



Vivekananda International  
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# Militancy in Kashmir ~ A Study

Abhinav  
Pandya



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## **About the Author**



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## **Militancy in Kashmir - A Study**

### ***Abstract***

*Militancy in Kashmir today is at a very critical juncture. The movement is directionless and largely leaderless. It may take a blind turn. If it goes on like this, it may even lead to anarchy and Kashmir could become a hunting ground for barbaric Jihadi forces like Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The possibility of these pernicious forces capitalizing on existing youth unrest in Kashmir is further accentuated by the likely withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.*

*The recent Syria-styled Fidayeen attack on a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy that led to the death of 46 personnel and the responsibility for which was claimed by the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), involving a Kashmiri young Jihadi, is the most alarming indication of what lies in the future. Before the Pakistani “Deep State” and transnational terrorist groups spread their tentacles in Kashmir, India needs to get its act together. The solution has to be multi-pronged; political, diplomatic, psychological and spiritual and should involve multiple stakeholders and with multiple layers of engagement.*

*This study, based on interviews and casual interactions with a diverse range of people - youth from South, Central and North Kashmir, university, college and school students, security officials, NGO workers, artists, separatists, former militants, army government officials, religious clerics, mainstream politicians, youth leaders and ordinary civilians - covers a wide range of issues, including socio-political and cultural trends, perceptions prevailing among different stakeholders and the dominant intellectual and religious narratives. The primary focus is on trends emerging since 2016, after the encounter-death of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) leader Burhan Wani, which in many ways is considered as a watershed moment in the recent history of militancy in Kashmir.*

*Kashmir has had several significant watershed moments over the last three to four decades but 2016 is considered very crucial. The years preceding 2016 undoubtedly witnessed the silent sowing of seeds of the current discontent, the manifestations of which have come into sharper focus after the death of Burhan Wani. Significantly, this event has been invariably mentioned as the takeoff point for trends emerging since 2016. That is why this study is important for developing any suitable policy narrative and course of action for the future.*

## Kashmir's Politics in Drift

Recognising the widely prevalent view that the Kashmir dispute was primarily a political issue, any analysis of the situation must begin with a critical assessment of the current political scenario. The prevailing impression in the Valley is that politically, Kashmir is in a state of drift, heading towards a black hole. Mainstream political parties such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference (NC) apparently seem to have lost their "connect" with the people. Their credibility has significantly eroded in recent times for various reasons. Commonplace Kashmiris accuse the mainstream parties of corruption, nepotism, atrocious governance and opportunism. College and university students generally maintain that during the PDP-BJP coalition rule, the high-class Saiyyids were placed in all prominent positions in administration, academia and other state bodies.



Figure 1 Security Personnel guarding the desolate roads of Srinagar after stone pelting, courtesy: Adil Abbas

The PDP is perceived as having lost credibility and public support because of its alliance with the BJP. The latter is portrayed as a Hindu extremist party by active social media in the valley, which is largely controlled and managed by elements based across the border. In South Kashmir, the PDP has been facing the ire of its core Jammāt supporters for its alliance with the BJP. There is a perception in the valley that by doing so, the PDP helped the BJP establish itself as a political force in the state, kick-starting debates such as tampering with Article 35 A and Article 370 of the Constitution.

Another significant reason for the ordinary civilian's ire against the now-dissolved coalition government and state administration in general, is their non-responsive attitude, extreme corruption, ineffective governance, and above all, allegations of arrogant and insulting behaviour by senior and district-level civil servants. Ordinary people are being made to wait for days on end for routine governance and administrative matters. In several interviews, Governor Satyapal Malik has categorically stated that, "Corruption is the single biggest problem of the state. Those in power here, be it political, administrative or business power, live like Mughal emperor Jahangir. The poor youths who go with their ponies to earn

a living during the Amarnath Yatra do so without even wearing warm clothes.” (Greater Kashmir, February 25, 2019)

Thus, the state of Jammu and Kashmir is the victim of extraordinary levels of corruption, both at the political and the bureaucratic level. The pathetic condition of roads and other civilian infrastructure, inadequate sewage systems, half-constructed flyovers, shoddy execution of public works, insufficient public transport systems and primitive health and educational infrastructure, speaks volumes about incompetent governance, corruption, poor work ethics and administrative arrogance. People also hold earlier regimes led by the NC equally responsible for the above mentioned grievances. The feeling of resentment, alienation and hatred is deeply entrenched and mainstream parties are seen as working in tandem with Delhi, to pursue their selfish political interests.

It is not only the mainstream parties that have lost the connect with the people; the paramount and highly moralistic claims of the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to represent popular sentiment too hardly has any standing or relevance in present-day Kashmir. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) raids (Economic Times, July 13, 2018) have totally exposed the Hurriyat leaders as Pakistan-paid mercenaries with little concern for or connect with Kashmiri issues. The Hurriyat has been pursuing Pakistan's evil agenda on the one hand and exploiting India's fears on the other, all for an elusive dream of playing a dominant political role in the affairs of the state. Ordinary civilians, especially the youth, find it difficult to trust Hurriyat leaders, whom they accuse of corruption and nepotism. The widespread accusation is that the high-profile separatist leaders send their children to quality schools and colleges in India and abroad, manage high-salary jobs and elitist careers for their kith and kin, whereas the children of ordinary people are motivated and mobilised to participate in stone-pelting, become militants and die at the hands of security forces.

There are stories galore of Hurriyat leaders not disbursing monetary help to the stone pelters and their families, and are siphoning off funds. After the refusal of Hurriyat leaders to talk with an all-party delegation (India, October 25, 2016) and the Yashwant Sinha-led delegation in the past, this belief has gained strength that the Hurriyat does not want the Kashmir issue to be resolved because they want to retain their perks, and privileges from both India and Pakistan.

The Hurriyat is seen as a party in decline, suffering from internal frictions, lacking clarity of vision, motivation, and moral integrity. Syed Ali Shah Gilani's ill-health and frictions between Yaseen Malik, Masarrat Alam and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq have generated the feeling that the APHC is in perpetual decline, with no credible successor to the present crop of leaders.

Thus, on the political front, it is argued with conviction that present day Kashmir lacks credible political stakeholders with sufficient popular goodwill and grass root support and this may pose a severe challenge in initiating any fruitful process of political dialogue/

engagement. In the absence of credible representatives, the dialogue will be an exercise in futility. Additionally, this has also led to a definite disconnect with trends, narratives and events happening in Kashmir at the grassroots level.

