

“General Musharraf’s four point formula can provide an effective roadmap in Kashmir”

An Interview with Prof Abdul Ghani Bhat

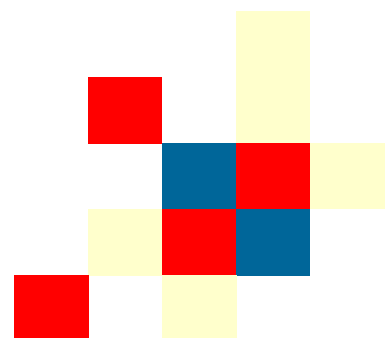
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Professor Abdul Gani Bhat, is a former Chairman of the Hurriyat Conference in Kashmir Valley.

Nadir Ali, a Research Assistant at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, interviewed Prof Bhat in February 2011.

Nadir Ali: What is your evaluation of the political situation in Kashmir and its impact on South Asia?

Professor Bhat: Kashmir is the crux of all problems between India and Pakistan. To resolve the Kashmir issue, Indian and Pakistani officials have met on various occasions in the past. For instance, Tashkent in 1966, where they signed the Tashkent declaration, then in Shimla after 1971 war, which culminated in the Shimla Agreement, and more recently when President General Pervez Musharraf made a serious effort to address the issue through the Islamabad Declaration. However, the Indian state has apparently chosen to silence and suppress the grievances of the Kashmiris which manifest itself through anger, alienation, collective discontent, turmoil and an ever increasing uncertainty.

The need of the hour therefore, is to address the root cause of these problems in Kashmir for the purpose of ensuring peace in the entire South-Asian region. However, this needs to be done while observing a certain measure of sensitivity to not infuriate the sentiments of any community and ensure a safe and secure future for South Asia. All three tangents need to be considered and one needs to take into account the Indian, the Pakistani and the sensitivities of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Yet the ground realities also need to be considered. With a combination of sensitivity and reality a reasonable solution can be found for the Kashmir situation.

Nadir Ali: What according to you is the ideal solution to the Kashmir problem?

Professor Bhat: There are many solutions which the scholars and strategists have been either suggesting or looking forward to. The United Nations (UN) passed a resolution recognizing the people's right to determine their own future according to their own wishes primarily ascertained in terms of a plebiscite or referendum under the UN auspices. The resolution was accepted by both India and Pakistan but has not been implemented in the last 64 years. Sir Owen Dixon had suggested an outline for a possible solution as early as 1950s which is known as "Dixon Plan" but even that Plan did not work out. Two countries fought wars in 1965 and 1971 and no resolution seemed in sight consequentially.

As far as the current scenario is concerned one needs to consider factors like nuclear weaponization in the sub continent. As a consequence of increased weaponization the balance of power between India and Pakistan has been restored to a status quo. One also needs to keep in mind the concept of globalization of economy. Globalization of economies pre supposes interdependence amongst various nations.

Violence is another factor which will influence the growth of relations between these two neighbours. Therefore, while seeking a settlement or while talking in terms of a possible solution one has to offer solutions for putting an end to violence. Meanwhile, extremism is as big a threat as violence and communalism. The call of time is to respond by rising above hostility, above irony, above cynicism and proceed pragmatically, imaginatively with openness and courage. For a person having deep linkages with both India and Pakistan it is difficult to differentiate and place his/her loyalties in one country in this sense they owe their allegiance to both India and Pakistan. If such people proceed on a premise of togetherness, that too in terms of a brighter tomorrow and a brighter South Asia they can abridge a link between India and Pakistan. Solutions will have to be found in a dispassionate manner otherwise the people of the two countries will be doomed.

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Its aim is to develop a comprehensive and alternative framework for peace and security in the region catering to the changing demands of national, regional and global security.

