

**EDUCATED YOUTH AND POLITICAL TURMOIL IN
JAMMU AND KASHMIR
(A CASE STUDY)**

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Abstract

Youth in Jammu and Kashmir has never known life except in chaos and political turmoil. The state has been a conflict zone between India, Pakistan and the People who stand for self determination. It is one of the most highly militarized regions of the world. From 1989 to 2002 only between 40,000 and 80,000 civilians, guerrilla fighters, and Indian security personnel died in violence. The major sufferer in this state of hegemony and Violence has been the Youth of the State. Their life, Education, physical and mental health, personal and social relationships, perceptions and attitudes all have been greatly influenced by the Political Turmoil over there. They became prey to both security forces and militants. However some of them succeeded in receiving education by whatever little opportunities they could avail. But the Irony is that even the highly Educated Youth has chosen Violence and armed Struggle as a method of conflict resolution. This is a big problem to worry about. Present study is an attempt at exploring the stand of Youth on political Turmoil. It aims at understanding the impact of Political turmoil on Youth of the state and their perceptions about conflict resolution. Attempt has also been made to find out the various factors which lead educated Youth to the path of Violence. The study is based on primary source of data which has been supplemented by Secondary data. Interview method has been used to collect the data apart from group discussions.

Key Words: Political Turmoil, Educated Youth, Conflict Zone, Militarization, Youth Perception

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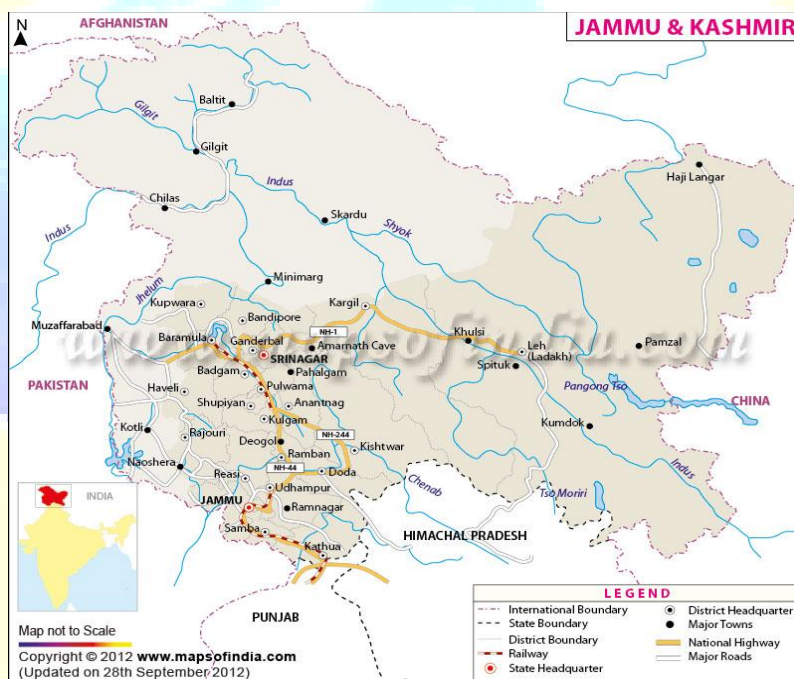
Introduction

Youth in Jammu and Kashmir has never known life except in chaos and political turmoil. The state has been a conflict zone between India, Pakistan and the Local People who stand for self determination. From 1989 to 2002 only between 40,000 (official Indian estimates) and 80,000 (claimed by the Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of pro-independence and pro-Pakistan groups) civilians, guerrilla fighters, and Indian security personnel died in violence. The process of Violence and hegemony is still going on. According to Indian counterinsurgency sources, in this period, more than 4,600 security personnel were killed, along with about 13,500 civilians (the vast majority Muslims) and 15,937 “militants” (the term for guerrilla fighters) including approximately 3,000 from outside Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir, “mostly Pakistanis and some Afghans.” Also in this period, 55,538 incidents of violence were recorded and Indian forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations captured around 40,000 firearms, 150,000 explosive devices, and over 6 million rounds of assorted ammunition.¹

