
Pan-Islamism and Radicalization of Kashmiri Youth

Introduction

Religious radicalization has its growing influence in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. Majority of the Muslim youth in the Kashmir Valley is increasingly inclining towards extremist political, social and religious ideas repudiating and challenging the status quo. There has been a sudden heave in Pan-Islamism in Kashmir's Muslim society gradually marginalizing an initial pro-nationalist agenda of insurgency. Rabidly fanatical clerics are indoctrinating the youth with Wahhabi ideology, whereby they reject the old Kashmiri tradition of people visiting and paying obeisance at the shrines of popular saints (Sufis and Rishis), terming it a violation of the teachings of Islam.

The youth are told that it is the duty of Muslims to capture power and impose Sharia law (Islamic Law), which disapproves democracy and legitimizes holy war (jihad) as means for establishing an Islamic Caliphate. Misuse of social media by the jihadist has exacerbated radicalization, posing more challenges to the security of the State.

The type of Islam which Kashmiris have accepted since centuries is a variant of Sufism – different from political Islam – in which Muslim Sufi saints preached pluralism and tolerance of other faiths. Jihad oriented insurgency in Kashmir purged Kashmiri society of its indigenous characteristics, as Pakistan funded and propagated radical – and militant Islam made deep inroads into the Kashmiri society. Pakistan-based jihadi groups like Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Harkat ul Ansar, Markaz Dawa-wal-Irshad and its militant wing Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have become extensively active in the Kashmir Valley as they found it easy to mislead the gullible people in Kashmir.

Pan-Islamism, essentially upholding the concept of *Ummah (Islamic community)*, rejects national boundaries for an Islamic Caliphate. This idea has been drilled into the heads of militants and hence violence and mayhem in the Valley of Kashmir are direct consequences of it. Islamist extremists pose a challenge to the pluralistic social order, interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence among various communities while it gravely obstructs construction of secular and democratic polity in the region.

Hindsight of emerging political identity

The year 1931 witnessed the rise of a massive nationalist movement against Dogra rule in the context of feudal bondage. It was an endeavour by the oppressed people against a repressive regime; they wanted to shape their destiny and of their coming generations. On 12 November in the same year, the last ruler of the Dogra dynasty, Maharaja Hari Singh appointed a Commission to enquire the reasons for unrest and grievances of the Muslim community. The Commission was headed by Sir G.B. Glancy, an official of the Foreign and Political department of the British Government of India, and the Commission recommended a slew of reforms like in the administrative structure and representation of Muslims in service, which the Maharaja implemented. The Pandits initiated an agitation against these recommendations referred to as the '*Roti agitation*', led by a Pandit social organization called,

'Yuvak Sabha', which succeeded in warding off reservation of employment on communal basis. However, it soon lost its momentum and ceased to be an independent political movement.

In 1932, popular Kashmiri leader, Sheikh Abdullah, formed the first political party of Jammu & Kashmir, the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, to project the rights and aspirations of the Muslim community. The party focused on Kashmir peasantry, artisans and working class groaning under the burden of taxes levied by the Maharaja. The All Jammu & Kashmir Muslim Conference also prompted the formation of the 'Kashmiri Pandit Conference' and the 'Hindu Sabha' in the State. As President of the Muslim Conference, Sheikh Abdullah appealed for a non-communal struggle aimed at putting an end to the suffering of all communities and securing a responsible government.

"Our country's progress is impossible so long as we do not establish amicable relations with other communities", Sheikh Abdullah, while addressing Muslim Conference in 1932.

"Let us all rise above petty communal bickering and work jointly for the welfare of the masses. I appeal to all Hindu brethren not to entertain imaginary fears and doubts. Let us assure them that their rights shall not be jeopardized if they join hands with their Mussalmans", Sheikh Abdullah, while addressing masses, regardless of caste, creed or religion, 1935.

In order to secularize his organization and gain mass support, Sheikh Abdullah reconstituted Muslim Conference as National Conference in 1939. This started the 'Quit Kashmir' movement in 1946, a struggle against the Dogra oligarchy, which was based on the demand to set up a democratic government in the State with power vested in the hands of the people. The leaders of the earlier Muslim Conference condemned the Quit Kashmir movement and called it Sheikh Abdullah's conspiracy (along with the Congress party) to disseminate Hindu hegemony in the State, however, the course of political development during the period 1939 to 1947 remained free from communal and violent leanings. As President of the National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah, in his speeches affirmed that his government would be a popular government of the people of the State regardless of their religion.

