

## Children as Combatants and the Failure of State and Society: The Case of the Kashmir Conflict

KHALID SHAH

**ABSTRACT** At the forefront of the new militancy in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) are children. This brief builds on a United Nations (UN) 2018 report highlighting the recruitment of juveniles by militant groups in Kashmir, and explores the issue using data and case studies. The brief discusses the factors and conditions that encourage minors in J&K to join such groups, in the context of the weaknesses of the existing juvenile justice system in the country and the excesses employed by security forces.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many analysts hold that the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is in the throes of a new wave of militancy—one that is driven by the growth of the internet and social media that allow militants to broadcast their propaganda in real time. In 2015, for example, a series of images of young boys brandishing guns in the jungles and orchards of south Kashmir went viral on social media. The imagery widely provoked shock and horror. Until that point, the old insurgency of the 1990s was considered successfully contained, and young Kashmiris had become increasingly disenchanted with violence. During the period between 2008 and 2015, prolonged protests had provided a platform for the expression of discontent, thereby reducing the need for local boys to join militancy. Indeed, the number of local Kashmiri recruits had decreased considerably in the early 2000s. By 2010, the number was down to six.<sup>1</sup>

The wielding of social media in 2015 showed a drastically different *modus operandi* from that of the old militancy in Kashmir. Until those pictures came out, there was little public discourse about local militancy.<sup>2</sup> In the past, militants remained in hiding and away from the limelight, either for the lack of access to media or to avoid being caught by security forces. The new crop of militants, however—armed with the power of instant fame through social media—seem more eager to make a public display of their involvement in armed *jihad*.

At the forefront of this new pattern in Kashmir insurgency was Burhan Wani. Throughout 2015 and the early months of

2016, Wani captured the public imagination in Kashmir through social-media pictures and videos that went viral in the state. The power of these images was so strong that the issue of militancy not only established itself in the popular discourse but also marketed itself as a commodity, similar to how a new product in the market would entice consumers.<sup>3</sup> However, while Burhan Wani's poignant life story and foray into militancy became a catalyst for fresh recruitments, an important aspect of the phenomenon he embodied escaped the attention of many: that Wani was a minor at the time of joining the ranks of Hizbul Mujahideen, akin to the "child soldiers" of the militancy in the 1990s.

After Wani, many young boys who had not reached adulthood at the time of recruitment joined various extremist outfits. During the unrest of 2016, triggered by Wani's killing, a new dimension of the conflict emerged: more and more minor children were taking part in street protests and enforcing shutdowns.<sup>4</sup> The militant groups used the juveniles as tools of propaganda and to recruit more young boys into their ranks.

The involvement of children in acts of violence, e.g. stone pelting and arson, was then followed by a heavy-handed crackdown of security forces. In the absence of a juvenile justice mechanism, the law-and-order apparatus failed to differentiate between children and adults, in turn provoking an ever greater degree of anger amongst the Valley's people. The case studies in this article will show how some of the children who were involved in stone pelting and other forms of

protests were eventually lured into the ranks of militancy, due to the government's failure to rehabilitate and steer them back into mainstream society.

## UN REPORT AND INTERNATIONAL NORMS ON CHILDREN AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

'Child soldier' is a term used to define any boy or girl below the age of 18 recruited by an armed/insurgent group as an active combatant, or in other capacities.<sup>5</sup> The concept itself is not new; many armed conflicts have seen the use of children as active combatants, suicide bombers, spies, over-ground workers and, in some cases, as means of propaganda. For instance, in Jammu and Kashmir, a 17-year-old student became a suicide bomber and blew up an explosive-laden car in front of an army camp in 2000.<sup>6</sup> Other cases, too, have seen the involvement of Pakistani children in cross-border infiltrations into the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2007, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) formulated the Paris Principles—a set of guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. The reviewed guidelines of 2007 do not limit the term 'child soldiers' to active combatants who take part in direct hostilities; they include "any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes."<sup>7</sup>

Recruitment of minors in armed groups is a violation of existing international

humanitarian law and conventions. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court deems it a 'war crime' to enlist children under the age of 15 in state/non-state armed forces or to use them in hostilities.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Article 4 of the UNHCR Optional Protocol calls upon states to criminalise the recruitment of any person under the age of 18. It states:

1. Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.
2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalise such practices.
3. The application of the present article shall not affect the legal status of any party to an armed conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Over 110 countries, including India in 2005, have ratified the Options Protocol.<sup>10</sup> The International Labour Organisation Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which was ratified by 150 countries, also prohibits the forces or voluntary use of children in armed conflicts.<sup>11</sup> Many countries have now come up with special programmes for children involved in armed conflict.