### The Disenchantment of Youth



Figure 2 Disenchanted youth of Kashmir pelting stones, on the pathway to militancy, courtesy: Adil Abbas

The declining credibility of political parties and ineffective administrative machinery of the state has been contributing to the growing disenchantment among the youth. Besides, the disruption in the academic schedule due to frequent strikes, the law and order situation, students' agitation etc. paint a grim future for them. In government colleges, student agitations on everyday issues like infrastructure can be effectively dealt with by the district administration, the college authorities and the vice-chancellor, but invariably ends up with the administration opting to march in the police as their first and only response! The police act in a high-handed manner, at times, resorting to the use of pellet guns. Often, one finds that people are demanding good governance and protesting to get electric transformers repaired, or issues of employment, water and electricity addressed, but by raising slogans of 'Azadi'.

On the question of jobs, it is alleged that even in the Public Service Commission recruitments, university recruitments and other appointments, mostly candidates close to powerful politicians and influential Islamist and anti-India pressure groups are selected and appointed. An applicant without political connections and financial strength stands very little chance. Many a time, candidates' rejection happens because of the inherent bias against a particular region like hailing from an area considered a Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) stronghold, though someone with actual Jamaat support might easily get appointed!

The most significant reason for the disenchantment of the youth of Kashmir revolves around the presence of the army and other security forces across Kashmir. They complain



that routine checking, barricades, ill-treatment, manhandling, sexual abuse, insult and humiliation inspire hatred against the security forces and the desire to seek revenge. They totally fail to recognise the reasons for the presence of the security forces in the militancy-affected areas. They also overlook the fact that all operations launched by the forces are against identified hardcore militants, and the civilians willfully expose themselves to a confrontation with the forces by trying to obstruct their operations.

### **Youth Swayed by Militancy**

Right from the initial days of militancy, going back to the early 1990s, the youth in Kashmir have grown up seeing a gun-wielding soldier or a militant. As a result, they have developed a mindset where the gun is perceived as the strongest and the only symbol of empowerment. This is very similar to another situation say, for example, in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, for a rural and urban middle-class youngster, becoming an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or Indian Police Service (IPS) or a politician is a strong symbol of empowerment. To the Kashmiri youth, living in an environment of conflict, it gives them a strong identity. The young boys are also fascinated by the thrill and glamour of gun-culture. They are lured by the smart military and commando-styled attires of the militants with their latest gadgets and weaponry. The pictures posted on social media attract the lay youngsters because such pictures give them instant fame and recognition, in a state where there are hardly any other platforms for seeking recognition and respect. The heroism attached to young, handsome men dying for a cause creates glamour around militancy.

The rapid rise in the youth getting attracted to militancy since the Burhan Wani incident is not only in numerical terms. More importantly, there is a qualitative difference from the militancy of the 1990s when foreign terrorists primarily dominated militancy, with not much public support for terrorist attacks. However, today's militancy is mostly driven by 'homegrown' elements, though Pakistan-based controllers and operatives continue to play a prominent role in weapons supply, funding and directing the broad narratives, strategy and agenda for militant organisations.

Militancy, these days is like a wave in Kashmir. The youth seem to be swayed by it. The youngsters seem to have lost hope with India because of the continuous failure of the dialogue process. They seem to suffer from an acute sense of despair, depression, and hopelessness. They don't see any future concerning good career, business, employment and quality of life. They do not have any expectations from the mainstream politicians because of the reasons mentioned in the earlier section. They are also highly critical of and disappointed with Pakistan because of the terror tactics used by the latter's proxies like the Jammāt. Besides, they feel that Pakistan is unsympathetic to and insincere in supporting their nationalist aspirations.

One development of serious concern is that the youth seems to have lost the fear of death. Some see death as a pathway to glory and the Islamic concept of paradise. There is a

kind of heroism being attached to the gun culture. Militants are becoming role-models for the youth. Wallpapers of Burhan Wani and Zakir Musa are common on their mobile screens. They listen to the speeches of Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed. They listen to Arabic Taranas (type of composition). Even art forms like rap music have themes of ‘Azadi’, with Islam and anti-India feelings very strongly embedded in them. Boys in the 8 to 14 years of age group indulging in stone-pelting at the security forces during Cordon and Search Operations (CASO) are in the process, getting early exposure to militancy. The types of Zakir Musa, former Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) leader and now the commander of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGUH) have such a strong following that even boys of 8 to 14 years of age get themselves photographed in his style and post them on their Facebook and Instagram accounts.

The Islamic concept of the afterlife is a strong motivator for militants. The social system also gradually tends to support it. In villages, the graveyards have become revered places for social union and mobilisation. Funerals have emerged as places of community mobilisation. Such a scenario clearly indicates that in the near future Kashmiri youth may volunteer for suicide/Fidayeen missions. Similarly, stone-pelting also has a strong religious symbolism. In Islam, the concept of stoning Satan is very pious. The tactic of stone-pelting allegedly was picked up from Palestinian Intifadas. Credible sources have informed that CDs with strong religious-motivational lectures eulogising stone-pelting and displaying Palestinian videos were widely circulated in the valley by separatist leaders, in an organised manner in 2008-09 at the behest of controllers based in Pakistan. This kind of religious imagery is being used in a very disruptive manner to manipulate young minds.



Figure 3 Radicalised stone-pelter of Kashmir, courtesy: Adil Abbas

The present generation of Kashmiri youth which was born in the early 1990s has grown up in this environment of violence, religious radicalisation and political turbulence. As a result, they already have a radicalised mindset to an extent. They have no memories of

the common Pundit-Muslim syncretic social culture of Kashmir. With such a basic cognitive framework they are not very much interested in Sufi practices.

### **Religious Radicalisation Contributing to Militancy**

Religious radicalisation is another primary cause for the rise of militancy. Radicalisation is a fact of life in Kashmir. No Kashmiri can deny this. The debate on this is only limited to its spread and impact. There is a notion that ‘Kashmiriyat’ and its essence of Sufism will always act as a firewall against religious radicalisation in Kashmir. However, grassroot situations tell a different story. Shockingly, in South Kashmir, in a class of 40-50 students, 15-20 wanted to join militancy. They said they would even be ready to lay down their lives on one call of AGUH commander Zakir Musa. What should be a cause of genuine concern is the assertion that they want an Islamic Kashmir. They categorically reject the home-coming of Kashmiri Pundits. If these views are samples of the feelings of Kashmiri youth in general, there is much for our policymakers to worry about!

Between 2002 and 2008, the peace period, the JI strongly entrenched itself in Kashmiri society through proselytisation, ijtemas (religious gatherings), threats, terror and intimidation. Their ideology is that of a politicised Islam. In brief, the JI can be referred to as a South Asian cousin of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. They believe in an extreme version of Islam and implement the agenda of Pakistan-based handlers. The result of their activities was witnessed from the beginning of militancy in the Valley in the early 1990s and more intensely since the unrest re-erupted in 2008 and is continuing since.