"In Kashmir, we want a people's government. We want a government which will give equal opportunities to all men, irrespective of caste and creed. The Kashmir Government will not be the government of any one community. It will be a joint government of the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. That is what I am fighting for", Sheikh Abdullah, President National Conference.

On 22 October 1947, Pakistan invaded both regions of the State, Kashmir and Jammu. The invaders were organized in company-level units and armed with lethal weapons. The invaders – hordes of tribesmen from the tribal areas of Pakistan – butchered defenceless Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, burnt houses, looted and destroyed properties and indulged in large-scale rape and abduction of women, many of who were forced to convert and marry in parts of Pakistan. The panic-stricken Maharaja, his handful of soldiers unable to withstand the onslaught of the invading hordes, made an appeal to the Government of India to come to his rescue. The Indian Government subjected military assistance to the Maharaja signing the formal Instrument of Accession, which the Maharaja signed.

Consequently, India and Pakistan fought the first Kashmir war for more than a year, and on the midnight of 31 December 1948, a cease fire agreement was agreed which came into immediate effect.

It reset the boundaries of the State, with which India gained control over almost two-thirds of the State of Jammu & Kashmir comprising Jammu, the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, while Pakistan was left with large portions of western Jammu and Poonch, Skardu of Ladakh area and Gilgit Baltistan.

Maharaja Hari Singh and the National Conference both accepted the accession of the State of Jammu & Kashmir with India. International intervention from the United Nations (UN) made the accession of the State to India open with the option of a plebiscite, which Sheikh Abdullah also accepted, but this option could not be implemented since Pakistan did not fulfil the preconditions of holding a plebiscite (according to the UN Resolutions) which included withdrawal of its forces from the parts of the erstwhile princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, now controlled and administered by Pakistan.

In 1972, a year after the Bangladesh war that saw the liberation of East Bengal from the clutches of West Pakistani rulers, the people of the Valley prepared to endorse accession of the State to India. The Simla agreement between India and Pakistan, following the Bangladesh Liberation war, in which both sides agreed to settle any disputes by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations, had also rendered the UN Resolutions irrelevant. Abdullah announced, *“our dispute with Government of India is not about accession but about the quantum of autonomy”*. In February 1975, Sheikh Abdullah assumed power for the second time as the Chief Minister of the State after a gap of 11 years and an Accord was signed between the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, and Sheikh Abdullah, which further strengthened India’s control over legislation in Jammu & Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah remained the Chief Minister and a popular Kashmiri leader till his death in 1982.

Farooq Abdullah, who succeeded his father as Chief Minister, won a convincing victory against the Congress in 1983, which helped the people of the Valley to reaffirm their confidence in the Indian democracy. However, not happy with Farooq Abdullah’s waywardness, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi began destabilizing him and eventually Farooq Abdullah was dismissed on the grounds of his inability to prove majority support and allegations of covertly supporting anti-Indian elements in the Valley. The move angered the masses but there were no protests against Abdullah’s dismissal and his brother-in-law, Gul Mohammad Shah, replaced him.

Operation Topac: A Pakistani conspiracy (1984)

Pakistan has always vehemently denied any collusion in Jammu & Kashmir, despite contriving tribal incursion of the State in 1947 (First Kashmir war), 1965 (Operation Gibraltar) and most recently in 1999 (Kargil war). Pakistan had pre-planned an operation, referred to by several names viz. *‘Operation Topac’, ‘Kashmir Plan’* or *‘Zia Plan’* for initiating terrorism and unleashing a proxy war in the State of Jammu & Kashmir with an objective of making it a part of Pakistan. *Operation Topac*, a brain-child of President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan, had a three-phase action plan for covert support to armed insurgency in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir. Under the first phase, youth from Jammu & Kashmir were to cross the de facto border (Line of Control – LoC) to seek weapon training at various training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir. During the second phase, called *‘Operation Stage’*, the Pak-trained youth were expected to indulge in large scale subversive activities, like bomb blasts and shoot-outs, creating an atmosphere of terror and demoralizing the administration. The third phase,

which was supposed to be the final stage of the operation, was to liberate the Muslim majority in the Kashmir Valley and establish an independent Islamic State.

“What Pakistan could not achieve through the wars of 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 had to be achieved through an amalgam of subterfuge, subversion, force and religious fundamentalism”, Jagmohan, an Ex-Governor of Jammu & Kashmir & Author of ‘My Frozen Turbulences in Kashmir’.