The UN also plays a remarkable role in highlighting the plight of children in armed conflicts. Each year, the Secretary General of the UN releases a report on "Children and Armed Conflict," with the aim of creating global awareness about the exploitation of children by various non-state and state actors. The report, tabled in the UN Security Council,

contains findings of a worldwide study to inform the global community on the issue.

Over the last few years, the state of J&K has consistently appeared in the report with regards to armed conflict and other law-and-order issues. The 2016 report raised concerns about the incidents of targeted arson against 36 schools in J&K during the 2016 unrest. While the 2017 report did not mention Jammu and Kashmir, the 2018 report brought up the recruitment of children by militant groups in the state. According to the report:

“...three incidents of the recruitment and use of children were reported in J&K in the context of clashes with national security forces. One case was attributed to Jaish-e-Mohammed and two to Hizbul Mujahideen. Unverified reports also indicate the use of children as informants and spies by national security forces.”<sup>12</sup>

The report played a crucial role in highlighting the issue at the international level. The findings of the UN report were mentioned in the national media in India, although the coverage was inadequate. It failed to draw attention on the scope and depth of the issue and did not spark a larger debate. So far, there has been negligible investigative reportage on the phenomenon of children turning to political violence and the reasons behind this. The little available reportage fails to stress upon facts from the perspective of international conventions and humanitarian law. Ambiguous terms such as “minor militants” and “diaper militants,” often seen in news reports, do not do justice to the subject and further obfuscate the information being delivered.

While the UN report did create some ripple, it lacked depth of research, as it quoted unverified reports, carried inadequate facts, and failed to mention the background to the groups cited in the findings.

With data accessed from the J&K police, reports in various publications and case studies of some of the child recruits, this brief will attempt to highlight the trend of child recruitment by militant groups, the involvement of minors in various forms of violent protests. The brief will also explore some of the reasons for their foray into militancy and violence, specifically whether there is a correlation between recruitments and state responses to the protests. It will examine how strong-arm tactics of the state and societal indifference might be counterproductive and can push impressionable child recruits towards the path of violence.

## THE STORY FROM THE DATA

According to data accessed from the J&K police, at least 24 children below the age of 18 were recruited by various militant groups from 2010 to July 2018.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, a news report quoted the locals from south Kashmir—where the new wave of militancy is most intense—stating that the police underplays the number of new recruits: “Locals aware of the happenings differ with the figures. They say around ten of these militants are below 18 and police avoids mentioning their age correctly.”<sup>14</sup> The police data only mention the children who may have been arrested or detained and the militants who have shown up on the radar of intelligence units. However, there are many more juveniles who are involved with groups such as Hizbul

Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad as over-ground workers providing logistic support, for instance, Mudasir Rashid Parrey, as per reports, he was an over-ground worker for LeT commanders Abu Zargam and Abu Fanan<sup>15</sup>

The data maintained by the J&K police show that the first underage recruit in the new, social-media driven wave of militancy was its poster boy Burhan Wani. At the age of 15, he was recruited by Hizbul Mujahideen, and by 2013, he had become the leading figure of the group. The police data show there were no juvenile recruits during 2011–13.<sup>16</sup> In 2014, a 16-year-old boy joined Hizbul Mujahideen, and he subsequently surrendered to the police.<sup>17</sup> Following this, 2015 saw a sudden spike in the recruitment of underage boys. This was also the year when pictures of Wani became a viral sensation on social media.<sup>18</sup> At least seven children were recruited by Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba that year: six joined the former and one was recruited by the latter. Of the seven recruits that year, four were killed in various encounters, two surrendered to the police, and the whereabouts of one is not known.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, four children were recruited by Hizbul Mujahideen, of which three were arrested and one surrendered to the police.<sup>20</sup>