The Jammāt acts as the main conduit of militancy. Its cadres function as Over Ground Workers (OGWs) providing infrastructure support and the protective shell in which the militants operate. They also help in arranging logistics, weapons, shelter and facilitating movements. A large number of militants have a Jammāt background. However, in rural areas, people are in a way ‘scared’ of the Jammāt cadres. They fear that cooperating with the security forces or the civil administration will invite the wrath of the JI. Its militant wing, the HM, has once again resumed sending Kashmiri boys to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) since 2012 for indoctrination and training, as they used to in the initial years of militancy.

In recent times, the young generation has become a little disillusioned with the JI. The reason for this is being identified as its deep involvement in terror in pursuit of the agenda of foreign players, ignoring the grievances of Kashmiris. The young intellectual class largely isn't impressed with the ideology or the activities of the Jammāt. Lately, the Jammāt has increased its outreach by inviting rural folk to participate in the Ijtemas. The JI is trying to strengthen its district-level set-up with a special focus on youth. It is targeting universities and colleges. Over the last few months, JI-controlled WhatsApp groups are being created in large numbers. It appears that some dominant long-term strategy is being designed to take ownership of the current youth unrest.

Copious amounts of literature on political Islam, books of Maulana Maududi, Syed Qutb and Hasan Banna are readily available in all bookshops. These books are widely read in universities and colleges. They are available in English and the quality of printed versions is excellent. This unholy nexus between the bookshops, distributors, universities, colleges and religious organisations with their foreign-based donors and operators needs to be excavated to deal with radicalisation.

### **Radical Groups Competing for Influence**

Notwithstanding the renewed efforts of the JI since 2010, a significant drift towards the Ahle-Hadith/Wahabi sect has been observed. Sufism that was the essence of Kashmiriyat is perceived to be dying a slow death. The Ahle Hadith, Jamaat-i-Islami, and Tableeghi Jamat reject the Sufi shrine worship and other syncretic rituals and practices. Their brand of Islam is fundamentalist in nature. The corruption in shrines and superstitious/dogmatic practices of Sufism are also substantial factors for the rise of the Ahle-Hadith and other fundamentalist Jamaats. Besides the robust petro-dollar funding, better infrastructure, educated religious scholars and global Islamism being essential reasons, Kashmiri youth feel that Ahle-Hadith gives them an empowering Islamic identity in a conflict environment. Where the dominant narrative is militancy, conflict and violence, the peaceful Sufi meditative religion does not align well with youth sentiment.

Though the majority of the population is still ‘Etaqadi’ (Barelwi local Muslims) but their roots in Sufism have lost spiritual essence. Only rituals like worshipping at shrines have remained with overtones of religious extremism and communalism, conditioned by the overall milieu of religious and political radicalisation. Once having a marginal presence in the valley, the Ahle-Hadith now has around a million followers out of a total population of six million, and there are approximately 700 Ahle-Hadith mosques (TOI July 19, 2017). Their influence has substantially increased over the last decade. However, unlike the JI, prominent religious clerics and scholars of the Ahl-e-Hadith/Salafi Sect do not discuss politics in their mosque lectures, preferring to stay away from it. They also consider militancy and JI activities as un-Islamic. They are busy establishing an ideological base for something even more dangerous, i.e. an Islamic Kashmir.

Thus, Kashmir is increasingly becoming a battleground for sectarian rivalries. Lately, some Ahle-Hadith scholars like Mushtaq Veeri have praised the Islamic State and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for propagating the Caliphate Code in Kashmir. Mufti Shabbir Ahmad Kasmi (TOI July 19, 2017), a Deobandi (ideologically a close cousin of the Ahle-Hadith) has expressed support for Zakir Musa and his AGUH. Absconding Wahabi scholar Zakir Naik is very popular among youth groups of the Ahle-Hadith in Kashmir.

The JI and the Ahle-Hadith have a strong presence in the education sector and institutions. The Salafis are ahead of others in their non-religious social presence. They run orphanages, clinics, colleges, schools and madrassas. A lot of Salafi literature has been

freely distributed in Kashmir over the last 30 years. However, with a home to 2.8 mobile (TOI July 19, 2017) internet users, the spread of Wahhabi influence poses a greater danger through social media messaging platforms. This religious overdose is generating fundamentalism and exclusivism, eventually leading to extremist thoughts and actions.

It is pertinent to mention that the ideological justification of a global Jihad and sanctity for terrorism in Kashmir as Jihad is instrumental in generating public support for militancy and stone-pelting. They consider stone-pelting as their bare minimum contribution to the so-called Mujahids during CASO.

Such narratives have also raised fears among the Shias. Shia radicalisation is also on the rise in Kashmir. It has foreign roots. One can find a strong Iranian influence in the Shia community of Kashmir. It is very common to see hoardings of Khamani in Kargil and Leh. There is also a significant flow of foreign religious scholars and students to and from Iran.

### **Social and Main-stream Media in Radicalisation and Militancy**

Social media is also playing a dominant role in radicalising the youth. Once a CASO begins, messages on WhatsApp groups mobilise people for stone pelting. Instagram posts of militants, fiery speeches of terrorists like Masood Azhar, Arabic Taranas are widely circulated as well. The Youth Forum for Kashmir set up in Islamabad in 2012 by Ahmad Qureishi with the backing of the Pakistan Army has also played an influential role in fomenting youth unrest in Kashmir. They targeted universities and colleges.

Further, the coverage of Kashmir events in mainstream Indian media is acting as a major spoiler. Kashmiri youth maintain that mainstream Indian media portrays all Kashmiris as terrorists and Kashmiri politicians as being 'Pakistani'. The influential round-the-clock news channels indulge in bitter debates on communal matters, getting fanatic religious leaders on their shows that contribute to a highly polarised environment. Usually, such provocative journalism is taken very seriously in Kashmir. People even in the remote villages of Kashmir are well acquainted with names like Arnab Goswami, Major Gaurav Arya, and Subramaniam Swami. Some Kashmiri politicians and youth leaders go to the extent of attributing radicalisation in Kashmir as a reaction to Hindu extremism! They added that Hindu-Muslim dynamics in India has an enormous impact on the Kashmiri mindset. Therefore, unfortunate incidents of beef-lynching and communal riots create a feeling of insecurity among Kashmiris.

To an extent, this may be real, but religious radicalisation has its internal dynamics and it has been going on independent of happenings in the overall socio-political scenario of India. Furthermore, there is reluctance on the part of Kashmiris to accept that radicalisation might erode the *Tahreek's* international credibility by exposing strong Islamist undercurrents and diluting its supposedly secular and political nature. However, even the outer trappings of the movement are now a far cry from its much-touted secular credentials.

Despite this one cannot deny that national media is projecting a highly biased and negative image of the Kashmiri people for small TRP interests. This is detrimental to India's long-term interests in Kashmir and therefore needs strong reversal through greater media self-regulation.