Amanullah Khan established the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), a political organization, originally a militant wing of the Plebiscite Front in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir. In May 1984, Amanullah Khan, then the Chairman of JKLF, was contacted by Lt. Gen. Akhtar Abdul Rehman, a very close confidante and advisor of President Zia, the then head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the star of Pakistan's campaign against Soviets in Afghanistan, to enlist the support of JKLF in initiating an insurgency in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir. The plan was finalized by 1986, and action started in July 1988. There are documentary evidences involving Pakistani based sources, corroborating their complicity in the violence in the Kashmir Valley. JKLF, supported by the Pakistani Army, established training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir with plans of weapons training for the youth from the Kashmir Valley. In February 1990, Amanullah Khan in an interview to Zahid Hussain of Karachi monthly magazine *Newline*, said in reply to a question by a journalist, *“How did you mobilize the uprising? Was it a long-term plan?”*, replied; *“Yes, it was... it had to be well prepared. So, we actually 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”*.

Operation Topac, to be launched in 1991 had to be prematurely implemented owing to the sudden death of Zia-ul-Haq and General Akhtar in the air crash of 17 August 1988. General Zia-ul-Haq's death in the said plane crash in Pakistan in 1988, triggered large scale rioting in Srinagar, Baramulla, Pulwama, Baderwah and Anantnag, which eventually became areas of militant strongholds. The process of blasting of bombs, holding demonstrations and rioting to whip up passions of local population continued till the end of 1988. In early 1990, Amanullah Khan, very explicitly said in an interview with *Times London*, that the uprising was a product of well laid plans and that the young men who crossed the LoC received weapons training through his organization based in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir

“We chose Srinagar and the Kashmir valley as the first stage of our attack, what has happened so far is the urban phase, mostly sabotage and hit and run tactics (phase one of ‘Operation Topac)’, Dr. Farooq Haider, Vice Chairman of the JKLF – revealed to *the Economist* (London).

Zia-ul-Haq's obsessive passion for Jammu & Kashmir was very well known as he went on record shouting slogans *“Kashmir Banega Pakistan”* (Kashmir will become a part of Pakistan). Some observers opine that as the *‘Afghan Struggle’* against the Soviets during Zia-ul-Haq's regime was nearing completion, *Operation Topac* was a very well-planned move to prolong his rule by involving the majority community of Kashmiri Muslims without repeating the mistakes committed in 1965.

Alleged Rigged Election 1987 in Jammu & Kashmir

In 1986, Farooq Abdullah paradoxically concluded an accord with Rajiv Gandhi's Congress and returned to power by striking an alliance with the party, which left the people of the Kashmir Valley somewhat disillusioned and confused. They once again thought that their trust had been betrayed, which was followed by communal riots the following year and a new political party, Muslim United Front, gradually began gaining strength. It was formally launched to safeguard the interest of Muslims and vitalize their identity and aspirations. MUF acquired motivation from various fundamentalist groups, their focus being Islamic solidarity and restoration of religious and political rights. The traditional shrine culture was repugnant to its doctrine and its affiliates too began Islamizing Kashmir politics. In 1987, MUF fought the elections on the identity of Muslim brotherhood, Kashmiri identity and the ideology of an Islamic State. Some observers suggest that the election was rigged by the Abdullah-Gandhi alliance and Muslim United Front believed that it received maximum votes and support compared to the National Conference that was declared the winner of the elections. With the declaration of the results, many people of the Valley lost faith in the democratic exercise and once again felt betrayed which again resulted in strikes and incidences of violence.

Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir

In 1988, several secessionist leaders and Kashmiri youth crossed the LoC to Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir, received weapons training and returned to the Valley, well prepared for an armed insurgency. Pakistani and Kashmiri religious parties and their militant squads were used as a front to escalate armed attacks in Jammu & Kashmir and succeeded in injecting the ideology of communalism in the Valley of Kashmir. Pakistan's motive to annex and not to liberate Jammu & Kashmir, causing disintegration within India, is corroborated by the fact that a majority of the terrorist and separatist groups' objective remained merger with Pakistan. A malicious campaign against the minority community, Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus), was launched by extremist Islamic terrorist groups using periodic write-ups in local newspapers, sermons through mosques, shouting slogans and referring to the minority community as non-believers (kafirs). A final ultimatum was given to this community through a press release on 14 April 1990, asking them to leave the Valley within two days or face death as reprisal. The entire community of about 350,000 Pandits of the Valley was ethnically cleansed and forced to flee their ancestral homeland. In this phase of militancy, the local Muslims who resisted, also bore the brunt of atrocities by Islamist terrorists and mercenaries as there was a massive propaganda drive against Sufi Islam and the composite Kashmiri culture, both dubbed as anti-Islamic.

