

Nationality & Identity Shifts in Jammu & Kashmir's Armed Conflict

Alpana Kishore



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Acknowledgements

The decision to explore nationality and identity in Jammu & Kashmir was a conscious outcome of a sense of incompleteness left over from my years as a television journalist reporting from Kashmir in the nineties. Political and militant developments then were so fast and furious that rarely could one delve deeper into issues or pause to examine why people responded to events in the ways they did. It was why I felt the need to switch to research.

When I started this fellowship, I was also guided by a strong desire to avoid the ‘official’ line of both mainstream and separatist political leaders and rely on views of ordinary people as far as possible. Exploring nationality and identity required authentic voices straight from the horse’s mouth, a chance to examine an oral narrative deeply affected by ideologies and isms – but in the privacy and quiet of peace; away in time and space from the upheavals that rocked Kashmir and generated only the hard ‘official’ line for the cameras even from ordinary folk.

Much of this was impossible to cover as reportage on television especially in the nineties, when Kashmir lurched from one disturbance to another. This was an absence I had keenly felt when it seemed everybody spouted the rhetoric of the moment and had a mountain of tantalizing, hidden thoughts below that I had frustratingly little access to due to time or coverage constraints and the high level of violence that could never have allowed people to speak freely on screen.

I wanted to portray the uncertainties as they reacted to events that challenged their beliefs, record the changing mindsets *midstream* – as they were happening, capture the indecisions, the inner wrestlings and the emergence of new beliefs at the very start of their constructions. I also wanted to open up the monolithic constructs of the ideologies and beliefs operating in the Valley – whether it was ‘Kashmir is an integral part of India’, ‘Kashmir *banega* Pakistan’ or ‘*Azaadi ka matlab kya? La illaha illala!*’

It is why there are few ‘leaders’ voices that are part of this document. It is why there is a strong predominance of lesser heard voices – of minorities and rural Kashmiris to take just two examples. It is why there are so many voices from students whose views are constantly in

flux – in keeping with the vastly more exposed, well travelled and multiple choice lives they lead compared to the generation preceding them, who barely ventured past the Banihal Pass or more correctly, even their village.

The WISCOMP fellowship gave me every single tool needed to complete this fairly mammoth yet delicate task of prising out these fluid beliefs and deconstructing them to examine what they actually stood for, why people believed in them and what was authentic or inauthentic about them.

The support of two people was critical in the broader picture of this fellowship being awarded to me. Professor Mushirul Hasan's encouragement and support at a time when I returned to work with a project on Partition after quitting journalism and took my first tentative forays in a new world was heartening and inspiring enough for me to continue on the distinctive path I had decided to travel on. The material and conclusions I gathered, significantly built the concepts and foundations of my thinking on identity and nationality, that served as a solid base while working for this fellowship – both within Jammu & Kashmir and in the context of the global crisis that critically influenced the conflict there.

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In Jammu, great appreciation to Shiban Dudha, Sanjay Dhar and Mohanlalji who opened up the world of the migrant for me, especially to the wonderful Ashwini Kumar who went out of his way to provide the office away from office and be the perfect colleague to a former staffer of his company that he had never met. To Amitabh Mattoo who helped with contacts and arrangements in the state, to Balraj Puri for sharing with me his thoughtful analyses and writings and to Aamer Rafiqi and Jaffer in Doda who showed me a different side to the Kashmir conflict, many thanks.

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Finally immense credit must go to the wonderfully supportive and generous – and may I say – untiring WISCOMP team of Sumona, Stuti, Seema and Manjri who allowed me the luxury of time and space to ruminate over my material till I was confident of it – indeed my greatest gift from them was the lack of pressure to ‘produce’ something that would merely go into official records. I must express my greatest appreciation and never-enough gratitude for the constant encouragement, flexibility and freedom they gave to me to shape my project in an atmosphere of camaraderie, commitment and enjoyment in the work we were collectively doing.

In the end, of course, nothing would have been possible without Dr Meenakshi Gopinath's steadfast endorsement of this project. Her unhesitating commitment to it – and to me – meant I finally had the support to fulfill a longstanding personal goal – to go back to Kashmir and complete an agenda I had left unfinished. With this commitment, she gave me an immeasurable opportunity to recover talents I thought I may have lost and to get back a focus and direction in my life I feared would be impossible. For this, a profound and heartfelt thank you.