### **Civil Society and Human Rights Groups**

Additionally, Indian civil society and human rights activists are playing a negative role. Incidents of beef-lynching are sporadic and certainly not a nation-wide phenomenon. Nearly 25 crore Muslims are living peacefully across India with all constitutional rights and privileges. Communal incidents are an aberration and given the sheer size of the country their numbers have been minimal. Hindu-Muslim conflicts are mostly localised and arise out of non-religious reasons. However, civil society activists and political parties have been blowing things out of proportion for narrow interests or out of ideological hatred. There is hardly any rationality behind such narratives.

The oft-quoted narratives made rather irresponsibly for political gain ('rising intolerance', 'emergency-like-conditions,' 'government-being-controlled by Fascist and dictatorial forces') are having the worst impact on young minds in Kashmir. Deliberate and malicious attempts to portray the central government's dictatorial and extremist image is leading to a feeling that the Indian establishment is planning to effect demographic changes and dilute their autonomy. We all know that there is hardly any truth in such narratives but the repeated peddling of such lies is furthering the agenda of terrorist organisations and foreign-based actors. There is thus an urgent need for civil society and political parties to exercise rationality, or it will severely hurt India's national security interests.

### **Impact of Developments in the Global Arena**

Last but not the least, global jihad and the growing awareness of geopolitical happenings in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Pakistan and Iran may also be a contributing influence to radicalising Kashmiri youth. There are a few people who claim to have met Kashmiris who fought alongside ISIS fighters in the battles of Mosul and Fallujah. While the veracity of such claims is difficult to establish, this is not new. It may be recalled that the Arab Spring movement that started in Tunisia and rapidly spread across the Arab world, was closely followed in Kashmir with the youth agitation of 2008 being largely influenced by the happenings in that part of the world. In more recent times, the Baghdadi phenomenon in Syria-Iraq too found quick resonance in the Kashmir Valley. In visual terms, the black flag of ISIS has almost started competing with the green Pakistani one's, not in terms of actual following of these symbolic displays but purely as an irritant against the authorities.

Having looked at the sporadic attempts to internationalise the Kashmir issue, it appears that the Kashmiri separatist movement is entering the next phase i.e. its internationalisation. Such efforts can be seen in Turkey's rising involvement, which through its official online

portal TRT World, is leaving no stone unturned to blow the Kashmir issue out of proportion, fabricating and disseminating false information. One can also observe dishonesty in such attempts when the Islamist and extremist nature of the separatist movement is conveniently brushed aside. This discussion of attempts to internationalise the Kashmir issue deserves a separate and detailed commentary, which is beyond the scope of this report.

### ‘Musa-Musa Zakir-Musa’..

Any discussion on present-day Kashmir cannot be complete without a reference to former HM commander Musa, who now leads the AGUH which is ideologically affiliated to Al Qaida. Musa represents a significant ideological shift in the thinking of Kashmiri youth. As opposed to supporting old Hurriyat and nationalist doctrines of “Azadi baraye Pakistan” (Kashmir joins Pakistan) and “Azadi baraye Kashmir” (Independent Kashmir), Musa has come out with the idea of “Azadi baraye Islam” (Islamic Kashmir). He is immensely popular in Srinagar, Anantnag, Kulgam, Baramulla, Bandipura, and Gandarbal areas. Also, 80 to 90 per cent of his supporters are in the age-group of 16-24 years, but also include doctors and engineers. His focus is mainly on religious purity, bringing real Islam to Kashmir.



Figure 4 A protester displaying ISIS flag, courtesy: Adil Abbas

According to a young journalist who, as a student was a junior of Burhan Wani, martyred Indian Army captain Umar Faiyaz and Zakir Musa at the Navodaya School, 'Zakirbhai' was very religious even in school. He was reticent, stayed away from games, scolded girls for not covering their heads, was soft-spoken and an intellectual-kind of a person who indulged in religion and philosophising. He emerges as a man with a clear and sharp vision for Kashmir. This clarity of mind projects him as a strong leader among the youth. Some young boys, who had participated in stone-pelting activities said they followed Musa because ‘it is the clarity of his mind which binds them to his narrative’.

Musa desires an Islamic caliphate in Kashmir that rejects Pakistan, India and the Hurriyat. He has a massive following among the youth. Class Twelve students from private schools are joining his organisation. Songs eulogising him are being sung during marriages! But his Kashmiri followers do not approve of the brutal methods of ISIS. They find them un-Islamic. They prefer Musa's milder and convincing ways of establishing a caliphate. He connects through his compelling, lengthy and indoctrinating videos, heavy on Jihad and Islam narrative. His ideology defies the concept of nationhood.

However, there are worrying trends like mentioning the beef-lynching of Pahlu Khan and Akhlaq. His call to Muslims in other Indian states to rise, use petrol bombs, and blow up government offices and police stations is aimed at trying to achieve an ideological shift in Kashmir. The youth following him are more passionate about Islam than the idea of an independent Kashmir. The process is of making a fundamentalist, puritan and extremist version of Islam the dominant narrative in Kashmir.

Understandably, his ideology is unacceptable to Pakistan. The HM and the JI are bitterly opposed to Musa. Pakistan-based actors are unable to comprehend the Zakir Musa phenomenon. Their think tanks, analysts and their OGWs are trying hard to understand Musa and his strategy. There are several conspiracy theories doing the rounds in political and security circles attributing his rise to the Indian establishment, but they lack evidence and are based on hearsay. Seeing his massive fan following, Pakistan is trying to 'accommodate' him through the HM and the Jaish. However, he is steadfast in his ideology and unwilling to give in to Pakistani pleas.

Presently, the AGUH does not have an organised cadre, funds or weapons. He is trying to raise his organisation and funds. He is very cautious in recruiting cadres. He asks them to snatch weapons and come back where his network finds them. More than 100 incidents of gun-snatching have been reported. He is also trying to woo HM cadres and rope in Islamic scholars. He convinced Abu Dujana to leave the HM and join him. He sees a high premium in recruiting engineers, doctors and people with IT skills. He has been trying to build his base in central Kashmir which is relatively a quiet area at present. Many AGUH sleeper cells are discreetly recruiting cadres.

There is an impression of complacency on the part of the security establishment in their denials of Zakir Musa and his Tanzeem. Since he is driving a wedge between militant organisations and does not have an active organization by himself, they don't perceive him as a major threat. The fact that the AGUH does not have a grassroots level cadre or organisation should not lull us into denial and complacency. Hypothetically, if he can manage funds and arms, he might raise an army ideologically motivated and highly radicalised. If they are trained in weapons and IEDs, then this may crystallise into an entirely new form of insurgency. Further, it seems he is likely to explore the option of cyber-Jihad.



