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Ethnic Separatism and Insurgency in Kashmir

Presently, in the absence of any great political leadership in Kashmir, the mantle of leadership is falling on religious leaders who are using the issue of continuing violence in the troubled valley in their regular congregations. Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq, the head priest of Kashmir, says, “definitely more Muslim youth are seen in the mosques because the only place where they get some sort of relief or respect after being humiliated by Indian security forces (seen as Hindu troops) is in places of worship.”

This in turn is changing Kashmir into a complex web of inter-confessional problems, as both India and Pakistan are trying to use the sentiments of a particular sect for their advantage. If Muslim radical groups in Kashmir have been demanding a merger with Pakistan, then radical Hindu groups in Jammu are asking for a division of Jammu and Kashmir into three states on the basis of religion.

Equally, in a post-nineties scenario, Muslims in Kashmir by and by are being divided on the basis of casteism, sufiism, peerism and fundamentalism. New sections of the *al Hadees* and *Tableeq* schools of

thought are emerging, their institutions resembling *Jamaat-i-Islami*, which does not believe in sufiism or shrine worship.

India and Pakistan are knee-deep in the Kashmir issue and both countries are using the religious-racial card, thus entangling the issue and making it more difficult to untie this particular Gordian knot.

Some intelligence agencies, for their own interests, are dividing Kashmiris into *Shia*, *Sunni*, *Paharis*, and *Backerwals*. The urban-village divide is also surfacing in the valley. It is a known fact that the ethnopolitical problems often get aggravated and bring an outside influence into what could otherwise be regarded as an internal affair. There have been Sikh and Hindu massacres and killings of laborers from Bihar and Nepal, indicating clearly that a specific influence intends to keep non-Muslims away from the valley. The long-term consequences are that such events may demolish the once-composite and plural society where cracks are already visible.

Meanwhile, in a knee-jerk reaction after September 11, the administration is coming up against the waves of gun culture in Kashmir and is chasing foreign militants and trying to break their influence on society. The administration is also trying to choke the inflow of illegal money into Kashmir by identifying the property acquired by the new Islamic groups as well as persons involved in bringing in financial help to the separatists. In other words, New Delhi is trying to use the same measures against terrorists in Kashmir as the United States used against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In the early nineties, Kashmiri Pundits (elite Hindu class) were driven from their homeland.¹ The young Pundits growing up outside Kashmir know only one thing: that their elders were driven out by militants and forced to leave their belongings and live in refugee camps. Some Hindus, mostly from rural areas, continue to live as displaced persons in unhygienic refugee camps in Jammu and New Delhi. Several of them have died of heat stroke, as they were not used to living in plains or deserts.

In Kashmir, Muslim teenagers have grown up under the shadow of the gun and a security bunker in their neighborhood, with a feeling that troops from outside Kashmir are ruling the valley with the barrel

1. Kashmiri Pundits constitute only 5 percent of the population of Jammu and Kashmir.

of the gun. The cycle of hatred thus spans generations, and hope for Kashmiri Pundits returning to Kashmir seems bleaker with each passing year.

Youth from the scattered generation of Kashmiri Pundits growing up outside Kashmir for the last thirteen years are shaped in a different culture and are no longer a part of Kashmir. Several of these youth have not even seen snow or mountains and only hear stories of Kashmir from their parents or relatives.

These young Pundits, it seems, have said good-bye forever to the Himalayan valley. Being among the educated class for centuries, they prefer to be educated outside Kashmir than to live in an atmosphere of suffocation where today, no one is ready to provide them security. Daily violence and incidents such as attacks on the Kashmir Assembly harden their resolve to not return to the troubled valley.

Muslims in Kashmir, on the other hand, are growing up under the umbrella of a single religion: Islam. The younger generation can scarcely imagine how their elders used to live with Kashmiri Pundits or how educated Pundits who maintained secularism in the curriculum dominated the education system in Kashmir.

The six-year-old ruling government, under the chief ministership of Farooq Abdullah, has failed to create an atmosphere where Kashmir Pundits can return, despite the government's election manifesto in 1996 that considered the return to be a priority. The same election manifesto was used in 2002 (autonomy plus return of Hindus) by the ruling National Conference, but without participation by the real opposition (separatists) in the elections, the manifesto remains meaningless.

Pundits, who left Kashmir in early 1990, are now selling their property, never to return. A cursory survey suggests that at least 60 per cent of the Hindu property in Kashmir has been sold.

The continuing violence has polarized Hindus and Muslims. For the first time, the most visible face of an effort by Islamic militants can be seen by their actions in "Operation Fidayeen" (dying in the name of Allah while fighting for Islam).

