

# Kashmir: Killing sparks mass opposition to Indian occupation

Hassan Raza Fri, 22/07/2016 - 22:03

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On July 8, Indian soldiers shot dead Burhan Wani in the forests south east of Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir. Although Wani was only 22 years old, he was a leading figure in the biggest of the Kashmiri independence movements, Hizbul Mujahideen, and his death triggered a new wave of mass protests and demonstrations, the biggest since 2010.

Over 100,000 attended his funeral and the Indian troops responded to this by firing directly into the crowds, using live ammunition and pellet guns, killing 50 and injuring as many as 3,000. Many of those, including young children, were blinded by the tiny steel projectiles of these 'crowd control weapons'.

Although the state then cracked down with a curfew and a ban on newspapers, videos circulating on social media showed that troops even attacked the ambulances taking the injured to hospital, where they faced more brutality as the hospitals themselves were subject to tear gas attack.

Predictably, this repression has added fuel to a new rebellion against Indian occupation and for 'Azadi' - Independence. Wani was a particularly important figure amongst the youth of the country because of his effective use of the internet and social media. His own story, he joined the rebel movement after he and his brother were attacked and beaten by Indian troops when he was just 15, reflected the experience of his whole generation. His intransigent rejection of any compromise with India and commitment to full Independence exactly expressed their aspirations.

It is, therefore, highly significant that all attempts by established political figures to demobilise the current protests have failed. Even a call for calm by the veteran opponent of the occupation, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, generally revered as the only leader who has 'not compromised', was met with jeers from protestors. Geelani, it should be noted, equates Independence with accession to Pakistan and has had a long association with the Pakistani military, while this new movement identifies 'Freedom' with 'Independence' from the neighbouring states, both of which claim sovereignty over the territory.

The new situation created by this powerful movement has many similarities to that of 1989 when, after a clearly fraudulent election in Kashmir, the youth took up arms under the leadership of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, a bourgeois populist party. That was a national liberation struggle involving both the Muslim majority and the Pandit community, who are Hindu. When the Indian army succeeded in crushing the rebellion, the political vacuum was filled by Jihadi militants who, with backing from Pakistan, divided the movement along religious lines, forcing the majority of Pandits to flee into exile in India.

It is, therefore, important that, in his last video, Wani reassured Hindus wanting to go on the Amaranth Pilgrimage in Kashmir that his forces would not touch them and would respect their right to undertake their religious duties. Indeed, he appealed to all Kashmiri Pandits to return and live as neighbours with Muslims

? while condemning any efforts to establish what he called, ?Israeli-style settlements?.

What is clear from the whole history of Kashmir, since the departure of the British and the Partition of India, is that the Pakistani state is no friend of the Kashmiri people but has only ever used it for its own purposes. Equally clear, however, has been the weakness and the concessions to nationalism of the main forces of the Indian Left. Instead of defending the liberation movement and the Kashmiris' right to national self-determination, they call only for ?peace? and, in the name of opposing religious fundamentalism, they reduce the whole movement to a question of violent religious extremism.

The only way forward for the movement in Kashmir is to build a new leadership, politically independent not only of both neighbouring states but also of the capitalist class within Kashmir, on the basis of a programme of socialisation of the main economic resources of the country and their development by the democratic organisations of the workers and farmers who work them, in short, an independent, socialist Kashmir.

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