

**Conflict Transformation in Kashmir-III**

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In the last two parts of this ongoing study, an attempt was made to look inward to locate the roots of the conflict within the J&K state. The study also looked at the political developments which laid an impact on the state's relations with the Union of India. However, the conflict in Kashmir has external linkages too. The present analysis shall deal with the external aspect of the conflict in Kashmir.

**Backdrop**

Pakistan has been claiming Kashmir on the basis of 'Two Nation' theory in which the sub-continent was divided on religious lines and the State of Pakistan was created. The Pakistani scholars claim that gradually Kashmir got intertwined in the strategic and defense doctrine of Pakistan. However, this approach ignores the legal arrangements which were evolved to demarcate the boundaries between India and Pakistan as a consequence of the accord to divide the sub-continent on religious lines. That a formula was also devised for the Princely states which were not under the direct control of British government to accede to the either dominion is not taken into cognisance. This approach equally ignores the political developments in J&K state between 1940 when Pakistan resolution was adopted by the Muslim League and the 1947 when Pakistan was actually created. It may be mentioned here that Kashmir was not a party to the 'Two Nation' theory advocated by Muslim League. Thus, the Muslim League had neither any base nor any influence in Kashmir. The people of Kashmir had launched a political struggle articulated by the most popular party, National Conference, against the autocratic rule in the state. The struggle had the twin objective of (a) transfer of sovereignty from the autocratic ruler to the people of the state and (b) the abolition of feudalism. The leader of the Muslim League and the founder of Pakistan, Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah took another route to realize his ambition of incorporating Kashmir within the territorial framework of Pakistan. He started pandering to the autocratic ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, and even exhorted the Kashmiri people to express their solidarity with the ruler. This exhortation was received with a lot of consternation in Kashmir in which Mr. Jinnah, who was visiting Kashmir, had to face hostile protests and had to leave in disgust. Mr. Jinnah, as a tactician and a reputed lawyer, had rightly calculated that in terms of the Act of Independence, Maharaja had to decide on the option of joining the either dominion, India or Pakistan. However, after the creation of two dominions when Maharaja remained

indecisive about joining the either dominion, Pakistan sponsored the tribal attacks on the J&K through Afridi tribals from its North Western Frontier Province. Subsequently, Maharaja of J&K, supported by the most popular leadership of the state, acceded to the Union of India. The tribal incursions in the J&K state ultimately transformed into a full fledged first India Pakistan war on Kashmir. In 1948, a ceasefire took place in which J&K got divided first into two and later into three parts. Pakistan again tried to annex Kashmir in 1965 and 1971 on the same logic that Kashmir 'remained the unfinished agenda of Partition'. However, Pakistan failed to annex Kashmir militarily. Therefore, the strategic experts of Pakistan embarked on a new strategy of engineering an insurgency in the state. It may be mentioned here that this strategy was employed at the first place in 1965 when a large number of infiltrators were pushed in Kashmir. But it did not evoke any sympathetic public response.

It is reported that in 1984, when Kashmir's Jamaat -i -Islami chief, Peer Sadauddin Tarabali was visiting Pakistan, he was approached to support the initiative of an armed militancy in the state. He is reported to have declined the offer on the plea that 'gun did not suit Kashmiri' people[1].

It is very well established and confirmed even by the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, that Pakistan sponsored the insurgency in Kashmir. However, it would be interesting to know as to how did the strategy work and how was the logistics of this insurgency put in place. We are reproducing the observations of Mr. Firdous Syed, who assumed the name of Babar Badar and became the Chief of a deadly militant group, Muslim Janbaz Force, which operated in J&K for about five years. He later abdicated violence and launched the first initiative towards peace. The extracts of his observations are revealing:

### **JKLF in Forefront**

"Initially, it was the JKLF that spearheaded the militant campaign. Actually Pakistan wanted the militancy in Kashmir to appear as an indigenous uprising. JKLF at this time had no base in Kashmir. Pakistan started looking for the people with secessionist tendencies. All those people who had a track-record of being anti-India, those who had been jailed during some or the other time were handpicked.