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India deserves a seat in the United Nations Security Council but the Kashmir imbroglio blocks its passage. The other important factor hampering its progress in the UNSC is the involvement of China and America in South Asia. South Asian region is one of the world's very significant regions, and therefore the involvement of these two powerful countries is understandable. But, their involvement is likely to produce a crisis which will affect the relationship between India and Pakistan. Kashmir is not only linked with the future of South Asia as a region but with Afghanistan too. There is a saying in Kashmir: "Tendus peth tend tay tendus lag zeer, Kabul, Kandhar bay Kashmir", that is there are linkages between Kabul, Kandhar and Kashmir and Kashmir cannot escape the fall outs of the situation in Afghanistan.



So to be brief, the resolution of the Kashmir will bring peace, security and stability in the region of Asia for decades and years to come if not centuries. It will ensure prosperity of the people in the region and not leave them to languish in poverty. India's chances of a permanent set in UNSC will brighten up in the wake of improvement in its economic standards. Solving the Kashmir issue will also call for less Chinese presence in the region and the Sino-American conflict will no longer affect political situations in the region. The problems of extremism and violence will also go from Afghanistan and from Kashmir. Pakistan will probably benefit more than any other country. To crown it all India and Pakistan will be able to establish friendly relations. This will prove to be an end to all ills in the region. But the prime condition remains the resolution of the Kashmir issue which is unmistakably interlinked to Indo-Pak ties. Therefore, the people in this region need to summon the courage and endeavour together towards establishment of peace and prosperity and a solution which is acceptable, honourable and durable.

General Musharraf's four point formula can provide an effective roadmap in Kashmir: 1) self governance, which is a political concept not a political concession, 2) demilitarization- "Well, if violence goes and if peace returns, you don't need the armies. Let the armies go to barracks," 3) Irrelevant borders which implies free movement of people and trade between India and Pakistan, and between the two Kashmirs, 4) Joint management of Kashmir, which is not joint control. Joint management will mean that India, Pakistan, and the two Kashmirs will comprise a group. A group to manage common interests and common issues like trade, tourism, and river waters etc. Joint management is politico-social concept in the sense that politics and the social milieu will be considered together. These four points would enable the two countries to build trust amongst each other by increasing understanding, communication and mutual good will. Therefore, Musharraf's four point formula through joint management and self governance, demilitarization and irrelevant borders and free trade will provide a case worthy of pursuit.

Nadir Ali: According to you Musharraf's four point formula is a workable solution to the Kashmir problem. Why it failed to get materialised?

Professor Bhat: During Pervez Musharraf's time the leadership in India and Pakistan had made appreciable progress towards finding a solution of the Kashmir problem. The Foreign Minister of Musharraf's government even claimed that "the agreement between India and Pakistan on Kashmir was just a signature away." However, this deal could not be brought to fruition as General Musharraf had to resign. In fact earlier in April 2007, Pervez Musharraf told me to see the Prime Minister of India, who was gracious to grant me an interview at his official residence. We talked for more than 40 minutes. I told Mr. Manmohan Singh that General Pervez Musharraf asked me to tell you "that you are a Pakistani Sikh ruling India and I am an Indian Muslim ruling Pakistan. A duty is divinely enjoined on us to buy peace for the people in the sub continent. Let us summon courage and rid Indians and Pakistanis of sentimentalism that is bordering on insanity." The Indian Prime Minister felt very happy, and remarked that "unless we restore peace, progress will not mean anything. Progress in turmoil is no progress." If the General had not left at that particular time it is possible that India and Pakistan might have reached a solution and the Kashmir problem would have been resolved.

There was also a review clause in the Musharraf formula that after 7 or 15 or more years it would be referred to the people and if they agree with it the arrangement will be deemed as final settlement on the Kashmir problem. But if they say no, then another mechanism will have to be evolved to ascertain the desire of people in all these regions comprising Jammu and Kashmir and India and Pakistan. The proposal was in fact not only an acceptable solution but a very workable one too, where no party would have suffered the painful sense of defeat: neither the Indians nor the Pakistanis and not even the people of Kashmir.

Nadir Ali: You have traveled in both India and Pakistan. How would you compare the two countries? How should the Indian State alter its approach towards Kashmir?

