



WWJMRD 2018; 4(9): 27-35
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
UGC Approved Journal
Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25
E-ISSN: 2454-6615

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Kashmir Insurgency: its Changing Nature (1990—1995)

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Abstract

Separatism has always been a popular concept in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, especially in Kashmir. This discontentment among Muslims of the valley in particular (mainly those who were against the accession with India) could never be won over or even accommodated by the ruling people and has resulted in the revelation of militancy and insurgency. The paper is an analysis of the discontents among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It will throw light on the blatant manipulation of the electoral process in 1987 that led Kashmiris to believe that they would remain permanently marginalised in the current political dispensation. They were led to feel that 'the bullets will deliver when the ballot had failed'. The main thrust of the paper is to analyze the Kashmiri rebellion that began as a call for 'Azadi' or freedom in 1989 and was transformed into different trends in the succeeding years. This paper looks into the various reasons which could be identified for the proliferation of armed insurgency. It analyses the dominant militant groups like, Hizbul Mujahideen, JKLF, their organizational structures; support bases; strategies and objectives. The paper will also throw light on popular disillusionment with increasing militancy and growing crime tendencies among proliferating armed groups. Finally the paper also critiques the response of various governments at the centre and the state.

Keywords: India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Insurgency, Discontent, Separatism, Resentment, Alienation, Plebiscite Front, Accord

Introduction

In fact the origin of most of the separatist group can be traced to the Plebiscite Front formed by Mirza Afzal Beigh and other companions of Sheikh Abdullah, who had been arrested in 1953. This group directly or indirectly patronized a number of secessionist outfits till the date of its dissolution in 1976. Many of them don't exist anymore while others have become active these days: Awami Action Committee formed by Moulvi Farooq in the case the holy relic. In 1963, Awami Action Committee of Moulvi Farooq that initially followed a pro-Pakistan line came into existence. This party has remained active throughout the years and also supported Farooq Government in 1986. Among the entire separatist group JKLF has been the most vociferous and active since 1966.

Two events triggered agitations, led in each case by student leaders who are now prominent in the state's politics. One was Pakistan's war of aggression in August-September 1965. The other was the Indra-Sheikh Accord in Feb. 1975. After the famous holy relic theft and its restoration case, Ghulam Mohammad Shaikh (Who was nabbed for anti-national activities in Delhi) formed the Student's and Youth League. With the Shaikh and his close associates, Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg and Maulana Mohammad Sayyid Masoodi were in prison student leaders like Fazlul Haq Qurashi, Nazir Ahmad Wani and Mohammad Altaf Khan (Azam Inqilabi, came on the streets holding demonstrations. The Jammu and Kashmir Students League was established in 1963-1964 under Beg's patronage. However, except JKLF it was Al-Fateh, headed by Ghulam Rasool Zehgeer remained famous for its anti-national and disruptive activities since 1965. The outfit was involved in clashes with security forces in 1970, looting of tehsil education office in 1970 and Hazratbal Bank dacoity of 1971. It was also found that the group had also conspired to kidnap and murder some eminent personalities during 1971 elections. However, in 1978, a new outfit Al-fateh was

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formed by G.M Shaikh and he recruited to it some diehard fundamentalists like Nazir Ahmad Wani, Mian Sarwar and Salim Zehgeer.

As far as the early signs of the outfit are concerned, in the first instance of its kind, some youths were arrested in 1967 for allegedly attempting murdering a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan in Nawa Kadal area in Srinagar. Their trial in the Nawa Kadal Conspiracy Case though held in-camera, evoked keen public interest. Next came, in 1968, an attempt was to steal rifles from the rooms of the (NCC) the Islamia College. Afzal Beg a brilliant lawyer led the defense team which included Sheikh Nazir Ahmad who is now General Secretary of the National Conference.

Meanwhile, in 1967 some college teachers were arrested for being the members of "Core Group" of Mohammad Maqbool Bhat's Kashmir National Liberation Front. He had been arrested and sentenced to death in 1966 for the charge of a murder of an intelligence officer. Bhat was committed to guerilla warfare and to the State's independence, not accession to Pakistan. He escaped from prison in 1968, and rearrested in 1976, and was then executed in 1984. The Kashmir Liberation Army, of which ex-Major Ammanullah Khan was a member, was his creation. Ammanullah Khan set up the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in United Kingdom in 1978 with Dr. Farooq Haider of Rawalpindi.

Events in the state, meanwhile were taking their own course. On January 13, 1971, the authorities claimed that they unearthed the Al-Fateh group. Its members were alleged to have been plotting to storm the Hazratbal branch of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank as part of its plan to "liberate Kashmir by resorting to armed struggle", Ghulam Rasool Zahgeer headed this underground outfit which had been setup in 1967-68. Prominent among its members were Fazl-ul-Haq Qurashi, Nazir Ahmad Wani and Azam Inqilabi. Beg defended the accused at their trial but he was before long in the thick of parleys with Parthasarathi which led to the 1975 Accord, that split the group. Zahgeer supported Afzal Beg's Plebiscite Front. Nazir Ahmad Wani and others opposed its new policy. The rift led to the birth of the Jammu and Kashmir People's League on October 13, 1974, with Qurashi as its chairman.