"Ahsan Dar, Bilal Siddiqui, Maqbool Elahi, Abdullah Bangroo, Ashraf Dar, Aijaz Dar, Yaseen Malik, Ashfaq Majid Wani, Abdul Hameed Shiekh, Javed Mir, Mushtaq Zargar, Hilal Beigh, Abdul Majid Dar, Shiekh Aziz, Babr Badar, et al (The first brigade of militants in Kashmir trained and financed by Pakistan) are the prominent people who crossed over during this time. A look on their backgrounds drives home the fact that none of these, as is generally believed, were economically oppressed. Moreover, all these people were not rooted into any particular ideology. Some of them were impressed by Jamaat-i-Islami but were not its members; JKLF ideology had an appeal but it was not entrenched deep in them. Almost all these people had a mediocre

educational background. None of them had university-level education nor had anyone been to any full-time madrassah (Islamic seminary). They were somewhat a mixture of ideologies borrowed from different quarters and jelled together by their hate against the system.

“Once in Pakistan, all these youths received training in JKLF camps run by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) in the far-flung tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. Once a group of boys would reach Pakistani part of Kashmir, they would be taken to Rawalpindi wherefrom they were ferried in pick-up trucks to some barren, deserted tribal areas. The trucks used to take these boys to training camps and were covered in such a manner that nobody inside could see where they were being taken. At the camps, the Pashtun instructors would teach them how to operate Klashnikov rifles, RPGs, (Rocket Propelled grenades) throw hand-grenades and use explosives, besides telling them some basic tit-bits about how to conduct ambushes. Initially the training lasted for some 15 days, but in certain cases, boys were trained for longer periods while some were taken to Gulbadeen Hikmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami camps and even inside Afghanistan to participate in actual war there. It was very difficult for a majority of Kashmiri boys to reconcile with the kind of life they had to live inside these training camps. For instance, they found it very difficult to eat camel’s meat with some local bread instead their staple meal of rice.

### **Indoctrination Mission**

“It was the time when Kashmir was exporting its youth to Pakistan and importing militants trained in sabotage. These youth also came back with an ideology - an ideology that was not their own but was indoctrinated in them.

“It was January-February 1990. Pakistan had actually read the ground situation in Kashmir incorrectly. It had not anticipated the kind of response militancy got from the Kashmiri population, youth in particular. After Dr. Rubaiya Sayeed’s abduction incident and the ruthless crackdowns and massacres that followed, Kashmiri youth started crossing over to Pakistan in large numbers. Pakistan was taken aback for the rush was far beyond than what it had expected and was not ready to accommodate. It couldn’t deal with the huge rush of Kashmiri youth and suddenly felt its infrastructure inadequate to cope up with the influx. Four to six boys were returned with a single gun and that too after giving them ‘*dry training*’. They would just be taught how to operate weapons inside a room without actual ‘*hand-on equipment*’ training.

“By returning them ill-trained and ill-equipped, Pakistan was simply pushing them towards a certain death. This is what exactly happened in most of the combat situations - Kashmiri boys simply fell like dry leaves. The military tactics that are witnessed among the militants today came only after they have fought for more than a decade. They had no such background then. They were simply turned into the sitting ducks

for the Indian security forces. Not only was training inadequate but Kashmiri militants lacked the military mind as well.

“By now, militancy had brought the situation to a boil. During the initial days, since the militancy in Kashmir was spearheaded by JKLF, it had as such Kashmiri nationalism as its ideological plank and aimed for an independent and united Kashmir. But as it gained momentum, Pakistan too shifted its stance and instead created and patronized groups which would fight for Kashmir’s complete merger with Pakistan. As the Pakistan, which was controlling the militancy in Kashmir, changed its policy, the complexion of militant groups fighting in Kashmir also changed. With the entry of groups with pro-Pak leanings like Hizbul Mujahideen, Harkatul Mujahideen, Al-Umar and Muslim Janbaz Force, the Kashmir militancy changed its complexion from ethno-nationalism to ethno-religious.