After nearly achieving their goal of changing the demographic structure in the valley, militants are extending their activities across the Pir Panchal mountain range in the Jammu division. A series of Hindu massacres in the Doda, Poonch and Rajouri districts of Udhampur and Jammu has led to the migration of minorities from the upper

ranges. Militants in these mountainous regions are ruling the roost in the absence of security positions, as difficult terrain makes it impossible for troops to station themselves on these hilly ridges.

As a coup d'état, the government has come up with Village Defense Committees (VDCs). Most VDCs consist of Hindus who have been issued arms by the government to protect the villagers.

This situation widens the split between Muslims and Hindus. Muslims, scared of militants, are not joining the groups, while Hindus are dependent on the VDCs. Minor incidents lead to scuffles, which then lead to communal tensions.

Situation in Kashmir

AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK on the United States, life on the street of Srinagar, the summer capital, which had been limping back to normalcy, once again saw a change. Though the situation seems normal in the daytime, the nighttime hours are tense and abnormal. Those living near the Line of Control (LOC) have shifted to safer places. Villages dotting the LOC have been mined, and the presence of security troops has increased manifold. The fear of war between India and Pakistan, despite the recent de-escalation of tension, continues to keep the countries' respective armies and weapons face-to-face on the 1,100-kilometer disputed LOC and the international border.

In this situation, mothers continue to wait for family members that do not return in time. The warrens and walkways of Srinagar and its surroundings remain scorched and stationary. People still prefer to not celebrate night marriages.

The daytime veneer of normalcy seems increasingly dangerous as the underlying hatred continues to brew. It is just a matter of time before the volcano of enmity erupts on the streets if the government's policy to win Kashmiris does not surface, or if meaningful dialogue between Pakistan and Indian leadership fails to take off.

Present Actors in the Conflict

THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD ARMED STRUGGLE that laid the foundation in Kashmir under the slogan "Independent Kashmir" has melted into Islamic jihad, spearheaded by radical leaders bent on installing the rule of Allah. But after September 11, the Kashmiri Muslim militants, as

well as separatist leaders and their sympathizers, are rethinking the role of foreign Islamic militants in Kashmir.

Is the presence of foreign militants going to help or hurt the freedom struggle? This question is being debated on the streets of Srinagar, and public opinion is divided. The new generation is in favor of foreign elements, while saner elements say their role is over. This was recently witnessed on the death anniversary of Molvi Farooq, on May 21, 2002, where Hurriyat leader Abdul Gani Lone was shot dead. A four-hour procession and speeches were punctuated by pro-Jihad and pro-foreign militant slogans despite the Hurriyat leadership's discouraging of such actions. The seventy-one-year-old Lone, who earlier had said the role of foreign militants was over, paid the price for his words, creating renewed fear amid the moderate leadership.

Indian officials presently believe that some one thousand-plus Muslim mercenaries, mostly Pakistani- and Pashtun-speaking Afghans, are leading the campaign and have given a new thrust to the decade-old separatist campaign that shows no signs of ending. Guerrillas, who are expert in mountain warfare and can live for months in stocked caves, claim they have a following of thousands pitted against a huge reservoir of Indian army, paramilitary and Kashmir police. Carrying ample arms and ammunition, the first thing guerrillas do is to construct a camouflaged bunker in the mountains; sometimes they even buy temporary truce with the security troops.

The main fear that foreign militants may have links with the Taliban of Afghanistan is proving to be truer as there has been an increase of attacks on security positions after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The post-Afghanistan repercussion has seen fissures among the groups of militants in Kashmir, and internecine clashes were reported between local and foreign militants.

The second actors are local Muslim militants who number about three thousand, according to Mr. A.K. Suri, police chief of Jammu and Kashmir. Most of these militants are also pro-Pakistan but are somehow people-friendly. For example, the *Hizbe-ul Mujahideen* militant outfit is divided. One is preaching hard-line Islam and is directly under the control of Pakistan, while the second—led by Majid Dar,²

2. Dar had announced the cease-fire in July 2000, which continued for two weeks, and has now lost two of his commanders in mysterious circumstances. It is believed that foreign militants killed these two local commanders.

who is camping in Kashmir and is considered a moderate—may play an important role in the future. Dar does not want foreign militants to control the Kashmir movement. This group is also flexible and does not believe in Islamic rule in Kashmir despite its slogan that Kashmir should be a part of Pakistan, but they are ready to compromise on something less.³

The third actors are the separatist political amalgam of some twenty-three outfits known as the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). The APHC is not presently enjoying a marked respect among the local populace as it has not been able to give anything but death and destruction to the masses. Still, the APHC constitutes the main actors in the theater of the conflict, and these actors share the same emotions as common people on the street. Without Hurriyat participation there is no solution possible in Kashmir. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat says, “we live in the masses and not in the bunkers ... some people might be angry with us but they understand our limitations.” Three of the executive members of APHC, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Yaseen Malik and Abdul Aziz, along with dozens of second- and third-line leaders, are in Indian jails.

