

Debating the Causes of Insurgency and 'Jihad' In Jammu and Kashmir

DR. PRANAV KUMAR¹ AND Mr. YATAN SHARMA²

¹Assistant Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India.

¹PhD candidate at University of Delaware. Delaware, the USA.

Introduction:

Terrorism has been the most convoluted and serious issue for the state (now Union Territory) of Jammu and Kashmir. During the time of independence, instability prevailing in the region led to an armed invasion of the state by the Pakistani army and Pakistan-backed tribesmen. The tribesmen were mainly aroused by a call of Jihad. Though they were pushed back by the Indian troops, a large territory remained under their control. Pakistan devised a plan of proxy war in Kashmir. In the late 1980s, the insurgency started in Kashmir. However, there is the need to underscore the fact that insurgency was not spread throughout Jammu and Kashmir but was mainly restricted to the Kashmir valley. The violence in the valley has continued unabatedly. Many books and research thesis have been written on this issue. A plethora of reasons has been identified in various literature for the beginning and continuation of insurgency and violence in the valley. In the following article, an attempt has been made to critically scrutinize the arguments provided for the insurgencies in the valley and at the same time, it also highlights the real causes of the spread of terrorism in the valley.

Background

There are three important incidences, which form the background for the beginning of the insurgency in Kashmir. Two of these incidences are seen as immediate causes of the insurgency and the third incidence is seen as the signpost of the beginning of brutality and terrorism in Kashmir.

The 1987 Legislative Assembly elections in Kashmir are widely perceived as the turning point in the history of Kashmir. Most observers and politicians argue that the elections were rigged. Dr Jitendra Singh, a senior politician from the state and a union minister in the NDA II government said "In order to ensure that Farooq Abdullah returned as Chief Minister with a comfortable majority, the (then) state machinery had manoeuvred to secure the defeat of Muslim United Front (MUF) candidates, while the Centre remained a mute spectator because of the Rajiv- Farooq Accord and a tactical understanding between the National Conference and Congress"ⁱ.

The 1987 Assembly elections were held in the month of March. The voting percentage was around 75 per cent. There were two important political groups; the alliance of the National Conference and the Congress ii) an opposition unity group called Muslim United Front (MUF). The NC-Congress alliance won 66 seats in the Assembly. The alliance received only 53% of the popular vote but garnered 87% of the seats. The MUF only had 4 seats, even though it had polled 31% votesⁱⁱ. The gap between the percentage of votes and seats was too large to be realistic. There were widespread protests claiming the election was a rigged one. People did not perceive the government as legitimate and the radical Islamist forces were able to tap into this negative energy. Thus, all these chains of events led to the foundation for the spread of insurgency in the state.

The Second incidence is the kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed. She was the daughter of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, then the Home Minister of India in the Janata Dal government. This government was led by Prime Minister V. P. Singh. Rubaiya was kidnapped on 8 December 1989, from near her home in Nowgam, Kashmir. The terrorist group Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) claimed the responsibility for the Kidnapping. The JKLF was run by Yasin Malik. The JKLF demanded the release of militants in an exchange for Rubaiya. The militants were; Sheikh Abdul Hameed, Ghulam Nabi Butt, Noor Muhammad Kalwal, Muhammed Altaf; and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar. The weak government of India capitulated before the demands and released all these militants. At 7:00 p.m. on 13 December 1989 Dr Rubaiya Sayeed was set free, two hours after the government released the five jailed militantsⁱⁱⁱ. Ironically, Mufti Sayeed continued as the Home Minister of India. This was one of the most shameful chapters in the history of independent India. This immediate surrender of the government before the terrorists gave them a clear message that the Indian state is a weak state and terrorists can easily challenge the power of the state with impunity.