“It was the time when they recognized Peoples Leagues’ Muslim Janbaz Force (MJF) or Mushtaq Zargar’s Al-Umar. They recognized Hizbul Mujahideen also during the same time, as well as Hilal Beigh’s Students Liberation Front (SLF).

### **The Coordination**

“Major Tariq was coordinating things from Muzaffarabad. I remember his coming to me and asking what I was doing with Shabir Shah. “He is already arrested. Why don’t you start your own organization?” he told me and gave me a pamphlet of *Al-Madad* and asked me to create a militant outfit of the same name in Kashmir. But I refused outrightly.

“After I came back to the Valley in 1990, one of my associates, Ghulam Qadir Hagroo, brought a boy named Jamshed to me and insisted that since he has been sitting on his head to get him arms issued from me, he should be given the arms. We used to take away the arms of the cadres once they came back after training from across and had taken away Jamshed’s bag (of arms and ammunition) as well. So when we got his bag, and were inspecting it, there was a letterhead of the *Al-Madad*. I could easily recollect my conversation with Major Tariq about it. I asked Jamshed what it was and he didn’t say anything. Anyhow, I told someone to burn down all these letterheads. After three days or so, there was a press statement in newspapers announcing the creation of a new militant outfit named *Al-Madad Yalgaar-e-Ali* with Jamshed as its commander-in-chief.

“It was Major Tariq who was creating as many militants groups in Kashmir as he could. Pakistan sowed the seeds of dissent within Kashmiri militant groups by creating different outfits. Although on the face of it, all these groups were fighting for the same cause, but the difference in material interests created cleavages, which were difficult to do away with.

## The Madness

“It was a kind of madness that ruled the roost. There was no coordination or control at all. Anybody could give a strike call without any rhyme and reason and people would adhere to it without much ado. Someone would say “let’s go to Cherar-e-Sharief (a sufi shrine on the outskirts of Srinagar) or “Hazratbal” (another revered shrine located in Srinagar) or elsewhere else and everybody followed. Someone said that we should put our watches in sync with the Pakistan Standard Time instead of the Indian Standard Time and everyone followed. Someone called for a Muslim or Kashmiri dress code and the people obeyed. Someone called for painting the signboards and hoardings green and within no time entire Valley turned green.

“Nobody was controlling things, nobody had the wherewithal or capacity to control it nor had any idea or will to control it. Lack of physical ability aside, our intellectual faculties also were too immature to be able to think about controlling it. Not only the people but the militant leadership too was swayed away by what was happening. Everybody had under-estimated India’s military might and over estimated Pakistan’s commitment to Kashmir and Kashmiris.

“Soon there were inter-group clashes. Jamaat-i-Islami started showing its ruthless face by playing dirty politics. Hizbul Mujahideen killed Mir Mustafa, who was a JKLF sympathizer. All JKLF could do was to issue a statement saying that if Hizb continued to kill people like this, then nobody will be with the movement. ‘Until yesterday everybody was with the National Conference; does it mean that we should be killing all those people who were with the NC? Then who will be left?’ they said.

“As for the Hizbul Mujahideen, which was the formidable group in the ‘*Green Camp*’, it was getting stronger with every passing day. Not only was Pakistan giving it maximum logistical and financial support, but after the Jamaat formally adopted it, Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan and Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan of Gulbadeen Hikmatyar also gave it a lot of support strengthening it enormously.

## MJF’s Birth

“The situation in Kashmir was peculiar in the sense that everything was happening at the same time and nobody was actually controlling anything. Amid this confusion we began meeting for creating ‘Muslim Janbaz Force’ (MJF) and for the resurrection of ‘Peoples’ League’. Peoples’ League as the parent organization was to provide guidance and political face to its militant outfit MJF, but actually it was the MJF that would be pulling the strings. As we continued on our own, carrying out some military actions and together with the support from across and Shabir Shah’s sway over large section of youth, MJF emerged as one of the frontline militant organizations.

