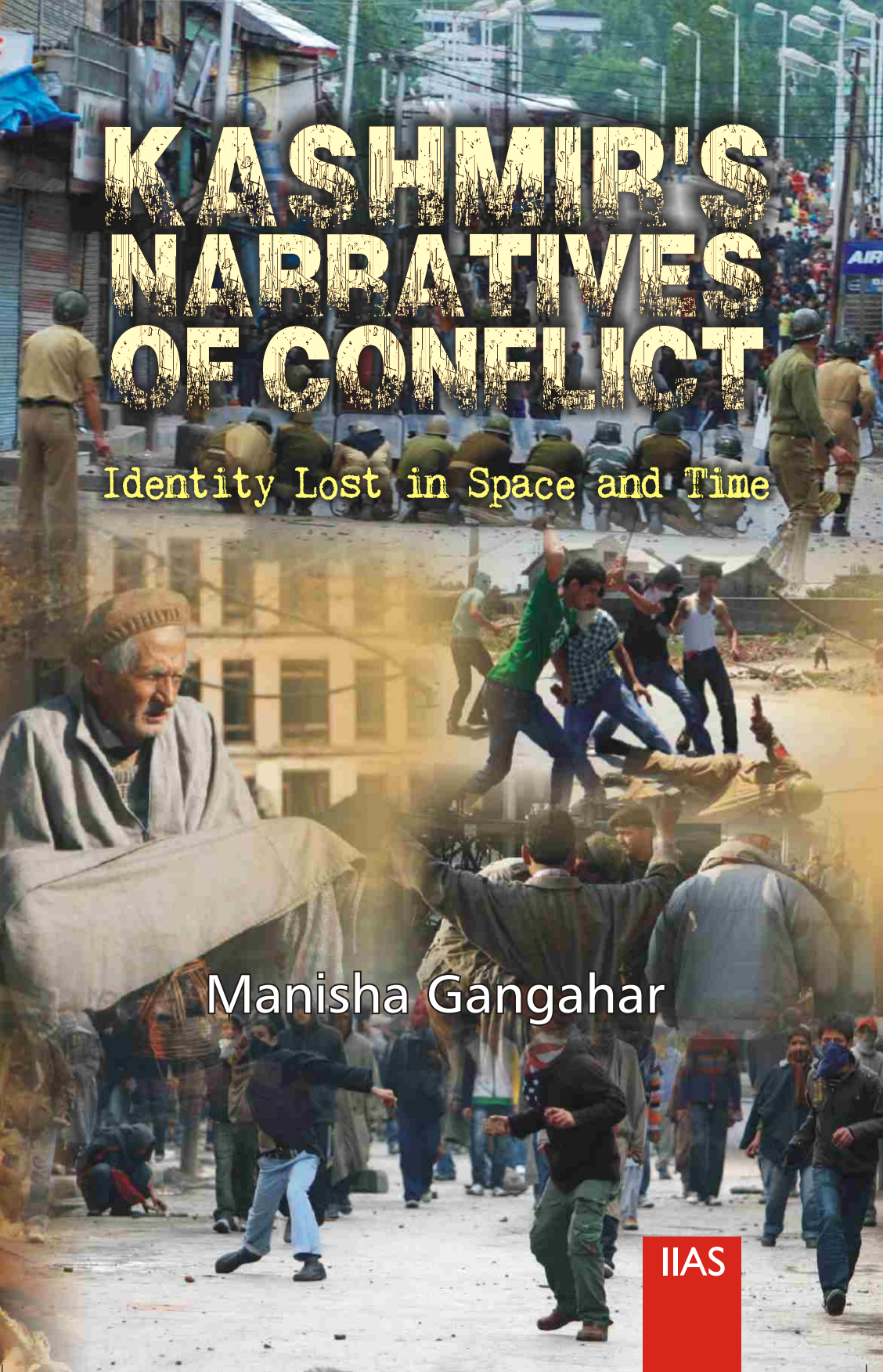
KASHMIR'S NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT
Identity Lost in Space and Time
Manisha Gangahar
IIAS

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Author's Note

"*Aapka India, hamara Kashmir*" (Your India, our Kashmir).

It was a casual remark, but it tugged at my heart and agitated my mind. A journalistic assignment drove me to Kashmir in 2007. Since then, the visits have continued, curiosity and perplexity travelling side by side. I wanted to make sense of that comment, figure out what it really meant for people within and outside the Valley, travel the distance and feel the distance.

What was the story, how different was it from what I'd heard and read? The Valley instantly draws you in, it also draws a lot out of you; the loss of innocence, for one.

An academician by qualification, a journalist by practice and a traveller at heart, I have tried to bring all these sensibilities while 'reading' and attempting to understand Kashmir.

What would a city under siege look like? There is something surreal about it; part of your own country and yet the barbed wires, bunkers, check-posts and security force personnel every 100 yards tell another story. The reality hits you hard. It isn't the same as reading in the newspapers or watching a news bulletin. More than that, after almost 25 years since militancy erupted in the Valley, what has changed? There are, it seems, only more questions than before, a blurred image that won't clear up despite the Photoshop tools at the disposal of the State.

I do not seek to arrive at or come up with solutions to the territorial dispute or the political status of Kashmir. Neither do I attempt to provide a final statement.

My work, neither that of a political scientist nor a historian, is from the position of a reader trying to make sense of various points

of view on Kashmir, of a traveller trying to make sense of the distance traversed and the distance that exists.

Kashmir has seen a periodic semblance of what is described as peace in the past few years, but that's more a silence of violence. What is normal is difficult to comprehend, because it is something unknown to an entire generation. The Valley has seen injury and hurt. It is a difficult combination, not easily healed.

1 Introduction

> 'Don't expect 100% Kashmiris to thump chest,
> say we're Indian... that will never happen.'
>
> —Omar Abdullah, J&K Chief Minister
> (*The Indian Express*, March 31, 2013)

Why not? The answer is evasive.

More than six decades and this question—whether Kashmir is, was or can be, an integral part of India?—can still stir passionate debates and violent protests on the streets. The territory is disputed, but can one say that the identity is not? What defines being an 'Indian' or being a 'Kashmiri'? The question of identity can consume lives and erase communities. In this seemingly tug-and-pull of homogenisation and fragmentation, as a result of a troubled history, political blunders and alliances, more than discovering a meaning, it is identity politics that a Kashmiri is found caught in. Kashmiri identity, I believe (based on my archival research and field work), is founded on this idea of *Kashmiriyat*.

The larger idea, through my readings of selected texts, is to bring out a lack of coherence, absence of homogeneity and a sense of conflict within the idea of *Kashmiriyat*. Displacing the concept of *Kashmiriyat* by juxtaposing it with a governing ideology, documented history and political context shows the fissures in the discourse of 'Kashmiriyat'. Well, it is a commonly used term, as Syed Bismillah Geelani (2006) takes note of:

> The Governor of Jammu and Kashmir told students in the University in Srinagar that the only thing that can bring peace to the Valley is *Kashmiriyat*. A few years ago when Prime Minister Vajpayee went to Kashmir, he too spoke of *Kashmiriyat* as a panacea for all problems in Kashmir. And now Dr Manmohan Singh in his first trip to Kashmir after

> becoming prime minister has also spoken of *Kashmiriyat* as a balm for the wounds of the people in Kashmir. It is not only Indian leaders who have been selling the idea of *Kashmiriyat*; the present government of Mufti Mohammad Sayed also bases his 'healing touch' on *Kashmiriyat*. Apart from leaders and politicians, many self-confessed Kashmir experts also advocate *Kashmiriyat* as the solution to the complex Kashmir question (p. 33).

It would be wrong to look at *Kashmiriyat* as a historic entity, for the term and the concept have been fluid, fitting into the mould of the times and changing with political-socio developments in the region before the 1930s. In fact, Pandit intellectuals, such as Leftist writer and activist Prem Nath Bazaz, coined the term "Kashmiriyat" to project a common cultural heritage among Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims, though in the process papered the dissimilarities (Habibullah 30). And since then, as I argue, *Kashmiriyat* has been altering at various points of time. Justin Hardy (2009), journalist and writer, spells it out:

> The poetry of the Valley's past is that it was a heaven…*Kashmiriyat*. It became a word hung about with a history that it did not have, a call to arms from when it first came into common use when the Kashmiri people were calling for India to 'quit Kashmir', just as so many of the Indian nation were calling for the British to 'quit India'. Kashmiriyat had barely been in use before 1947 (p. 23).

The work, thus, seeks to explore how a Kashmiri defines his identity and how he relates to it and if, in the process, is able to accomplish a unified self. Ask a Kashmiri what makes him a Kashmiri, and the answer will be *Kashmiriyat*. Ask what it means to be a Kashmiri, the answer will be 'practising *Kashmiriyat*'. Try again and ask what is *Kashmiriyat* and you just end up wondering when the reply comes: it is unique to the Kashmiris. No point asking for a definition because there would not be just one and each would be as vague and adaptable as the other. Syed Bismillah Geelani (2006) offers a few explanations in an attempt to discover the definition of *Kashmiriyat*:

> An experienced Kashmiri Pandit elder who is still living in Kashmir told me that *Kashmiriyat* was based on traditions unique to Kashmir, wherein both Hindus and Muslims visited Muslim shrines, and there was a custom of praying loudly in the mosques. Another Kashmiri Pandit and his wife living in exile in Delhi defined *Kashmiriyat* in terms of the common

> lifestyles of all Kashmiris, as reflected in the tradition of going for picnics in the almond blossom season, or in *shikaras* on the Dal Lake (p. 34).

According to Avanti Bhat (2005): "It is this cultural ethos, this spirit, which is the people's Kashmiriyat—this is their tradition" (p. 7) and he adds, "Indeed, Kashmiriyat was the unifying, secular factor in everyday life" (p. 8). For Humra Quraishi (2004), within the Valley, "Kashmiriyat—shared customs and language—has bound the different religious communities, especially the Muslims and the Pandits, for several centuries" (p. 75).

Hence, it has come to be understood as a value unique to the people of a region and a reflection of a tradition that is above religious rivalries, while upholding cultural harmony. There has, however, been another interpretation as Victoria Schofield (2010) puts it: "For those who were able to see through the shifts from India to Pakistan to independence and back again, of all their leaders, Sheikh Abdullah best personified the spirit of Kashmiriyat. At times, safeguarding Kashmiriyat meant independence; at others, when Delhi was prepared to loosen the reins of control, it meant autonomy with the Indian Union" (p. 128).

While it is hard to arrive at a precise definition of *Kashmiriyat*, it is also essential to note that no matter how trivial a role, the idea of *Kashmiriyat* being a distinct socio-cultural space has contributed to the sense of unease among Kashmiris when they step into the outside world. This is not to say that the history of Kashmir, the ancient traditional milieu and culture, along with the natural, serene beauty, could be dismissed as ordinary. But the travelogues published and accounts passed on about the Valley in the colonial period—*Travels in Kashmir: A popular history of its people* by Brigid Keenan, *Travels in Ladakh and Kashmir* by William Moorcroft and *Valley of Kashmir* by Walter Rooper Lawrence—besides historical documents and books on the culture of Kashmir also contributed to the idea of 'separateness and uniqueness'.

In the preface of *The Happy Valley* (1879), W. Wakefield states: "...I had the opportunity of constantly meeting and talking to numerous friends and travellers, who had visited Kashmir. From their observations, joined to what I gathered from the somewhat scanty literature treating of that country, I was fairly well acquainted with

the subject of these pages before I had the good fortune to visit the Happy Valley for myself..." (p. v). Then, in his concluding remarks, Wakefield writes: "...should they [contents] in the future serve as some little guide and assistance to intending travellers in the romantic Vale, I shall deem myself amply repaid..." (p. 271)

At the same time, Brigid Keenan (1989) makes a point: "Stories like these added to the valley's legendary beauty, having given Kashmir a sort of aura of sanctity, and it has long been a place of pilgrimage where a whole variety of believers have sought their different holy grails" (p. 70).

However, what again has been overlooked are the accounts of later travellers like William Moorcroft and George Forster: "Where Bernier saw delightful flower gardens, free-flowing waterways and handsome houses, they saw only decay: ruined pavilions, tumbledown houses, choked canals, overgrown gardens and filthy, unattractive people whose natural shrewdness had been distorted into low cunning in order to survive" (Keenan 84).

Thus, the idea of 'Kashmiriyat', in the pages that follow, is reflected upon, delved into and contested in context. However, when not just decades, but centuries; not just one dynasty, but different regimes; and not just one civilisation, but several cultures have influenced what is often referred to as *Kashmiriyat*, it becomes a futile effort to mark its contours on any map, be it political, territorial or, for that matter, even cultural. And so has it been if one looks at the works produced on Kashmir since 1947. Each study only leaves the interpretation and understanding convoluted to a greater degree. I make yet another attempt. But, rather than trying to offer an exactness to the idea of Kashmiriness, I seek to find the ambiguity regarding Kashmiri identity and explore how ordinary Kashmiris negotiate spaces in their lives—political, regional and religious—particularly since Kashmir became a disputed territory and a conflict zone.

The reading, however, is not possible in isolation of their historical background and political contexts. Moreover, my aim is to get a grip on whether normal day-to-day reporting, literary writings and cinematic productions carry with them an understated or underlying sense of betrayal or injustice, anger or simple ill-will or prejudices; and, how all these permeate into the region's conscience unknowingly. And,

even more important, how in doing so, they all shape into narratives interpreted so differently across India.

In the subsequent sections, through the reading of print media, literary narratives and personal interviews, I comprehend the vocabulary of violence in Kashmir. The idea is to explore the relationship between violence, freedom, dissent and democracy in case of Kashmir and how violence becomes a means to assert one's identity or, perhaps, negate an identity that has been forced upon an individual, in this case Indian. The aim is to read outside the 'received frames' and ask questions about perceptions, impressions and understanding of a violent act.

Words matter. More so if they become the voice of ordinary people; and still more if these ordinary people have not had their voice heard for a long time, and have not had their say. Thus, I believe, there is a need to read media reports and literary narratives on Kashmir to understand how words written and spoken routinely about Kashmir, in the Valley and outside, carry deeper underlying meanings, at times contradicting each other, and which can have a far-reaching effect, without there necessarily being a structured purpose to it all. How these narratives have been and are contributing to the reconstruction, articulation and contestation of Kashmiri identity is the focus of the second section.

Taking a cue from Stuart Hall's conception of popular culture as a zone of contestation, I look at cinema as a terrain where struggle for meaning and an engagement with reality takes place. Moving away from the idea of 'popular culture' as only being accessible to and about the masses, I would rather define it as something that presents and represents the experiences of ordinary people. It plays a crucial role in shaping and expressing identity, perspectives and ideologies (Shenhav 2006), besides offering an access to human thought and a worldview. Hence, popular culture here is not to be looked at as a form of social control imposed from above or a purely expressive culture emergent from below. To quote Stuart Hall (1996), "it is an arena that is profoundly *mythic*. It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves…" (p. 470).

To put it simply, I look at films not only as a means to entertainment, but also as something that can educate and inform. Films as powerful pieces of culture communicate to us about ourselves and, in the twentieth and twenty-first century, are regarded as the dominant form of this communication. The intention is to see how the contours of cinematic imagination are marked by the popular sentiments of the masses and how they reflect what is real, not just events but also the understanding of those events. With regard to Kashmir, the aim is to trace identity as an already accomplished historical fact which is then presented in the cinematic discourse, turning it into a process of 'production', which is never complete and always constituted within, not outside the representation.

Is Kashmiri identity, then, being pushed towards liminality?

Well, when we speak of 'identity' of an individual at the conceptual level, the same encompasses a variety of identities which may intersect lines that mark several sub-boundaries of numberless identities. For this reason, identities can no more be articulated in and through a straightjacketed conceptual framework of "absolute identity" that never changes and is permanently fixed. An alternative to such an "absolute identity" has become imminent in the present times than any other in the past and, hence, needs to be conceived and articulated in order to infuse some kind of unity, without lapsing into the ubiquitous "absolute identity". Such an alternative identity will at once involve both 'identity' and 'difference' and, thus, may be named either as "distributed" or "assorted" identity, or both, with a "unified sense of identity".

"Distributed identity" primarily implies an island-like 'dots' marking distinct sub-identities, without any unification factor involved in it. The added dimensions to this "distributed identity" are the dimensions of space and time, which are generally used to define a given locus (socio-cultural region) with sharp boundaries. On the contrary, "assorted identity" includes the "distributed identity" as its sub-set, but goes beyond it, in the sense that assorted identity has some kind of a sense of "collective unity".

Thus, the main and only difference between the "distributed identity" and "assorted identity" is their 'focus'. In the former, the 'distribution' of factors is emphasised, while in case of the latter, 'collective unity' is apparent. Undoubtedly, an irresolvable predicament

would follow from these identities—individually or collectively—if no explicit 'unifying sense' were imparted to them. The 'unified sense' appears to be a little clearer in assorted identity than in distributed identity. However, in any case, the 'unified sense' needs to be articulated explicitly, rather than in a subdued manner that we may find in "assorted identity".

No sooner one begins to define an individual's identity in terms of a region or a nation (distributed or assorted) in a straightjacket manner, than it appears to disintegrate and fragment itself, defying all attempts at imparting a unified sense of identity within it. This seems to occur even if one is conscious of the need to prevent 'absolute identity' of yesteryears to overwhelm the being. Thus, we have to impart a 'unified sense' to distributed or assorted, in an explicit manner, going beyond a mere 'sense of collection of identity' that we vaguely visualise in the latter. The 'unified sense' needs to envelop all the sub-identities from outside as well as penetrate into each sub-identity dot at the same time.

In fact, the endeavour to offer a certain kind of meaning to the occurrences has always been a preoccupation of the human mind. Philosophers and psychologists have always tried to resolve the conflicts in the universe and within the human psyche. There has been a constant quest for the 'Absolute', whether it is in terms of knowledge, reality, truth or identity. While philosopher Theatetus said, "The one who knows something is perceiving the thing that he knows, and, so far as I can see at present, knowledge is nothing but perception" (Russell 163), Socrates believed that "all the things we are pleased to say 'are' really are in process of becoming" (Russell 163). Therefore, knowledge is what becomes and not what is. Similarly, the notion of identity is constructed rather than being discovered, through the interplay of knowledge and power.

The idea and understanding of identity was modified by the end of the eighteenth century. The importance of recognition became critical along with the emergence of the idea of individualised identity. Earlier, it was the notion of authenticity that developed out of an individual's moral sense that would further lead to a sense of 'full-being'. The individual longs for an ideal self and, in being true to one's moral sense, would help the individual in articulating himself in the most authentic manner that could be possible. The understanding

and achievement of an ideal would lead to a sense of fulfilment and complete self-realisation.

Individuals become full human agents, capable of understanding themselves and, hence, defining their identity through socio-cultural and political mediums. In fact, it is the dialogical character that is fundamental to human life: "We define our identities always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (Taylor, 1994: 32-33). Discovering an identity does not mean that the same is worked out and formulated in isolation, but that the identity is negotiated through a dialogue, which is partly overt and partly internal, with others. This dialogue is generated within the political and cultural realm of a society and, at times, is imposed through political as well as cultural mechanisms. As Charles Taylor (1994) maintains:

> …our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being… (p. 25)

In traditional societies, 'identity' was regarded as fixed and stable on the basis of predefined roles within the social set-up. A system of kinship and religion provided an individual with his/her particular place in the world. One was born as a member of a clan with his behaviour and conduct previously defined. Identity was not a problem in these societies as individuals were circumscribed within the realm of their traditional system of family codes and religious sanctions. Their roles and functions were predefined and each one was comfortable in his/her position and place that he/she was allotted by the authoritarian agencies. However, in modern times, identity becomes a problematic subject. The individual is caught up in diverse roles, which are often contradictory to one another, thereby creating doubts about one's position in the society.

No longer can the concept of identity be seen in its original and conventional form. Rather, it has to be rethought and reconstructed according to contemporary needs. This does not mean that it has to

be discarded completely but, in fact, has to be evaluated within the cultural paradigms in the present era and calls for deconstruction of the whole idea of identity and identification. Thereby, the concept must be brought "under erasure" (Hall and du Gay 2), not only displacing it but at the same time re-conceptualising it. The idea of the 'Cartesian self', that referred to a human being as an autonomous entity capable of attaining stability through his power of reasoning and arriving at a unitary selfhood, is done away with.

Jacques Lacan (1989) has also criticised the notion of a stable identity. According to the Lacanian theory, an autonomous self cannot exist and that personal identity is always established in relation to 'others'. The identity of an individual keeps on transforming depending on his relations with his/her parents, relatives, acquaintances or even the media. Various agents of socialisation have a role to play in formulating one's sense of identity, which thus cannot be static or enclosed within a single frame. And because of dynamism built within the cultural process, movement is towards liminality. The modern man with a fragmented and fractured identity is uncertain of his location in the world and all the time feels out of place. He undertakes a journey in search of some sort of meaning. The quest for identity becomes a kind of a project whose conclusion keeps getting postponed for the future.

A definition of identity would, thus, be debatable. For, there is no one way of looking at one's identity in any domain, be it social, cultural or even metaphysical. However, it would be unrealistic to look at identity as a historic, monolithic conceptual entity, for the term and the concept have been fluid, fitting into the mould of the times and changing with socio-cultural developments, and this is even more true in the ever globalising contemporary world impacted by the internet. And, when a concept like 'nation' comes into play to shape up the idea of "self" within the socio-cultural or political sphere, it becomes much more complex and problematic since it apparently presupposes an underlying metaphysical identity, now wrapped in so many layers of other identities. The concept of "absolute identity", thus, becomes a victim of self-negation. Giving expression to both the multifarious identities, and their mutual annihilation by a self-negating conflict, is in itself an exercise fraught with numerous logical difficulties. For instance, the minute one takes it to refer to an identity in the larger context, the diversity overshadows the uniqueness; (on the contrary)

the minute it is confined to a specific region, it negates the idea of plurality of identities.

It is true that individuals make a claim of selfhood through cultural representations, which then contest not only for political and social sanction but also for an authority in the prevailing world order. The ideologies and representations intersect and overlap in their attempt to reveal cultural differences and, simultaneously, they also reveal ambivalences and spaces between the opposites. Cultural identities, however, can never be fixed but are all the time negotiated within the realm of culture and through various cultural forms, among which narratives and cinema are important cultural apparatuses. Culture and cultural identity, over the years, have metamorphosed into a plane where there is a free flow of "signifiers" and "signifieds" and where the traces of the erased structures are still prominently visible. The locus of a cultural identity cannot be fixed at a point but it becomes more like a whirlpool. The identity cannot be explained in linear terms; rather, the linearity has been replaced by the idea of circularity and multidimensional existence:

> Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement—now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of 'global' media technologies—make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by *culture*, a rather complex issue (Bhabha, 1994: 172)

Culture needs to be understood in terms of semblance, simulation and assimilation. The diverse cultural experience across the lines of borders and traces stretches the boundaries of an identity that has been construed within the limit of specific locations. The problem now is not articulation of an identity but that of a cultural identity which is plural; an articulation of a cultural difference that cannot be solely based on its origin or region, as there is a lot of repetition of signs and overlapping of territories and there is doubling that will not be sublated into a similitude. Culture, thus, becomes much of

an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity since its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation while marking a balance between art and politics, past and present, the public and private.

Contemporary theories, with globalisation forming the background, attempt at re-evaluating and reinterpreting histories that offered a sense of identity. The intellectuals indulge in contrapuntal reading, while interrogating the grand narratives. All this has thrown light on the ambivalence at the very centre of the colonial mission and nationalist projects, which have been represented through their cultural tools. Nonetheless, it is to be understood that identity must be claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre. But neither the centre nor the periphery can exist independently, so it is the relationship between the two that facilitates construction of an identity for each. At the same time, it is assimilation of the metropolitan culture with the subaltern culture that would make up one's identity, for not only have the geographical borders blurred but also the cultural demarcations.

The definition of the self or subjectivity is built around characteristics like uncertainty, fragmentation, pluralisation and diversity. A configuration of relations with authority, social institutions, ontological and epistemological transformations and cultural mechanics is taking place all the time. And, it is amidst all this that an individual has to give meaning to his or her existence and establish his/her identity. In fact, "the language of autonomy, identity, self-realisation and the search for fulfilment forms a grid of regulatory ideals, not making up an amorphous cultural space, but traversing the doctor's consulting room, the factory floor and the personnel manager's office, and organising such diverse programmes..." (Hall and du Gay 145). Cultural encounters lead to cultural assimilation and identities, as a consequence of which identities become luminal in nature. Self-definition, therefore, remains a continuous process, as negotiations of identities are carried out, while the socio-political location of an individual keeps shifting towards liminality.

Although human beings usually identify themselves through their association with a particular community or a collective culture, yet this identity is not static but is a process in itself, which is never complete. Therefore, cultural struggle becomes a passage towards self-definition.

And because of dynamism built within the cultural process, movement is towards liminality. The term 'liminality'is derived from the Latin word *limen* meaning "boundary or threshold". In the postmodern view, it refers to the nebulous social-political location of an individual. At the same time, there is a persistent effort to acquire a stable selfhood through negotiations of identities. It is important to understand that identities are not independent of ideologies; rather they are located within ideological representations.

Nevertheless, the discursive practices view identity not as a kind of recognition with a group having common characteristics but a construction with latent political and ideological motives. Identity is seen as a cultural and social construct, which signifies not 'who we are' but 'how have we been represented'. A similar thought is expressed by Charles Taylor (1994) when he asserts that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence… Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (p. 25). Therefore, identities are produced as a result of an exclusionary project within and through the play of representations. In other words, identity is constituted through difference as Stuart Hall affirms that "it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the positive meaning of any term—and thus its identity—can be constructed" (Hall and du Gay 4). This relationship of difference that is essential for the establishment of an identity is developed within power politics, thus contesting the belief of identity as something natural and unified. Indeed, identity is all about positioning of subjects through representations that are ideologically constructed.

Moreover, the disjoined signifiers of culture in the world are fixed in the punctual periodisations of market, monopoly and multinational capital; the interstitial, erratic movements, which signify culture's transnational temporalities, are knit back into the cultural spaces. First, it was the colonial encounter that resulted in a fractured sense of identity. The 'self' of the colonizer was manifested through the Enlightenment Project, colonialism/imperialism. The colonizer can only exist if there is a colonized. The enterprise of imperialism, which was launched with an intention of acquiring economic and political power, was also a self-defining exercise. In the process, however, the

colonizer is acquainted with the gaps and third spaces between the binaries. Hence, the identity isn't unified, but it keeps oscillating. Then, the nation-building process of the colonized, with an aim to hit back at the colonizer and assert the indigenous identity, created more cleavages in the sense of self. For, nations had to be manufactured and after coming into existence as nation-states, the identity once again becomes convoluted. The need to define the 'self' has only increased in the contemporary times, as Edward Said (1994) puts it:

> Self-definition is one of the activities practised by all cultures: it has rhetoric, a set of occasions and authorities, and a familiarity of its own. Yet, in a world tied together as never before…the assertion of identity is by no means a mere ceremonial matter (p. 42).

But even when an understanding of one's identity is achieved, there isn't a closure. For, as Amartya Sen (2006) maintains, once we know how we want to see ourselves, we may still have difficulty in being able to persuade *others* to see us in just that way (p. 6) and he writes: "Any person is a member of many different groups… and each of these collectivities, to all of which this person belongs, gives him or her a potential identity which—depending on the context—can be quite important" (p. 46).

Indeed, it wouldn't be wrong to say that identities are represented, manifested and spatialised through popular culture, as I noted earlier. Covertly or overtly, it becomes a site for construction and negation of identities. The stories told through different mediums carry with them baggage of the past and present, the anecdotes and interpretations, all are shaped by different ideologies and myths, and cater to different audiences. The reality will differ depending upon where one belongs. However, history repeats itself, it is said. Maybe. But in Kashmir, history is recalled often and, each time, with a little distortion here and a misinterpretation there, a few omissions and some gaps. It is, rather, worse than a replay; for, it leaves Kashmir not merely as a territorial dispute or a metaphor for the struggle for 'freedom', but a dilemma, a conundrum. Historical documents suggest that religious affiliations and regionalism have contributed to Kashmiri identity, with politics and culture intersecting the space. Thus, I seek to explore how a Kashmiri negotiates regional, religious and national identities. Also, while tracing how the term formed the basis of a unique regional

identity and justification for the demand for greater autonomy or even independence/secession from India, the study looks at how Islamic consciousness became a prominent and integral component of not only social identity but also of political ideals and, eventually, of Kashmiri nationalism.

Whether it is the Dogra rule, Kashmiri national movement, accession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to India, militancy, huge Army presence, the statements of political leaders or mobilisation of the people to meet political ends, all are debated in different contexts and interpreted differently. If history becomes need-based on the one hand, the byproducts of postcolonialism, like nationalism, freedom, identity and democracy, are discredited on the other hand. And, the corollary is a sense of ambivalence regarding Kashmiri identity, which becomes a sphere of conflict as the metaphors of identity shift and lose their meanings.

The 'actual' and 'fictional' coalesce to examine the reconstruction of a usable past; a reconstruction which, in retrospect, appears to be a misrepresentation and loaded with contradictions. The narratives, unlike the academic and research works, carry the thoughts, fears, biases and assumptions of common people and as works are accessible to and meant for their consumption. Thus, the debates they carry between the lines—as all writings do—are brought out from the confines of the academia. These narratives are stories; some true and some weaved out of imagination but based on real events of the past and present. They, as all literature is, are a reflection of life. My aim, however, is to read them in the light of their background and history, the representation or misrepresentation they are bringing to the reader, the views they are upholding or fashioning through the words or through characters and the reality they are trying to suggest.

The media reports, texts and films are placed in the post-1989 period when insurgency broke out in the Valley and the idea of a distinct Kashmiri identity became pronounced. For the convenience of readers, a brief about the novels is presented, though discussion of no single literary narrative is confined to any one particular section:

Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* (2008), Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011) and *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (2013) are penned by journalists who have worked and reported on Kashmir. As Kashmir's journalists become story-tellers, their stories are not merely

news reports. In the realm of narrative or literary journalism and even as fiction, they become for others true representatives of the Kashmiri people, filling the gap between representation and reality. Closer to reality, if not the absolute truth, the writings facilitate a perception about and interpretation of the conflict—Kashmir in this case.

Basharat Peer's novel, *Curfewed Night*, is a *memoir* where he recollects stories of a young man's initiation into a Pakistani training camp; a mother who watches her son forced to hold an exploding bomb; a poet who finds religion when his entire family is killed; of politicians living in revamped torture chambers; former militants dreaming of discotheques and temples being turned into Army bunkers. True, the narrative portrays the ground reality in Kashmir, but it is hard to deny that the reality of the present carries the burden of the past with it. Peer does tell his side of the story, but reading his words, I seek to highlight the cleavages and fissures that exist, the spaces of ambivalence and errors of omission or sheer assumptions.

Mirza Waheed offers another dimension to the story of Kashmir. *The Collaborator* is fictional but very close to what people in Kashmir have seen and gone through in the last twenty years, he writes. The protagonist in the novel is a Kashmiri Gujjar boy whose headman father refuses to leave the village when the rest of the families flee in the early 1990s. He collaborates with an Indian Army Captain to count the corpses, fearing each day that he will discover one of his friends among the dead. The boy grapples with the idea of being a Kashmiri, a Muslim, as he becomes sceptic about the 'national' movement for *azadi* or independence from India. He doesn't share with his friends and villagers the sentiment that India is the enemy or that they really need to do anything about the way things are, for he wonders how an independent Kashmir will make any difference. But then he belongs to one of the minority groups within Kashmir. To what extent can the minority decide the parameters of its identity? For him, Kashmiri identity is nothing; it offers him nothing. He would still be a minority, within it and outside it.

Rahul Pandita was fourteen years old when he and his family were forced to leave their home in Srinagar. Being Kashmiri Pandits, they and others became targets of Islamic fundamentalism that soon followed the Kashmiri insurgency that erupted in 1989. His memoir, *Our Moon has Blood Clots,* is that chapter in the history of Kashmir

that has been ignored, with the suffering and pain of the Pandits having been pushed to the margins. It is Pandita's personal journey, but is entwined with the history of the Pandits. The memoir is not only a recollection of the past but also writing of history.

Another text, also by a journalist but a non-Kashmiri, is *In the Valley of Mist* (2009). Here Justin Hardy, through the story of one family, narrates the saga of Kashmir, its transition from a paradise on earth to a disputed territory. Interlaced with anecdotes and spot news, the narrative offers the story of both sides as seen by an outsider, but who is not an Indian either. She underscores how the very characteristics of Kashmiri lifestyle like *phiran* become a threat to their identity, with security forces regarding it as a cover to hide arms.

Salman Rushdie, in *Shalimar the Clown* (2006), takes forward the annihilation of the idea of Kashmir that he had introduced in his *Midnight's Children*, where Tai stood for the traditions and everything that once made up the Kashmiri identity, while Aadam was the new man representing modernity. The two, and what they stood for, are in opposition. Similarly, Kashmir too is positioned between the new forces and the memory of the past. The novel, hence, becomes a point of departure for the Valley into the modern era, with Aadam Aziz losing his faith. However, while Tai in *Midnight's Children* dies in the year of Partition, the two Kashmiri protagonists, Shalimar Noman and Booniya Kaul, of *Shalimar the Clown*, are born in the year of Partition, hence becoming the mirrors of post-Independence Kashmir. *Shalimar the Clown* reroutes postcolonial paradigms by examining transnational terror networks, and their regional and international impact on politics, cultures and identities in the periphery, exemplified in the continuing struggle between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

Similarly, Vikram A. Chandra in *The Srinagar Conspiracy* (2000) presents the dichotomy. The protagonists are soon towed out of a peaceful life in Kashmir only to be thrown into this rage against New Delhi. More than fundamentalism, it is the economics that drives the Kashmiri youth towards the extremes. The narrative is interspersed with the arguments of a TV journalist, perhaps the author's alter ego, that political self-determination for minority groups in 'patchwork quilt' nation-states like India is disastrous to peace and permanent security of those very communities as well as the mother countries.

In *The Homecoming* (2008), Shashi Warrier pens the experience of a Kashmiri who returns to his home and parents in the Valley only to find that everything has changed. And, the change is not just the emergence of Army barracks on city roads and that men in uniform stop every passerby for identification, but the air feels and smells different. Having lived and worked in India all his adult life, he hopes to live his retirement days in Kashmir in peace, but his idea of a peaceful Kashmir is now an illusion, lost in the past. His children and brother offer to him different perspectives while his parents hold on to what Kashmir was once upon a time. As for himself, he can find no escape out of the muddle.

Under the Shadow of Militancy claims to be a diary, covering the time period from February to August of 1990, kept by an unknown Kashmiri Pandit. The author, T.N. Dhar, says that the diary fell into his hands and, henceforth, he has tried to put the pages together without tampering with its contents. It consists of two parts—a short "Introduction" by the author and the "Diary" written by the "unknown Kashmiri". The Diary consists of sixty-seven units and how the author came by it is explained in some detail in the Introduction. Intermingling anecdotes and assessment of the events that took place, the supposed Diary offers a record of the turmoil in the Valley that emerged in 1989, how it swelled and how ordinary people suffered.

George Mastras's *Fidali's Way: A Novel* (2009) only has a section based in Kashmir, but it is the strong sense of the place that Mastras gives to the story that makes it worth picking up. It is the story of an American unintentionally caught up in the present-day conflict between Pakistan and Kashmiri separatists. Mastras very successfully places a human face on those involved in a tragic struggle (on both sides) that is little more than headline news to the rest of the world. In alternating sections of the book, Mastras tells of a very special woman who grew up in the very Kashmiri village toward which Nick is headed and of the little boy who grew up there to become a ruthless *mujahideen* leader fighting the Indian Army for possession of his part of Kashmir. Aysha, even as a child, was considered to be the village healer, and she grew up to become one of the few female medical doctors in her part of the world. Her fiancé, Kazim, went a different way, choosing radical *jihad* over marriage to the beautiful Aysha, a decision both

would continue to regret. It reveals that any attempt to homogenize the perceptions and views of Kashmiris, or even the mindset of the Valley, is a futile exercise. The climax of the book comes when personal grudges, religious fanaticism and rabid nationalism clash at the clinic run by Aysha to the benefit of Indians and Pakistanis, alike. This only accentuates the ultimate vainness, meaninglessness and folly as far as the idea of independence or Azadi is concerned.

As a native of Kashmir, Ashok Kaul tells his side of the story through the characters of his novel, *Kashmir: Nativity Regained* (2011). The estrangement that the Hindu Pandits felt when they were asked just to pack up and move out, leaving their homes behind, is well put across through the novel. *Kashmiriyat* for them ceased to exist when they received threats from fellow Kashmiris. They were stripped to being just Hindus in Kashmir and not even Indians in Jammu for they had no help from the Indian government and were left to rot in 'migrant' camps. What identity could they talk about?