The fourth important actors are Indian security forces, which are present in large number and do not have a good human rights record. After September 11 the security troops felt more concerned about the continuing violence in Kashmir, but became morally encouraged after the United States declared two top militant outfits as terrorists. Indian security troops posted in Kashmir now have more pressure from New Delhi to control the militancy. An international campaign has been launched to prove that Kashmiri militancy constitutes cross-border terrorism. Though the vigil on the villages dotting the LOC has increased to check the infiltration, any tactical change in the militancy is yet to be seen.

Insurgency in Kashmir—Changing Tactics

AT FIRST SIGHT, there seems to be no marked change in the militants' actions in Kashmir; however, more foreign militants are getting killed. The pro-Pakistani groups are still visibly controlling the militancy but the strategy is changing; local militants with hard-line Islamic ideology

3. Interview with Majid Dar.

are seen in the forefront. Outfits use different names to maintain the discipline of the militant cadre and the distribution of money and weapons they receive from their elders based in either Pakistan or other Islamic countries.

The banning of the two terrorist organizations will hardly make a difference; as evidenced since 9/11, local militant outfits such as al Umar Mujahideen, Tehrik ul Mujahideen, and Jamiat ul Mujahideen are more hostile, recruiting local young Muslim boys mostly from rural and poor areas.

After the declaration of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), locals have been scared to give hideouts to foreign militants. If security troops were to find a foreign militant hiding in a house, the house would surely be blasted and the militant killed. In recent encounters, militants were seen hiding in the mosques. In fact, there has been a proliferation of mosques in Kashmir. One cursory survey suggests that more than three thousand new mosques have been built across the valley since 1990.

Prevailing Flux in Kashmir

THE KASHMIR MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE remains on the front burner but there are no leaders available to carry the movement forward. Those still in Kashmir are too scared to act as leaders due to radical militants and their supporters. Unlike in the early nineties, the present Islamic militant groups have a limited following among the locals.⁴ These armed guerrilla groups have no political party. According to one survey, the role of Jamaat-i-Islami, which once had less than 10 percent support, is losing its ground. The main scare, however, remains the growth of the *Wahabi* and *Khilafat* type of Islam and the strengthening of its roots in Kashmir. Already several organizations named after social workers are new milestones in Kashmir. Several orphanages and medical centers are being financed through unaccounted money, which is routed to Kashmir from Gulf countries. Two dozen top businessmen and social workers were arrested this year for acting as conduits for *hawala* (illegal transition) money. Police recovered large sums of money in July 2002 from a

4. There is always a fear of repercussions. In several cases, houses were blown up by security troops once they found militants using the houses as hideouts.

commander of Hizbe-ul Mujahideen and a journalist. On their disclosure, a few separatist leaders were arrested for collecting and forwarding hawala money for separatist activities. Two top leaders of the Hurriyat are also in jail for allegedly receiving hawala money. Police say more money has been pumped into Kashmir from Islamic countries since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. According to Indian intelligence reports, every executive member of the Hurriyat is getting Rs. 700,000 per month.

Another activity of the fundamentalist Islamic group is to rope important, influential, and rich people into its fold as role models in society. Several such people are falling prey to this design, either intentionally or unintentionally.

One should know that Kashmir's decade-old freedom struggle is being used intelligently by fundamentalists to change the kind of Islam in Kashmir. This is a dangerous trend but no one agrees or suggests ways to curb it because it is not visible to the naked eye. This policy received body blows but did not change after the fall of the Taliban.

One important observation is that the population of the Kashmir valley is now 99.5 percent Muslim. There are no minorities left.⁵ Scattered massacres of minorities in the last five years of militancy act as a shield for the return of Hindu migrants. Hindus are encouraged to sell their properties and are getting a good amount of money from Muslim Kashmiris.

The bleeding valley has seen an increase in the construction of mosques across the state. The architecture of these mosques features domes and minarets, unlike earlier times when mosques had stupa-type ceilings resembling Buddhist or Hindu temples. These mosques are also used as a resting place for militants and have provided jobs for hundreds of unemployed youth as preachers, priests, or caretakers of the religious places.

Thus, Islamic militant groups in the valley are seen differently by unemployed and underdeveloped⁶ youth, who silently respect the militants because they die for a cause. Youth are told that Muslims of

5. In early 1990, two hundred thousand Kashmiri Hindus left the valley. Since then, only four thousand Hindus and about thirty thousand Sikhs remain in the valley, whose population is more than six million.

