



Kashmir - A new Opportunity has Opened Up



27 Oct, 2017 [C D Sahay, Centre Head & Senior Fellow, Neighbourhood Studies and Internal Security Studies, VIF](#) [View2715](#) [Comments 0](#)

In a major initiative, Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh, on October 23, 2017 announced government's decision to appoint Shri former Director of Intelligence Bureau (IB) as 'Representative' of Government of India 'to carry forward a dialogue with elected representative organisations and concerned individuals in the state of Jammu and Kashmir' and 'initiate a sustained interaction and dialogue to understand the aspirations of the wide cross-section of the society, particularly the youth in the Jammu and Kashmir and communicate them to the State Government' (Government of India, 2017).

The decision has been widely welcomed as 'a very serious step forward' and a timely initiative (J&K CM, Indian Express, October 25). It added "it is exactly what we always wanted...this is the beginning of a political process". These sentiments have been echoed by most stakeholders in Kashmir affairs, though political leaders, mostly on party lines, have expressed reservations ranging from government's 'admission of failure in its approach'; 'we will have to wait and watch the developments' and even 'need to involve Pakistan in the process' etc. One would not like to see politically motivated arguments here in this commentary.

In May, 2017, while examining the developments in Kashmir in three phases (post- Pathankot terror strike; post-Burhan Wani encounter; post-Uri Surgical Strike), this writer had, in an article titled '*Jammu and Kashmir – On Path to Nowhere*', argued that violence in Kashmir could be brought under control through 'an extended period of kinetic measures' by intelligence driven operations; adding that "the final component of the strategy could be designed to, in the long run, say over the next six months, enable policy makers in New Delhi and Srinagar to reach out to the youth, the alienated sections of the society and the 'dispersed' leaders of the agitation". I had also therein suggested that "this can be done through the intelligence apparatus and credible interlocutors, both of who have always played an important part in 'breaking the ice' and creating the conditions for resumption of dialogue under the Vajpayee enunciated doctrine of *Insaniyat, Jambooriyat and Kashmiriyat* that PM Modi has also represented the people of Kashmir as the basis of his policy on Kashmir".

Prime Minister Modi re-emphasized his commitment made to the people of Kashmir in his Independence Day speech this year, specific problems in Jammu and Kashmir can neither be solved through bullets nor through abuses, but only by embracing all Kashmiris ("Na goli banegi – gale lagane se"). The Government followed this up with the Union Home Minister undertaking an extended four-day trip to Kashmir in 2017 during which he met with representatives of more than 80 delegations. Based on inputs made available to the HM during the visit furnished by the security and intelligence services, the government has come to the conclusion that the year-long kinetic measures, initiated in June 2016 and the continued targeted operations, had achieved the desired objective of bringing violence under control, and is now ready to initiate the promised engagement with the stake-holders.

It needs to be noted here that this year till mid-October, 176 terrorists have been neutralized by the security forces in a series of coordinated operations. This includes 12 prominent commanders of Lashkar-e Toiba, 10 belonging to Hizb-ul Mujahideen and two leading commanders of the terrorist network operating in the valley, has been the highest in recent years. The backbone of Pakistan sponsored terrorism has been largely neutralized through the ongoing investigations launched by the National Intelligence Agency targeting individuals facilitating flow of terror funds to the leaders and ground level operators. According to available details, 19 billion dollar sponsored funding network have been under investigations, with 10 of them already under detention in connection with registered offences.

Strangely enough, some of the detractors of the initiative have raised questions on the suitability of Shri Sharma as the 'Representative' given his intelligence background and not being a political entity. In the words of his former senior colleague Shri K M Singh, (former Secretary to the DG-CISF and Member National Disaster Management Authority), "Shri Sharma is a hardcore professional having thorough knowledge of the situation in the State right since the early 1990's when he was posted in the Valley. He remained engaged with Kashmir affairs right till he was Director of IB late last year. He is a self-effacing professional, maintains low profile and is easily accessible individual".

Shri Sharma has the confidence of the decision makers in the government and thus fulfils all the required traits of a negotiator/ diplomat for a challenging assignment ahead. Challenges for the Representative will be many and formidable. Previous initiatives taken by the government have not succeeded; questions would be asked as to what happened to their recommendations. The youth are disillusioned, leaderless and directionless; have suffered enormously; have been exploited, and have high aspirations and expectations. Economic packages have come in plenty but have not been streamlined?

Today, the situation has changed. While the law and order and security situation has come under control, there are questions from the people that need to be resolved. The vested interests within and outside the country who have gained from the continuing unrest in the valley, would not keep quiet. How to deal with these developed deep rooted vested interests. What level of cooperation will the Representative receive from the various stake-holders?

But a good beginning has been made. The government needs to be congratulated for the initiative. CM Mahbooba Mufti has sounded the call and said, "Shri Sharma carries the official authority and rank to interact with all he needs to talk to and therefore, his reports and recommendations carry the stamp of 'ownership' by the Central government".

The need of the hour, in the interest of Kashmir and the Kashmiri people, is for all stakeholders to support the initiative by extending support and help Kashmir in the new opportunity that is likely to open up.

(Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the VIF)

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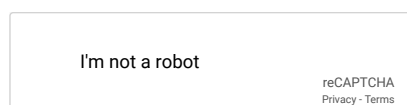
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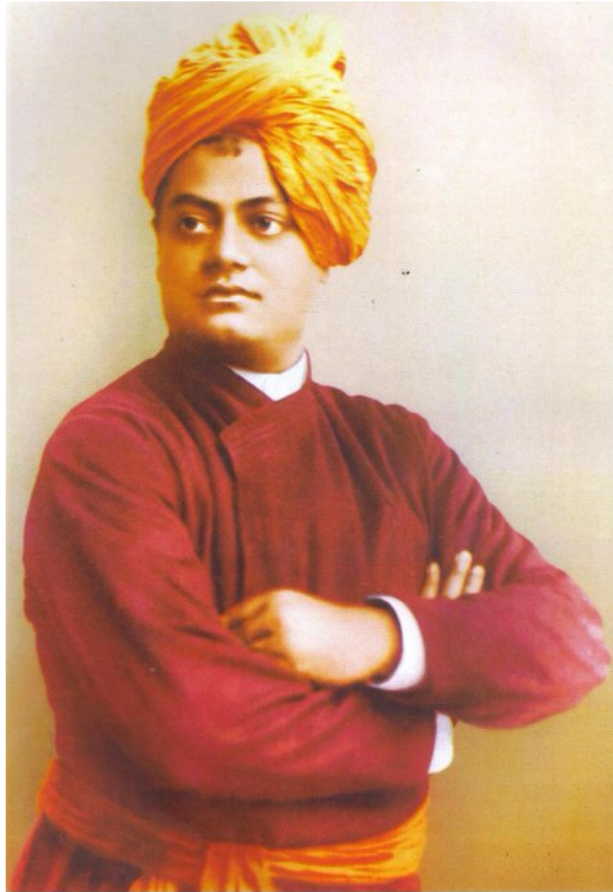
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