In 2017, the number of child recruits was eight, seven of them in Hizbul Mujahideen and one in Jaish-e-Mohammad, called Fardeen Khanday. Khanday hit the headlines after he launched a *fidayeen* (suicidal) attack on a paramilitary camp in the Lethpora area of Pulwama.<sup>21</sup> (This case will be examined in detail in the following section.) In the same year, the J&K police managed to prevent eight

minor boys from joining militant groups; the boys were subsequently returned to the families after counselling. Four of them were intercepted on the LOC as they tried to cross over to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir for training.<sup>22</sup>

In 2018,<sup>23</sup> five children were recruited by militant groups. Two of them joined Hizbul Mujahideen and one became part of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, an AQIS affiliate group operating in J&K. The remaining two—Mudasir Parrey and Saqib Bilal Sheikh—had joined Lashkar-e-Taiba and were killed in an encounter on 9 December 2018. The Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind recruit surrendered two months after he took up arms.

According to official figures, the total number of local recruits in the militant groups in 2015 and 2016 was 66 and 88, respectively. The numbers rose to 126 in the year 2018 and around 165 in the first 10 months of 2018.<sup>24</sup>

## CASE STUDIES<sup>25</sup>

### Burhan Wani

In 2010, 15-year-old Burhan Wani disappeared into the jungles of South Kashmir to join the Hizbul Mujahideen group.<sup>26</sup> Wani was amongst the first few recruits in the new wave of militancy (various experts studying the Kashmir conflict have categorised the current militancy as a “new wave of militancy.”<sup>27,28,29</sup>) In 2010, the number of local Kashmiris in militant groups was very low and most of the active militants were foreigners.<sup>30</sup> In 2013, after the death of the erstwhile leader of the group, Wani became the commander and leader of Hizbul Mujahideen.<sup>31</sup> Thereafter,

he became the face of the group and released multiple pictures, posing with guns along with his colleagues, and video clips explaining his reasons for joining the militancy and calling on more youth from the valley to join them.<sup>32</sup> The videos and pictures he released became a game changer for the militancy in Kashmir, as it portrayed fearlessness amongst militants, attracting a new breed of young educated boys.<sup>33</sup>

By Wani's own admission, a moment of humiliation that he and his brother faced at the hands of J&K Police triggered his foray into militancy. He was allegedly beaten up by police officers over a petty charge. Seeking revenge, Wani joined Hizbul Mujahideen. Wani's case shows how the police's misconduct in dealing with the youth can lead them to seek a violent recourse. It also shows how social-media presence can make terrorists out to be heroic figures seeking martyrdom under the rubric of Jihad.

Moreover, Wani's social-media presence took the idea of militancy to every household of Kashmir, and his rise into the leadership, albeit circumstantial, not only revived the militancy but also gave it an ideological and moral direction. Naturally, he appealed the most to boys of his age and became an inspiration for their foray into militancy, as one analyst pointed out: "Children who were not even in their teens in 2008–10 are now angry, politically disenchanted youth. The anger among these youth has been brewing and they found a ready hero in Wani. The heroism was worth it as Wani pushed the envelope by using new tech-savvy methods of recruitment, promotion and message delivery."<sup>34</sup>

## Fardeen Ahmed Khanday

The case of Fardeen Ahmed Khanday shows how children fall prey to the idea of militancy. The 16-year-old boy led a lethal *fidayeen* attack on a paramilitary camp located in South Kashmir, along with two other Pakistani fighters of *Jaish-e-Mohammad* on 31 December 2017. The attack claimed the lives of five troopers and all three fighters.<sup>35</sup> A 10<sup>th</sup>-grade student, Fardeen was brilliant at studies. He too hailed from Burhan Wani's home village.<sup>36</sup> Three months after he was recruited by *Jaish-e-Mohammad* into the militancy, he took part in the terror strike that shook Kashmir, the threat of local Kashmiri participation in suicide attacks looming large.<sup>37</sup> It was one of the rare suicide attacks led by local Kashmiri militants, and the fact that one of the attackers was only 16 years old magnified the worry. Khanday's case took the family and friends by surprise as there was no tangible trigger for his plunge into militancy.<sup>38</sup> However, his interactions with a commander of *Jaish-e-Mohammad* group is believed to have been an important influencer.