6. Seventy percent of the Muslim youth come from a rural background and are not well educated. They have a limited vision, which I describe as "valley vision." Fifty percent of these youth have not seen any other state of India and live in a closed society and mindset. They have no jobs and easily fall prey to Islamic propaganda.

the outside world are fighting for Kashmir's independence and dying for them.

The disappearance of Osama bin Laden and Maulana Omar is fast turning into a myth of invincibility and stories are floating around about how Allah has helped them to disappear. Islamic clerics in Kashmir are using these stories while preaching to the youth in the rural mosques. The new generations of Kashmiris born in this atmosphere are fast learning the new rules of life, least realizing that these groups have some different hidden agenda.

The lack of jobs and rehabilitation for former militants⁷ is increasing the sympathy for foreign militants. Post-9/11 situations have also seen the recycling of Kashmiri Muslim militants in Kashmir.⁸ Young, jobless boys have limited vision and take the recourse of Islam for salvation.

Private discussions among Kashmiri intellectuals reveal a worry about the unseen powers that are forcing their womenfolk to observe *pardah* (wearing of the veil). These forces are also trying to change the style of education in Kashmir. Some places named after Hindu culture, such as Anantnag and Gulshan Nagar, have been renamed as Islamabad and Gulshanabad. Ideologically, the locals do not agree with this type of growing Islamic chemistry but are throttled to defend their own culture lest they be killed either in the name of an informer or infidel.

One of the professors at Kashmir University said, "we are afraid that our culture, both social and religious, is being invaded by outsiders and fear that the new generation is fast learning the Wahabi and Khilafat type of Islam." The well-read and secular-minded in Kashmir recall the last century of Afghan rule in Kashmir, which has been described by historians as the worst rule in history.

Also, the tribal raid of late 1947 in Jammu and Kashmir is still fresh in the minds of local people. Poonch, Rajouri and Uri, the three border towns of the Indian Himalayan state, have several memorials that recount heroic tales of the legends who died fighting to save the chastity of their womenfolk and to save their native land. Locals now consider the Indian forces to be more or less in the same league.

7. According to official figures, more than forty thousand former Muslim militants and their sympathizers were once arrested and released.

8. Police say more local boys since September 11 are either crossing over to Pakistan or getting locally armed training, which includes several former militants.

The Role of Indian Troops in Kashmir

SECURITY TROOPS ARE CONTENT, their claims concerning the linkage of terrorism in Kashmir to Pakistan and to Afghanistan having been vindicated (this is the slogan one hears after visiting any security camp or office). This sore victory is seen as a great morale booster; the ruling political leaders' statement in Delhi to wage a war against Pakistan is like a drip of dextrose to the sagging morale of the security troops.⁹

But there is a sense of something missing. Enmity exists between troops and the local populace, and every incident forces them to further dislike each other. The post-Afghanistan situation gives more confidence to the security troops, who consider Kashmir terrorism to be similar to that of Afghanistan. Security troops want the world to allow them to crush the militancy in Kashmir but do not want to see any other peace-keeping force on their land to monitor their actions.

The local population continues to consider the paramilitaries as outsiders. Troops, on the contrary, consider Muslims supportive of militancy. No one is working to bridge the gap, which has turned into a deep cavity. Incidents such as September 11 and the ensuing war in Afghanistan have led to more fissures. The misunderstanding increases with every passing day. After the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament, Kashmiris have felt scared to travel outside Kashmir because hotels and guest houses in Delhi and other places ask Kashmiris to register with local police.

In Srinagar and across the Himalayan state, more than 350,000 troops are directly or indirectly involved in counter-insurgency operations. With the new threat of war and now assembly elections, the number has increased by 150,000. Indian troops remain alert on the rugged, porous and snow-capped borders. In towns their vigil has multiplied. One of the surveys conducted by students of mass-media communication shows that more than 90 percent of the security troops, including the paramilitary, are from outside Kashmir. To illustrate the relationship between security troops and the local population, I will describe one of my encounters when I was moving along with security troops literally on the LOC.

9. The issue is being used to woo Americans and to maintain pressure on Pakistan. The United States is openly mediating the Kashmir issue in the name of facilitator, and repeated visits of U.S. political leaders to the subcontinent serves to at least start the first step of negotiation between the two enemy neighbors.

As I was in the border town of Kupwara, 120 kilometers north of Srinagar and bordering Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a soldier aimed and yelled, "There, on the roof, it looks one of the militants is on top of the house." The patrolling troops dashed toward a three-story residential building just across from the snow-covered, rectangular terraced fields.

