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Book Review of “Kashmir a Wounded Valley” by Ajit Bhattacharjea

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Ever since the eruption of violence, there has been a lot of destruction and devastation in Kashmir, A large number of people were killed and innumerable turned physically disabled. Property worth billions of rupees got destroyed. Not only this, thousands of the families were rendered homeless as they had to adopt migration and take refuge either in other parts of India or Pakistan administered Kashmir. This way the unending violence affected each and every aspect of life and gave rise to such a chaotic situation where death and destruction became order of the day. The fighting between the Indian security agencies and the armed militants worsened the situation to the extent that it assumed such an alarming proportions which full filled all most all the characteristics of “Hobbesian State of Nature”. All though, the era since 1990 can also be placed among the darkest periods of Kashmir in view of its trouble and trauma, yet one positive aspect which pertains to the same is that a lot of literature has been written on Kashmir during the ongoing violence. A number of books and other documents related to different aspects of Kashmir problem came to the light. This way a lot of primary and secondary source material became available for all those students and scholars who are interested to study Kashmir.

Among the various important books which have been written on Kashmir since 1990, mention can be made of Jagmohan’s “My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir”, Ved Marwah’s “Pathology of Terrorism in India”, Tavlen Singh’s “Kashmir a tragedy of errors”, Balraj Puri’s “Kashmir towards insurgency”, P.S. Verma’s “Jammu and Kashmir at the political cross roads” Sumentra Bose’s “The challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, self determination and a just peace”, Major General Arjun Roy’s “Kashmir Dairy; Psychology of militancy”, J.N. Dixit’s “India Pakistan in war and peace”, M.J. Akbar’s “Kashmir behind the vale” Proful Bidwai and Achin Venik’s “South Asia on short fuse”, Z.G. Mohammad’s Kashmir in war and diplomacy etc etc. Parvez Musharuf and Jasvant Singh also dealt with Kashmir problem in their works. However, the book entitled “Kashmir a wounded valley” written by Ajit Bhattacharjea in 1993 and published by U.B.S. publishers – new Delhi can be described one of the best books written on Kashmir ever since the eruption of violence.

The book consists of XVIII chapters followed by appendix and a detailed bibliography. The author who by profession is a prominent journalist of India had visited Kashmir in the aftermath of the 1947 tribal invasion and took on spot stock of the situation. Again after the eruption of the violence in Kashmir in the early 1990, he visited Kashmir and made a comparative analysis of his both the visitis. The author seems convinced that in 1947, anti – India feelings were absent among the masses and had the Government of India allowed the U.N.O. to conduct a plebiscite, possibly majority of the population would have voted infavour of India instead of Pakistan. But after the 1990 upsurge, the anti – India movement has gained momentum and Kashmir has become a question of recapturing for India. This is the crux around which the entire preface of the book revolves.

The first five chapters of the book provide a detailed insight about the hoary past of the culturally rich Kashmiri nation. These chapters also highlight the conspiracies hatched both internally and externally by the vested interests and thus subjugated this hapless nation. From chapter VI to X, the author of the book throws a detailed light about the political awakening and the subsequent developments which led to the Kashmir's accession to India. He has also dealt with all such issues which resulted in the growing dissatisfaction of the Kashmiri masses against the Dogra autocratic rule, the political awakening, the tribal invasion, the Indo Pak war, reference of Kashmir issue to U.N.O, conditional accession, grant of autonomy and transfer of power to the popular leader of Kashmir.

Similarly in the other chapters from XI to XIV, the author describes how India and Pakistan fought in different international forums on the question of Kashmir and how the super power rivalry blocked the way for a peaceful resolution of Kashmir. Moreover, it has been also explained that how the integrative measures were taken which marked the end of Kashmir's special status under article 370 to a large extent. (This article 370 has been completely abolished now and the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir has been bifurcated in to two Union Territories- U T of Jammu and Kashmir and U T of Ladakh).

In the remaining four chapters from XV to XVIII, the author has made an attempt to explain how the denial of federal autonomy to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, non functioning of democratic institutions, corruption, unemployment, non development of the state and many other factors alienated the common Kashmiri from Indian nation and how Pakistan took advantage of the situation by providing arms and ammunition to these Kashmiris and this finally gave rise to the armed militancy in Kashmir. At the end, the author advises that the policy of bullet against bullet is no solution to the Kashmir wrangle therefore, he insists for broad based and meaningful negotiations on Kashmir.

To conclude it can be said that " Kashmir a wounded valley" is another good book on Kashmir. The author claims that the facts have been scrupulously studied and presented with a sense of objectivity. However, the author has many times twisted the facts while explaining the human rights abuses. Moreover, on many occasions he seems to be convinced that had the Government of India allowed the conducting of a plebiscite in Kashmir prior to the eruption of violence in 1990, she would have definitely won. He supports his argument with a reference to the electoral participation of Kashmiris from time to time. But this kind of plea can be neither accepted nor rejected as a lot of time has passed since then. However, to conclude it can be said, that Ajit Bhattiacharjea has written a very important book on Kashmir entitled as " Kashmir a wounded valley" . Indeed this book is worth reading particularly for those who are interested in South Asian politics.