Exodus of hundreds of thousands of Pandits from their homeland is rarely mourned by the world, says Siddhartha Gigoo, as he narrates the story of Sridar, a Kashmiri Pandit boy, in his novel *The Garden of Solitude* (2011). After fleeing from the Valley, Sridar could find solace nowhere but in his writings that speak about the agony of separation. Years later, he returns to the migrant camp and to his ancestral house in Kashmir in search of stories that are on the verge of being forgotten. He wonders if there is anything left that could help define him and an entire generation of Kashmiri Pandits.

As stories become narratives of experiences that people have had and which have affected their lives, they are produced to be recounted by others. However, they are not merely chronicles about what happened; they are more about meanings. And so are media reports. As they talk about the happening or an occurence, the same is reconstructed and ceases to remain solely as an empirical fact. It takes on the narrative feature, including subjectivity (of the reader), believability and coherence. Thus, the day-to-day print media reports help to substantiate my arguments, particularly the reports about the episodes of Amarnath land row of 2008, Central University controversy and stone-pelting incidents of 2010, besides those about insurgency. These incidents had brought the people of the state to the streets and made them resort to violence. What becomes underscored in the process of

study is that media deploys the categories and stereotypes in a manner that they appear before us as totally unproblematic and incontestable. The act of reporting is simultaneously the art of writing the 'truth'; the question is whose truth—your story is definitely not mine. And, normalcy, peace and unrest are communally defined.

Defintions and meanings are contested in the realm of popular culture, of which films are one of the artifacts. The film texts here are read with an aim to represent and assert certain understandings and provide fodder for reflection on assumptions regarding Kashmir.

2 Reading the Vocabulary of Violence

Peace is a befuddling word in Kashmir, not easily understood and even more difficult to explain. There's nothing to not understand about violence on the other hand, it's a generational reality, a vale that's come to define the Valley. What has changed gradually though is the vocabulary of violence. In the recent past, violence may have ebbed but the silence of violence still resonates, becoming vociferous, loud and clear and visible when the call for it, so to speak, comes. Like after the hanging of Afzal Guru, a convict in the Indian Parliament attack:

> In a *fidayeen* attack—occurring after three years—two militants and five CRPF personnel died and ten others sustained injuries on the National Highway Bypass in Bemina area of Srinagar on Wednesday. The officiating Inspector General of Police, Kashmir, Abdul Gani Mir, said that two unidentified militants were gunned down after they attacked and killed the CRPF men on the playground of J&K Police Public School at Bemina around 10.45 a.m. He said six more paramilitary personnel and four civilians sustained injuries in the suicide attack, unprecedented in the State's history of militancy in 23 years (*The Hindu*, March 13, 2013).

As per media reports, the detained Pakistani commander of a *fidayeen* squad is believed to have revealed that reviving suicide strikes on the police and security forces' formations was Lashkar-e-Toiba's initiative "to avenge Afzal Guru's execution" (*The Hindu*, March 16, 2013). The newspaper reported that twenty-six-year-old Mohammad Zubair alias Talha Zaraar of Multan had disclosed that his *jihadist* outfit had decided to take revenge of Guru's 'martyrdom' immediately after his hanging at Delhi's Tihar Jail on February 9. "Within a week, LeT [Lashkar-e-Toiba] launched a specially trained and well indoctrinated *fidayeen* squad of five Pakistani militants through Uri," the sources, quoting the detained militant, had told *The Hindu* (March 16, 2013).

The last of the eighty or so suicide strikes in the state had occurred at a hotel in the business nerve centre of Lal Chowk in Srinagar in January 2010. Two militants and some policemen and civilians had died in the two-day operation (*The Hindu*, March 13, 2013). The March 13 (2013) attack on a CRPF camp at Bemina was the group's first suicide operation—three years after the last of the series at a hotel in Lal Chowk area on January 6, 2010.

The Hindu of March 16, however, concluded with a senior official's quote: "There seems to be a greater coincidence between LeT's revenge attack on March 13 and the Pakistan National Assembly's resolution on March 14." While the role of Pakistan in fomenting trouble or adding to the crisis in Kashmir can never be denied, the phases of violence in Kashmir have only revealed the ambivalence regarding the Kashmiri identity, when asserted through violence. Among the Muslims, the martyrdom of Hussein at the battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. is often referred to while invoking a readiness to sacrifice lives for the collective good in the face of overwhelming odds. Thus, the use of or support for the use of suicide attacks or martyrdom operations as a weapon in *jihad* against the perceived enemy has been a feature of radical Islam. But it has been criticised by moderates and since radicalism has never been the ethos of Kashmiri culture or lifestyle, suicide attacks have not received mass endorsement in the Valley.

At the same time, suicide attacks must not be comprehended merely from the point of view of an Islamic culture that inclines towards fanatic hatred of the West and violence, even in its extreme form. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, militant Islamic groups adopted suicide bombing simply as a tactic when other methods had failed:

> The choice of the suicide weapon as an instrument in the hands of the terrorists derives from the fact that it is available and "cheap", and the damage caused to the morale of the rival population is grave. A suicide attack is, like all other terror attacks in the modern era, primarily meant to provide its perpetrators with maximum media coverage, thus magnifying "a powerful self-image" (Shay 2).

Suicide bombing, it seems, is a weapon of last resort. Robert Pape's (Pape 2003, 2005) study of all 462 suicide bombers, who attacked targets worldwide between 1980 and 2003, offers support to the

recent school of thought that propounded the act and practice as a strategically rational political action (Sprinzak 2000). The core of Pape's argument is that "... every group mounting a suicide campaign over the past two decades has had as a major objective—or its central objective—coercing a foreign state that has military forces in what the terrorists see as their homeland to take those forces out" (Pape, 2005: 21; Laqueur, 2004: 19).

In Jammu and Kashmir, though not suicide attacks, but martyrdom *per se* has definitely been glorified and, as a result, martyrs have received public adulation. A martyr's appeal, seemingly, has a universal reach and a potential to incite action and is used to further the decrees of a revolution. But a martyr is not self-made—other than sacrificing his own life—but rather is a product of the society. A martyr for the Kashmiris, however, is regarded as an anti-national outside the Valley. Then, was Afzal Guru a convict or a martyr?

Afzal Guru, a surrendered militant of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF),[1] was convicted in the Parliament attack and executed on February 9, 2013. A front-page headline had announced: "Afzal Hanged at Last" (*Hindustan Times*, February 10, 2013). Right or wrong? That is an invalid option when it comes to India. With plurality in every precinct of the land, there could only be multiple opinions. And, in our nation-state, each time nationalism is evoked, it can't possibly be seen in isolation of the context; the timing plays a role. But yes, there exists something called the 'collective conscience' that we the 'Indians' share. Influenced, induced, manoeuvred, hegemonised, even coerced, but it comes into existence, is cited at times and completely ignored at another.

[1] There are two distinct outfits, each of which identifies itself by the name Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). Amanullah Khan heads the first while Yasin Malik, who parted ways with Amanullah Khan and formed another JKLF, heads the other. Both the Fronts trace their origin to the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF). The JKNLF was an offshoot of the Plebiscite Front, a forum allegedly launched at the behest of the late Sheikh Abdullah, who was Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir and President of the National Conference, at a time when he was at loggerheads with India's Union Government. After the Sheikh-Indira Accord was signed, militant, pro-independence elements within the Plebiscite Front walked out to continue with the movement to secede from India.

So, of course, the 'collective' must have rallied for Guru's hanging. According to French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1982), society is an ensemble of ideas; it indicates a reality that is produced when individuals interact with one another, resulting in the fusion of individual consciences. Hence, society becomes greater, bigger than the sum of its parts and it supersedes the existence of any one particular individual and is wholly new and different from the parts that make it up. This refers to collective conscience. The term is used when a self-governing individual comes to identify with a group or a particular structure and, thereby, produces a kind of cohesion, of which all individuals then become a part. It offers a legible unity to a structure or a group. According to Durkheim, and even Louis Althusser (2001), the subject becomes an accumulation of external processes and societal conditions.

It is not that the 'consciousness' of an individual would build up from the inner spirit of the being, but by external forces that are in control of the State. These are press-ganged into the individual through various devices and means available to the State. The directives of collective consciousness express the term as the internal exemplification of conditions present outside the individual in any given social set-up. Hence, collective conscience in a way represents the liaison that exists between an individual and the larger structure or group, which is the State. However, it also emphasises on the sameness among all subjects. It is assumed that since collective is an assembly of like-minded individuals, the mass will emerge—and the emergence would be a recurring feature—to reproduce the production force, in other words the consent of the masses. Thus, collective consciousness is the influence of and upon the public as a result of the thoughts and actions that are arbitrated by outside pressures. Nationalism then is one such collective state of mind or consciousness experienced by a group that endorses the interest of the nation. It is evoked and practised from time to time, especially when the idea of nation or nation-state is threatened.

Hence, as part of the collective, I try to make sense of the pages devoted to "Afzal Guru Hanging", for media is the agency that evokes and articulates the collective conscience. Was it a fair case? Or, was the legal case besieged by the 'national consciousness'? Arundhati Roy, while debating the verdict, questions: "Who crafted our collective

conscience on the Parliament attack case? Could it have been the facts we gleaned in the papers? The films we saw on TV?" (*The Hindu*, February 10, 2013). As a cultural artifact, newspapers become a space for not only interpretation and debate but also a domain of inquiry. They are essential in generating the modes of thought and behaviour appropriate to a highly organised and homogenised social order.

> For too long, we have looked at media materials—be they film, or television, or print, as if they exist in isolated, hermetic universes. This mode of analysis that sees 'cinema as cinema alone' and that does not take into account the networked information world inhabited and created by universe, readers, audiences and producers of media materials through a constant process of interactive, cross-referential and self referential iteration of media objects, is totally inadequate when it comes to the task of understanding the place of images, sounds, words and information that attempt to express the contemporary realities we live in (Sengupta 38-39).

For the collective outside the Valley, it was a patterned reading and standardised interpretation of Guru's hanging. But the 'reading' of the event—Afzal's trial and hanging—can't be performed and neither can its reverberations be viewed in isolation. For, the processes occur in a media space, where messages, memories, events and mediums are transmitted and they overlap each other. Ignoring the fact that meaning is produced at junctures would only jeopardise the destinies of not just one polity but also that of an individual in terms of life and death. When the wife of the slain sub-inspector, who was among those killed in Parliament attack, said "better late than never" (*The Hindu*, February 10, 2013), the grief and sentiment was shared by the masses. Justice delivered, even if delayed, the chorus could be heard. But in Seer Jagir (Sopore, Kashmir), Afzal Guru's widow will perhaps never find peace: "What more do you want? You have all killed my husband. You hanged an honest man to fulfil the conscience of your people. You have taken away everything I had. Leave us alone…" (*Outlook*, March 4, 2013). The people of the Valley don't share the same idea and meaning of justice as the people of the nation-state, India.

In fact, the reference to the consensus has been made in the judgement, an excerpt of which *The Indian Express* (February 10, 2013) carried: "The incident, which resulted in heavy casualties, had shaken the entire nation and the collective conscience of the society will only be satisfied if the capital punishment is awarded to the

offender…" As far as the legality of the verdict and the hanging is concerned, loopholes have been underscored.[2] While senior advocate Kamini Jaiswal, who represented S.A.R. Geelani in the same case, says that "the government's decision to hang Afzal Guru was fuelled by political considerations… his right to live has been violated", senior lawyer Gopal Subramaniam maintains that Afzal Guru was given a free trial and the courts ensured his legal rights (*The Hindu*, February 10, 2013). However, the guilt of Afzal Guru was not as evident and proved as the State would like its people to believe. In an article, "The Question of Reasonable Doubt" (*Open* magazine, February 23, 2013), Mihir Srivastava, having followed Afzal Guru's case closely since 2005, writes that the case did not merit a death sentence: "It seems no coincidence that Afzal, the only man sentenced to death, was the only accused who was not properly defended at the trial stage. All evidence against him was treated as tenable as there was no one to dispute it on his behalf." It is another matter that the "collective" had preferred to ignore it in the spirit of nationalism. Mirza Waheed (2013) wonders about the logic, as he writes: "It is of course impossible to understand the complex moral arithmetic necessary to arrive at the perfect potion needed to assuage the collective conscience of a billion people… I also began to feel lonely, for in spite of the proliferation of conversations on social media, a solidarity of the oppressed and besieged is hard to find amid the buzz of the internet or a postmodern metropolis" (p. 257).

Certainly the collective in the Valley and outside do not have the same conscience. Moreover, the collective voice in the Valley must also be muted lest it threatens the security of the 'nation'. Hence, curfew was enforced in the Valley on the day of Afzal Guru's hanging. The police had detained over fifty youth and many separatist leaders to keep the situation in the Valley under control (*The Tribune*, February 21, 2013). For the rest of the country it was out of security concerns, but the people in the Valley hollered as being "caged", as an editorial in *Greater Kashmir* (February 13, 2013) stated: "Although government's apprehension about violence in the Valley cannot simply be rejected off-hand, yet a democratic dispensation that swears by the rule of law

[2] See Arundhati Roy's "And His Life Should Become Extinct" in *The Hanging of Afzal Guru.*

cannot afford to cage its people like cattle for days together, giving a damn to their individual and collective civil rights… With curfew in place for about 100 hours now, there is every chance that people might have run out of essential commodities…" Also, besides an "unofficial ban" on publication of dailies in Kashmir, their circulation was not allowed (*Greater Kashmir*. February 13, 2013), the Central government had directed Internet service providers on February 14 to block fifty-five Facebook pages that were supposedly pro-Afzal. A complete breakdown of communication occurred in the Valley. Life was under detention, pointing at the repression-dissent nexus. Mirza Waheed (2013) calls it a "collective strangulation" (p. 255) and writes: "…you hang a Kashmiri in Delhi and then, to complete the picture, to make the performance full, immediately put Kashmir under a military siege. A country that needs to impose a curfew every time it fears what it calls 'unrest' in a region that it claims as an integral part should by now have learned that it is not an integral part. It never was" (p. 255).

The State controls dissent through legal regulation of physical space and wielding coercive power. If pacification of political dissent is not possible, the State indulges in repression through power mechanisms. While restrictions and regulation could and have been justified in the name of security, it is a photograph that was carried in *The Hindu* (also on the back page of *The Tribune*) on the day after Afzal Guru's hanging that not only points a finger at the genuine collective conscience but also the idea of dissent—peaceful protest—in a democracy. The picture caption reads: "Bajrang Dal activists clash with Kashmiri students who were protesting the hanging of Afzal Guru, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi." Of course, it was not about India versus Kashmir. Is not protest and dissent essential to the functioning of a healthy democracy? Contested ideas and competing opinions, even when offending the prevailing sensibilities, are crucial to the existence of a free society. But, in practice, it is not so. Dissent struggles for legitimacy despite being the mainstay—and not a glitch—of democratic governance. The Kashmiris may not agree, but the Indians—the collective conscience—believe that Kashmir has been an integral part of India, hence its people are Indian citizens. They have a right of space to protest. Can the nationalism slogan legitimise the crushing of dissent? Do Bajrang Dal activists represent the collective conscience? Even if they get away by saying that the other party provoked or initiated, what

about a Bajrang Dal activist having a 'ladoo' to celebrate the "justice"? Neither nationalism, nor Indianness would sanction such a "reaction". Let the collective conscience not be fooled. What is an Indian citizen supposed to read the picture as? What would a Kashmiri youth in the Valley make of it? The answers, perhaps, needn't be spelled out.

In 2006, in an interview to Vinod K. Jose (2013), Afzal Guru had introduced himself in the following words:

> Afzal is a young, enthusiastic, intelligent, idealistic young man, Afzal a Kashmiri influenced like many thousands in the Kashmir Valley in the political climate of early 1990s, who was a JKLF member and crossed over to the other side of Kashmir, but in a matter of weeks got disillusioned and came back and tried to live a normal life, but was never allowed to do so by the security agencies who inordinate times picked me up, tortured the pulp out of me, electrified, frozen in cold water, dipped in petrol, smoked in chilies you name it, and falsely implicated in a case, with no lawyer, no fair trial, finally condemned to death. The lies the police told were propagated by you in media. And that perhaps created what the Supreme Court referred to as "collective conscience of the nation". And to satisfy that "collective conscience", I'm condemned to death. That is the Mohammad Afzal you are meeting (p. 222-23).

Afzal's story is that of many Kashmiri youth, caught between Scylla and Charybdis. The security forces have a job to do, yes. They do it, perhaps, to the best of their ability, yes. But can human rights violations be shelved as collateral damage? The cases where the highhandedness of the Army has been proved, the responsibility must be owned up. This is not to say that the inhumane acts of 'men in green' have solely been the doings of the security forces; for, there have been the *jihadis* or STF being excessive in their actions as well. In an interview to Parvaiz Bukhari, DSP (STF) Davinder Singh accepts that he interrogated and tortured Afzal Guru at his camp at Humhama (Budgam district) but he came out clean. The DSP, however, denies asking Afzal to take Mohammad to Delhi and help him: "I am being victimised for having worked in Special Operations Group (SOG), for being very nationalistic" (*The Hanging of Afzal Guru*, Appendix III, 277-280). However, Afzal had told Jose:

> I was also one of those who crossed to the other side of Kashmir as a JKLF member, but was disillusioned after seeing Pakistani politicians acting

> the same as the Indian politicians in dealing with Kashmiris. I returned after a few weeks. I surrendered to the security forces, and you know, I was even given a BSF certificate as a surrendered militant. I began to start life anew… But never a day passed by without the scare of Rashtriya Rifles and STF men harassing me… The situation was even worse for a surrendered militant like me. They detained us for several weeks, and threatened to implicate in false cases and were let free only if we paid huge bribes. Many times I had to go through this. Major Ram Mohan Roy of 22 Rashtriya Rifles gave electric shock to my private parts. Many times I was made to clean their toilets and sweep their camps. Once I had to bribe the security men with all that I had to escape from the Humhama STF torture camp. DSP Vinay Gupta and DSP Davinder Singh supervised the torture. One of their torture experts, Inspector Shanty Singh, electrified me for three hours until I agreed to pay one lakh rupees as bribe (p. 224).

For the ordinary people in Kashmir, it has been misery and suffering at the hands of both their own people who have joined militant ranks and the security forces. On one side are the *mujahideens* who exploit the local Kashmiris to ensure their own safety and to meet their ends and on the other side are the security personnel, who through atrocities, identity checks and intrusions, humiliate ordinary Kashmiris in their own homeland, leaving them physically and mentally wounded. In Kashmir, since 1989, not just the geographical territory remains 'occupied' but the mindspace of the two generations has been encroached upon. Life has turned into mere existence. The armed movement may have lost its momentum, but in Kashmir there can be no guarantees. Peace is fragile, the anger is always simmering and the outburst could take any shape. And, the Indian government's act of stealthily hanging Afzal Guru only fanned the ambers and did the needful to stoke the sentiments of the people in Kashmir by sending a 'speed post' to inform Afzal's family about the rejection of mercy plea and execution, knowing well that it wouldn't reach in time: "The Union Home Minister and the Home Secretary's public statement that the family… was informed at the 'right time' about the decision stands exposed as the government dispatched the courier only 32 hours before the hanging" (*Deccan Herald*, February 11, 2013).

The intention, perhaps, is clear or rather, lack of any intention is more apparent.

> Why did the government take almost two days to dispatch the letter on February 8 at 12:07 am to Guru's family when the letter (number F3/SCJ3/AS (W)/2013/189) was drafted by the superintendent of Tihar Central Jail No. 3 on February 6 to inform Guru's wife, Tabassum, about his hanging… It was delivered to Tabasum on February 11 at 11:03 am at her Sopore residence—which was two days after he was hanged"(*Deccan Herald*, February 11, 2013).

If anybody thinks that this story will not be passed on to the generations in Kashmir, the person is only being too idealistic. How would one dismiss the collective conscience of the people of Kashmir?

The memo, in callous bureaucratese, with every name insultingly misspelt, sent by the superintendent of central jail number 3, Tihar, New Delhi to "Mrs Tabassum w/o Sh Afjal Guru" reads: "The mercy petition of Sh Mohd Afjal Guru s/o Habibillah has been rejected by Hon'ble President of India. Hence the execution of Mohd Afjal Guru s/o Habibillah has been fixed for 09/02/2013 at 8 AM in Central Jail No-3. This is for your information and for further necessary action" (Roy, 2013: 245).

The memo arrived after the execution had already taken place, denying Tabassum one last legal chance—the right to challenge the rejection of the mercy petition. Both Afzal Guru and his family, separately, had that right. Both were thwarted. Even though it is mandatory in law, the memo to Tabassum ascribed no reason for the President's rejection of the mercy petition. If no reason is given, on what basis do you appeal? All the other prisoners on death row in India have been given that last chance. Arundhati Roy (2013), with clear sarcasm, writes: "Since Tabassum was not allowed to meet her husband before he was hanged, since her son was not allowed to get a few last words of advice from his father, since she was not given his body to bury and since there can be no funeral, what 'further necessary action' does the jail manual prescribe? Anger? Wild, irreparable grief? Unquestioning acceptance? Complete integration?" (p. 246)

Be it the baggage of history, the trust deficit between Kashmir and the State or the repression that followed since 1989, the events in Kashmir are viewed differently depending where you are positioned. In an answer to a question as to what he would want to be known as,

Afzal had pronounced his own name. But what followed, perhaps, is his perspective of reality, how the collectives differ:

> I am Afzal for Kashmiris, and I am Afzal for Indians as well, but the two groups have an entirely conflicting perception of my being. I would naturally trust the judgment of Kashmiri people not only because I am one among them, but also because they are well aware of the reality I have been through and they cannot be misled into believing any distorted version of either a history or an incident (Jose 234).

In not so many words, Afzal Guru seems to have underscored the relationship between India and Kashmir—trust deficit, to begin with. But going through the reading of the "Afzal Guru Hanging", there are too many questions left unanswered. Also, for the ordinary masses, who make the 'collective conscience', taking sides is the only option left. What's right is manipulated and, perhaps, the collective unconsciousness is aware of this.

Recollecting the meeting with Afzal Guru on the day after his elder brother had said that Afzal was a terrorist and should be hanged in a sting operation shown on a TV news channel, Indira Jaisingh (2013) writes that Afzal Guru had laughed and said: "There is no mystery about that, he is in the care and custody of the STF" (p. 209). After the hanging, Afzal's elder brother underscores another fact: "No one supported him, be it Kashmir's politicians, separatists or anyone else. They all abandoned him. Now everyone is playing politics in his name, drawing mileage out of his death. Everyone is gaining at the cost of a poor Kashmiri's life" (*Outlook*, March 4, 2013). At the end of the day, thus, personal is political. While most would agree that the timing and also the impudence on the part of the Indian government had been deliberate, it brought anger and politics on the streets in Kashmir:

> Meanwhile, the drawing-room discussion veers towards the JKLF, from which Afzal had disengaged but whose ex-militant badge he had to wear the rest of his life. The JKLF, family members say, should not be allowed to get any mileage out of the hanging. The PDP has approached them but the family is confused by the direction they should take. The National Conference too has approached Afzal's wife, but there are no takers for them in the house of mourners (*Outlook*, March 4, 2013).

Power, politics and violence. Can they be isolated from one another? Hannah Arendt (1970) argues that "power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy" (p. 52) and quoting C. Wright Mills, she states that politics of any kind is a struggle for power and violence happens to be the ultimate power. Arendt insists that authority, strength, and power of the state rest upon its legitimacy, which gives it the power to foster collective action among its citizens. State violence, which may be justified, suggests that the state lacks sufficient legitimacy to gain citizen compliance through non-coercive power.

> Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as non-violence; to speak of non-violent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it (Arendt, 1970: 56).

The means of violence would prove futile when authority and its commands are defied and defiance occurs when the collective breaks free of the command-obedience relationship. The opinion of the masses—not a few—is anti-establishment.

Afzal Guru is now 'memorialised', with posters/placards reading: "Hanging Bhat did not work, hanging Guru will not work." Never mind Afzal Guru's ideology, he metamorphoses into the new motif for struggle, resistance and rebellion in the Valley. Guru is the new icon. The sentiment that he was not allowed a fair trial and then did not even get a chance to meet his family before his death are strong enough to reinforce a Kashmiri's sense of victimhood and support reorganisation of memory for the desired social and political ramifications.

Guru shares the space, the history and also the people's memory with Maqbool Bhat, as Bhat's mother Shahmala had put it: "I felt like my son, Maqbool was again hanged. February 9 was reminiscent of everything that happened on the day he (Maqbool) was hanged. Afzal was like my son" (*Greater Kashmir*, February 11, 2013).

It was in June 1966 that Maqbool Bhat, belonging to one of the National Liberation Front groups, crossed the ceasefire line from

Muzaffarabad to find recruits for the launch of their first armed operation in Jammu and Kashmir. Maqbool Bhat had been in jail for his role in a bank robbery and the murder of a bank manager. But till then, Bhat had only appeared in newspaper briefs as a proponent of Kashmir's Azadi. It was when the killers of senior Indian diplomat Ravindra Hareshwa Mhatre[3] had sought Bhat's release in exchange for freeing Mhatre that he suddenly assumed some prominence in the Kashmir discourse. "Bhat's hanging changed little and made little difference to the tenor of life in Kashmir. Except for a puny of protest in Srinagar, Kashmir pulled on regardless" (*Tehelka*, February 12, 2013). It brought about no transformation or revolution in the subsequent five years, nor had an affect through the portentous elections of 1987, which saw major electoral gains for the Muslim United Front, a coalition of religious and political outfits broadly aligned against New Delhi and challenging the monopoly of the National Conference. But surprisingly, the National Conference was declared to have won the elections, which stirred protest and anger among the people of Kashmir. And then, Maqbool Bhat was resurrected.

> It was only when armed struggle broke out in 1989 and toppled the existing structure that Bhat's name started doing the rounds, but again only on the margins of Azadi discourse. It took some painstaking effort by JKLF to refresh his memory and then appropriate him as the symbol for its freedom struggle (*Tehelka*, February 12, 2013).

On the one hand, Bhat has been described as "the first authentic martyr of the Kashmiri independence movement", as Praveen Swami (2007) cites: "Each year more mythology is added as the legend of Maqbool Bhat expands… [he] may one day join the ranks among the 'rishis' of Kashmir who are believed to have such powers…" (Swami 106). On the other hand, the irony that Maqbool Bhat was jailed in Pakistan on suspicion of being an Indian covert agent and was eventually executed as a traitor (Swami 106) is hard to miss. Maqbool Bhat, however, was deeply cynical of the intentions and statements of Pakistan. In May 1973, still in prison, he wrote a letter to his niece

[3] Mhatre was an Indian diplomat who was kidnapped and murdered in Birmingham (UK) in 1984.

Azra Mir asserting that "Pakistani ruling class has never ever supported Kashmiris in their struggle for freedom, as they should have done. This class has never been interested in the liberation of Kashmiris. Whatever they say is merely lip service" (Swami 127). In Bhat's vision, he was engaged in a people's struggle against power, not a *jihad* against a Hindu state: "Generals hate the concept of [a] people's army because it challenges the monopoly of the [Generals] on military resources. It is a historical fact that military dictators never supported any organisation engaged in liberation war" (cited in Swami 108).

Bhat did not entertain Islamic fundamentalist sentiments; he wasn't even close to being a fanatic. For, nowhere does he attack Hindu figures or Hindu religion in his writings. In a letter from prison to a political activist in Srinagar, he wrote: "Nations survive because of that spirit, that abiding passion for liberty, which according to our Prophet (praise be upon him), emboldens one to recite the Kalima-e-Tawheed [the call for truth] before a tyrant, and that too with the conviction that this is the greatest *jihad*" (Swami 134).

It was Maqbool Bhat, still in Azad Kashmir, who had initiated protests when the Indira-Sheikh Accord was signed, while the Valley had not really reacted. He had referred to Aristotle, Buddha, Martin Luther King and even Marx and Engels to rationalise his resistance to India, but Bhat's own liberation ideology was flawed or has not been documented: "Yet, others in the NLF-JKLF hierarchy from the outset rejected the principles of the man they revered" (Swami 134). Though there is a dearth of accounts regarding his vision about the future of Kashmir, he had certainly vouched for an independent Jammu and Kashmir (see Swami). His speech in the Pakistan court, however, underlines his revolutionary character.

In the cause of defeating India, the alliance that began to emerge after Sheikh Abdullah's death suggested that Islamists and nationalists could co-exist. Bhat's ideological legacy seems to have got lost on the way as his heirs could neither enjoy the fruits of his struggles nor draft a trajectory for the next generation.

The Islamists were, in fact, the real beneficiaries and they made it clear that he was not their hero. In 1984, the Jamaat-e-Islami's house journal, the *Azaan*, carried an obituary for Bhat, notably omitting the customary suffix *shaheed,* or martyr, from his name:

> He had entered that world of emotions, where a person like him, burdened by the overwhelming force of emotion carries on without making any distinction between the bitterness and sweetness of life, losing the capacity to distinguish between wrong and right… Be it as it may, [we are] greatly saddened by the death of those youngsters who, despite having been so capable, become victims of their emotions, instead of facing the massive boulders in their path with determination and courage (Sikand 746).

Bhat still remains a "one-day shutdown figure" (*Tehelka*,February 13, 2013), as on every February 11, Kashmir observes a *bandh* in his memory. Afzal Guru, on the other hand, has acquired a greater symbolic significance. Omar Abdullah, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, pointed out that the present generation of youth in Kashmir would identify more with Afzal Guru than they could with Bhat. Moreover, in the Valley, the Parliament attack is not looked at as an unparalleled terror attack, or an assault on India's symbol of sovereignty.

Afzal's body was buried near Jail No. 3, right next to the grave of Kashmiri separatist Maqbool Bhat, who too was hanged in Tihar on February 11, 1984. But a jail official pointed at the dissimilarity: "But there is a difference between the two. While Butt was a separatist leader, Afzal never spoke about secession of Kashmir from India. In fact, he used to tell us that he had been unnecessarily dragged into this. In fact, he actually believed in ridding India of corruption" (*The Hindu*, February 11, 2013). The two Kashmiris hanged may have had different ideologies, diverging trajectories, not the same status among the masses, yet the two have something common: empty graves in the 'martyr's graveyard' in Kashmir.

Also, the two names have been transformed into metaphors that could be used not only as rhetorical instruments but also as empirical aid in framing a narrative to suit the context. Also, the two become the phenomenon that carry reference points within as markers for verification. In the discourse of Kashmir, Guru and Bhat have, thus, been verbalised as metaphors in terms of substitution, comparison and also interaction. For, the commemoration of the martyrs through public expressions help to sustain collective boundaries, reinforce collective consciousness and a national ideology.

While the Kashmir struggle got martyrs and the Kashmir politics got names for rhetoric, the peace, perhaps, remains at the horizon.

Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Yasin Malik, who went on a twenty-four-hour hunger strike to pressurise Indian authorities to hand over the body of Afzal Guru, said actions like the hanging of Guru would create frustration and anger among youths in Jammu and Kashmir who had adopted non-violent forms of protest (*TheIndian Express*, February 9, 2013).

Yasin Malik was fourteen when he first realised that Kashmir was a disputed territory. A scuffle between locals on the road and a driver of an Army vehicle underscored the conflict for the teenager. When people slapped the drunk driver, they were lathicharged by the security forces, the property was set on fire, and curfew was imposed within hours. Hiding behind the ticket counter to save his life, he understood that this land was home but he was not free and that he just had to rebel.

In an online interview,[4] Murtaza Shibli describes Yasin Malik in these words: "Yasin Malik is a very strange and intriguing character. In fact, I find him the most interesting to study and he exemplifies the character of Kashmiris—confused, guileful, opportunist, emotional, brave, cautious and full of tantrums." The son of a bus driver, Yasin Malik rose through the ranks as a militant commander and survived several militant threats. He is believed to have support of the Intelligence agencies on both sides of the border. Also, as many in Kashmir argue, Yasin Malik has bartered his soul with the Indian government and no longer represents the will of the people. Nevertheless, he has proved to be a survivor, as Shibli writes:

> He surrendered in the early 1990s and gave hundreds of JKLF arms and ammunition to the Indian forces which raised the Special Operations Group (SOG) from that using the same arms to kill fellow militants, some from his own group. Yet he called it a cease-fire and got away with it at a time when surrender meant sure death from separatist militants. Then he established a network of informers for the Indian security agencies to overcome the influence of Hizbul Mujahideen and Jamiatul Mujahideen, particularly in the Srinagar district. Despite the Hizb's opposition to him, he not only survived but surged ahead. Later, he established direct contact

[4] March 30, 2012, http://www.defence.pk/forums/strategic-geopolitical-issues/12137-kashmiris-launch-new-revolution-if-talks-fail-yasin-malik-back-fighting-talk.html#ixzz2LPmfrzK4

> with Indian Prime Ministers—Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh—both clandestinely and openly and when the news was out, he managed it very well. He had very good contacts with Indian leaders Rajesh Pilot and George Fernandes as well.

From a student leader to the man who began the armed struggle in Kashmir and then declaring ceasefire in 1995, Yasin Malik has seen the changing phases of violence, from Kalashnikovs to stones, interspersed with democratic means, including a signature campaign, to assert his point. Moreover, he has endured violence. Having spent ten years in jail, third-degree torture and regular visits to interrogation centres left him physically weak and scarred. He can barely hear from one ear and his left eye is damaged. I asked him about those days and he said with a smile, "Maulana Rumi, the Sufi poet, didn't let the romanticism in me die. In jail, or when you adopt non-violent means, you need more romanticism to keep you going."[5]As for his romanticism, Humra Quraishi (2004) remembers when she interviewed him in Delhi and she writes:

> He seemed not so much the hard-core militant that the Government of India portrayed him as, but rather a diehard romantic fading rather prematurely into oblivion. He recited verses from the tragic actress Meena Kumari's famous poem 'Tanha'—Loneliness—and because he had recently suffered a partial paralysis, the words sounded impossibly sad" (Quraishi 126-127).

Quraishi says that Malik talked less of politics and more about the turning point when "he made a poster with a word 'Azadi', or independence, painted on it and was beaten and prisoned for the offence" (p. 127).

When JKLF started the militant movement in the Valley, it did have the people's support. A separate, independent Kashmir as it existed in 1947 was the ideal goal. Pakistan was only an aid, a training ground, in the struggle towards that objective. As Praveen Swami

[5] This and subsequent quotes with Kashmiri leaders Yasin Malik, Javed Mir, Sajad Lone, Engineer Rashid and Aasiya Andrabi and common people, including those who had joined the militant ranks, are part of personal interviews that I conducted in Srinagar in February 2012.

(2007) notes, the JKLF executives not only depended on their own resources but their plans were also in opposition to Pakistan's strategic interests. Politically and ideologically, JKLF was not Islamist in its thought and actions. But, with greater infiltration and influence of Jamaat-e-Islami, things changed.

In May 1994, Yasin Malik who was released from jail (after his arrest in August 1990) declared that his faction of JKLF would renounce violence as a tool to achieve the goal of 'independence'. Of the four JKLF founders, two—Abdul Hamid Shaikh and Ashfaq Majid Wani—were killed in police encounters. The other two, Javed Mir and Yasin Malik, carry on the "struggle" and both claimed that the sound of silence today is as loud as that of violence of the Nineties. Back in 1989, said senior JKLF leader Javed Mir, picking up arms was "to attract the attention of the world". Loud and clear. "Too many pacts and agreements were signed between India and Pakistan but nothing changed on the ground in Kashmir," he reasoned. Violence became necessary, he recalled, because it is one thing that is noticed, has the power to genuinely transform the state of affairs and "a process toward freedom" in case of Kashmir. Also, State violence and violent actions of the security forces could be countered by violent reactions. "To bring the parties to the table, the gun was picked up," said Javed Mir.

Did it help?

"Giving up arms was the most unpopular decision, my own people did not support it," Yasin Malik, siting at his Maisuma residence, reminisced.

The JKLF had demanded, rather aspired for, an independent Jammu and Kashmir, including Azad Kashmir or what is referred to as Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, as the state existed prior to 1947. It was the nationalist ideology that formed its underpinning. Kashmiri nationalism was the driving force. Hence, violence was justified, rather legitimised, in the name of Kashmiri nationalism.

