Original Paper

Modernizing Extremism: A Case of New Age Militancy in Kashmir

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Abstract

The research article delivers enlightenment on the New Age Militancy in Kashmir in which the new energetic and vigorous faces arose to enter militancy and for the stated design the usage of contemporary and improvised ways are drawn to recruit youngsters in the valley. Known to the outer world as tech-savvy militants who are hailing from the rich educational backgrounds and they do believe in autochthonous viewpoint of militancy irrespective of different names of the terror outfits. Besides this, there is a new trend of "Arms Snatching" which has been prevalent in the valley mostly from last three years to arm the newly recruits. The article also analyses the impact of the social media usage in branding the New Age Militancy.

Keywords

kashmir, militancy, new age militancy, separatists, social media, tech-savvy, weapon snatching

1. Introduction

Kashmir is observing a wave of militancy and at this extent of the contemporary era, the modern age Militants are becoming more dangerous and destructive for the State machinery. The Jammu and Kashmir police are discovering it extremely complicated to manage eye on the contemporary media technology, which has given abundant popularity to the new age Militants. Post Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) Commander and popular local militant, Burhan Wani's killing, numerous youths have entered the militant ranks, notably from the South Kashmir.

New Age Militancy or Contemporary designs of unrest in the State of Jammu and Kashmir (hereafter Kashmir) have been high in the long-disputed territory of Kashmir since the killing of Burhan Wani by

security forces in July 2016. Wani a 22 years old from south Kashmir's Tral area was a militant commander associated with the Hizbul Mujahideen, which is considered as the largest armed militant group in the Kashmir Valley. The group's intention is to reassemble Kashmir and Pakistan, forming one side of a conflict that has persisted since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Unquestionably for the utmost in Kashmir, Wani's death and the subsequent unrest in the valley resonated with the long-drawn struggle for Azadi, or freedom, acquainted by collective remembrances of century's long exploitation and domination at the hands of successive foreign rulers.

Thousands of young Kashmiri men entered the Kashmir militancy during the 1990's, but those who sustained are seeing new generations as more "*Potent and Committed*" to Islamism, and more ready to die. Since 1989, Kashmir has been a hotbed of insurgency, unrest and a potential nuclear flashpoint. There were 7,000 militants, which served Kashmir in the 1990's. "*The figure is currently pegged at around 200*" (Hindustan Times, 12th July 2016). The new difficulty and challenge for the Indian State is that how to counter the massive insurgency and they always have to keep in action the strength of a million military men commissioned in Kashmir, the protestors of the modern age who march towards the encounter sites by pelting heavy stones on the security forces of the State and these protesters are risking their lives during live encounters in a bid to help and support the trapped militants escape from the encounter sites and to express solidarity with them. This is enough to confer democratic legitimacy upon militants and the armed struggle. It also indicates that their popularity among masses has touched new heights. This sensation was entitled as a "*challenge*" by none other than the chief of the State police who had said that "*People marching towards encounter sites is a challenge*" (Greater Kashmir, 15th February 2017).

Upon the backdrop of people thronging to encounter sites in the valley, on the *15th February 2016*, the *Indian Chief of Army Staff* issued a warning to people and advised them to stay away from the encounter sites and that if they proceed to obstruct anti-militancy operations in the State they would be deemed as OGWs (Over Ground Workers) of militants and later who will face "*tough action*". "*Those waving Pak, IS flags to be dealt as anti-nationals, over ground workers of militants, will face harsh action*" (Kashmir Reader, 16th February 2016).
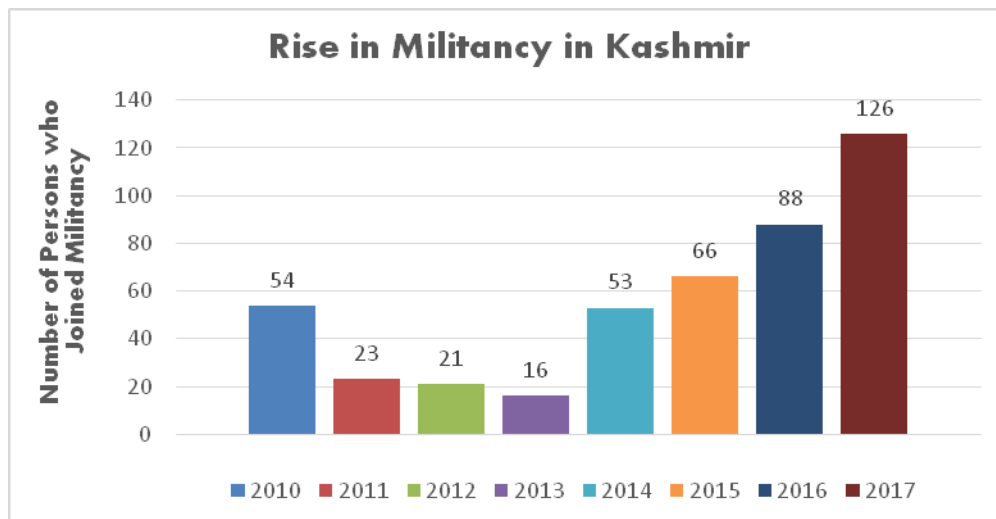
Figure 1. No. of Persons Who Joined Militant Ranks from 2010-2017

