

Kashmir, Before and After Burhan Wani - “A situation now spiraling out of control”

Thursday 4 August 2016, by [MUSTAFA Seema](#) (Date first published: 3 August 2016).

NEW DELHI: the 22-year old poster boy of militancy in Kashmir Valley Burhan Wani is shot dead by the security forces. His death unleashes a series of protests across the Valley where tension has spiked to new levels following the encounter.

In the dichotomy that is Kashmir, Wani had become the face of militancy for the security establishment, but was the face of hope and aspirations for an increasingly large section of Kashmiri youth. He had emerged after the strong suppression of youth protests in 2008 and again in 2010 on the social media. He went on to discard his mask, take ownership of the path that he had chosen as a reported Hizbul Mujahideen recruit, and disclosed that he was from Tral and a well educated family.

His death could prove to be a turning point in a slow ascending curve that can climb the graph dramatically at any point in time. There is deep worry amongst the more aware in Kashmir of the situation now spiraling out of control. More so because Wani's death has come in the midst of deep unrest in Kashmir, daily protests, stone pelting, arrests, curfew, clampdowns with no effort by the political authorities to bring down the temperature.

There is no dialogue, no reaching out, not a word by Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti who had been in the forefront of protests in 2010 when 126 boys were shot dead under the National Conference government, by the forces across the Valley in different incidents.

Instead, the confrontation between the forces and the people seem to have become more severe, with the youth now defying all restrictions to come out on the streets to lodge their protests against India, not caring about safety. The alienation, as all observers in Kashmir are agreed, is sharper; the anger more visible, and the helplessness and despair growing in the face of a completely non-responsive government.

The story of Wani—his militancy and his popularity—feeds into the larger picture that can be found in an interview given by his father Muzaffar Ahmad Wani to Mir Basit Hussain and carried by the youth portal Youth Ki Awaaz earlier this year.

The first point Wani reportedly made was how his entire statement to a Delhi newspaper was not reported, and only a reference to Islam was retained. This of course is the usual Delhi mainstream response to Kashmir: a border state, with the complexities inherent in its geographical location, compounded further by history and debilitating politics, not being understood or recognized.

In what Muzaffar Wani said lay the story of many a household in Kashmir that had felt the impact of insurgency, of encounters, of enforced disappearances over decades. As the father, grieving then for one son, Khalid, and now for two, said, “Young boys are getting radicalized because of the everyday torture and humiliation they face.” And added, “to douse that fire you need water, not petrol.”

And water is what seems to be missing in Kashmir for decades. Why boys take to militancy has a simplistic answer as a first response. Because it is there, the way out ingrained into the system, with

terror operatives always looking for and encouraging new recruits. Just as why there have been so many shootings ending in massacres in the United States. Because of the easy availability of guns that can then be picked up by those who want to use them.

Having said that, the reasons are highly complex with the youth being driven to militancy by circumstances, and hopelessness in a climate where insurgency co-exists with state suppression and violence. In this context Muzaffar Wani made several important and revealing points in the interview.

Burhan was just a young lad leading a normal life. His elder brother Khalid who had joined the Hizbul earlier was killed in an encounter when he had come to meet Burhan, a teenager at the time. Burhan was also beaten up according to reports. Wani would provide an insight into the decisions taken by both. Khalid along with his father was arrested and interrogated, sometimes for days, when there was any untoward incident in the area and the family was subjected to hundreds of searches with even walls of their home being broken by the invasive forces who walked into their home at any time of the day or night. Burhan joined after his brother was killed, with the guilt, grief, and anger driving him to the terrorist outfit, more so because the system offered no solutions. Not even reprieve from the constant humiliation of detention and searches.

His father answered an oft repeated question with the wisdom of his years as to why all others, similarly treated, did not join militancy, "Almost everyone here has been beaten up by the Army. You also must have had your share. But everyone didn't become a militant. It depends on how much one can take. Yeh aap ki ghairat pe depend karta hai (It depends on your self-respect). Someone's 'Ghairat' got challenged time and again, so he decided to answer back. Others decided to stay quiet. My son couldn't bear to see the atrocities and the humiliation, so he was forced to choose the path which he is on right now."

Almost all homes in Kashmir are impacted. Militancy enters some homes after a history of being detained, interrogated, questioned at will disrupts normal life on an almost daily basis. As Wani pointed out, they were rounded up and detained for several days at times during VIP visits. They were whisked off and questioned for any untoward incident in the area, as a matter of routine. The Public Safety Act was used with impunity against the young people in what was a fear-ridden environment. Young children grew up seeing the male elders in their families being taken away, mothers fearful and terrified, and reacted according to their own disposition later.

Some join the militants, others take to stone pelting, still others vent their anger on the social media, but all in all the young in Kashmir are disturbed, alienated and angry. In Wani's words heard from many in Kashmir, "I have faced a lot of problems after 2010, especially in 2012. They (police) used to detain me whenever militants used to strike. One day, unknown men snatched rifles from the police; they detained me and Khalid for 5 days. When Obama had come to Delhi, they detained Khalid! He missed his exams due to that."

And again, "A Sarpanch (village head) got shot and again Khalid and I were put behind bars. During the elections (Parliamentary as well as assembly) we used to be put under detention. Khalid on an average used to spend two months in a year in jail. They (police) raid our house every now and then. That is a routine for us now. And we don't have a problem with that. It's their duty. But when they unnecessarily used to detain and trouble Khalid and even me, that used to mentally disturb every one of us. They have searched our home may be a thousand times. Not only rooms, they check the walls to see if anyone is hiding."

Wani pointed out what all, including the media forgot, Burhan did not start this, he was not responsible. "When all this started, Burhan was not even born," he said.

And this portends of the future. As those out on the streets, or before their computers, or with terrorist outfits all have one thing in common—they are young, they are all part of a generation born and brought up in conflict. Unlike their parents, their patience is limited, their aspirations high, and their tolerance for abuse low. They do not share the same support for Pakistan as the older generations did, but their alienation from India is perhaps sharper and more intense now. It was not so before 2010. It has increased since. If one spike in the curve was in 2010, the second perhaps even sharper spike has been the PDP-BJP government in Jammu and Kashmir. The anger against both has reached new levels, with matters worse as there is no alternative today even marginally acceptable. Omar Abdullah brought new hope for the youth when he came to power, but when this dissipated rapidly through his acts of commission and omission, the PDP was there on the sidelines some of the shock.

Today there is no political party with even minimal credibility to stem the tide of alienation and anger. Testimony to this is the increasing number of protests with more and more people coming out to defy the guns and bullets of the forces.

This for any government would have rung big alarm bells but clearly the leadership has turned deaf, and cannot hear the bells as they toll. For the signals are that Kashmiri youth are readying for a battle, but this will not be fought through terrorism that the state is fairly well equipped to deal with. But through possibly increasingly violent protests on the streets that will open the doors to what could become a big human tragedy.

Seema Mustafa

P.S.

* <http://focusweb.org/content/kashmir-and-after-burhan-wani>

This article was originally published in The Citizen on 28th July.