In the novel, *The Homecoming*, a conversation takes place between Hamid, an ordinary Kashmiri who had come to Srinagar almost like a refugee because he had lost his land and work in Rajouri due to firing across the Line of Control, and Muhammad, a Kashmiri political leader who had been raising slogans against India but had now joined a pro-India party, aspiring for a rise in his political career:

> 'I want my homeland back. I want to live in peace, I want to be able to meet my relatives on the other side of the Line. I don't want war. I don't want threats.' [Hamid]
>
> 'Unfortunately that's not what the country wants.'
>
> 'Who are you to decide that?' Hamid asks. 'You have people like me on the Line who suffer when there is shelling, but do you ask us what we want? No. You say what you like and claim that the people want it. Who these people are, you never say. Is it the people of this country? Have you told them what it is like?' (Warrier 219)

This conversation underscores the interweaving, but lacking cohesion, of concepts like homeland, peace, country and its people, and to what extent is 'I' a "we" in the context of Kashmir. How far can the "I" go and part with to be a part of the "we"? Both the characters in *The Homecoming* are Kashmiri, but they don't endorse the same ideas. Step out of the fiction and this is true on the streets. As my taxi driver had put it quite categorically when I had asked him if it had been 'normal' in Srinagar in the past days: "Geelani sahib is in Delhi, chances of a *bandh* are rare." Syed Ali Shah Geelani, hardliner and chief of Hurriyat Conference (G), has been instrumental in calling strikes but prefers to spend his winters in Delhi, locals don't miss pointing out. This is not to say that he has lost his following, even today he is a revered leader for many Kashmiris.

The story is more linear when it comes to news. Associated Press, a news agency, on November 4, 2001, wired a report with the headline "India Clashes Leave 15 People Dead", and it read:

> Srinagar: Gunbattles with suspected Islamic militants left 15 people dead in the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir over the weekend, police said Sunday. In one incident, Indian troops shot and killed 10 militants believed to be members of the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, which is fighting to separate the region from India, a police official said on condition of anonymity. Hindu-dominated India accuses Muslim Pakistan of supporting an Islamic insurgency in Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority province. Pakistan denies it aids the insurgents but calls them freedom fighters. Human rights groups say at least 60,000 people have been killed in the fighting since 1989.

The report is suggestive of a few things: 1) the idea of nation and the nation-state; 2) how religion becomes the defining factor or, in

other words, signifier of national identity and 3) the nouns 'insurgents' and 'freedom fighters' have varying meanings. Violence, of course, is the central idea here, but let's not lose sight of the innuendos and nuances—India, Pakistan, Hindu India, Muslim Pakistan, Muslim Kashmir. In short, nation and nation-state are all too clear for one set of readers and all too jumbled up for the other. But coming back to violence, it can be, and often is, understood within the cause-and-effect equation. Is violence the cause or the effect? The choice of an answer would vary on assumptions and presumptions, which, to each his own. Kashmir is not just a piece of land or a nation… and can Hindu India and not a secular India be called a nation-state? It is, as the rhetoric goes, the unfinished business of Partition. Or, is it now merely a 'running business' for those having vested interests?

Justin Hardy, in her book *In the Valley of Mist*, suggests that media doesn't tell the real story or, at least not the complete story when it talks of Kashmir. This is how she reports the incidence of gunfire or a reported gunfire:

> By then I knew the official report: a patrol of the Rajputana Rifles had been attacked by militants of the JKLF. Two jawans had been injured, two militants killed, and several others had escaped. I was told that the militants had been en route to attack military personnel when they met the patrol. In another version, I was also told that the militants had been meeting in a house when the patrol broke in during a raid. And then I was told that the militants were not militants at all but a group of *mistris*, masons, knocking down an interior wall of a house that was believed to be a place where militants met regularly. The bang of their hammers was said to have been confused with gunfire (Hardy 37).

So, in Hardy's case, it's just reportage of what could and might have happened, very dissimilar from what perhaps the AP reporter would have seen and written… no perceived notions, just an event unfolding without the baggage that maybe every Kashmiri carries.

Violence is a discourse in Kashmir; hard to comprehend, even harder to dissect.

It was way back in July 1988 that the two bomb blasts in Srinagar changed life as people knew it. Not that it was all quiet earlier. Protests, even stone-pelting, have dotted Kashmir's history. In fact, reactive violence has been part of public sphere in Kashmir since the 1930s as a result of resentment against the brutality of those in power.

But a new vocabulary was introduced in 1988. The blasts were not merely a reaction to the presence of Indian armed forces in Kashmir or just a rejoinder to the rigging of 1987 elections wherein Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference was declared to have won and Muslim United Front candidate Mohammad Yusuf Shah was imprisoned. Farooq Abdullah was a Kashmiri too; the political power wasn't going to a non-Kashmiri, yet it wasn't acceptable. It was seen as Delhi's rule, which meant anti-Kashmiri.

On the other hand, Praveen Swami (2007) notes, "[h]eaded into the 1987 election, then, a number of opposites were at play: old elite versus new elite; Islam versus secularism; modernity versus tradition; Kashmiri separatism against the Indian state" (p. 160). The popular perception was that the Indian State had crushed reactions, revolts and any opposition with brutal force and, thus, had further alienated the people, leading to organised popular violence. Whether Muslim United Front (MUF) would have come to power or not can't be asserted, but its campaign centred upon Islamic ideology and it did create a constituency for itself in Kashmir which had earlier been absent (Swami 2007). Amidst this political disorder, Abdul Hamid Sheikh, a cadre who had received some training at an ISI-run camp, crossed back into Srinagar. With him, Yasin Malik, Ashfaq Majid Wani and Javed Mir forming the nucleus, the JKLF became the organisation that spearheaded the militant movement in Kashmir. "A scrawl of graffiti on the wall of a house nearby read: 'War Till Victory—JKLF'" (Peer 27). Nevertheless, a sense of ambivalence regarding the state of affairs existed among the Kashmiris. In *The Srinagar Conspiracy*, a conversation between Habib and his Pandit friend's father hints at a kind of ambiguity as far as the struggle for independence was in question:

> Habib: 'Papa, if our plan works out, then I could be one of the rulers right here in Kashmir…' Papa was scathing, 'So, what do your wild friends think will happen? Are you expecting independence? Do you think India will get up one fine morning and walk out of Kashmir… or for that matter, do you think Pakistan will vacate its chunk of Kashmir?'
>
> 'Well, perhaps not,' Habib tried to hedge a little. 'Perhaps we could get some autonomy. But who knows, perhaps we will get full *azaadi*.'
>
> 'Oh, I see… Guns? You are going to get guns into our Valley? You want

> to reduce my Kashmir to the level of an Assam or Sri Lanka?'(Chandra 56-57)

How would guns help might not have been clear, but it seemed the only way to make a point. Violence from thereon became an assertion, maybe for Kashmiri political identity, or maybe just as a means to an end, but what end exactly, well, that no one had in mind and at that point, it didn't even matter. But not protesting, not taking up arms would have been, as most Kashmiris put it, unpardonable. As Basharat Peer, in his memoir *Curfewed Night*, writes:

> Prague had protested and won; Berlin had protested and won; Kashmiris too had believed that our protests would win Kashmir its freedom… Maybe those demonstrations and not the armed militancy would have become the dominant aspect of politics in Kashmir...(Peer 140).

As the protests turned more violent, the noise of the gun took over. Not just resentment, or even reaction, it amounted to open rebellion (there was no television, then, thankfully, for the Indian State) since the democratic channels were closed and the only way to make oneself heard was violence. But it was till then an indigenous movement, a Kashmiri movement, following the principle of democracy—of the people, by the people and for the people—the people being that of Kashmir. And against India, the State. With people who were declared defeated in elections, arrested and humiliated forming the core of the movement, the dichotomy of "them" and "us" was strappingly reinforced. The Indian State became the colonizer, the oppressor and has continued to be looked upon as such in Kashmir. Was there a choice left? Violence for 'freedom', violence to 'liberate' Kashmir from occupation, to bring about a revolution, to hit back and to wrest what was 'ours', that belonged to 'us'.

Basharat Peer puts the difference quite clearly: "We call it Kalashnikov and the Indians call it AK-47" (p. 23). The gun became an instrument to achieve political power, the power to rule, which the Kashmiris perceived had been denied to them. Moreover, holding a gun was looked at as being in control, and not subjugated to the external occupier. It became a symbol of revolt, an identity-marker. A youth carrying a Kalashnikov immediately became a "hero, a martyr, a man".

> We saw a group of young men dressed in fatigues, assault rifles slung on their shoulders coming from the other side of the road. They were tall and seemed the most glamorous of men; we were awestruck… One of them, who was barely 18, let me hold a Kalashnikov. I felt its cold, steel barrel, ran my fingers on its banana-shaped magazine of bullet, posed with its aluminium butt pressed against my right shoulder. It felt fascinating! (Peer 24-25)

Sooner than later, it became unassuming but a significant accessory. A marker of Kashmiri identity, perhaps. An endorsement of Kashmiri's struggle for independence, a recognition for oneself, for the other as well. "But Kashmiris by nature are not violent," is asserted by every Kashmiri, be it a politician, an intellectual or a Kashmiri on the street. It is reiterated by Yasin Malik but when I asked him about his party's role in violence, he tried to clarify: "JKLF is not an organisation. It is a thought; it is the romanticism of the people of Kashmir. JKLF represents people's culture, their ethos, their Sufi thought." In other words, it stood for Kashmiri identity, as separate from Indian, both politically and culturally. Identity, thus, is seen in the prism of political identity. But was it to meet the political end or was the concern pure religion? The JKLF has been as ambivalent as the idea of *Kashmiriyat* itself.

The armed struggle too was no different, with its goal unclear and its justification unconvincing. When militancy engulfed Kashmir Valley, the ten districts of Jammu were peaceful and so was Ladakh. The entire province of Jammu remained untouched by Kashmir's insurgency during its initial three years (Puri 24). And when it did erupt in Jammu, it happened in spurts and followed a different pattern in comparison to what happened in Kashmir. While my focus is the violence in the Valley, an overview of militancy in Jammu becomes essential while debating the issue of Kashmiri militancy or insurgency as a national movement. And even within the Jammu region, the outbreak of militancy and response to it varied from one district to another. It was in 1993 that the first major militant attack occurred in Doda district, which was also the first district in Jammu and Kashmir where mass killings of the minority community took place. Much later, militancy touched Poonch district, which adjoins Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as

New Delhi refers to it. Poonch was one of the main re-entry points for Kashmiris who had gone to the other side for training in arms. Also, the hilly terrain of this area was far more suitable to the militants than the plains of the Valley. Yet, militancy failed to take root here as late as 1996, prior to which local people only acted as guides for the armed militants coming into the Indian territory and showing them the routes to Kashmir valley or Doda district (see Puri 2008).

An important fact to note is that more than half of the pre-1947 Poonch district is at present part of Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir or PoK (yes, PaK and PoK are one area but two references which essentially underscores the reality). Back to Poonch and the oft-repeated issue of divided families living on either side of the Line of Control (LoC) is even more relevant to this part of the state. And even though villages and families in Poonch were divided, the Kashmir revolt failed to inspire the people of Poonch district, and there was no pro-Pakistan sloganeering recorded as well. The region, moreover, has its own distinct culture and people lack affinity with the Kashmiris. The delayed response to militancy in Poonch was on account of the ethnic gap between Kashmir and Poonch. What underscores this lack of affiliation is yet another fact, which is that local recruitment by militant groups in the district started only when non-Kashmiri-speaking militants from Pakistan arrived on the Indian side. "They were termed as 'foreign' but that is a misnomer since most of the militants in this category belong to Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir, who are part of the same ethnic stock as the people of Poonch. A foreign militant, who is an alien in the Valley owing to his different ethnicity, may well be at home while he is in this border district" (Puri 42).

Primarily, it was infiltration from across the border that kicked off militancy in Jammu and not national consciousness or aspiration for a separate political identity. Fierce encounters along the LoC in the Poonch sector were a common feature in the early 1990s (Puri 2008). In the 1965 war, infiltrators got sufficient support from the local population of Poonch district and they were able to win a large tract of land. Even local commanders were appointed and they declared themselves independent of Indian rule. This was in sharp contrast to Kashmir, where the infiltrators received no such response both in the 1947 and 1965 Indo-Pak wars.

In Jammu city, the militants didn't expect to get support due to ethnic and cultural differences with the local population. As such, they chose soft targets. The first militant attack in the city was on March 19, 1994, in which the former Speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Wali Mohammed Itoo, was gunned down. A few months later, on June 16, 1994, a blast rocked a mini bus in Jammu city leaving seven people dead. And then on January 26, 1995, the then Governor K.V. Krishna Rao, who was delivering the customary speech on Republic Day, escaped a bid on his life when three bombs went off in the M.A.M. Stadium in Jammu, but eight people were killed.

The first suicide attack in the city took place on August 1, 2000, in which pilgrims to Amarnath cave in Kashmir were the targets. The militants attacked the guarded office in Jammu city where the Amarnath-bound pilgrims were registered. In most of the attacks, no militant organization claimed responsibility. The suicide attack, according to the police, was the handiwork of Lashkar-e-Toiba. But the commonality in the attackers' place of origin was conspicuous. They all came from Punjab province in Pakistan, a region that shares a culture with Jammu plains. The aim was to provoke the Hindu population and attract publicity, but the narrative of violence in Jammu region took communal overtones.

In the early Nineties, the militants only sought refuge in the region when they came under pressure from security forces in Kashmir but it failed to get a favourable local response for a good length of time. It was only in the mid-Nineties that militancy became common to both the parts of the state.[6] The point is that nationalism or freedom struggle wasn't understood in the same terms in the regions of Jammu and Kashmir (and even Ladakh). Neither were arms picked up in these places for a single, bigger cause, which was nationalism. Also, the Kashmiri national flag was not visible in Jammu as it was in the Valley:

> Zaidi faced his men, standing straight and tall amidst all the graves. They called this the martyrs' graveyard, all those who died while fighting the security forces were carried here and buried draped in the green flags of

[6] For reasons and factors, see Luv Puri's *Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir: The Uncovered Face*.

> independent Kashmir. Zaidi would have preferred Pakistani flags, or the banners of his new group, but for now he was ready to go along with the consensus among all militant groups that their men should be buried draped in a common flag (Chandra 110-11).

Militancy, by 1990s, outgrew its Kashmiri character and became Islamic in nature. Kashmiri nationalism was pushed back. As Vikram A. Chandra (2000) writes in his novel: "The mass movement was over. The war of attrition had begun" (p. 109). And, that is when the struggle lost its national meaning as well:

> The names of towns and streets were changed to reinforce a new cultural identity. Green was decreed to be the colour for all signboards of the shops and commercial establishments. The time in all the watches and clocks was turned backwards by half an hour. Pamphleteering became an obsession (Gigoo 36).

Even Rahul Pandita (2013) notes the change: "Ravi and I sat in disbelief as the stadium erupted with deafening cries of 'Pakistan zindabad!' Green flags, both Pakistani and the identical Jamaat-e-Islami banner, were seen being carried by people in the stadium. Many in the crowd also held posters of Pakistani cricketers" (p. 51).

As the sound of violence grew, the symbolism and its delineations were altered. Nationalism was evoked to justify the Kashmiri militant movement but it became exclusive in nature when Jamaat-i-Islami, a marginal force till the 1980s, forcefully hijacked it and presented the armed struggle as a *jihad* between Islam and disbelief. Thus, religion came to define the movement and legitimise violence. The nationalist agenda was overshadowed by religious fundamentalism.

The exodus of Hindu Pandits and the fact that the JKLF made no effort to check or curtail this ethnic cleansing underscores the changing character of the struggle for Kashmir's liberation. Wajahat Habibullah (2008) recollects: "In February 1986, with the Rajiv Gandhi government in its infancy, violence against the Hindu community broke out in Anantnag district of South Kashmir. Fifty homes were reported to have been burned down and many more were damaged and looted… The most remarkable aspect of this outbreak was that even though the community had faced persecution by bigoted rulers in the past, this marked the first person-to-person conflict in all of Kashmir's history" (p. 65).

Kashmiri Pandits were a minority in the Valley, and they became a casualty of struggle for Kashmir's independence. In his memoir, *Our Moon has Blood Clots*, Rahul Pandita recalls a story that has been passed down from generation to generation, becoming a piece of wisdom:

> Two boys got into a verbal duel in downtown Srinagar. It turned into a fistfight and, in no time, the two lay on the road, with one boy overpowering the other. As he lay over him, the stronger boy's sacred thread which identified him as a Pandit became visible.
>
> 'Bloody hell, you are a Pandit!' shouted one boy. In a moment, the tables turned and it was the other boy who won the fight. The fact that his opponent was a Pandit gave the other boy strength. Nobody was expected to lose to a Kashmiri Pandit in a physical fight (Pandita 29).

Violence had not suddenly emerged, but it no longer remained latent. Antagonism between Pandits and Muslims was always in effect, as Pandita asserts, "…by the age children learned the alphabet, they realised that there was an irreversible bitterness between Kashmir and India, and that the minority Pandits were often at the receiving end of the wrath this bitterness evoked. We were the punching bags. But we assimilated noiselessly, and whenever one of us became a victim of selective targeting, the rest of us would lie low, hoping for things to normalise" (Pandita 34). Also, the misgiving between the two communities is underscored in Siddhartha Gigoo's novel, where "Hira Lal was kidnapped because he is a Pandit and militants suspected him to be an informer. For the Hizbul militants, all Pandits are informers… they want us to leave" (p. 48). Religion, we are often told, is supposed to heighten the moral quotient in human beings. But violence and killings in the name of religion seem to prove what Slavoj Zizek (2009) refers to as living in post-ideological era:

> Since great public causes can no longer be mobilised to ground mass violence (i.e. war), since our hegemonic ideology calls on us to enjoy life and to realise our own selves, it is difficult for the majority to overcome their revulsion at torturing and killing another human being. The large majority of people are spontaneously 'moral': killing another human being is deeply traumatic for them. So, in order to make them do it, a larger 'sacred' cause is needed which makes petty individual concerns about killing seem trivial. Religion or ethnic belonging fit this role perfectly (p. 115).

But if political identity of the Pandits was the same as that of Muslims in the Valley, which would be 'Kashmiri', what justifies their killing and exodus? Fear of death, yes. But in this case, death wasn't courtesy the oppressor, but the fellow Kashmiris.

> 'Next morning the other Pandit families in Mattan started evacuating their homes,' Gunatoth said. The decree clearly stated that the Pandits leave. The posters on the walls on the Pandit houses read: "All non-believers and informers are given thirty-six hours to leave this place. Those who fail to obey will be sawed" (Gigoo 40).

Moreover, the State was equally indifferent. At the end of the day, or rather overnight, the Pandits were neither Kashmiri in Kashmir nor Indians in Jammu as far as the national identity was concerned. Nationalism, whether Indian or Kashmiri, was wind-swept. In Kashmir, nationalism couldn't stand up to the hollers of "Allah-o-Akbar" and "Nizam-e-Mustafa", while in Jammu the regional differences were more visible than the common nationality. What became common, for the Pandit, about the two places was violence. Those who survived the physical violence in the Valley were attacked in another form in Jammu: "Lasa, my landlord, comes home drunk every night and starts abusing. My daughter hides under the quilt in the room. She is scared. Sometimes, I don't feel safe here" (Gigoo 104). In Jammu, there was no threat to life, yet the Pandits did not feel secure. The Indian citizens, the Hindus in Jammu, were vehement in their behaviour towards Kashmiri Pandits, considering them as outsiders, not one of them. Kashmir, on the other hand, too was no longer any different.With their own neighbours and fellow Kashmiris turning against them, Pandits had no place of their own:

> Lasa remembered how a Muslim woman had shouted in frenzy from a window, 'May God destroy the seeds of the Pandits.' A Muslim did not want to believe that two Muslim youths had killed the priest. They believed what their leaders wanted them to believe. The truth did not matter. The truth did not exist (Gigoo 105).

A similar incident is recalled in Pandita's memoir: "Processions would stream into Srinagar from all over. There were several instances of Pandits being forced out of their homes to lead such processions. This was done to ensure that in case the paramilitary charged at the crowd or fired at it, the Pandits would become the first targets"

(Pandita 81). A fostered identity that Muslims shared with Pandits—at least for public consumption—waned away to an extent that one brutalised the other. As Pandita recollects: "At Safa Kadal, the fleeing Pandit families were showered with coins and *shireen* to tell them they were already dead. The mob had shouted: *Ram naam sat hai, akh akis patte hai* (Ram's name is truth, Panditsare leaving one after another)" (Pandita 101).

Pandita reiterates through his memoir what had been, more or less, an awareness that JKLF had been responsible for the killings of the Kashmiri Pandits, though Yasin Malik doesn't openly acknowledge it as one gathers from the excerpt of the online interview he gave to Murtaza Shibli:

> **I find it strange, because it was your organization JKLF that killed most of the innocent Kashmiri Pandits and yet the blame goes to the so-called fundamentalists.**
>
> [No answer]
>
> **What do you say about the brutal killings of the Pandits? They were all innocent.**
>
> What can I say…. that is a dark phase of our history when everybody was killing each other. It was never our policy to kill Pandits. But some of our boys thought they were legitimate targets because they were pro-Indian and perceived as conspiring against the majority community.
>
> **You are saying that you never killed any Pandits?**
>
> Of course not.
>
> **But I have heard that as JKLF Chief Commander, you ordered such killings?**
>
> That is simply not true.
>
> **So who killed them?**
>
> I don't know.
>
> **But you are responsible for such killings as Chief Commander?**
>
> No, I am not… and I don't want to talk about it further.
>
> **Okay let us talk about the killings of the Indian Air Force men. You have a case registered in this regard.**

I said that I don't want to talk about it. I am no more a militant. In fact, I left the gun soon after and now I believe in non-violence. I am following Gandhi and he is my inspiration.

Does that mean you are against the militant struggle in Kashmir?

Well, I don't believe in it and that is all I want to say. What other people want to do is their business.

Recently, another faction of JKLF was launched by Javed Mir; how many factions has JKLF now got?

You should ask that to Kashmiris as to how many JKLFs do they recognise. You will get the answer.

While Yasin Malik doesn't explicitly puts his thoughts forward, for hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani there are no doubts that the armed struggle is a *jihad* between Islam and the forces of disbelief. For him, as Yoginder Sikander (2001) translates Geelani's writings and political ideology, this *jihad* aims at the merger of Kashmir with Pakistan and finally establishment of an Islamic state. He, however, claims that the 'holy war' is against the Indian state and its agents and killing of Hindus or harming the Indians is not the purpose. Aasiya Andrabi, chief of the all-women *jihadi* outfit called *Dukhtaran-e-Millat*, maintains a similar view. On my asking about *Kashmiriyat*, she trashed this idea and also that of Kashmiri nationalism, saying that Islam is the basis of identity for Muslims: "We believe in a two-nation theory. One of the Muslims, the other of non-Muslims. Kashmir, sooner or later, will be an Islamic state."

With violence being justified as *jihad*, in the name of Islam, killing and getting killed gets a religious sanction. When death is the measure of devotion to noble causes, even the victims become co-conspirators if they accept it as some historical necessity. Every conscious Kashmiri would contribute to the cause, said Aasiya Andrabi. But the cause is no longer 'Kashmiri', it is about 'Kashmiri Muslims', that is how she understood it.

And in the 1990s, the contours had changed. "With nightfall, the minarets resounded with new slogans. 'Pandits must leave. Freedom is ours! The land must be purified!'" (Gigoo 43)

The end to be achieved was converted from nationalism to religious fundamentalism. And in the novel, *Fidali's Way*, the thought is spelled out in words:

> As long as he [Abdul] was fighting *jihad*, what did he care for the nuances of political affiliations?
>
> Kazim, in contrast, understood that war was in its essence a political endeavour, and that all the rest—especially religion—was simply a matter of how the leaders spun the filthy business of killing humans.
>
> The insurgency is about to change. I [Kazim] just need to know if you are ready for it. That is all.
>
> Do people support the insurgency?
>
> "I [Kazim] have always felt to succeed against the Indian against such great odds, we must keep the people on our side. And we have done so. They have never turned on us. But what if that changes? It will be the death of our struggle. Of our dream" (Mastras 237-38).

On the other hand, the nation-state has long been the vehicle, the ideological justification and the political legitimation not only for political and cultural unity but also state violence. Moreover, the State claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory, the one that makes up the nation-state. And violence would entail dependence on implements of coercion, including physical force, to acquire obedience or compliance and to deny the power of others to challenge authority. State violence is, in a way, an acknowledgement that some groups and individuals deny the authority and, hence, the legitimacy of the State. If people identify with the State, they are less likely to protest despite having grievances. And hence, People's Conference president Sajad Lone said, "The Kashmiri people are articulating their aspirations, not grievances." In Kashmir, State violence is explained as a means toward maintenance of law and order and ensuring national interest. When I mentioned this to Independent MLA from Langate, Engineer Abdul Rashid, he was quick to ask me back: "India needs to show we matter not by force. When militancy has declined, why hasn't the State terror?"

A Srinagar-based journalist questioned me: "Would it be wrong to say that the greater the use of violence against those who question its legitimacy, the more the Indian government expresses its own

doubt about the effectiveness and efficiency of its legitimate forms of authority, its status as a nation-state or about Kashmir being its integral part?" Perhaps he was right, in the sense that when pushed to an extreme, State violence becomes State terror—frisking, checkpoints, crackdowns, interrogation, all has been going on for too long:

> A soldier stopping near you meant trouble. It meant an identity check, a possible beating or a visit to the nearest army camp. Or he might simply order you to carry a bag of supplies to his camp. Soldiers forcing civilians to work for them was common (Peer 49).

Understandable, the suspicion, the security measures, the past, it has made security men sit on the edge. But when does it stop? Does a statement from Hizbul Mujahideen chief, as quoted in *Open* magazine (April 2012), have a reaction from the security forces or they only follow orders from Delhi: "A few days ago, Syed Salahuddin, chief of terrorist organisation Hizbul Mujahideen, confirmed something that Kashmiris say is common knowledge—that he has withdrawn all his men from Kashmir."

Violence is the monopoly of the State (Weber 1991), but if that were the case then it is not a political action since freedom and speech are destroyed. And, hence, the power is diminished.

> Nowhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror to maintain domination, about whose weird successes and eventual failures we know perhaps more than any generation before us. Terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control. It has often been noticed that the effectiveness of terror depends almost entirely on the degree of social atomization. Every kind of organized opposition must disappear before the full force of terror can be let loose (Arendt 54-55).

When coercion fails, blatant force follows but it is given the name of legal defence. But even if authorised by the State, can men in uniform find another way, be a bit reasonable? In Kashmir, besides there being a colossal trust gap between the security forces and the residents, men in uniform tend to walk over—not just the place but also the people. The Inspector General (CRPF), Dr R.P. Meharda, told me during an interview: "Yes, there is a huge trust deficit

between the security forces and the people… Due to certain peculiar circumstances, people [security persons] have acceded their brief… some excesses do take place but course correction is done at the officer level…" However, he asserted that "security forces are not people's enemy". The legally armed men do not, however, endorse the idea that when a State resorts to violence against its own citizens, it is confessing that it no longer has the strength and power of legitimate authority to command compliance without coercion. In Kashmir, even coercion is a violent act. But perhaps, a Kashmiri has learnt to take it in his stride, as Basharat Peer says: "The soldiers stared at our identity cards and frisked us. There was a strange familiarity with this ritual. It was oppressive and intimate at the same time. In some perverse way, it did signal reaching home" (Peer 102).

Well, after a while, it is hard not to be indifferent to the reality of the day. Future becomes the present, the present is the past. And, the moment you try to question the past, present and future, you are being difficult. Kashmiris end up being 'trouble-makers', 'mischief-makers' and 'mobs'. Somehow, in conflict zones, the structures of power and responsibility do not overlap meaningfully. Neither is dissent looked at as a privileged act in political culture, even though it represents democratic values. Rather, dissent becomes a contentious, adversarial, non-conformist political thought and activity that challenges the status quo and transgresses norms of public interaction and deliberation (Boykoff 466-469). It struggles for legitimacy despite being the mainstay—and not a glitch—of democratic governance. Struggle characterises democracy as well as dissent; both lose their meaning without struggle. Thus, democracy ought not to put an end to polemics, disputation and controversy, but allow the words of dissent to be aired and articulated. So, is Indian democracy struggling hard enough?

Arundhati Roy, in fact, begins her introduction to her book, *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2010), by tossing up a question: "Is there life after democracy?" And then, she goes on to clarify that the democracy in reference is not an aspiration but a working model, democracy in practice. Roy does explain that the intention of her criticism is neither to compare the forms of governance, nor to suggest a return to totalitarianism. She, rather, feels that our democracy "needs some

structural adjustment" (Roy, 2010: xi) and isn't refuting the fact that India is a democratic state, but only that it is in a shabby state.

It can't be denied that India as a nation-state is held together not merely for convenience, through calculation or the threat of punishment, but by the Constitution. It is the Constitution that keeps the Indian society intact, politically. On a daily basis, this Constitution is permanent, never to be questioned, and that political institutions must protect and preserve it. The citizen feels a sense of loyalty to the Constitution and, thereby, to the values it upholds through its democratic structure which affects the lives of the citizens. One such ideal is the sovereignty of an individual and his political judgment. It justifies or legitimises the democratic government in power.

In return, the individuality of the citizen also adorns legitimacy, along with an understanding that he is equal to the other citizens of the State. What follows is the ethical principle—that all individuals must cooperate as a society—with a legal clause: that individuals enjoy political and social equality. Put together, it makes up the moral quotient of the Constitution. This morality is the protection against any sort of authoritarianism as a result of economic, corporative or political inclinations. At the same time, in a constitutional democracy, each individual is guaranteed the legal freedom to challenge its fundamental principles. So, at the centre is the person, not simply as a rational agent moved by preferences, but as an individual who has the right to ask for explanations, for the obedience owed to the laws of the state. At least this is how an ideal democracy is understood in the classrooms. Now, shift gears to the ground reality, as Roy asks: "What have we done to democracy? What have we turned it into? What happens once democracy is used up? What happens when each of its institute has metastasized into something dangerous?" (Roy, 2010: x)

Most of us would argue that democracy provides a mechanism by which grievances are addressed. But, most of us would also agree that it is a slow process and is often found to be inadequate. Also, it is not only those who suffer who should, and are entitled to, comment on the grievances or question the government about it. Anybody can convey his/her dissatisfaction with government policies and, hence, be a dissident. In fact, dissent is integral to the idea of democracy and the right to dissent is integral to a free society.

In reference to the Parliament attack case and the trial of Afzal Guru, Roy takes on the role of a dissident and raises doubts about the flawed democracy:

> It tells us a great deal about the way the world's largest 'democracy' really works. It connects the biggest things to the smallest. It traces the pathways that connect what happens in the shadowy grottos of our police stations to what goes on in the cold, snowy streets of Paradise Valley; from there to the impersonal, malign furies that bring nations to the brink of nuclear war (Roy 2013: 98).

The hallmark of Roy's politics is dissidence, a form of protest that is integral to human society. People partake in justifiable political protests against their government out of allegiance to a cause and out of a conviction that the world can be made better through dissent. In fact, we are all dissidents at one time or another. Winning or losing is not important, but carrying on the legacy of resistance is what matters the most. Roy has persistently been of the view that the intellectual has to chastise the on-going propaganda of misrepresentation and the façade of democracy:

> I think that it's very important for us to understand that every day people are being decimated now. I was one of the people who said that the globalization of dissent was the way to fight the globalization of corporate capital. But that was the era of the World Social Forum. But I think things have changed since then, because the World Social Forum has been taken over. So what has happened is a kind of corporatization of dissent. And the globalization of dissent then ends up creating hierarchies, where you pick and choose your genocide or you pick and choose the worst thing that's happening (Barsamian 2008).

As a derisive critique, Roy maintains that India could, in fact, teach the world about occupation and how to manage dissent, "for it just wears people down, you just wait things out. When they want to mow people down, when they want to kill and imprison, it does that, too" (Barsamian 2008). For Roy, if democracy is the foundation of a nation-state, the keystone of democracy is the will of the people. But in case of Kashmir, she says, everybody seems to feel that they can speak on behalf of the will of the people, but nobody wants to ascertain what is the will of the people. She feels that an idealistic solution to the

problem of Kashmir is not a probable reality. India is never going to give up anything.

Dissent, as I understand, has more than one dimension. At an epistemological level, dissent can improve rationality by insisting on accountability. Through the questions, dissenters can open up new information and generate new points of view. At a social and moral level, dissenters stand apart from the majority but only to defend the traditional values and human rights. And, dissent can check political imbalances. It is not always discursive practice and can even be symbolically expressed while proposing alternative patterns of reflection.

Roy's writing on Kashmir fits the bill, facilitating free debate, circulating another viewpoint and making pluralism of information possible. Society's methodical and systemic ideals stand challenged wherever individual freedom is put under centralization of power, which always distorts public debate through social manipulation and regulation of institutions. The freedom of association and right to express personal opinions, which are the rights of democratic citizens, must be forfeited if they stand against the power. Thus, ignoring the facts and the numbers, isn't Roy's deliberations her right? Others may or may not agree with her, refuse to follow in her footsteps, use their own faculties to form an opinion, judge the state of affairs, but she has the right as a democratic citizen to question the authorities, hold them accountable, doubt their judgment and not believe them. Is it true then that sovereignty and dissent are inseparable in a democratic society?

State intrusion always results in either resistance by the individual or submissive conformism that marks dictatorial systems. At times, in the name of peace and, at another time, to uphold nationalism, voices of dissent have been smothered. But what constitutes dissent? The expressions of dissent could include vocal disagreement, civil disobedience, demonstration, lobbying and even violence. For Roy, it is her words. She insists that since democracy is based on opinion and not the truth, dissent is also not subversion, but asking for a review and revision. Amendments in laws are what democracy facilitates and, thus, dissent is only another dimension of the decision-making process:

> As a writer, a fiction writer, I have often wondered whether the attempt to always be precise, to try and get it factually right somehow *reduces* the epic scale of what is going on… My only excuse is to say that it takes odd tools to uncover the maze of subterfuge and hypocrisy that cloaks the callousness and the cold, calculated violence of the world's favourite new Superpower (Roy, 2010: xii).

But the point is, where do the limits of democracy end and that of dissent begin? Is only the majority allowed to dissent and if the minority is dissenting, it is anti-national? To what extent should the State accept the differences and their articulation before it begins to discipline or erase them? India is a democratic country, so would it be wrong to call the dissent democratic? Doesn't dissent strengthen one's commitment to the nation-state? Howard Zinn, a historian, had remarked: "While some people think that dissent is unpatriotic, I would argue that dissent is the highest form of patriotism."[7] Though a case of sedition was filed against Arundhati Roy for her speeches that allegedly sought independence for Kashmir, she claims that they were essentially a call for justice, while adding: "Pity the nation that has to silence its writers for speaking their minds…Pity the nation that needs to jail those who ask for justice while communal killers, mass murderers, corporate scamsters, looters, rapists, and those who prey on the poorest of the poor, roam free" (*The Hindu*, October 26, 2010).

In Roy's defence and also to make a point on nationalism, Ashis Nandy, in an article "The Great Indian Love Affair With Censorship" (*Outlook*, November 8, 2010), while quoting Samuel Johnson's line that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel," says the adage these days can be applied to nationalism. This, Nandy argues, is the explanation of the threat to arrest and try Arundhati Roy on charges of sedition for what she had said on Kashmir at a public meeting in Delhi. "What she had said is simultaneously a plea for a more democratic India and a more humane future for Indians," asserts Nandy (*Outlook*, November 8, 2010).

It is essential to read Roy's article "Azadi" within the context. Its dateline is August 22, 2008. Almost two decades after insurgency

[7] Sharon Basco interviewed Howard Zinn (interview "Dissent in Pursuit of Equality, Life, Liberty and Happiness") for tompaine.com on July 3, 2002.

erupted in the Valley, in 2008 the people, the ordinary ones, took to the streets to protest against the State institutions. What triggered the revolt was the Amarnath land transfer episode. What followed was a shutdown of the city, street protests, stone-pelting and police firing. People were killed. The government revoked the land transfer and, as a result, Jammu took to the streets and the Jammu-Srinagar highway was blocked.

In fact, Roy's write-up did not state anything new about the happenings in Kashmir that the Indians were not already aware of. Neither did it needle the Kashmiris, for they were already in the state of having been provoked and, as a result, had taken to the streets with stones in hand. The article also did not raise the issue about whether the Amarnath land transfer was right or wrong. It did not talk about the regional divide in the state that was palpable. But she was questioning; rather, challenging the wisdom of Indian Parliament and the democracy that India is:

> It had been demonstrated in no uncertain terms to people in Kashmir that they lived on sufferance, and that if they didn't behave themselves they could be put under siege, starved, deprived of essential commodities and medical supplies. The real blockade became the psychological one. The last fragile link between India and Kashmir was all but snapped… Hadn't anybody noticed that in Kashmir even minor protests about civic issues like water and electricity inevitably turned into demands for Azadi? To threaten them with mass starvation amounted to committing political suicide (Roy, 2010: 166).