The People's League marked a watershed as its founders were shot into prominence. later Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Bashir Ahmad Tota, Azam Inqilabi, Abdul Hamid Wani (alias S Hamid), President of the Young Men's League, and Shabir Shah, its General Secretary had been arrested on October 3, 1974. The League stoutly opposed the 1975 Accord. The Shaikh and New Dehli also, had acquired an opposition force they could not suppress in the new clime of the 1970s as they had done in the 1950s. But the People's League had to see multiple splits and mergers. Azam Inqilabi left it soon after the setup his Islamic Student's and Youth Organisation, later renamed Islamic Jamiatul Tulaba, under the leadership of Tajamul-Islam, a student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

As Shaikh suffered an unprecedented low due to his 1975 Accord his former close associate, Sufi Mohammad Akbar parted company with him over the Accord and attracted some support. Shaikh Abdullah held sway because of his commanding personality and manpower. Even though Shaikh remained popular in the valley after signing the Accord of 1975, it was taken as surrender of Shaikh by the

people of Kashmir. Thus an undercurrent an anti-centre sentiment could not be wished away which enriched the soil of secessionist forces. Upon his death Farooq Abdullah succeeded him with ease, but Indira Gandhi ousted him from the office of Chief Minister in July 1984 owing to which he became immensely popular. There was no less than 72 days' curfew in Srinagar during the first three months alone. But he was not cut out for the role. Farooq Abdullah made his peace with Rajiv Gandhi and returned to power as the leader of NC-Congress coalition government under an accord with him in November 1986. By common consent the opposition Muslim United Front (MUF) would have won not less than 20 seats in the Assembly Elections in March 1987. Their rigging proved fateful for two reasons. First the candidates and their polling and counting agents were not only cheated but imprisoned and beaten up. (Every Kashmiri politician and journalist narrate horror stories about the cheating in the past elections. They point out that if the Muslim United Front had been allowed to win the 15 or 20 seats they claim it is likely to have won in 1987, history would have been very different. Sayyid Salahuddin, the HM leader, who was cheated out of his seat as a candidate Sayyid Yusuf Shah might today have been in electoral politics.) Secondly, having backed the MUF enthusiastically, Kashmir youth lost faith not only in the election process but the political system itself. When the attempt by the young protagonists to capture state power through constitutional means was scuttled by rigged state elections, they felt 'the bullet will deliver where the ballot has failed'. It was in police control rooms and Kashmir jails that the first generation of Kashmiri militants was born. They took the arms. All those who later spearheaded the insurgency had participated in the election process in one capacity or another. Thus seeds of revolt, sown in the fertile field for years, were ready to sprout. Events provided the opportunity for an organized expression of resentment at different times, with different moods.

Phase I

Peace and order in the state had radically deteriorated by 1988. The militants used violence most effectively to achieve the immediate political objectives of paralysing the state apparatus and delegitimizing the political institutions which had appropriated the space for articulating the political aspirations of Kashmiris. They sought to defy the state authority; transfer people's allegiance and loyalty to themselves; attack the state symbols; and render every state institution that could potentially meet their political challenge dysfunctional. A series of violent demonstration erupted on various issues, such as the hike in the power tariff and the demand for a ban on Salmans Rushdie's Satanic Verses. The systematic campaign in 1988-89 challenged and replaced the official state symbols with an alternative calendar of public events. Bandhs were organized on Indian Independence Day and Republic Day and "civil curfew" (opposed to government orders) was imposed with a ceremonial burning of the Indian flag while Pakistan's Independence Day was celebrated with fanfare and green flags were hoisted in Srinagar. The Accession Day, 26 October, was denounced as the 'day of occupation' and Nehru's birth anniversary on 14 November was observed as a 'Black Day'. The death anniversary of the founder of JKLF, Maqbool Bhat was celebrated as

'Martyrs' day, in glaring contrast to Sheikh Abdullah death anniversary which was termed 'Yome-i-Nijat' (Day of deliverance). A symbolic drive was launched to remove the 'India' signs of the State Bank of India, Air India, Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum, and Indian Insurance Companies. People were ordered to transfer money from Indian Banks to the Jammu and Kashmir Bank. The militants' writ ran large. Their order to observe Friday instead of Sunday as holiday was tacitly complied with in public offices, including the civil secretariat and banks. The civil curfew and blackouts were so effective that even the state owned Srinagar Cooperation complied.