Some of the soldiers ran to cover the back of the building, while two of them pressed against the compound's brick and mud wall, hitting the main gate with the butt of their automatic rifles. They forced open the jammed door.

An old woman shuffled out and opened the main gates. Anxious soldiers raced past her to the top of the floor, found nothing, and started searching the old mud and timber house. Ten minutes later, they came down dragging a shrieking and nervous teenager who begged for mercy, claiming he was a student and had nothing to do with the militancy. Half a dozen nervous family members, bare-footed, mostly women and old men, joined in pleading to leave the boy alone, as he was innocent. They showed the boy's identification card and books as evidence.

"I know the area well," said the soldier, "You were wearing a white *pheran*" (traditional Kashmiri rough woolen cloak used for warmth). Focusing on us and pointing his gun toward the frightened boy, he lectured, "I know this house and I know militants visit this house." Thinking for a minute and observing the surroundings he ordered, "next time I have any complaint about the presence of the militants here, I'm not only going to arrest you but your whole family," and he let the boy go.

Relieved but tense family members hurriedly returned to their dwelling as the soldiers left the area and disappeared in the nearby alley. In the house, the silence broke with the elderly person scolding his son for always bringing trouble to them. I saw three more young boys, trembling and freezing in a corner of a dark and cold room. The elderly members cursed their children for yelling and making the house a playing field and thus an attraction for the patrolling security troops. The children were advised in their native Kashmiri language to learn the new ways of living with the changing scenario in Kashmir.

In a conversation with the family members over a cup of tea, I learned that the three boys were playing on the top floor of the house, which resembled a big hall. In the dark hours, because of the

prevailing situation in the border areas, locals do not venture out. There is also no development. Most of the time there is no electricity, not to mention stadiums, libraries or recreational clubs. Patrolling troops saw some of the boys dashing in what looked like a hall and suspected them to be militants.¹⁰ As troops approached the house, the instant reaction of the boys was to remove the pheran and prepare to face the troops in pants and sweaters, lest they be considered militants.

For many in Kashmir, the above incident is routine. Every day there are several raids on private houses to arrest militants, and every day a couple of search and cordon operations take place. Confidant and trusting steps are lacked by security troops in these operations. The steps taken by troops are to control mass riots, not to control mass movement. The occasional and tentative moves toward accommodation between Kashmir and New Delhi have not been promising.

Security Forces Express an Opinion

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, security troops have been more vigilant on the rugged borders dividing India and Pakistan, as it is suspected that there are more chances of hard-liners escaping Afghanistan to enter Kashmir. "We have to continue our patrolling to show the militants that we can reach wherever we want and we can control the situation," said an army officer based at the LOC.

Another army officer, who did not visit his home even after the birth of his second child, said, "duty is duty. What we really want is for none of us to be killed or injured so we can all go back to our homes and families alive."

There is hardly an Indian paramilitary man or army officer who was not or is not posted in rotation in the troubled areas of Kashmir to control the armed struggle since 1989. You find several of the officers in the leisure cocktails comparing their past experiences in violent Kashmir with what is happening today. "I don't see myself fighting non-professionals as was the case in early nineties. Now I find them more trained and confident," said a young captain of the army. "I was also not trained for this type of job to fight in the towns, nor do I feel proud to be there on the streets, but I have no choice."

10. Militants cross over from Pakistan-administered Kashmir to Indian Kashmir through porous border areas of Kupwara and usually mix with the local population before proceeding to other parts.

He regrets using force on boys who are still in their early teens: “You feel bad arresting young, innocent kids who are fighting someone’s else war. But you have to apply force to extract weapons and truth,” confesses the officer, who says foreign militants are instantly killed even if they are caught alive.

The young captain also does not deny that he lives under the constant threat of a militant attack and that fear has become part of his life. Militants today are fighting with a changed strategy and find more support among the rural poor than among the urban rich. Troops maintain pressure on the residents to keep militants on the run.

“Whenever we arrest someone in the rural areas, nearly all the villagers swarm the security camp, swearing the arrested fellow is innocent and pleading to release him and assuring that never again will he indulge in any activities ... but you soon sniff out the system of survival the locals have adopted. They sometimes know the militants but don’t want to share the information with us until they suffer from them. Behind your back, sometimes, you hear just abuses because they consider you not very friendly,” admits an army officer. Another officer explains, “The first month I acted as the most descent guy on earth and started helping them but the second month turned me crazy as I was showing too much courtesy, which began altering my private hours, literally making me a nervous wreck. I then started beating them to avoid me. I lost my doctrines—I had lost my human feelings after living in a society that never wanted to see the end of the violence but believed in leg-pulling and favors, even at the cost of someone’s life.” He called them the “enemy within.” There have been several cases in which a soldier runs amuck, killing his own colleagues or committing suicide. The usual explanation by the army is that soldiers are living under tremendous pressure and tension in Kashmir.