Again, what Roy is pointing at is real and true. That the chorus of Azadi punctuates the protests in Kashmir has been documented in narratives, news reports and witnessed by people, irrespective of their alliances, travelling to Kashmir. The "unknown Kashmiri" notes in his Diary, *Under the Shadow of Militancy*, that "the disturbed conditions in the Valley have given a setback to his plans, and forced him to think about…the true meaning of the slogan Azadi…" (p. 23-24). And then he shares an anecdote:

> When Nazir asked me what I thought of Azadi, I told him that it meant freedom, but for whom or for what purpose, I was not sure. That he needed to find out for himself. Instead of considering it as a political slogan, which signifies an urge for "independence", he tried to understand

> it in relation to his life and work, which I thought was unusual... They tell everybody that Azadi will change our lives. What gain will it bring us? Will I get money without doing any work (Dhar, 2002: 24-25)?

The connotation and expression of *Azadi* has changed over a period of two decades—from the time when insurgency erupted to the phase of stone-pelting in 2008. But since India's claims about normalcy and decline in militancy had already been made public, the 2008 episode couldn't be pitched on external forces at play. This Roy again underscores. Did the government do enough or what the government does is never enough is always the conflict. But the more important concern is the human life, the humane aspect of the conflict. Should humanism be compromised and forgotten or pushed into the unconscious to make space for nationalism? More than the anti-national sentiment, what comes across after reading "Azadi" is the satire, a kind of irreverence. We all indulge in that at different points of time. The only difference is that hers is heard loud while for most of us, it is like talking to ourselves.

When she writes that "the voice that the government has tried so hard to silence in Kashmir has massed into a deafening roar" (Roy, 2010: 166), she, more than underscoring the legitimacy of that "voice", is questioning the means to an end. At what cost has peace been arrived at—if at all it has—in Kashmir? Ashis Nandy raises similar questions:

> What is it about the culture of Indian politics today that it allows us to opt for a version of nationalism that is so brutal, self-certain and chauvinist? Have we been so brutalized ourselves that we have become totally numb to the suffering around us? What is this concept of Indian unity that forces us to support police atrocities and torture (*Outlook*, November 8, 2010)?

India, for nationalism or bigger geopolitical interest, has tried to cajole and coerce the Kashmiris from time to time. Still, lives are being lost on the streets. Would it then be an offence to become a dissident in human interest?

> Armed struggle provokes a massive escalation of violence from the State. We have seen the morass it has led to in Kashmir and across the northeast. So then, should we do what our prime minister suggests we do? Renounce dissent and enter the fray of electoral politics? (Roy, 2010: 37)

The views of Roy are interpreted as a threat to the national interest. But that is only one interpretation, one that opposes the mainstream opinion and thought. How about taking it as a political satire? The arguments she presents, minus the entertainment, are political in nature and subversive to an extent. If politicians can use the rhetoric and the irony to influence the people, why not the dissidents? Dissent as an exercise becomes a deliberate critique of the powerful in a given cultural-political frame. It moves further than merely being an emotional or intellectual engagement. The cultural resources are called upon as a tactic for re-envisioning, re-appropriating and re-ordering of the rhetoric of dissent. Roy maintains that like nations, even dissent is now manufactured.

Her rhetoric, in fact, could be read as political satire. Irony, satire, parody, mockery may be dismissed as cynical and divisive, damaging to the serious discourse rather than leading to any progress or change, yet they help to create discursive spaces and galvanise counter-debates. Though her numbers maybe an exaggeration, the ironic authenticity makes ordinary people give second thoughts to issues of human concern—and not just numbers—and soon the stage-managed spectacles within our political and media landscapes become obvious.

> …the schism between knowledge and information, between what we know and what we are told, between what is unknown and what is asserted, between what is concealed and what is revealed, between fact and conjecture, between the real world and the virtual world, has become a place of endless speculation and potential insanity (Roy, 2010: 25-26).

Thus, Roy's writings on democracy and Kashmir offer political dissent, challenge mainstream narratives, highlight absurdities and inconsistencies presented in our media and by our politicians, and rely on a certain level of her own understanding which may look to reveal or sabotage. In Michel Foucault's words, "writing unfolds like a game that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits" (Foucault 102). The need, thus, is to explore the different meanings of the writing, Roy's text of dissent in this case. As Roland Barthes emphasises that a reader of a text is an active producer rather than a passive consumer, (Barthes 9-23) the words of dissent must be reinvented and viewed in the light of this context. And thereby, reading becomes politics itself, for the meaning or interpretation is

appropriated by the reader. So, what is the message of dissent, if at all it is being able to enter the public realm and how does dissent redefine the relationship between power and human agency?

The objective of dissent is also to facilitate free and open investigation, speculation and critical inquiry, as Roy asserts: "I do believe that the only way to keep power accountable is to always question it, to always mess with it in some way or the other" (*Outlook* September 9, 2011). But without freedom of expression, full publicity and dissemination, there can be no methods of social inquiry or knowledge of social phenomena and no democratic public or political democracy. Hence, free media is a must-have in a democracy. But the media is not free, most of the times at least. Noam Chomsky takes note of it as he remarks:

> The media in India is free, the government doesn't have the power to control it. But what I saw was that it was pretty restricted, very narrow and provincial and not very informative, leaving out lots of things (*Outlook*, November 1, 2010).

In fact, the propaganda model (Chomsky and Herman 1994) of the media argues that there are five kinds of filters that decide what is "news", what goes into print or gets broadcast. It is hard to deny that media doesn't bring its prejudices and priorities on the pages that get published. While talking about Afzal Guru, as already discussed, Roy draws attention towards this fourth pillar of democracy. Recalling, she writes that on the afternoon of October 4 at Jantar Mantar, "there were more journalists than protesters" among the people who had gathered to protest against Afzal Guru's death sentence. Of course, Roy is not trying to underscore the actual count that she did but, again, the rhetoric suggests the functioning of the media. And, despite the attention it offered to the case, it forgot the ethics, as Roy shows through the quotes from the mainstream media about Afzal's story, which she calls "malicious, outright lies":

> *Hindustan Times*, 'Case Cracked: Jaish Behind Attack', Neeta Sharma and Arun Joshi, *The Hindustan Times*, 16 December, 2001: In Delhi, the Special Cell detectives detained a lecturer in Arabic, who teaches in Zakir Hussein College (Evening)… after it was established that he had received a call made by militants on his mobile phone (Roy, 2010: 52).

The Times of India, on December 17, 2001, carried the headline 'DU lecturer was Terror Plan Hub' and Roy picks a few more to substantiate her argument regarding the hollow ethics of media. Her questioning of the treatment meted out to S.A.R. Geelani, who was also arrested in the Parliament Attack case, and the reports that were reproduced in the media is provocative. And dissent is supposed to be that. The media, by attributing their stories to "police" and "official sources", can't escape the responsibility of being a watchdog, the fourth pillar of democracy.

Perhaps, Arundhati Roy, through her articles, is doing the job of alternate media, as Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) explains: "I could see how producing alternative media messages implies much more than simply challenging the mainstream media… It implies having the opportunity to create one's own images of self and environment; it implies… disrupting the traditional acceptance of those imposed by outside sources" (p. 3).

Carrying on the legacy of resistance, Roy emphasises on an opposition which demands accountability and her words fit somewhere in the diversity of resistance: "I am a writer who has a particular set of views and I use whatever skills I have, I deploy whatever skills I have, whatever means I have to write about them, not always on my own behalf but from the heart of the resistance" (*Outlook*, September 9, 2011). As a dissident citizen, Roy publicly contests prevailing structures of power or the underlying logic of public policy, simultaneously positing views that consistently fail to breach the dominant political discourse. It is as a dissident that she is engaging in a struggle for peace. She is no exception and wouldn't want to be de-politicised through the stereotypes of women; she isn't being led, she isn't being brainwashed, she is a free-willed citizen in a democracy, raising a voice against the establishment and its acts in Kashmir.

Kashmir is an example of coercive/cooptive Statehood. Kashmir's people live in a nation they do not necessarily identify with, there's an overbearing presence of men in uniform, many have been exiled and displaced, while others live a threatened life. What do the protests in the Valley tell us? Are they just aspirations, grievances? Or, is it a rebellion for a complete change and not just an amendment in the present state of affairs? Don't they point at the myths that accompany the idea of nationalism?

> This does not mean that the Parliament is of no consequence and elections should be ignored… Of course, there is a difference between a politics that openly, proudly preaches hatred and a politics that slyly pits people against each other. But the legacy of one has led us to the horror of the other (Roy, 2010: 38).

Nationalism, no matter how you define it, plays an important role in bringing and keeping people together. It also decides how the State exercises control over the people and how they respond or react to it. But nationalism is problematic once it becomes an inclusionary and exclusionary project and a coercive exercise. For India, to sustain the idea of nationalism, to maintain the boundary of a nation-state, muffling the voices of dissent becomes essential. The end is a homogenous national identity, the Indian identity. And I quote Edward Said (1995):

> The processes of identity enforcement that are likely to produce rejecting, violent, and despairing responses by groups, nations and individuals whose place in the scheme is perforce inconsequential. Thus, the triumph of identity by one culture or state almost always is implicated directly or indirectly in the denial, or the suppression of the other. Nationalism exacerbates the processes by offering what appears to be ethnosuicide as an alternative to clamorous demands for equality, sovereignty, for national self-definition (Said 356).

Said has been critical of identities given by flags and national wars. And Kashmiri movements take the cue when it comes to violent resistance against the Indian 'flag', for it essentialises the plurality. The unity in diversity becomes suffocating. Fair enough. But how does Kashmiri nationalism, as propounded by separatists, negotiate the differences within its own region and avoid offering yet another "universal, essentialised" Kashmiri national identity for the people of the state? Defensive nationalism of Kashmir, that of the oppressed, inspires the liberation movement but at the end of the day, one realises even that is not sufficient in Kashmir.

On the other hand, Jammu and Kashmir, being a Muslim-majority state, is important to Indian national identity for it is a testimony to the secular character of the Indian state. But this is between the lines. The official narrative is that state violence is only to maintain law and order. It is the monopolisation of power and the contradiction between

it and the demands of people on the periphery who, through resistance, have created new subject positions that challenge fundamentally the definitions of who and what ought to be repressed. The Public Safety Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which give a free hand to security forces, end up being acts of violence against the Kashmiris, but essential in the national interest, to combat terrorism.

> In the contemporary contest between stable identity as it is rendered by such affirmative agencies as nationality, education, tradition, language, and religion, on the one hand, and all sorts of marginal, alienated, or antisystematic forces on the other, there remains an incipient and unresolved tension. One side gathers more dominance and centrality, the other is pushed further from the centre, toward either violence or new forms of authenticity like fundamentalist religion (Said 353).

If, on the one hand, violence becomes a means to a political end and a religious calling, it also hits back and erodes what it is trying to save. Violence has never been a part of *Kashmiriyat* or Kashmiri-ness. Yet, it becomes a means to define it, and in the process negates the very idea of *Kashmiriyat*. It affects the people it intends to save from the outsider. Moreover, it churns out a sense of ambivalence:

> Tonga, the tall JKLF man from our village, was with them… Tonga and his cohorts were planning to attack a convoy of Indian troops supposed to pass by our village. The villagers were trying to persuade them against it… 'Mohiuddin sahib, you are our son, you are from our own village. You have to stop this attack. Do you want your own village burnt?... have the fear of God, this is your own village!'
>
> Tonga explains himself: I know! I know! I swear by my mother I can't do anything. Every time my commanders plan an action here, I fight with them. Don't I know? My old mother lives here, my three daughters live here (Peer 43).

Moreover, Basharat Peer notes how the divisions made it into the homes, for there were families where "the militant son talked and the retired police officer father listened" (p. 35), it was hard to make sense of violence, to explain what it brought along and what it took away. "The driver (bus) played Bollywood songs and the passengers talked about the militant movement" (p. 35).

And here's a different tinge to Kashmir, and an eye-opener as most things are here. In his article, titled "A Reluctant Soldier", Majid Maqbool narrates an anecdote:

> A young man from Kashmir had become a CRPF trooper, except that he was not posted on the streets of Kashmir. And that is the only thing he liked about his job—the fact that he was not patrolling the streets of Kashmir as a CRPF trooper… Reconciling his Indian-CRPF-soldier self with his Kashmiri-youth identity has been most difficult. This peculiar identity—of being a Kashmiri who earns a living as a CRPF trooper—has given him many sleepless nights, and put many unresolved questions in his mind (*Open* Magazine, November 6, 2010).

During my visit to Kashmir, I played this anecdote to a Kashmiri CRPF trooper who was deputed in Kashmir itself. His reply: "CRPF has given me a job, I earn my bread, have two sisters to marry off… there are two kinds of people, good and bad. And we have to remove the latter, irrespective of who he is and where he belongs to." But that very day, I met a former militant in Bandipora, not far from Srinagar. He was on rest, he told me. And then went on to say: "If need be, I would return to the mission. There are believers and non-believers, and *Sharia* must be established and followed in Kashmir."

I had thrown up my hands in the air. It's no use, I had felt then, bracketing Kashmir. Each has his or her own story, but threaded by a common and rather complex relationship between politics, freedom and violence, with interplay of power.

But then, if one contrasts an ethic of absolute or ultimate objective with an ethic of responsibility, the decisive distinction between them is consideration of the consequences of action. The ethic of ultimate objective focuses on intention while the ethic of responsibility focuses on the foreseeable consequences of one's actions. The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends feels responsible only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not squelched, for example protesting against the injustice of the social order. Thus, suicide bombers may see their action as a means to protest injustice and to inspire others to similar protest with no attention to the real and human consequences of that action to others.

Nasrat Bhat, whom I met during my visits to Srinagar, runs a small shop of essential items in the downtown area of Srinagar. He had

acknowledged that his son had participated in street protests and said: "How can a Kashmiri be an Indian when India kills our children? What do I tell my boy when he asks why they do this to us? What about our rights?"

I later asked Sultan, a teenager who had no inhibitions when it came to speaking his mind, what made him pick up a stone and throw it at another man and I quote his reply: "Are you kidding? It is satisfying. Simple. Not that I expect much to change, not soon at least, but I have done my bit. It is like when you ease yourself. You are relieved."

Well, never mind if it is easing out at the risk of one's life. Would it be right to read the street protests, with teenagers pelting stones, as something that has "no deeper meaning or hidden message" (Zizek 2009)? For Zizek, it is essential to accept the meaninglessness of street protests:

> …more than a form of protest, they are what Lacan called a *passage a lacte*—an impulsive movement into action which can't be translated into speech or thought and carries with it an intolerable weight of frustration. This bears witness not only to the impotence of the perpetrators, but, even more, to the lack of what cultural analyst Frederic Jameson has called 'cognitive mapping', an inability to locate the experience of their situation within a meaningful whole (p. 65).

But violence on the streets of Kashmir is no longer confined to the means-end continuum; it is operating outside it. For the youth, the acts of violence offer a sense of belonging, more so a collective identity. But as Amartya Sen (2006) puts it, "a fostered sense of identity with one group of people can be made into a powerful weapon to brutalize another" and as these collectives, which are based on (to use Sen's term) "imagined singularity", are imposed on the naïve people through fear or even terror, they are wheedled at one point and bullied at another time to accept the stand of those in power. And, that power is of violence. However, Ward Berenschot (2011) suggests that violence should be studied in the light of the dynamics of everyday human interaction. The objectives and urges of those who contribute to the violence, as well as their perception of the dangers involved, can be seen as the outcome of the interchanging web of social relations in which these individuals live their lives on a daily basis, argues Berenschot. In

Kashmir, the dynamics seem to change without warning. The victims of a day become perpetrators another day and each day it is like living under the threat of death, the unpredictability is killing.

In fact, violence has undeniably disrupted everyday life. A protest, retaliation by security forces, call for a strike, followed by a curfew, and then the cycle repeats. What is for people in other parts of the country perhaps a daily routine of stepping out for work and then returning home that only breaks on the weekends, in Kashmir it is not as regular an affair. For days, there is no stepping out. And, if they do then there could be days before they return, as in case of detentions and many never return in case of having been 'disappeared'. With constant disruption, life becomes momentary. And, when the government or the national media announces "business as usual", it is the indirect form of State's domination that re-signifies the trauma: "But they [security officials at check point] shouldn't be so rude… I don't mind about the sweets. I feel violated. The feeling that I am not trusted even in my homeland" (Warrier 14). It seems to affect not just the outside routine, the normal life, but also the within, and the alien feeling is no longer aroused when in the outside world but now also when in the 'homeland':

> A BSF man stops me, holding out his hand, palm up. I stop and show him my identification. He asks me where I am staying… The suspicion is killing this city. When I travel in India, people look at me with suspicion. They see a man with a possible Pakistani connection, or possibly Pakistani sympathies… That's how it's been all along (Warrier 36).

While a Kashmiri Muslim is suspected in his own territory, the Kashmiri Pandits, as a result of displacement and dispossession, feel lost. The metaphorical violence they are subjected to in a new place, the pain of homelessness, leaves them equally traumatised:

> 'No school will be willing to admit a homeless migrant; one without an address,' Sridar thought (Gigoo 90).
>
> There was only one question to be asked during the funeral processions that left the camp everyday. Snakebite or sunstroke? … For months together, marriages in the Pandit migrant community did not happen at all. No birth took place in any of the families living in the camps (Gigoo 101).

> Idleness and vacuum of the soul engulfed Mahanandju. He started having delusions. Sleep fled him. His thoughts oscillated back and forth the past and the present, the imaginary and the real (Gigoo 113).
>
> ***
>
> Nita Gigoo (Kashmiri Pandit girl of 30 in a refugee camp in Jammu) was very clear that, in the case of her family, it was not the stories they heard that made them leave, or even the death of her uncle and his son, her cousin. It was the creeping and loudening sense that their community had been marked as the enemy (Hardy 53).

Social transformations brought about by violence and its portrayal in dominant discourse lead to transformation of the unexpected into the ordinary, with death and terror being a banal phenomenon. As a consequence, even when there is silence of violence, the identification with the 'normal self' is fractured. The violence has so seeped into the intimate realm, affecting familial life and, hence, the individual's sense of self. The very experience of being a perpetrator at one point and a victim at another while pelting stones, being detained, living with torture marks, recollecting the tragedy, all create solidarity, sharing of the same space, making of a collective claim as Kashmiris.

Exemplified in the act of martyrdom, violence creates a community of common substance based upon an idiom of sacrifice, leading to social alignment. And, when a Kashmiri youth picks up a stone, it involves annihilation of the enemy and not necessarily killing. Yasin Malik, during the interview, had said: "They once used to enter Army camps and kill Indian soldiers, even as *fidayeen*. But now they themselves are getting killed." He was referring to young boys killed during protests and in stone-pelting or those who had nothing to do with violence, yet in the end being counted as collateral damage.

"Edward Said himself picked up stones to protest," Yasin Malik pointed out.

The reference is to the picture of Edward Said throwing a stone at an Israeli guardhouse on the Lebanese-Israeli border in the year 2000. Instantly published around the world, the photo immortalised stone-throwing as a form of symbolic resistance. Said's writings have not only contributed in giving definite shape to the Palestine movement, but his ideology of resistance that marks his work has found takers

in Kashmir as well. Resistance through violence is not just a physical activity. Violating the laws of the oppressor is like breaking free. In fact, the online edition of *Greater Kashmir* had a write-up titled "I am a stone-pelter. Who are you?"

> You can find me on any street of urban Kashmir, although I have some favourite spots, I love Jamia Masjid and Maisuma, old town Varmul, Sopur, and Malakhnag Islamabad to name a few. You can easily recognize me as I am the best dressed youth of my area, trendy jeans, smart sports shoe, whacky jacket and few fashion accessories, they say I buy them from the money I get for stone-pelting. My income is being discussed everywhere and there is no unanimity on that it varies from 100 to 2,500, at times I am afraid that I may be brought under income tax net. My attire has little to do with fashion, and more with the nature of my job, I am supposed to be athletic and nimble-footed and I have to mingle with the crowds, hence my attire. Ideal day at work is thrilling and exciting, the suspense, the drama, the surge and the chase…
>
> Why do I pelt stones, this thought had never crossed my mind, I just instinctively knew when I had to don the armour and start the battle. It was only after Ragda 2008, I heard some whispers, hushed tones, and a few glances of suspicion on the street. I am street smart, I realized I am not the darling of the masses anymore, people who fed me with (Teher) even in the midst of the battle, now hated me. I should have seen this coming, it all started with the fatherly police chief Asif Mujtaba, quoting Hadith against stone-pelting, learned man he is, after securing our (*duniyah*) worldly life, he immediately focused his attention to secure our (*akhirat*) life here after. We miss him; he was our real benefactor, trying to ensure us peace in this world as well as other world (February 13, 2010).

Violence, true, but its moral equation has changed. The act of pelting stones, this violence, is not aiming for an end. It is an end in itself. Neither objectivity nor morality, not even nationalism or religious affiliation is at play here. The act becomes a matter of being. Hilal Mir, a Kashmiri who is now an assistant editor with *Hindustan Times* in New Delhi, explains better in his write-up "How I became a stone-thrower for a day":

> For the first time I felt like an ordinary Kashmiri and wanted to react like them… I picked up a stone from the debris of the housing cluster burnt by the CRPF soldiers in 1990 and threw it at the soldiers, a few of whom were filming the stone-throwers with mini-cams. Caught, I could have

> been booked under the Public Safety Act and jailed for two years without a trial. I would also have been jobless… But I threw more stones. I later realized that it was an atavistic reaction, as if it was the only legitimate thing to do in that cursed place (Kak 48-49).

The random irrational or calculated rational violence contains inherent value, not merely an instrumental one. For that matter, even the State-sponsored acts of violence, torture, frisking, check-posts, barricades and other forms of coercive power do not remain just physical acts, but more. The legitimisation of national security laws and their judicial sanction are based on the dominant Indian nationalist ideology that is fundamentally homogenising and exclusive. The minority cultures and ethnicities, though accepted, must be celebrated within limits and should never threaten the nationalist, as Walter Benjamin pointed out: "Lawmaking is power making and to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence" (Benjamin 295).

The modern State has the legitimate right to violence and force to maintain its rule based on the consent of its citizens or even otherwise. On the other hand, during counter-insurgency operations, the tactics are based on ruthless militaristic means that are framed to destroy the will of the people through psychological operations: "Humiliating and destroying the honour of an individual or community is a common method because the concept of honour is an important aspect of psyche in traditional societies, including India. Various means that include encounter killings, disappearances, rape and destruction of livelihood have been employed to punish insurgents" (Anuradha M. Chenoy and Kamal A. Mitra Chenoy 78).

When the State becomes an orthodoxy, a canon, it arms itself with such self-confirmations as responsible, realistic, just and pragmatic and, thereby, State violence, even if covertly, is conflated to implicate nationalism and assert national identity. But whose nationalism? And who decides?

The stone thrown on the street is being intelligently shadowed by a sharp understanding of oppression. The use of tear gas and water cannons followed by detention is only dealing with a mob to maintain order. The version would vary depending on which side of the fence you are. People's Conference chief Sajad Lone had said: "*Azadi* means they are rebelling. It is a form of dissent." JKLF chief Yasin Malik

maintained that *azadi* means political independence, while Chief Minister Omar Abdullah emphasises that the objective is to have greater autonomy for J&K and for hardliners like Aasiya Andrabi and Syed Ali Shah Geelani, it is about establishing an Islamic state.

And, for people on the street, for children taken into custody, for families who have lost one of their own, it is sheer violence, as the word in any dictionary, perhaps, would mean.

The last few years have seen a transition to a less violent mode of mass rebellion. It fed on the two-decade-long local memory of arbitrary detention, torture, hundreds of graveyards for the victims of conflict becoming shrines to the loss and 'Kashmir cause'. The pent-up bitterness and a sense of being dominated, it seems, are waiting to explode.

What must be those, who had picked up arms, thinking as they watch the streets being taken over by the younger people, the stone-pelting *tehreek*, a movement? What counsel do they have to offer to this new generation of Kashmiris, who grew up in the tumultuous 1990s? What lessons are these veterans in turn drawing from the young and the new phase of protestation?

Both Malik and Mir said it must be taken seriously and respected. For, the form of the resistance is fluid and can swing back to the place where it has come from.

At another level, for a Kashmiri, violence in any form becomes an agency that allows him to act, confirms that he is capable of action. Beyond simple questions of acquiring control or potency, it involves a person's ability to make decisions for himself, to disagree with the status quo. Therefore, it becomes an important dimension of freedom and freedom's connection to anti-State violence. Defying curfew orders, protesting against the establishment, pelting stones at everything that symbolises the State, all become for Kashmiris acts of freedom and assertion, though violent in nature. The graffiti 'Go India. Go back' is no ordinary rejection. "Kashmir was never a part of India" is the chorus in Kashmir, followed by "plebiscite was promised" at regular intervals each time you bring up the issue.

Violence in the structuring and interpretation of subjectivity also intertwines moral as well as emotional progressions. Where do Kashmiris like Shaukat, for whom it was neither nationalism nor religion that made him pick the gun, fit in? Violence was not a choice,

but there was no choice left for him. His reasons were personal, which then took the shade of a common sentiment: "What we want is Azadi". For him, gun and stone would put an end to the helplessness that a Kashmiri feels.

But it doesn't end here in Kashmir. The problem with violence is that the end to which it is directed is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the means it justifies. The dialectics of violence, the oppressive State violence on the one hand and self-determining and liberationist violence on the other, the tension between oppression and resistance makes it an end in itself. As the notions of 'for' and 'against' creep insidiously into the public space and then take over all forms of political, moral and professional discourse, violence occupies the mindspace. For, even when the sound and fury is missing, the guns are quiet and stones are not being pelted, the silence of violence is blaring. As Sajad Lone said: "Violence has lost its social sanctity, though not the issue of Kashmir."

Even the best-intentioned movement suffers the effects of Foucault's paradox that is hegemonic consequences of a liberating project. Perhaps, worst of all, where it becomes self-sustaining and of long duration, people accept it, live with it and survive in a world gone dull, nasty, brutish and short. There is no denying that violence has generated its own objects, created interior meanings. In Srinagar, I asked seven-year-old Lalam, living in an orphanage, about his father and he said "*woh bhag gaya*". I asked him what does that mean and he gave a blank look. Not that he didn't understand, but what words could he have used to explain it. Missing is too simple, having fled doesn't tell the entire story, absconding is the new word for him and he wonders if that is the right one. For thirteen-year-old Imran, also in the orphanage, it was a little better. He was quick to tell me that his father was martyred, "*shaheed ho gaya*". He was killed in a crossfiring between security forces and militants. They are the orphans of conflict. So are Kashmiri Pandits. "Each one of us has been a part of a tragedy that can offer no catharsis," said Dr Amit Wanchoo, a Kashmiri Pandit entrepreneur in Srinagar. Anything more or less may fill the gaps in the narrative but doesn't help in the reasoning. "A few years ago, commuting from my home in Bandipore to Srinagar was not just a pain. It was humiliation. I was born and brought up in Kashmir and now I have to prove that at every turn of the street," said

Rehmat Ali, a daily-wager I met at a *dhabha* in Srinagar. He obviously was referring to the presence of barricades and check-posts of security forces in the Valley.

"Sorry, Kashmir is happy," was the lead article of *Open* magazine in April 2012, pinned up another valid question: "Why is it obscene to accept that historically wounded people are ready to move on?" was the slug of the article. And it quoted a young Kashmiri: "Trauma in Kashmir is like a heritage building—the elite fight to preserve it. 'Don't forget' is their predominant message—'don't forget to be traumatised.' They want the wound of Kashmir to be endured because the wound is what indicts India for the many atrocities of its military. This might be a long period of calm, but if the wound vanishes, where is the justice? So, nothing disgusts them more than these words: 'normalcy returns to Kashmir, peace returns to the Valley, Kashmiris want to move on'.

So, this is Kashmir. Lost. Wanting to move on, but stuck. The sticking points are many and as the article in *Open* magazine quotes a Kashmiri youngster, "Just how can you say normalcy has returned and there is peace?"

What has happened is that the guns have fallen silent, the rage continues to simmer and it is finding new reasons. And this time, pretty understandable ones—jobs, development, water, power issues. Isn't that what would go for normal in the rest of the country? For over twenty years, violence was a daily existence and reality in Kashmir. All were touched by it, very few were not scarred. Then, the guns fell silent. But does the absence of violence necessarily mean peace? What does the word "normalcy" denote? The fact that an overwhelming majority votes in panchayat elections? But then, every time there's a killing, which is termed an encounter by the security forces, and Kashmir rises in protest, India holds its breath. Is that normal? A peaceful Kashmir, a normal Kashmir. Do these generalisations have any meaning? Are these merely Indian generalisations? Does it even matter to an average Kashmiri? Guns have given way to stones and this past year, not even that. The silence of violence. But, peace, Kashmir is yet to find.

3 Negotiating Identities

There is, of course, no one way of looking at one's identity and when concepts like 'nation', 'religion' and 'region' come into play to shape up the idea of 'self', it becomes more complex and problematic. While each offers a sense of identity and belonging, the concepts are equally capable of leading to an identity crisis and Kashmiri identity has been its victim. Try defining it, debating it and comprehending it within the framework of these concepts, and there are just too many knots and threads entangled. The minute one takes *Kashmiriyat* as encompassing a territory larger than the Valley, the diversity overshadows the uniqueness; the minute it is confined to the Valley, it negates the idea that *Kashmiriyat* upholds plurality. It is hard to overlook regional and religious affiliations while trying to make sense of Kashmiri identity.

The by-products of decolonisation—which are nationalism, regionalism, religion, citizenship, rights and independence—evoke a sense of ambivalence among the Kashmiris. In the texts—literary, journalistic and cinematic—even as they talk of military presence in their 'homeland', 'occupation' of their territory, human rights violations and their constant yearning to call themselves free, the ambiguity regarding the idea of *Kashmiriyat*—basis of rationalising a separate, independent unique Kashmiri identity—becomes apparent:

> Baba mumbles for Ammi to translate. 'He says he no longer knows what it means to be a Kashmiri.'
>
> 'Why?' I ask. Baba mumbles again, and Ammi says, 'He doesn't know what Kashmir is, and he doesn't know where he belongs' (Warrier, 2008: 206).

Baba and Ammi belong to the generation who have witnessed the transition—the British rule, Partition, accession and then the demand

for 'azadi'—but towards what; when will they touch the finish line, they now fail to understand, to construe. How then, and what, do they explain to their grandchildren? The past is just nostalgia, of which some traces are left. There are no befitting words to describe the present, while the future is just a hope. Kashmir as a territory is disputed. But it doesn't end there. Besides being caught between two countries, it is a casualty of conflicts within its own space. While negotiating religious, regional and national affiliations, Kashmir becomes a conundrum.

Administratively, Kashmir today is a part of the Indian state called Jammu and Kashmir. The state, which had earlier been under Hindu rulers and Muslim Sultans from time to time, became part of the Mughal Empire under Akbar in 1586. Then, from 1756, it was under Afghan rule till it was annexed to the Sikh Kingdom of Punjab in 1819. But in 1820, Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the territory of Jammu over to Gulab Singh and in 1846, Kashmir was also given to Gulab Singh under the Treaty of Amritsar. Ladakh had been annexed by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1830. Evidently, this whole northern-most state was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1846 and was the biggest princely state[1] in India before the Partition in August 1947. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that Kashmir Valley had never been an independent and single territory, but had been ruled jointly along with other parts of the region under one or the other ruler. When India as a nation-state, politically and geographically, came into existence in 1947 as a result of the union of princely states, Jammu and Kashmir was also one of them.

India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru promised plebiscite[2] to the people of the state. A political blunder, many argue, but

[1] The state of Jammu and Kashmir was not part of British India; rather, it was part of princely India. Not directly governed by the British but by the hereditary rulers, the so-called Maharajas and Nawabs, the princely states were nonetheless under British paramountcy and they were subject to the British (see Ashutosh Varshney).

[2] A plebiscite is the direct vote of all members of an electorate on an important public question being referred to them, in this case accession of Kashmir. On January 5, 1949, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan resolution stated that the question of the accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan will be decided through a free and impartial plebiscite. As per the 1948 and 1949 UNCIP Resolutions, both countries accepted the principle that Pakistan

still a fact that is recapped each time there is a call for Azadi. The conditions for plebiscite, the Simla Agreement[3], the statements of Sheikh Abdullah (vacillating between integration with the Indian Union and complete Independence), though also facts, are either left out or referred to depending on what side of the debate one is on. In fact, Ashutosh Varshney (1992), while discussing why Kashmir has become a problem, points at selective retrieval as one of the factors: "Partisan intellectuals and leaders are reconstructing national histories with a litany of interethnic charges, with tales of broken promises or stories of ethnic ingratitude" (p. 124). In other words, forgetting or what Ernest Renan (1990) calls "historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation… The modern nation is therefore a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts" (pp. 11-12). Nevertheless, the spirit or the life-force is that the subjects share quite a few things—commonality among them—after having forgotten several other things. So is Kashmir a part of India and is Kashmiri an Indian? I am not even looking for an answer here. The aim is to bring out the contradictions, whichever side one is taking.

Rahul Pandita, a Kashmiri Pandit, writes in his memoir that "the image of India for an ordinary Kashmiri was restricted to Punjab—to Amritsar and Ludhiana. Kashmiris went to Delhi, or Bombay, or Calcutta, but any non-Kashmiri was a Punjabi for them" (p. 24). And a Punjabi and a Kashmiri have culturally nothing in common.

On the other hand, Kashmiri Muslim Basharat Peer, in an answer to if he considers himself an Indian, replies: "I still have an Indian passport as that is the only travel document available to anyone from the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir. The question of my nationality continues to be a matter of dispute. I refer to myself as a Kashmiri, as a journalist, as a writer." (*The Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2010)

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secures the withdrawal of Pakistani intruders, followed by withdrawal of Pakistani and Indian forces, as a basis for the formulation of a truce agreement whose details are to be arrived in future, followed by a plebiscite. However, both countries failed to arrive at a truce agreement due to differences in interpretation of the procedure for and extent of demilitarization, one of them being whether the Azad Kashmiri army is to be disbanded during the truce stage or the plebiscite stage.

[3] Simla Agreement on Bilateral Relations between India and Pakistan was signed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the then President Z.A. Bhutto in Shimla on July 2, 1972.

So, is every Kashmiri, like Peer, trapped?

There would be countless endorsements of the belief that in all historical periods Kashmir remained integral to what constitutes the corpus of Indian tradition, culture and thought: "… *Kashmir*, for innumerable eras, has been an important ingredient of the holy Indian vision—a placid, yet sacrosanct and solid and concrete piece, an intrinsic and indivisible part" (Guha 1982). Also, Kashmiri culture is not regarded as something alien to the Indian sensibility, nor is it so vulnerable that it could merely be inundated by Indian-ness: "Kashmir was part of the Indian civilisation from time immemorial. Is Kashmiriyat not a part of this civilisation? No one is going to extinguish Kashmir's identity, just as nobody is going to wipe out the identity of Kerala…" (Hari Jaisingh 17).

Yet, a Kashmiri finds it hard to take concepts like nation, nationalism and national identity for granted. Nitasha Kaul (2011) seems to put the reluctance and opposition in words as she writes:

> Burn your Bollywood movies. Come to Kashmir. Walk through our cities. The bridges. The ruins. The graves. Look at what we eat. Look at our buildings. Our shrines. Our architecture. Our speech. Our history. Speak to us. See how we live. We are not you. We have never been you. We don't want to be you.
>
> Freedom cannot be denied finally (p. 206).

While such sentiments, the missing sense of belonging, can well be understood and also the pain, yet the demurral seems more a lack of will on the part of Kashmiris. It is not rationally possible, even probable, to paint people, cultures, cities within India in a single colour. True, it happened across India when the British left, the streets were renamed and so were some buildings, even cities have been subsequently rechristened, but the intention had been to underscore the indigenous character of once-a-colony India, an attempt to regain its nativity, if one could call it that. Religion was definitely not the criterion. In case of Kashmir, religion was the choice in an attempt to assert a separate, distinct identity, as Siddharth Gigoo recollects: "The names of towns and streets were changed to reinforce a new cultural identity. Green was decreed to be the colour for all signboards of the shops and commercial establishments. The time in all the watches was turned backwards by half an hour" (Gigoo 36). However, the reasoning for

holding a particular thought and viewpoint varies from one individual to another, as the narratives show. In *The Homecoming*, the narrator says: "When I am depressed… I think of Kashmir as a bone that two dogs are fighting over. That the bone represents 10 million people seems to have been forgotten. When I am not depressed, it seems very clear that the Pakistanis have consciously changed their strategy…" (Warrier 99).