The scattered generation of Kashmiri Pandits growing up outside their homeland is shaped in a different culture with almost no connection to their roots while on the other hand, the young generations of Muslims in Kashmir are growing up under the umbrella of a single religion, Islam, and constant fear. There being no reference of communal harmony, heritage or diversity of people that once existed in the idyllic Valley of Kashmir, the younger generation can barely imagine how their elders used to live with Kashmiri Pandits. After nearly achieving their aim of changing the structure of human population in the Valley, terrorists were successful in extending their subversive activities in Doda, Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu & Kashmir, where a series of Hindu massacres also led to the migration of the minority community.

With the objective of strengthening anti-terrorism operations, the Prevention Terrorism Act (POTA) was passed by the Parliament of India in 2002 and was also implemented in Jammu & Kashmir (later abolished by the government of Manmohan Singh in May 2014); security troops had the permission to blast a house if militants were found hiding inside it. To counter POTA, militants were seen hiding in mosques. In fact, there has been a proliferation of mosques in Kashmir. cursory survey suggests that more than three thousand new mosques have been built across the Kashmir Valley since 1990, of which the architecture features domes and minarets, unlike earlier times when mosques had ceilings resembling Buddhist or Hindu temples. These mosques have provided jobs for hundreds of unemployed youth as preachers, priests and caretakers of the religious places and have also been used as a resting and hiding place for militants.

Emergence of Separatist Movements

Despite the evidences regarding *Operation Topac*, some believe that the alleged rigged elections in 1987 fostered disillusionment among the Kashmiri Muslim population, emboldening the youth to cross the LoC to receive arms training in 'Azad Kashmir' (Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir). JKLF led by Amanullah Khan committed itself to the self-styled secular political struggle advocating secession of Jammu & Kashmir from India. Yasin Malik, along with Hamid Sheikh, Ashfaq Wani and Javed Ahmad Mir, formed the core group — dubbed the "HAJY" group — of the JKLF militants in the Kashmir Valley. The JKLF started its militant activities in the Valley and struck first on 31 July 1988 by exploding a bomb in Srinagar. On 8 December 1989, Dr. Rubiya Sayed, daughter of Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad, was kidnapped by JKLF, which demanded the release of militants. Capitulating to the pressure, the government facilitated the release of militants thereby giving them new confidence and stimulating their movement. In March 1990, Ashfaq Wani was killed in a battle with Indian Security Forces and in August 1990, Yasin Malik was captured in a wounded condition and imprisoned until May 1994. Hamid Sheikh was also captured in 1992, but later released by the Border Security Force.

The organized struggle led by JKLF and supported by Pakistan was at its crowning in 1990, and took a violent turn resulting in abductions, senseless killings and other criminal activities. Once the insurgency was efficaciously launched, Pakistan decided to withdraw its support from JKLF, they being perceived to be committed to the independence of Jammu & Kashmir rather than its accession to Pakistan and as a result much of its squads had either been dispersed, destroyed or absorbed into other groups and the movement almost died down by 1993. Its leadership also split into factions, some of them renouncing militancy. HM, a pro-Pakistani Kashmiri Muslim terrorist group formed by Muhammad Ahsan Dar in 1989, marked the beginning of the second phase of the movement and its shift towards radical Islam. HM introduced jihad to rationalize political violence in the name of religion and at one point about 2,000 young militants were said to have been associated with HM. Pakistan facilitated the formation and promotion of various other terrorist groups which included Harkat ul-Ansar, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, and LeT under the umbrella of Islamic jihad.

To impose the radical Islamic culture on Kashmiris, Pakistan initiated a strategy to convert the multi-cultural Kashmiri society into a hardcore Islamic one through the fear of gun. Many Sufi shrines and

mosques were targeted by the Pakistan-backed militant outfits; In May 1995, the Islamist mercenaries from Afghanistan and Pakistan destroyed the ancient shrine of saint Noor-u-Din (Nund Rishi for Kashmiri Pandits), called Chrar-e-Sharif. This shrine had been a center of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of devotees, both Hindus and Muslims, over the past six hundred years. Such brutal practices by Islamist terrorists, who exhorted the Kashmiri Muslims to banish these '*un-Islamic practices*', as visiting ancient holy shrines of saints (Sufis/ Rishis), caused revulsion among the common masses in Kashmir.