In the State of Jammu and Kashmir 280 youth have joined militancy in the last three years (*2017, 2016 and 2015*) (note 1) which is quite alarming and disgusting. The worst disturbing fact is that 126 newly recruits joined militancy ranks in the year 2017 (Note 2). The new recruits are from well-off families and belong to highly educated categories like that of the Mannan Bashir Wani who is a 26 year old PhD Research Scholar hailing from Kupwara who has joined militancy this year in January (2018) and soon after publicising his joining on social networking site his photograph became viral on the Facebook with AK-47. He was a Research Scholar of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and joined Hizbul Mujahideen (The Indian Express, 6th February, 2018).

Footprints of militancy have been clearly increasing in the Kashmir Valley with as many as 126 young men taking to arms during the year 2017. Increasing footprints of militants have raised concern among the security agencies that assumes the trend which reflects the worsening situation in Kashmir. 88 Kashmiri youths joined militancy in 2016. Since 2014, there has been a constant rise in the number of people joining militancy. Most of these new recruits came from Pulwama, Shopian and Kulgam districts in South Kashmir, which has become the hub of tech-savvy, young militants (Rediff News, 05 July, 2017).

The new age militancy is not confined to this but it has further extended the menaces of extremism in the State. The newest trend of entering the new age militancy era got a boost when a cop of the Jammu and Kashmir police namely Ishfaq Ahmad Dar, belonging to a Heff village of South Kashmir's Shopian district had joined the Militant ranks (The Tribune, 28th October 2017) (Note 3).

In an interview with the Alpha (*Name Changed*) the cop who is working with the J&K Police as *Special Police Officer* (SPO) said that, how can a person remain stable on a mere payment of six thousand rupees only which earlier stood at three thousand rupees only despite enormous hardships during the unrest period. The cop revealed that during unrest and stone pelting we are acting as frontier ones and despite the fact that we are even also considered as Special Forces Group for tackling the

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insurgencies in the State.

2. Use of Social Media by Terrorists

Due to the accessibility, affordability and extensive scope of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, terrorist or militant groups have frequently utilized social media to facilitate their intentions and expand their message. Efforts have been made by numerous governments and agencies to prevent the practice of using social media by various terrorist organizations.

In a research finding by *Gabriel Weimann* from the University of Haifa, Weimann had noticed that nearly 90% of organized terrorism on the internet takes place via the usage of social media (Note 4). According to *Weimann*, terror groups use social media platforms like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Internet Forums* to broadcast their messages, recruit members and to collect intelligence (Note 5).

Terror organizations practice social media because social media tools are affordable and convenient, promote quickly broad distribution of messages and it acknowledges unfettered communication with an audience without the filter or "*selectivity*" of mainstream news outlets (Note 6).

Also, social media platforms support terror groups to engage with their networks. Whereas earlier terror organizations would release messages and information via mediators, social media platforms enable terror organizations to deliver messages directly to their designated audience and discuss with their fans and inmates in real time (Note 7). The terrorist groups or extremist organisations use the social media as a tool to promote their networks. It has been used in fund raising, recruiting and passing of important information and signals.

Ill-will ejecting from the social media pages and several other tech-savvy platforms reached through mobile phone applications or other platforms have virtually retained terror factories operating across the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and has encouraged to churn out modern age "*Jihadis*" who keep the terror pot fuming in the State of Jammu & Kashmir.

Use of Social Media by the militant outfits in Kashmir has been a new trend particularly post Burhan period. It was actually during the Burhan Wani's reign that the practice of the social media in the valley came up by dint of constantly uploading photographs and videos on *Facebook* and for the same, he was tagged as "*Poster Boy*" (Note 8). Newly recruits of the Militant ranks in the valley are announcing their joining of various militant ranks through Facebook. Announcement, threats and messages if any there, are shared through the Facebook.

New Age Militancy in the valley of Kashmir is not limited to this, there are also other hot issues like weapon snatching. The Local Police parties mostly where they are less in number are attacked or even fired upon to snatch their service rifles like that of the latest snatching attempts of Shopian district, where the weapons of the five policemen posted in the district court complex were snatched by the Militants (Note 9). There have been the frequent issues of the weapon snatching in the valley and the local police forces have suffered a huge setback.