To my children and husband who took my disappearances with good natured grumbling...its over – wait for the next one!

Alpana Kishore

Preface

WISCOMP *Scholar of Peace* Fellowships are designed to encourage innovative work by academics, policymakers, defence and foreign affairs practitioners, journalists, NGO workers, creative artists and others. Awarded for academic research, media projects and special projects, the fellowships are seen as an important step to encourage work at the interface of gender and security; conflict resolution and peace. These studies are expected to provide new insights into problems pertaining to security, promote understanding of structural causes of conflict, suggest alternatives and encourage peace initiatives and interventions. The work of the Fellows is showcased in the form of the *WISCOMP Perspectives* and *Discussion Papers* series.

Alpana Kishore's study titled *Nationality and Identity Shifts in Jammu and Kashmir's Armed Conflict* is a journalistic account of the views, memories and beliefs of people who have lived through the Kashmir conflict and the choices they have exercised in this setting. She travelled extensively through some of the most remote regions of the state in 2007-08 and conducted some 300 interviews with urban professionals, bureaucrats, landlords, police officers, villagers, fishermen, students, armed forces officers, former militants and Islamist ideologues or teachers – in short almost every section that has affected or been affected by the armed insurgency. It is this emphasis on primary sources and the oral narrative that impart a vivid sense of the contemporary and the immediate to this project.

The author who covered Kashmir in the early 1990s as a television journalist makes the central proposition that the Kashmir conflict has never managed to liberate itself from the faultlines of religion. The legacy of partition and its concomitant communal agenda represented by the two nation theory, is intrinsically intertwined in the way nationality and identity have been shaped from 1947 to the present in Kashmir. In making this central proposition the author also implicitly reflects on the larger fundamental question that has engaged scholars of identity politics, namely, at what point does a certain marker of ethno-political identity become politicized. In addition, what are the factors that cause that particular marker of identity to acquire a militarized overtone at a certain point in time? If as the author suggests, in the case

of Kashmir, religion has been used as a mobilizing factor, if in recent years the struggle shaped by Pakistan's two nation theory and the advent of the "guest *jehadi*" has indeed rewritten the rules of society and culture and hijacked what could have been a secular political struggle, the question is: why has this been so?

This acquires a special resonance in the case of Jammu and Kashmir because, as the author points out, the lived practices of Islam in this land symbolized in no small manner by the *ziarrats* that dot the landscape and the shared syncretic spaces where Hindus and Muslims worshipped together, is so much at odds with the visible signs of a very different global Islam that one encounters today. She makes the case that the rise of Islamic organizations, the appearance of the mosques with domes, the *mohalla* (local community) leaders, the Islamic TV, the *Jehadi* bank are all symbols of the disconnect between the Islam that had been practiced for years by the inhabitants of Kashmir and the face of Islam laid out by "Islamists".

It is perhaps important to point out at the outset that in following this line of enquiry Kishore makes a qualitatively different argument from the one that *reduces* the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir to a Hindu-Muslim conflict. There is an acknowledgement that the Kashmir problem is clearly a political problem that cannot be explained away by a brand of identity politics based exclusively on religion. At the same time there is no denying that religious overtones have provided a visible overlay to the political problem. It is this *interface between politics and religion* that is the subject of the author's interest as she traces the impact of global Islam on politics in a land where Islam had, as she rightly points out, a completely different face.

Political and national questions acquire an added complexity in the case of the conflict in Kashmir where a bewildering range of identities have coalesced and conflicted over time. Two interlinked factors further complicate the question of identity and nationality. To begin with, the trajectory of the conflict has changed significantly from 1990 till date – new actors have emerged, controlled the armed conflict at some points in time and receded into the background, sometimes reemerging in a different form and shape. This along with the changing power equations between multiple stakeholders located in different power centres – Delhi, Islamabad, Srinagar, Muzaffarabad and now increasingly Jammu and Ladakh – has made the task of unraveling identity shifts within a

dynamic matrix of competing nationalisms in Jammu and Kashmir's armed conflict that much more difficult.

The author uses the partition of 1947 and the creation of Pakistan – as her point of departure for her analysis on Kashmir's current nationality and identity issues. As is well known, the partition of the subcontinent was based on the two nation theory popularized by Mohammad Ali Jinnah in which Hindus and Muslims were envisioned as two separate nations. Under the circumstances, for India the accession of Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim majority state, was and is seen as the acid test of its secular ideal of nationhood. For Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir as a part of India is a rejection of the two nation theory which forms the edifice of its own core identity as a nation state. At stake is not just contiguous Muslim majority territory between two states that have been locked in hostility for years, but also two opposing philosophies and ideologies.