Structural Changes in Kashmiri Society & Impact of Pan-Islamism

By early 1990, Jammu & Kashmir witnessed a trend of Pan-Islamism, clearing Kashmir Valley of the Hindu minority presence and young boys disposed to lay down their lives in the name of jihad. Separatist groups perceived as secular were abandoned by Pakistan, favouring other Islamist substitutions, when they started moving away from the Pakistani's stance to see Jammu & Kashmir merging with Pakistan. Islamic terrorists endeavoured to bring structural changes at cultural levels of the Kashmir society since the inception of militancy, as in the year 1989 and in the early 1990s there was a mushroom growth of militant organizations in Kashmir advocating '*Nizam-e-Mustafa*' (*Rule of the Prophet*) as the objective of their struggle. Simultaneously, all cinema houses, beauty salons, wine shops, bars, video centres, use of cosmetics, listening to music or any such form of entertainment were banned by militant groups. There were bans imposed on the selling of cigarettes and on the circulation of Indian national- and Jammu based newspapers in the Kashmir Valley. Islamist groups threatened to bomb houses, where women refused to wear veils. Such diktats bear a striking similarity to the ones imposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan and recently by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria.

Various Islamist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and its militant wing, HM, the radical women's wing, Dukhtaran-e-Millat, Jamiat ul-Mujahideen, Allah Tigers, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, Al-Badr, Al Jihad Force, al Umar Mujahideen, Muslim Mujahideen, Islamic Students League, Zia Tigers, and many such organizations decreed the objective of their struggle as Islamization of the socio-political and economic set-up, merger of Jammu & Kashmir with Pakistan and establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.

The entry of Mark Tully into the valley, the former New Delhi Bureau Chief of the *BBC*, who urged people to shun Islamist extremism was banned by terrorist group Wahdat-e-Islamia. The offices of daily local newspapers like *Aftab*, *Al-Safa* and *Srinagar Times* were attacked with bombs and set on fire and several prominent media personalities including Mohammed Shaban Vakil, Editor of *Al-Safa*, Lassa Kaul, Station Director of Doordarshan-Srinagar were gunned down for not hauling the militant line. In a bid to destroy the established political structures and to foil the process of restoration of democracy in the State, a series of assassinations and bomb attacks on social and political activists belonging to nationalist and liberal sections of the Muslim society in Kashmir were also carried out. The Amir (Chief) of terrorist group LeT, Hafiz Mohammad Khan went on record saying: "*Democracy is among the menaces we inherited... These are all useless practices and part of the system we are*

fighting against. If God gives us a chance, we will try to bring in the pure concept of an Islamic Caliphate”.

The liquidation of central government officials, Kashmiri Pandits, liberal and nationalist intellectuals, social and cultural activists was described as one of the prerequisites to cleanse the Valley of its un-Islamic elements thereby establishing an Islamic Order. The militant groups imposed the Islamist viewpoint on society, politics, governance and laws, and declared practices of democracy and secularism as unethical.

The initial call to jihad in Kashmir was rather generic, with a segment of population viewing the struggle as a means to ‘liberate’ the entire State from India, and in some cases also Pakistan, but soon the use of highly indoctrinated and Wahabised (Wahabism: form of Islam that insists on a literal interpretation of the Quran) proxies inducted into Kashmir became the norm. Many proclaim that these groups represent a far right political version of the Sunni Islamic faith that has been nurtured widely in South Asia since the Zia ul-Haq regime in Pakistan.

“Many of the Jihadi militants active in Kashmir (especially those with the closest reported links to Al-Qaeda) trace their religious origins to a conservative Islamic revivalist movement that began during the colonial period in India”, excerpt from Asian Economic & Political Issues, Authored by Frank Columbus.

The violence in the Kashmir Valley is now more religious in character than political, being dominated by a group of militant leaders acting under a Pan-Islamic ideology. Islamist intellectuals and activists have been seeking to distort the difference between Islam as a religion and nationalism, reinforcing the Islamic political consciousness by politicizing already existing religious traditions and practices and by resisting change and modernization. The young Islamic militants of today carry placards of Osama Bin Laden, hoist Taliban and ISIS flags while participating in anti-government rallies. They identify with the Sharia law and choose to remain alien to the concepts of democracy and modernization. The earlier ‘Azaadi’ (Freedom) slogan for autonomy and dignity has currently transformed into the expression of revulsion and rage against Hindu India and anything else non-Muslim.

Elections in Jammu & Kashmir (1998, 2002 & 2008)

The State Assembly elections, though boycotted by separatist groups were held in Jammu & Kashmir in 1996, in which the National Conference won and Farooq Abdullah was appointed as the Chief Minister of the State. The situation during this period was relatively peaceful as the level of violence was low till the time 23 Kashmiri Pandits were killed by terrorists in Wandhama town on 26 January 1998 (Republic Day of India). The incident, also referred to as ‘1998 Wandhama Massacre’, being carried out on the eve of a national celebration in the constituency of Farooq Abdullah, was a reminder of the evil designs by fanatic Islamic terrorists supported by Pakistan. The incident also indicated how the State and central government had failed to control the ‘Kashmir situation’, dejecting their claims of normalcy returning to the Valley.