In this atmosphere of chaos and disorder, violence and hegemony was born and brought up a generation of Youth who suffers at every Juncture. A generation of Young people who greatly influenced the political turmoil in the region and got influenced by it. A generation of Young people who was brought up in an environment where encounters, killings, tortures, detentions, curfews, disappearances, shut downs, forced migrations, communal clashes and every form of Violence was at its zenith. In such an atmosphere obviously their education, socio-economic life, personal and social relationships, their conception of and interaction with the outside world was badly affected. Hence, most of the time, they are left with no options but to combat. Some of them choose armed struggle for self determination, while others choose peaceful democratic ways to march forward towards a better future and a better Jammu and Kashmir. Some showed their anger by stone throwing. However few succeeded to receive good education by availing whatever little opportunities they had. But the irony of fate is that even educated youth has chosen violence as a weapon to combat. This is a big problem to worry about. The present study is intended at exploring the stand of Youth on violence and turmoil in the state, factors leading them to tread the path of violence. It also aims at understanding how violence has affected personal, family and social lives of youth in the state. How they see the turmoil and what do they think, can bring peace to the region.

Study Area

Jammu and Kashmir, an erstwhile princely state, is the apex state of India. It shares its borders with the states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab in the south, People's Republic of China in the north and east and Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the west and North West. It stretches between 32.17' north latitudes to 37.6' north latitudes and 73.26' east longitude to 80.30' east longitudes. Thus it lies wholly in the northern and eastern hemispheres. It spreads over an area of 2.22 lakh Sq.km. ² out of which 83803 Sq.km falls administered by Pakistan and 41500Sq.km is under the occupation of People's Republic of China.³



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The State is divided into three regions viz Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Jammu is the Winter Capital whereas Srinagar is the Summer Capital of the state.

Article 370 of the Indian constitution grants special status to the state. Therefore all provisions of the constitution of India do not apply to the state. The state has its own constitution and Flag. ⁴

Brief History and Extent of Turmoil

Jammu and Kashmir has been a conflict zone for India, Pakistan and Local People of Jammu and Kashmir who have been struggling for self determination, since the time when two dominions of

India and Pakistan were created in 1947. At that time there were around 560 princely states under British India and Kashmir was one among them. The hold-up in deciding Kashmir's future by Maharaja Hari Singh after the British left was the core cause of Kashmir conflict. The tribal invasion caused by raiders from Pakistan made the Maharaja feel anxious and he decided to take help from India. India's viceroy Mountbatten promised him militarily help and in return Maharaja signed the "Letter of Instrument of Accession to India", which stands controversial ever since. Nehru, the first PM of India, on November 02, 1947 on all India Radio announced that the future of Kashmir will be decided by means of Plebiscite. However the plebiscite is still pending. This delay in Plebiscite paved the way for the intervention of Pakistan as well. From 1989 local the militant phase of the movement for self determination started. The aftermath of the conflict is the large scale destruction of life and property. The number of Indian security personnels present in the state is around 700000. In the span of last two decades, around 90,000 people have been killed, and around 10,000 have disappeared. Indian military has been accused of rapes, killings, lootings, custodial torture and deaths, and violating human rights⁵. The major sufferer by and large in the ongoing turmoil has been the youth of the state. Their health, education, employment, social and personal relationships, perceptions and attitudes indeed their whole life has been affected.

Data Base and Methodology

The study is based on Primary data. Research Scholars and Post Graduation students from 5 universities namely University of Jammu, Kashmir University, Aligarh Muslim University, Hyderabad University, and University of Eastern Finland have been interviewed apart from focussed group discussions.

Students of University of Eastern Finland and Hyderabad University were interviewed through phone calls and emails, while Students from other Universities were intervined personally.

