

Journal of Peace Studies Vol. 6, Issue 5&6 September-December 1999

Kashmir: The Restructuring of the Caliphate

Riyaz Punjabi*

*Prof. Riyaz Punjabi is Director (Hony.), Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi.

The new millennium dawned on Kashmir in a scenario of renewed violence and regeneration of conflict. The spectre of an ideology which was sought to be imposed on society in the first phase of militancy in 1990 returned back holding the potential of continuing mindless violence and turmoil. The events, which unfolded in the year 1999, clearly indicate that there is a renewed violent effort to restructure and perpetuate the ideology of establishing an Islamic Caliphate with Kashmir as its vantage point. It is important to note that there has been a mute response to both—the ideology as well as the mechanisms to realise this objective—at the level of the people. Be that as it is, this situation eludes the peace prospects in the state.

Before an attempt is made to reconstruct the events, it is relevant to point out that in an analysis of the ongoing militant movement in Kashmir, this writer had maintained that a particular militant grouping in Kashmir had stressed on the objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. [*The concept of an Islamic Caliphate: The Religious and Ethnic Pulls of Kashmir Militant Movement* (Journal of Peace Studies, Vol. 1 Issue 1. Nov.-Dec., 1993) reproduced in this issue as Document at the end]. This writer had further maintained that the militant grouping perceived a new Islamic state to stretch from Kashmir through Pakistan to Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia—a ‘la Caliphate’ of the medieval times.

This writer had argued that the militant groupings, perceived to represent the cultural identity of Kashmir would come into conflict with the groupings spearheading the movement for Caliphate, which would ultimately prolong the conflict in Kashmir.

From 1994 onwards, the militant groupings representing the ethno-cultural identity of Kashmir had started distancing themselves from militancy and violence. The leading militant group, J&K Liberation Front (JKLF) even renounced violence and pledged to utilise non-violent Gandhian methods to realise their objectives. The other like-minded groupings decided to join the electoral and democratic mainstream politics in J&K. It resulted in massive public participation in 1996 elections, which returned a civilian government in the state. However, it left the space open for those groupings, which were pursuing the objective of establishing the goal of an Islamic Caliphate. In absence of local support towards this ideology, the ideologues had to devise new mechanisms. The Kargil aggression may be seen as a part of this new mechanism.

It is relevant to note here that the logic of Pakistan’s claim on Kashmir has not undergone any major change during the last five decades. However, a new element of establishing an Islamic Caliphate was introduced later into this very logic of claiming Kashmir as a Muslim majority state. As was revealed during the aggression on Kargil in J&K in May-June 1999, the projections of the aggression continued to remain the same as they were in September, 1947: the tribal *lashkars* (raiders) driven by a religious (Islamic) zeal crossed over from Pakistan to ‘liberate’ their ‘Muslim brethren’ in J&K. This very logic was propounded by Pakistan in its

first military operation to annex Kashmir in 1947. This logic was repeated in 1965 when infiltrators were sent to Kashmir to engineer disturbances.

During the aggression on Kargil, Pakistan kept on insisting that the raiders (whom it described as Mujahideen) were not under its control, although practically it provided them all the logistical support including launching them from its own territory. It was no secret that these ‘Mujahideen’ were taking part in the operations along with the Pakistan regular army, which was later confirmed by Lashkar-e-Toiba leaders in Pakistan as well. The refrain was same old one – ‘Mujahideen’, driven by a “religious zeal” were on their mission to liberate their brethren in J&K State.

The Kargil aggression was followed by military take-over in Pakistan. At the political level, the extremist political groups had been raising the hype of ‘betrayal of Mujahideen’ by Nawaz Sharif government on the eve of withdrawal of Kargil aggression under international pressure. It was becoming increasingly clear that the ‘Mujahideen’ in consort with the influential and strong sections of Pakistan army perceived the aggression on Kargil as a part of ‘Jehad’ to ‘liberate Kashmir’. Hence the withdrawal was declared to be a ‘betrayal’.

The Pakistan-sponsored militant groups in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir were vociferous in their condemnation of withdrawal of Kargil aggression. The Pakistan-based militant groups, now active in Kashmir, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (earlier Harkat-ul-Ansar), Tehrik-e-Jehad-e-Islami and Al Badr ‘claimed that the liberation of Kashmir or its accession with Pakistan was not their objective, rather they were engaged in Jihad in the name of God to establish the Islamic Caliphate and the rule of Allah.[1] According to them, they would carry their Jihad to the logical conclusion.[2] These groups further declared that they were not bound by the dictates of government of Pakistan or US, rather they were bound by the dictates of Allah. It is interesting to note that the Chiefs of the private armies in Pakistan were underlining the role of the ‘Mujahideen’ in Kashmir. The Amir (Chief) of Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, Chief of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Fazal-ul-Rehman Khalil and Hizbul Mujahideen claimed that Kashmir issue would be ultimately resolved at the hands of ‘Mujahideen’.[3]