By default, his ideological trajectory connects him to global Jihadi forces. His followers display a strong fervour for events in West Asia and broader geopolitical trends. With a role in a series of bomb blasts in Eastern Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKAP) is already well established in that region and in the long run is likely to play into the hands of Pakistan's Deep State. Foreign fighters of ISIS returning to Central Asia may also see an opportunity in him given the ISIS' declining fortunes in West Asia. They might want to stir things up in distant parts like Kashmir, given that the ISIS has declared Kashmir as the gateway to the caliphate in India.

Here, it may be added that the ISIS footprint is established in Kashmir. The area has beautiful Arab-styled Salafi mosques full of ISIS graffiti on side walls. ISIS flags during protests may be teasers with some symbolic value, but the caliphate ideology-IS mentality is finding ample space in Kashmir especially among the youth. Here, one is focusing more on the thinking and ideology and not on the actual organisational structure. According to a media report, (Deccan Chronicle, July 6, 2016), Mr S. M. Sahay, a senior police officer of Jammu and Kashmir categorically stated that the youth bulge witnessed in Kashmir is very similar to the one fueled in West Asia. Speaking at a seminar in New Delhi, he said, "Kashmir was beset by the same Islamism that had incited young Muslims to target westerners in violent attacks." (Boston Review: "Kashmir's High Price for Demanding Independence", September 26, 2016).

Nadir Ali, President of the Center for Peace and Justice, who works with pellet victims, organises interactions in remote rural areas of the valley. He expresses serious concern about the rising IS-mentality among Kashmiri youth. His vast interactions reveal worrisome radical trends and notions of the caliphate and the Islamic Jihad getting deeply embedded in the Kashmiri subconscious.

Kabir Taneja, a senior analyst with the Observer Research Foundation, a think tank, in an article titled "Perils of Humoring ISIS in Kashmir (ORF June 30, 2018)", categorically rejects the presence of the ISIS in Kashmir, contending that it is the state police that is harbouring such a narrative for adopting a hard-nosed military approach in counter-terrorism easily. The basic premises concerning strategy and the organisational structure of the ISIS and their modus operandi; needs more detailed exploration and can be the subject matter for another article. Here, it will suffice to mention that middle-level Kashmiri police officials with an in-depth understanding of societal trends and vast experience of CASO, generally agree that the ISIS mentality is slowly getting entrenched in the valley.

Also, for a moment, even if we assume it to be a far-fetched situation that the current craze is primarily hyped around the persona of Musa and AGUH could fade either for lack of funds or after his death, even then, the ideological shift which he is heralding in Kashmir will be pernicious to any attempt at a political resolution of the Kashmir dispute. The caliphate ideology will complete the circle of cultural alienation of

Kashmiri youth from India. It will be impossible to have a dialogue with a generation that does not believe in international institutions, nation-states, elections, democracy, human rights and multiculturalism. The person may die, but the ideology will outlive him, and likely to get more rigid and intense, after his death. If that happens, *Takfiri* (a Muslim who declares another Muslim to be an apostate, i.e. not believing in the essential tenets of Islam, and therefore no longer a Muslim) extremism will be the next stage in Kashmir. Many Sufi shrines such as Baba Hanifuddin's shrine and Dastageer sahib were allegedly burnt in the recent past by Lashkar-e-Taiba ("J&K: LeT module behind Dastageer sahib shrine fire busted," Rediff.com, October 2, 2012). Senior Shia leaders, who are formally separatists have expressed in private conversations that Sunni extremism in Kashmir will make life difficult for Shia. They even suggested this author that India should scrap article 35 A and 370 to fully integrate Jammu and Kashmir with India and prevent the onslaught of Jihadi extremism against minorities like Shias and Sikhs. In many social, intellectual and political quarters of Kashmir, there are concerns of an intense sectarian war breaking out in Kashmir, besides lone-wolf attacks, and suicide bombings.

Since the AGUH does not have an organised command and control structure, even Musa admirers, in the interim, join other militant organisations. At the initial level, ideological differences don't matter much. The main thing is sentiment. So, they join whatever organisation they have access to or whichever is active in their area. In South Kashmir, most of them are joining the HM. Many others join Al Badr, Jaish and Lashkar, which are primarily foreign-terrorist (FT) organisations. They have highly trained cadre and are strictly controlled by and from Pakistan. The passion is so strong that only in Central Kashmir it is said that 10,000 young men are waiting to take up arms. While this could be an exaggerated claim, the possibility of militancy raising its ugly head in Central and North Kashmir can be quite high in the coming months. The HM has strong local roots. It is not as harsh with informers as is the Lashkar and the Jaish. However, in future, if the AGUH can create an organisation and get access to funds/weaponry, then a significant chunk is likely to shift from the HM and other organisations to the AGUH.

In the near future, the HM and other established organisations are likely to continue posing a major security threat. According to informed sources, currently, the total number of militants in the valley hovers around 300-310, not much as compared to 1990. The number of FTs appears to be just around 110-12, mostly located in north Kashmir, and the local terrorist element is around 190, mostly in South Kashmir. However, public support for militancy remains high and this is likely to continue. During CASO, thousands of people gather in no time for stone pelting. Mosques and social media platforms are used to incite people for stone-pelting. Militants, who die in the process, get tremendous respect and fame in the society. People in large numbers attend their funerals, and their families acquire social prestige. The quick fame and glory for dead militants inspires many more to become militants.

These days FTs are using innovative psychological tactics like 'shadow militancy' to compensate for the lesser number of actual fighters. In this, a terrorist named 'X' is introduced as different individuals in different names in different villages. So, when security forces neutralise a foreign terrorist, then someone from the other village will claim that he saw terrorist 'X' in his village and security forces lack the will or the strength to kill the 'other' terrorist 'X', lest be accused of killing the wrong person. As a result, terrorist 'X' becomes a hero. Sometimes even divine explanations are also attached to that terrorist! It is profoundly demoralising for the security forces.

### **Changing Values; Crumbling Institutions**

Amidst all these, the great sense of redemption in the idea of death as a Mujahid, as a pathway to Jannat that could redeem them of their worst worldly sins, still retains validity and emotional attraction in common perception. This attitude is strikingly similar to what French expert Olivier Roy has discovered about French foreign terrorists, many of whom have been found to be gays, drug addicts, hardly performing a Namaz and joining ISIS in search of an identity. Their social up-rootedness and lack of integration in western societies has provoked them to join ISIS.

In Kashmir, a similar phenomenon could be happening. The new generation seems to be losing respect for old institutions of society. They do not respect elders and shrines, have no faith in institutions of family and marriage and indulge in promiscuity and drugs. Morals, loyalty and ethics in social, personal and political life have strongly eroded. The worst effect of the long conflict has been on the culture and traditions of Kashmir. Now in the absence of rootedness which the culture and social system provided, they are suffering from an acute sense of collective depression and hopelessness. As a result, they either take to drugs or seek new outlets for identity and anchorage in religion or rather an exclusivist and fundamentalist version of faith.