In total 18 people were interviewed. 8 people were interviewed from Jammu province, 8 from Kashmir province and 2 from Ladakh province. Respondents were both male and female.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

1. To study the approach of Educated Youth of Jammu and Kashmir towards violence and political turmoil.

2. To examine the factors that lead to their involvement in the conflict and to find out the various problems they face at home and outside the state.
3. To explore their perceptions and viewpoints about the conflict resolution.

Factors causing involvement of Youth in Violence

The recent Amnesty International report examines the phenomenon of disappearances in Jammu and Kashmir. While some of the 'missing' may have crossed the border, by far the larger number have fallen victim to arrests, detentions, tortures and deaths at the hands of the security forces. Courts cannot provide much relief as court orders are ignored by bureaucrats and armed forces.⁶ The Press Council of India's 'committee' under B. G. Verghese produced a report exonerating army personnel of mass rape at Kunan Poshpora in 1991. However, the victims continue to suffer even today. Regular allegations of human rights violations are being made in the Kashmir press.⁷

In the course of study 86% of the respondents opined that violation of human and political rights have led the educated youth on the path of violence in the state. When they see their families being tortured and detained, innocent people being killed, and when they are denied of their political rights they go for violent measures.

The militarization and imposition of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) has been condemned unanimously. It has been observed as one of the most important factors forcing the youth for adopting a Gun Culture. No other law has incurred the odium this Act has within the country and abroad in United Nations fora, especially in the Human Rights Committee, repeatedly.⁸

Young people see security forces and militants as an intrusion into their privacy. Unnecessary and frequent Security checks, arrests and detentions, curfews, their constant vigilance and a constant anxiety have fuelled their anger. The implementation of AFSPA, POTA and PSA has further resulted into killing and detention of many youths and thus has aggravated the already ruined state of affairs. However 47% of the respondents believe that the ongoing chaos and involvement of educated youth has its origin in India's freedom, partition and the later history. Thus historical factors also serve as a motivating vigour which drives youth towards violence. Sharp economic slowdowns and low levels of per capita income appear to increase the likelihood of conflicts.⁹ Around 48% of the respondents think that Unemployment, underemployment and poor economic conditions are the other causes which seem to be forcing the youth towards

violence. It has been observed that unemployed youth is more prone to violence than the employed youth.

Children born and brought up in a violent conflict zone generally do not find other measures as effective as violence. 73% of the respondents believe that the already prevailing chaos, disorder and lawlessness in the region motivates youth to choose violence as a measure to the conflict resolution.

In the course of Study it has been observed that a deep sense of alienation prevails among all the respondents. The political turmoil has created a trust deficit both between the youth and the people living outside Jammu and Kashmir apart from the trust deficit between Govt and the Youth. It has been observed that respondents have lack of faith in people while staying outside the state. they expressed a kind of fear while staying outside the state. Outside the state they are seen with suspicion. They face unequal treatment while travelling or residing at any place. They face problems while making their passports. They face accommodation problem all over the India and especially in the NCR. Even within the state especially in Jammu city they are unequally treated. 65% of the respondents reported that such an unequal treatment is very common for every Student from Jammu and Kashmir who is studying outside the state.

In many cases they are branded as terrorists on their face. They reported constant humiliation at every level whether in the classroom or in their friend circle or while sitting at some public place. Such a humiliation and unlikely treatment is can prepare the grounds for rebel and anger. All the respondents stated that Humiliation and sense of Honour may serve as an important factor affecting youth attitude towards violence.

Kunan, a small hamlet in Poshpora area of Kupwara district, was 'stormed' by soldiers on the night between February 22 and 23, 1991. Thirty-two women were mass-raped. The world community raised hue and cry for a couple of months and ultimately the traumatised victims were forgotten.¹⁰ such incidents and the subsequent delayed rather denied justice is enough a motivating force to push the youth towards violence.