The inconclusive official response to complex circumstances consequently encouraged the militants in Kashmir. More and more people placed hopes on the path of violence to achieve certain aims. Acts of violence were better planned, daringly executed and created stronger roots. All political activities were halted and political institutions were undermined. Militants selectively killed prominent workers of the National Conference, the only pro-Indian political force in the valley. An open ultimatum was issued to its cadre in August 1989 to publicly break association with the party. The compliance was so high that the Kashmir *Daily Aftab* carried a special column Izhar-e-lataluqee (declaration of disassociation) for this purpose. Political parties had practically stopped functioning. Former Chief Minister G.M. Shah remarked: "We (politicians) are not relevant at all. No one talks to us. No one listens to us. You are all up against an idea, which is supported by the gun and believed by the people".

People took pride in the militants exploits because the 'boys' had somehow restored Kashmir's pride. People have realized that the secular, nationalistic parties are all lies. They are not in power to help the Awaam (common people); they are here only for self-aggrandizement and for power.... People have lost faith in democracy and were more attracted to the militants and their armed solutions to the problem, because they felt that they at least were prepared to die for Kashmir.

Initially, the movement was driven by a well-planned strategy. While the impulses of Kashmiri separatism were generated initially, Pakistan was quick to capitalise on the situation. Significantly, Pakistan used the 'Kashmir Card' as distinct from the 'Muslims' or 'Islamic Card' to empathize with the struggle of the militants. Some people among the militant ranks considered Pakistan as an ally, while other justified taking support of the people of Azad Kashmir (PAK) because Azad Kashmir (PAK) is our part (of Kashmir) only.

Influence of international events:- The international environment has a direct or indirect bearing on the situation in Kashmir. Dismantling of the Berlin Wall and overthrow of Romania's tyrannical rule proved alluring echoes to them. The average Kashmiri was very conscious about the change of borders and the birth of new nations causing euphoria that it would be their turn next. The Iranian Revolution, the Palestinian Intifada and the breakdown of the Soviet Union provided greater impetus to the Kashmiri youth.

Phase II: The Mass Movement

By January 1990, the simmering rebellion of 1988-1989 came to a boil in mass resistance to Indian rule in the

Kashmir valley. The militant's campaign of selective assassinations of alleged Indian spies and political "collaborators" in the valley escalated sharply at the end of 1989. Over the months more than one hundred such killings (which were a mix of officials of the local political hierarchy both Muslims and non-Muslims alleged as spies and intelligence agents) occurred, effectively paralyzing the governments administrative machinery and severely damaging its surveillance and intelligence apparatus.

Farooqs Abdullah's resignation and Governor Jagmohan's policy of crushing the movement finally caused it to explode. A massive crackdown on the people and incidents in which a large number of unarmed civilians including women and children were killed, proved to be a watershed in transforming the underground militant siege into a popular mass movement. Kalashnikovs replaced black flags and the boys became mujahidin overnight. (I do not meet anyone who has a word to say against the militant groups. Even old men claim that everyone is a mujahid (rebel) and everyone is prepared to fight to the end. The valley witnessed a series of processions of several thousands of people demanding azadi, causing total collapse of state authority. Even the JKLF were initially stunned by the spectacular scale and emotional intensity of the protests. Hundreds and thousands marched in the streets of Srinagar, and other towns like Sopore, Baramullah and Anantnag and tens of thousands participated. Squads of stone throwing youth confronted heavily armed personnel of the Central Reserve Police force (CRPF) and Border Security Forces (BSF) in every Srinagar neighbourhood. During just three days of mass protests 21-23 January 1990 some three hundred excited but unarmed demonstration were shot dead in Srinagar by the forces.

As far as Kashmiri women are concerned, they became more visible in politics, however, in the initial phase of militancy in Kashmir. During the period of mass uprising, Kashmiri Muslim women throughout Kashmir were often seen leading mass protests and agitation against Indian rule. Women acted as couriers or messengers, sometimes putting their own life at great risk. They supported their husbands, brothers and sons in seeking arms training to participate in the jihad and at least in the early years voluntarily provided food and shelter to the "Mujahideen" in their armed struggle against the Indian security forces. Kashmiri women kept up the household when their men were away, allowing the men to participate in the uprising. Women would sing traditional songs, welcoming the gun-wielding militants and even showering them with flowers and candies.

A new phenomenon emerged in Kashmir society as militancy was glorified in the early 1990s such Muslim Kashmiri girls were drawn towards the gun-toting young men, seeing them as heroes in the struggle for Azadi (independence). (These are hundreds of such cases in Kashmir). Governor Jagmohan's recipe was to unleash the coercive arm of the state to eliminate terrorism and force Kashmiri's into submission. He believed: 'the bullet is the only solution for Kashmiris. Unless the militants are fully wiped out, normalcy cannot return to the valley'. So began a long spell of state repression in the form of cordon-and-search operations or crackdowns and curfews in major towns lasting for weeks without any provision for essential food supplies, road blocks, checks involving beating, intimidation, verbal abuse and humiliation, widespread

torture, rape, arbitrary detention of scores of youth suspected of being militants and shooting by the security forces at public processions and crowded market areas, often in a panic response to the militant's fire.