In the year 1989-1990, the arrival of jihad, insurgency, and radical Islam was brutally pronounced in the incidences of killings of Kashmiri pandits. By the beginning of 1990, Farooq Abdullah resigned from his post. But by then the valley was in the hands of jihadis. A large number of Kashmiri Hindus were killed. Several women were raped. There was a coordinated and orchestrated

plan by a network of radical Islamists and terrorist groups to cleanse the valley from the Hindus. The efforts of the terrorists were backed and supported by the common Muslim radicals in the valley. The cries for Azadi were backed by the call for jihad against the 'kaafirs'. The Pandits, who were branded 'Kafir' were asked to leave the valley immediately. The all-out war against the Indian state and total repulsion of the Pandits became the aim of Kashmiri Muslims. More than 2 lakhs of Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee from the Kashmir valley. Kashmir once a citadel of Hindu learning and wisdom has now become a hotbed of Islamic radicalisation and insurgency. In February 1990 the month after the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits, Amanullah Khan told an interviewer, "Yes, it was [a long-term plan]it had to be well prepared." "So, we started political planning in 1986 and continued till the end of 1987 for one and a half years we were planning our strategy and it began in July 1988"^{iv}.

The Traditional understanding: Causes of Insurgency

Traditionally, the understanding of insurgency has revolved around the classical arguments developed in the post-World War II era. This group of arguments mainly focuses on economic causes. And added to this social and political reasons are identified. One of the foremost reasons cited by many traditional scholars is the lack of economic development, poverty, and lack of employment opportunities for youth. According to this argument, economic despondency leaves no choice for the youth. Hence, they raise their voice through violent means. Added to this, the engagement in terrorist organisations also provides a form of economic security. This argument is not tenable. The per capita income of Kashmir is higher than the Ladakh and Jammu regions. Added to this, the per capita income of Kashmir is greater than the per capita income of many other states of India. Even the people and the groups active in the valley have not given prominence to the economic demands themselves. The economic causes are not the sole cause of the spread of terrorism. However, in many cases, the economic cause might play the role of a Catalyst.

Another reason that is widely cited is the democratic deficit. In the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Kashmir valley region had 46 seats in the legislative assembly. This was more than the collective seats allocated to Jammu and Ladakh region. The political power within the state was solely concentrated in the hands of people and parties from the valley. In that sense, the people of Jammu and Ladakh were less represented and less powerful in a political sense. However, despite the apparent discrimination, the people of Jammu and Ladakh never took the route of violence. Thus, the democratic deficit cannot be a substantial cause.

There are some arguments which have tried to portray the dilution of autonomy as an important cause behind the rise and continuation of insurgency in Kashmir. Constitutionally there was no autonomy given to the state. Rather several temporary measures were created given the special circumstances of the signing of the instrument of accession. A false impression about the permanency of these temporary provisions was created by vested interest. In the Union of India, many states were given special powers or provisions. And there has been an increase or reduction in these provisions from time to time. Most importantly, the special provisions were for the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir, which included the regions of Jammu and Ladakh. The people from these two regions never put arguments about the dilution of autonomy. This can also mean that the leaders and political groups of the Kashmir valley were misusing the special provisions to ignore and exploit the other two regions. Hence, it can be argued that the special provisions were rather a source of corruption and inequitable distribution of power and resources. In this light, this reason does not hold the ground of evidence.

Some people have tried to argue that there is discrimination by the central government against Kashmir and Kashmiris. This argument does not hold ground. As the evidence suggests otherwise. Many times, the central government has allocated special funds for the development of Kashmir. The youth from Kashmir receive special fellowships, grants and seats across India. Moreover, in a federal structure, many states try to blame the central government for the lack of development in their states. This blame is not backed by evidence and data.

Another argument has mainly been raised by the people with a vested interest in the human rights violation and the high-handedness of the army. This argument is absurd from the beginning. When the insurgency started in Jammu and Kashmir there was no role for the army at that time in the state. The army was deployed in the state to secure national interests and protect the people. The Islamists in the valley had started a terror campaign with cross-border funding and support, they persecuted the Kashmiri pandits. The militants started killing people in large numbers. Hence the widespread presence of the army was required to protect the state assets and provide security to the citizens of India.