“However, according to a district commander of our group ‘Although it was the time when Shabir Ahmed Shah was yet to be exposed for his political and intellectual shallowness, which we came to witness in 1994; but yet one can easily understand the bankruptcy of the movement, which will help a great deal in understanding why it failed. We all used to talk a great deal about the right to self-determination or United Nations Resolutions and other such terms without being aware of what they actually meant.”

“If the movement had any real asset at that time, it was the trust and faith in each other. I remember that I was heading for Kupwara and had reached Tujjar (near Sopore) when I got a message that Nayeem Khan had been released. I was surprised. At that time I couldn’t dare to suspect his commitment and sincerity and wouldn’t have thought of him as being anything different than a freedom fighter, despite my all suspicions. Peoples’ League decided to put Nayeem Khan incharge as the chairman of Peoples’ League because it felt that MJF was doing well and didn’t need much of his services. But S Hameed, who had become the chairman six months back wouldn’t budge citing Nayeem Khan’s credentials were suspect. It was simple power politics and there were fights over the issue. It was the time when I realized that whatever was going on was not *jihad*. It was simple politics and people had their vested interest in it. Nayeem Khan’s re-entry only thickened the dirty game of power politics.

### **A Dramatic Venture**

“In the meantime, we planned doing something dramatic. One of the cadres came and suggested that a couple of Swedish engineers involved in the construction of Uri Civil hydel project would come to Gulmarg every Sunday to play golf and that we could kidnap them. We agreed to it and it was decided that the kidnapping would be done not for the ransom, but in order to get international attention to the ongoing freedom movement in Kashmir. So our local unit did the kidnapping and because of it, Kashmir came under international focus. Swedish Foreign Minister and other international dignitaries including the UN Secretary General appealed to the MJF to free the engineers. It was April 1991. The kidnapping of the Swedish engineers attracted a lot of international attention on Kashmir.

“It was during the same time (April 7, 1991) that we (Nayeem Ahmed Khan and I) were in Ahmed Nagar area in the outskirts of the Srinagar city on the banks of Anchar Lake and one morning we found that the Army had cordoned the area. We had placed a boat in the lake just as a precaution in case of any eventuality, but Army had sealed all our escape routes already and we were caught.

### **The Militant Leadership**

“One has to acknowledge that the movement that had the likes of Yaseen Malik, Ahsan Dar, Abdullah Bangroo or Firdous Syed (Babar Badar) who lacked the

intellectual capital or a ruthless person like Mushtaq Zargar - who blasted Tahseen Billa into pieces on the mere suspicion that he was a police informer - in the leadership role, that movement was bound to fail.

“Bombs were tied to the body of one Tahseen Billa and he was blasted to bits in such a ruthless manner that his flesh was later eaten by the crows and kites from electricity high-tension wires. But the separatist circles, showing utter disregard for the human life, did not condemn it. It was an era of madness and arrogance. People would be caught, tortured and even killed on the pretext of being police informers and nobody would ever bother to ascertain whether the allegation was substantiated or not. I remember having seen a boy in Sopore with white blisters all over his body. Militants had caught him on charges of being an informer and tortured him with a hot iron. People were killed mercilessly on the mere suspicion of being informers. *Mukhbir* as the informer is called in Urdu, is even today the most notorious term in Kashmir and has been responsible for more deaths than anything else. But the irony continues in full play despite the killing thousands of Kashmiris after labeling them as *Mukhbir*. According to Sajjad Lone, Chairman of People’s Conference, (whose own father and veteran political leader, Abdul Gani Lone was gunned down at a public meeting in Srinagar): ‘nobody has ever bothered to define the term – what does a *Mukhbir* mean and what kind of punishment one merits?’

“Such was the height of militant ruthlessness that they wouldn’t even allow the people to offer funeral prayers or even bury the body of an ‘informer’. The small people with almost no or very little social and cultural capital became militant commanders and committed all sorts of human rights violations and atrocities on people. Thousands of innocent people were thus ruthlessly tortured and killed by their very own Kashmiri militants, in many cases their own friends, neighbours and acquaintances also.

