

## Differences can coexist, the Ambassador of India in Spain affirms

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Madrid, 11 Nov (EFE).

India, a modern country made up of more than 600 kingdoms and principalities, shows that "differences and diversity can live and prosper together", states the Ambassador of India in Spain, Sanjay Verma.

In an interview to Efe, Verma defends the decision taken by the New Delhi authorities to suppress the status of semi-autonomy that the region of Indian Kashmir enjoyed; he assures that the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, advocates a "cultural nationalism" that "does not go against globalisation" and promises to boost the relations with Spain to the highest level "as soon as you have a stable government."

In his opinion, many factors contribute to the unity of India, despite its vast diversity of ethnic groups, languages, religions and cultures.

"There has always been an idea about India that has existed for thousands of years –the fact that India has been considered a civilising State throughout history. If you look at the geography of the subcontinent, this also gives us an aspect, an outline of nation. In the past, even when India was not a modern State-nation, the people from the four corners of the world knew that something called India existed, a rich, prosperous and advanced country, and it is a fact that at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, around 24% of the world GDP came from India."

"WE ANTICIPATED THE IDEA OF THE UNITED NATIONS "

In recent history, the diplomat continues, the nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi played a very important role in redefining the country. "In 1947, when India achieved its independence from the British, we were around 600 different kingdoms and principalities, and all of them united to become India. To a certain extent, we anticipated the idea of the United Nations and the European Union," he points out.

The connection that languages such as Sanskrit or Tamil provided, the predominant Hindu religion -although with a "very profound" and ancient presence of Islam and Christianity-, the modern Constitution and popular elements such as Bollywood -the film industry in Hindi-, hockey or the gastronomy, "all these elements make up India." "The differences and diversity can live and prosper together," the Ambassador sums up.

Verma highlights that the problem of the Indian Kashmir "is not a religious issue for us, as it has been raised by some people or foreign powers," and points out that it has lasted almost as long as the resistance against the British Crown's dominion over the country.

"The British ruled over India for 200 years, of which we were under direct rule of the Crown for 90 years, and the rest under the nebulous management of the British East India Company. We attained our freedom in 1947. The problem of Kashmir started then, in 1948, and now it has been almost 72 years," he recalls. "Almost three generations have been lost in trying to solve the issue of Kashmir."

On 31<sup>st</sup> October, under the "Reorganisation Act" passed in August, the Indian Kashmir officially lost its special status of semi-autonomy with the disappearance of the State and its division into 2 territories, which will now be directly administered by New Delhi.

The special status was based on a clause of the Indian Constitution, article 370, the only one defined as "temporary" in the Constitution, as Verma explains, which granted the area "certain privilege in terms of identity, administration, etc."

#### "KASHMIR IS NOT A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM"

"But we have realised -the diplomat argues-, that for 72 years, instead of bringing us closer to the solution of the problem, this has become a deterrent and has been used by foreign powers and the elite in Jammu-Kashmir. So, the idea is to repeal this article and incorporate Kashmir together with the other states and territories of India on equal conditions."

According to the Ambassador, with this measure, "all the social and economic privileges that are being granted to the rest of India will now be granted to the state of Jammu-Kashmir," and we will therefore "give more power to women and the young people, extend education measures for the benefit of the most disadvantaged segments of the community in the educational institutions and the employments, and law and order will be reinforced."

The Indian representative assures that these measures "will be an incentive for the Indian industry to invest in Kashmir. Before they would not invest because, even if they did, they could not own the assets, as article 370 did not allow it."

"It is sometimes presented as if India wanted to go against a Muslim province in the country. But let's recall that the population of Jammu-Kashmir is of almost 9 million, of which 8 million are Muslim. But in the rest of India there are 185 million Muslims and there is no problem. They are proud of being Indian."

**MODI DEFENDS A CULTURAL NATIONALISM THAT "DOES NOT GO AGAINST GLOBALISATION"**

Verma defines Prime Minister Modi, of humble origins, as "totally devoted" to the task of changing India from top to bottom.

"From the beginning he has taken decisions that were very risky, government decisions that some considered to be politically suicidal –the demonetisation of the economy or the GST, the single tax for the entire country, or prosecuting economic criminals. He has taken a great risk, but the people support him. And in the second elections –held between April and May– he has obtained more MPs for his party –the BJP, giving India a strong government."

Modi is "someone who returns to the concept of 'Indian inheritance', who defines nationalism in a cultural sense, but a nationalism that does not go against globalisation."

According to Verma, the Prime Minister "is in favour of globalisation, but reaffirming the Indian identity and celebrating some central aspects of the Indian cultural inheritance that could have been subsumed in the recent past. He is therefore making India feel proud again."

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