Professor Bhat: The two countries can be best described as one soul inhabiting two bodies. Many scholars endowed with a fine sense of history believe Pakistan and India share geographical features, similarities in poetry, fine arts, music, waters and several species of birds. It is also a ground reality that the two countries are likely to share future political repercussions of the developments in each other's territories. The region can be brought out of the political quagmire only by oneness of thought and deed disregarding caste, creed and colour, which is my sincere hope.

India is world's seventh largest country and world's largest democracy. India has great amount of resources and great potential which is visible in its growing economic clout. However, if India is really keen to address the Kashmir problem it has to give some amount of leeway to Kashmiris as it is only by their conjoined effort that the two will be able to reach a possible solution. India should resume its composite dialogue with Pakistan. Let Indians and Pakistanis agree that the Kashmiris also have stakes in the conflict. If they acknowledge this it will be a very positive step towards resolving the Kashmir issue.

Nadir Ali: What is your assessment of the Kashmiri separatist leadership? Do you think they have a long term vision and a sustainable goal in mind? Do you think people repose faith in them or that they can deliver to the expectations of these people?

Professor Bhat: Well, leaders do not have to put on blinkers. Leaders have to be wide awake to the realities. If you are not wide awake to the realities, you do not have any right to belong to politics. A good leader should not feel frightened if some people do not go his way or do not say what he says. A good leader should have two qualities: a) represent the sentiment genuinely, in this case the sentiment of the people in Kashmir, the people in Jammu, and the people in Ladakh; b) one who understands the dynamics of the change, who has the will to ride the tide of change and not be swallowed by the change but work out a strategy to tame the raising waves so that we reach the shore across a sea of turmoil.

Nadir Ali: The Kashmiri youth are in revolt. They are very angry and are fighting hard. How do you see this rising angst?

Professor Bhat: In terms of collective psychological personality of Kashmir the sentiment is transferred from generation to generation. It is as though the people in this region inherit the baggage called Kashmir problem, not only from 1947 but much earlier than that. Talking of youth, they are most visible on the streets. While the elders deliver speeches, and are not a part of the agitation: violent or peaceful, it is the youth who are always involved everywhere like in Telangana, in Palestine, in America (in the Vietnam War) etc. It is the youth who are the future. In Kashmir the sentiment and the anger of the youth finds expression in the roar of the gun, in stone pelting, in raising slogans, etc. Even everyday problems in Kashmir get often articulated as Aazadi (Freedom) discourse and it is the youth who are in the forefront. It is the youth who hold the key to the future of Kashmir.

Nadir Ali: Professor, you were one of the founding members of Hurriyat conference. Now there are two sections of Hurriyat: one is moderate and the other is extremist. What were the main reasons behind this split and why cannot the Kashmiri separatist leadership unite?

Professor Bhat: Unity is an ideal which the people love to talk about but never achieve. Russia was a monolithic state, one single political party (USSR) but Russia broke and Communism is no more except for whatever little is left in China. India has a number of political parties and belongs to the democratic era and upholds the democratic culture. Disagreement on issues is allowed in an environment of rhetorical dissidence. Therefore, talking in terms of two Hurriyats does not matter. They (Hurriyat G) have their own path to pursue, and the other section has its own path to pursue which believes in dialogue. But look at the change: Geelani sahib tells gunmen not to wield guns anymore as this will be doing a favour to India. Even Jihad Council chief Salahudin says they are prepared for a dialogue. Today Geelani sahib is willing to receive and talk to the members of Indian Parliament. What was *haram* yesterday is *halal* today. The two Hurriyats have the same goal and are differentiated only by the belief or disbelief in extremism.

Nadir Ali: What is your message to the International community and what do you want to convey to India and Pakistan?

Professor Bhat: The people of Kashmir deserve to live in peace. However, no peace can be established in a vacuum. It has to be bought. So how do the people of Kashmir buy peace for themselves? Let the international community throw their weight on India and Pakistan and express sympathies with the Kashmiris and help resolve the long standing dispute which has not only soured relations between these two neighbouring countries but also endangers the future of all concerned parties.