Was Pakistan responsible for this? The Indian government believes that it was, but there is far more evidence to suggest that up to this point the insurgency or revolt was pretty much indigenous to Kashmir. It may have been led by youths who had been trained across the border but the peoples' anger against the local political leaders, the issues that united them definitely. The circumstances in the late 1989 and the beginning of 1990 transformed Kashmir into a dreamboat for Pakistan, which was interested in seeing political instability in this neighbouring land since 1947. The mishandling of the situation by the Indian authorities, such as the stoppage of the democratic process in Kashmir and the security instability to respond by more peaceful means when necessary, created room for Pakistani interference. The militants changed the names of some roads and reset their watches in accordance with Pakistan standard time.

During this time, the leadership of the movement was provided by young Kashmiri Muslims, the new generation who had received modern education. Their principal demand was that India should fulfill its commitments to the United Nations and allow a plebiscite to be held in the territory to enable the people to decide their own political future. Challenging the legitimacy of Indian rule, these Kashmiri nationalists advocated an independent, secular, democratic Jammu and Kashmir. Their ideology informing their nationalist project was that of Kashmiriyat or 'Kashmir Identity', which they saw as a unique amalgam of traditions drawing upon local Muslim, Hindu and other sources. Though Kashmiri nationalist project was spearheaded by several organisations and parties, the foremost being the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) established in 1964, the JKLF demanded that the state of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed prior to 1947 which includes Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit, Baltistan and the part under China to be united as 'one fully independent and truly democratic state'. It advocated 'equal political, economic, religious and social rights for all citizens in the proposed State irrespective of race, religion, region, culture and sex'.

Phase Three:

The years 1990-1993 were the boom period of armed struggle in the valley, a time of immense turmoil and sufferings but also of great enthusiasm and optimism about the mass movement. During 1990-1992 droves of young men, determined to avenge humiliations, abuse and brutality endured at the hands of the Indian state, would leave their homes in cities and villages, either to undertake the hazardous LOC crossing or seek training and arms in militant camps established in the valley. In early May 1991, at the start of the summer infiltrations season, seventy two young men of the valley were killed by Indian troops on the LOC on a single day while attempting to return from Pakistan administrated Kashmir (PAK) to join the fight. The valley was rife with Indian troops, but they were unable to gain the upper hand over guerillas fervently supported by almost the entire population.

Two features of the azadi movement during this phase merit emphasis. First, the insurgent groups fighting Indian

forces consisted overwhelmingly of local Kashmiri recruits, in sharp contrast to 1947-1965. According to official figures all the guerrillas (844) except two who were killed in fighting during 1992 were from Kashmir.

Second, the insurgency was initially very largely specific to the valley. In the early 1990s the guerrilla made first inroads into Jammu in the Doda district, a huge mountainous expanse covering the northern part of the Jammu region. The vast area and forbidding terrain make it an ideal base for guerrilla fighters. However, due to its demographic and political factors, rather than merely topography and geography made Doda district into one of the toughest zones of the guerrilla war by 1992.

Sidelining of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front: - By late 1991, the movement was at its peak and then its decline set-in as the character of militancy gradually changed. From mid-1990, the JKLF began losing its leadership role, partly because the Indian security forces were better prepared. By the end of the year, most of the JKLF's top leadership had either been killed or imprisoned.

As the armed revolt rapidly acquired a popular character owing to the severe and indiscriminate nature of Indian repression during 1990, Pakistan sensed that a long awaited window of opportunity for it had finally opened in Kashmir. Pakistan realized that the Kashmir card had served its purpose and followed to persist to its logical conclusion, it might backfire on Pakistan, because independence and re-unification of the divided Kashmir not Pakistan was the JKLF's political goal.

Under the circumstances, Pakistan continued to be the unmistakable winner. A conscious policy decision appears to have been taken very quickly in Islamabad, in fact, to curb the independence sentiment that clearly lay at the foundation of the movement. While the People's Party was yet in power, Pakistani leaders became aware of the need to assert more Pakistani control of the uprising.... In early February 1990, a meeting was held in Islamabad, with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in the chair and with the Chief of the Army Staff, General Aslam Beg, and the President and the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir (PAK) in attendance. They decided they had to curb the Azadi forces, meaning they would not equip them and not send them into the Valley". Hence from the early 1990s began a policy of deliberate marginalisation of the Kashmiri nationalists by the Pakistani establishment. They floated a rival group, Hizbul Mujahideen. With a sudden and total cessation of funds and arms supplies from Pakistan, the JKLF's calculation went completely awry. They not only had difficulties in fresh recruitment and training of cadres but, more important, faced a new lethal enemy in the Hizb. The Hizbul Mujahideen's ascendancy and its agenda for Islamization was the hallmark of this phase of militancy (1991-1993). Using the prism of religion, the problem was articulated in terms of the Muslim valley waging an Islamic movement against the Hindu Indian State in order to accede to Islamic Pakistan. The Hizb faced two challenges in the valley, namely, the JKLF's secular ideology, and the Kashmiri pandits. Pakistan and Azad Kashmir's Muslim's were considered as a part of the millat. (The Islamic Community Worldwide).