Despite the threat of terrorism and politics of separatism, the electoral process continued and Assembly elections were conducted in 2002 and 2008, latter being the most successful one having

witnessed increased participation indicating the decline in aspirations for 'Azaadi'. However, on 26 May 2008, the Valley once again echoed with the slogans of 'Azaadi', because of the State government's decision to transfer 99 acres (0.15 sq miles) of forest land in Kashmir Valley to the Hindu Amarnath Shrine to set up temporary shelters and facilities for Hindu pilgrims. The decision once again agitated the Muslim majority disrupting the peace process and many demonstrations, with protesters waving green flags opposing the State government's decision of land transfer, were carried out by Kashmiri Muslims, thereby making it hard to ignore the deep Islamic impact. The State government accepted the demands of the protesters from the Kashmir Valley by revoking the land transfer decision on 1 July 2008, leading to disturbances in the Jammu province. Subsequently, several Hindu groups, such as the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), started protesting in Delhi in support of the land transfer. The Amarnath land controversy resulted in widening the already existing gap between the people of Jammu & Kashmir, (while Ladakh remained aloof), based on religious identities.

The deluded youth of the Kashmir Valley

The unfortunate accidental death of a Kashmiri schoolboy, Tufail Mattoo, due to teargas shelling on 11 June 2010, was the ostensible flashpoint setting the Valley afire as mass protests erupted all over. The boy who was trying to make way home from school was immediately turned into an "accidental martyr" and was buried in the Martyr's graveyard against the wishes of his family who wished their son to be buried in a family graveyard point. The killing of the boy was followed by protests, demonstrations and clashes with local and Central Armed Police Forces, in which another boy was killed leading to yet other protests till several young lives were lost. The official figures reveal around 110 people lost their lives and 537 civilians were injured during stone-pelting incidents from May to September 2010.

Following these incidents, the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an amalgam of Pro-Pakistani separatist- and socio-political organizations, led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, once again called for the complete demilitarization of Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir. The protestors continued shouting pro-Islamic slogans, targeting symbols of government authority, burning vehicles and attacking police with stones. Continuous shutdowns and strikes were called by separatist leaders periodically, leading to disastrous paralysis of peace and stability in the Kashmir Valley. Kashmiri youth was being incited by pro-Pakistan elements owing to their perceived hold on the youth to indulge in violence. The youth continued to be misinformed with biased and half-baked news on law and order developments in the Kashmir Valley while ironically, the children of these separatist leaders were conveniently out of this so-called movement, either studying in big cities or earning decent remunerations in different parts of the world, using the children of common man as foot soldiers to carry out their selfish designs.

The youth forms 65% of the population, addled between politics and religion. A report from trusted sources indicates that "61% of the Valley's youth listens to religious sermons on their audio players" and "25% is interested in Jihadi speeches". As a corollary, of these, 52% have qualified the higher secondary or undergraduate examination and 32% are graduates or postgraduates. It is indicated that a large number from this segment also has access to information from sermons and

meetings at mosques, graveyards and television channels. The provocation is so impactful that some of the youth were found joining the militant organizations after leaving their luxurious jobs and academic institutions. While it may be contended that religious influence is not necessarily a negative sign, its possible implications could have disturbing heralds for the future. The youth are made to believe that the Muslims of the outside world are fighting for Kashmir's independence and dying for Islam, further substantiated by the fact that the Hurriyat hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani held funeral prayers in absentia for the slain terrorist Osama bin Laden, who had no connection with Kashmir politics whatsoever, referring to it as a '*religious duty*' of Kashmiri Muslims to hold prayers for the '*Martyr*'. The young and unemployed boys, having grown up in an atmosphere of continuous fear and unrest, silently develop respect for the Islamist militants in the Valley, who they think are dying for a divine cause. The education system in the Valley has suffered an irreparable loss, lacking the efficacy to help students develop a vision, who eventually take the recourse of Islam as an escape. The three decade long armed conflict and geo-political disorder has particularly affected the psychology of the Kashmiri youth which take to stone pelting conveying volumes about their vulnerabilities and psycho-social thought processes. Stone-pelting is legitimized as a vent for the young self-styled fighters to reflect their spirit of freedom and anger. The communication technology is being exploited; with young Kashmiri militants blatantly releasing their pictures and videos on social media, presenting themselves in the typical image of a virile '*warrior*' – dressed in fatigues, carrying weapons, laughing or smiling in a forest background in an '*ISIS-like*' fashion, glamourizing militancy and thereby trying to attract more youth.