It was reported that if a member of their family has been killed or when some security personnel molests or teases a woman in the family, people may spontaneously retaliate and. The respondents expressed that Family honour might be an important reason which motivates youth towards violence.

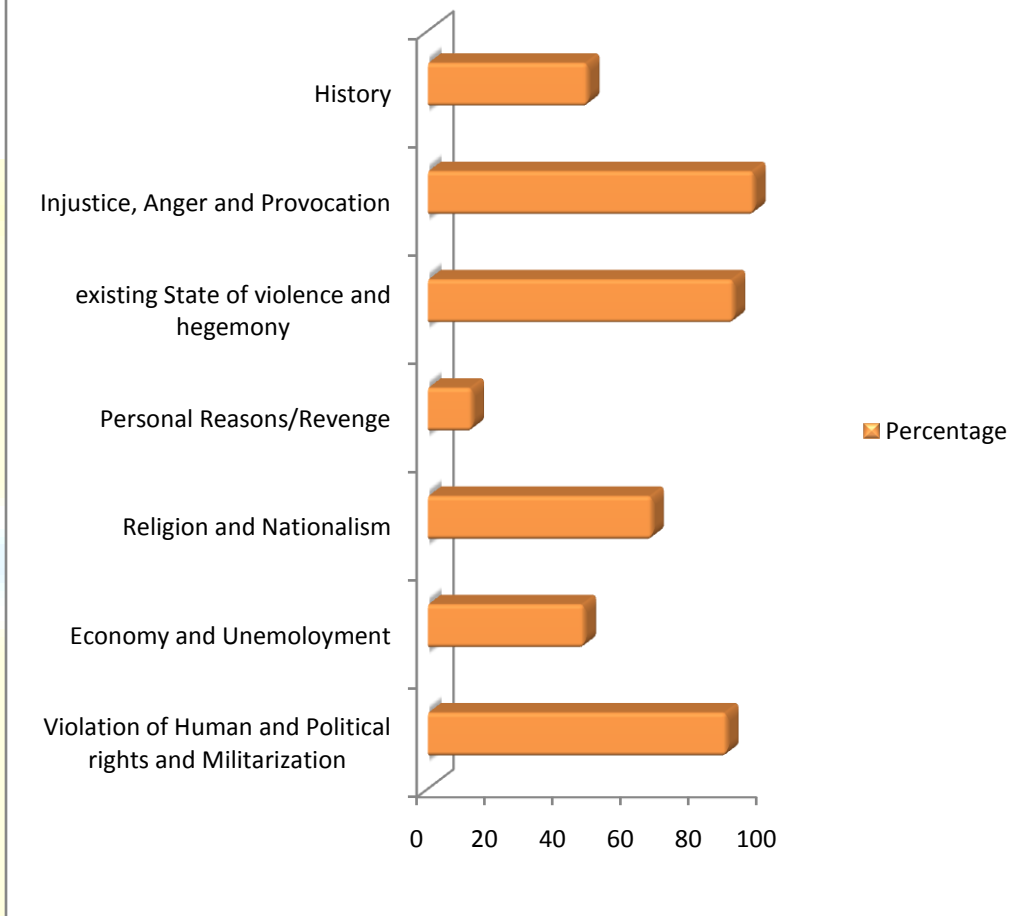
The agitation, which began in late June 2008 over "diversion" of 800 kanals (one kanal is one-eighth of an acre or one-third of a hectare) of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (sasb) for the Amarnath yatra, went beyond the issue of land diversion, which had brought people in Kashmir on to the streets. It was overtaken by the demand for freedom from India. The immediate trigger for the resurgent demand for azadi was the sense of insecurity in the Valley at the communal attitude of the security forces and the complete dependence on New Delhi for their physical well-being during the agitation in Jammu for reversal of the order cancelling allocation of land to the sasb. The State's abysmal role, especially of its law enforcing agencies, which failed to stop rioters in Jammu, Kathua and Udhampur from fomenting a communal divide and blocking the national highway (the only road connecting the Valley of Kashmir with the rest of India) infuriated a people whose right to life, already under threat from a ubiquitous security apparatus, was further imperilled by a fear of starvation.¹¹

