

Religion, Terrorism and Inter-Community Relations: An Analysis of Jammu and Kashmir

Kamran Zarri^{1*}, Dr. Priyanka Sharma²

ABSTRACT

Terrorism have taken a new turn in the wake of 21st century, thereby creating a sense of insecurity among the people worldwide. Religion has often been identified as enhancing terrorism. It has also been challenging to comprehend the cause of the rise of terrorist activities with religion. The reason for the increase in terrorism has also remained difficult to understand. However, scholars all over the world have posited variety of reasons which blame religion on the one hand and socio-political factors on the other hand as the root cause of Terrorism. Thus, in many societies' conflicts may be regarded as religiously motivated, however, they may not actually be routed from religious antagonism and differences, and in some societies, chances are high that other factors ranging from economic, social, and political marginalization can invoke religion to unify resistance against perceived injustice and oppression and in some cases, radical groups may use it to fuel violence as we have witnessed today in some parts of the world. This paper will explore the relationship between Terrorism and Religion in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Religion, Inter-community Relations, Jammu and Kashmir*

One fundamental problem in the study and analysis of contemporary terrorism is the lack of an accepted definition of terrorism. Despite decades of academic literature on the subject of terrorism, no universally accepted definition has been found. Thus, finding an operational definition of both religious and terrorism appears to be equally challenging.

As a term, "terrorism" does not have deep roots in the English language. Rather, it comes from the French word "terrorisme" which was used to describe the state terrorism practiced in France during the Reign of Terror in the late eighteenth century. At that time, the word came to denote the tactic of utilizing indiscriminate violence, especially violence against non-combatants for the purpose of achieving political, ideological, or religious goals. In this sense, both nation states and social-political movements were viewed as potential sources of terrorism.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Strategic and Regional Studies, University of Jammu, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Road, Jammu Tawi (J&K) India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Lifelong Learning, University of Jammu, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Road, Jammu Tawi (J&K) India.

*Corresponding Author

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It is well-known fact that the effect of militarization and Terrorism had a deeper, larger, and wholistic impact on society. It engulfed the entire societal dynamics in its inferno and made its impact fell in all sectors and all sections of society. These implications were deeper because all institutions, inter-relationships, processes and all aspects of life, especially economy, social, political, culture, education, language, psychology, demography, health, development and literature, got involved and affected directly or indirectly making these implications more profound. Thus, it may be inferred that reality related to terrorism can be observed in totality of these factors because these are widespread and partly because these are necessarily related to each other.

In this regard, two main arguments are presented by academicians, professionals, experts, and others. The first argument states that the social implications of Terrorism need to be analyzed in the broader context of the whole situation of Jammu and Kashmir after 1947. The proponents of this view believe that it will offer a broader view and long-term perspective for emerging social-political issues and problems in Kashmir. They contended that many developments in Jammu and Kashmir started after 1947 and in the process of evolution, these got changed, revised, and distorted. They offer two supportive arguments in their favour. Firstly, this perspective argues that the whole situation shall be analyzed entirely in totality after 1947. Secondly, every development in Kashmiri society cannot be solely related to terrorism. It follows that this situation prevailed even before terrorism started and could have continued even in non-militancy situations. So, it seems highly purposeful to study all social developments with their origin, initiation, nature, and so on. The second argument says that the social impact of terrorism were particular and specific, and could only be understood realistically with in the limited time-frame of two decades. The use of this approach will make it possible to develop proper and detailed conclusions about these implications. The supporter of this viewpoint believes that this perspective will help us objectively, specificity, realism, and comprehensiveness in the explanation and analysis of implications.

Thus, it can be stated that both these theoretical and methodological arguments incorporate numerous aspects of social realism and social reality. The first argument emphasizes the entirety and totality of the perspective on the other the second argument emphasizes on the specificity and particularistic of the social implication of terrorism that can be realistically explained and understood. The two arguments, however, do not stand conflictive but complementary and accommodative in nature.

TERRORISM AND RELIGION

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir as it is manifested itself during the last two decades cannot be defined as a religious motivated conflict. It is a purely political conflict that has arisen out of indigenous political reasons. Though it has both external as well as internal dimensions. The external dimension of conflict are located in the history of Partition, and the claims made by Pakistan on Kashmir due to its Muslim majority character. The internal dimension of conflict are located in ethno-linguistic identity politics of Kashmir on the one hand and the context of alienation caused by existing political structure on the other. The excessive intrusion of the centre in the politics of erstwhile state, continuous manipulation of the local politics, and the failure of democratic and federal arrangements have perpetuated the sense of alienation in Jammu and Kashmir (Rekha Chowdary).