Organisational Base:

The Hizbul Mujahideen was a large organization with an estimated strength of 13,000 to 20,000 men. Its political

patron, the Jamaat-e-Islami nominated Sayyid Salahuddin as the Supreme Commander. Each wing of the organisation had a leader for military and ideological training, intelligence, supplies, logistics and finance. All positions together formed the nucleus of the larger body, the Majlis-e-Shoora, which was the central command of the Hizbul Mujahideen.

The organizational networks of the Hizib spread down to the divisional and district levels in the valley. Their cadre was better equipped, more disciplined, and highly trained with considerable combat experience in Afghanistan. The Hizb had a women wing, Dukhtaran-e-Milat led by Aasiya Andrabi.

Strategy:- Inspired by Pakistan's Inter-services Intelligence (ISI) experience in Afghanistan, the Hizbul Mujahideen's ideas was to make the economic, military and political costs of retaining Kashmir too prohibitive for India. This had two components: to raise military costs by tying down large numbers of Indian army in the valley; and to extend the areas of operations to other parts of the state, and indeed, the rest of the country. 'We want to hit India economically...and strike in every nook and corner, Salahdun said.

Pakistan's Support:

The Hizbul Mujahideen was mostly patronized by Pakistan in arms, training, logistics and funds. Islamic political parties led by the Jamaat-e-Islami strongly advocated arming Kashmiri militants and open camps were organized in Pakistan for recruiting mujahidin and collecting funds for the 'Kashmiri Jihad'.

Mobilisation: The Hizb cadre was recruited by the Jamaat-e-Islami which had done systematic groundwork by introducing a Suni Islamic Culture and literature through madrasas (schools) touching the Koran Hadith since the 1970s, and preparing young Kashmiri Muslims for an Islamic revolution. The Hizb mobilized the cadre in the name of Islam and introduced the highly emotive terminology of jihad to justify political violence. A popular slogan was 'Na guerrilla Jang, Na Qaumi Jang; Al Jihad, Al Jihad' (It is neither a guerrilla war nor a national war, it is a holy war).

However, it was precisely due to strict adherence to Islamic ideology that the Hizb lacked popular support in the valley. Kashmiri Muslims supported the Hizb in 'the fight against India', but its pure Islamic beliefs soon alienated the masses. The Hizb faced a formidable ideological adversary in JKLF whose national and secular ideology was antithetical to Islamic ideology. But backed by Pakistan they succeeded what they wanted, sidelined the JKLF.

Government response:-

The state administration as well as the central government continued to be a divided house. Governor Jajmohan was replaced by G. C. Sexena a former head of the Research and Analyses Wing (RAW). But this had very little impact in the valley, as atrocities of the security forces went unabated throughout the 90s. He reined in the security forces and avoided public showdowns. The Congress Government at the centre led by the Narsinha Rao saw the ruthless suppression of the insurgency in Kashmir with lethal force. At the time of killing the muslims in Kashmir, Indian soldiers used to shout, "Saala Musalman, hum

tumko zinda nahin choddenge (muslim bastards we shall not leave you alive). A Muslim preacher in Sopore was forced to pronounce 'Ram Ram at gunpoint by the Indian army. The Kashmiris alleged before a group of noted civil right activists, that they were being "killed and destroyed" because they were Muslims.

Sexena failed to win the confidence of his administrative team. His handling of senior IAS officers, petitions against the functioning of the government and security forces and an indefinite strike by government employees came under sharp criticism. His initial tough stand of 'no work no pay' ended in tame acceptance of virtually all their demands, with the net effect of turning the bureaucracy against him.

Split of militant groups:-

The ideological polarisation between the JKLFs goal of Kashmir banega Khudmukhtar (Kashmir will be independent) and the Hizbul Mujahideen's demands of Kashmir Banega Pakistan divided the militant ranks sharply and set in motion the fragmentation of the movement. In order to adopt a twin-track strategy to mould the valley uprising to its conception and interest Pakistan cut off aid to JKLF. The first strategy aimed to divide and weaken it encouraging its pliable elements to break away and form pro-Pakistan groups, like Al-Umer Mujahideen and Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen (led by JKLF commander Mushtaq Ahmad Zarger etc). The second strategy was to build up a pro-Pakistan guerilla organization operating in the valley, the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) as a force that could rival and then displace the JKLF.