The above incidents show that there is no policy of security troops staying in Kashmir for two to three years just looking forward to completing their tenure and returning home safely. The continuity in the security force policy is lacking. The new officer will criticize his predecessor and make it a point (with some exceptions) to see that he is moving in a new direction, as he considers that all the steps taken by his former office holder were wrong because there were no immediate results or improvement in the situation.

Contrary to human tendencies, new bonds or developing relations are not visible between the local populace and the security troops. There are hardly any cases of marriages between locals and security troops, despite their living in Kashmir for more than a decade. Furthermore, hardly a Kashmiri family maintains friendly relations with a security person who is transferred out of Kashmir, unlike other places where new relationships are maintained through correspondence or other ways of communication.

Locals Understand the Language of Survival

LOCALS HAVE LEARNED HOW TO GET BY and prefer to keep their young ones away from the troops lest they be identified as militants or sympathizers and arrested and interrogated. One hardly finds a Muslim youth that has not faced some sort of interrogation or been paraded in front of informers in the infamous “crack-downs” (search and cordon operations). Hundreds of young boys are missing in custody. Presently, two organizations of affected persons are fighting for their rights in court. (In private, the soldiers admit they can only scare the young boys and let them go. They too are equally scared of the militants.)

Separatist Groups and the General Populace in Kashmir

ISLAMIC GUERRILLA LEADERS were once proud to exhibit they had fought against the Russians in Afghanistan. It was like a certificate of advanced training in guerrilla tactics for the Mujahideen. Before 9/11, guerrilla leaders used to compare the situation time and time again with what was happening in Afghanistan, considering themselves a part of the Muslim Umma and boasting to implement Islamic rule not only in Kashmir but on the whole planet. Today they speak less of Afghanistan and do not want to compare their insurgency with the Taliban lest the Kashmiri struggle too will have to suffer.

Islamic guerrilla leaders say they are struggling only for the freedom of Kashmir. Some separatist leaders say they do not want Hindu-dominated areas of Jammu or Buddhist-dominated areas of Ladakh.¹¹ These separatists outrightly reject that any al-Qaeda

11. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat said this in his individual capacity and not as chairman of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference.

member is present in Kashmir, unlike in 2001 when every burial procession of a militant killed in an encounter would attract noisy pro-Islamic and pro-Taliban slogans.

Under the surface, one finds that the sympathetic tone for the Afghan Mujahideen continues. For instance, locals silently pray for their sacrifices in their hideouts and vow to take revenge. Although the lack of verbalizing about Afghanistan or Islamic militants is a tactical change, a layer of hatred is swelling underneath that could, over time, burst out in one way or another.

“Even Prophet Muhammed bought peace with the infidels on their terms and conditions for ten years till He defeated them ... Inshaallaha! We will do the same,” said Mushtaq Sopori, an active member of the al Hadees sect of Islam in Kashmir that promotes mosques and educational institutions across the valley.

As the relationship between India and Pakistan spirals downward, security troops continue to arrest hard-line overground activists in Kashmir. More than a dozen Jamaat-i-Islami and APHC leaders and activists were arrested in a four-month period in 2002 under the new law of POTA.

A diabolic shift is distinctly visible. The future policy or strategy of the active radical groups in Kashmir will definitely be more clandestine. There is a fear that Kashmir Muslim teenagers will be the future members of the *fidayeen* (suicidal squad) if steps for the solution of the Kashmir problem are not properly addressed.

Secondly, intellectuals are beginning, for the first time, to compare the Kashmir issue to other Muslim struggles and blaming the West. One strong view, held by Kashmiri Muslim intellectuals who acknowledge the existence of radical Islam, holds that such movements can best be seen as an extreme response to the intrusion of the West, which has seldom tried to solve problems such as those in Palestine, Bosnia or Kashmir. Kashmiri politicians also want America and its allies fighting in the war against terrorism in the backyard of Kashmir, to learn from the mistakes of the British Empire. Kashmiri politicians blame the British for not tying up the loose ends of the Kashmir issue, which have, since 1947, festered between the two South Asian rivals to such a degree that today even the British government is suffering. “What could have been solved in two meetings then is leading into a nuclear war,” said Nazir Ronga, president of the Kashmir Lawyers Association.

Most grievances of the Kashmiri Muslims describe Western imperialism against the Islamic world like the introduction of Israel into the Middle East and the threat to Islamic societies by the spread of what is often seen as “corrupt Western culture.” In this view, the terrorist acts of September 11 were regrettable but understandable, flowing from the widespread rage against the West found in many Muslims. The terrorists were drawn from a much larger pool of discontented and angry Muslims. “‘Good’ Muslims do not approve of acts of terrorism, which are widely regarded as acts of self-defense, and are thus defensible morally,” says another leading Muslim advocate in Srinagar.