For a Kashmiri, the three different nationalisms—India, Pakistan and Kashmir—are hard to juggle. Kashmir is an essential peg: to cancel out the effect of Hindu-ness of a nation-state in case of India and to complete the Muslim-ness of a nation, Pakistan. As for it being just "Kashmir", it is more like asking for too much. While the territory is supposedly indispensable to two large nation-states of India and Pakistan, the Kashmiri identity is held hostage to these two competing nationalisms. And, hence, the idea of national identity for a Kashmiri is more compounded that it appears: "And its people—whatever their religion or national identity—are Kashmiris" (Kaul, Nitasha 190).

A national identity when understood as part of one's personal identity would suggest that an individual belongs to a particular national grouping. This would further imply, as David Miller (1995) puts it, that nations do exist and are not merely conjured up as fake entities and if someone entertains a sense of belonging to a nation, then he is not duping himself. But since identities are not stagnant in time and space and they are more like variables, questions about them are bound to arise and doubts become a recurring feature. On the other hand, if they were to be completely fictitious then people would never feel the need to commit themselves to a particular identity or be inflexible as far as a fixed set of values are concerned. National identity, thus, is not a falsehood or purely irrational. But do people make a nation or a nation makes a people? The answer is elusive.

It is an accepted fact that neither India nor Pakistan—and not even Kashmir—existed as a historic entity. Rather, each was manufactured through a deliberate effort and as a resistance to the existing structure of order and rule. Nationalism—in case of all three—preceded the nation, just as Ernest Gellner (1964) says that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (p. 169). Subsequently, the paradoxes are quite visible which Benedict Anderson (1983) explains as follows:

> (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of the nationalist. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality…(3) The political power of nationalism vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence (p. 5).

Once the euphoria of attaining Independence ebbs, the communities making up a nation-state begin to take note of the divisions that exist within the larger border. India's is just that story. Since there was no common theory of nationalism *per se* (it was a western concept, anyway), with no common interest except for a single practical goal of gaining independence, Indian nationalism became a mixture of many things—Hindu revivalism, social reformation and anti-imperial movement. With the diversity quotient being greater than that of similarity, it was a struggle against the imperial rule that brought parts and regions together on a single plane. The national struggle sought to unify various strands of nationalism and introduce some degree of homogeneity. And for national awakening, indigenous motifs became important and recovery of 'authentic India' became the need. The divisions of language, class, caste and religion were made to blur in order to make the 'national movement' a success. Culturally imagined unification and mass mobilisation, with an aim of establishing an independent nation-state, took place. Thereafter, the story of 'unity in diversity' unfolded. Making of the Indian nation project was, thus, first imagined and then realised, more so in imagination. But it worked, for quite a while at least.

Once the Indian nation-state was in place, it was assumed that liberty and progress would ensure that nationalism doesn't fizzle out and the internal boundaries would continue to remain invisible even if they existed. Moreover, a larger political identity was to help appropriate sub-categories, region and religion in particular. But, over the years, the balance of the ethnic and political elements of the concept of nation has shifted. In the Indian context, Gellner's axiom that nationalism is a kind of analogy between culture and power is put to test when it comes to India-Kashmir equation. The fusion of culture and power, as is explained by G. Aloysius (1997), involves movement from other cultures and movement away from the past in one's own culture: "Together, this double movement of power over culture

constitutes the social change or transition to nation, demanded and affirmed by nationalism as an ideology" (p. 17). If Indian nationalism, then, was an end to self-determination for the collective against the British imperialism by exercising power over the diverse cultures and moving away from the past of those cultures, then, within the collective, self-determination for the individual states against assumed Indian imperialism—though it is not completely an alien culture yet influencing the ethnic cultures—needs to be addressed. In case of India and Kashmir, perhaps, the fulcrum to balance power and culture in order to move towards a common nation has not been arrived at.

Furthermore, while understanding Antonio Gramsci's (1968) concept of hegemony as articulation of the interests of the masses by those in power or those leading the masses and then mobilising the people for their consent, hegemony becomes a unifying force. It then results in the 'collective will'. The hegemonic principle transforms into an ideology, nationalised for the nation-building act to unfold. From a perception to collective consciousness and finally a national ideology, 'Kashmiriyat' can be looked at as a principle that fused culture and power and, hence, nationalism for self-determination.

National histories contain certain elements of myth insofar as they interpret events in a particular way, and also as far as they amplify the significance of some events and diminish the significance of others. More often, national myths involve telling stories about events whose occurrence is not in doubt, and different factions inside the nation will offer competing interpretations of these events… (Miller 38-39). But expecting to come at clear and clean definitions of cultural and political groups by tracing them into the past only facilitates in building up new myths or reiterating the old ones. As Miller argues:

> The crucial line of division may lie not between the truth of 'real' history and the falsehood of 'national' history, but between national identities that emerge through open processes of debate and discussion to which everyone is potentially a contributor, and identities that are authoritatively imposed by repression and indoctrination (p. 39).

These myths serve a purpose in the constitution of national identity by providing an assurance that national community, of which individuals now form a part, is based in history. The myths offer a sort of authentication, embodying a sort of continuity between generations.

Kashmir's myth was its distinct identity, unique culture and a separate land. While culturally it was imagined and presented as 'another world', historically and politically it was its 'independence' from the Indian mainland that was made into an absolute reality. However, after Independence, India effected the process by which Kashmir's collective identity was constructed and, thereafter, maintained. Through introduction of Article 370 in the Constitution, a special status for the state of Jammu and Kashmir was recognised. In other words, the Indian state simultaneously embraced and denied its differences from the Kashmiri society. While a sort of distinct cultural and political identity of the Kashmiri population was recognised, the similarities between Kashmir and the Indian state were asserted through the secular tradition of *Kashmiriyat* prevalent in the Valley. Thus, *Kashmiriyat* became a footing for assimilation and, at the same time, basis for not a complete integration into India. In Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, Colonel Hammirdev Suryavans Kachhwaha reiterates the idea of India:

> The liberation movement was starting up in those days and the idea was to nip it in the bud by strong pre-emptive measures. Kashmir for the Kashmiris, a moronic idea. This tiny landlocked valley with barely five million people to its name wanted to control its own fate. Where did that kind of thinking get you? If Kashmir, why not also Assam for the Assamese, Nagaland for the Nagas? And why stop there? Why shouldn't towns and villages declare independence, or city streets, or even individual houses? Why not demand freedom for one's bedroom, or call one's toilet a republic? Why not stand still and draw a circle round your feet and name that Selfistan (Rushdie, 2006: 101-102)?

What the Colonel is asserting is that the idea and existence of a nation-state must not be jeopardised for the many nationalisms that may exist within it. But borders, like it or not, do offer a sense of belonging to a place. Otherwise, what would demarcate one's homeland? Doesn't one's culture owe to the borders within which it evolves? Stepping across what line brings one home? In case of India, apparently, these questions give shape to a bigger identity crisis instead of resolving it, for there are too many borders within and within each is a manifestation of a distinctive identity.

And since each of the territories that make up India is unique,

distinct from one another, the assorted character becomes the very essence of the Indian nation. But what holds a nation together are beliefs, which are passed on through cultural artifacts. It is through various means and tools that a sense of nationalism or a nationalist feeling is effected.

But a compromise, if one may call it so, must be practised between the state and the nation-state in order to keep the nation alive. Just as Gayatri Spivak (2010) emphasises on the "detranscendentalizing of nationalism, the task of training the singular imagination, always in the interest of taking the 'nation' out of nation-state" (Spivak 51), a need to appropriate nationalism(s) is felt from time to time. And, in the process, nationalism begins to negotiate with the most private but the underlying purpose or objective is to control the public sphere (Spivak 2010). But nationalism insists on the pre-eminence of national identity over other identities built on various adherences and affiliations, be it religion, caste or ethnicity. So, for the Colonel, as for the most outside the disputed territory of Kashmir, being an Indian comes first, rest of the identities are secondary. Moreover, the other identities, since they are potential rivals and can be subversive, are looked at as a threat to nationalism, against the interest of the nation.

The sense of nationalism or nationalist feeling is effected through other means and tools. The State attempts at integrating diverse cultural and ethnic groups into the mainstream through formal nationalism—Constitution, government structures and policies. It is the State's own actions in backing formal nationalism and in politically constructing an identity through its legal and constitutional structures that set up a framework which then allows and restricts the future actions of the state and civil society and the relationship between them. In this process of political construction of an identity for its ethnic groups, the State selectively propagates a certain kind of history, selective references and symbols which satisfy its own need for cultural homogeneity and its own version of nationalism.

With regard to Kashmir, the Indian leaders endorsed the nature and boundaries of Kashmir 'nation' espoused by Sheikh Abdullah. He used *Kashmiriyat*, a secular-ethnic identity which referred to a shared cultural history marked by religious syncretism, and the "Naya

Kashmir"[4] manifesto that outlinined a new socialist ideology for the state, as the two tools for Kashmiri nation-building. Also, these facilitated in drawing a link with India as a socialist nation and, thus, for Jammu and Kashmir's inclusion within the Indian State. But the modern political self in form of a nation-state didn't find it easy to engage the 'others' within it, Kashmir being one, in a dialogue that would rub off Indian nationalist sentiments on the Kashmiris. The aspiration to be politically self-determining proved overwhelming, though it was only limited to the territorial Kashmir. More than nationalism serving as a unifying force, it allows the fissures to appear, in regard to Kashmiri nationalism, giving way to new demands of separate national identities.

On the other hand, nationalism for men in uniform is easy to comprehend in words, spirit and action. There are no multiple choices, no concessions allowed. So, Col Kachhwaha, in *Shalimar the Clown*, doesn't find it difficult to justify military establishment in Kashmir or the harsh actions of the Indian Army:

> Kashmir was an integral part of India. An integer was a whole and India was an integer and fractions were illegal. Fractions caused fractures in the integer and fractions were illegal. Not to accept this was latently or patently to favour disintegration. This was subversive. Subversion leading to disintegration was not to be tolerated and it was right to come down on it heavily, whether it was of the overt or covert kind. The legally compulsory and enforceable popularity of Elasticnagar was thus a matter of integrity, pure and simple, even if the truth was that Elasticnagar was unpopular. When the truth and integrity conflicted, it was integrity that had to be given precedence. Not even the truth could be permitted to dishonour the nation (Rushdie, 2006: 96).

Elasticnagar is a fictitious military establishment and becomes representative of the State, the power it exerts. It also stands as a reminder of India's attempt to integrate Kashmir into the bigger nation, by cajoling or coercion. For the reader, however, these words are not just

[4] "Naya Kashmir" was a memorandum given by Sheikh Abdullah demanding far-ranging democratic reforms, establishing the Jammu and Kashmir state as a constitutional, democratic welfare state with the Maharaja as the nominal constitutional head. This memorandum became famous as the Naya Kashmir document. Attached with this document was an economic plan projecting a humanistic view of development far in advance of the times.

the jabber of an armyman who is a disappointment to his patriotic father, for he has returned alive from the battlefield. His conviction about India as a whole and Kashmir being a part of it is based on his 'national consciousness' that has been awakened through his uniform, his sense of duty and his own reading of the history, like many Indians. His integrity towards his nation, the idea of it, doesn't need any props, not even truth. It is just there, to be accepted and practised. But the acknowledgement of this irony—may not be true but is bigger and more important than the truth—positions the India-Kashmir relationship at the crossroads. Rushdie quite tactfully brings out the contradiction within this whole idea about nationalism. And for ordinary citizens, nationalism would be just what it is for the Colonel, an imagined reality to be taken for granted without searching for any logic behind it or raising any questions about it.

As for Kashmir, India did, or tried to do, what it could to convince itself and the Kashmiris that it was a part of the Indian nation and nation-state. Jammu and Kashmir is the most subsidised state of the country and it depends on the Centre for funds. Well, that is just economics. Though part of the efforts to assimilate the state, it did not prove enough. Nationalism, at times, brings with it a sense of infuriation and annoyance, even frustration, and this is noticeable when the Commanding Officer in *The Collaborator* says:

> I gave you a job, kept you busy, otherwise you would have been fucked a hundred times over by some stinking Afghan jihadi with a penchant for Kashmiri boys. But what am I saying? You are not even proper Kashmiri! Forget it, man, this is war, and these things are elements of the business here. I'm the fucking Commanding Officer and they have given me a responsibility, to cleanse this place of anti-fucking national elements, and that's what I'm doing… (Waheed, 2011: 278).

He does hint at something more than just the conviction; it is a 'responsibility', nothing more and nothing less. Kashmiris, never mind whether they make the Indian community or are outside it, are a threat to Indian nationalism and, hence, need to be dealt with. The Gujjar boy, on the other hand, doesn't want to be a collaborator, a *mukhbir*, but he doesn't have a choice. Both are doing what has to be done. Right or wrong, it is just the thing that needs to be done and each one must find his own justification for it.

From 1953 onwards, the Indian State was not able to reconcile the informal Kashmir and official Indian nationalism. The absence of a competitive party system and the inability of the governments to accommodate the rising demands of the population, combined with the unfortunate decisions of the leadership to pursue patronage politics at the expense of an appropriate economic and political strategy for development and governance, generated a crisis in the Valley. Soon, it snowballed into an armed movement, challenging the status quo and revolving around Kashmir's distinctness and consequent past political claims of self-determination.

The informal Kashmir and official Indian nationalisms stood at odds and what followed was an open clash:

> On August 15, traffic stops, shops close, schools shut down, identity checks by Indian troops increase and life freezes. In the capital, Srinagar, however, pro-Indian politicians who form the local state government herd groups of their supporters and force government schools to gather contingents of schoolchildren in a cricket ground guarded by hundreds of Indian paramilitaries. Then the politicians hoist the Indian flag. Outside the stadium, the streets remain empty (Peer, 2008: 39).

The Independence Day celebration, more than marking an event of history, is a celebration of the Indian nationhood and nationalism and participation would mean that one accepts, adopts and endorses the nationhood. But in Kashmir, as noted in novels and media reports, it is irrelevant with its significance being limited only to government officials and those in power. Formal or state-sponsored nationalism proves to be inept in relating to the Kashmiri Muslim population and fails to find any takers among the masses.

The majority population, by marking August 15 as Black Day and not participating in any celebration, disassociates itself with the political identity of India. But again, it were the Kashmiri Muslims who did not recognise, accept and celebrate the day. In *Curfewed Night*, Peer recollects: "… the seniors told us not to chant the Indian national anthem. 'We are Kashmiris and now we are fighting for independence. We cannot go on chanting the Indian songs, even if the principal might like us to.'" (p. 23). For Kashmiri Pandits, as Pandita recollects, there was no reason why not to; not even *Kashmiriyat*, perhaps. "It brought back the memories of the kicks I had braved in school while I sang

the National Anthem…" (Pandita 8-9). The nationalist sentiment was lost after the exodus and in the subsequent years. The schoolboy was a Kashmiri, but did being a non-Muslim make him an Indian in Kashmir? Having grown up, moved to Delhi and in a job, Pandita wasn't stirred to think of nationalism on Independence Day: "I no longer sing the National Anthem. A few years ago, a child beggar at a traffic signal pinned the national flag onto my shirt. I threw it away in the waste bin of a café near my house. It was the day I realised I could no longer remember my mother's voice" (p. 9). What had changed, his identity or his ideology? Perhaps, any sense of being a patriot disappeared and his national consciousness (Kashmiri or Indian) had gone dead. For, he now feels to be belonging to neither anymore.

Kashmiri Pandits have been demanding a separate homeland, Panun Kashmir. "The geo-political aspirations of the seven lakh Kashmiri Pandits can only be addressed with the establishment of a separate homeland with full and free flow of Indian Constitution in Kashmir valley," said president of Panun Kashmir Ashwani Kumar Chrungoo (*The Indian Express*, June 21, 2012). The idea of a territorial demarcation for the Kashmiri Pandits negates the very idea of Kashmiri nationalism. Some Pandits have returned to the Valley in want of employment and out of need. They have been given accommodation, as part of the Rs 1618-crore package to facilitate the return of the Kashmiri Pandits, in the five settlements across the Valley (Pandita 2013). Yet, they remain outsiders, as Pandita reports:

> The real problem arises, they [Pandits in settlements] said, at their workplaces where they face acute harassment from their Muslim colleagues. 'They treat us like pariahs,' said one female teacher. 'My headmistress threw a notebook at me the other day and shouted, "You sixth-grade pass-outs have come now to lord over us!"' … Many in Kashmir clearly resented the return of Pandit employees under the package (Pandita 248).

A woman, whom Pandita quotes in his memoir, said: "Each day we leave behind something of our identity. Yesterday, it was the freedom to sing the National Anthem; today, it is the freedom to wear a *bindi*; tomorrow it could be our faith" (Pandita 250).

On the other hand, when Kashmiris celebrate or even mark August 14, Pakistan's independence day, it is suggestive of showing solidarity with another nation, a Muslim nation. But, with religious connotation

dominating the act, it once again negates the idea of K*ashmiriyat* or even Kashmiri nationalism, for that matter. And so do the informal events such as Friday noon prayers and showing of holy relic at the Hazrat Bal mosque, which are considered to be effective means to create national consciousness as opposed to the State-generated national symbols and practices. Likewise, flag is an important national symbol and the way one treats it becomes the manifestation of nationalism; any disrespect would tarnish the feeling of patriotism. Often, nationalism and patriotism are used interchangeably, but Ashis Nandy (1994) points out a clear distinction with nationalism being an ideology and patriotism an emotional state:

> Nationalism, thus, is more specific, ideologically tinged, ardent form of "love of one's own kind" that is essentially ego-defensive and over-lies some degree of fearful dislike or positive hostility to "outsiders"… Patriotism, on the other hand, presumes the existence of communities other than the country and gives them recognition, sometimes even priority. It is, at least, vaguely aware that there can be demands of the nation and of these communities. Unlike nationalism, patriotism makes no claim that the ideal relationship between the individual and the state be an unmediated one (Nandy, 2006: 3502).

Thus, for both men in uniform and militants, patriotic sentiments are not the driving force. It is the pure, even crude, sense of nationalism: "The worst part was the psychological torture. They would make us [Papa 2 torture chamber survivor] say Jai Hind every morning and evening. They beat you if you refused" (Peer 146). For people in Kashmir, the Indian national flag means nothing. Even the Indian cricket team, whose win is a shared celebration for the Indian nation, is hooted at in Kashmir: As Basharat Peer says:

> We did not relate to the symbols of Indian nationalism—the flag, the national anthem, the cricket team. We followed every cricket match India and Pakistan played but we never cheered for the Indian team. If India played Pakistan, we supported Pakistan, if India played the West Indies, we supported West Indies; if India played England, we supported England (p. 11).

In fact, the State's routines, rituals, activities and policies constitute and regulate the social making of meaning and within it a 'national character' and 'national identity' and, thereby, making up

the totalising dimension of the formation of a State. On the other hand, the individual dimension is assembled through the claims that are exemplified in the categories like class, gender, ethnicity and so on. However, the totalising and individualising dimensions are in a constant struggle, represented in and by the lived experiences of the state subjects (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Either dimension, when accomplishes the task of making the conscience collective, impedes the other. For the Kashmiris, the collective conscience responds to the individual dimension—being a Kashmiri—and it stands against the State's coercive forms and agencies.

Also, central to nationalism is transformation of space into territory that has relied on the conceptualisation of people as living within a single shared spatial frame (Anderson 65). An identity between people and territory is created and then naturalised through motifs. In case of Kashmir, for instance, it is this trope—"paradise on earth"—that concretizes and commodifies the space, converting it into a property with a proper name, Kashmir, the Valley: "I don't want to cross the Banihal tunnel. Can we turn back" (Gigoo 67). Jammu is part of the state, but not part of the essential homeland.

Gradually, the space, property and heritage fuse together into a territory with borders and the inside is distinguished from the outside: "The houses here seem to have lost their roofs," an old man said to his wife, seeing that the houses didn't have the tin roofs like the ones in Kashmir (Gigoo 71). The tangible goods become part of the heritage, evoking and conjoining nationalism, as the diarist of *Under the Shadow of Militancy* had penned:

> Do I have to make an announcement in public that I am here because I belong here, that my roots are here, that my ancestors have lived here for centuries? I feel I should hold to my place for myself and for my children, even if it involves risking my life? But is it really that important? Should one continue living in a house which is already on fire? I am too tired to think (Dhar, 2002: 13).

For the Pandits, as would be for anybody living in a place for years, to 'flee' is not an easy decision to make. The house that they leave behind is a life that they are forced to end and for no other reason but because they have been born into a religion and have practised a different faith. Is it possible to cut off the ties from the past, from

the land, the house that has been home? Pandita writes how difficult it became for his aging mother to come to terms with the changed circumstances:

> Ma would go for walks in the neighbourhood park in Delhi…Father would watch her close the door quietly behind her and, after she was gone, he would call after her, knowing very well that she could no longer hear him.
>
> 'For God's sake, don't repeat your home story in front of everyone!'
>
> The home story was a statement that Ma had got into the habit of telling anyone who would listen. It didn't matter to her whether they cared or not. It had become a part of herself, entrenched like a precious stone in the mosaic of her identity (Pandita 10).
>
> I realize how much that statement meant to Ma. It was the only thing that reminded her of who she was… *'Our home in Kashmir had twenty-two rooms'* (Pandita 10).

Remembering the house, the particular kind of house, is in a way constructing memory in time and space and, thereby, mediating an identity. Outside the Valley, Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims feel out of place: "For a lifetime we lived amid the snow-capped mountains. The sun we knew gave us warmth, not death" (Gigoo 112). But in contrast, when Kashmiri parents found sending their children out of Kashmir as the solution to the problem of keeping them safe during the militancy and away from insurgency, India was the choice for the masses. Those who could afford to get them educated abroad sent them overseas but for the middle and the lower middle class, the obvious choice was Indian cities; not Pakistan. The reason, indeed, was not the infrastructure or education system. Religion of the majority population of the Indian nation too was not the concern, neither did it matter that India was the 'occupier', the enemy. It was just a better choice than Pakistan, the nation of Muslims. In Delhi, a Kashmiri Muslim finds it difficult to get an accommodation; he is not trusted, as Basharat Peer mentions in his memoir. But a Kashmiri Pandit rented out a room to him and even offered to remove the picture of the Hindu God. Peer, however, preferred the way it was, the Kashmiri way. Outside Kashmir, the Kashmiris, irrespective of their religion, are there for each other. The religious distinction is overshadowed by

regional affinity. Would it be wrong to say that *Kashmiriyat* seems to gain meaning outside Kashmir?

The Coffee House in Delhi, writes Gigoo, becomes a place much frequented by the Kashmiri Pandits:

> We are not migrants. We left Kashmir long back, and ever since live in our own houses in Delhi, argued a gentleman... But we are with the new migrants in this moment of pain. We know how it feels to be homeless. We understand this alienation,' he added. 'Good that we left Kashmir long back,' another man blurted indignantly. 'What did we have there that belonged to us anyway? There was no beauty at all. It was a wretched darkness. Pandits were living on borrowed time. This had to happen one day. There was no trust between the Pandits and the Muslims; only pretence. Exile has always been our destiny. I lost my old house ages ago, but I gained my freedom outside Kashmir' (p. 89).

The phrases "own houses in Delhi", "homeless", "freedom outside Kashmir" insinuate the idea of displacement but within that is an element of incongruity regarding the idea of home.

In a strange way, all is interlinked in case of Kashmir: mention Kashmiri nationalism and the regions cry out for their distinct identity, talk of secular *Kashmiriyat* and Hindu Pandits narrate their story. The *Kashmiriyat* is lost in Kashmir, but is reawakened outside the state borders. While *Kashmiriyat* upholds plurality, India too follows secularism as its State policy, yet the religious affiliations not only question the individual identity but also the idea of nationalism, both Indian and Kashmiri. One's loyalty towards one's nation is determined on the basis of religion. In India, the Muslims will always be suspected of being anti-national and in Kashmir, Hindu Pandits would be a threat to Kashmiri nationalism. In *The Srinagar Conspiracy*, the elderly Pandit asks Habib, a friend of his son:

> So tell me, son, what happens to the rest of India, where a hundred million Muslims will be looked at with suspicion and will be blamed by the Hindu right wing for a second partition of the country? What happens to us Hindu families who live in Kashmir? (p. 57)

Nevertheless, for a Kashmiri, 'national consciousness' is a product of life that he witnesses on the street, in police stations, during elections, in hospitals and in his drawing room. How does he make sense of nationalism? Both seem to be in conflict when it comes to earning

a living. For a Kashmiri soldier, is duty in uniform just part of the job or is it an act of treachery? On the other hand, the Gujjar boy in *The Collaborator* is disgusted every time the Commander justifies his acts in Kashmir as duty and the boy says: *Yes, I must shoot him… This man who calls it his job, who wants to leave after finishing his 'Kashmiri stint'… that will be it. The end.* I will be freed (Waheed 287). The idea of duty and job too is different depending from where an officer comes from, where he belongs. Looking at another story, the contradiction between the nation-state that offers a political identity, more than anything else, and nationalism that is based on cultural identity sharpens out:

> Basharat Baba of Srinagar was selected to train in the game of football in Brazil. It was only after his passport was rejected that he learnt that his father was a former militant. "The Blacklist that is holding up some 60,000 passport applications is a fact of life in Kashmir… For an ordinary Kashmiri such as Basharat, however, the blacklist meant that his spot went to one of his friends from the ISAT team" (*Open* magazine, March 12, 2011).

What does Basharat need to acquire, a Kashmiri political identity or can his being an Indian accommodate his Kashmiriness? Perhaps, it doesn't make a difference, for he is at a loss with either and both, finding hard to awaken any national consciousness. And, when the government policy has allowed surrendered militants to assimilate into the mainstream, why should Basharat pay for his father's ideology? That's a question for another debate, another time. For now, can the idea of India transcend the limitations of the Indian state or does it work the other way round? At the end of the day, it is the identity card that seems to matter. But what is an idea, suitable identity to adorn, Kashmiri or Indian?

> It doesn't really matter to him what the names are, as long as there is a photo they can show on Doordarshan. All ID cards have Indian, *Kashmiri*, particulars…(Waheed, 2011: 14).

If being an Indian is to be regarded purely as a political identity, with an institutional emphasis more than anything else, it should simply mean that the members share the identity collectively and not necessarily at an individual level. Yet, the tension between the

collective and the individual (read state), giving rise to assertion of regional identity, can't be seen as reflecting merely fissiparous tendencies. At least not in case of Kashmir. It is a manifestation of ethnic nationalism[5]. In fact, "ethnonationalism denotes both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly where the latter is conceived as a nation state" (Conversi 2). In case of Kashmir, as Sumit Ganguly (2010) notes, the issue of ethnic stereotyping wasn't discernible despite economic and social disparities between the Hindus and Muslims. With the outbreak of insurgency in 1989, the ethnic differences came to fore. While Kashmir sought separate nationhood on the basis of ethnic *Kashmiriyat*, it got further ethnically split: "The displaced Hindus tend to see their former Muslim neighbours as little better than marauders… The Muslim population of the Kashmir Valley… distrust Hindus with equal vigour" (Ganguly 176).

The problem of locating political identity in cultural characteristics of the majority population is bound to surface and, thereby, making it a Hindu or a Muslim nation. "Baba shakes his head and mumbles. 'Indians,' Ammi translates, and he nods. 'We were all Indians once'" (Warrier 24). If it could be that simple, alas! But that's a two-generation-old sentiment. For the youth in Kashmir today, the experience of the past is missing and the stories that have been passed on have several gaps. Since the Indian security forces entered their 'homeland' and 'occupied' it, the contours of nationalism are well marked out for them:

> 'But Mama he is not Muslim.' He continued, 'We do not want that history to be taught, which shows Kashmir is a synthetic culture where pre-Islamic traditions are not commingled but blended in a dominating form. He cannot stop it now by preaching such history. It is too late' (Kaul, Ashok: 22).

Iqbal tries to explain it to his Uncle that *Kashmiriyat* is losing ground in its home territory. The lessons of the teacher, his Uncle's Pandit friend, can't stop the new tide that has introduced new meanings and

[5] Ethnonationalism is a term that refers to a wide range of political phenomena including what may be called nationalism, separatism, secessionism, sub-nationalism, ethnic insurgency, ethnic militancy, or sometimes simply regionalism (see Sanjib Baruah (ed), *Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader*).

new lessons in the classrooms. The words, the history needs to be reinterpreted or just completely forgotten to make place for another ideology, another history. The history too becomes need-based and can be manoeuvred from time to time.

The words of Indian political leaders only help Iqbal and those who believe in his ideology. The real-life politicians are no different: BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee had warned Pakistan that "if it is asking for 4 million Kashmiri Muslims, it should be ready to receive 120 Indian Muslims in case Kashmir secedes from India." (*Afkar-i-Milli*, February 4, 1990). Former Indian Minister for External Affairs I.K. Gujral, during a visit to New York, had said: "If Kashmir secedes, it will reflect on Muslims of India adversely" (*Minaret*, May 16, 1990). On the other hand, in *Radiance*, a weekly news magazine associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami, it is asked: "Attention Prime Minister: Are Indian Muslims hostages?" (*Radiance*, New Delhi, February 25, 1990). However, a Hyderabad-based newspaper, *Rahnuma-yi-Dakan*, known for publishing moderate views, observes: "The linkage of Indian Muslim fate with that of Kashmir is grossly unfair. Indian Muslims are neither responsible for, nor capable of controlling the secessionist feelings in the Valley" (*Rahnuma-yi-Dakan*, June 2, 1990).

The politics of meaning becomes more essential. The tensions and contradictions between the meaning and structures associated with the State-sponsored and popular nationalism make the concept convoluted. Ordinary Kashmiri villagers suffer and die as a result of antagonisms that are fostered and manipulated by distant national leaders in pursuit of equally distant national ideals. As for Kashmir, it had been fractured in its political preferences and also regional-cultural identity. "We may be Muslims, Jawahar, but our Islam is of a different colour from the Islam of some of the fundamentalists who will reign in Pakistan. Our culture is different, our ethos is different. We can't be independent, we are too small. But perhaps in India, we will find tolerance and acceptance" (Chandra 14). It was with a similar thought that Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah chose not to join Pakistan despite the majority population being Muslim and acceded to India on the grounds of secularism. Peer, in his memoir, reflects upon the idea of the Sheikh: "Slowly, I learnt to like Delhi… I was also getting to understand the various Indias that existed, Indias that I liked and cared about, Indias that were unlike the militaristic power it seemed

in Kashmir" (Peer 70). Pluralism—religious, social and cultural—is an essential ingredient of Indian nationalism: unity in diversity. In the process of nation-making, cultural parallels are drawn but while trotting ahead, ethnic communities feel alienated. In an attempt to unify the political entity and to establish a single nation, the divisions within are hardened and this leads to proliferating demands for self-determination.

> There is something different about home. I can't put my finger on it, but there's a difference.
>
> It's been there for the past few months. Since the Army moved to the borders. What difference does that make to the atmosphere here?
>
> 'Don't you understand how much it means to your father? That we go to war for a fourth time, and over Kashmir? It's breaking him. And that brother of yours…'
>
> 'What about him?'
>
> 'Your father wanted a united India. Your brother's demands for autonomy hurt him.' (Warrier 12-13)

The argument that Kashmiri cultural identity is incompatible with the mainstream culture is flawed, for not only is the Kashmiri cultural identity not a homogenous, historic entity but also because the mainstream culture—Indianness—is not a unified, absolute structure. Hence, compatibility or assimilation, even though challenging, can't be impossible. Well, even if it is assumed that Kashmiri nationalism is incompatible with Indian nationalism, or that Kashmir can't be part of the Indian nation-state, which is a federation of several nationalisms, how can the other two ethnically different parts be integrated into Kashmir? What is generally called Kashmir happens to be the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which has three ethnically separable geographical regions—a Dogra Hindu majority Jammu, a Muslim-majority Kashmir and Tibetan-Buddhist majority Ladakh. "If Kashmiri nationalism is not based on religion but on *Kashmiriyat*, a separate Kashmiri ethnicity, then it has to be realised that the Buddhists in Ladakh and Hindus of Jammu are ethnically not Kashmiris (similarly, Jammu Muslims are Punjabi and Gujjar Muslim, not Kashmiris)" (Varshney 32).

Moreover, Jammu is only a bit smaller than Kashmir. An ethnic notion of an independent Kashmir cannot be sustained, for the state is internally incompatible and the two other regions/groups have time and again expressed their disapproval regarding Kashmiri dominance in the state and would rather choose not to join it. And, this has been true right since the early 1950s. It can't be denied that for Kashmir, the rigging of elections, military 'occupation', human rights violations and denial of justice for ordinary people are reasons enough to distrust the 'idea of India'. But then, its own regional parts are wary of the idea of Kashmiri nationalism; rather, they don't acknowledge or endorse it. Nation as a community has been imagined in case of both India and Kashmir.

If a national identity for any country means the characteristics that make its community different from others, then in case of India, one culture with a set of characteristics doesn't suffice to meet that end. As a result, the differences become the defining characteristic of the national identity thus construed for India. But a pre-occupation with the national identity leads to a constant attempt to sustain the difference. So, Kashmir (and so do other states) feels the need to assert its distinctness lest it should forget the difference and end up fusing into the Indianness, even though there is no homogenous Indianness. At the same time, the regional parts of Kashmir would follow suit and make all possible attempts to assert their differences and distinctness. In all this assimilating and remaining different, there is a sense of 'maybe' that lingers on, as Peer says:

> Delhi was beginning to be a second home. Maybe a city feels like home when you know there will be a person or two who will come to the airport, to the railway station to greet you, when you know there are people you want to meet as you arrive in the city. I might have forgotten Kashmir—it might have turned into a place I visited every two or three months—but I could not. Kashmir was the text and subtext of my professional, personal and social worlds in Delhi. Kashmir was the almost daily death count in the newspapers (Peer 71).

For Peer, the experience of two worlds aggravates the sense of being lost. Kashmir and Delhi are not just geography. More than territories, they are ideologies, different nationalisms and two different systems of life. The physical journey to India's capital, Delhi, and professional

settlement there made Pandita a migrant, but not the same as migrants from other parts:

> On festivals, and on family functions, or when they were dying, they knew they could go back to where they had come from. I couldn't do that. I knew I was in permanent exile. I could own a house in this city or any other part of the world, but not in Kashmir Valley where my family came from (Pandita 7).

Would being a part of one territory mean that you can't be a part of the other?

> When I was young and away from home for most of the year, I had the company of other Kashmiri boys who were equally far away from their homes. We had much to share, our roots and our isolation, in a place where everything was strange (Warrier 174).

The roots, which I understand here as the cultural past, definitely offers a sense of identity. For, a culture has a past, a history, and is rooted to the geographical space. And, when even some fragments of it are resuscitated, along comes the myth of homogeneity of that culture, for only selective history is allowed to resurface in the memory in order to perceive, define and legitimise nationalism that follows. So, when a Kashmiri outside the Valley tries to reconnect with his culture, which is his past and is unique to his home place, he looks for *Kashmiriyat* as a whole and not the fissures that exist. On the other hand, Mirza Waheed's protagonist has never stepped out of his border village. India, Pakistan, Kashmir or Jammu and Kashmir are hazy, vague ideas or just names he overhears: "Azad Kashmir: … but a place I did not really know. It was, now I understand, and still is, a *khayal*, just an idea" (Waheed 147). More than anything else, he doesn't understand how these names of places can offer a sense of identity to an individual. But at the same time, he also wonders what this would mean:

> I tried to look at him meaningfully, not knowing what to say. This was wrong, everything was wrong. The situation was almost laughable—people from my village were fleeing to escape the wrath of the Indian Security Forces and were doing that by running away to India itself, for what was Jammu, or any part of the plains beyond the mountains of Kashmir, but India? *India* (Waheed 251)!

Assertion of Kashmiri nationalism as against the Indian nationalism is not only historically questionable but also, as manifested in these narratives, ambiguous in itself. The reasons for doing it could be military 'occupation', subversion of democracy and human rights violations, but for Kashmiris, whatever the origins of their problems and complaints, their demands become inevitably contextualised. But has the hegemony of Indian nationalism stifled the political space and allowed little accommodation of Kashmiri sub-nationalism? Perhaps not. The plural character of society and political divergence in the state of Jammu and Kashmir itself has exposed internal contradictions in the thesis of Kashmiri nationalism.