A good percentage of respondents opined that lack of esteem among security personnels for religious scriptures and sacred places and sometimes their explicit communal nature provokes youth to indulge in violence. Kashmiri nationhood is another driving force that influences the mind set of Youth. When they see their own people suffering, it provokes them. 66% of the respondents believe that religion and nationalism provokes the youth to tread the path of violence. Many students gave the example of recent Goon Killings and Kishtwar Incident which happened in the summers of 2013 respectively.

Many students expressed deep dissatisfaction with the State governments, unfair elections, widespread and rising bribery and corruption. They opined that pathetic economic and employment policies of the state government has also left the youth of the state frustrated and helpless.

They said many youthful persons take up arms to struggle for the economic and social security they have been deprived of, especially by political leaders, those in public sector and who exploited the positions for their own benefits. 46% of the respondents believe social insecurity and revenge as other factors affecting the attitude of Youth towards violence.

FACTORS AFFECTING INVOLVEMENT OF EDUCATED YOUTH IN VIOLENCE



Consequences of political turmoil among educated youth

Youth in Jammu and Kashmir has always been the victim and prey to violence of both security forces and militants. Generally they are hardly left with any other choices but to combat.

Mental health is a vital part of overall wellbeing and quality of life. Mental illness has reached epidemic proportion with many suffering from post traumatic stress disorders¹² among the youth of the state. Amin, S and A.W. Khan¹³ found that in Kashmir the prevalence of depression is 55.72%. The prevalence is highest among 15-25 years age group. However in the course of study

86% of the respondents reported depression and other related problems. It was reported that they continued to have serious emotional and psychological problems. Anxiety, depression, fear, hopelessness, frustration, annoyance, sense of insecurity, threat perceptions to them and their families, complete alienation and bias are all what they have been experiencing since the day they came to senses. And all this had serious repercussions on their mental health.

Profound social distancing outside the state, discriminations, wrongful arrests, being branded as terrorists, always seen with suspicion and difficulties in getting accommodation are some of the major problems they face while being outside the state. 73% of the respondents reported a deep sense of alienation and social distancing and 66% reported severe accommodation Problems while being outside the state.

Youth is also the earning hand of their families. When the earning hands of the family are chopped, the socio economic condition of the family is naturally affected very much. Poor socio economic conditions, unemployment and lack of proper environment for education are some other outcomes of the turmoil. Curfews, shut downs by, encounters, occupation of public buildings like schools and hospitals by security forces are the biggest hurdles in receiving proper education, suitable employment and overall socio economic development and quality of life. Economic insecurity, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of health facilities are all the aftermaths of turmoil.

They said the politically generated inter community and intra community trust deficit is horrible. Pointing to recent Kishtwar communal riot it was stated that the VDC's (Village Defence Committees) is a great threat to the social ties over there. They reported that arming of a particular community, Infact any community in the name of self defence is creating two major problems viz communal riots and trust deficit between people of different communities.13% respondents faced communal violence at personal level and communal remarks on their face both within and outside the state.

Teasing, Sexual abuse by both Militants and security forces has been reported by 33% of the female respondents. Female respondents reported an acute level of depression and fear while being at home. They prefer to stay in university campuses instead of going home even in

vacations. They reported that they don't go to the market, school, college or hospital, even if it is at a stone's through from their home, unless there is some male member with them.

It is very much haunting that being Kashmiris, they do not feel safe either in their own state or outside the state.¹⁴ Sense of Insecurity, threat perception etc are the other troubles the educated youth face. 95% of the respondents said they live in extreme fear, whether inside or outside the state except University campuses.