The substantive reasons for insurgency

1. Proxy war by Pakistan

The foremost reason for the rise of insurgency in the valley is the proxy war with Pakistan and the cross-border state-sponsored terrorism. Since 1947, successive Pakistani governments have harboured anti-India feelings. They have always searched for avenues to make India bleed. The Pakistani establishment decided to implement the plan of proxy war and target Kashmir. In the early 1980s, the Pakistani establishment decided to start a new type of warfare against India in Jammu and Kashmir. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq HI, who served as the head of state of Pakistan from 1978 until he died in 1988, oversaw and steered this plan. This plan is infamously known as Operation Tupac, also called Pakistan's 'Kashmir Plan' or 'Zia Plan'. The aims of Operation Tupac included";To train Kashmiri youths in the handling of sophisticated weapons, Destabilizing and discouraging the

state administration, Making the Kashmir valley a Hindulless Muslim area, and Preparing Kashmiri Muslims for “Jihad”. According to this plan Amanullah Khan (founder of JKLF) was "tasked" to trigger insurgency in Kashmir. Pakistan took advantage of the political instability in the 1980s and used it the spread terrorist activities in the region. Local politicians joined hands with the infiltrators and raised the demand for a separate Kashmiri nation. A half dozen principal terrorist groups are operating in Kashmir. All of them are being funded and operated from Pakistan. The Pakistani military runs the training camps in Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir for these jihadis. There are some other types of groups, which are not directly engaged in violence but provide support to the violent activities. Hurriyat is another group which seeks Azadi of Kashmir and like other terrorist organisations, this group also receives funding from Pakistan.

2. Radicalisation and Wahhabi Islam

The Kashmir valley has witnessed a wave of intense radicalization in recent decades, accompanied by the spread of Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a conservative movement within Islam's Sunni branch practised in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism has been known as an intolerant and aggressive form of Islam^{vi}. The local variant of Islam, mystic Sufism, which is ostensibly considered syncretic and liberal, is now facing an existential threat from the ideology of Wahhabism. It has grown exponentially since 2011. As they grew up, the young generation born after the emergence of militancy in the 1990s was indoctrinated with radical and extremist views. Wahhabis hired highly qualified Imams and constructed lavish mosques in Arabic style with massive minarets. They also provide generous scholarships to young students who wish to further their education in Saudi Arabia^{vii}. Aside from that, the concept of a more traditional Islam has made significant inroads in Kashmir through various radical organisations. One of them is Jamat - i- Islami. It is a pro-Pakistani international organisation that is said to be the backbone of Kashmiri militancy. It is based on the philosophy of Maulana Maududi, a Pakistani extremist Islamic cleric. Similarly, Burhan Vani, the poster boy of Kashmir's new-age militancy, lauded the idea of a caliphate and a sharia-ruled Kashmir. Burhan Vani's popularity can be gauged by the fact that his death in an encounter with security forces in 2016 sparked widespread civil unrest across the valley. Many people were killed during these protests. Thus, this Islamic radicalisation and Wahhabism are one of the foremost factors raising insurgencies in the valley^{viii}.

