashmir Valley, and an avenue for Pakistan to gain a foothold in the Valley, has the removal of the special status brought Kashmir closer to India, reduced the sources of extremism and separatism, and undermined Pakistani influence in the Valley? Most indicators of violence in Kashmir have shown an uptick despite the double lockdown that Kashmir is under today. Mainstream Kashmiri politicians today are as unhappy and disgruntled as the separatist politicians and the restive youngsters in South Kashmir. And Pakistan has left no stone unturned to aid and abet violence in the Valley. For Rawalpindi, all bets are off on Kashmir. India's national interest hardly benefits from such a toxic situation.

New Delhi's Kashmir policy today is caught between a rock and a hard place: there is no indication that the path that it chose in August 2019 would lead to peace and development in the Valley, nor can it revert to pre-2019 August status quo which would be political suicide for the BJP.

DEFINITIONS:

- ❖ **mythmaking** (noun) – the practice of creating myths.
- ❖ **myth** (noun) – (false) belief, idea, notion; story.
- ❖ **wherein** (adverb) – in which.
- ❖ **potential** (adjective) – possible, likely, probable.
- ❖ **conflict resolution** (noun) – it can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute.
- ❖ **undo** (verb) – cancel, reverse, revoke, nullify, invalidate.
- ❖ **long-standing** (adjective) – long-established, deep-rooted, fixed, persistent, continuing (for a long time).
- ❖ **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.
- ❖ **strip of** (verb) – dispossess, deprive, deny/ remove, take away from (rank, power, etc.).
- ❖ **statehood** (noun) – the condition of being an independent state.
- ❖ **simmering** (adjective) – fuming, smouldering, brewing (of emotions).
- ❖ **cauldron** (noun) – unstable situation, uncertainty (with emotions).
- ❖ **discontent** (noun) – dissatisfaction, disaffection, unhappiness, displeasure.
- ❖ **larger-than-life** (phrase) – mammoth, massive, monumental.
- ❖ **manifestation** (noun) – display, demonstration, appearance, avatar, embodiment.
- ❖ **collective** (adjective) – combined, united/joint, cooperative (by all people as a group).

- ❖ **psyche** (noun) – soul/spirit, essential nature/ persona, individuality.
- ❖ **mesmerising** (adjective) – captivating, hypnotizing, fascinating, enthralling.
- ❖ **deep state** (noun) – shadow government; influential decision-making bodies believed to be within government and it can be any agencies (e.g., military or any other).
- ❖ **heroism** (noun) – fearlessness, boldness, bravery, courage.
- ❖ **right wing** (noun) – conservative, rightest section/ portion of the political spectrum.
- ❖ **successive** (adjective) – consecutive, succeeding.
- ❖ **decade** (noun) – a period of ten years.
- ❖ **enthusiastically** (adverb) – interestingly, eagerly/keenly, vigorously, vehemently.
- ❖ **embellish** (verb) – elaborate, exaggerate, expand on.
- ❖ **vibrant** (adjective) – high-spirited, energetic, dynamic.
- ❖ **demonise** (verb) – to show someone as evil/wicked/bad.
- ❖ **ills** (noun) – problems, troubles, difficulties.
- ❖ **root cause** (noun) – the basic reason of something.
- ❖ **notwithstanding** (adverb) – nevertheless, nonetheless; in spite of, despite, regardless of.
- ❖ **valley** (noun) – a low area between hills or mountains typically with a river running through it. Valley is a metonym of Jammu & Kashmir in this context (Metonym is used as an alternative for something else with which it is closely related/associated).
- ❖ **conundrum** (noun) – problem, difficulty, quandary/dilemma.
- ❖ **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement/ condition.
- ❖ **hold someone/something responsible for** (phrase) – blame someone/something for something else.
- ❖ **ruin** (verb) – spoil, destroy, damage.
- ❖ **stall** (verb) – stop, block, obstruct, impede, thwart.
- ❖ **lack** (verb) – be without, be in need of, require, be short of.
- ❖ **merit** (noun) – good/strong point.
- ❖ **as a matter of fact** (phrase) – actually, really, in fact.
- ❖ **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
- ❖ **precisely** (adverb) – exactly, absolutely, squarely.
- ❖ **insurgency** (noun) – uprising, revolt, rebellion.
- ❖ **for sure** (phrase) – definitely, surely, certainly, without doubt.
- ❖ **set up** (phrasal verb) – establish, start/begin, inaugurate, create.
- ❖ **acquisition** (noun) – obtaining, acquiring/ procuring, appropriation.
- ❖ **militancy** (noun) – belligerency, combativeness, contentiousness/defiance (usually to support a cause).
- ❖ **in any case** (phrase) – whatever happens.
- ❖ **if anything** (phrase) – on the contrary.
- ❖ **play a part/role** (phrase) – contribute to, be instrumental in, be a factor in.
- ❖ **oft-cited** (adjective) – often referred.
- ❖ **counter-argument** (noun) – counter-statement, rebuttal, disconfirmation, disproof.
- ❖ **subsidise** (verb) – support, finance, contribute to, provide finance for. (it generally means “pay part of the cost of something, so that it is available at a lower price”).
- ❖ **sustain** (verb) – support, maintain, bolster up, prop up.
- ❖ **relatively** (adverb) – comparatively, proportionately, somewhat, to a certain extent/ degree.
- ❖ **make out** (phrasal verb) – portray, represent, assert.
- ❖ **distinction** (noun) – difference, variation, contrast, dissimilarity.
- ❖ **revenue deficit** (noun) – it arises when the government’s revenue expenditure exceeds the total revenue receipts.
- ❖ **bloated** (adjective) – (of organisation) larger than normal, larger than necessary, excessive in size (but less efficient than it should be).
- ❖ **bureaucracy** (noun) – officials (in the administration, government, the establishment) as a group.
- ❖ **precious little** (phrase) – very little (to emphasis something).
- ❖ **take place** (phrase) – happen, occur, come about, transpire.
- ❖ **thanks to** (phrase) – as a result of, owing to, due to, because of.
- ❖ **put differently** (phrase) – express differently, put/express in other words.
- ❖ **at least** (phrase) – anyway.
- ❖ **well-being** (noun) – healthy state/condition, prosperity.
- ❖ **cash-strapped** (adjective) – relating to someone who has less money; poor, impoverished, disadvantaged, dispossessed, underprivileged.