### **The Pakistan Factor**

It appears that Pakistan controllers are finding it challenging to send weapons and militants across the border because of the increased vigilance and border fencing. India's aggressive response to the trans-border misadventures of Pakistani forces seems to have changed the perception on the other side. They believe that any misadventure will be met with massive retaliation. Further, they are facing global condemnation as a terror-sponsoring country and, are facing possible Financial Action Task Force (FATF) sanctions. The global mandate is against terrorism, so it is not as easy for them to stage major terrorist attacks. However, their strategy involves keeping a limited number of foreign terrorists active in diverse areas as catalysts. They keep the population on the boil, keep public passions high and abet people for stone-pelting.

Meanwhile, home-grown militancy seems to have filled the space rendering the pains of sending FTs partly superfluous. As a result one comes across many innovations in their strategy. It appears that in future Pakistan-based actors might stay more focused on strategy, planning and high-value logistics leaving the operational aspects to local actors. In the category of high-value logistics, they are inviting a group of 10-30 young Kashmiris to Pakistan to visit under the pretext of meeting relatives or other excuses, and training them in the use of IED explosives. It is easier, cheaper and risk-free to undertake such missions. Also, the possibilities of being detected are fewer. They will continue to coordinate, act as an essential conduit, maintain discipline, and above all, punish any deviant behaviour. Further, Pakistan is likely to focus more on Fidayeen attacks because of the following reasons: 1) High-tech border vigil making infiltration difficult; 2) Large presence of home grown terrorists rendering risks involved with infiltration unworthy of being taken; 3) Emerging congenial socio-cultural and religious milieu in Kashmir making recruitments for Jaish suicide squads easier.

Recent trends also indicate that cross-border actors are interested more in raising human rights issues. To promote this, young people are being encouraged to study law, international relations, human rights and sociology. Cross-border actors intend to use such intellectual proxies for false propaganda, psychological war and to malign India's reputation abroad. According to a veteran counter-terrorism expert, young scholars are invited to Pakistan on the pretext of attending seminars and youth conferences in universities. There, invitee scholars are arranged to meet prominent civil servants, diplomats, politicians and intelligence officials. Once they come back, they raise fictitious issues of human rights and their narrative is selective, biased and incomplete. In future, such activists are likely to be used to raise issues like the rights of people displaced in hydro-electric projects in the Valley.

Further, they are also focused on polarising and dividing the state on communal, religious and regional lines. Many prominent stakeholders, including mainstream politicians in Kashmir have been demanding a divisional status for the Pir Panjal and Chenab Valley, which geographically and in popular perception, are parts of the Jammu region. Such demands smack of creating fractions in the Jammu region and infest it with a separatist insurgency. The Jammu region has so far been largely disconnected from the Islamist and separatist Kashmiri insurgency. Further, this author was also witness to nefarious attempts to usher in demographic changes in Jammu and Ladakh region to make these regions Muslim-dominated and to radicalise local liberal Muslims.

The Pakistan Government led by Imran Khan has made some initial gestures for peace, which isn't unusual, but ultimately goes nowhere. However, public expectations on both sides of the border from the new government are high. The Kartarpur Saheb Corridor initiative did initially raise some feeble voices for some similar initiatives in Kashmir as well, but people do concede that in Pakistan, the political leadership only provides the

façade; it is the army that calls the shots. Their overtures for peace have so far lacked sincerity and honesty so much so that a large segment of Kashmiris who are assumed to be soft towards Pakistan, do not trust them anymore. Also, if the prevailing perception of the Pakistan army drawing its sustenance from keeping Kashmir on the boil has even the least bit of substance, then there are sufficient reasons to find such peace overtures perfunctory and mere lip-service. Pakistan's insincerity is clearly evident in its lack of action against Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed, despite India's repeated requests.

### **The Way Forward**

A prominent politician, when asked about the way forward in Kashmir, narrated an old Kashmiri story: "A lion comes in the field and the young boy asks his father to guide him. His father replied that now he does not need to do anything. Whatever has to be done will be done by the lion". He went on to explain, "We Kashmiris chose the secular lion of India in 1947. Whatever has to be done has to be by India only". This story, true or otherwise, sums up in two sentences what Kashmiris expect of India and what India needs to do. However, it completely ignores the question, what Kashmiris need to do for themselves? Perhaps they know the answer but do not want to spell it out. Be that as it may, the policy planners in New Delhi have to contend with this attitude and approach of the Kashmiri people and leadership.

Given this background, some observations/recommendations are being made on the basis of issues discussed in this study:-

- 1) While the phenomenon of a rising level of radicalisation, a strong sense of separatism, continuing alienation and anti-India feeling in Kashmir are a reality, yet these should not be the reason to conclude that things have come to a dead end. There are many layers to the prevalent sentiment of dissatisfaction and unrest. The anger of the youth is more about the trust-deficit which has intensified in the absence of a proper dialogue or engagement. Grievances with the civil administration, fears about dilution of autonomy, lack of employment and economic opportunities, near collapse of tourism and the handicraft industry, shoddy civilian infrastructure and basic utilities, poor academic infrastructure, corruption, nepotism and angst with routine discomforts arising out of their interface with the armed forces (including the use of pellet guns - since resolved, other forms of alleged or perceived military high-handedness) form a significant component of the youth resentment.
- 2) The young shout slogans of "Azadi", but they have no clarity of thought nor any futuristic plans and strategy. This provides a ray of hope that in some ways and in some areas they can be engaged. The youth that expresses a strong sense of separatism surprisingly softens down to show a genuine desire for dialogue and accommodation whenever mention is made of the efforts of former Prime Minister Vajpayee. The older generation and those who were involved in the militancy of

1990s have mostly become mainstream actors/citizens and they expect from the Government of India proper rehabilitation, peace and political dialogue.

- 3) Local youth join any militant organisation for four important reasons namely, hopelessness, revenge (mostly because of the atrocities by the armed forces), religious conviction and attraction for the gun as a symbol of empowerment. Home-grown militancy and the public support for it is where we need a nuanced policy package that is a mix of soft and hard approaches. Indoctrination levels of local militants are low due to their strong cultural roots.
- 4) Unlike the situation where people join militancy strictly out of intellectual ultra-leftist leanings while dealing with militancy in Kashmir, the emotional and psychological factor must be taken into consideration. Someone who has become a militant to seek personal revenge can always be brought back into the mainstream, or even the conditions that provoke an individual to seek revenge through the gun can be addressed.
- 5) In the case of FTs who are highly radicalised and have a high level of anti-India agenda, our single-minded approach should neutralise them by force while crossing the borders or where ever else, in their hideouts or sanctuaries. They are enemies of the State and should be dealt with accordingly.
- 6) Our primary challenge is not the number of militants but the public support for it. The quantum and intensity of stone-pelting during CASO are reliable indicators of the level of public support for militants. Hence, we have to strike at the social and cultural constituency of militancy and bring the recruitment levels down. In the current phase, there appears to be a vacuum. There is no political, intellectual and spiritual leadership in Kashmir. The gun-culture has made deep inroads and the youth is directionless.