The impact of the two nation paradigm could not be expected to leave the hearts and minds of the people of Jammu and Kashmir untouched, given its all pervasive influence in the psyche of state building in the subcontinent. A separate ethno-political consciousness has consequently always been a part of the Kashmiri population particularly among those who lived in the valley. The basic existential debate, as the author argues, continues. Should the Kashmiri be an Indian, a Pakistani or a Kashmiri? In this maelstrom of competing nationalisms which could not be divorced from the shadow of the two nation ideology (that formed the basis of partition), nationality and religion inevitably get intertwined. This explains why religion has provided at the very least a continuing subtext within which current identity politics in Kashmir can be located. Sometimes hovering in the background, at other times asserting its influence in a manner more manifest, the two nation theory has ensured that religion and religious identity remain intrinsically woven into the political fabric of the Kashmir conflict in some form or another.

If the historical formulation of the two nation ideology forms the subtext of the current nationality and identity issues in Jammu and Kashmir as Kishore suggests, there are several other factors at work that she identifies as having contributed to the overall leitmotif of grievance, injustice, tyranny and “loss of past glory” articulated primarily by the largely Sunni Muslim population of the valley, who have emerged as the strongest voice articulating the separatist identity. Unsurprisingly

these visions of the past helped the leadership construct a new identity for the Kashmiri at a time when he was oppressed by imperial and colonial rule, yet its impact over the years was instrumental in creating an insistent chimera of lofty and fantastic goals that ignored practicality and thereby often dismissed realistic and achievable targets.

Not the least of these factors are also the repeated promises made by the Indian state such as the promise of a plebiscite which is perceived to have been reneged upon and the constant interference by New Delhi in issues of governance in the state. This has promoted the belief that the Indian government and not the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir is the chief arbiter of Kashmir's destiny.

The sense of alienation is enhanced by the perception of the Indian government as creating a differential access system in the state as it assumes the role of both predator and protector depending on what suits its interests. Alpana Kishore draws our attention to the fact that the Indian state distributes both largesse as well as punishment, including armed reprisals to militant threats which can kill other non combatant population as well. Sometimes the killing (of non combatant civilians) is followed by awarding monetary compensation which is seen by the local population as a poor substitute for justice and only adds to the sense of indignation and alienation.

Owing to the pervasive presence of the Indian state represented in its most visible form by the stationed security forces, the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly those in the valley, have often not distinguished between the Indian state, the Indian army, the Indian government and the Indian people and directed their rage at an undifferentiated notion called "India." This has added to the mist of confusion. Within this space the *azadi* (independence) sentiment as articulated by the separatist elements represented primarily by the (non pastoral) Sunni Muslim population of the valley has failed to acquire a definite shape, form and coherence. Instead *azadi* has ended up meaning different things to different people. The separatist leadership which has also been changing and shifting as the levers of power moved from the local leaders to the foreign mercenaries at one point, appeared to be unwilling and unable to provide any clear cut answer as to what the people are expected to fight for and what that fight would actually entail. This lack of clarity in terms of envisioning the end picture and the heavy costs of armed combat has left a large segment of the

population beleaguered and most importantly fatigued at a war that never ends. The “silent fence sitting majority” to borrow the author’s phrase appears to be changing from within as shifting loyalties and identities and the pressures of modernization create constant dilemmas calling for crafting a different set of responses at different moments of the conflict.

The politics of identity has been further complicated by the mass exodus of the “ethnic twin” of the Kashmiri Muslim population of the valley – namely the Pandit (Hindu) population- in the 1990s. Here again the author sees the two nation theory emerge from the background and cast its shadow as the two communities have now put their shared identity on the backburner and sought identification with fellow religionists. This is again a defining moment that marked a shift in identity politics as thereafter a regional and religious sub identity gained ascendancy over a hitherto shared national and secular Kashmiri identity. The juxtaposition of individual bonds at the people to people level between members of the Muslim and Hindu communities in the valley was coupled with collective antagonisms that could not be papered over any longer. While it is impossible to pinpoint the exact causes of the collective antagonisms the author suggests some triggering factors such as the Pandits’ notions of superiority and their use of education as a power tool. The intertwining of individual ties and collective antagonism created a mosaic of diverse contradictory emotions that has been difficult to unravel till date.

