

The Generation of Rage in Kashmir, by David Devadas, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 223, Rs 495

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Kashmir has been experiencing new dynamics of conflict. Though not entirely unknown to students of ethnic conflicts, the dynamics and complications that have developed over a period of time have made the Kashmir conflict extremely complicated given the number of actors involved in it. Additionally, it has been seen that the semblance of peace in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has often been mistaken as resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately, this mistake has dented the thinking of policymakers and politicians, both at the centre and state level, who are then caught off-guard when there is a new eruption of disenchantment, or what the author David Devadas calls 'rage'.

The Generation of Rage in Kashmir is an attempt to bring to notice the perilous state of the ground-level situation in Kashmir. The author aims to describe the rage that the youth in Kashmir have demonstrated of late, while taking on security forces and resorting to stone pelting. Devadas juxtaposes two separate generations, one born in the 1990s and the other born in the new millennium. Highlighting the mismanagement of the situation in Kashmir by the state and the security forces, Devadas argues that this has resulted in the rage of the new generation. His book substantiates his premise as it is an outcome of extensive surveys and questionnaires that college students in Kashmir have enthusiastically filled. Furthermore, Devadas adds to it his personal opinions and incidents, giving a different perspective to the reader.

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The author begins by creating for readers a background for the current situation in the valley. The peace talks initiated by the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee around April 2003 and 2004 ushered in an era of hope. However, the talks did not lead to any tangible results. By the year 2007, the new generation had grown cynical and contemptuous of the older generation who had taken up arms against the state, and believed that militancy was futile and the secessionists were self-serving hypocrites (p. 4). Devadas argues that this was the opportunity that the government should have taken advantage of, starting with the process of gradual demilitarisation of Kashmir. However, this opportunity was missed and the new generation that came of age in 2017 (the millennial generation) did not want peace, thus giving rise to a new militancy (p. 10). The biggest mistake, according to Devadas, was that 'the Indian state saw this new insurgency as a continuation of the old one' (p. 11). Crackdowns and arbitrary arrests were rampant as security forces were given absolute powers, undermining the rights of citizens, and the system struggled to revert to lawful functioning, making the situation somewhat ironical, where rule of law collapsed in a war zone (p. 120).

Devadas has highlighted four aspects that the Indian government failed to take into consideration while formulating a 'policy response' for handling the situation in Kashmir (p. 10):

1. The government was blind to the fact that the 1988 insurgency had ended.
2. They were dealing with a changed generation in Kashmir.
3. The desire of the generation that came of age in 2007 to settle down to peace and economic opportunities.
4. The fearlessness of the new (millennial) generation.

The methods used by the armed forces, specially the Special Operations Group (SOG), were violence and humiliation, which turned out to be self-defeating in the end as the new generation became anti-state by 2016 (pp. 23, 113). On the other hand, the killing of Burhan Wani and the activities of 'Jamaat-e-Islami', coupled with several socio-economic factors, led to discontentment and the eruption of rage (pp. 27, 143). The violent suppression of 'stone pelters', the social and technological revolution and the 'Islamisation' of youth further incited rage in Kashmir.

Devadas also brings to light the psychological impact of living in a conflict-ridden zone. He points out the experience of isolation, violence

and poor education which dramatically changed the social fabric of the Kashmiri life (p. 46).

David's book, a result of extensive surveys and personal anecdotes, brings to light an interesting chronology of the discontent the people of Kashmir began to experience. In his surveys, he refers to the concept and the discrepancies amongst Kashmiris about *azadi* and the meaning assigned to this term was inexplicable, attaching it with the concept of 'rights', benefits and security, calling this discrepancy one of the biggest problem in Kashmir (p. 70). Majority of the youth in Kashmir felt deprived of the rights that Indians in other states took for granted, which is ironic because a majority of citizens in India and Jammu region feel that Kashmiris have benefited from special privileges (p. 62). He also mentions the insecurity and fear that women confronted in the conflict zone, highlighting their vulnerability.