### **Religion as Source of Strife**

“Irrespective of what the political or militant leaders said then or say now, one has to understand that the cause of all the strife in the subcontinent including Kashmir has been religion. Even ‘Two Nation’ Theory that saw the subcontinent break up into two states (now three) was a manifestation of the same religious hatred that has been the major source of friction between different religious communities in the subcontinent.

“It may be argued that Kashmiris through Shiekh Abdullah had ratified Kashmir’s accession to India and defeated the ‘Two Nation’ Theory. But this belief is flawed. Shiekh Abdullah defeated ‘Two Nation’ Theory as a political package for Kashmir but not as a sentiment. Besides, there has always been a trust deficit between New Delhi and Srinagar and much of it is attributed to the religious ‘otherness.’

“The uprising started in Kashmir from a nationalistic plank, but even then, the other communities— Kashmiri Pandits or Sikhs and others were not with it? If it had some footing in geography, then Jammu Dogras and Ladakh Buddhists too should have been part of it. Irrespective of what the militant or separatist political leaders say, one has to agree that the secessionist tendencies were sharpened among Kashmiri Muslims alone.

“While many actors and factors can be held responsible for giving religious colour to the uprising that began seemingly on a nationalistic plank, the role of Jamaat-i-Islami Kashmir merits a special mention for its enormous contribution. Like its Pakistani counterpart, Jamaat-i-Islami Kashmir, although in the thick of political developments and upheavals from the very beginning, was never really able to attract votes. In fact, not in very distant past, Jamaat was no way near to even being a popular political group. But when National Conference departed from secessionist politics after the Accord of 1975, it was Jamaat-i-Islami that not only preached secession but also changed its discourse from secular to religious idiom. The secessionist politics in Kashmir was so much influenced by religion that even the JKLF invoked religious symbols and terminology.

### **Pakistan’s Limitations:**

“Shabir Shah was arrested in Ramban on September 28, 1989. I was in Pakistan. Ashfaq Majid Wani and Yaseen Malik were also there and they had brought some money with them for they wanted to purchase some sophisticated weapons. But the Pakistani Intelligence people took away that money from them. The latter demanded grenade launchers from ISI but they were refused although at that time ISI had Surface to Air Missiles as well as Stinger Missiles available with it. Both Ashfaq and Yaseen were dejected.

“Why are we not being allowed to buy sophisticated weapons? These people told us that we should prepare the situation in Kashmir as well as the people there for war and they (Pakistan) will launch a full scale war to liberate Kashmir and now that we have created the situation, they are not ready for it,” Ashfaq told me, as he was seemingly shocked, not able to understand Pakistan’s duplicity.

“We met Shiekh Rashid Ahmed (now Pakistan’s Information Minister) in Rawalpindi. He welcomed us and showed great respect. I could clearly feel that it was the typical Kashmiri hospitality for fellow Kashmiris that he was showing us. When we told him that we were not given sophisticated weapons, he offered that he would take us to Darra (in NWFP) wherefrom we could purchase the weapons of our choice. Next morning, Ashfaq and Yaseen went to Darra.

“I don’t know whether they were able to buy weapons from there, but I know they were not allowed to carry the grenade launchers to Kashmir. This is how it dawned on us that Pakistan was not prepared to cross the threshold of the India’s patience. If they

were not prepared for it, it meant that they were not prepared for war either and it meant that they had lied to us. All those groups who went across for training during the initial days were told that they should prepare the ground in Kashmir (inside) and we (Pakistan) would launch the attack from outside. They had told us that together we would sandwich India the way it had done to Pakistan at the time of creation of Bangladesh. But now they had developed cold feet and were reneging from their commitments to us.

“They would never go to war with India, something that we desperately wanted. They only wanted the situation to simmer. I remember we also asked them for SAMs (Surface to Air Missiles) so that we could target Indian helicopters, but they never allowed us to go beyond a certain point.

“Pakistan wanted to continue with a low-intensity war (thousand cuts war) saying that it would bleed India. When I went to Raja Bazar Rawalpindi in Pakistan in 1989, for every hundred rupees in Indian currency, I could get only Rs 80 in Pakistani currency. When I went there again in 1994, Rs 100 in Indian currency was exchanged for 126 Pakistani rupees. Even a layman like me could guess that Pakistan’s claim of bleeding India had proved wrong. They had not bled India, but had in the event bled themselves.