The ambivalence regarding Kashmiri regional and national identity that comes out through the narratives underscore the idea that just as India as a nation is an "imagined community", so is Kashmir as a nation. Within the frame of Ernest Gellner's (1983) definition of nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy requiring that ethnic boundaries should not cut across national lines, Kashmiri nationalism then is contrived to acquire a separate political identity and then justified. In other words, Kashmir as a political community was neither natural nor primordial, but was constructed to meet socio-economic goals rather than acquire an identity. The movement against the Dogra rule was socio-economic and more Muslim than Kashmiri and the aim was purely to check the inequities between Hindus and Muslims. It was, however, soon blanketed as a national movement.

When the Muslim Conference was converted into the National Conference, a constitutive story of *Kashmiriyat*, which posited that Hindus and Muslims in the region shared a distinct Kashmiri identity, was created to bring people together. For people-building, it was essential to emphasise the validity of *Kashmiriyat* as the basis for a separate political and national identity and the legitimacy of National Conference as its representative. All regions and religions had to be embraced to cement the concept, which was articulated in political speeches and through newspaper articles. Kashmir had to be presented as a unified identity, but the idea of *Kashmiriyat* was not put into practice after it was generated by reclaiming selective history. However, the people-building process in Kashmir also became exclusionary. An attempt of constructing an irreducible and homogenised nationalism became counter-productive to the extent that it brought out the deeply

plural character of Jammu and Kashmir's society on both sides of the border and the political choices of its people, especially the minority communities. Each has been engaged in a little battle for nurturing its socio-cultural identity, seeking avenues of social and economic development and creating its own political space. In other words, each community interprets the political rights, inherent in the right of self-determination, differently. Regionalism and religion seem to perforate Kashmiri nationalism or even its possibility.

While the administrative unity of the state was achieved under the Dogra rule, the two regions, Jammu and the Valley, neither shared a common history nor were able to meet on common ground in political terms. Except for a brief period from 1932 to 1938, when Muslims of both regions were brought under the common platform of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, the political responses and ideologies of the two regions remained quite different. Even the political movement against the Dogra rule remained, more or less, confined to Kashmir. In 1939, when the Muslim Conference converted into the National Conference, the Hindus of the Jammu remained indifferent and the Muslim population of the state was divided between the Kashmir-based National Conference and the Jammu-based Muslim Conference. The accession of the state with India on October 26, 1947 marked a shift in the internal political structure within the state and in the post-1947 period, the regional dynamics contributed to the sense of ambiguity regarding the Kashmiri identity.

> The National Conference, though a popular party of Kashmir, did not have a similar support and legitimacy in Jammu as in Kashmir. The anti-feudal movement that had captured the imagination of the mass of Kashmiris did not make much impact in Jammu. There was, in fact, no political voice representing the impoverished and oppressed masses of Jammu, mostly belonging to the Dalit and backward classes (Chowdhary 2011).

While Sheikh Abdullah was constantly oscillating between greater autonomy within the Indian federation and independence, the people of the state were equally divided regarding their political position. While Jammu wanted complete accession to India, Kashmir was defensive regarding its autonomous status. Years later, his son Farooq Abdullah as Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, asserted: "The

concept of autonomy is not to weaken the ties of the state with the rest of the country, but it will go a long way in greater integration by meeting the regional aspirations of the people" (August 15, 1997, Jammuandkashmirarchives.com). However, at times, India did adopt all possible strategies to suppress popular nationalism in the Valley through an extensive system of political patronage and sometimes by giving economic packages. This, in turn, added to the imbalance between Jammu and Kashmir, with the former viewing these efforts as attempts to appease the Muslims of the Valley. Jammu was missing from the larger narrative of the state as well as was marginalised as far as the policies and politics of the nation-state with regard to the region was concerned. This only deepened the crevices, with each part becoming protective and assertive of its own separate entity and, thereby, questioning the idea of Kashmiri nationalism.

Self-determination, as the inherent right of all people of Jammu and Kashmir, has been reiterated by political leaders but the fact that people of Jammu and Ladakh are all for full and unconditional accession to India has often been dismissed or is never allowed to be articulated in the political power corridors. Is this because the Chief Minister has always been from Kashmir and not Jammu? The National Conference's programme of land reforms, demand for autonomy and its guarantee through Article 370, economic packages and employment restrictions, have been seen not merely as steps to benefit and suit the interest of the Kashmiris but as measures that deprived Jammu of its share of power and economic resources. In fact, Article 370 reflected the deep-rooted political and ideological divide between the two regions. In the absence of any other kind of political mobilisation, Jammu's regional politics was appropriated by the well-established sections. They sought to voice their class-based responses as the grievances of the Jammu region as a whole. Jammu politics represented those who had been privileged but were now faced with the threat of loss of their position of advantage. Since the transfer of power from the Dogra ruler, Jammu's demands have taken on two shapes (Zutshi 2003).

On the one hand, the socialist forces had approved of the state's special status and supported Sheikh Abdullah's socialist agenda as articulated in the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto. But in addition, they had demanded devolution of political power from the state government to the regions of the state. On the other hand, distinct demands had arisen

with communal overtones. These cover a broad spectrum and include "complete accession" or "full integration with the Indian union", the equitable distribution of educational and economic institutions, equal political representation in the civil services and the legislative assembly, and separate statehood for Jammu. The integrationist view had emerged as the major frame of reference for a large number of Jammuites in comprehending and evaluating inter-regional relations within the state. Whenever people in Jammu perceive a threat to the state's integration with India, particularly in the pronouncements of Kashmir's leadership, they become vocal in their demands for one Constitution, one flag and the break-up of Jammu and Ladakh from Kashmir and integration with the Indian Union. However, their demands are often equated with Hindu nationalism and, thereby, dismissed.

As Kashmir remains caught up on the issue of its own identity vis-à-vis the Indian state, political divide has continued between the parts of the state. While Kashmir's politics went through various phases of assertion of ethno-nationalist politics and contestation of Kashmir's relationship with Delhi, Jammu's politics continued to be defined by inter-regional issues. A broad and fundamental consensus prevails in the Jammu region that the state government has consistently discriminated against Jammu in favour of Kashmir. Regional discrimination has remained Jammu's major political discourse and the complaints are wide-ranging. Almost all professional and technical institutions, such as the post-graduate Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, the Dental College, the Agricultural University, the Regional Engineering College, the artificial limb centre, are located in the Valley. Also, all major industrial plants are located in the Kashmir Valley.

In 2008, there was an uproar regarding setting up a Central University in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. "The issue of the location of the Central University that had been promised to the state of Jammu and Kashmir by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has become a tug of war between vested interests in Jammu and in the Valley."[6] The Central University controversy regarding where the university would be located, in Jammu or the Valley, threatened peace in the region. Soon, the issue was raked up on communal lines: instead of Poonch

[6] http://currentnews.in/2009/09/14/row-on-central-university-splits-the-state/

and Doda, which have an even population of Hindus and Muslims, the Hindu-dominated Samba would be the acceptable location. But Srinagar wouldn't agree to it. Though the HRD Minister tried to do his best: "Sibal promises fair deal to Kashmir on Central University" (*The Times of India*, August 4, 2009), the government had to set up two universities in the state to buy peace. Religion and regionalism seem to perforate Kashmiri nationalism or even its possibility. The state government has often been accused of showing neglect to the other two regions, Jammu in particular:

> Throughout the post-Accession period, 'Kashmir' has continued to be the focal point of Jammu's dominant politics and 'regional discrimination' has remained its major political discourse. According to this discourse, there are regional imbalances within the state. While 'Kashmir' dominates, 'Jammu' is neglected (Chowdhary 131).

The expressions of identity politics beyond the Valley, though operating on a different plane, tend to invade the space of Kashmiri identity and the context of conflict. In the domain of politics, Jammu has been demanding a re-organisation of power relations within the state on the one hand and contestation of the ethno-nationalist goals of Kashmiri identity politics on the other. Kashmir remains the reference point of the identity politics of the Jammu region. Jammu in itself is a cultural mosaic and represents diversities of varied kinds, based on religious, linguistic, cultural, tribal and caste categories; they are multilayered and overlapping identities. They do not share the idea of *Kashmiriyat*, which is referred to as the basis of a separate, distinct identity, and this is reflected in their attitude towards Pandits, who had been forced to flee:

> In Jammu, over the past few months, things had been taking an ugly turn. Initially, like us, Jammuites thought our exodus was temporary. Though they benefitted economically because of us, they developed an antipathy towards us. For them, we were outsiders. Within months, invectives had been invented for us. The most popular among them was:
>
> *Haath mein kangri munh mein chholey*
> *Kahan se aayey Kashmiri loley*
>
> Kangri in hands, chickpeas in their mouth
> From where did these Kashmiri flaccid penises come? (Pandita 123)

The ethno-national Kashmiri identity politics remain at the root of the internal context of the conflict. For instance, in March 2010, the resurrection of the Daughters Bill, referring to the issue of disqualification of women from holding the Permanent Resident status if they married outside the state, made the communal divide within Jammu and Kashmir more visible, as *The Tribune* headline read: "Daughter's Bill creates communal divide; Jammu-Srinagar-based parties interpret differently" (March 12, 2010). The amendment was interpreted differently, with the Jammu region believing that the Bill was meant to deny their girls the state subject rights and took it as anti-national and anti-Hindu. For the Srinagar parties, allowing Permanent Resident status to girls married outside the state would change the demography of the region and, thus, erode the significance of the state's autonomy. It also goes a long way in showing how the mainstream media, at times, is responsible for the slippage of the 'national' into the 'communal' and fills in the categories with connotations that suit it.

But somehow, it is always Kashmir that appears more fascinating, and I am not referring to the landscape of the Valley. But the two regions, Jammu and Kashmir, have been sharing a symbiotic relationship, with each on the mind of the other all the time. And why is it that Kashmir won't talk of Jammu at all though it is the winter capital, though Jammu would always have Kashmir on its mind? Is the narrative for Jammu irrelevant?

The early dimensions of Kashmiri national consciousness may have been predominantly cultural, but it gradually moved towards being decidedly political and *Kashmiriyat* was imbued with a religious notion. The people had believed the national myth of *Kashmiriyat* based on a shared history and culture but the myth was not just questioned but subverted, as religion began to overwhelm and change the contours of identity.

> There was no reason to believe one mullah could change a whole mindset built on a centuries-old culture of tolerance. In Gilkamosh, life went on, idyllic and peaceful as it always had been (Mastras 56).

But sooner than later, things did change in Gilkamosh in *Fidali's Way*, with fundamental Islam finding way into the lives of people and conditioning the minds of the youth, just as it happened in Kashmir

in the 1990s. Religion has played an important role in mobilisation of people across the globe. Even Sheikh Abdullah, during his movement against the Dogra rule, tried to reach out to the majority Muslim population through the basic tenets of Islam that ordinary Kashmiri Muslims could understand. The debate on Kashmir has often referred to the rhetoric of the two-nation theory, which interspersed the struggle from time to time that ended with the creation of India and Pakistan. Kashmir belonged to Pakistan, it is argued, since its majority population is Muslim. Likewise, Geelani has opined: "[t]he Muslim worldwide *ummat* is one, monolithic ideological community, cemented together on the basis of common belief ('aqida') and faith ('iman'), which sees no differences…" (Sikand, 2001: 221). Blaming territorial nationalism as the cause of strife and bloodshed in the world, he is of the opinion that:

> All Muslims being considered as one nation, Muslims and Hindus in India, and Kashmir as well, are considered to be members of two different nations despite living in the same territory… For Muslims to stay among Hindus or in an environment which is very different from their own is said to be as difficult as it is 'for fish to stay alive in a desert'. Muslims, he says, cannot live harmoniously with a Hindu majority without their own religion and traditions coming under a grave threat, one major factor being Hinduism's capacity to absorb other religions and communities into its fold (Sikand, 2001: 221).

Religion punctuates the narratives of nationalism and regionalism. Consciously or unconsciously, it becomes the marker of one's identity in relation to the others.

> Despite the rather sleepy existence of our village and my ignorance about the political history of Kashmir, I had a sense of the alienation and resentment most Kashmiri Muslims felt and had against Indian rule (Peer 11).

In the above excerpt, Peer considers himself to be part of the Kashmiri Muslim community who resents 'Indian rule', while in the latter he refers to 'Kashmiris', and himself being one, who seek independence. In *Under the Shadow of Militancy*, the "unknown Kashmiri" wonders: "And what about me, waiting for a fate like that of Bharat? Or what? Why am I still here? Is it a difficult question to

answer or is it a question at all? There are thousands of people in the city: Muslims, Pandits, Sikhs, Christians… Do they have to answer this question, or is it only me?" (Dhar, 2002: 12)

Rahul Pandita (2013) recollects that for him, his identity as a 'Pandit' in Kashmir was marked when the Muslim men had gathered to dismantle the temple and had desecrated the idol of Hanuman. Another incident entrenched on the mind, highlighting the difference between Pandits and Muslims, was when his own class fellows, including his best friend, had disgraced the goddess:

> One of them looked at me, and then all of them ran away suddenly, throwing a bunch of papers on to the floor. I thought my victory [in cricket match] had embarrassed them. But what were the papers they had left behind? I picked one up, and recoiled in disgust—the paper was covered with snot. I threw it away. It was then that my eyes fell on another, partially crumpled paper. A shiver ran through my body. It was a page torn from the school magazine—it was the portrait of the goddess Saraswati. It was covered with snot too. My heart sank and my stomach felt as if someone had punched me (Pandita 30).

Then, what is Kashmir? Who is a Kashmiri? What defines *Kashmiriyat*? Once again, as discussed in earlier pages, any attempt to standardise or homogenise these terms results in a whole series of exclusions. The making of Kashmir as a distinctive socio-cultural space that came to possess a distinctive identity has been an ongoing process. Kashmiri lifestyle and customs, which became a part of *Kashmiriyat*, were not only influenced by the geography of their land but also resulted from changing thrones and as a result of altering socio-cultural, religious and economic conditions of the times. Sanskrit learning, Persian language, Shaivism, Sufism and Buddhism, all added to Kashmiri identity.

However, the relationship among religious identities, community definitions and the state has been undergoing significant shifts in content, articulation and engagement in the Kashmir Valley. While it is often noted that *Kashmiriyat* rose to the fore most vociferously in the historical narrative of the Dogra period and became the foundation for the national movement against the Hindu rulers—and now for demanding independence from Indian rule—the contradictions with reference to religion within the discourse of *Kashmiriyat* and Kashmiri

nationalism are often overlooked. "To suggest that a Kashmiri identity, *kashmiriyat*, defined as a harmonious blending of religious cultures, has somehow remained unchanged and an integral part of Kashmiri history over the centuries is a historical fallacy" (Zutshi 55).

True that there were never religious riots in the Valley and that a sense of belonging to a particular region subdued the religious affiliations, but it wasn't that the differences did not exist. Though the narrative of the national movement against the Dogra rule demonstrates religious syncretism in the state, it leaves out that the "Kashmiri national movement of the 1930s and 1940s was preceded by a Kashmiri discourse on identities that focused primarily on defining the religious community, not the Kashmiri nation" (Zutshi 47). Moreover, the revolt against the Hindu ruler was precisely based on the difference between the socio-economic conditions of the two religious communities and not on the grounds of nationalism.

In Kashmir, religious identity has always been the basis for forming a community and, moreover, politics has played a significant role in their formation in the Valley. There was always resentment among the majority populace, if not clear hostility, about socio-economic benefits being reaped by Kashmiri Pandits under the Dogra rule. In fact, even the Kashmiri Pandits reorganised themselves into a community on religious grounds. With the coming of Arya Samaj, the political and religious underpinnings in the state came to the fore. The criticism of Islam in its public meetings and its *shudhi* activities (re-conversion to Hinduism) brought them increasingly into confrontation with the Muslims (Zutshi 2003). Their activities, however, helped in catalyzing Kashmiri Pandits' activities in the sphere of reform and in rousing the community in defence of their political and economic interests.

Another incident that gave impetus to the mobilisation of the Hindu community was the change of the court language from Persian to Urdu. Since the Pandits were proficient in Persian and did not know Urdu, Punjabis from outside were called on to the jobs. The fact that Punjabi Hindus were not only receiving the benefit of employment but also the societies they formed to guard their interests earned the maharaja's patronage agitated the Pandits. From the late nineteenth century, it was the Punjabi Hindu community that provided a stimulus forging a sense of community solidarity. Kashmiri Pandits, under the leadership of Shankar Lal Kaul, were the first to raise the slogan of

"Kashmir for Kashmiris" to protest the grabbing of job opportunities[7], which resulted in the enactment of state subject laws in 1927.

But gradually, it became a duel between Muslims and Hindus, and not posing a Kashmiri against another Kashmiri. In the social reform movements among Kashmiri Pandits as well, change was linked to religion rather than to appeals of its inherent rationality. This was partly a reflection of the predominance of the conservative element, but it also resorted to facilitate reform in that it lent the movement legitimacy in a state in which religion was still the pre-eminent marker of social identity.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the political need to locate and define a Muslim community in the realm of Kashmiri politics led to an emphasis on Islam and its definitions. The idea was to manifest a cultural difference from the state and the minority, thereby manoeuvring the power structures of Kashmiri society. But then, the search for a Muslim community was laden with paradoxes—never took a definite shape, nor got a unified identity. Islam of each, Gujjars, Shias, Sunnis and Sufis, was different than that of a fellow Muslim, in ideology and in practice. In *The Srinagar Conspiracy*, Vijay asks his *ayah* Ghulam Razzaq about the new Islamic wave in Srinagar and in reply, the elderly Razzaq says: "It's all these Bihari mullahs they got in some years ago, settling them here against all rules. They talk about the *Shariat*, trying to tell us that Allah will be angry with us because of how we pray" (p. 60).

Also, for instance, conflicts around the issue of sacred spaces and the right to preach resulted in intra-community divisions and at other times, the clash between Srinagar's Mirwaizes contributed to the defining of the Kashmiri Muslim collectivity (Zutshi 2003). Class, region and sect continued to play an important role in mediating the relationship between Islam and community identities in Kashmir. Mirza Waheed, in *The Collaborator*, does throw light on such fissures within the Muslim community:

> The mullah, I could never place him—was he a city dweller, was he an Allahwaala from Srinagar, was he from the neighbouring town? And was he Deobandi or Barelvi, was he hardline puritan or moderate *Aetqadi*—

[7] For details see Chitralekha Zutshi's *Languages of Belonging*.

> was he even from Kashmir? Most people in our village, in fact, almost all, had only ever been nominally religious…(p. 32).

It is hard to define all Kashmiri Muslims in the same words. For, the community is not a homogeneous entity in terms of religious practices, ideological beliefs and political preferences. Within the Valley, there is a stark division between the Sunnis and the Shias[8]. Shias are in minority, they don't have a voice and, hence, join the Muslim collective in Kashmir.

> "The meeting expressed serious concern over some unpleasant and undesirable incidents that took place in downtown here and urged both Shia and Sunni communities to maintain unity, amity and brotherhood at all cost…The members appealed to people not to do anything which may cause harm to our national cause," Hurriyat (G) spokesman in a statement had said, announcing a peace march to be led by Hurriyat Conference (G) chairman Syed Ali Geelani (*Greater Kashmir*, December 4, 2012).

Sectarian differences with the Muslim society have been emphasised or have remain suppressed depending on the context of the time. Tracing the fissures within the Muslim community, Rowena Robinson (2005) reports that it is the Sunnis who have been involved in terrorism. In Kashmir as well, there have been sectarian clashes. But as long as the common goal is 'azadi', which is the 'national' cause, the sectarian differences must be—and are—pushed under the carpet:

> The violence in Srinagar isn't for democratic self-rule because Kashmiris have that. The discomfort Kashmiris feel is about which laws self-rule must be under, and Hurriyat rejects a secular constitution…The Hurriyat Conference's idea of freedom unfolds from a religious instinct, not a secular sentiment. This instinct is sectarian, and all the pro-*azadi* groups are Shia-killers. In promoting their hatred, the groups plead for the support of other Muslims by leaning on the name of the Prophet Muhammad (*Live Mint & The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2010).

[8] The original split between Sunnis and Shias occurred soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in the year 632. There was a dispute in the community of Muslims in present-day Saudi Arabia over the question of succession, as to who is the rightful successor to the Prophet. The two groups have differences in religious beliefs and practices, which result in violent clashes from time to time. Over the years, politics and power have contributed to highlighting the sectarian differences within Islam.

Moreover, a Muslim of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir or Azad Kashmir as Pakistan puts it, will have little in common with the Muslim of the Kashmir Valley, for they speak different dialects of Punjabi and not the language of Kashmir Valley. Urdu was, in fact, imposed upon Azad Kashmir as the official language in the 1960s though hardly anyone in the local authority spoke it. Rather than looking at the intricacies of Islam, the fact that the population was Muslim was all that mattered. And, how much Kashmiri of Kashmiri Muslims are Gujjars?

> When we were mosque-less and imam-less, people seldom prayed, some almost never did ('these *kafir* Gujjars, they don't even know their *namaaz*' was the taunt often tossed in our direction by many a townsfolk); but now everyone seemed to be in a rush to make up for a lifetime of lost blessings, to catch up with the divinity. Very soon, and almost unheralded… sincere religious devotion became a priority occupation for many in the village… And gradually, the distant cries of Nizam-e-Mustafa started echoing in our secluded passes as well… First it was the mosque, then the loudspoken *azan* boomed; …Moulvi Sahib appeared from nowhere… The simple Baba-like beards of the older men gave way to flowing tufts of piously combed hair hanging down to their chests…(Waheed 30).

More than the sharp divisions within the majority community, the excerpt also hints at the Islamisation of political goals and religious practice. In fact, religion more than being just a way of life, becomes an ideology and takes the form of a sub-national, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interest (Nandy 1998). And, when it is appropriated as a legitimating instrument, it attains an exclusivist character and leaves out the minorities:

> It is religion-as-ideology that has provided a potent tool to the Jamaat-e-Islami to disown the traditional, plural forms of Islam in the Indian subcontinent and disjunct official religion from everyday life, to produce a pre-packaged Islam for Muslims uprooted and decultured by the processes of engineered social change in the region (Nandy, 1998: 323).

Moreover, the scuffle for social influence and political power among Kashmiri Muslims was set against the backdrop of the changing political economy of the Kashmir Valley in the 1930s. The political agenda of the new Muslim leadership was to return Kashmiri Muslims to their past glory by educating, elevating and unifying them into a

cohesive community under the banner of Islam. During the events of 1931, the religious syncretism that *Kashmiriyat* so proudly claimed as its inheritance was nowhere in evidence, nor in the discourse generated in the aftermath. In fact, the much-dreaded term 'communalism' emerged thereafter.

Sheikh Abdullah inaugurated the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932, whose main objective was to unite Kashmiri Muslims under one political umbrella through an appeal to their sense of belonging to an Islamic community. "For many Kashmiri Muslims, Sheikh Abdullah was not so much a figure who represented Kashmiri regional identity but a figure who personified the ideal Muslim" (Zutshi 233). However, it was only from the late 1933 that the Kashmiri Muslim leadership began the gradual articulation of the agenda and discourse of the movement in clearly national terms, one that addressed the issues of the Kashmiri nation as a whole. And, *Kashmiriyat*, with its emphasis on a united, assimilated Kashmiri cultural identity came to inform the political discourse.

In his presidential address at Muslim Conference in December 1933, he urged all Kashmiris to join the struggle and this was the first occasion in a public speech when Abdullah claimed to represent not only the Muslim community, but also the minority, the Kashmiri Pandits. Nevertheless, the trend within the Muslim Conference leadership to present a nationalist ideology in the mid-1930s did not, however, imply that religion as a marker of identity was relegated to the background.

After Independence, the Hindu-Muslim differences deepened since Jammu didn't endorse the demand for a special status for the state and sought total accession to India. India was a Hindu-majority nation and this was read by the Kashmir leadership as a threat to the Muslims, pushing secularism to the sidelines. The political and cultural narrative, as a result, began to take shape of the Muslim versus the other (Indian-Hindu), while the subsets within the Muslim community were conveniently overlooked. There is little mention of categories like the prosperous Muslims or the deprived Muslims, the Shias in conflict with Sunnis; rather, there are always the Muslims, as one collective against the Hindus. Thus, the argument that religious identity matters in formation of a collective seems only fair.

However, post-Independence, the anger against India—as a result

of the history, the oppression during elections and later, influence of fundamentalists and misunderstandings among leaders—manifested in the form of anger against the Hindu next door, the Kashmiri Pandit, missing out that the Hindu had been a part of the fabric called *Kashmiriyat*. "It's just that he's a Pandit and we're Muslims. It's that same old thing all over again" (Warrier 135). The destabilisation of Kashmiri Hindus became intensive after Independence. Though the agrarian sector in the state was in dire need of restructuring, it was indeed unfortunate that measures adopted to address the plight of the people inadvertently affected the minority community. Also, "Kashmir remains the only state in independent India where land was acquired by the government without any compensation" (Bhati 2005). The land reforms empowered the Kashmiri peasantry, which was largely Muslim.

This was, thus, viewed as a communal act of Sheikh Abdullah more than being taken as purely an economic or administrative decision (a repeat, perhaps, happened in 2008 when Amarnath land transfer was being seen a communal act by the Kashmiri Muslims, which I discuss later). These measures, though meant only to improve the socio-economic condition of the state subjects and not to target any particular group, generated a feeling of alienation among the Hindu community in their own state. The Pandit psyche had for years been feeling the insidious effects of perpetual alienation. This was the direct and indirect result of the sweeping political measures the Central and state governments had taken in the state.

According to documented history, during the Muslim period (1339-1819), several Kashmiri Hindu castes had embraced Islam, with Pandits being the only Hindus left in the Valley, of which many fled from the region. Among other reasons, the Pandit community more than often refers to forced conversion while narrating their perpetual hardships faced in the Valley. And then after years, the majority of the Pandits, the Kashmiri Hindu community, left in the wake of attacks on their people in the first few months of the insurgency. "By late March 1990, almost all the Pandit areas of the city were empty, many of their wooden houses in the Old City burned out" (Hardy 38). This was, and remains, a blotch on *Kashmiriyat*, as imagined. The fleeing of Hindu Pandits from the Valley has been termed differently—exodus, displacement, ethnic cleansing and even migration—and explained

through a number of arguments, including the role of Governor Jagmohan. But what can't be overlooked is the fact that Hindus left the Valley and not out of choice, as Ashok Kaul's character in *Kashmir: Nativity Regained* puts it: "Hassan could not find this answer whether these Pandits were driven out or were told to leave their homes. He was mature enough to understand banishment and exodus. He knew nobody is ready to leave his home, even if offered a treasure house" (p. 23). Once they are gone, they are forgotten. Each time *Kashmiriyat* is summoned to reiterate the demand for a separate nation, the need for Hindu Pandits to return is not as strong. They were a part of *Kahmiriyat* once, now they are just 'refugees':

> 'What about the refugees?'
>
> When people move out of Kashmir they stop being part of the "Kashmir problem". Hindus who fled are certainly part of the Kashmir problem but everyone's forgotten about them (Warrier 287).

The discourse of *Kashmiriyat* seems to revolve around how Kashmir is different from India and how the Kashmiris in the Valley had been suffering but it somehow leaves the question of the Pandits along the margins. For instance, the narrative of Kashmiri writer Basharat Peer has nothing more to say than taking a note of their absence: "And then our eyes were fixed on the empty chairs for a long time. Five of our Kashmiri Pandit classmates were not there. Along with killing hundreds of pro-Indian Muslims…, the militants killed hundreds of Pandits on similar grounds, or without reason" (Peer 22). They are mentioned in passing only to underscore the non-religious character of *Kashmiriyat* and then conveniently forgotten. For a Kashmiri Pandit writer, the tone changes, as in Ashok Kaul's *Kashmir: Nativity Regained*: "Why should Mohan be a Hindu? How long could I save him? There was a conflict in his mind. Past and present were becoming two parallel lines, sometime crossing each other and at times merging in one. It was not a smooth sailing for Pandit minority to retain their freedom" (p. 30).

Explaining the change as irrational behaviour would be naïve, even calling it an anti-Indian sentiment made little sense for the simple reason that *Kashmiriyat*, if at all it existed at the time of Independence or in 1953 or in 1989, did not weigh religious differences. The exodus of Hindu Pandits can be explained in no other way but in terms of

religion: "Throughout 1990, Pandits are picked up selectively and put to death. They are killed because Kashmir needs to be cleansed of them" (Pandita 72). When the Muslim men kicked and brought the makeshift temple down, Pandita recollects an observation: "There was no protest. We had learnt to live that way. Whenever things went sour, we would just lower our heads and walk away. Or stay at home till things got better" (Pandita 36).

But can one overlook the fact that it could be no different for a Muslim, for he has been made to feel and live like an outsider in his own homeland:

> A BSF man stops me, holding out his hand, palm up. I stop and show him my identification. He asks me where I am staying … The suspicion is killing this city. When I travel in India, people look at me with suspicion. They see a man with a possible Pakistani connection, or possibly Pakistani sympathies… That's how it's been all along (Warrier 36).

The only difference here is that the victimizer is not a Kashmiri, but an Indian. A Kashmiri Pandit has been called *mukhbir* or infidel also in his own homeland but by a fellow Kashmiri. Nita, narrating her story, tells author Justin Hardy that her family had been terrified that the Pandits were being called infidels, and that they must leave, that only those who prayed to Allah would be allowed to stay in the Valley (Hardy 54). None, in the name of *Kashmiriyat*, questioned the Hindu exodus: "It was not even internal displacement. They had no place to go. Just to leave Kashmir" (Kaul, Ashok 23). Displaced people without roots, loss of status and recognition, feelings of anger, sadness and frustration lie at the core of the Kashmiri Pandits' identity, now in exile. "We were already becoming nobody's people," writes Rahul Pandita in his memoir (p. 89). They have lost much more than their houses and assets, have seen a tradition die, finding *Kashmiriyat* lose its meaning: religion has proved to be bigger than any culture, human relationships and life itself. Kashmir then is no different than any other place in the country where Hindu-Muslim riots occur.

> In old Srinagar, houses are built quite close to each other. One of the Muslim women in Ganju's neighbourhood had seen him hiding in the drum. As the men came out, she signalled to them telling them what she had seen. The men returned and went directly to the attic and shot B.K. Ganju dead inside that drum (Pandita 116).

With *Kashmiriyat* having lost one of its essential characteristics—religious syncretism—it also loses it legitimacy as the basis for a separate nation. What could be crueller than losing the companionship of friends of a lifetime, being turned out of a place that had been their home and not being allowed to touch the earth that they thought was theirs. And, they had thought they would return sooner than later, and now it has been a lifetime. What new identity do they construe? The nation has been a disappointment and so has *Kashmiriyat*. What concept do they try this time that would suit their new community ideals and experiences that have been forced upon them? Redefining their identity in light of their social and political positioning, particularly in relation to the state of Kashmir, the Indian nation and global arena, only makes them feel the rootlessness and normallessness of their existence.

The collective memory of the Kashmiri Hindu community has straddled two versions. One version places the Kashmiris in an explicitly non-religious framework as an enlightened community above sectarian considerations. The second portrayal by the Pandit community is of victimisation by the Muslim rulers and of the community's constant attempts to maintain their religious purity as the first of the Aryans. They constantly refer to the forced conversions under the Muslim rule and the atrocities they had to bear by the tyrannical rulers. The Pandit community moves from one version to the other depending on how religiously secure or insecure it feels in Kashmir:

> He had begun to receive political circulars to this effect from various Pandit organizations. They told a tale of abuse that went back many hundreds of years. Sikander the iconoclast crushed Hindus the most. The crimes of the fourteenth century needed to be avenged in the twentieth. Out of the fear of conversion Brahmins jumped into the fire… And so on, all the way up to the present day (Rushdie 239).

In fashioning a new identity for the Kashmiris, the Indian State acknowledged the collective memory of the Kashmiri Muslims by appropriating the Muslim history of Islamic Kashmir and the cultural identity of *Kashmiriyat* associated with the Kashmiri society, but overlooking the actual or perceived experiences of the small Hindu community in the Kashmir region. The 'oppression' of Hindus during

this period is perceived as part of the repressive rule of one religious faction.

It seems that, in the process, India has effectively denied the Kashmiri Pandits an access to both legal and political space. And, the Pandit exodus only made it worse for them, for they were 'migrants of their own will'. Perhaps, nobody wanted things to take this shape, but it did and nothing was done about it: "Will we ever be happy Lasa? Pandits feel that we betrayed them and that we are responsible for the migration. They think that we are all militants. We don't feel happy without Pandits at all. This does not make sense" (Gigoo 134). The Pandits blame the state government and the Centre more so for being indifferent and not taking any action, not even under the pretext of maintaing 'law and order'.

It would not be wrong then to argue, at least debate, that secularism seems to be a lesson for the majority community to be learnt and revised on a regular basis. In India, Hindus are expected to be secular for they are a majority community and the onus lies on them (this is not to say that they haven't puporated riots); the moment they raise the voice for Hindu rights, they are termed communal even if their chorus doesn't hurt the religious minority that coexsit. But in Kashmir, the Muslim majority failed the test of secularism. Having lost their patience, the Pandit community has demanded a separate homeland for the Kashmiri Hindus, Panun Kashmir (our homeland), in the Kashmir region. *Kashmiriyat*, perhaps, was a misapprehension or just a fantasy:

> Maybe Kashmiriyat was an illusion. Maybe all those children learning one another's stories in the panchayat room in winter, all those children becoming a single family, were an illusion. Maybe the tolerant reign of good King Zain-ul-abidin should be seen—as some pandits were beginning to see it—as an aberration, not a symbol of unity. Maybe tyranny, forced conversions, temple-smashing, iconoclasm, persecution and genocide were the norms and peaceful existence was an illusion (Rushdie 238).

Not only *Kashmiriyat*, with its religious syncretism, proves to be an illusion, the idea of secularism—upheld as India's official policy and as *Kashmiriyat's* defining characteristic—ends up being just an ideology that can be used as a panacea every time there is a threat of religious violence. Taking a cue from Ashis Nandy's argument that

secularism strives in states or societies that are by character non-secular and bringing it to a micro level, it appears that Jammu and Kashmir is a befitting example. Not only Kashmiri nationalism, but also Indian secularism failed in Jammu and Kashmir when the Pandits began to flee or were, rather, forced to leave.

> 'Next morning, the other Pandit families in Mattan started evacuating their homes,' Gunatoth said. The decree clearly stated that the Pandits leave. The posters on the walls on the Pandit houses read: 'All non-believers and informers are given thirty-six hours to leave this place. Those who fail to obey will be sawed…' On their way back home, Lasa and Sridar had seen many posters glued to the walls, lamp posts, and the doors of some Pandit houses. Each one of them read: 'Pandits, leave Kashmir or perish forever' (Gigoo 41).

One ends up asking: who gets or will get what from secularism? Ashis Nandy (2001) argues that secularism is not the opposite of religious and ethnic intolerance but religious and ethnic tolerance; secularism is merely one way of ensuring that tolerance (p. 77). In fact, communalism and secularism are the disowned doubles of each other. In India, not only had secularism been essential for national integration but also both secularism and statism had gone hand in hand to sustain the idea of India. Having served well as a public value since Independence and as an indicator of the state's commitment to the protection of minorities, the concept has been delivering less and less in recent years (Sikh riots, Babri Masjid demolition, Godhra carnage are examples).

Secularism as an institutional arrangement seems to have failed and worse, it failed even to play its political role in Kashmir. It is no longer a canonical formula that could be focused upon to reach a resolution, ease tensions and resolve conflicts. It is more useful for political skulduggery. Religion is a legitimate instrument for the advancement of personal and collective self-interest. The ills of religion have found political expression but the strengths of it have not been available for checking corruption and violence in society. Even when a State is secular, meaning tolerant to all religions, it might not lead to secularisation of the society. Thus, what we have is only official secularism and the exodus of Hindu Pandits underscores it.

In Kashmir, religion has become a dominant force. The Amarnath land controversy of 2008[9] is an example of how religious ideology had seeped into different structures of the society. The newspaper reports, edits and comments on the Amarnath Yatra land controversy in 2008 illustrate that the idea of *Kashmiriyat*, which went beyond categories, has a new meaning attached to it. Not only has the boundary of *Kashmiriyat* contracted geographically, but other categories once disregarded have become its defining characteristics. *Rising Kashmir* is a Srinagar-based English daily and when the Amarnath agitation was sparked off after the transfer of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine board, the paper carried the following headlines: "Govt changing Kashmir's demography: Geelani" (June 14); "India isolating Jammu Muslims: Geelani" (June 15).