The factor of Religion did assume importance at a later point of time when the religious mercenaries joint the terrorism. However, it is important to note that the beginning of

terrorism was not made by Islamic groups. It was started by indigenous groups like Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) that did not advocate Islamic factor as the cause of terrorism. The cadre of JKLF was eliminated in the later period by the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen which perceived the problem of Jammu and Kashmir from the stand point of Islam and pursued the goal of merger of Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan. In this way religion come to influence the terrorism in a big way with the entry of Pan-Islamic groups like Harkut-ul-Mujahidin, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al Badr. These terrorists organizations invoked the ideology of Jihad and perceived the Kashmir conflict purely in the context of Islam.

Another important dimension of conflict where religion assumes importance, relates to the situation of terrorism and its implication for the religious minorities in Jammu and³ Kashmir. There are two contexts in which one can understand the nature of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir: Firstly, the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley immediately after the onset of militancy vis-à-vis terrorism, and secondly, the targeted killing of minorities.

Exodus of Kashmir Pandits

The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the aftermath of terrorism in 1990s has posed the question of religion in Kashmir. Many Kashmiri Pandits leaders had said that the exodus is the result of the extremists and fundamentalist forces in Kashmir. The Kashmir movement is defined as Islamic movement seeking merger of Kashmir with Pakistan. To establish their view point, the Kashmir pandit leaders on the other hand has sought to reinvent and redefine history and sought to argue that there has been a continuous persecution of Pandits in Kashmir for centuries together. It is in this context that the argument is put forward that exodus of pandits is not a new phenomenon and whenever the community has been under religious pressure, its response has been similar. Immediately after the exodus, the Panun Kashmir, a political organization was formed which referred to the exodus as a systematic effort of Muslims to oust the only minority community of Kashmir. Naming the armed militancy as a “Muslim religious crusade” of which the Kashmir Hindus become ‘first victims.

The exodus of Pandits results in the displacement of only minority community of Kashmir has posed a big question not only about the nature of political movement of Kashmir but also about the response of the separatist leadership and the Muslim community. However, it is important to ask these questions before arrives at a conclusion, First, was the exodus of Pandits motivated by religious sentiments. What role did separatist leaders play to the question of exodus and subsequently their return in the valley. And was the lack of trust between Pandits and Muslims is the reason which led to exodus of Pandits.

In response of these questions, it is important to discuss the role played by fringe elements that try to give religious colour to the Kashmir movement in the 1990s and the use of mosques and media to threaten the minorities, but the scale at which the exodus took place cannot be attributed to this factor alone. It is significant to note that pandits left the valley in the situation, when the state was in turmoil and uncertainty, as the valley was in the grip of militancy and there was total collapse of political administration and order. It is important to note that not only pandits, the militants also targeted the Muslims, forcing them to flee the valley. However, on the question of exodus the Kashmiri separatist leadership expressed

³ Chowdhary Rekha Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir
Kapur s. Paul and Ganguly Sumit the Jihad Paradox: Pakistan and Islamist Militancy in South Asia

regret and blamed their migration, to the Indian state. In recent time many separatists have stated that Kashmir and Kashmiri culture is incomplete without Pandits. In response to the final question, it is also important to note that there was no hostility between Muslims and Pandits before and after the exodus. The member of both communities shared a significant amount of space. They not only participate in each other festivals and share same culture but also speak the same language.

The inter-community relations before the exodus were as cordial as one could desire them to be. Despite the Muslims and Pandits following different faiths there was no tension between them. Except for two very brief periods in 1931 and 1986, Kashmir did not witness much expression of antagonism between the two communities. Many scholars have commented on the syncretism that prevailed in Kashmir. Mirdu Rai has equated it with the common context of religion in the Indian sub-continent where “on a popular level there was everywhere a continuity of traditions rather than divergence and this continuity formed on the basis of syncretism”. However, Rai finds such continuity of traditions and syncretism operating more in Kashmir due to something and syncretism operating more in Kashmir due to something that was more distinctive about its social structure. To quote her:

...what made the Kashmiri social structure so singular was the pattern of interaction between the Hindus and Muslims deriving from the valley's Hindus consisting solely of Brahman caste. This forced a relationship of ritual and economic interdependence between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims. In the absence of the full panoply of Jatis that characterized Hindu society elsewhere, the Pandits, whose caste status excluded them from either manual labour or work deemed polluting, relied heavily on Muslim specialist groups for the provision of essential services and liturgical goods...

