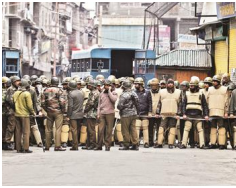


By Sidharth Mishra



Kashmir when calm inspires poetry, it inspires photography, it inspires good cinema and of course tourism. Kashmir when revisited by unrest invites journalists, prying on gore and blood. Ever since Hizbul commander Burhan Wani died about a fortnight back, the airtime and newspaper columns have been full of reports on Kashmir, each trying to outdo the other in blaming the government in finding a solution. None, however, said what their diagnosis of the problem was. In being fashionably liberal, the mainstream media has just stopped short of giving “azaadi” to the Kashmiris. On the other hand, the new genre of so-called nationalist media has left nothing to chance in painting Kashmiris as monsters. The truth lies somewhere in between.

Finding a solution to the issue through a media dialogue should be the last thing on government’s agenda. Mehbooba Mufti “going into the shell” may not have hurt the Kashmiris as much as it has hurt the media, which has repeatedly questioned her credibility. A government needs to act and not just talk, as National Conference leadership of Farooq and Omar Abdullah were inclined to do.

During this turmoil, write ups on micro-blogging site Twitter by the former Srinagar Corp Commander Lt Gen Ata Hasnain impressed me the most. Soon after the news of Wani’s elimination, he twitted, “Burhan Wani, leader of new militancy, killed by 19RR and SOG as per report. Fine achievement but now prevent re-emergence of new leadership.”

Thereafter he came out a very detailed and lucid understanding of the issue, writing, “My initial assessment, which I shared immediately, was that the authorities had to be careful in handling the post-encounter situation. This is in light of the fact that the Hurriyat would attempt to make much of this event and use it to motivate the youth; passionate crowds should be expected at the funeral. We had occasion to witness 30,000 people at a funeral of a Pakistani terrorist late last year. It will need to be a fine decision for the political and security authorities to allow a public funeral or provide a quiet burial done by the Police with the family attending. In the past, authorities have mostly given the freedom to conduct public funerals and faced the consequences for it.”

Despite the media going berserk over the handling of the issue saying officials have lost control, a quick look at the sequence of event in light of Hasnain’s prognosis should make one think that government all this while seems to be working according to a plan. Let’s first look at how violence expectedly erupted. As Burhan was laid to rest in his native place Tral, violent mobs attacked installations of police and paramilitary forces at various places in the Valley and set

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ablaze several buildings including three police installations. There was no deployment of security forces in Tral and adjoining areas to avoid a confrontation with the people coming to participate in the funeral. However, despite restraint, confrontations did take place and people did in retaliatory firing.

There were also reports of militants trying to “superimpose their attacks” on public protests, as was evident in an attack on District Police Lines in Pulwama which the security forces thwarted. The camps at Sangam, Larnoo, Seer, Gopalpora, Minority camp Mattan, Kokernag, Dooru, and Janglat Mandi were also attacked by the protestors, which in some cases invited retaliation. While holding firm, the government also issued an appeal to the parents to restrain their children from participating in such protests so that young lives were not lost.

The state police, too, urged protesters not to resort to violence saying it does not bring the right consequences and that it would like to avoid the killing of the youth. So the government has its record clean saying that they had maintained restraint and issued adequate warning before retaliation. This would be something which the liberal media would find difficult to counter.

On the political front, too, Mehbooba Mufti reached out to opposition parties including the National Conference, CPI(M), and also the Hauriyat to help restore peace in Valley. At the Centre, Rajnath Singh took Congress president Sonia Gandhi into confidence and also spoke to former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. This has helped the government focus more professionally than politically.

Violence was effectively contained; and as mentioned above, allowing people to come out in the day was probably part of the strategy. This was followed by effective counter-plan as the militants tried to “super-impose” their moves on the mass protests. Now that the streets have fallen silent, the government has got into fighting on the news frontier – the new age terror. As Ata Hasnain puts it, “the major difference today, even in comparison to the situation five years ago, is the widespread use of social media to iconise neutralised terrorist leaders and collect flash mobs. The authorities know best how to handle the situation and, politically, this is a challenge for the coalition government.” This is the challenge at hand for the PDP-BJP coalition government. No wonder it decided to shut down the internet and mobile networks in the valley to contain strife.

To their credit, in the midst of the current turmoil, they managed to revive the annual Amarnath Yatra, whose route passes largely through South Kashmir, the area where Burhan Wani operated. The Yatra had resumed from Jammu base camp on the afternoon of July 10, after remaining suspended for just two days. Not a small achievement by any measure.

It's not to suggest that a solution to the Kashmir issue has been finally found. But certainly, the

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government and security forces, for now, have been able to successfully isolate the issue to a limited area of the Kashmir valley leaving other parts of the state largely unaffected. Pakistan's designs have so far been neutralised both on ground zero and in the United Nation. Though the new age Kashmiris may continue to vent their misplaced angst on the social media, it's not going to take their movement very far.

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