In the book, the author alludes to the fact that their understanding of jihad, Islam and the consciousness of religious identity increased during the time of rage. The surveys also indicate their perception of the Kashmiri Pundits, along with other religions and women's rights. Regarding the security forces, Devadas argues that the army was seen in a more positive light as compared to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) (p. 78).

The emergence of Zakir Musa made it clear that there is a desire amongst the militants to establish an Islamist system, according to the Sharia law. Indeed, the younger generation appears to be more welcoming towards accepting the narrow image of Islam, which is very uncommon amongst elders (p. 84), thereby pointing to an important change in Kashmir that went unnoticed: the radical shift; general rejection of liberal democracy as a legitimate system; and rage (p. 85).

Devadas also brings to attention the internal political dynamics of Kashmir. Young Kashmiris lost faith in political leaders in 2008–09 and, in turn, the Hurriyat lost its influence amongst the younger Kashmiri people. The failure of the political leadership in controlling the horrific behaviour of the armed forces added to the disillusionment of young Kashmiris with politics (p. 98). This disdain was not just restricted to the political leadership but also extended to the 'separatists'. According to Davadas, vast amounts of cash flow, allegedly from prominent and involved intelligence agencies, to the political and separatist leadership of Kashmir incurred a sense of loss of perspective of the agenda of freedom and autonomy that had become the main aspiration of the younger

generation (p. 106). The separatist leaders, who were once hailed as the face of Kashmiri resistance, were now seen as government stooges; their lavish lifestyle contrasted sharply with that of the youth in Kashmir, who languished due to lack of education, employment opportunities and rage (pp. 103, 205). Moreover, according to Devadas, the inclination of the younger generation of Kashmiris towards the radical form of Islam was because they grew derisive of the concept of state, and this is what made the grounds fertile for Islamic extremism (p. 105).

The book also tries to see what impact the national media has had on the local perception and how it affects the local situation. David argues that the news media and the social media in other parts of India ignited a sense of polarisation, which further deteriorated after 26/11. With suspicion within India rising, the Kashmiris internalised the feeling, 'India wanted the Kashmiri land not the Kashmiri people' (p. 192). On the other side, schools in Kashmir kept themselves isolated from India; this goes against the prevailing narrative in the country in general which sees Kashmir as integral part of India. Despite programmes such as Udaan to generate employment or building of infrastructure for schools and colleges, Kashmir did not see any significant changes in the quality of employment and education (p. 208). In the book, Devadas emphasises the problem of unemployment in Kashmir and links it to the 'stone pelters'.

In the end, Devadas talks about the knee-jerk responses of the Indian state of sending more troops to restore calm to the building rage, which in turn added to the rage. Calls for reduction of troop deployments was never seen as an option (p. 203). He points towards a systematic degradation of education system during the initial period of crackdowns, which later culminated into corruption in the educational system, thereby creating a generation of graduates with no jobs who assumed that the government owed them jobs (p. 52).

Devadas does not mince his words while criticising the state or the armed services in the way they handled the volatile situation in Kashmir. Even though this is an academic work and will broaden the overall perspective of the reader about Kashmir, the book has an emotional appeal. It makes readers think and reflect on their own perception of the problem in Kashmir. *The Generation of Rage* is a relevant book in the growing literature on Kashmir conflict. It presents a narrative of the Kashmiri perspective which is absent from the mainstream media.

The book, however, ends abruptly and no pointers are given to what the state could do in order to regain the confidence of the people in Kashmir. There are no policy prescriptions suggested for the state. Perhaps, the author wants to imply that there is nothing that can be done. If that is the case, then Devadas has indeed presented a pessimistic future of the situation in Kashmir.

The book is subjective in nature and different perspectives can be drawn from it. Overall, Devadas could have, based on his extensive fieldwork, given some policy recommendations or measures that the state could use to assuage the generation that has taken to rage. Nevertheless, the book makes a significant contribution towards understanding the overall situation in Kashmir and how it has changed, especially for a lay audience.