However, there are ample reasons for hope. In the course of discussions on youth unrest earlier in this brief, a number of suggestions and observations have been made. Along with that, it may also be mentioned that the youth in Kashmir are also looking for a good career, joining the civil services, media, the modeling world and the film industry. There are many students pursuing a master's program in International Relations (IR). An interesting case is of a militant, fully trained in handling weapons, having participated in several encounters, getting converted into an ultra-Communist, now holding a master's degree in comparative religions, and now pursuing his second masters in IR. Kashmiri youth are talented, sharp, and ambitious and looking for opportunities to study in foreign universities, get good jobs, and improve their quality of life. However, those opportunities are missing and it is important to try to create them.

### **Course of Action**

Kashmir is at a very critical juncture. The so-called 'movement' is directionless and leaderless. It may take a blind turn. If it goes on like this, it may lead to anarchy and the

region could become the hunting ground for all kinds of barbaric Jihadi forces like Al Qaeda and the ISIS. There are forces waiting to capitalise on the ongoing youth unrest. To deal with the situation, the following suggestions could be considered:-

- a) It is imperative that before the Pakistanis or any transnational terrorist groups act, we get our act together and develop a new narrative acceptable to the Kashmiri people, built around finding a political, diplomatic, psychological and spiritual solution. The new narrative could also include the frequently heard demand for Azadi. We can redefine “Azadi” as “Azadi” from poverty, violence, nepotism, corruption, religious extremism and injustice. Against prevailing notions of “Azadi,” our stand can be of “Azadi baraye aman-o-Ahatram” (peace with dignity). It has to be a multipronged approach with multiple layers of engagement.
- b) We need to have a long-term political and economic vision for Kashmir. We need to ask the right questions-what kind of Kashmir we want after 15-20 or 25 years and what is the roadmap for that. A committee of experts could be constituted to chart out a political, economic, educational, cultural and religious roadmap for Kashmir. It should define the underlying principles, objectives, the strategy and the steps ahead. There must be consistency in our approach.
- c) For some short-term gains, no compromise should even be thought of, with the core principles or our long-term interests and objectives.
- d) There should be no compromise with our policy of zero-tolerance to religious extremism and terrorism. A systematic crackdown on Jamaat-i-Islami must be strategically pursued, in all sincerity. Moreover, the effort must be undertaken on a sustained basis.
- e) CASO against militants must continue, ensuring minimum civilian casualties and discomfort. A strong force posture against militancy will strengthen India’s state narrative and demoralise the cross-border sponsors.
- f) However, our approach needs to be nuanced. Over reliance on security narrative and use of hard power will not be very helpful in case of home-grown militancy. If one militant dies, five others join the movement. Therefore, we have to address the challenge of recruitment and strike at the social, political, cultural and intellectual roots of militancy.
- g) OGWs must be dealt with a heavy hand. As regards other ways of eroding the constituency of militancy, some possible measures are discussed below in the section on youth engagement.
- h) As stated earlier, there is no clarity and logical consistency among the separatists and mainstream politicians regarding the political aspect of the issue. We need to strengthen the mainstream in Kashmir and institutionalise democracy as a spirit. We can strengthen mainstream politics by engaging politicians in dialogue and incentivising the joining of the mainstream.

- i) The mainstreaming process should include politicians, civil society, clergy, artists, writers, journalists, civil servants, academicians, students, panchayat leaders and the business class. Inviting mainstream stakeholders for lectures, seminars, discussions, and interactions across the country in universities, colleges, chambers of commerce, development institutions and by the different state governments will create the necessary goodwill. Engaging separatists will enhance their stakes in the peace process. It will create a friendly space to channel the political solution. It will be very helpful in mitigating the angst of people.
- j) The district administration should have an open-door policy. Cleanliness, electricity, roads maintenance and other routine issues of public life will help in breaking the ice. The current disconnect between Kashmiris and administrative officials from other states working in Kashmir have led to a kind of stagnation. The district administration should have regular 'chaupals' in rural areas. This goodwill generating process has to reach the grassroots in Kashmir. District Collectors, Divisional Commissioners and other city administrative officials should visit schools, panchayats, mosques and other social forums in remote areas and engage the people in dialogue.
- k) Groups of Kashmiri teachers and students from rural areas can be taken to Delhi and other state capitals for informal interactions. Such outreach should avoid excessive media glare and politicization of such events must be checked effectively.
- l) Youth engagement programmes have so far focused on employment generation. However, when the cause is psychological, such a narrow corridor approach will hardly serve the right purpose. Definition of engagement should be widened to include addressing their sense of alienation and the trust deficit. The key lies in the right way of communication and creating the right perception.
- m) Kashmiris by nature are scholars. Their natural skills in the softer aspects of life such as art, literature and emotions are very subtle and refined. We need to engage youth at that level where there is the meeting of minds. We need to create political, social and intellectual and cultural outlets for the young generation to express themselves.
- n) Youth forums can be platforms where political, social and cultural issues can be freely discussed. They should also be encouraged to interact with youth from other parts of the country. They can be invited to think-tanks, colleges, schools, and universities. The story of India covering freedom of expression, democracy, secularism, respect for diversity, multiculturalism and the liberty of pursuing various art forms, could sell well in this context. They should not see the gun as a source of empowerment. The alternate role models can be created in academics, sports, civil services, literature, journalism, and films.
- o) Kashmiri youth must be exposed to a course in critical thinking. The curriculum should focus on teaching diverse religious and ideological thought processes. It can have six schools of Indian philosophy, western philosophy, and political philosophy, philosophy of religion, comparative religions and international affairs. The



curriculum should also involve meditation, yoga and psychological counselling to generate positive thinking.

- p) The Kashmiri youth mindset needs to be internationalised and catapulted out of the perceived or real sense of victimhood. Sentiments of religious extremism and separatism are also strengthened due to lack of exposure to global developments. Through foreign exposure, they will have an interface with forces of post-modern globalisation, development and economic growth. They will see fruits of economic growth, educational development, scientific advancement and technological innovation reaped by countries in the west and other nations like China, Thailand and the “Asian Tigers”, their mind, in all likelihood will venture beyond guns and religious obscurantism. Face-to-face with the new global revolutions in the field of artificial intelligence and space exploration, some of them will be able to perceive the futility of religious extremism and unrealistic notions of “Azadi”.
- q) In brief, it can be said that the state should have a dominant presence in the academic space and not in the religious organisations as they mainly focus on “deeni-taleem”, i.e., religious studies. In schools, the curriculum of Kashmiriyat and nationalism must be developed and taught. The young generation hardly knows anything about Nand Rishi, Lalleshwari, Lalitaditya Muktapida, Kalhan and the rich scholarly heritage of Kashmir. Such a narrative will go a long way in checking separatism and radicalisation.
- r) Easy availability of extremist literature must be given serious consideration. The youth must lay hands on non-religious literature. Literary festivals, music festivals and other literary events (by think tanks, development agencies, government bodies and non-government bodies) can be organised in Srinagar, Leh, Jammu and other cities of the state.

