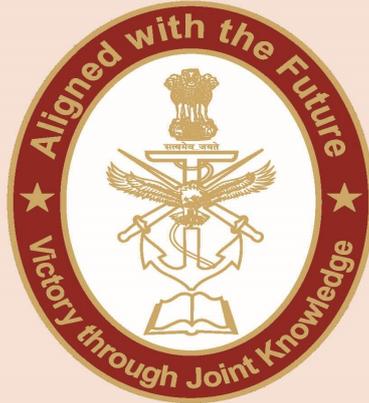


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

REPORT ON THE BOOK DISCUSSION

“KASHMIR AS I SEE IT FROM WITHIN & AFAR”

AT PURPLE BAY ON 06 JUN 2019

BY

COL ARVINDER SINGH, SENIOR FELLOW CENJOWS

Introduction

1. A Discussion about the newly published Book titled “***Kashmir As I See from Within & Afar***” authored by Shri Ashok Dhar was conducted at Purple Bay conference hall on 06 Jun 2019. Shri Ashok Dhar, born and brought up in Kashmir, has over thirty-five years of experience in the Energy sector. He is a member of Energy Institute (London), a Visiting Distinguished Fellow at Observer Research Foundation and the founding director of its Kolkata chapter. He has also worked in top leadership roles in three Fortune 500 companies in India and abroad. The Author himself was present to elaborate upon the contents of his book. Dr Manoj Joshi, a Distinguished Fellow at the ORF and a journalist specializing on national and international politics and Lt Gen Mukesh Sabharwal PVSM, AVSM (Retd) former GOC 15 Corps and former Adjutant General were the two eminent subject matter experts who were invited as discussants.

2. Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd), Director, CENJOWS, welcomed the distinguished Author, two eminent discussants and other audience. The Director, in his opening remarks, set the tone for further discussions by bringing out that Kashmir is close to heart of every defense

officer as he has served there in some capacity during his career. The service officer sees Kashmir from different prism i.e. Security prism. Whereas this book brings other aspects of Kashmir. He requested the Author and two eminent speakers to discuss his book.

Discussion of the Book by Dr Manoj Joshi, Discussant

3. The speaker congratulated the Author for a very comprehensive treatment of the subject which is so relevant in the contemporary issue which India is facing from decades. Dr Manoj Joshi, himself an author of the book "The lost rebellion - Kashmir in the nineties" touched upon the rise of militancy in Kashmir. He began by pointing out that this book brings out various phases historically in which Kashmiri Pandits took exile from Kashmir. It started way back in 16th Century. This book brings out the synthesis, which Kashmiri Pandits have with Kashmir, in spite of being in extreme minority. Shri Ashok Dhar has engaged the subject in a peculiar way and with two lenses. One as a Kashmiri Pandit who has grown up there and affiliates to 'Kashmirayat' and second as an Engineer, who sees the problem, dismantle it and shows what to do. This book is not about the nostalgia of a Kashmiri Pandit but a trail of death and destruction of last thirty years. We look at Kashmir as a Policy challenge and say that historical big issues can not be resolved but the author brings out how to resolve the big issues giving International models taken from history where even far bigger problems got resolved. He gave example of 'Alsace-Lorraine' in which France and Germany had disputes from centuries but the problem got resolved. The books bring about the historical part of partition of India and the Shimla agreement to define the Kashmir problem. The book brings out the situation of 90's to till date and still Kashmiryat survives. The radicalization is still not there. Indian Muslims have never supported Kashmir. Had it been a Muslim problem, the other Muslims in the country would have supported it. The book is about passion and what Kashmir and Kashmirayat is about. It brings out the insights which are valuable if we want to resolve the problem.

Discussion of the Book by Shri Ashok Dhar, Author.

4. Shri Ashok Dhar, brought out that during his long career with the energy sector he had an opportunity to travel and stay in in most of the Islamic and Gulf countries. He always had an inquisitiveness to study the history, culture, power structure and the religion of the country he visited. The Author gave a historical perspective, background and context which enabled the book to be published. The idea germinated during his visit to Kashmir with his family on a holiday in year 2009 when he realized that the new generation of Kashmir has been fed with incorrect narrative and doesn't know anything about the historical background of Kashmir, Kashmirayat and the Kashmiri Pandits. This book is an attempt to bridge this gap in the

perception of people on Kashmir. The book is a handiwork of ten years of research from the primary source i.e. the newspapers before 1947, exploring own roots and trying to answer questions which arose in the mind of the author. The author mentioned that this book is an honest and a true story of him with no anecdotes being false in order to get readership.

5. The chapter 'Being a Kashmiri' brings out why the Kashmiri behaves in a different way. He went through the historical aspect of Kashmir; its spiritual connects and introduction of Islam in Kashmir in 14th century. He mentioned that all of the history of Kashmir is well documented as it was the only place in South East Asia which had a culture of writing history by professional historians. Every aspect of the Kashmir mentioned is source reference. He talks about 'Kashmir Shaivism' which places women on pedestal and doesn't discriminate that only brahmins can preach religion as per the practices in other parts of India during the older era. He mentioned that this land of saffron can only be won by spirituality and not by gun. While bringing out the historical details, he brings out that though Islam came in India in 7th century but it came in Kashmir only in 14th century. He explained the genesis of Kashmiriyat in 14/15th century. Even during the time of Akbar, he kept about 90,000 soldiers in Kashmir against a population of about four/five lakh people. The Afghan rule came after the end of rule of Aurengzeb. In the chapter 'Trust me Trust me not' he discusses the trust deficit in Kashmir. The author finally argues and emphasized that presently the Kashmiriyat is dormant in Kashmir but not dead.

6. The book slowly and carefully uncovers multiple layers of the conflict to show that apart from being a territorial dispute, it is also about historicity, morality and leadership—aspects that have been neglected so far. The author holds that looking merely at the legality of the state's accession is like looking at an iceberg; peace will not come if we have not examined what Kashmiriyat is.

Comments by Lt Gen Mukesh Sabharwal PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Discussant

7. The speaker congratulated the Author for a very comprehensive treatment of the subject which is so relevant in the current context. He began by pointing out that this book is highly recommended for reading and not scanning. The reading of the book made him ponder on lot of issues of Kashmir which he experienced during his life time. This book is a journey of few decades and what has changed during that period. The books make a very interesting reading with complex issues discussed with a very readable narrative. The speaker points out that Kashmir is viewed differently by different people. Everyone who is associated with Kashmir has his on own take on the problem. He brings out that maintaining status quo cannot resolve the dispute permanently. The Kashmiri Pandits will return to Kashmir

if they feel secured. The local leadership needs to come up to bring about the change in young generation. The Economy of Kashmir needs to be revived to create jobs for which investments are required. The investments will only come when the problem of Kashmir is resolved.

8. This rigorously researched and passionately honest account shows us a way to look for solutions that are not merely reflective but practical, using tools extracted from management studies such as game theory. A radical approach that throws open a new window of inquiry to resolve an age-old issue

Conclusion

9. The Book discussion was followed by an animated question and answer session. Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), former AG spoke about his own experiences of Kashmir and discussed whether Kashmiriyat is still surviving in the millennial generation or has died down due to radicalization especially in Central and South Kashmir. The author felt that still green shoots of Kashmiriyat remain and this book is a small attempt to keep that green shoots alive.

10. The book discussion concluded by final remarks from Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (Retd.), Director, CENJOWS, who stated that the book's publication could not have been more well timed, particularly when there is a new majority government in the Centre and the nation is struggling to resolve the Kashmir issue. He thanked the Author, two distinguished discussants and the informed audience for active and whole-hearted participation in the event.