The most extreme and appalling expression of this '*cyber trend*' was seen following the death of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a 22-year-old militant commander of the HM, on 8 July 2016. His death was followed by the usual large-scale protests, which advanced to a greater degree from this new-found ability of protestors to send and receive information on platforms beyond the control of the establishment that they were protesting against. The social media offered these young radicals a platform allowing unimpeded circulation of videos, pictures and information which further fuelled the unrest. As per informed sources about 300 WhatsApp groups were used to mobilize stone-throwers to disrupt security operations in Kashmir and each of these 300 groups had around 250 members. Prior to this, the quantity of people throwing stones was nowhere near this figure.

In a recent video released by Zakir Musa, a former HM commander, he professed his support to militant outfit Al Qaeda which supports Shariah: warning that people would be beheaded for referring to the Kashmir-issue as '*political*' and not an Islamic struggle.

Sharia law, which legalizes the use of force (armed jihad) as a means for establishing a Caliphate, also deprecates the concept of democracy (equality for all) because as per Wahhabi ideology there cannot be equality between a man and a woman, a believer and non-believer (kafir), master and a slave, a ruler and subject.

"Kashmir will become a Darul Islam (an abode of Islam). Insha'Allah (God willing), I am always opposing those who want to accede with the infidels.", Zakir Musa, former HM commander.

Zakir Musa, in his early 20s, is said to be hailing from a highly-educated family and most of his siblings are reportedly doctors or pursuing medical degrees. He was deeply influenced by the jihadi preaching and literature and joined HM after dropping out from a Civil Engineering college. He ordained the Kashmiri youth to disdain the concepts of democracy and nationalism and turn towards Islam while openly inciting youth to throw stones at security forces; not in the name of nationalism but in the name of Islam.

This Islamic centric, reinvention of Kashmir-issue, has further divided the Kashmiri Muslims. On one hand youngsters are gravitating towards Zakir Musa's argument of Kashmir-issue being a struggle for a divine cause and on the other hand there is another segment of the Kashmiri Muslim population who may have political grievances but support democracy and disdain Islamic order.

Conclusion

The concept of distinct Kashmiri political identity evolved in the 1930s with the rise of a movement against the Dogra rule in 1931. The young Kashmiri Muslim literati of the Kashmir Valley organized themselves as a political group which led to the formation of 'All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference' in 1932, with Sheikh Abdullah as its first President. The party aimed at addressing the popular anger and discontent amongst the Muslim majority against the feudal-cum-colonial Dogra rule, subsequently representing the demands and aspirations of the masses, particularly those of the Muslim majority. Sheikh Abdullah, elevated to the status of Sher-e-Kashmir (Lion of Kashmir), enlarged the scope of his party by reconstituting it to 'National Conference' emphasizing on its secular character, thus helping the party gain wider public support. When Pakistan invaded the State of Jammu & Kashmir in the year 1947, the Maharaja requested India's military intervention and the Instrument of Accession was signed, giving India legitimate authority to take control of the State. Though both, the Maharaja and Abdullah accepted the accession, Sheikh's goal was autonomy. He maintained an anti-Pakistan stand, being aware of Jinnah's popularity as a Muslim leader in Pakistan, which was averse to his personal interest of ruling the State independently. Jinnah and Abdullah publicly criticized each other and Abdullah with his repeated commitment to secularism won support of the Kashmiri people.

"If Pakistan comes forward and says, we question the legality of Accession, I am prepared to discuss... We shall prove before the Security Council that Kashmir and the people of Kashmir have lawfully and constitutionally acceded to the Dominion of India, and Pakistan has no right to question that Accession", Sheikh Abdullah in United Nations Security Council, 5 February 1948

The course of political development in the State of Jammu & Kashmir was relatively stable and remained free from communal and violent leanings till 1947, when Sheikh Abdullah started to fight for autonomy and Jammu based Praja Parishad, completely against it, began supporting merger with India.

India and Pakistan fought two more wars after 1947-1948, in 1965 and 1971 respectively. The 1971 war changed the geopolitical landscape of South Asia and Abdullah once again changed his political course and instead of talking about accession, began speaking about the quantum of autonomy.

