**The Kashmir Files: Myth or reality**

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 “Terrorism-related charges levelled against me are concocted, fabricated and politically motivated” and that “If seeking Azadi (Freedom) is a crime, then I am ready to accept this crime and its consequences,” Yasin Malik said during the trial, reported by Associated Press.
I believe that the loss of a homeland is more than the loss of real estate. A homeland cannot be recreated in a refugee camp, or in a new village or in a city slum. A homeland is a compendium of experiences and emotions, a wealth of traditions and memories. When the occupation forces trample upon a homeland, it denies the rights of the dispossessed, trashing their religious values and destroying their sacred books and libraries. An occupation is a spiritual and intellectual rape where we feel molested and enslaved in an ever-increasing agonising way.
The foreign occupation has destroyed the very fabric of Kashmiri culture. It has also shattered the communal harmony and the pluralistic nature of the Vale of Kashmir. The occupation has dispossessed the people from their culture which is distinctly unique and different from Indian culture. The resistance in Kashmir is against an alien occupation and is not communal. It cannot be communal and should not be. The compulsions of Kashmiri history and the demands of its future alike forbid religious conflict or sectarian strife. Kashmiri culture was nurtured over the course of centuries where various religious and ethnic groups lived in complete harmony. Even after the annexation of the State of Jammu & Kashmir by India, this spirit continued to thrive, and Muslims and Hindus (Pandits) lived in amity in the Valley of Kashmir.
It is a fact that the BJP/RSS-led government has tried to weave a smokescreen with some unfounded myths, like, ‘The Kashmir Files’, which seek to discredit the genuine struggle of the people of Kashmir for the right to self-determination. But these ploys will never be able to cover up the reality and sufferings of people in Jammu & Kashmir. India has particularly tried to equate Kashmiri people with fundamentalism. I want to debunk this myth created by the BJP/RSS-led Modi Administration; that Kashmir is an issue of fundamentalism and communalism.
The term fundamentalism is quite inapplicable to Kashmiri society. A hallmark of Kashmir has been its long tradition of tolerance, amity, good will, and friendships across religious and cultural boundaries. It has a long tradition of moderation and non-violence. Its culture does not generate extremism or fundamentalism. Its five religious groups—Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and tiny minority of Christians—have for centuries flourished in harmony and mutual bond: no religious ghettoes; no religious apartheid; no economic or sharp cultural divides. All religious persuasions rejoiced at each other’s holidays and times of joy, attended social gatherings together, lived as neighbours in harmony, and treasured their mutual trust.
The various faiths of Kashmir eschew fanatical or extremist dogmas that distort and debase their doctrinal origins. Tolerance and mutual respect are their watchwords. For example, Kashmiri Sikhs have no antagonism towards other religions. Indeed, their trust in Muslims is so strong that they have refused bribes from the Indian army to blame Muslims for the killings of 36 Sikhs at Chittisinghpura, Kashmir on March 20, 2000, during President Bill Clinton’s visit to New Delhi that had been covertly organised by the Indian military itself.
The Valley of Kashmir has remained the symbol of communal harmony for centuries. Can anyone deny the fact—of no small significance—that while the Subcontinent under British rule was the scene of recurrent murderous strife, communal riots were unheard of in Kashmir? That unquestionable fact brings out the real character of Kashmir’s heritage. A person no less important than Mahatma Gandhi has eloquently elucidated those sentiments in 1947, “While the rest of the country burns in communal fire, I see a shining ‘Ray of Hope’ in Kashmir only.”
The sad part of ‘The Kashmir Files’ is the depiction of Yasin Malik as a vicious and evil person.
Metro Saga reported on March 14, 2022, that after watching, ‘The Kashmir Files film’, netizens started trending “The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Yasin Malik, is alleged to have been collecting funds through various illegal means for funding separatist and terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.”
The question arises whether Yasin Malik is a terrorist or not? The answer to this complicated question was given by one of the eminent journalists of India rather South Asia and a seasoned diplomat, Ambassador Kuldip Nayyar, who wrote in Redfiff.com on August 7, 1999, “The first militant, Yasin Malik, who raised his gun at a public meeting in the heart of Srinagar, has turned nonviolent and vegetarian. Now he is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi.”
Bharat Bhushan, a seasoned Indian journalist wrote in ‘The Telegraph’ on February 4, 2007,
“The president of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), one of the first to wield the gun in Kashmir, is today training youngsters in non-violent politics. He uses a curious mixture of religion—Sufism—and non-violence in an attempt to build a constituency for peace in Jammu and Kashmir.”
Let me mention a report published in a local newspaper in April 2015. It says that a group of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley joined JKLF chairman Mohammad Yasin Malik in the protest at Maisuma early this week. Reportedly, “The procession marched towards Lal Chowk chanting slogan Sang Sang Jiyain Gay, Sang Sang Marain Gay (we will live together and die together). The Kashmiri Pandits said that there was no need and no use of making separate colonies. ‘These colonies may benefit somebody’s politics, but can never benefit Pandits,’” Pandit Vishin Jee said.
The Kashmir Files film conveniently does not mention that Yasin Malik later gave up arms and professed to be open to talks. Nor does the ‘Kashmir File’ mention that Yasin Malik met then the Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh in 2006. Because of his non-violent ideology, Yasin Malik was invited by Dr Manmohan Singh on February 17, 2006, for initiating a dialogue between the Government of India and the people of Kashmir.
During the recent court hearing, Indian press reported that on May 10, 2022, Yasin Malik pleaded guilty on terror charges. However, the Associated Press reported that during the trial, Malik protested the charges and said he was a freedom fighter. AP added that Malik said, “Terrorism-related charges levelled against me are concocted, fabricated and politically motivated” and that “If seeking Azadi (Freedom) is a crime, then I am ready to accept this crime and its consequences.” Mushaal Mallick, Chairperson, Peace & Culture Organisation and the wife of Yasin Malik represented the sentiments of the people of Kashmir when she tweeted, “If standing for freedom of the people is a crime then every Kashmiri will do it, again and again.” Let the saner elements in Indian public square decide who is speaking the truth.