While it can be argued that only facts were being reported, it is hard to overlook the provocative tone and meaning of the headlines. A reader wouldn't have to wait to finish reading the whole story before allowing the rage to take over. When it comes to Kashmir, not only is there more than one 'truth', but the truth(s) is structured to cater to an ideology or an assumption. Noting what's played up and what isn't and the way things are construed, their relation to the systems of power and authority can be understood. At times, the media sets the agenda or a framework in accordance with which all other institutions are expected to operate and, at other times, they conform to the already established myths. Thus, what counts as facts, and how these facts must be interpreted is not merely about presenting or representing reality. Not only was the regional divide between Jammu and Kashmir widened but the split on communal lines became quite

[9] The Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) was constituted in 2000 by an act of the Jammu and Kashmir state legislature on the recommendation of the Nitish Sengupta Committee. In October 2004, the SASB sent a project report to Jammu and Kashmir's forest department, requesting for 455 acres of land for seven halting places for the pilgrims. This was granted in May 2005, but the state government overruled its department, saying that this decision contravened the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Forest Conservation Act of 1997. The decision was then reversed by the state's High Court, whereupon the SASB requested that the state government regularize the use of the government land by transferring a few plots to the Board. In May 2008, the state Cabinet passed a proposal diverting 99 acres of forest land to the SASB for Rs 2.5 crore.

conspicuous. The Jammu-Srinagar fissures are, in fact, a reflection of the India-Kashmir reality. They not only have regional but also religious connotations.

When *Greater Kashmir* went out with the headline "Govt transfers 800 kanal forest land to SASB shoulder: Sinha has last laugh" (June 4)—the reference being to the Governor Lt General S.K. Sinha—the facts were messed up. The abiding theme of the coverage day after day, reflecting the sentiments of the local political leadership, and perhaps the people, was that the government was changing land ownership so it could settle outsiders and change the demography of Kashmir, which would then no longer be for Kashmiris.

None of this paranoia was, however, reflected in the reporting emanating from Jammu. *Kashmir Times* and *Daily Excelsior*, both published from Jammu, were rather different in tone while reporting the land transfer. The same facts and the narratives were irrelevant to Jammu, yet Jammu somehow had Kashmir on its mind. In contrast to the Kashmir papers, *Kashmir Times* was more factual. On June 4, page 1 carried the headline: "SASB gets 39.88 hectares of forest land". *Daily Excelsior*'s coverage of the dramatic events in Kashmir was also sparse and one-sided. On May 27, it carried the headline: "Decision to allot land to SASB to be reviewed".

But once the land transfer was revoked, it was the turn of the Jammu media to stoke the fire. *Daily Excelsior* came out with voluminous coverage. The general population took to the streets to participate in the resistance movement against the state government. Never before had the Hindu-majority Jammu region witnessed such unity among its people. But here, too, religion overshadowed rationality and the slogan of Jammu nationalism was heard and Independence Day was marked by demonstrations.

The Kashmir papers reported the Jammu protests too on a daily basis but their headlines were rather different. The use of the word "communal" and accusations suggesting communal intent occurred frequently in the headlines of *Greater Kashmir*. Local newspapers in Kashmir also carried reports that presented data from the Indian census documenting a consistent decline of the Muslim population from 72.4 per cent in 1941 to 66.9 per cent in 2001.[10]

[10] Arjimand Hussain Talib, "Kashmir's Myth of Discrimination", Kashmir News

The mainstream newspapers outside the state downplayed the controversy and restricted from using language that could stir sentiments just as is the policy of India when it comes to Jammu and Kashmir. Reporting on the incidents, *The Tribune*, on June 19, 2008 carried the headline, "Land only diverted to board: Dy CM". The use of the term "diversion", however, failed to mellow down the sentiments of people on the streets. What is supposed to be an administrative act is interpreted differently and causes a further drift between the two regions and paints it as communal. Then, on June 20, 2008, *The Tribune* carried the headline, "Land controversy hits govt at crucial time", referring to the fact that Assembly polls were scheduled for next year and the incident would not work in favour of the National Conference as far as filling its vote-bank is concerned. More than anything else, it is just politics of power.

On June 22, 2008, a news report in *The Tribune* highlighted the Amarnath land row being turned into a communal and national issue. The headline read: "Omar's remarks may cost NC dear in Jammu". The reference was to the incident where Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was at the receiving end of the agitators' ire in the renewed protests over the Amarnath land row, which did not augur well for his party in the Jammu region ahead of the Assembly elections. It all started with a city resident, Kuldeep Dogra, committing suicide after reportedly feeling hurt by Omar's remarks. Omar had said in Parliament—"We fought for our land and will fight till the very end."

When the Amarnath land row agitation first broke out in the region, former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and Governor N.N. Vohra were the target of the protesters' rage. But with Omar Abdullah's comment, the wrath came upon him and his effigies were burnt from Kathua to Jammu. Even though he was the Chief Minister of the whole state, for the people of Jammu, he was the man of Srinagar and for Srinagar, or for the Valley Muslims. While the National Conference accused the BJP of exploiting the situation for vote-bank politics in the backdrop of Kuldeep's suicide, the agitating outfits attacked Omar Abdullah for his statements on the land row.

Service, August 12, 2008, at <http://www.knskashmir.com/articles/Myth/html> and Praveen Swami, "Kashmir Politics of Hate", Kashmir Herald, August 13, 2008, at <http://www.kashmirherald.com/main>

"Abdullah, who favours greater autonomy, has once again poured venom on India and Indians by shamelessly shouting in Parliament that Kashmiri Muslims were fighting for their land and they shall continue to do so if any piece of land is again diverted to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) for creating facilities for pilgrims," state BJP vice-president Hari Om said. State VHP president Ramakant Dubey said, "Firstly, Omar should remember that Kashmir is not his personal property and it belongs to the entire country. Secondly, his statement that Amarnath *yatris* were nowhere attacked in Kashmir was a total lie. Pilgrims have been attacked in places like Banihal and Ganderbal."

In an article, "Villians of the Valley", Prabhu Chawla says that "a divided Kashmir shows how far we have come in disowning the nation" (*India Today*, August 21, 2008). He goes on to blame the politicians for the crisis but does make a point:

> No nationalist—not to speak of the Government—has come forward to the rescue of India. The most visible flag in Srinagar has the Islamic crescent on it. Suddenly, Mirwaiz, Geelani, Yasin Malik and Omar are united in their cause. When they mention "New Delhi", it sounds like an imperial foreign capital. It's the cry of *azadi* all over again. The secessionists, whom "New Delhi" lets flourish in the Valley, now demand the release of all political prisoners and demilitarisation of the state (*India Today*, August 21, 2008).

There is little doubt that for all the veneer of territorial and cultural arguments, the main axis of conflict had become communal. Islam has become an instrument of 'Kashmiriyat' in the Valley and Hinduism that of Indian-ism in Jammu. On the other hand, the nationalist struggle swayed towards becoming a *jihad*, with the influence of Jamaat-i-Islami ideology and transnational Islam: "Along with the standard Qur'anic drills, Mullah Yusuf started to assign Kazim extra readings, which they would discuss after class. Kazim learnt all about sacred duty of *jihad* and the honour of martyrdom. For the first time, he learned of the oppression of Muslims by infidel Indians in Kashmir" (Mastras 59). The changed political rhetoric and sentiment of the masses, as also presented in the narratives under discussion, suggest that the emergent Islamic current in the space of the nationalist movement has shifted the Kashmir question into a much bigger context, having the potency of changing the complete character both of *Kashmiriyat* and Kashmiri nationalism. "The insertion of Kashmir into the vortex of

'resurgent' Islam has released new forces, with a major conditioning role" (Pasha 373). A visible shift in the tenor and temper of Kashmiri self-conception had begin with the insurgency though it took some time for the people to realise what was happening:

> The new madrassa was built adjacent to the town's largest mosque and across the street from the temple of Shiva… No one bothered to inquire how or why the madrassa had appeared so suddenly, as if by divine intervention, nor did they ask any questions about the source of its funding. And why should they? Who would think to question a school run by a religious charity? (Mastra 54)

While negotiating with the politically assertive Islam, the Kashmiri Islam, which had ingredients of Sufism and Rishism, has been lost. Also, the nationalist agenda picked up by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which spearheaded the militant movement in Kashmir, was soon overtaken. Islam and independence began to be used interchangeably. Since there were no heroic tales from the past, *Kashmiriyat*—an Islamised version—was used to justify and legitimise the use of violence. The struggle no longer remained indigenous, with the local Kashmiri insurgency being marginalised. With this also changed the definition of Kashmiri nationalism. Initially, it was a resistance to Indian State and assertion of a separate, unique nationalism, but gradually it became the war between the Muslims and others:

> Kashmiriyat did not emerge ex-nihilo from the soil of Kashmir: it was a product of the collusion of Kashmiri and Indian majoritarian nationalisms, both of which needed to obscure the inherent contradictions in their logic and rhetoric (Zutshi 258).

Islamic consciousness became a prominent and integral component of not only a social identity but also of political ideals. For Kashmiri Muslims, Islam may have been the basis of self-expression, offering an understanding of or meaning to life but gradually, and more dominantly since 1980s, Islam entered into the realm of politics and became a force towards a national cause. The post-1970s children were born not with a market agenda on progressive or liberal lines, but groomed on primeval orientations to fight for political religion, which was already crystallized by the process of mystification of the imaginative pure. From cultural identification, Islam became a political

identity even in Kashmir. Thus, locating a pure Kashmiri identity is like trying to establish a utopian world or, perhaps, reaching out for the horizon, which is assumed to be there, even visible at times, but still not a reality. Kashmiri identity, perhaps, is a negotiation between the differences and various affiliations.

At some point region and at another religion become the blocks that are not easy to get rid of. It became hard to smoothen the edges of the *Kahmiriyat* project and this only resulted in ambivalence regarding Kashmiri identity, that couldn't be defined in religious or regional terms. The national myth has been carried down the generations, has formed the basis of demands for Azadi, and at the same time has raised questions and brought the ambivalence to fore.

In the narratives, it is clear that for ordinary people, an extreme political position is not the choice or even a clear possibility. The middle space, the in-betweenness, while defining their identity as a Kashmiri is what comes to fore each time they make an attempt. The concepts and territories lose their meaning in their daily routine. Of course it is for individuals to make what *Kashmiriyat* is and they can give it any shape for their own personal comfort, but they should be allowed to join larger narratives. When *Kashmiriyat* is a product of multiple histories, it isn't possible or even right to limit it to a demarcated space. Relationship between belief and identity has been reversed. What makes the discourse about Kashmir so suffocating is that the beliefs of people tend to be products of their identities. There isn't a shared factual ground to cut through the differences of identity. Which histories matter and what is no longer a matter of history; it is a matter debated entirely through the lens of identification. So, deeper and deeper belief structures get developed to maintain identity; nothing can be allowed to question it.

Identities have to be opened up, histories have to be complicated, and the horizons of possibility have to be redefined. Kashmiri youth are romantic in the sense that they are refusing to bow to a larger logic of history; they are refusing to bow to the factual logic that the large nation-state in which they reside is bringing to bear upon them. But they are caught up in an identity trap that has no resolution. Perhaps, Kashmir's problems stem not from the inherent Hindu-Muslim antipathy that has been brought into being by political processes and historical forces. The idea of Kashmir is yet another entry in the

growing list of idealised, multi-cultural utopias that are under threat from the forces of singularity and oppression. Categorial identities not only fail to satisfy the needs but also fall short of providing any sense of peace within and outside an individual. The problems in Kashmir, however, seem too rooted in a long history of antipathies.

The "regional" in Kashmir is punctuated by "religion", which is a part of the whole.

So did India, or Jammu fail to understand this? Or, they did not understand it enough? At times, there is no larger agenda, just a manifestation of a thought and feeling and anger and if left to linger, it becomes an agenda without meaning to. And soon, it is too late to let it go and the man on the street finds his meaning in it. Romanticism and disillusionment punctuate the narratives, and any middle space is mostly looked upon in Kashmir as a giveaway to the others.

> He was even questioning the anticommunalist principles embodied in the notion of Kashmiriyat, and beginning to wonder if discord were not a more powerful principle than harmony. Communal violence everywhere was an intimate crime. When it burst out one was not murdered by strangers. It was your neighbours, the people with whom you had shared the high and low points of life, the people whose children your own children had been playing with just yesterday. These were the people in whom the fire of hatred would suddenly light up, who would hammer on your door in the middle of the night with burning torches in their hands (Rushdie 239).

The end, if it could be reached, would settle all doubts. Peace outside and within, even if at a cost, might be worth it. In Kashmir, however, The End evades each time one tries to reach out. The stories continue, they need to, they must. A letter from a Kashmiri Muslim to his Kashmiri Pandit friends sums it all:

> Years have passed ever since you left your home… I wait at the door of your house and knock… I return home without seeing you… Everyday I vacillate between hope and fear. Every day I attend a funeral procession of some dead person. The children in our neighbourhood raise slogans about freedom—azadi… A father awaits the return of his only son. A young woman disappeared only to return with wounds and seeds of shame… Lasa, I remember your words that we must remain mad in order to be sane. What are we fighting for? What are we living for? What are we dying for? (Gigoo 136)

4 Capturing Conflict

We are barraged with images since we dwell in a world where every facet of life is pervaded by visual signs. Seeing is believing. Clichéd, but still widely accepted even today. When we say that an image represents, the term has a double meaning even in the common sense. One, it means to present and second, to re-present something that already exists. In other words, to represent means to image and to depict. But imitation, or what Aristotle termed as "mimesis", is not about only how things look but also about the essence. Something beyond the appearance that would help the reader or the viewer understand reality better. Hence, mimesis is an imaginative act, not a mere representation of the world or the ideal epitomes that constitute it. Rather, it is an act of re-construal and re-construction of the world.

There is yet another understanding of the word. In reference to the political representation of people, it is said that the politicians represent us; that is, they "stand in for us". What is common to all the aforesaid understandings is that through representation, the meaning is being given to whatever is being represented. In the depiction of the image, a meaning is rendered, as Stuart Hall (1997) puts it, "representation connects meaning and language to culture…" (p. 15). But what then becomes significant for the viewers is not merely to engage with the representation but also read into the politics of representation, the politics of meaning. It is essential to take note of the forces and mechanisms at play in the construction of reality being presented and represented.

It would, however, be naïve to assume that there exists a single, fixed meaning. There can be no one interpretation and, furthermore, every interpretation or meaning as understood could be contested. It is impossible to decide upon that single meaning against which the

representation could be compared to find out if there is a distortion or if what is being represented is completely false. For, there can't be an absolute meaning.

Having said that, a meaning will depend on what people make of an image, of the representation, and the meaning that is understood or produced is on the basis of the way the image is represented. So, representation takes place before the act of deriving the meaning. Representation is not merely capturing of the process but it enters the process, the event or the image it is representing. Representation is constitutive of the object, is part of it, and not outside the event. Thus, meaning is to be found within a cultural discourse, not outside it. Indian cinema—often assumed to be representing life—has been believed to "indulge in the balancing game within its threefold task of providing escape, entertainment and engagement with social issues" (Jain 2009). Yet, it offers a space for cultural discourse to take place, where representations and meanings are contested.

Indeed, a discourse can be understood as any system which has a certain kind of values and beliefs attached to it. It has some written and unwritten laws that offer a world-view, which is unconsciously accepted. But, when this world-view is questioned, there are problems. A discourse becomes a reality, a truth that has an authority and its questioning would lead to conflict, in the outside as well as within the individual. The discourse, indeed, does not exist on its own. It has been constructed and then given the status of truth by those in power. Michel Foucault (1984) asserts that a discourse is an imposition of an ideology. It becomes a vicious circle, for a discourse is based on an ideology and, at the same time, it represents the ideological constructions through and within its system.

Thus, within the cinematic representations, with films being cultural artifacts, it is imperative to look for the unconscious reflection of social reality, the inferences that are drawn and messages intended. Anu Celly (2009) underscores the fact that "cinema is a mediator of social realities and personal dreams, collective concerns and individual aspirations [making] it assume a seminal and polysemic dimension as a humanistic discourse which has the potential to redirect the cultural and material fabric of our everyday life" (p. 215). Cinema is a site of plural signification, as Celly refers to it, through which not only

can social change be effected but it also becomes a catalyst of human conduct and a receptacle of ideologies.

There is then no denying that representations, their communication and interpretations bring in the question of power. Moreover, there is no escape from the fact that in the end, interpretation is meaning and since the image has no fixed meaning, rather a wide range of meanings, it shifts and is contextual. Meaning depends on a certain kind of fixing, even though it can't be permanently fixed, and this is where power or ideology enters. As Foucault had explained:

> …power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others. What by contrast, should always be kept in mind is that power… is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analyzed as something which circulates… it is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hand, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization… (Gordan 98).

With the play of power, it is in the realm of culture that politics of meaning takes place. Since films have been accepted as cultural texts that help shape the prevalent view of the world, it is also through films that the expected and accepted notions and viewpoints are challenged. Moving images and even stories provide the symbols, myths and resources that help reach at a common understanding for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today. Karl Heider, an ethnographic filmmaker and visual anthropologist, in his attempt to present a cultural analysis of Indonesian films and national culture in his book *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (1991), maintains:

> Movies are cultural texts, embodying within their frames the entire range of cultural behaviour from artifacts to motivation… cultural statements, communicating messages to huge audiences… are cultural carriers, as well, bringing their messages to an entire nation or language area or even the world, although different audiences may read different messages from the same statement (Heider 1).

Acknowledging films as a cultural form and hence also political, it is essential to interpret and understand meaning within ideological shapes

and frameworks. Film or cinema, as a part of popular culture, is a terrain of domination and resistance of ideologies and representations. It also engages with the ways that media culture reproduces relationships of domination and oppression. The interpretation is critical and multi-perspectival. As John Weakland (1975) writes:

> [F]iction films … though differing from the reality of detailed records of actual behaviour. [They] may reflect cultural premises and patterns of thought and feeling … Actual significance can only be determined, once film images are discerned by studying these in relation to the film-makers, their audiences, and to other information about their subject matters (Weakland 233).

So, what are the subconscious expectations and interpretations with which a movie-goer watches a film about Kashmir? The contours of the cinematic imagination, more or less, have been marked by the popular sentiments of the masses along the lines of the romance with the landscape, awakening of national consciousness, or a sense of terror. While I briefly trace how the silhouettes of Kashmir's presentation and representation have changed on the screen, the focus is on thematic reading of two movies about Kashmir released in 2010—*Lamhaa* and *Harud*—which set out, quite consciously, to dismantle the expectations that the collective would have from a movie on Kashmir.

I assume that film texts, as cultural artifacts, are not only constructing and representing reality but, as a medium of mass communication, they frame meaning in a particular way and the reader then decodes it in a specific way, leading to an intended reaction or unexpected response. This process, as Stuart Hall (1980) has argued, comprises several "linked but distinctive moments—production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction" (p. 128) and the meaning is framed amidst these moments.

In the process of reading or interpreting media (film) texts, Hall stressed the role of social positioning and suggested three hypothetical positions for the reader/viewer of the text. The first is dominant or hegemonic reading, wherein the reader fully shares the text's codes, accepts and reproduces the 'preferred' reading, there is no confrontation with the meaning. Then, there is what Hall calls negotiated reading, where the reader partly shares the text's code and broadly accepts the preferred reading but with a tinge of doubt. And, as a result, modifies

the interpretation on the basis of his own position, experience and interest. The third position is oppositional or counter-hegemonic. The reader, in this case, is placed in opposition in reference to the dominant code of the text. The reason could again be his social situation, experience or prejudice, but he rejects the preferred reading. I would, however, imply that not only 'decoding' but also 'encoding' shifts depending on the position, conditioning and ideology of the viewer.

In other words, I explore reproduction of meaning within Hall's framework, using it to path the trajectory of shifting meanings that Kashmir films have engaged with. Rather than reading a single film text within Hall's framework, the aim is to explore the consolidation of cultural expression in cinema regarding Kashmir and how the shift from a dominant or expected interpretation shifts to a level where fissures appear and finally when the reading is in contrast to the norm, different from what is, was or could have been.

After Independence, it was in 1949 that *Barsaat* was released. The on-screen romance of Indian cinema or Bollywood with Kashmir began. Set in part against the exquisite landscapes of Kashmir, with black-and-white images constantly moving into deep focus and silhouette, it entrenched the idea of the Valley being a paradise. In the subsequent years, the idea was kept alive, courtesy the cinematography that brought the scenic beauty of Kashmir into focus. In fact, *shikaras*—the long-prowed, sleek boats that are so common on Srinagar's lakes and canals—also made an appearance as early as 1949 in *Ek Thi Ladki*. For many, the song "*Lakhon hain nigah main*" in movie *Phir Wohi Dil Laaya Hoon* (1963) proved a befitting travel brochure with shots enlisting 'what to do and what to see' in Srinagar. In *Ek Musafir Ek Haseena (1962),* the song "*Mujhe dekhkar aapka muskuraana"* was also a good showcase for Kashmir. The heartbroken hero, searching for his beloved, wanders on a *shikara* through the canals of Srinagar, singing as he goes. One can catch glimpses of the willow-lined narrow canals and of the slope-roofed wooden houses so typical of the Old City of Srinagar.

In *Kashmir Ki Kali* (1964) as well, the landscape formed an apt background to the "happy moments", be it romance, honeymoon or jaunts. Kashmir was the metaphor for beauty and peace, the paradise on earth, and was used as such. It was never the subject, but an object.

The Kashmir to which Shammi Kapoor's character travels in *Jaanwar* (1965) is an autumnal one, with the orange and brown making an impact on the screen, alluring the audience.

But with *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965), Kashmir found a place in the story rather than merely being a backdrop. It was a fairy-tale romance between a poor *shikarawala* Raju (Shashi Kapoor) and the opulent, city girl Rita (Nanda). The girl's family opposes the relationship, the class differences being an issue but the girl finally knows what she wants. As for Kashmir, besides the scenic beauty, through the portrayal of Raju, characteristics like innocence, purity of heart and ingenuousness are underscored. It seemed as if the landscape has rubbed off its people as well and like the land, its people too became the chestnuts of all that is sublime. An important point that Syed Bismillah Geelani (2006) later makes in his study of Kashmiris is:

> After the film had already been a success, the director Suraj Prakash asked his writer what religion Raja belonged to, as this was never specified and no one had noticed it. The writer was speechless because the question had never arisen in his mind, though everyone knows that there are no non-Muslim *shikarawalas* in Srinagar (p. 30).

Religion was definitely not the concern or an issue of conflict. Geelani, however, feels that *Jab Jab Phool Khile* "coincided with the Delhi Agreement of 1974 between Sheikh Abdullah and Indira Gandhi. Everyone thought that the Kashmir question was settled and that the simple-minded Raja was no threat to anyone. Right from the time of Dogra rule, the Kashmiri was portrayed as a peace-loving person, not always trustworthy, but never aggressive" (p. 30). Though the gap between the movie release and Indira-Sheikh Accord (1974) was of almost a decade, the Kashmiri was certainly not the villain in the cinema. Even for Yash Raj, the creator of on-screen romance, a love story couldn't find a better setting than Kashmir (and only in 2012, he returned to Kashmir with *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*). Kashmir was about beauty and tranquillity on screen and so it was assumed off screen, at least till 1989, when insurgency erupted in the Valley.

The nuances of cinematic imagination changed with the release of Tamil-dubbed-in Hindi film *Roja* in 1992. Kashmir was recognised as a disputed territory on screen. In fact, Mani Ratnam's *Roja* won three national film awards, including Best Film on National Integration.

Roja was a film about Rishi Kumar (Arvind Swamy), a computer programmer who comes to a small village in hope of marrying Roja's sister, but is married to Roja (Madhu) instead. When Rishi's superior falls ill, he is sent to Kashmir in order to decode a message. Roja accompanies him, and in the beautiful setting of Kashmir, their relationship flowers. But during their stay in Kashmir, Rishi gets kidnapped and is held hostage by a Kashmiri militant group led by Liaqat Khan (Pankaj Kapoor). The militants offer the government the release of Rishi in exchange for the release of Wasim Khan, their jailed leader who has killed many people. The plot of the movie revolves around Rishi's imprisonment and Roja's struggle to get Rishi released and back with her.

The movie, however, took North to the South, a feel of the "reality", followed with the chorus of "unlawful", "unjust" war that terrorism is, that too with the support of "jihadis" from across the border. The blanket statement being made through the film is about nationalism. Rishi symbolised the modern, patriotic Indian, who is only too willing to uphold the idea of India, even if it means risking his own life to save the Indian flag from getting burnt. The movies become part of a large cultural discourse and, therefore, must be read in relationship to ideological assumptions. Rustom Bharucha (1994) describes the film as a patriotic romance that sets the young couple against 'militants' in Kashmir with the state providing the necessary link. It was the preferred reading on the lines of nationalism that the movie evoked. In a way, people's consent for upholding the supremacy of nationalism was procured. The official position on Kashmir, maintains Bharucha, is validated in the larger endorsement of the film:

> *Roja*, I believe, needs to be seen in this overall context in order to elaborate on its subtle and undeniably inventive extension of the 'manufacture of consent' by which the crisis in Kashmir is being circumvented by the government. Far from being a freak box-office hit, the film has been made possible through the larger 'consent' of the media culture surrounding it. In turn, it has contributed to this culture substantially by inscribing (and thereby, reinforcing) the official scenario on Kashmir with an illusion of reconciliation. Ultimately, Kashmir is 'ours', the sovereignty of its people a secondary issue to the territorial integrity of the state within the larger framework of the nation (Bharucha 1390).

In *Roja*, Kashmir is presented as a conflict between nationalism and terrorism. The militant leader, Liaqat Khan, a Kashmiri, asks Rishi to eat with them and showing warmth, tells Rishi that there is no personal enmity between them. It is a "*sauda*"[1] (deal) between them and the Indian State. Later, when Rishi is asked to speak into the recorder and ask for Wasim Khan's release in return of his life, he only shouts "Jai Hind". He is kicked and beaten up with guns, but he doesn't stop repeating the slogan. These scenes surely are meant to invoke nationalist sentiments and patriotism. In the conversation between Liaqat Khan and Rishi, the highpoint is that Kashmiris have been ill-advised and that they have gone astray. Since a nation (India) is all-encompassing and must be accepted, grievances need to be sorted through talks and not violence:

Rishi: *Kitne logon ka khoon kiya hai, bees, pachchis?* (How many people have you killed, 20, 25?)

Liaqat: *Aur bhi zada.* (Many more.)

Rishi: *Kyun*? (Why?)

Liaqat: *Azadi pane ke vaste hamare leaders ne yeh raasta chuna hai*. (To achieve independence, our leaders have chosen this path.)

Rishi: *Hai kaun woh leaders? Hamare desh mein ya bagal wale desh mein? Jise woh kahen ge, maar doge?* (Who are those leaders? In our country or in the neighbouring country? Who ever they say, will you kill?)

Liaquat: *Hm.* (Yes.)

Rishi: *Kyun?* (Why?)

Liaqat: *Jihad.*

Rishi: *Woh kya hai?* (What is that?)

Liaqat: *Tum nahin samjho ge, yeh holy war hai*? (You won't understand. It is a holy war.)

Rishi: *Kiske saath*? (With whom?)

Liaqat: *Hindustan ke saath.* (With India.)

[1] All translations from Hindi to English are my own.

Thus, Kashmir *per se* disappears from the discourse and it is Islamic fundamentalism that seems to be the enemy of the Indian nation. The message being conveyed is that the mindless separatists are attacking the nationhood. Rishi tries to convince him of the futility of the path they have adopted, an attempt to convey to the audiences that the Kashmir struggle is amiss, as Rishi argues with Liaqat: "*Kashmir mein base lakhon kutumbho ko tum ne bhaga diya… kya insaaf hai… socho,* you are all misguided" (You threw out lakhs of families settled in Kashmir…what justice…think…). It is only when Liaqat Khan's brother is killed while crossing the border that he realises the futility of this 'war'. But then he tells Rishi that it is too late, he—like every other Kashmiri—is trapped: *unhonne kaha tum dange phasad karte rehna, baki sab hum par chhor do* (They [Pakistan/ISI] said keep creating trouble, leave the rest to us)… *gaddari ki hamare saath* (cheated us)… *yeh ugarwaad kyun?* (why this terrorism?)… *tufani samudar mein phase hain* (caught in an ocean storm).

On the other hand, Colonel Rayappa's monologue, when he comes to inform Roja that the government has decided to release Wasim Khan, is quite provocative:

> *Bahut koshishon ke bad pakara tha jis Wasim Khan ko, use chchor dene wale hain hum, khush ho na tum, bade scientist ko chchurva ke sarkar mein inaam milne wala hai mantriji ko, woh bhi khush…pandrah sipahi jo Wasim Khan ko pakarte waqt kurbaan hogaye…phazool khun baha unka, khushi huyi*" (Wasim Khan, who was caught after a lot of efforts, will be released, now you are happy; the minister is happy because he will be rewarded by the government for getting a big scientist released; but the fifteen soldiers who sacrificed their lives while capturing Wasim Khan, their blood was unnecessarily wasted).

For Roja, perhaps, nationalism isn't greater than the life of her husband. Perhaps, for men in uniform, just as the *jihadis*, the minds have been so conditioned that the cause is above all human relations and emotions. Nevertheless, *Roja* publicises nationalism, setting it as an ideal, with Rishi as a perfect nationalist. In the end, however, nationalism is not compromised. The government doesn't need to let go of the terrorist as Rishi manages to escape from the captivity. But Liaqat manages to catch up with Rishi and has him at gunpoint. As

would be expected, he doesn't kill his enemy, has a change of heart. Or, the good Indian manages to drive some sense into the rebel. On the other side, the idealised Indian womanhood—the wife struggling to get her husband back alive—is revered. But it is nation that stands supreme. Nationalism, in fact, becomes a homogenous entity that encompasses heterogeneous ideologies, strains, interests and groups. The core value and social structure of a nation is redefined and reinforced. But what is marginalised is Kashmir, the people and their sentiments. It is lost in the larger narrative of nationalism.

Upholding yet another facet of nationalism, the secular principles, *Henna* (1979) was set in Kashmir. But thematically, it was more about how borders divide people culturally and socially. The film, writes Jyotika Virdi (2003), is prefaced with a slow pan of a river flowing through the picturesque valley over which the narration tells us: this story is set on the banks of Jhelum, which begins in India and flows through Pakistan. On one side, Hindus worship the waters at sunrise and on the other side, Muslims pray at sunset. The nation-building process seems to have divided the people. A sense of enmity for each other is invoked which was absent before the borders were drawn.

> Nature and culture are invoked together and the film unequivocally asserts that "difference" is a cultural construct. After Chander's accident, a simple physical map marking the India-Pakistan border and Captain Shahbaaz Khan's exposition on torturing "spies" who infiltrate these borders become loaded with meaning (Virdi 35).

While people have no ill-feeling, it is the matters of the state that politicise human relationships and make people stand against each other in the name of nationalism. Rather than the dispute of Kashmir, it is larger story of nation-state that seems the thematic concern.

The release of *Mission Kashmir* (2000) brought the Kashmir conflict to the centrestage. Altaaf's (Hrithik Roshan) family members, though innocent, are killed in a shootout between the police and the militants. Police officer Inayat Khan (Sanjay Dutt), whose own son dies due to lack of medical aid after a *fatwa* has been placed by Kashmiri fundamentalist forbidding people from helping the police officer, adopts Altaaf on his wife's insistence. But the day Altaaf discovers that the masked person who had killed his family is none other than his

own *Abba*, he flees from the house and joins militant ranks. Afghani terrorist Hilal Kohistani (Jackie Shroff) on a "Mission Kashmir" makes the most of it and instigates Altaaf against his father police officer. Altaaf, in his rage for revenge, kills Inayat Khan's wife, the mother who had nurtured him, infuriating Khan. In the meantime, Hilal is out to complete his mission. Inayat Khan, however, manages to convince and change Altaaf's mind to fight against Afghani infiltrators.

What must be taken note of is that both Altaaf, the militant, and Inayat, the police officer, are Kashmiris, also Muslims. Also, the film more than being concerned about the nationalist element, tries to explore the legacy of hatred and the currents of violence that it produces in a social set-up, with the Kashmir dispute forming the backdrop. In one scene, where Khan's Hindu deputy is furious and enraged, his Sikh colleague tries to comfort him. As Avinash bemoans the loss of loved ones to terror and says that Gurdeep can't understand, Gurdeep explodes in rage because his family was murdered by Hindus rioting after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In India, where several ethnic communities co-exist, everyone has his own wounds. Can nationalism heal those wounds?

While the viewer would accept the dominant ideology of nationalism and secularism, doubts about the validity of these concepts within a nation-state do arise. The hegemonic influence is not all-pervading. The jingoism is not splattered across, yet a sense of bringing around the enemy—whether he is from within or from outside—is an end that must be achieved. A militant becomes a foil to a nationalist, and if the nationalist is of the same religion or community, the message is even louder.

As Roland Barthes (1980) suggests that the Other is that which the bourgeois ideology cannot recognise or accept, but must deal with in either of the two ways—either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself. The militant is, thus, looked at as the 'Other' who then needs either to be converted into a nationalist and assimilated into the mainstream or be done away with. However, at the centre of the moral universe is the concept of nation, which orders the cultural imagination. The ethical dilemma tends to encircle the idea of nationhood.

Since *Roja*, Kashmir has primarily meant terror, almost filtered through Indian nationalist lens. After *Mission Kashmir*, *Yahaan* (2005) and *Fanaa* (2006) have been more or less linear, monological film texts, with one of the threads being that of a love story. In *Yahaan*, Army commander Aman (Jimmy Shergill) meets Adaa (Manissha Lamba) when posted in Kashmir to fight the insurgents. Adaa's brother Shakeel has joined hands with the terrorists to gain a free Kashmir. Circumstances soon lead to Aman and Adaa falling in love, but they keep the affair a secret. Aman is given the task of finding and eliminating terrorists, and soon captures their leader, who also happens to be Shakeel's mentor.

Later, Aman and four comrades are taken captive by Shakeel, demanding the release of their commander. Adaa finds her brother's hideout, and goes to plead with him not to harm Aman. Making use of the opportunity, Aman breaks free and escapes with Adaa. The army comes to know of Aman's relationship with the terrorist's sister and doubts his integrity. On the other hand, to thwart Adaa's efforts to help Aman, Shakeel takes over a mosque, holding people hostage in exchange for their leader and Adaa's silence. As Aman walks in to face Shakeel and is beaten up, Shakeel finds his own father among the hostages. Aman also tells Shakeel that the terrorist leader had bombed Shakeel's house and that his grandmother is in hospital. The other terrorists, while they are trying to escape, are captured by the Army.

The love is caught in the conflict. Can the lovers go against their own people? The Indian can't, or rather must not. The Kashmiri girl does what is right—her lover will be purged of stigma of being a traitor to his country. In the end, love surpasses all odds, even if it is a war zone, even if it is Kashmir. While the militants are imagined with a touch of compassion, even dignity, they are taken for granted as being in the wrong and, hence, Shakeel's self-realisation ends the drama. Beyond the love parable, the movie does fuel the idea of nationalism.

So does *Fanna* (2006), which opens in the Kashmir Valley with "Sare jahan se achcha" being played in the background as the camera establishes the setting with snow-laden landscape and *phiren*-clad locals. Zooni (Kajol) is shown saluting the Tricolour she can't see and is turned in the right direction. Hence, point to be noted—Kashmiri girl and she is patriotic too. Having met Rehan (Aamir Khan) in Delhi

changes her life; she falls in love, but Rehan has seemingly died in a terrorist attack. It is only towards the end that she finds out that Rehan is a terrorist himself, belonging to an outfit called IKF which is intent on creating an independent Kashmir by liberating both PoK and Indian Kashmir. While love for his son and Zooni does change Rehan, the terrorist, it is too late and Zooni shoots him. She chooses the "lesser evil" or the "greater good", as advised by her father in the beginning.

Though the choices that the characters in these movies make are not easy, relationships are trapped in political and territorial barbwires, yet the central thread of the films has always been upholding Indian nationalism, the Indianness surpassing all odds to ensure that good wins over evil. Narrative structures of films are in part social-political conventions but not out of context of their contemporary period, for they do influence the way films are understood, consumed and absorbed into audiences' lives. It would then not be wrong to say that what is intellectually satisfying depends on pre-existing narrative conventions. The films so far mentioned have always ended with a resolution of the conflict. There is reconciliation, answers have been found, even if only for the time being. The viewer leaves with a feeling that a meaning has been determined. The central thread of either nationalist sentiment or goodness and love not only runs central, but also ties the ends together. The discourse is closed, which is not how it is in the case of Kashmir.