According to the data published in the New Indian Express (*January 2018*), the data says that 251

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weapons were looted by militants in Jammu and Kashmir including automatic rifles, AK-47, Self-Loading rifles (SLR), INSAS, carbine rifles and a gas gun that were looted by militants in the State in various weapon snatching bids during the last three years. The data also revealed that while 363 militants and 71 civilians were killed in militancy violence during the year 2016 and 2017. The snatched weapons include 35 AK Rifles, 43 SLRs, 44 Insas, 4 carbines, 1 Light Machine Gun *(LMG)*, 5 (303) rifles, 12 Pistols, 1 Pika Gun, 1 Gas Gun, 2 *UMG's*, Ak-41 Rifle and 102 Tear Gas Shells/Grenades (Note 10).

The data further revealed that of the 251 looted weapons, 76 items including 23 AK rifles, 25 Insas, 4 carbines, 10 *SLRs*, 1 *LMG*, 2 (303) Rifles, 1 Gas gun, 6 pistols, 1 Pika gun, 2 **UMGs** and 1 Ak-41 Rifle (*The New Indian Express, 18ᵗʰ January 2018*) were recovered in addition to this 90 accused persons were also arrested (Note 11).

3. Conclusion

The performance of surviving especially in Kashmir division of the State has grown worthless and most damaging due to the disarrangement of the State, arising each from political or non-political, regional or non-regional, the State of the present context has absolutely and entirely become a hell and unstable place. The State has become too sensitive to combativeness, human rights violations along with several other unlimited challenges. All the mechanisms of governmental agencies have become ineffective in tracing and discovering out this Kashmir problem.

New Age Militancy, Separatism, Social Unrest and Political Instability has worsened the worthy atmosphere of the State further, it has led to an improvement in the extremist forces in the State. The rise in extremist forces needs to be checked and joining of the militant ranks by the youth should be terminated immediately. There has been an unexpected rise in the extremist incidents like new age militancy, weapon snatching and social unrest only when there is a sudden rise in the extremist actions. More the extremist incidents are there, greater the probabilities of unrest will be there.

Bloodshed, unrest and all the forms of the extremism needs to be ended in the Kashmir for the sake and welfare of the peace in the region. Prosperity will prevail in the region only when there is a peaceful and well-disposed atmosphere in the State and for the said purpose all the forms of extremism need to be wiped up from the region, because more the extremist activities are there more the chances of State's backwardness are there.

Before concluding, I'm closing with the poem of a very noted poet "*Bahar Kashmiri*" who has captured the dilemma of the Kashmiri's in his poem composed in the 1940's and has been quoted from the book "Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir" (Chitralekha Zutshi, 2004, pp. 310-311).

"*From all sides, I am assaulted,*

The English, the Indians, the Afghans, the Pakistanis,

To whom should I complain, to whom should I tell my fate?

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Capitalists, tyrants, oppressors, and friends, all want me to become their accomplice,

With whom should I agree, whom should I disagree with?

To whom should I complain, to whom should I tell my fate?

I am poor and downtrodden; whose side should I go?

If I agree with one, the second will be angry, the third will impale me on the sword and the fourth and fifth strangle me.

To whom should I complain, to whom should I tell my fate?" (Note 12)

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Notes

Note 1. The data was revealed by Chief Minister Mahbooba Mufti on 6th February 2018 in the Legislative Assembly of the State against a written reply to a question raised by opposition National Conference leader Ali MohammadSagar.

Note 2. "Jammu and Kashmir: 280 youth join militancy in three years; 126 joined militant ranks in 2017." The New Indian Express. Dated: 6th February 2018. Retrieved February 10, 2018, from http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/feb/06/jammu-and-kashmir-280-youth-join-militancy-in-three-years-126-joined-militant-ranks-in-2017-1769236.html

Note 3. "J&K cop who went missing 'joins militant rank'". The Tribune. Dated: 28th October 2017. Retrieved February 21, 2018, from http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/j-k-cop-who-went-missing-joins-militant-ranks/488679.html

Note 4. "Terrorist groups recruiting through social media". CBC News. Dated: 10th January 2012. Retrieved February 19, 2018, from http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/terrorist-groups-recruiting-through-social-media-1.1131053

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Note 9. Militants snatch rifles from police officials in Kashmir's Shopian. Hindustan Times. Dated: 5th May 2017. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/militants-snatch-rifles-from-police-officials-in-kashmir-s-shopian/story-pypE6l5g7u4thPTk96uPuM.html

Note 10. 251 weapons looted by militants in Jammu and Kashmir in 3 years. The New Indian Express. Dated: 18th January 2018. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/jan/18/251-weapons-looted-by-militants-in-jammu-and-kashmir-in-3- years-1757777.html

Note 11. "251 weapons looted by militants in Jammu and Kashmir in 3 years." The New Indian Express. Dated: 18th January 2018. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/jan/18/251-weapons-looted-by-militants-in-jammu-and

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