The political legacy of the Sheikh Abdullah clan was carried forward by Sheikh Abdullah's son Farooq Abdullah who won a convincing victory against the Congress in 1983. Farooq Abdullah was dismissed and replaced by Gul Mohammad Shah whose tenure lasted for two years from 1984-86. In 1986, Farooq Abdullah concluded an accord with Rajiv Gandhi and returned to power the following year. These elections were allegedly rigged, as everyone expected MUF to win, and have been deemed by some as being responsible for the insurgency in the Kashmir Valley. Ever since the Accession, the Sheikh dynasty, has ruled the State for more than 30 years and as and when, they are out of power in political commotion, they raise the slogan of '*plebiscite*', '*Azaadi*' and '*autonomy*' which they intermittently use as a political trump card to exploit public sentiments. Some might say that it would not be unfair to state that mishandling of the State of Jammu & Kashmir by the government and inconsistent political stand of their own elected leaders left the people of the State, particularly that of the Kashmir Valley, '*politically confused*'.

Although the genesis of terrorism is often attributed to the alleged rigged elections, in reality it was the realization phase of Pakistan's *Operation Topac* to inflict a thousand cuts on its adversary, India. Pakistan has always refuted the truth of *Operation Topac* but it has proved to be a reality both documentarily and circumstantially. The founder of JKLF, Amanullah Khan and Dr. Farooq Haider, Vice-Chairman of JKLF, have explicitly spoken to the press at several occasions conforming the legitimacy of *Operation Topac* and the fact that they were running Pakistan funded weapon training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan has been successful in its design of stoking the fires of massive insurrection in the Kashmir Valley in early 1990. JKLF, funded by Pakistan organized a struggle of so-called self-determination, eventually resulting in violent abductions, senseless killing and other criminal activities. Though JKLF, that chose to be the face of insurgency claimed that insurgent movement was for freedom of the State, it never tried to liberate the part of the State (Gilgit Baltistan and Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir) which is under the illegal occupation Pakistan. Instead, it used Pakistani funds to establish weapon training centres in Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir for young boys from the Kashmir Valley to get trained, fight their own people back home and eventually get killed. They demanded the right of self-determination in the name of the people of Jammu & Kashmir but, in essence, campaigned on behalf Pakistan.

Pakistan withdrew its support from JKLF giving way to another terrorist organization, Hizbul Mujahideen, that favoured the idea of the State's merger with Pakistan and establishment of an Islamic order while introducing the concept of jihad. The next decade was characterized by not only widespread violence throughout the Kashmir Valley but also structural changes of the Kashmiri society with an emphasis on the establishment of Islamic order. There was a mushroom growth of militant organizations that decreed the objective of their struggle as "*Islamization*". Mosques became platforms for religious sermons intermingled with fiery political speeches, delivered by trained Islamic scholars (Mullahs) from Pakistan. Central government officials, Kashmiri Pandits, liberal and nationalist intellectuals, social and cultural activists, liberal Muslims and writers became the primary

target of the gun-toting self-styled revolutionaries. Pakistan embarked on a strategy to convert the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Kashmiri society into a hardcore Islamic society, on the lines of Afghanistan, through the fear of the gun. Consequent to these developments, almost an entire population of minority community of Kashmiri Pandits was forced to run away from their ancestral land and continues to live in exile today.

Considering the array of events, it is hard to phantom that the struggle was in any way related to demands for greater political rights. Pakistan took advantage of a weak political system and palpable political divide among the people of State by imposing social changes associated with religion giving rise to Islamic fundamentalism and subsequently creating an environment from which insurgency thrived.

The Islamic Militants are the new role models for the unemployed youth who are made to believe that Muslims across the world are fighting and dying for them as a service to Islam. The disappearances of (now killed) Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar have been turned into myths and replaced by stories that Allah helped them to disappear and these stories are used by Islamic clerics in Kashmir while preaching to the youth in mosques. The education system has been destabilized, with the mushrooming growth of madrassas outpacing the modern institutions of education.

Jihad is not only fought with arms and weapons but also has a cyber dimension to it. Social media has glamourized militancy and an ideological war is being fought in this new operational theatre, using web based applications that allow creation and sharing of messages. *'Electronic Jihad'* includes activities such as the provocation to engage in terrorist activities and carry out violent attacks, radicalization and recruitment of supporters and carrying out a psychosomatic war aimed at increasing the enemy's vulnerability.

Despite the bloodshed and ongoing unrest for nearly three decades, for a sizeable population, religion remains a key instrument in furthering the political agenda and seeking greater political rights. It is for these people to understand that practices that led to tampering of social order, pluralism and inter-religious harmony can never be divine. It needs to be acknowledged and accepted that no movement has succeeded in achieving its objectives unless it is inclusive in its political character and social base, representing political interests of all ethnic groups.

It is high time that media, civil society and most importantly, the political leaders who have been acting as the corporal hosts of the State, educate the youth of the Valley and discourage them to hero-worship militants, who majority of the times, are angry victims of pseudo-religious eyewash and economic deprivation.