Most locals in Kashmir were surprised after the September 11 terrorist attacks but some took pride in it. “That Muslims are ready to die in the name of Allah to defend Islam is seen in itself as a unity among Muslims across the globe. It is an act of sacrifice and achievement for Islam and we should be happy that the younger generation of Muslims worldwide is learning from the elder Muslims how to defend Islam against the unfaithful. They are not falling prey to corrupt Western culture,” says a professor of a college in Sopore town, North Kashmir.¹²

The implications of such a view are quite specific, showing that Kashmiris are not happy with the attack on Afghanistan but they cannot criticize it openly lest they too be dubbed as terrorists by the international community. The only way to release their anger is to criticize the West and its policies against Muslims.

“The West must stop pursuing a policy with a double standard. It must change its policies toward Israel, it must support oppressed Muslim groups around the world, especially in Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya, and it must abandon its support for reactionary and oppressive Islamic regimes.” These arguments carry much weight in Kashmir today because Muslims see India as an ally of Israel. They feel Israel is helping Indian security forces in counter-insurgency operations.¹³ Kashmiri people are suffering at the hands of Indian security troops who are mostly from the other states of India.

12. Sopore is a stronghold of Jamaat-i-Islami and was the most affected town in the last ten years of militancy.

13. Militants kidnapped four Israeli tourists in Kashmir in 1991 and one Israeli tourist was killed. Since then, Israeli tourists do not visit Kashmir.

Hundreds of human rights abuses have been registered against the troops but seldom are actions taken against them.

Since the fall of the Taliban, locals have demanded more vociferously that Asia Watch and Amnesty International be allowed to visit Kashmir as they feel troops have been given more power in Kashmir since September 11 and are not accountable to their superiors. The charge was outrightly denied by the troops' superiors and India does not allow the entry of the two organizations.

New Reasoning Emerges in Kashmir after 9/11

WITH THE FALL OF THE TALIBAN and the installation of a new government in Afghanistan, a fresh reasoning is emerging among Muslim separatist leaders: that the Kashmir movement should no more have the influence of foreign Islamic militants lest the world declare them too as terrorists. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat, chairman of the APHC, for the first time asked India and Pakistan to freeze the Kashmir issue. Farooq Abdullah, chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, has also moved rapidly to cash in on the confusion. The chief minister called for strikes across the LOC on terrorist camps, which has been endorsed by nearly all political parties (ruling an opposition) to go all offensive against Pakistan and the terrorist groups.

Observers feel that Farooq wants to remain more loyal than the king and can please New Delhi in all respects to stay in power. Farooq used the issue for the state elections held in September and October 2002 to sweep the elections once again and rule for another six years. New Delhi had resisted his move and tried to rope in some separatists but failed. Americans had pressured India by demanding that the elections be held under governor's rule and that international observers be allowed to monitor the elections, but these demands were not met by India.

The Afghanistan situation has already weakened the position of separatist organizations; in the coming year, separatists cannot think of participating in the elections or they will face a miserable defeat because at this stage they cannot bargain with New Delhi. Thus, all the bridges and contacts New Delhi gained with separatists through interlocutors have been burned. The Hurriyat has recently agreed to participate in elections but for the representative character, considering these elections as the first step for negotiating with Indians.

Another thought of school emerging in the valley is that a fresh epoch will begin for Kashmir once the situation in Afghanistan completely settles. The moderate and suffocated intellectual class, with a cautious optimism and crossed fingers, feels it is the right time for the international community to mediate and settle the Kashmir issue. Their voices suggest that the West should no longer sit on the fence and helplessly watch the dangerous trends emerge in Kashmir since the present visible opportunity may not exist in the future. The truth remains that any serious peace process would need much greater commitment; otherwise, the proliferation of weapons, terrorism, sectarianism and fundamentalism will grow in South Asia.

After nearly a decade of violence in Kashmir, the September 11 attacks on the United States and the fate of the Taliban regime are forcing the locals to visualize a modernistic reasoning to resolve and mend the dispute between the two South Asian archrivals. Such a resolution will not only keep Islamic fundamentalism out of South Asia but will also allow Kashmiris to live a respectable life free from fear. To exclude the dimension of the ongoing Kashmir problem from any permanent political solution would be folly and would lay the groundwork to reap another generation of violence from the war-scorched soil of Kashmir. Kashmir should be seen as the overarching concern; otherwise, the world will again have to assemble to resolve the unfinished partition left over by the British in 1947.