The Hindu Right wing has been quick to capitalize on the fears and insecurities of the Pandit community after the terror and bitterness of the exodus. While the notion of “going back” is a sentiment that continues to resonate powerfully among the displaced population, it is now coupled with the realization that for a new generation brought up in the camps of Jammu, there is little economic and cultural stake in the valley any more. The task of determining shifting identities is currently further complicated by the fact that the undifferentiated separatist Kashmiri speaking voice in the valley since the insurgency began, can not be regarded as the whole picture and that there are numerous stakeholders now. Kishore also draws our attention to the fact that there are multiple points of view which include among others the pastoral community (Gujjars) and the Shias, some of whom are also the new beneficiaries of the state policy of reservation.

The politics of identity has been shaped not just by the majority-minority divide but also by a rural-urban divide that has deeply influenced how the population of the valley has viewed and reacted to militancy over the years. This is one of the most powerful themes of this monograph as it embarks on the ambitious journey of unravelling the different strands of identity politics that has propelled the trajectory of the armed conflict.

Kishore does not shy away from starkly gesturing towards the politics of deceit. The fact that urban Kashmir raised the slogans and the temperatures and then sent its children to safer places outside, while rural Kashmir bore the brunt end of the militancy losing its youth and its sources of life and livelihood bears evidence to this. This change in the character of the armed conflict as she points out appeared within the first two or three years when the leadership of the movement passed on from the local and urban centres to the rural based *Hizbul Mujahideen* and then on to the hands of the foreign mercenaries. The counterinsurgency operations of the Indian security forces that followed, involved setting up of a security grid across the state mapping every city and street. With the militants retreating from urban centres to the mountains and jungles the basic fabric of the movement was irrevocably altered. Kishore makes an important point as she graphically describes how rural Kashmir emerged as the epicentre of the conflict and the normal rhythms of life and home simply collapsed.

The home, once a place of refuge, now became a virtual prison which could be searched by Indian security forces at any time and where militants could seek food and refuge. The labourer, the low level government employee, the ex soldier were brutally attacked and Kishore evocatively reminds us of the plight of the “recruited” who had to follow a brutal inexorable path of no return – the foreign militant would kill him if he tried to leave, the Indian security forces would kill him if he did not. The isolated village hamlet, idealized and romanticized now emerged as “a place without escape.” Today the urban citizenry and its well travelled prosperous elites continue to articulate the sentiment of *azadi* in some form or another even as they stay away from its violent manifestation in the rural landscape.

The impact of education has also changed identities as new ambitions have surfaced and ushered in what Kishore describes as Kashmir’s great leap forward. The pulls and attractions of new jobs and new educational opportunities have created another set of identities especially for the younger generation.

In tracing the complex shifts in identity politics over time and interweaving this with the conflict narrative, in recreating the stark evocative images of violence and counter violence particularly in rural Kashmir, in exploring the changing space of the home and the community torn apart by violent conflict, Kishore has created for the reader a vivid tapestry of images that help capture the dilemmas of a beleaguered population as it seeks to interrogate old identities and construct new ones in an increasingly globalized world. The fractured and internally traumatized Kashmiri identity is constantly being challenged as it adapts to the changing situation and priorities of life. In tracing the intersection of politics with religion, and in its use of ethnographic research and interviews to interrogate these issues, the monograph breaks new ground by sketching the constant push and pull of conflicting identities over the years. It will be of use to readers interested in understanding the complex conflict in Kashmir as well as researchers who seek to gain a deeper insight into the complex web of identities that can generate and sustain low intensity conflicts.

The WISCOMP Team

Part – I

The Broad Picture:
An Overview

A Historical Framework

Identity and nationality have for long been at the periphery of political, military and diplomatic narratives that seek to explain the Kashmir conflict. In fact these two have been looked at in isolated ways that have not brought together the various explanations into a cohesive whole. Identity – at the very heart of this conflict – is the link that connects all the others. Its importance therefore is all the more crucial. Yet serious analysis and examination has been nominal at best.