Militant groups active in J&K also use children for propaganda. Many propaganda videos and pictures appear on social media. Videos of underage militants released posthumously extoll the strength of armed groups and their child recruits. Dramatic sequences of children enacting a gunfight—where one group acts as security forces and the other as a militant side—send out subliminal messages.

Many such videos and pictures have appeared on social media, which require a separate study through semiotic analysis.

Putting out pictures and videos glorifying militancy has been an overriding feature of the new wave militancy in Kashmir. These videos are more potent than the traditional mode of communication, as they circumspect the process of gatekeeping and pass on the message directly to the target audience without any filter.<sup>39</sup>

Fardeen Khanday's death in the fidayeen attack of 2017 brought out the endemic issue of juveniles being pushed towards Jihad. Posthumously, Fardeen was used as a propaganda tool by Jaish-e-Mohammad. An eight-minute-long video, recorded hours before the suicide mission, was released by Jaish-e-Mohammad following the attack. In the video, Fardeen appeared confident, flanked with automatic rifles on each side of the shoulder and a large cache of other arms and ammunition around him.<sup>40</sup>

"By the time the video is released, I will already be a new guest in heaven. My friends and I have listened to the call of the Quran and plunged into the battlefield of jihad ... This will continue until the last occupying soldier is present in Kashmir ... Even after repeated claims by Indian security forces and agencies, Jaish-e-Mohammad has not been wiped out from the Valley. Jaish is not so weak. It is impossible to stop Jaish-e-Mohammad ... We are roaring."<sup>41,42</sup> The propaganda video was released with the intention of attracting more Kashmiri boys into the ranks of Jaish-e-Mohammad.

The suicide mission (and its video recording, and release) happened at a time when Jaish-e-Mohammad was trying to gain a foothold in J&K.<sup>43</sup> Jaish commander Noor

Muhammad Tantray was tasked with brainwashing and luring Kashmiri youth to the armed group, which played a significant role in the recruitment of Fardeen Khanday for the suicide mission.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, after the suicide attack, Khanday was used to lure more recruits for fidayeen missions.<sup>45</sup>

### **Faizan Ahmad Bhat**

Another case is of Faizan Ahmad Bhat, who was recruited into militancy at the age of 15. On 4 March 2015, a group of protestors led a procession to a spot where a gun battle between militants and security forces was underway. The protestors had gathered at the site of the encounter to help the militants escape the security forces' cordon. In the chaos of stone pelting, a security personnel dropped his rifle, and the 15-year-old Faizan managed to pick up the weapon and escape from the spot. He did not return home that night and later joined Hizbul Mujahideen. Eighty days later, he was killed in an encounter. In Faizan's case, joining militancy was circumstantial and impulsive, but it is also reflective of the mindset leaders of Hizbul Mujahideen who allowed a 15-year-old child into their group, an organisation once led by Burhan Wani.<sup>46,47</sup>

### **Arif Dar Lelhari**

Arif Dar Lelhari picked up a pouch of leftover ammunition from an encounter site, making him a possible target of investigations. As per the news reports, Arif "stumbled" into militancy after being harassed by his friends. "The police now say he was bullied and teased by other children in his village, who convinced him the Army would go after him for taking the ammunition."<sup>48</sup> Two weeks after finding

the pouch, he joined Lashkar-e-Taiba. He later earned the title of ‘senior militant’ for having survived more than two years of active militancy.<sup>49</sup> His parents have told reporters that he had never been harassed by the security forces and could not come to terms as to why their boy joined militancy. In this instance, too, the local commanders of Lashkar-e-Taiba seem to have been the major influence that led to Lelhari joining the group.

### Shamsul Viqa and Others

Shamsul Viqar, a national-level cricket player and a student of law, joined militancy after numerous detentions for stone pelting. Reports suggest he was a “listed stone pelter” and police harassment pushed him to the point of complete alienation, as he could not even stay nights at home, fearing police raids. Viqar attended a funeral procession of a slain militant, after which he never returned home.<sup>50</sup> His recruitment came to be known through pictures released in social media.