Focal Issue

THE GENERAL CONCERN OF SEPARATIST LEADERS is that they are ready for any respectable negotiation, but New Delhi will have to keep in mind the fact that fifty thousand to eighty thousand Muslim families have lost their loved ones in the last twelve years. Also, more than one hundred thousand Muslim families have indirectly suffered. The main argument by these moderate separatist leaders is that they are accountable to and will not be pardoned by the Kashmiri masses if they compromise with India by participating in the election just for the sake of the civilian government administration. "Compromise at what cost?" asks Yaseen Malik, chief of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front.

Conclusions

THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE KASHMIRI VALLEY is at an alarming juncture. Meanwhile, a renewed series of attacks on the security positions by the militants in spring and summer of 2002, including a fidayeen attack on the State Assembly and Indian parliament house in New Delhi, has been a morale boost to the otherwise sagging militancy in Kashmir. The past experience of the Indian intelligence suggests that militants may soon do something spectacular to attract international attention and to keep the local populace under fear prior to the elections. Intelligence officers say whenever pressure builds up among the militants, they try to ward it off by initiating some action.

The lesson to be learned from the post-Afghanistan situation is that if a vacuum is allowed in a conflict-like situation, then radical groups who rule with a religion-and-gun ideology will take advantage of the circumstances. In the case of Kashmir, all sides in the conflict have no solution to the problem. So for personal gain, all parties drag on the strife with no concrete objectives. The longer the conflict continues, the more polarized the sides become. In Kashmir, boys are no longer boys; they are becoming militant and fluent in the language of the gun. There is hardly a child in Kashmir who has not seen the deadly automatic assault rifle or a dead body.

The hatred is not surprising, as more than thirty-five thousand people have been killed in the continuing decade-long conflict. Troops have killed more than fifteen thousand militants and wounded hundreds more. Also, more than thirty-five thousand people were arrested under charges of supporting or participating in the militancy. Thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have been forced to flee the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Distrust between the security troops and the local population is complete. One wonders how the Hindu and Muslim communities will again co-exist in Kashmir, even if the conflict ends.

Hardly any research is being done either in Kashmir or in other parts of India to tackle the Kashmir situation. "Some of the non-resident Kashmiris have become spokespersons of the Kashmir cause in the United States or in other European countries where they would be unimportant and jobless without the Kashmir issue." These organizations also collect large sums of money in the name of jihad in Kashmir and would like to see the conflict continue.

As the Kashmir uprising drags on, one of the outcomes is the growing enmity between Hindus and Muslims, which had never erupted previously. Today, if the fate of Kashmiris moves us, it is because it has become a twentieth-century saga. One feels an eerie premonition and vulnerability before the spectacle. What happens in Kashmir seems both a reversion and a forecast.

Kashmiri masses are sandwiched between reversion and forecast—not knowing what their future is or which side they should support. They condemn the continuing massacres in Kashmir but do not want to blame anyone. They are leaderless and tired of the ongoing violence.

Today, Kashmir brings hope to none. The environment of hatred begets hostility and vice-versa. Kashmir is no longer a magical place. In these circumstances of continuing hostility and non-accommodation, the role of a third party (or parties) becomes a must. The key to an effective American policy in South Asia depends on Washington's engagement with India and Pakistan. India is an emerging major power and Pakistan, despite its internal economic and political problems, is also a significant state. Musharraf is trying hard to bring economic stability to his country. Washington, since the fall of the Taliban, is assisting them by lifting sanctions and providing billions of dollars as loans and donations. The United States is also keeping a vigil to reduce the risk of accidental war between India and Pakistan.

Three developments in Kashmir that have partially come out of the ashes of September 11 have influenced Kashmiri perceptions and have helped, I believe, ripen the Kashmir Conflict for resolution.

First, the defeat of fundamentalist forces in Afghanistan that use terror as a weapon definitely has ramifications in Kashmir, where such elements have been trying to impose their ideology. Such forces should not be allowed to grow in Kashmir; now is the right time to nip the devil in the bud.

Second, a space has been created for the voice of Kashmir's indigenous people to once again take center stage. Indigenous Kashmiris are already re-energizing, emboldened by the expectation that the international fight against terrorism will not just target terrorist groups but will also promote an atmosphere of reconciliation and justice in Jammu and Kashmir. Indigenous Kashmiris expect a well-meaning and ultimately peaceful solution to the conflict by encouraging dialogue between New Delhi and Kashmiri leaders.

Third, as a result of coalition building, Kashmir does have some hope that the West can engage both India and Pakistan in a dialogue stressing the need to resolve this dispute by emphasizing an incremental peace process that does not necessarily mean independence from or accession to Pakistan.