Much of the story – but not all – of Kashmir’s current day nationality and identity issues begins with the Two Nation theory, Partition and the creation of Pakistan. It is these that have held a central place in its bank of mythology. It is these that gave the critical weight to the heightened religious identity of the Kashmiri Muslim and fused efficiently with his historic sentiment of injustice. It is these that provided a new communal framework to process events, put into place a distinctive set of beliefs and supplied the rhetoric. It is these that have contributed the maximum to his vacillating, unstable identity since – the critical factor in the non resolution of the conflict.

Isolation, insularity and past glory – The crucible of Kashmiri identity

To start with however the climatic and geographical isolation of the Kashmiri has bred a long time insularity that promotes a sense of community vis-a-vis the ‘other’. It has also magnified Kashmir’s Brahminical¹ and scholarly *past* – as glorious as other ancient communities – and the memory of Kashmir’s own medieval era Muslim rule² to a *larger than life* size and impact – visible in the enhanced manner in which the Kashmiri views himself today – as the heir to a

¹ Kashmir’s famous historian Kalhana traces its beginnings to Lord Krishna’s times. Ruled over by great emperors like Ashoka and Kanishka, it also became a decisive hub of Buddhism and Shaivism. Great architecture, medicine, ancient written histories and Kashmir’s indigenous ruler Lalitaditya who expanded his empire westward in the precious few years of triumph in an otherwise long saga of treachery, vice and decay are part of this ancient civilisation’s glorious lore of which the Kashmiri Brahmin (known as the Pandit or scholar) and his racial supremacy is the pivotal focus.

² The memory of this centres around Budshah – the great Sultan Zainal Abidin who in the fifteenth century ruled for fifty years and ushered in a golden era of active religious tolerance and stability. His rule is distinguished like Lalitaditya’s reign almost one thousand years before him, by its physical brevity in the long periods of Kashmiri history’s rot and decay but provided also, like it, an abiding and tenacious historical memory of imperial authority that could endlessly fuel the fervent Kashmiri aspiration for power – especially over others.

superior race. Similarly, it's very real *oppression* during the outsider Mughal, Afghan and Sikh rules or its secondary status during what could be called the 'insider-outsider'³ Dogra rule that bears similarity to that of many other colonised or feudal communities or regions; has been elevated to an *epic* status in a sort of suffering or injustice 'hierarchy' of colonised peoples. This has encouraged a feeling of aggressive entitlement right up to the present day.

These idioms of past glory and oppression were utilised and shaped by the Kashmiri leadership of the 1930s⁴ to impart a mass orientation to its anti imperialist struggle inspired and supported by the larger Indian struggle for Independence against the last Dogra regime by giving to the people their lost self respect in the years of alien rule. For this they created a fresh identity of towering proportion and fashioned a dazzling, somewhat unrealistic construct of nationhood⁵ aimed at a largely poor,

³ Mughal rule signalled the end of Kashmiri independence in 1586 but marked its absorption in to a larger world with economic stability, central administration, public works and religious tolerance. Its degeneration and collapse brought in the Afghan and Sikh rules after 150 years; remembered for barbaric cruelty and hard oppression respectively, the first especially against the Pandits, the second targeted especially at the Muslims. The Dogras who followed the Sikhs, were handed over Kashmir for Rs 75 lakhs as a reward for their fealty to the British whose manipulations created a new state of J&K out of diverse, remote, isolated, patchwork kingdoms like Gilgit, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh etc to control the region against Russian encroachment and influence. They would retain it till Independence in 1947. As part of this state patched together by the British, they were 'insiders' from Jammu but taken from the Kashmiri's view that prioritised himself as the only race that had the right to rule the state – they were 'outsiders'. Their rule, especially the initial periods did nothing to dispel this notion, characterised by tyranny, forced labour, misrule and discrimination but neither was it different in this sense from several in Kashmir's long, chaotic history where each ruling community whoever it happened to be took turns to repress and destroy rival communities, whoever *they* happened to be.

⁴ Sheikh Abdullah, one of the few educated Kashmiri Muslims who had graduated from Aligarh led a movement against the Dogra Maharaj Hari Singh to agitate for a greater say in administration and governance for Kashmiri Muslims who made up a significant proportion of the state but were banned from the military and denied official posts and state largesse in economic goodies like *jagirs* or lucrative trade licenses etc that went to the Dogras and/or the Pandits or even outsiders like Punjabis.

