

NOTE

ARUNDHATI RAY, KASHMIR AND JINGOISM

A B writes :

Now it is Arundhati Ray's turn to be the target of state violence. She has been implicated in a case of treason. Her offence, as reported in the press, is that she has refused to accept the notion that Kashmir is an inseparable part of India as a historical fact. Now the question is how Kashmir came to be treated as a part of India? After the transfer of power and the partition of India Hari Singh, the then Maharaja of Kashmir, decided to remain independent and entered into a standstill agreement with Pakistan. The Government of India wanted more time to consider the agreement. But after a few months, Hari Singh informed the Government of India that invaders across the border with Pakistan had infiltrated and were marching towards Srinagar, and military help from the Government of India was urgently needed. In order to give legitimacy to the intervention of the Indian army, Kashmir was formally acceded to India by him. The Government of India agreed to send troops but told in clear terms that once the invaders were expelled, the final question of accession would be settled with a reference to the people of Kashmir. After the troops were sent, Jawharlal Nehru, in at least two speeches stated that the people of Kashmir, guided by a 'great leader'-obviously he meant Sheikh Abdullah-were resisting the invaders, and that after the expulsion of the invaders, the question of accession will be settled with the consent of the people. It is clear that Nehru had very little doubt that if a referendum was taken, the majority of the Kashmiris would opt for the accession of Kashmir into India. That was probably why he made the promise before the United Nations to hold a referendum or plebiscite. But the promise was not kept, and the Government of India took to a policy of carrot and stick.

The brutal tortures perpetrated by the police, army and para-military forces on the Kashmiris are well-documented, while Pakistan has consistently been trying to fish in troubled water. The Government of India, by constantly holding that the problem regarding Kashmir is a bilateral affair has trampled the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, and the successive rulers of Pakistan, while paying lip service to the notion of independent Kashmir, has virtually occupied a part of Kashmir, which they have named 'Azad Kashmir'. And they have successfully communalized Kashmir polity over the years making Kashmir a part of 'Two-Nation Agenda', which it was not when India was partitioned on the basis of religion. For all practical purposes Hari Singh did all the blunder for perpetuating a crisis that may trigger a fourth war between India and Pakistan.

Once Indira Gandhi took initiative in converting the actual line of control as the border, thus virtually accepting Pakistan's suzerainty over a part of Kashmir. This was a violation of the principle of self-determination, but at the same time it was a recognition of the notion that Kashmir could no longer be held as an inalienable part of India.

These facts clearly suggest a point: neither Nehru nor his daughter firmly stuck to the belief, the belief that has gained currency over time by virtue of media propaganda, and by challenging which Arundhati Ray finds herself in the dock. Of course, there are many who, hold the opinion that Jawharlal Nehru made a historic mistake by promising a referendum. The idea of these people is simple; it is no crime to subjugate a small nation by force, and the democratic promise of Nehru must be sacrificed at the altar of jingoism. A large number

of them give the analogy with Tibet, forgetting that such sort of analogy is grossly undemocratic in nature. Their mindset is clear; drawing the Tibetan example after all is safe, because it is not easy for the Government of China to punish an Indian for condemning China's policy on Tibet. But to criticize the GOI's Kashmir policy has the risk of incurring the wrath of the Indian state.

No one exactly knows how much the Government of India has so far spent in order to cling in practice to the notion that Kashmir is an inalienable part of India, but it would not probably be less than one trillion rupees. Such huge unproductive expenditure of course benefits some in the sense of having a Keynesian type effect, but it is harmful to the economy in the long run. □□□