By 1992 the JKLF dominance of the armed struggle was under siege on three fronts: strong pressure from the Indian forces, the formation of the splinter groups with Pakistan support and the rapid rising strength again with Pakistani support of HM as a military force.

The first known armed clash between JKLF and HM guerilla occurred in Srinagar in April 1991, and a JKLF area commander was killed. Further clashes and casualties on both side, occurred during 1991 and 1992 because of their ideological disagreement. The valley witnessed a mushrooming of militant groups up to 1993. Besieged on three fronts, its best cadres died or jailed, the JKLF was fighting a losing battle. The year 1993 marked the decisive ascendancy of HM as a dominant guerrilla group in the armed struggle. In 1993 Javaid Mir the sole member of HAJY group who was still active in the field, admitted as much when he said, "Gun power is not the only thing that matters. The public are the most powerful weapon and they are on our own side". Though HM's ideology of Kashmir banega Pakistan (Kashmir will become Pakistan) remains a minority orientation, but its sacrifices in the cause of azadi were and are widely admired.

Popular disillusionment:-

By 1994 the azadi movement had reached a crossroads. The underlying decision in the movement -the existence of the two competing definitions of 'freedom' and 'self-determination', the rallying of 1990 had been laid bare by the rise of pro-Pakistani militants as the fighting force of a population that was still largely independent. Mysteriously murder of several prominent leaders of the Srinagar intelligentsia, known for independents convictions, Human right activists and Clerics or Moulvi's, disillusioned the masses.

Militant factions began turning the guns on each other. New recruits entering the fray were driven more by the glamour and power of the gun than ideology. They start interfering in daily life of the people. Many militants extorted donations from the people, forced people to offer food and shelter. Some were engaged in illegal sale of timber and contract killings. People realized that azadi was not around the corner. The mass processions demanding azadi had long ceased, they were becoming disenchanting.

Fourth phase:-

The Hazratbal siege and surrender of the militants in April 1993 marked the beginning of a turnaround. Militant lost face and people felt angry for having undergone severe hardships for nothing. Pakistan perceived it as a sign of fatigue among the Kashmiri militants, and in order to keep militancy alive a conscious policy decision appears to have been taken to push foreign militants in the valley. In addition to crackdowns and blasts and firings, a new term had entered the vocabulary of war in Kashmir, 'gun culture'.

As a result of this change in Pakistan's Kashmir policy numerous Jihadist outfits in Pakistan began turning their attention towards Kashmir. These Pakistani jihadists were playing a key role in fighting in Kashmir, eclipsing even the local Kashmiri groups. The introduction of foreign mercenaries into Kashmir radically changed the character of militancy into complete Islamisation and total negation of the Kashmiri component. The proponents of this traditional Islamic identity defined the militant to include the world's entire Muslim populace. They were fighting various governments accused of terrorizing 'true Muslims' in Islamic states and Muslim minorities in the secular states of the world. Their goal was to establish a grand Islamic state stretching from Kashmir to Pakistan through Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia, similar to that Islamic Caliphate of medieval times. Some factions defined it as the first step towards converting the universe into Dar-ul-Islam (land of Islam), while others focused on the immediate objective of establishing Islamic governments in moderate Arab states, such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunis, Jordan, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Myanmar the Philippines and India. They believed in one supreme leader and were not only committed to violating borders separating Islamic countries, but also justified armed interference in another country because Islam is in danger.

Such pan-Islamic militant organizations completely negated the Kashmir independent struggle and the right of self-determination was irrelevant. The Jamiat-ul-Ulma-e-Islam reiterated that, Islam and independence were two contradictory slogans and declared 'establishment of caliphate as the ultimate goal of Kashmiri struggle. Named as 'guest militants' by the Hizbul Mujahideen, the 'foreign mercenaries' with extremist Islamic orientation were alien to the socio-cultural ethos of Kashmiri society. The people strongly resented the political movement being hijacked by the Islamic warriors who had no respect for the religious beliefs of Sufi Islam.

Organisational Base:- From the early 1980, Pakistan emerged as the major launching pad for numerous militant Islamist groups fighting in Afghanistan with large numbers of activists, not only from Afghanistan, but also from the Arab world and from the Muslim diasporas in the West, all united in the mission of spearheading Jihad against the

godless Soviets. Several Pakistani Islamic parties, particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jamiat-e-Ulma-i-Islami and the Jamiat-i-Ulmai Pakistan were drawn into the Jihad and set up or sponsored their own militant wings.