“When Ashfaq and Yaseen came back, I shifted to Muzaffarabad. There I met Mushtaq Zargar, Maqbool Elahi, Ashraf Dar, Javed Shalla and others. Maqbool Elahi was during those days trying to create Hizbul Mujahideen and trying to contact Jamaat leadership in the Valley to muster their support. But Hizbul Mujahideen was not named as such then. It was something like Ansaar-ul-Islam. But in Kashmir Valley, Master Ahsan Dar announced the launch of Hizbul Mujahideen and claimed that it was the Jamaat’s militant wing although Jamaat was not actually aware of it then.

“In fact ISI contacted Syed Ali Shah Geelani through Ghulam Nabi Fai, Dr. Ayub Thakur and Nazir Ahmed Qureshi. They all met with the ISI people at Kathmandu in late 1989 following which Geelani was arrested. It was only after Geelani was roped in that Jamaat actually became involved but before that when Ahsan Dar had made the announcement, it had created panic in some Jamaat ranks for they were not knowing anything about what was happening. At this time Jamaat could have disowned Hizb, but the situation was such that it had become a sort of fashion to have some clout among the militants. Initially it was Nasir-ul-Islam who became the *Amir* (Head) and Ahsan Dar became the chief commander of Hizb. So Jamaat not only owned Hizb, but steadily began to control it. Within six months of its creation, Nasir-ul-Islam was eased out and Salahuddin became the *Amir*. Nasir created his own Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen. After some time, Ahsan Dar too was ousted and Syed Salahuddin himself became the chief commander.

## **Kashmiris Not Suited for Militancy**

“Pakistan knew that the situation was boiling in Kashmir and it wanted it to continue the way it was. It suited its game. It knew Kashmiris’ military capacities as well as the kind of weaponry it had issued. So in any case, Kashmiris wouldn’t have done anything that would have brought any harm to Pakistan. It had not issued anti-aircraft guns or missiles. Moreover, Pakistan knew that Kashmiri was good in creating confusion but not good enough to irritate India into waging war against Pakistan.

“And it was largely true. Kashmiri boys, it can be said, 95 percent of them closed their eyes while firing bullets during military actions. Firing at an aimed target during combat is something only a battle-hardened warrior can do. Kashmiris were not like that. They can throw grenades here and there and again very rarely at an aimed target. They can do bomb blasts. They are also very prompt in shooting at soft targets, killing unarmed people on whatever pretext.

“A simple survey can drive this fact home. Study the military profile of Hizbul Mujahideen, for instance, as it has been there all along during the past 15 years of militancy in Kashmir. How many military actions it has undertaken? How many direct combats and ‘enemy casualties’ thereof? How many of these direct combats were carried out by the local Kashmiri militants? In how many were the foreign mercenaries involved? How many bomb and other blasts and grenade throwing incidents and again the extent of damage inflicted on enemy? And finally, how many soft-target killings, including the suspected police informers, militant adversaries (group clashes) and political activists go to its credit?”

## **Conclusion**

In view of the foregoing, the processes of conflict transformation in Kashmir has deep external linkages. The support and assistance and training of insurgents from across the border to keep the turmoil going has to stop. A great effort would be needed to address the issue of brutalization of the society. The resurrection of cultural and spiritual values in the society is yet another challenge.

*( To be continued )*

1. Sayed, Firdous, *Genesis of Militancy in Kashmir*, paper presented in a Seminar in Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh, September 19-20, 2005. According to Firdous, the position of Tarabali was confirmed by Gulam Nabi Fai, a former Jamaat –I –Islami activist and now based in Washington and is running Kashmir-American Council. According to Firdous, the former separatist leader who even hijacked a plane from Kashmir and blew it off at Lahore airport in Pakistan, Hashim Qureshi, also confirmed the Tarabali’s assertion.

We are thankful to Firdous Sayed for providing us with the copy of his presentation.