⁵ Abdullah reminded audiences that they were a scholarly, imperial race that had their own empires and annexed others' territories, exhorting them to bring back their lofty past. In doing so, he restored a terribly battered self esteem of an oppressed people who had been under the yoke of alien rule for centuries. Indeed as Lord Birdwood writes in his book, it would have been unnatural if he had not allowed his mind to "dwell on these tempting vistas of past history". But its effect was perhaps more adverse than favourable. It created an unhealthy, extravagant self importance in a small, uneducated, poor, downtrodden community who entertained grand visions of power and might when they had the means for achievement of, neither. This effect would propel them even 40 years later into a disastrous armed insurgency for whose sacrifices they were neither prepared nor equipped, despite their protestations to the contrary.

illiterate, oppressed peasant population in one part of the princely state – the Valley of Kashmir. Cut off from inaccessible areas (ruled by others of varying communities including the British) within its *own* designated territory, its isolation precluded any strong, unified or organised *state* identity.⁶ Consequently Kashmiri nationalism did *not* signify state nationalism. Rather, its rhetoric bolstered the notion of being at the top of a hierarchy, pre ordained by past greatness to rule over others.

These idioms have since passed on to succeeding generations. Bolstered by political power wielded since 1947 by the Kashmiri Muslim, they have become today, unbroken and unchallenged articles of faith. The Kashmir self perception therefore privileges this history, draws a sense of ‘specialness’ and entitlement from its narrative of subjugation and is unwilling to give the histories of ‘others’ an equal respect or attention. Curiously, therefore, both victimhood and ethnic supremacy vie for attention in this storytelling.

While this uncontested narrative includes the elements of the glorious, scholarly self ruled past and the grievance, or tyranny at the hands of others; missing⁷ from it is the understanding of the state’s larger geographical realities, its abundant diversity and numerous communities and the need for broad based consensus and power sharing with them based on modern concepts of equality and democracy – notwithstanding the leadership’s commitment to *other* modern concepts

⁶ Lord Birdwood in his book *Two Nations and Kashmir* described it in the mid fifties as a “mountainous country of no roads, whose isolated groups are conscious only of their own existence....”

⁷ Besides the Brahminical past, Abdullah’s powerful oratory swept his audiences, on the tidal wave of a dream of becoming Asia’s ‘Switzerland’ that would transform their small 120 km by 40 km Valley into the powerful core of a “nation”, “co-equal” to India and Pakistan, “a dazzling gem on the snowy bosom of Asia”. The careful appeal to racial superiority was part of the notion of aggressive parity that would then brook no doubts over comparative size, might or numbers since the Kashmiri’s self perceived brilliance would allegedly make up for any such disparity.

This was packaged *without* the realistic assessment of the neighbourhood surrounding Kashmir that Abdullah himself referred to in his opening address to the Constituent Assembly in 1951 when he said, “We have to consider the alternative of making ourselves as an Eastern Switzerland, of keeping aloof from both states....I would like to remind you that from August 15 to October 22, 1947 our state was independent and the result was that our weakness was exploited by the neighbour with invasion. What is the guarantee that in future too we may not be victims of a similar aggression?”

like a secular orientation for their struggle or its anti feudal land reform ideas.

Despite its modern day claim therefore, to represent the pre-'47 imperial state cobbled together by the British and the Dogra rulers including regions afar in Pakistan held Kashmir or Jammu/Ladakh; Kashmiri identity has no core, central belief beyond its geographically bred insularity – the Valley is the beginning and the end of it.

Its notion of superiority over other non Kashmiri communities like Gujjars, Pahadis etc *within* the Valley also precludes their inclusion in this core identity as social equals or partners worthy of sharing power with. In fact they have no place in its narrative.⁸ In the end, today's stridently voiced Kashmiri identity stands *only* for the Kashmiri Sunni Muslim identity, no matter what else or who else it claims to represent. The result has been a highly developed yet equally limited self perception expressed by a tightly defined identity.

The Amarnath land row⁹ was a prototype of this limited self perception. Lukewarm to the idea of broadening the confined vision of his land, the Kashmiri Sunni Muslim is reluctant to yield religious, cultural or physical space in the Valley to the 'other' unless controlled and shaped

⁸ By the early '50s, Abdullah had narrowed his focus of independence to the Kashmiri Muslims despite his secular vision because both the Ladakhi Buddhists and Jammu Hindus who made up half the state's population made it clear they were unwilling to be part of this vision and indeed wanted full integration with the Indian Union. See Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir*, p 113. Additionally he envisaged economic cooperation from both India and Pakistan and a guarantee from the US, UK and UN for this independent state. See David Devadas, *In Search of a Future: the Story of Kashmir*.