The Harkat-ul-Ansar is an international network of Muslims who believe that 'frontiers could never divide Muslims' and offer their services for jihad anywhere in the world. It has an elaborate organizational structure with separate cells for fund raising, training and operations. Another organization, Markez-ud-Dawa-Wul-Irshad of the Ahle Hadith sect had a military wing, Lashkar-i-Toiba. Centered in Afghanistan, they volunteered themselves in Kashmir to wage jihad. The members of these organizations were highly committed and trained in sophisticated weapons. They changed the militant tactics by directly engaging the army through attacking pickets, checkpoints and patrol parties.

Government response: The growing disillusionment of the people with the degeneration and Islamic orientation of the militant movement opened a window of opportunity for the government. But the Congress government led by Narismha Rao pursued the old policies of crushing extremist elements through military pressure, opening negotiations with the moderates and holding elections. Little efforts were made to assuage Kashmiri's hurt psyche.

Rajesh Pilot, Union Minister of State for Home, tried to break new ground by shifting from a law and order strategy to a political approach. The first step was to project the human face of the administration by replacing key personnel in civil and military positions in Srinagar. A new team espousing a soft approach, including governor Krishna Rao, two senior IAS officers (Ashok Jaitely and Wajahat Habibullah) and Lieutenant General M.A. Zaki were appointed. Governor Rao's game plan was to win over the public by stopping random cordon operations alienating innocent civilians, meeting common people and addressing their complaints, and better discipline among the security forces. The government announced a package of preventive procedural rules to curb excessive brutality against the militants and to expedite the release of innocent persons. Besides, democratic politics needed to be revived by encouraging the grass-root politicians to start communicating with the people.

A United Command to improve and institutionalise the coordination of counter-insurgency operations between the security forces and the civil administration was created in May 1993. The Army's role was expanded, although the paramilitary forces retained primary responsibility for internal security. The centre announced an economic package including expansion of higher education facilities, public works projects, etc. However, these attempts were severely criticized for offering 'too little, too late'. The state administration was disappointed because the package failed to address the unemployment problems, shrunken revenues, and staggering deficit while the militants objected to the government's attempts to pave the way for elections. Again massive strikes paralysed the valley. Operational handicaps ensuing from personality clashes and weak coordination among different wings of the government and security forces derailed other administrative measures. The United Command never worked effectively. The army and paramilitary forces distrusted each other and crucial intelligence information

was withheld on important occasions. The whole system was in disarray. One wing of the government did not know what the other was doing, or worse, they were working at cross-purpose.

Fifth Phase 1994-95:

This phase was marked by retracing steps in search of political avenues for negotiations, growing instances of people's resistance, opposition to militants; misuse of the gun, and determined efforts to regain Kashmiri control over the movement.

Popular disillusionment with increasingly fragmented militancy was the most critical factor in reversing the direction. The 'Mujahideen's (militants) halo of heroism was gradually giving way to a painful realization among the public that because of the phenomenal expansion of the armed struggle, the ranks of freedom fighters contained politically shallow people, opportunists and even criminals. By mid-1994 it was reported that, "Kashmiris are sick of growing criminal tendencies among proliferating armed groups". The gun for Jihad had backfired. In the first reported incident of public protest against the militants, 5,000 women demonstrated against the slaughter of a pandit family in April 1992. A year later, kidnapping of Nahida Imtiyaz, daughter of National conference, MP Saifuddin Soz, was criticized because 'abduction of women was against their religious tenants' and it evoked appeal from JKLF leaders for her release. In 1994 people actively resisted the militants. On May 1994 militants tried to kidnap Yasmeen, daughter of National Conference leader Ali Mohammad Sagar, but it was foiled by a crowd of people. In another incident, Muslims brickbatted the militants on shooting of two Hindu shopkeepers in downtown Srinagar. In June 1994 an "unprecedented outburst of fury at pro-Pakistan insurgents erupted at Qazi Nissar's funeral" as more than 100,000 mourners chanted slogans such as Hizbul Mujahideen muradabad (death to HM), Jo mangega Pakistan, us ko milaga kabristan (those who want Pakistan will be sent to the graveyard) and Hum Kya Chahtey? Azadi (what do we want? Freedom). A hartal (general strike) called to protest the murder was successful, and houses all over the valley turned off their lights between 7 p.m and 10 p.m in a show of solidarity. It was argued that "the slogans are no way indicating that Kashmiris want to live within the Indian union. Rather they send a clear signal that Kashmir wants independence from both its neighbours".

Exploring Political Avenues: Introspection in the militant ranks led some leaders to reconsider political solutions. The central government had earlier released five prominent separatists leaders - Sayyid Ali Shah Geelani of Jamaat-e-Islami, Abdul Gani Lone of People's Conference and Maulana Abbas Ansari, Qazi Nissar Ahmad and Abdul Gani Bhat -hoping that they would unite the disparate militant factions and prepare the ground for a negotiated settlement. An All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) comprising 30-odd political groups and militant factions and an executive council from seven parties was formed. Chaired by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, the Hurriyat sought to bring different ideological stands into a common alignment. A common minimum position was evolved in demanding plebiscite to allow Kashmiris to exercise self-determination according to UN resolution including the right to independence.