26% of the respondents reported that while being in the state they along with their families have been unpaid labourers many a times, for the security forces, during their school days.

47% of the youth reported that while being in the villages in the state they do not sleep at home out of fear. Their families send them to some other place or nearby towns out of fear. Temporary Migrations were also reported during the study. Around 47% of the respondents reported such incidents.

According to some who have travelled, it is a standard practice that once the train enters Punjab, for personnel of the Punjab police to enter the coaches, and till they leave the train no Kashmiri escapes their attention. Each person is taken to the toilet where he is searched and luggage thoroughly rummaged. All this leads to demands for money, a shawl or even a carpet.¹⁵

A good percentage of youth also said that they are always seen with doubt and suspicion everywhere. They found a great trust deficit among people. 47% of the respondents reported such problems. Unnecessary security checks, Searching, and vigilance while travelling has been reported by 73% respondents.

Political turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir has although affected everyone regardless of their religion, region, caste, creed or colour, but the youth of state has been the main target. They suffer at every juncture. They face teething troubles in their day to day life both within and outside the state.

Major problems with Educated Youth of Jammu and Kashmir

| Problems Reported | Percentage of |
|-------------------|---------------|
|-------------------|---------------|

| | Total Respondents |
|--|-------------------|
| Forced Migrations | 46 |
| Abuse and Humiliation | 47 |
| Accommodation Problems | 69 |
| Social Distancing and Alienation | 73 |
| Suspicion, Frequent Checking and Searching | 73 |
| Depressions and related Problems | 86 |
| Insecurity and threat Perception | 87 |
| Fear and Hopelessness | 89 |

Proposals for Policy makers

The first and foremost priority of the Central and the State government should be to protect human and political rights in the state. This can be done by providing the youth with a rather more democratic environment. In this direction gradual demilitarization of the social space is the first step. In such a sensitive region, no section of the society should be provided with arms. This can lead to more communal clashes and trust deficit among different communities and government. There is urgent need of trust building among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. Laws like AFSPA, POTA, and PSA etc must be replaced by democratic laws. Respondents do not seem to have that much trust in the Govt of Jammu and Kashmir. As they see the state government as indifferent to them. Govt should make and implement effective plans for Active Youth Participation. Promotion of communal harmony by establishing respect and cooperation between different communities should also be the important concern of the State and Central governments. Propagators of communal violence hatred and animosity between different communities should be punished and dealt strictly according to the law. Generation of employment, creation of more and more economic opportunities should be focused on. The ruined condition of Education and public service must be improved. New employment policies do not seem to satisfy the educated youth of the state. Rampant corruption in the public sector has created hegemony in the state. To check corruption strict laws should be made and those

involved must be dealt strictly. Youth residing in different parts of the country must be provided with a kind environment in which they could feel and live safe and secure. They must be treated with extra benevolence in order to bring them in the main stream. Nonaligned and just media should be encouraged in the state so that it may serve as instrument of bringing together the people and the governments. As they believe their cries have been unheard since long. However the situation of the State in general and that of youth in particular can never be vastly enhanced by means of development programmes alone. It would be wrong to assume that education employment and economic development is all that youth would be satisfied with. They must be provided with a democratic and just environment apart from setting the stage for peaceful talks for conflict resolution. Last but not the least Youth participation in socio politico and economic development programmes is necessary.

Conclusion

Educated youth of Jammu and Kashmir are the finest group of the society. They are the true representative of Jammu and Kashmir. They are being forced by the circumstances to opt for violence which can be a serious threat to the Indian sub continent and south Asia. They explained the situation of the turmoil in depth as they had been experiencing it since long. They provided various important and practical solutions to the political turmoil in the state. However they face serious problems at personal and social level due to the ongoing conflict within and outside the state which had serious repercussions on their attitude and perceptions apart from mental and physical health. They must be taken an extra care of both within and outside the state.

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