In December 2018, two minor boys—Mudasir (14) and Saqib (17)—were killed in an encounter along with a Lashkar-e-Taiba operative in J&K.<sup>51</sup> News reports quoting friends of Mudasir suggest that top Lashkar commanders, Abu Zargam and Abu Fanan, had influenced him. Mudasir was also involved in stone pelting and other forms of protest and was detained by security forces at the age of 12.<sup>52</sup> “He was a minor and kept in jail for a week. Though they didn’t beat him up or file an FIR against him, it affected him a lot,” his relative told a news reporter.<sup>53</sup> What triggered Saqib’s foray into militancy is not known, and his parents were completely caught by surprise. Once again, the news of his

recruitment came through pictures released on social media. Police officers maintain that he was convinced by his younger friend Mudasir to join Lashkar-e-Taiba.<sup>54</sup>

## INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENT DISCONTENT

The mass agitations of 2010 and 2016 witnessed an increased involvement of the valley’s young. In both agitations, teenagers and pre-teens took part in stone pelting and enforcing the strikes.<sup>55</sup> So far, there has not been any demographical study of the stone pelting in J&K. However, various secondary sources show that minors in Kashmir took to the streets during the 2016 unrest, and many of them were injured with pellets during stone-pelting incidents. The death of Burhan Wani turned him into an icon in the state, resulting in many children participating in—and even leading—the agitations and demonstrations.<sup>56</sup>

Due to uninterrupted shutdowns, the schools in J&K remained closed for many months, leaving children with little to do; this further facilitated their participation. Various accounts in the press report children attacking cars and motorcycles plying on the roads during this period.<sup>57</sup>

Journalist Sudhi Ranjan Sen came in direct confrontation with a group of 12–14-year-old boys while returning from a reporting assignment at the time of the Uri terror attack. They escaped after the driver intervened, begging and touching the feet of a 12-year-old boy (amongst the group manning the roadblock) asking forgiveness for violating the strike. Sudhi confirms that boys in the 12 to 15 age group were active throughout the post-Burhan Wani unrest.<sup>58</sup>



According to expert David Devadas, these teenage boys often had handlers teaching them how to take control of the streets: “One, teenagers are not only extremely well organised and resourceful, the fact that they have adopted similar tactics across different parts of the Valley indicates that things are being minutely coordinated – that tactics have been recommended to ‘handlers’ in different places, and in turn they are doing an efficient job of teaching the boys they coordinate. They say that most of those who participate are teenagers.”<sup>59</sup>

The then chief minister of J&K accused the separatists of using children as shields in demonstrations and instigating them to get into direct confrontations with security forces and take part in violent protests. “Nobody wants violence except for those who don’t have to face the impact of this violence as their own children are studying outside the Valley. They ask the children to fight bullets, pellets and tear gas, but themselves fear a policeman.”<sup>60</sup> Juveniles have died of bullet injuries during rioting and mob violence and, in some cases, come in a direct confrontation during anti-terror operations.<sup>61,62</sup> Data released by the J&K government in 2017 showed over 2,500 pellet victims in the recent agitations, many of them children who ended up getting blinded.

The state of J&K has a depressing record in juvenile justice. As pointed out in the case studies, many of the child recruits were involved in stone pelting and other forms of protests during the unrest of 2016 and the agitations before that. The case studies show that misconduct by security forces can push children towards violence. Instead of rehabilitating and counselling the minors

involved in protests, the police and other security forces deal with them in a manner that only proves to be counterproductive. Many recruits in the new militancy were motivated to join terror groups because of the continuous harassment by the state police, particularly the counterinsurgency corps.

After the unrest of 2008, which popularised stone pelting amongst the youth in the state, the police and other security forces often detained minors in police stations in contravention of the norms of the Juvenile Justice Act. Some minors were tortured in police stations, while others faced the wrath of the state through pellet guns and batons.<sup>63</sup>

Hundreds of youth were arrested in the aftermath of the agitations of 2010 and the Burhan Wani unrest. In 2016, around 7,000 youth were detained and arrested by the J&K police, many of them minors.<sup>64</sup> Only some of them were booked in a juvenile home, others being detained in police stations, in violation of the law.<sup>65</sup> In some cases, minors are booked under the PSA Act.<sup>66</sup> To this end, there are at least two cases of minors being shown as adults on paper.<sup>67,68</sup> The Juvenile Justice Act mandates the setting up of juvenile justice boards, yet the state of J&K had not set up a single juvenile justice board until May 2016, and cases involving minors were handled by regular judges.<sup>69</sup> The court has often filed PSA cases against juveniles, citing a brazen violation of the law.<sup>70</sup> The state has a single juvenile home at the moment, with the capacity to accommodate 50 individuals; it has received 1,153 juveniles over a period of seven years.<sup>71</sup>