The Hurriyat's constitution was committed to peaceful political struggle although it included several militants outfits engaged in the armed struggle. It ruled out a negotiated settlement within the framework of Indian Constitution and yet sought recognition from New Dehli as a legitimate mouthpiece of modern Kashmiri opinion. The Hurriyat's internal contradictions, ideological divergences, subservience to Pakistan and failure to exercise political control over the militant outfits did not allow it to become an effective instrument. The militant's open threat, 'we will liquidate them if they talk of anything other than self-determination under the UN resolutions' gave little room for maneuver.

The process, however, survived with the release of Yasin Malik in May 1994, and that of the People's League chief, Shabir Ahmad Shah in November 1994. The JKLF had never toed Pakistan's line, and Shabir had come a long way from pro-Pakistan standpoint to adopting a pro-people approach. Both were acutely conscious of the movement's loss of direction. Yaseen Malik declared that the first priority was to 'purify' the movement by weeding out the 'undesirable elements, criminals and Indian agents', and lashed out against the 'black sheep who have been misusing the gun taken up for a sacred cause'. Shabir Shah also acknowledged infiltration by criminal elements that were bent upon destroying the struggle'.

Many militant leaders like Ghulam Nabi Bhat, brother of Maqbool Bhat, Javaid Ahmad Mir, Ammanullah Khan, and Azam Inqillabi joined the fray in protesting against the prevailing 'gun culture' and favoured exploring political opinions. Ghulam Nabi said; "only the gun cannot get us azadi. The solution lies in talking across the table". This view was echoed by JKLF leader Javaid Ahmad Mir: 'we can hold talks with the centre provided they centered around independence. The gun after all is not the answer'. Even Amanullah Khan reiterated, 'I would be a fool if I thought we could shut out Indians only with the gun.... The fight is also political and diplomatic'. Yaseen Malik had undergone a dramatic transformation in forswearing the gun to adopt the Gandhian method of observing fasts. He announced a unilateral ceasefire and was prepared to hold talks with the Indian government provided 'there were no pre-conditions and we are treated equally'. Azam Inqillabi appealed that the 'time was ripe for shedding the gun culture and taking an active part in the democratic struggle'.

Regaining Kashmir Control: -

A critical feature of this phase was conscious and sustained efforts to wrest the initiative from pro-Pakistan and foreign 'Islamic warriors', and reassert Kashmiri control over the movement. Taking a secular course, Shabir Shah stressed that 'it is not a fight between one and the other religion but a war between oppressed and oppressors'. He redefined the Kashmiri movement:

He demanded right of self-determination to make it unambiguously clear to India that we are a quom, a respectful and courageous identity with a determination to march in step with others in the comity of nations. We are not a herd, which can be pushed around by India or Pakistan.... We will lay down our lives but will not permit any division of the state by the people in Islamabad or New Dehli....The issue concerns 1.25 crore inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir and a solution has to be acceptable to

the three parties - India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir.

The Mirwaiz Umer Farooq characterised the movement as 'not an Islamic movement but a movement of Kashmiri people'. Finally Yaseen Malik and Shabir Shah tried to build a bridge between Kashmiri people and Pandits. They appealed to the Pandits to return to Kashmir as 'Kashmir is incomplete without Kashmir Pandits. However both Yaseen and Shabir Shah failed in uniting militant factions because Pakistan directly controlled the powerful ones like Harkat-ul-Ansar and Hizbul-Mujahideen.

Government Response:-The government continued to drift and failed to capitalise on the situation to win the confidence of the people. Internal dissension (between state and central government officials) dogged the decision making apparatus. The one-point game plan of holding elections was criticised as an ill-time move and met with stiff resistance from across the political spectrum, ranging from the BJP and the CPIM at the centre, the National Conference, the Hurriyat and migrant Pandits, as well as government officials, popular reaction to elections ranged from apathy to antipathy, depending on the domination of the militants in various places.

The turning point which forced the government to postpone elections was the Char-i-Sharief crisis in April 1995. Following a prolonged military stand-off between militants and security forces, Kashmir's most revered saint Sheikh Nooruddin Shrine, Char-i-Sharief was destroyed in a massive fire that embittered the people and deepened their alienations. Valley residents generally blamed the Indian army for the shrine's destruction. While quoting the slogans of fighting jihad and 'Kashmir Banega Pakistan' written on the half burnt walls of the shrine, Indian army blamed militants for this incident. (The investigations revealed that army helicopters were found to spray explosive powder on the shrine on the 10th night).

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