Realism, in reference to post-1989 Kashmir, had somehow been camouflaged. Realist films attempt to be life-like in the sense that the events and situations that occur in that film could have actually happened (or that they did happen) in real life. More or less, reality had been produced but after tampering with it. Another important aspect, I would maintain, is that realist films are audience-centered. In other words, they encourage the audience to come up with their own individual interpretation of what the film means. Realist films compel the viewers to think on their own, rather than falling prey to the hegemonic influence. They are more interested in representing (or re-presenting) reality to the viewer and then letting the viewer decide what it means.

With the aforementioned films, either it was the nationalist sentiment that was overwhelming when a viewer walked out after

watching the film, or it was the idea that love sees no distinctions of religion or community. Human conditions that were touched upon were universal in their appeal and Kashmir formed an appropriate backdrop to bring out the themes, romance, love, patriotism or secularism. But the two movies, *Lamhaa*, a mainstream Hindi film, and *Harud*, an independent film, seem to have brought Kashmir as a discourse itself on the screen. The two films are very different in story and in their treatment, but both offer an open set of textual intersections, and relations differently realised in their interrelation with the viewers, who would realize that the meaning that they attempt to grasp keeps shifting and they, as spectators, have varying positions towards the film text. For once, a message is not through the conflict of and in Kashmir, but the Kashmir conflict itself is the message.

The time of their release is also of some significance. The year 2010 saw a series of protests in the Valley. While the Amarnath land row was still fresh, there were protests in the downtown area of Srinagar on June 11 against the killing of three Kashmiris by the Army, claiming that they had been infiltrators. As the paramilitary forces tried to disperse the protesters, a seventeen-year-old was killed while playing cricket. The protests became violent, as protesters picked stones. Thereafter, a vicious circle had set in: killing of a boy was followed by protest demonstrations and clashes with security forces in which another boy would be killed, leading to more protests by the boys till several youth lost their lives, curfew was imposed and *azadi* slogans reverberated in the Valley. Normalcy in Kashmir was again questioned. Sixty-five years since India's Independence and Partition, Kashmir ceases to be a paradise. It gets a new signature: the most dangerous place on earth. Any story from Kashmir almost becomes a rumour, there is no single perspective; rather, multiple realities exist simultaneously.

As is true for any discourse, in case of Kashmir too, each stratification inevitably incorporates various motives, leanings, intentions—unconscious, pre-reflective ideologies that are often defined as political. All discursive activity, thus, becomes jockeying for a position, an ideological struggle between accents, intonations and meanings, but also crucially an interaction producing communication and understanding. And, applying Bakhtin's dialogism, the counterpoints become equally significant in understanding a reality that a piece of art, films in this case, represents. The aim of using dialogism is to

understand a film's textuality that is capable of bringing into play critical sensitivities.

> Film, through its heteroglot system of effects (visual, audio, written and so on), points at such 'varied horizons', impelling us to engage with other aspects of social experience and other members of the interpretative community, generating a network of 'creative perception' and dialogic participation (Flanagan 10).

Film text, as I understand it, is an artistically shaped series of meanings that comprise motion and utterance. It not only produces meaning but becomes a site where meanings are contested and projected back by the spectator. Film texts, argues Flanagan, are "part of human culture and communication and take their place, and should be located within, the back and forth of anticipation, interpretation, reception and, inevitably, argument that makes up that sphere in all its complexity and vitality" (Flanagan 20). More than delving into the cinematic equation of the film and the spectator, the intention is to understand the particular film text through a dialogic characteristic that it carries within it.

Furthermore, the film text in reference can be viewed as polyphonic in the sense that there are many voices and ideologies present, partaking in the process of an on-going dialogue. As the reciprocity of different ideas takes place, each idea finds meaning in relation to another. Thus, heteroglossia enters the novel.

> [Heteroglossia] is the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will always be a set of conditions social, historical, meteorological, physiological that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions… (Bakhtin 428).

Just as there are different ideas at play, there are different identities that interact and it is in relation to one another that each gets a meaning.

Lamhaa, which opens with a scene that announces the year 2009, is not trying to make a statement. Kashmir conflict is the central thread but the movie doesn't place any two parties or positions against each other, there is no good versus evil or even nationalism pitted

against anti-nationalism/terrorism. Rather, it talks about Kashmir *per se*. Kashmir is the subject, rest all—be it characters, ideologies, even violence—is secondary, as if they are the products of Kashmir, not that they make up Kashmir. In the "making of the movie segment", director Rahul Dholakia categorically says: "*Lamhaa* is talking about a lot of reality. We are not taking sides, but we are not mincing any words in saying what we have to say." However, at the time of its release, the movie was not allowed to be premiered in Srinagar:

> According to a source, the film has been denied this permission by the J&K government, who fear that the separatists may object to holding any functions in aid of *Lamhaa*, a film about the plight of Kashmiris caught in midst of the paramilitary forces and the separatists. When contacted, [Bunty] Walia confirmed the news and said, 'Yes, I was told by the J&K officials that they could not allow me to hold a premiere of *Lamhaa* in Srinagar as they expected a backlash from the separatists' (*The Times of India*, July 7, 2010).

The subtitle of the movie read: an untold story. Perhaps, the story of Kashmiris, the ordinary people, has never been told. Their life is a daily ordeal, either it is fear of violence, or a search for a 'disappeared' family member or just earning enough to survive. Life is lost.

[H]e [producer Bunty Walia] is doubly upset with the irony of the situation and says:

> The director of *Lamhaa*, Rahul Dholakia, stayed in Srinagar for six months to work on this film. It is sad that we are not allowed to kickstart our film in Srinagar, which is a part of India. My beard has grown white while making this film. It has been an uphill task. This is definitely not done (*The Times of India*, July 7, 2010).

The narrative of *Lamhaa* appears as an interaction of distinct perspectives or ideologies, borne by different characters, who are able to speak for themselves, even against each other. The 'power to mean' is not in a single character's hold. It is, thus, as if the movie was put together by multiple characters and their ideologies, not a single standpoint. Moreover, all characters are treated as subjects rather than as objects, thereby offering a dialogical worldview. Instead of a single objective world, there is a plurality of consciousness, each with its own world. The spectator does not see a single reality being presented on the screen, but rather, how reality appears to each character.

Vikram Sabarwal (Sanjay Dutt), alias Gul Jahangir, is a military intelligence officer who has returned to Kashmir after eighteen years to investigate about a plot to disrupt and paralyse the Valley—worse than what happened in 1989. He is a patriotic character, but not to the extent of being a xenophobic. Kashmir is his concern, nothing more and nothing less. He understands that the Kashmir conflict is not a linear story. In a conversation with his authority, he says: "When it is the politicians who should be arrested, ordinary people are instead."

Aziza (Bipasha Basu) is a revolutionary girl with a strong opinion about Kashmir and *Kashmiriyat*. She is very different than the quintessential Kashmiri girl—nothing of the *Kashmir ki kali* sorts—and is a member of a political party and, thus, works with men. She wears *salwaar-kameez* but with sports shoes, walks like a man and can do hand-to-hand combat. Aziza believes in *Kashmiriyat* as an ideology: "*Baba gaddaar ko marne se pehla pushte nahin hain*." (One is not supposed to take permission before killing a traitor.) She says this to Haji Shayad Shah, PKF leader and also her foster father, not knowing that Haji is a traitor too. It is only in the course of the movie that she realises how she has been manipulated in believing in what she does believe in and that it has its faultlines. By the end of the film, Aziza has transformed, not that the struggle for Kashmir's independence is no longer her aspiration but she can see that there are as many enemies within and the politics of conflict. She heads the women's wing of the party called "Fatima Squad" that acts as the custodian of morality but her own women compatriots attack her after she questions the patron and party head Haji and breaks away from the party for Kashmir's freedom.

Haji Shayad Ali (Anupam Kher) is an elderly and revered political leader of Kashmir, but is funded by the ISI and this truth is only uncovered towards the end. His shrewd politics includes instances of subtle reference to Kashmiri Pandits as being more Indians and less Kashmiris during a press conference after a blast has taken place and it is assumed that it was an attack on Haji's life. Hearing the reporter's name, Dhruv Raina, Haji asks him to repeat it before he answers:

Haji: *Kya bomb blast Mumbai, Ahmedabad ya Delhi mein nahin hote*?

(Don't bomb blasts occur in Mumbai, Ahmedabad or Delhi?)

Reporter: *Sir, lekin karvate to Lashkar-e-Toiba jaise terrorist group hi hain*.

(Sir, but groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba are only responsible.)

Haji: *Barson baad ek Pandit reporter ko yahan dekh kar accha laga. Vaise aap Kashmir mein kab se reporting kar rahe hain?* (It is nice to see a Pandit reporter in Kashmir after many years. Since when have you been doing reporting in Kashmir?)

Reporter: *Yehi koi sche maheene se.* (Since about six months.)

Haji: *Yeh Parvez hain, jab sche maheene ka tha tab jail mein band kar diya tha… kya sche maheene ka bachcha bhi terrorist tha?* (This is Parvez. He was six when he was locked in jail. Was a six-month-old also a terrorist?)

The brief conversation between Haji and Raina hints at the rancorous relationship between the two communities in Kashmir. Haji, however, portrays a manipulative politician—just like so many politicians are anywhere else—his rhetoric gives a hint of Islamic fundamentalism, especially when he provokes children to join *jihad*. Though independence of Kashmir is the dream he too entertains, but without conceding his own power or ideology.

Atif (Kunal Chopra) is the representative of the Kashmiri youth with a mix of zeal for Kashmir's independence and its people's welfare. He had joined the militant ranks, but returns with a realisation that violence is not the answer. Rather, peace is the way. Having split with Haji, he forms his own party called Gulmohar. He has decided to try the ballot since picking up guns did not help to bring about a change, make a difference. The passion, along with rage, is apparent in his political speeches:

Aaj hamari identity sirf ek I-card ban kar rah gayi hai. Kehne ko to hum jannat mein rehte hai, lekin sach baat to yeh hai ke atharan saalon se hum ek khoobsurat jail mein reh rahe hain. Na bolne ki azadi, na sochne ki, na apne dhang se jeene ki azadi.

(Today, our identity is confined to an I-card. As a matter of saying, we live in paradise but the reality is that for the past eighteen years, we are living in a beautiful prison.)

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Hamare bache bahar kaam nahin kar sakte kyunki unhe militant kaha jata hai, aur yahan par woh kaam kar nahin sakte kyunki yahan koi industry nahin hai. Yahan par industry tab tak nahin hogi jab tak yeh moka parast

leader hain jo nahin chahate ki awaam taraki kare, kyunki taraki pasand awaam sawaal poochti hai.

(Our children can't go out to work because they are called militants and they can't work here because there is no industry. There won't be any industry here till the time we have opportunist leaders who do not want that the masses should progress because then people will ask questions.)

***

Duniya chaand par ghar bana rahi hai aur hamain apne ghar se nikalne se pehele pachaas baar sochna parta hai.

(The world is making houses on the moon and we have to think fifty times before stepping out of our homes.)

But Atif is an unwanted opponent, a threat to the people who want to keep the conflict alive, and those who have their personal, vested interests. The moment he begins to question his own people, starts to point out that they are in the wrong, he must be sacrificed, as the Lashkar-e-Toiba chief says: "*Gulmohar ka parcha hatha do, woh hamare mission ke liye theek nahin*." (Remove Gulmohar's ballot, its presence is not good for our mission). The mission is to turn Kashmir into an Islamic state.

The film, indeed, presents its characters as having their own final word, but there is a constant dialogue among them as they relate to and interact with one another and the larger ideas and ideologies. There is yet another Kashmiri, Pir Baba, who has left politics but hasn't given up political interests, as Atif says for him: "*Yeh Kashmir hai janab. Yahan siyaasat koi nahin chchorta*" (This is Kashmir mister, nobody leaves the position of power). Pir Baba is the only one whom Vikram trusts, confides in, but Pir Baba betrays for his own reasons. If Kashmir is burning, then why should Jammu be spared, he argues. Then, in the story and to contribute to the conflict, there are power-brokers and dealmakers as big as those who have access to the high-ups in the Capitals of the two countries. Kashmir conflict is a business, lucrative enough to ensure that it doesn't ever get resolved. On the other hand, an ordinary tailor on the street makes an extra buck as an informer for both sides along with selling military uniform to the militants. The security men on the border are shown to understand that many have crossed over only in enthusiasm and wish to return, should even be allowed to do so. But a CRPF man in the city humiliates a local,

threatens to kill him and declare him a militant if he questions the authority and the power of the men in uniform.

Thus, *Lamhaa* underscores the fact that in a war zone, there are too many shades. It isn't black and white. In contrast to a monological world that is integrated through a single consciousness, say of nationalism, dialogism recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. *Lamhaa* does that, for plurality is the 'principle' that is the main reference point of the film's aesthetic field. In fact, as a dialogical work, *Lamhaa*—though a political thriller and fast-paced—appears a lot more 'objective' and 'realistic' than a monological film that subordinates reality to any single ideology—nationalism, for instance.

The movie is not anti-national or anti-India. Rather, it is only presenting realities and worlds other than those that one assumes exist. Even the State's perspective is not monological. If the concern with border security gives legitimacy to the State's action then it also intersects the freedom and human rights of a group of people. Vikram Sabarwal is devoted to his country, but doesn't impose his nationalistic sentiment or the idea of India on Kashmir. The incomplete nationalism and flawed democracy is as much underscored as is the different Kashmirs and the misguided and even fundamentalised Kashmiri independence struggle.

The film text can be read as containing many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective and each of these voices has its own perspective, its own validity, and its own narrative weight within the movie. Vikram Sabarwal, as he enters the film (and in Kashmir), announces: "*Attharan saal baad main Kashmir laut rahan hoon, sab kuch phir se yaad aa raha tha, saal 1989…*" (After eighteen years, I am returning to Kashmir, everything is coming back to the memory, year 1989…). As a flashback, the story of Kashmir from 1989-2009 unfolds:

> Haji Ali: *Ham kya chahate hain…* Azaadi…*jihad hamara raasta hai…* (What do we want… Azaadi…*jihad* is our way…)
>
> ***
>
> Security officer: We are in a war zone. *Dushman har samah, har jagah maujood hai, har sadak par, har ghar main hain.* (Enemy is present at all times, is everywhere, on every street, in every house.) Find them, if they don't surrender, shoot them. Any doubt? No sir.

***

Security officer: *Uthalo!* (Pick up!)

Kashmiri woman: "*Ineh kyun lekar ja rahe ho, kahan lekar ja rahe ho?*" (Why are you taking him, where are you taking him?)

Security officer: *Mamooli si interrogation hai, kal subah chhor denge.* (It is for interrogation, we will let him go in the morning.)

***

Children (chorus): Allah-uh-Akbar

Haji Ali: Police *par kangri aur pathar phenkne ke din gaye…shidat ke saath* Pakistan *mein ja kar training karna… Agla juma Pindi mein.* (Gone are the days when throwing *kangris* and pelting stones at the police helped… Now, with complete dedication, get trained in Pakistan… Next Friday, in Rawalpindi.)

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Narrator (Viktram Sabarwal): *Haalat itni kharab hui ki Kashmiri Panditon ko apna sab kuch chhor kar Kashmir se nikalna para, kise ne unko rokne ki koshish nahin ki.* (Circumstances got so bad that Kashmiri Pandits had to flee, nobody tried to stop them.)

The reader/viewer finds it hard to decide where his 'consent' lies. Violence is justified in different names, there is no escaping violence, and each Kashmiri is a victim in some way or the other. The intention of the film is made clear in the very beginning: it is about the conflict, but even the conflict is plural now. However, dialogism is not simply different perspectives about the same world. It involves the distribution of utterly incompatible elements within different perspectives of equal value. Bakhtin had criticised the view that disagreement means at least one of the people must be wrong. Since several standpoints exist, truth requires many incommensurable voices. Hence, it involves a world that is fundamentally irreducible to unity. Separateness and simultaneity can neither be wished away, nor escaped.

Lamhaa, in context of Kashmir, underscores that no single meaning is to be found in the world, but a vast multitude of contesting meanings. Truth—that too exists in plurality—is established by being addressed, through engagement and commitment in a particular context and it changes with time, in context. As Bakhtin (1981) points out that

the fictional image that appears single-voiced can eventually yield another double-voiced meaning; long undetected, through the careful application of a contextual analysis that reflects the preoccupations of the present era of reading as well as past ones (p. 374).

Representing and reflecting Kashmir on ground, *Lamhaa* only shows the world as made up of multiple voices, perspectives, and subjective 'worlds'. What is real is that existence is through engaging in a dialogue, and dialogue must not come to an end but, at the same time, dialogues do not occur between fixed positions or subjects. People are also transformed through dialogue, fusing with parts of the other's discourse. The other's response can change everything in one's own consciousness or perspective. Dialogue can produce a decisive reply, which produces actual changes. As Aziza's discourse in the film transforms, so does that of Atif. In fact, at a point when she is rebuked for exposing a sex racket, Aziza questions Haji Ali if being politically correct is more important than the lives of Kashmiri women. On the other hand, the sex worker, whose face has been blackened by the Fatima Squad members, says: *Sab looterein hain. Fauj bandook ki nok pe lootti hain aur leaders azaadi ki dauhai de kar* (All are robbers, the Army robs at gunpoint and leaders in the name of independence).

Bakhtin's dialogism in this context could then also be understood as the struggle against external definitions of thoughts and actions, which have a deadening effect on the people. If humanity itself is indeterminate and something that can't be finalised, then the discursive act can't reach an end or be defined in rigid terms. Power, politics, religion, freedom, nationalism… these are concepts, have meaning but they also lose all meaning when the life of an ordinary man is put at stake to justify these.

In *Lamhaa*, Vikram Sabarwal is welcomed on the mission and in the city with this line: "*Kashmir mein mausam aur mahaul kabhi bhi badal sakta hai*" (In Kashmir, weather and circumstances can change at any moment). People of Kashmir can vouch for it. For them, it is living one moment at a time, counting them and adding one more. That is what the title *Lamhaa* too suggests and it is with this thread of momentary existence—the temporal and spatial character of Kashmir—that I move to the second film, titled *Harud*.

In Kashmiri, 'harud' means autumn. Like the season, the title is suggestive of the decay that has taken place in Kashmir. But 'autumn'

becomes a chronotope, whereby the spatial and temporal frame of a narrative is closely integrated. The space, Kashmir as disputed territory, is a trace of time and, on the other hand, time—which is the season autumn—becomes a marker of space that Kashmir has become. Within this spatial-temporal frame or chronotope, production of meaning, identities, values and boundaries takes place. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) introduces the concept by offering that "in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (p. 84). Moreover, this chronotope relates the interpretation of the reader/viewer with the broader historic, social and cultural setting in which it is interpreted.

> A chronotopic schema can be determined by analysing the ways in which the plots and time markers of texts are interwoven with a series of settings and spatial markers. Time and space, however, are not only textual features; they also function as a mental unit that constitutes the backbone of the writing [filmmaking] and reading [viewing] processes. The interwovenness of time and space must be conceived as a supratextual device that gives unity to the disparate spatial and temporal elements of a text (Keunen 2000).

According to Bakhtin, chronotopes become important sites in a narrative, not only fleshing out its narrative but also allowing its "knots" of meaning to be "tied" and "untied". He believed that the emergence of a recognisable chronotope within a narrative offers audiences an opportunity to invest the causal chain (or lack) with their own values.

In case of a film, transmission and reception are centred on the manipulation of time and space; at a particular place and a specific time, a visual representation of spatial reality unfolds at around twenty-four frames per second, projected onto the screen with definite spatial parameters. Thus, chronotope of a particular text works as an ideological index. At another level, a chronotope would work as a dialogue between the text—movie *Harud* here—and the viewer as a strategy that evokes perception and reasoning on the part of the viewer based on the history or prior knowledge about the subject,

here the Kashmir conflict. As a result, an interaction between the text and viewers' cerebral processes within the structure, presented through chronotope, takes place. Although time and space are ingrained in the text, they come alive and take shape only in the minds of the viewer. In all its undertones, chronotope would be part of the encoding-decoding process.

In *Harud*, space-time relationship is evoked by "autumn". While the season of decay becomes the thematic base for the movie, referring to the clinically depressed population and decay of life, it is equally suggestive of this Kashmir as a space—territorially and culturally—that is disputed since history, the time-frame. Each time the pastel, *chinar* leaf falls on the ground, it speaks of hopelessness that has frozen in time here in Kashmir, waning of desire, patience and life itself. At another point, the leaf is caught in the barbed wire, just as Kashmiris and their lives are trapped. In yet another shot, the maple leaf is being fiddled with in the hands of a character. The leaves are broomed away, removed from the road, clearing the space for traffic flow. But the space called road, which in normal circumstance would lead to limitless possibilities, is a trap in Kashmir.

Rafiq (Shanawaz Bhat), the protagonist, is most of the time seen riding a bicycle. It isn't a road movie but, nevertheless, journey is involved. The striking feature of the journey is that there is no destination and there is no change of place, so Rafiq is cycling in his town, of course with a purpose for it is his mode of transport to work and to move around. Yet, each time Rafiq is deep in thought or something has just affected him, he is shown cycling in the next shot. In a way, cycling becomes symbolic, especially when the camera focuses on the wheel, capturing a close shot more than once. The cycling is suggestive of the ordeal that a Kashmiri goes through on a daily basis, the vicious circle—where the beginning and the end is hard to distinguish. At the same time, it is a movement, a journey with a hope towards a brighter end at the point of the destination, which is Kashmir itself, a promised land in a way.

The chronotope of road, therefore, in this film lacks a specific spatial realisation because there is no change of location as such. Space covered would mean time spent, but in a conflict zone, it is like coming to a standstill. In another frame, we find Rafiq's father, who is a traffic cop, trying to negotiate the traffic. He collapses on duty, the sense

of being at the crossroads—as the physical becomes metaphorical as well—overwhelms him, with his thoughts caught between the past and the future. The fact that his elder son has disappeared won't let him move on, the constant worry that he might lose his other son as well burdens him and he can't make sense of the world around him or the chaos that is visible in the physical, territorial space. The centre of attention, rather, shifts to a metaphysical plane, which is the characters' inner conflict, the negotiations of personal space and identity in that time-frame of autumn.

On the other hand, for Rafiq's friend, physically transporting oneself out of Kashmir, perhaps, could be the way to escape the daily suffering:

Friend one: *Main kal Jalandhar ja raha hoon.*

(I am going to Jalandhar tomorrow.)

Friend two: *Tu challis degree ki garmi mein shawl bechne jayega?*

(In the heat of 40 degrees, you will go to sell shawls.)

Friend one: *Is jahanum se to wahan ki garmi hi achchi hai.*

(That heat is better than this hell.)

As the conversation ends, Rafiq is seen riding his bicycle again, at a speed. As if he too is trying to escape but to where, or can he actually escape? *Harud* is, thus, about the human condition in this place that was once a paradise but now is seen as hell.

Autumn is an in-between season—neither too hot, nor too cold. The movie is set during this time corresponding to a period when there is no tangible peace and no blazing violence. How does one in Kashmir live in that 'in-between' state? And the movie shows that one is hardly living but can only exist—one day at a time, one survives one incident at a time. And Rafiq, a zombie-like character, does exactly that. The movie opens with Rafiq travelling in a bus that would drop him and his two friends in Kupwara, on the Indo-Pakistan border, to cross over. The expression that Rafiq wears is neither of enthusiasm nor fear. He doesn't seem to be contemplating anything or wondering about the family left behind. His eyes are not roving around; he is calm to the extent that he appears to be numb. When the boys get down, another person—supposedly their navigator—meets them

and fetches a pair of shoes for Rafiq, for the ones he had wouldn't be appropriate for the kind of journey involved. Just when they are about to move, a friend of Rafiq's father notices him and brings him back to his hometown, while the other two leave for the 'other side'.

For each one, it is the same story: you step out of the home, if you manage to return, it is a sigh of relief for the family; if not, the never-ending search begins for the 'missing'. After a failed attempt to cross the border, uncertainty is what Rafiq comes back to. He wanted to become a 'militant', fight the enemy, avenge the missing brother and maybe go beyond just existence and seek a purpose on the other side. But he is corrected by his militant friend, who says: "*Jannat ka rasta Pakistan se nahin guzarta*" (The way to paradise doesn't go through Pakistan). And then Rafiq finds his brother's camera and the last pictures it captured. He inches towards relative normalcy but the struggle to regain one's dignity from the daily humiliation that a Kashmiri goes through doesn't end. What are the choices available to them in a violent place where gun power rules over reason? It is a story of how the Kashmiri youth encounters the customary trappings of the term "azadi" or "freedom". They must strive to regain their dignity and also their humanity from the violent assaults of the State as well as the rebels. Again, the dialogical worldview of Kashmir is presented. Kashmir isn't a linear story.

In fact, the movie is deliberately slow, not unravelling a plot but creating a mood, which is bleak but not morose. That sense of feelings tightly wound up—of things simmering beneath the surface and not being allowed to come up—is integral to the film. Kashmir's socio-political condition makes itself heard and seen even when the characters are silent. The treatment of *Harud*—war-torn landscape, barren soundtrack and minimalist dialogue—is in contrast to the way *Lamhaa* presents the story of Kashmir. *Harud* underscores the conflict within the individuals, who are silently suffering. While Rafiq wanders like a lost man, his father Yusuf is slowly moving towards insanity. His job, his uniform, fail to save him from gradual deterioration. The mother, on the other hand, refuses to give up the hope that her elder son will return and regularly attends meetings of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons.

It was in 2003 that the mobile phone came to Kashmir. A convenience that the rest of the world took for granted came as a

novelty to the Kashmiris. While it was a revolution of sorts, it revealed the desperation of a people who believed that this gadget would somehow improve their lives and welcomed it with hope and anticipation. As a man in queue, waiting to get his connection, puts it:

> *Agar hum saat baje savera kaam pe nikal kar ja rahe hain, to yeh pata nahin hota ki kahan pe blast ho jayega ya beech sadak goli-badi hogi, kuch pata nahin hota, ghar walon ko bhi pata nahi hota, to is se* communication, family, friends *ke saath* contact *rehta hai.*
>
> (If we leave our homes at seven in the morning, nobody knows where a blast or firing would occur. With a mobile phone, we can inform our families and stay in touch with friends.)

Safety seems to be the only concern for the many people in Kashmir. On the other hand, the film in a subtle way also tries to touch upon the dichotomy between the economic liberalisation and the rise of a consumer economy in India and the onset of the separatist movement in Kashmir.

A lot, in fact, is left unsaid but the camerawork is evocative, capturing the twists and turns that are taking place in the minds of the people. Unlike what is shown in news channels or mainstream movies, *Harud* presents the unrest within as a result of the turmoil outside. Director Aamir Bashir remarked that "one is making a time capsule". A "time capsule" is a sealed container preserving articles and records of contemporary culture for perusal by scientists and scholars of the distant future and, hence, suggesting that the present becomes history, which would then be available in the future.

Perhaps, a viewer could possibly keep his comprehension of the film and his emotional response separate. But in case of Kashmir, it is a very difficult accomplishment. The stagnancy in pacing and monotony in the daily existence underscores the void in a Kashmiri youth's life. There's a sense of distress. While the Valley's people try to keep the hope alive, the direction of life is lost. As Rafiq oscillates between his dreams and reality, besides showing the anxieties and fears of the character, it also seems to fuse the two worlds. What is real, perhaps, is only an imagination. In Kashmir, reality is a perception that is different for each. The conflict has seeped so deep into the mindscape that there is no escape.

Islam ke naam par,
Panditon ke naam par,
Kashmiriyat ke naam par,
Azaadi ke naam par
Sabhi shamil hain

(In the name of Islam, in the name of Pandits, in the name of Kashmiriyat and in the name of Independence, all are involved).

5 An Identity in Flux…

Within the discourse of Kashmir, as the frame of identity is shifted to the space of writing, textual and cinematic, the representation procures a third dimension that is open-ended, even profound, to allow a definition in strict terms. The stories and narrative accounts, be it in the form of memoir, fiction or even journalistic, are crucial to the study of representations and relationships, for they influence people's judgments and perceptions. At the same time, they are essential tools of manufacturing—and bending—truths to reach the desired conclusions.

Moreover, it would not be wrong to say that individuals divulge their affiliations and identities through their actions and speech. It is through their acts that their uniqueness—who they are—and their personal abilities are revealed. Yet, it is only through the stories that their identity becomes fully manifested. The function of the storyteller is, thus, crucial not only for the preservation of the doings and sayings of actors/characters, but also for the full disclosure of the identity of the actors/characters.

The narratives, as Hannah Arendt (1959) claims, "tell us more about their subjects, the 'hero' in the centre of each story, than any product of human hands ever tells us about the master who produced it" (p. 184). The fact is that narratives constitutive meaning as a result of the process of articulation of thoughts, ideas and ideologies both for actors/characters and writers themselves and for readers and spectators. The meaning, however, is temporally deferred because there is some distance between the events and their descriptions/representations. While the interplay of narration, interpretation and understanding defers meaning, it helps to provide an insight into the happenings, the reality around us.

In Kashmir, when much of the social and political life has turned into questions of recognition, identity poses a quandary:

> Each person's individual identity is seen as having two major dimensions. There is a collective dimension, the intersection of their collective identities, and there is a personal dimension coming, consisting of other socially or morally important features…that are not themselves the basis of forms of collective identity (Taylor 151).

But when identity is comprehended as something that comes from the outside rather than something discovered as having existed within, narratives become essential in providing a sense of identity. As Jonathan Ree puts it, "The problem of personal identity, one may say, arises from play-acting and the adoption of artificial voices; the origins of distinct personalities, in acts of personation and impersonation" (Hall and du Gay 122).

Thus, in an attempt to define a Kashmiri identity, politically and culturally, one finds it positioned in the space between a range of contradictory spaces that coexist and even overlap. And in the process, as Bhabha writes, "what is interrogated is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed" (Bhabha, 1994: 47).

While "change implies the capacity to relinquish at least aspects of a given identity" (Hall and du Gay 61), writing and contrapuntal reading subverts all assumptions about a given identity. It is important to take note of how cultural texts, ranging from literature to films, act as modes of subjectivity and identity in case of Kashmir. And, through my reading of the selected texts, the idea has been to underscore the gaps that give rise to certain questions that have been left out of the Kashmir discourse. These may or may not have answers, but they can't be dismissed at random. In the Valley, as stories become history and points of reference, the ends are always a new beginning. Unpredictability has become the anchor of life in Kashmir, how long will it continue to define ordinary people's lives is again uncertain.

When peace is assumed, violence breaks the silence and just when the roar becomes deafening, dead stillness is overwhelming.

Six months after Afzal Guru was hanged in Tihar jail, Kashmir is raging in anger and protest. On July 18, 2013, while a headline of

a write-up in *Tehelka* magazine read: "Ramban firing brings Valley to the edge", a report in *The Indian Express* stated: "Four people were killed and several others, including security personnel, injured in stone-pelting and the resultant firing today when a mob attacked a BSF camp in Ramban district over alleged high-handedness by a patrolling party".

Praveen Swami, in an article on Ramban episode, points at how fragile is the peace in Kashmir and, furthermore, how accounts of an incident could be as diverging as the idea of *Kashmiriyat* and Kashmiri identity has become over the years:

> From the multiple stories emerging on Thursday [July 18] morning's killings, it's hard to say for certain just what happened. Jammu and Kashmir's minister of state for home, Sajjad Ahmad Kitchloo, said the riots began after BSF personnel walked into a mosque with their shoes on. In the Border Security Force's account of events, the detention of a local resident on suspicion led to a brawl—which in turn led him to spread rumours that a copy of the *Koran* had been desecrated. In one of the more lurid online telling of events on an Islamist website, a witness claimed to have seen BSF personnel who "picked up [a] *Koran* and ripped them off and threw them under their feet". Take your pick: everyone else is doing it. Jammu and Kashmir's chief minister, Omar Abdullah, has been left complaining that media can't even get the number of people killed right, let alone more complex facts.

What follows is violence. Where would this end, if at all it will? The answer is evasive, as Kashmir conflict becomes a conundrum. A recent report in *Tehelka* hints at resurgence of militancy and the youth in Kashmir once again shifting towards armed struggle:

> The targeted attacks have created a perception of militancy in the Valley that far exceeds the number of militants on the ground. What is more, the death of any of them leads to a groundswell of public support… In contrast to the past few years, when they preferred to lie low until identified and targeted by the security forces, militants in Kashmir are now going on the offensive…the trend seen as the most worrying is that of local Kashmiri youth taking to militancy. It shows a renewed will for *jihad* in the Valley. A clutch of youth between 18-25 years, relatively well-educated and from middle-class families are consciously joining *jihad* and redrawing the militant landscape of the Valley (June 28, 2013).

In addition, as the report says, the militants have dumped the latest technology this time and, hence, even the police have to revert to the conventional human intelligence to fight this 'new' militancy.

Is this yet another attempt to assert the "Kashmiriness"? Or, is it a sign of restlessness among the youth? Has the new generation lost direction or has the cause lost its validity? A place that was once the paradise, was home to a unique concept called *Kashmiriyat* has been lost—in space and in time. What remains is conflict, within and outside.

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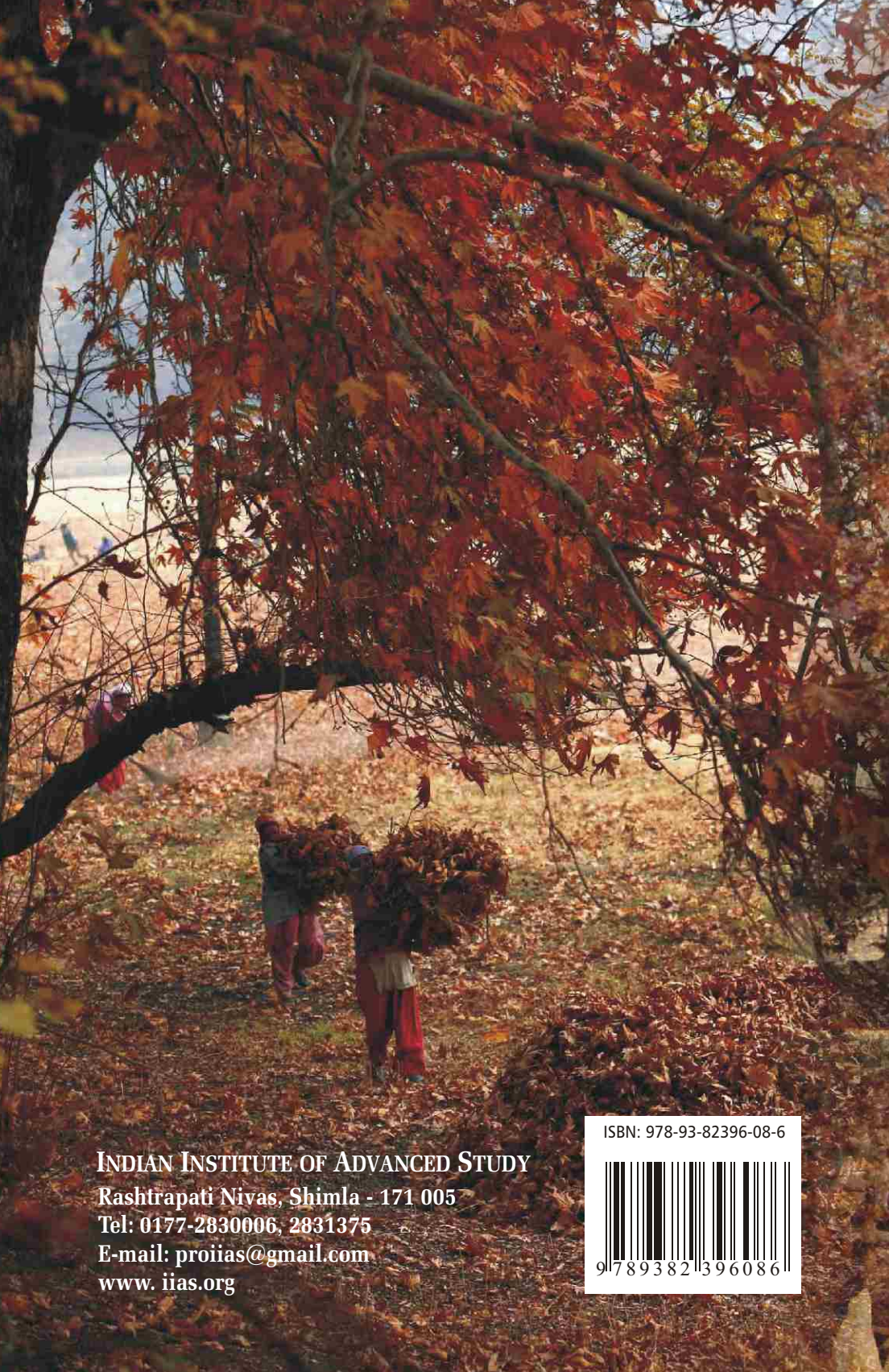

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