Thus, while religious differences were fully acknowledged, there were also vital ties that bound these groups in the region. Unavoidable social interaction between these communities help not only to forge familiarity with each other lifestyle but also tolerance for each other's religious faith.

However, the 1931 communal riots form the major exception to the tradition of tolerance and common bond. However, Prem Nath Bazaz strongly strong argues that the upheaval of July 1931 was neither “the handiwork of arch conspirators” nor “the outcome of religious zeal”. It was, on the contrary, a result of the emergence of political forces that had joined together against ‘despotic rule of Dogras’ against feudalism. Chitrlekha Zutshi similarly rejects the argument that the tension in 1931 was motivated by religion. The rioting, according to her, was not a job “of a frenzied mob looking to kill in the name of religion, but one intended to redress the immediate economic grievances of Muslims”. According to her, “the tussle between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmir Pandits in after 1931 was more about political and economic representation than religious antagonism, Kashmiri Muslims tired of being exclude from education, the government, and the lower rungs of the administration rallied around the cry of ‘Islam in danger’ raised by youth recently returned from British India with professional degrees. Significantly, the looting following the central Jail incident was concentrated in the Vecharnag locality of Srinagar, home to Kashmiri Pandit petty administrators and moneylenders...”

With the exception of the 1986 riots in limited areas of Anantnag districts, there have not been instances of communal tensions in Kashmir in post-1947 period. The bond between the Muslims and Pandits was visible all through up to the period of their exodus. Even during 1990, when Pandits left the valley, they carried the memories of goodwill and cooperation

from their Muslim neighbours and friends. The situation has been recorded by one of the Kashmiri Pandit intellectuals in the following manner:

In the late 1989, when militancy surfaced in the valley, the Muslims in general, where as a neighbour, friend or a colleague asked their Pandit brothers not to leave their homes and provided security to them. Many Muslims accommodated Pandit families in their houses to save them from militant attacks. There are instances when Muslim ladies, at the risk of their lives, stood at doors of Pandit houses, to stop militancy gained the upper hand and the common Muslim himself came under the threat of the gun, timely information was provided to the Pandits to so that they flee to safety.

There are two more factors that reflects upon the relationship between Pandits and Muslims. Firstly, the fact that a few thousand Pandit families that still chose to live in Kashmir after the exodus of the community at large did not feel any threat to their lives from their Muslim neighbours. In fact, their existence in Kashmir after 1990s has been possible mainly due to the protection given to them by the Muslim community and the trust that existed between the two communities. It is a different matter that these Pandits became the soft target for the militants and were massacred took place in 1997 in the Sangrama village of Badgam district. Seven Kashmiri Pandits were killed in Wandhama on the eve of Republic Day. In 2003, 24 Pandits were killed in Nadimarg. It is important to note that most of these killings took place when the government was planning to rehabilitate the displace Pandits back to the valley. However, these massacres did not go very well with the sensitivities of the Muslims and each time strong popular resentment against these killing was expressed in Kashmir.

The second factor relates to the continuing bond between the Pandits and Muslim even after exodus. Apart from the fact that the relationship between neighbours and friends belonging to the two communities continues at various levels, there is strong feeling in Kashmir that is being articulated forcefully from the last few years, that Kashmir is incomplete without the Kashmiri Pandits. Not only the mainstream political leaders, but even the moderate separatists have been stating the fact that the exodus of the Pandits has meant a loss to the Kashmiri ethos. The loss of the sense of diversity provided by the presence of Pandits, howsoever miniscule minority they might have been, is considered to be a major loss of the Kashmiris.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism in Kashmir is infused by the notions of religious identity, but in actuality, it is not a war against a particular faith. Rather it is a geopolitical context between India and Pakistan that is rooted in national interests, notions of security, and the religious dynamic of ethnic and religious nationalism and militancy. During the present phase of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, secular ethos of the state has faced challenges from numerous sources. Religion has been implicated in the politics of the state in a variety of manners. However, despite the provocations of the extreme kind, the divisive politics has failed to assert itself. This is not to argue that the intervention of the factor of religion has not any tension at the societal and political level. On the contrary, there have been situations of unprecedented nature that have tested the resilience of the plural society a number of times: the emergence of fundamentalist forces seeking to overtake the separatist and politics of Kashmir, the mass exodus of Pandits from the valley, target killing and massacres of minorities, etc. These situations have impacted the political responses at the ground level. However, these responses have been countered by the social and political realities of the Jammu and Kashmir which make it difficult for the divisive politics to assert in a sustained manner.

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Conflict of Interest

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