Another expert, Bashir Manzar, points out how the absence of a juvenile justice system

alienates the children: “The state has no mechanism to deal with child protestors or child militants. We have, just for namesake, one juvenile home in Srinagar. It lacks everything. These homes are meant to counsel the kids so that they are given a positive and constructive direction. Nothing of the sort happens there. Besides the children are treated as adult criminals, handcuffed, and tortured. Once in police custody, these children graduate, from stone pelting, to militancy.”<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Data from the police and various case studies show that children in J&K are being recruited by militant groups such as Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. Most of them are recruited as active combatants or over-ground workers, who help in organising logistical processes for the armed groups.

The icon of the current wave of militancy, Burhan Wani, exemplifies the term “child soldier”, as defined by the UN. Wani was the first *child soldier* or *child recruit* who became the leader and icon of the new wave of militancy, whose deification has attracted more juveniles into their fold. Over the last few years, specifically after Wani’s killing, there has been a consistent trend of militant groups recruiting children.

The press and civil society have tended to put a shroud on the issue of child soldiers by relying on vague terms such as “diaper militants” and “minor militants” to describe this trend.<sup>73</sup> The misleading narrative created by these terms coupled with the narrative that glorifies these underage militants results in dire consequences. There is a lack of

recognition of the real issue of minors becoming combatants.

A scholar studying the Kashmir conflict condoned the recruitment of the juveniles into the militant groups stating the “public support” and “youth bulge”: “In order to permanently renegotiate their relationship with the Indian state and to look for a solution outside of the ambit of Indian Constitution, people in Kashmir see violence as the only alternative. This alternative has not been criminalised and is in fact celebrated. And such celebrations are not a new phenomenon. They continue from the 90s. Today, the heroism attached to militancy in Kashmir is kept alive by the public support it gets and is carried forward by a young and educated generation, which is a function of the youth bulge and a high literacy rate. In such a situation, one should not be surprised by the recruitment of a 15-year-old. Rather, we should prepare ourselves for more such recruitment as long as either or both the sides involved do not relent.”<sup>74</sup>


Societal changes play an important factor in shaping the attitude and mindset of children. The dynamics of conflict in Kashmir are ever-changing, and parental and societal sanction for militancy has emerged as a new and dangerous trend.<sup>75</sup> A parent who lost his son to militancy sees a larger purpose for his son’s death: “It doesn’t matter whether he was 14 or 15. Even if he was 10, he could have made that choice. Jihad doesn’t need an age. These boys understand the situation much better than all common men like us. They have now become an inspiration.”<sup>76</sup> The ‘resistance’ narrative in Kashmir celebrates the involvement of children in the militancy and demonstrations; young boys and girls are

encouraged to ratchet up emotions in protests.<sup>77</sup> Children are being pushed to the frontline under the cloak of 'resistance', and the society needs to introspect and recalibrate the responses to this trend.

The case studies show different reasons for taking to militancy. However, the circumstances, the chain of events and the overall turbulent atmosphere all impact on the youth. Better parental and societal guidance and control may help stop further recruitments of Kashmiri children into the ranks of militancy.

Responses of the state towards child agitators, particularly by the police and the judicial system, show a stark callousness.

There is a dearth of creative and imaginative solutions to prevent these children from taking to militancy. The brutal treatment meted out to minors by security forces only serves to push them deeper.

Finally, the lack of an adequate and inclusive juvenile justice mechanism ensures that the children who participate in civil protests and stone pelting get radicalised inside the police lockups, where torture and misconduct are rampant. The justice system, thus, further alienates these children from society and the state. The state must show far greater sensitivity in dealing with children participating in political violence, and it must make efforts to protect, care for and rehabilitate them. 

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Khalid Shah** is an Associate Fellow at Observer Research Foundation.

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20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA

Ph. : +91-11-35332000 Fax : +91-11-35332005

E-mail: [contactus@orfonline.org](mailto:contactus@orfonline.org)

Website: [www.orfonline.org](http://www.orfonline.org)