- ❖ **scholar** (noun) – academic, intellectual, expert/pundit, learned person.
- ❖ **inherent** (adjective) – implicit, intrinsic, fundamental, basic.
- ❖ **inherent limitation** (noun) – a restriction or constraint which is associated with the fundamental nature of something.
- ❖ **pacification** (noun) – peacemaking, conciliation, placation, appeasement.
- ❖ **grievance** (noun) – complaint, problem, objection/protest.
- ❖ **politico-ethnic** (adjective) – relating to something governed with both political views and ethnic groups' traits/characteristics.
- ❖ **radicalisation** (noun) – the process of causing someone to follow radical ways particularly in politics (& society).
- ❖ **unrelenting** (adjective) – unceasing, unabating, unflagging, unstoppable.
- ❖ **interference** (noun) – intervention, meddling, unwarranted involvement.
- ❖ **simplistic** (adjective) – oversimple/oversimplified, schematic, facile.
- ❖ **stroke of a pen** (phrase) – if something happens by/at the stroke of a pen, it happens very quickly by the authority.
- ❖ **cursory** (adjective) – casual, brief.
- ❖ **reading** (noun) – interpretation, understanding, study/analysis.
- ❖ **testify** (verb) – give evidence, be a witness, be proof of.
- ❖ **deep** (adjective) – intense, heavy, serious.
- ❖ **overwhelming** (adjective) – very great/large, huge, sweeping, uncontrollable, very strong.
- ❖ **unfortunate** (adjective) – sad/regrettable, untoward, inappropriate, ill-timed/fated.
- ❖ **implications** (noun) – consequence/outcome, ramification, repercussion.
- ❖ **articulation** (noun) – expression, statement, mention, assertion.
- ❖ **representation** (noun) – portrayal, depiction, characterization.
- ❖ **strengthen** (verb) – reinforce, fortify, bolster.
- ❖ **undermine** (verb) – reduce, diminish, spoil, damage, weaken.
- ❖ **impede** (verb) – hinder, obstruct, slow down.
- ❖ **perception** (noun) – understanding, discernment, recognition/realization; interpretation.
- ❖ **sympathiser** (noun) – supporter, well wisher, ally.
- ❖ **mistreatment** (noun) – ill treatment, abuse, mishandling.
- ❖ **empathy** (noun) – compassion, sympathy, feeling.
- ❖ **plight** (noun) – difficult situation, trouble/difficulty, quandary.
- ❖ **mainstream** (adjective) – accepted, established, recognized (as normal or conventional).
- ❖ **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually.
- ❖ **stumbling block** (noun) – barrier, blockade, obstacle, restriction.
- ❖ **extremism** (noun) – radicalism, fanaticism, dogmatism.
- ❖ **separatism** (noun) – dissension, nonconformity, dissent/faction.
- ❖ **avenue** (noun) – way, path, direction, route.
- ❖ **foothold** (noun) – grip, anchorage, purchase, support, firm contact.
- ❖ **uptick** (noun) – a small increase or upward trend.
- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
- ❖ **disgruntled** (adjective) – aggrieved, dissatisfied, unhappy/disappointed.
- ❖ **separatist** (adjective) – dissident, nonconformist, sectarian.
- ❖ **restive** (adjective) – restless, agitated; rebellious, insurgent; uncontrollable, unmanageable.
- ❖ **leave no stone unturned** (phrase) – to do every (single) thing possible in order to achieve something; not give up, be persistent, be determined.
- ❖ **abet** (verb) – to encourage/help someone to do something wrong/illegal.
- ❖ **all bets are off** (phrase) – used to describe a situation in which the outcome is uncertain/unpredictable and so anything can happen.
- ❖ **hardly** (adverb) – barely, slightly.
- ❖ **toxic** (adjective) – harmful, dangerous.
- ❖ **caught between a rock and a hard place** (phrase) – in a difficult situation difficult someone has to choose between two unpleasant things.
- ❖ **status quo** (noun) – the present situation, the current state, the existing state of affairs.
- ❖ **suicide** (noun) – self-destruction.