### **De-radicalisation**

Moving on to other important issues, as stated earlier, there is an urgent need to take cognition of the growing threat posed by radicalisation in Kashmiri society. It is broadly agreed that the best guards against radicalisation are provided by India’s family system and social traditions. Fortunately, in Kashmir, the family as a unit is still secure. Ordinarily, a radicalised person severs all ties with the family and old friends. However, in Kashmir, militants maintain their ties with the family, though for security reasons, physical contact might be few and far between. In families, girls and women are highly empowered. Kashmiri women who constitute 50 percent of the population, need to be engaged in the de-radicalisation campaign.

Further, efforts in the direction of reviving and preserving the Kashmiri cultural heritage in music, spirituality, arts, language, and literature can be undertaken. Since universities and colleges are emerging as significant centres of Jihadi radicalisation, these should be subjected to NAAC inspections on a regular basis. Apart from a quality upgrade,

the NAAC should also keep track of radicalisation trends in academic institutions and submit regular reports on them. Prompt action must be recommended by NAAC to counter religious extremism in the academic world.

Also, there is a need for the Government to evolve a long-term de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation policy for Kashmir. This would require detailed exploration by subject-experts, but it must be multidisciplinary in its approach, roping in religious scholars, experts in the philosophy of religion and politics, experts in cyber-jihad, psychologists, educationists, civil society members, Geo-politics scholars, security experts, intelligence fraternity, sociologists, and other relevant actors. To begin with, the Government can launch a strategic, precise and an all-around effective crack-down on the organisations like JI- the core constituents of radicalisation infrastructure.

Business, employment and livelihood-business linkages of Kashmir and the rest of India, particularly in the traditional areas of horticulture, handicrafts, tourism and carpet industries, have always been very robust but for the last nearly three decades when these links came under serious strain on account of militancy. There is an urgent need to strengthen and further develop old ties. Tourism and carpet industries need a complete overhaul. New employment and business opportunities for the youth can be created in these sectors through specialised efforts. The existing schemes of the Government of India do not address the problems and concerns specific to conflict and post-conflict societies like Kashmir. For conflict zones like Kashmir, such schemes and programs need to be customised. For that, if required, even UN experts and international development experts who have worked in the conflict zones could be co-opted.

### **Social Media**

The narrative on social media needs to be challenged and replaced with an alternative. WhatsApp and Facebook groups run by Pakistan proxies like JI, global jihadi organisations and militant organisations are very refined and sophisticated in terms of quality of content and their logical rigour. Facts and figures are deftly manipulated and selectively presented to nourish a fertile ground for vulnerable minds which can be easy targets for Jihadi ideology and anti-India feelings. The quality and content of the videos are also much evolved. India needs a very systematic, scientific and a nuanced effort that reflects a sound understanding of Kashmiri sub-conscious while developing an alternate narrative. Here also, the task has to be assigned to experts in the field rather than left to the security and intelligence establishments on their own.

An alternate narrative needs to be created in universities and colleges of Jammu and Kashmir to counter lies peddled by cross-border actors. Think-tanks, research forums, youth forums or inter-faith dialogue bodies and cultural interaction clubs can be created to challenge dominant narratives of Jihad and the hypocrisy of Pakistan in political matters. Pakistan keeps silent on the atrocities faced by Uighur Muslims in China but keeps harping

on the grievances in Kashmir and India. Such forums can initiate debates on the conditions of minorities, state of civil rights and democracy in Pakistan. Rejection of religious extremist parties in the recent elections in Pakistan can also be the subject matter of such forums. These will be very helpful in demolishing the lies peddled by Pakistan and its proxies in Kashmir. They can organise discussions on strengthening democracy, merits of the liberal world order and the true meanings of Azadi.

The spiritual vision of masters like Sri Sri Ravishankar, Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev and others can be immensely useful in providing a healing touch to Kashmir. It may not be a well-known fact that the father of the deceased HM leader Burhan Wani spent several days in an Art of Living ashram after his son's encounter death. This fact puts a big question mark on the whole narrative of religious extremism in Kashmir. Kashmiri subconscious still has sufficient space for the spiritual pathways of Tauhid and Vedanta. It's time we explored these domains.

The Pakistan factor in Kashmir affairs is a fact of life, and hence, it is important to engage Pakistan in a dialogue and peace process. However, there should be no going back on our firm stand that terror and talks cannot go together. Kashmiris have by and large now come to accept this reality. For any dialogue process to resume, progress and eventually succeed, Pakistan must cease support to and stop sponsorship of terrorism. In the meantime, the current robust kinetic posture against trans-border Pakistani activities in aiding and abetting terror activities, including financial support, must continue in a sustained manner. Since the Surgical Strike (Sept. 2017), people in Kashmir feel very enthusiastic about India's ability to respond in a pro-active manner.

For the future, if Pakistan does not show any substantial change in its stance, then the option of a sub-conventional/hybrid war should be explored. It also needs to be mentioned with a special emphasis that India's strong and aggressive force-posture with Pakistan which in effect involves giving them a proportionate or even disproportionate response, if needed, plays an important role in clearing the smokescreens of confusion in a Kashmiri mind. Call it a specific trait or a personal observation, the fact is that Kashmiri sub-conscious is generally confused on various issues. May be several centuries of foreign rule has left its imprint on the collective psyche of Kashmiris. In the Kashmiri mind the emotions are very dominant. However, the idea is not to generalize and the observations leave enough space for the exceptions.

Coming back to the point of India's aggressive force posture vis-à-vis Pakistan, it must be mentioned that in the past, India's decisive victory in Kargil played an instrumental role in convincing Kashmiris that the future lies with India. But the best way to engage a Kashmiri mind is dialogue. That's the message coming out from all diverse stakeholders at the formal and informal levels. The sense of political alienation is very strong. The cultural and religious alienation is also rapidly rising. Hence, a wide range of people feel that

structured engagement will be helpful in generating trust and goodwill within a year. After that, the Government could come out with a concrete political solutions. It would be desirable to approach the problem directly rather than taking a circuitous route by avoiding the political aspects of the issue. There needs to be clarity of vision for this, and in due course, concrete proposals need to be rolled out.

*(The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation. The author certifies that the article/paper is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/web upload elsewhere, and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed, and are believed to be correct).*

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