

A New Wave of Militancy in the Kashmir Valley

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A new wave of militancy, mostly comprising of educated young men, is sweeping through the trouble-torn Kashmir valley. This new breed of Kashmiri militants is more radicalized and more firm in its convictions than its predecessors.

Lately, there has been an unprecedented rise in the number of militants operating in the Kashmir valley with South Kashmir erupting as the new hotbed. Attacks have been carried out against Army, paramilitary forces and police with nonchalance. The number of people attending the funerals of militants is often massive. The militants enjoy huge public support and sympathy; in fact, they had it right from 1989, but now, the new generation of Kashmiri youth is more overt in this. They repeatedly resort to stone pelting near the encounter sites so that the militants have a free escape. Most of the times, this proves successful because of the obvious distraction and also the apprehension of civilian casualties on part of the security establishment.

The security establishment is worried; the people are apprehensive, all the while the volcano of Kashmiris' distrust for India, which frequently gets manifested in the streets, encounter sites, funeral processions and Friday prayers, is heating up. Without appearing cynical, the immediate aftermath of the recent Pampore attack, in which eight CRPF men lost their lives, was an apt illustration of how common Kashmiris feel about India right now? While the very next day, the whole of India was mourning the death of its soldiers, the Pampore town observed a complete shutdown as a mark of solidarity with the two LeT militants killed in the attack. Young Kashmiri militant, Burhan Wani, has emerged as the new poster boy of militancy in the Kashmir valley. Just take a look on the different social media sites; it is he who has become the new online hero for the Kashmiri teenagers, and not any IAS toppers which would have generally been the case in any normal situation.

The political and security establishments both at the state and central level have acknowledged this disturbing trend. Recently, the GOC Northern Command Lt Gen D S Hooda frankly admitted to the ever increasing radicalization and the new found tilt towards militancy among the valley youth. But if Gen Hooda's acknowledgement is taken as the assessment that his organization has made of this recent radical surge in Kashmir valley, then there needs to be a serious appraisal. He points out the oft repeated reasons—lack of opportunities, religious fundamentalism and role of ISI. Most of the militants are well educated and do not come from the 'deprived' sections but from relatively affluent middle class families. Gen Hooda has called for an honest assessment and urgent remedial measures of this problem.

But dismissing and bracketing this militancy, which is totally local in its orientation, as being

the handiwork of the neighbouring country's intelligence agency is surely not an honest and prudent assessment. Gen Hooda and his establishment would be well served if they aim to move away from their self-righteous and simplistic persuasion. One is entitled to pose the question that from where does this alienation emanate? One cannot but agree with Gen Hooda and the perceptions of his organization that there is an urgent need in exploring the ways for de-radicalizing the valley youth. But the million-dollar question that he needs to ask himself and his establishment (both political and military) is that how to achieve an end to the deep-rooted sense of alienation and frustration among the youth? Except the periphery areas, the so-called 'integrationist' schemes like the Sadhbhavana have utterly failed to achieve their purposes. It is because the situation is too complex and serious to be resolved by lollypops like Sadhbhavana.

When the state defines itself by sanctioning violent practices, as theorists argue, there is bound to be a counter-definition which at times, like in the case of Kashmir valley, takes things to another extreme. For many people, including those in the establishment, the recent surge in the militancy in the Kashmir valley has been an unexpected development. However, the underlying reality points towards a slightly different direction. While there has been a steady decline in the militancy in valley during the last eight years or so, one thing which has really got unnoticed, is the extreme state oppression which has exacerbated during the same period of time.

The tragedy is not the number of militants joining the militant organizations but the repressive ways of choking the democratic space, recurrent rights violations by the forces, failure and incompetence of police in tackling small law and order problems which results in high-handedness, atrocities and humiliations that an average Kashmiri faces on almost daily basis, and the impunity enjoyed by the erring personnel. All these years, hundreds of Kashmiris have been killed in the street protests. The most recent example is that of six killings in Handwara protesting against an alleged act of molestation. Many more have been imprisoned under the draconian laws. In many ways, the persona of once a bright teenager, Burhan Wani, and the manner in which he was brutalized by the repressive state mechanism to turn into a mutineer, has become emblematic of the whole of Kashmir's tryst with state oppression. They only ask: how can you have democracy and militarization functioning together?

Not being an alarmist here, the scenario is indeed grim which demands immediate attention. This response certainly cannot be done through neutralizing the militants physically; after all, they carry a certain ideology and how can you kill an ideology with bullets and mortar shells? The need is to engage with them, listen to them, and work for a solution, which is, believe me, what these militants want. Finally, the real cause of this militancy is the unresolved conflict itself and not any other factor. We would do well to move towards the resolution of the conflict through a serious dialogue and an engaging democratic process; only then, the cycle of violence can be broken.

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