In first week of November, in a congregation (Nov.3-Nov.5) of Markaz-e-Toiba at Muridke, near Lahore in Pakistan which was attended by a strong contingent of 30,000 militants of Lashkar-e-Toiba, the military wing of its patron religious body, Markaz-e-Dawat-ul-Irshad, reaffirmed its resolve ‘of waging Jihad against the world particularly India and the US’.[4]

According to reports, ‘Lashkar soldiers narrated their battle experiences in places as far afield as Bosnia, Chechnya, the Philippines, Burma and Kashmir. In this congregation, the Chief of Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hafiz Mohd Saeed asserted that “we reject democracy: the notion of people’s sovereignty is anti-Islam. Only Allah is sovereign.” [5]

On November 3, the very first day of the congregation in Muridke, the ‘Suicide Squad’ of Lashkar-e-Toiba intruded into the Army Head Quarters at Badamibagh in Srinagar killing six army personnel. It was the first sensational attack carried out by foreign militants during the ten year long militancy in J&K state. In fact, it heralded a new phase of militancy in Kashmir. The Lashkar Chief, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed hailed the Srinagar attack as a big success.[6] He further warned that his commanders had the capacity to storm even the Indian Prime Minister’s office in New Delhi.

The intrusion on the Army Head Quarters was followed by attacks on the army camps at the hands of ‘suicide squads’ of militant groups of Lashkar-e-Toiba and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. These militant groups have been targeting the offices of local political parties, especially National Conference, and the political workers. The recent hijacking of Indian Airlines plane is the part of this ongoing new phase of militancy in J&K.

The ideologies of Islamic Caliphate found a marginal support in Kashmir. Jamaat-i-Islami completely denounced violence and militancy in the State. It was generally perceived that Hizbul Mujahideen group was the militant wing of Jamaat-i-Islami. However, Jamaat issued several statements denying any links with Hizbul Mujahideen. The Jamaat officials asserted that the fear of gun had coerced them into silence; hence the wrong perception of their relationship with Hizbul Mujahideen persisted. The message from the Kashmir society was clear that it had rejected this ideology. The muted responses to Kargil aggression and the other events are the obvious indicators of the rejection of this ideology at the societal levels.

In due course of time, the militant groupings professing the Caliphate ideology realised that their local base had completely shrunk. Thus they had to devise a new strategy to revive the ideology. The greater involvement of private armies, comprising mostly Pakistanis, Afghans and joined by the militants from some other Muslim countries, in the violence in Kashmir reveals this new strategy. The number of foreigners killed in the encounters with the security forces in J&K further substantiates this argument. A cursory reading of the statements of these groups in local media reveals that the motivating factor, by and large, remains ‘Jehad’ to be continued until the basis for establishing an Islamic Caliphate is laid.

It may be mentioned here that the engagement of private armies in Jihad in pursuance of Caliphate ideology holds a disastrous potential for Pakistan society and polity itself. The Afghanistan experience in raising Jehadi groups to deal with former USSR should dissuade the policy makers in Pakistan from encouraging, sustaining and exporting these groups to Kashmir, and they should comprehend the ultimate consequence of such militancy on their own society. Mir Jamil-ul-Rehman rightly maintains:

“The newspapers have often reported the existence of the training camps in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir where private armies are being raised by some Jehadi organisations. These camps are illegal because our law does not allow raising private armies. The gullible unemployed youth are attracted to these camps because they offer them food, weapons and heaven in the world after. These private armies are no threat to an enemy, but they have the potential to play havoc with the peace and stability of the country.” [7]

He further points out:

“Inexplicably, the jihadi parties keep on mushrooming; about a dozen are now operating in the country. They avow to liberate Kashmir and conquer India to free the Muslims from the Hindu rule. It is an attractive slogan meant to attract popular support. However, there is no way they can implement that slogan. The reasons are two. First, the Kashmiris would get their freedom by their own efforts with moral and diplomatic help from the people of Pakistan channelled through the government. Second, the age of conquering other countries is over.” [8]

It may be concluded that there is a renewed effort in targeting the ethno-cultural identity of Kashmir. It appears that the continuing onslaughts on this identity at the hands of Caliphate ideologies may push the former into a dormant State if not dwarf it. The ethno-cultural identity

of Kashmir, having faced the chipping process of Caliphate ideologues, has started asserting itself. The attempts to reverse the process holds the potential of a prolonged conflict in which groups of people arraigned against each other, creating a civil war like situation, can not be ruled out.

References

1. Weekly, *Chattan*, Srinagar, Kashmir (12th July-18th July, 1999) p.1.
2. Ibid.
3. Weekly, *Chattan* op.cit.,p12.
4. Weekly, *Outlook*, New Delhi. November.22, 1999 p. 52.
5. Ibid.
6. Weekly, *Outlook*, op.cit. p.53.
7. *The News*, Karachi, Pakistan, 10th October 1999.
8. Ibid.