3. The transnational Jihad

The continuation and the perpetuation of Jihad in Jammu and Kashmir can also be connected to the ongoing transnational jihad in different parts of the world. There is an ideology, which believes that it can conquer the world and establish the rule of sharia. In the last two decades, Al-Qaida, ISIS and other terrorist organisations were found to be active in Kashmir. This was recognised by the global community and it is accepted that trans-national networks of terrorist groups are operating in Jammu and Kashmir. It has been acknowledged that the members of the Islamic terrorist networks were suspected of having crossed over to Kashmir. Jihad has been an essential element of Islam since its inception. Jihad means holy war. Since the beginning, this term has been used to identify the duty of Muslims to fight against non-Muslims, who refuse to convert or pay Jizya taxes. For centuries, the Islamic marauders have roamed around the globe to make everyone a Muslim. In modern times, in multicultural societies, Jihad has taken the meaning of waging a war (personally or in a group) to establish the supremacy of Islam, to establish the Sharia-based Islamic system or carve out an Islamic state or simply bring fear and terror in the hearts of people. Unfortunately, there are also a large number of apologists who tend to provide an ahistorical and illogical description of Jihad. These apologists argue that real Jihad is inner. This refers to a human struggle between good and bad. However, the history of the world and the millions of victims will not agree with this laughable assertion of the apologists. A leading scholar on Jihad, Richard Spencer explains Jihad; “Jihad in Islamic theology primarily, or even prominently, anything but warfare against unbelievers. The Qur’an directs Muslims to “fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and his messenger have forbidden, nor practice the religion of truth, even if they are of the People of the Book until they pay the jizya with willing submission and feel subdued” (9:29). Nor does Muhammad mention any other pretext for an attack”.^{ix}

4. Role of special status behind insurgency and terrorism in the valley

In addition to the role played by external forces and Islamic radicalism, the so-called special status that was granted to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir through article 370 had also been critical in the spread of terrorism in the valley. After Independence, Kashmir was attacked by the Pakistani regulars with some tribesmen. At that time, the army of the Dogra king was comprised of soldiers both Muslims and Dogras. In Muzaffarabad the Muslim soldiers deserted, shot the commanding officers and joined the raiders. The raiders were actively advancing. On 24 October Maharaja Hari Singh approached the government of India for assistance. After Hari Singh signed the treaty, the Indian troops were sent to rescue the state. Later, due to these special circumstances, some special powers were given to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

However, the special status later started to become a big problem for the state. It was evident that by the 1990s the state was dominated by orthodox Muslims and self-centric local politicians. Exodus and brutal killing of Kashmiri pandits in 1990 was a clear indication that there was power concentration in the hands of a few Muslim politicians which they had misused to a great extent. It was this special status that restricted the role of the central government and the parliament. And because of these many anti-terrorist laws did not apply to Kashmir. For instance, laws on preventive detention led by the Indian parliament were not applicable in the state and as consequence authorities were unable to prevent terrorist activities. Similarly, reservations for socially and economically marginalised sections of society were not available. In addition to this, the right to information was not available. As a result, the local politicians were free from public scrutiny. They were not accountable to answer where they are receiving money and for what purposes they were using it. This is the fundamental reason that almost all local politicians along with the regional parties opposed article 370. The status had hindered the full integration of Jammu and Kashmir in India. This provided the reason for Pakistan and terrorist groups to justify the inhuman act in the valley. In recent times, after the revocation

of Article 370, it has been reported that the Kashmiri youths joining terrorist groups dropped by more than 40% since the abrogation of the special status. According to the data shared by the ministry of home affairs, the cases of stone-pelting have been reduced by 50%.^x

Conclusion:

There is a wide gap between facts and perception in Kashmir. The facts are; proxy war by Pakistan, Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, and orchestrated efforts by external forces to spread the jihadi ideology. However, a large number of people within Kashmir perceive the situation differently. Sometimes they call for Azadi and other times they assert for Sharia-based society. Unfortunately, this perception is created amongst the Kashmiris by controlling the narrative and feeding the propaganda. There are forces mainly outside India and a few even within India, who have a vested interest in the Kashmir region. There is a whole economy of conflict, and from terrorists to so-called experts benefits from this. The insurgency in Kashmir was started with a focus on certain elements. But now, there is a large loose network of people, and groups across the world, who are directly or indirectly involved in the perpetuation of jihad in Kashmir. It is shameful that the common masses in Kashmir have merely become pawns in the hands of radical organisations, external forces and some elite individuals living in western capitals.

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