⁹ The Amarnath agitation of August 2008 centred around the allotment of a few 100 acres of land in South Kashmir by the government to the Amarnath Shrine Board based in Jammu for the building of certain conveniences for Hindu pilgrims en route the arduous pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave in Kashmir's upper regions. The People's Democratic Party, then in coalition with the ruling Congress, led the agitation that snowballed into a giant communal controversy over dangers to Kashmir's identity by the 'conspiracy' of Hindu bureaucrats to allegedly allot land to 'outsiders' surreptitiously that would lead to an erosion of Kashmiri sovereignty. The PDP led frenzied street protests fuelled by them that raged in the urban centres, led to the killing of protestors and, the downfall of the Congress government and the revocation of the allotment order that had been passed by the Assembly two years earlier. This led to a massive reaction in Jammu, always chafing under what it called Kashmiri discrimination in state resources, that quickly attracted Hindu right wing interest; that agitated for the permanent reinstatement of the order allotting land allotment and threatened to blockade supplies to Kashmir which in turn ignited further hysteria.

by *him* in the manner *he* sees fit¹⁰. Therefore the other four constituents in the envisioned ideal of the J&K “nation” cannot aspire to equal access or control when it comes to the sacrosanct Valley – the very core of the tightly defined Kashmiri identity. This then unravels a key notion of *azaadi* – the idea of ‘one nation’ taken from the 19th century kingdom patched together with divergent regions and communities, some of whom could outnumber the Kashmiris.

This also forms the big hole in separatist Kashmiri nationalism. Ethnic or religious identities like the Pahadis, Gujjars, Dogras and other Hindus, Buddhists, Gilgitis, Baltis etc all make up the old imperial state that Kashmiri nationalism stakes a claim to and assumes an entitlement over, to rule or lead. They will all be a part of the ‘final settlement’ whenever it is made. Yet, the insular Kashmiri, short sightedly, does not envisage them to be equals or offer any part in the leadership stakes.

Therefore, not only is the articulation and imagery of the *azaadi* ideal Kashmiri Sunni Muslim centric, it’s very base is the primacy accorded to him in the scheme of things. It is his history that is prioritised as the long oppressed ‘nation’ yearning for political empowerment and his entitlement that is highlighted. It is his anti imperialist struggle against a different ethnic and religious monarchy – the Dogras – that has provided the powerful impetus for this identity creation and its future sustenance. It is his tightly defined perception of *himself* as the first entitled heir to this construct of nationhood that slots the Dogras as ‘alien’, even though they belong to the original J&K state configuration that the *azaadi* ideal claims as ultimate objective (notwithstanding the inherent contradiction of the reality of their imperial rule over Kashmiris).

Ironically, the intellectual edifice of this new-found Kashmiri identity built upon pleasing historic memories was first provided by the minority Kashmiri Pandits steeped in the Brahminical mindset of their glorious scholarly past who believed they would retain their elite position in any

¹⁰ In all this, a simple fact was bypassed. The Shrine Board as a state entity had full freedom to get land allotted from the government in Kashmir or simply buy it as a state subject just as Kashmiris can and do buy land in Jammu. The legal interpretation of ‘outsider state subject’ as defined in Article 370 pertains to *all those* outside the state of J&K not those *within* it. Yet the PDP’s rhetoric chose to portray the Board as an ‘outsider’ that it was willing to *lease* land to under stringent conditions (temporary, seasonal construction, knowledge of imposition of conditions upon members on the Board etc) but was not under any circumstances willing to permanently *allot* as this would lead to an alleged erosion of Kashmiri sovereignty and identity, since some of its members were non state subjects.

new dispensation even after the overthrow of ‘outsider’ Dogra rule. Yet its *application* and its *impact* was felt most by the Kashmiri Muslim. The benefits or ruling privileges that would accord from such an identity would also accrue basically to him. The state’s post Partition division simply reinforced this tendency as his primary non-Kashmiri, Muslim rivals (i.e. the Pahadi/Punjabi speaking population)¹¹ that *could* challenge this dream were mostly removed from the picture by the 1948 war and ceasefire that made them part of Pakistan administered Kashmir.

What this new identity then created was a supercharged “yearning for sovereignty as a long suppressed people”. This promoted a real, deeply felt desire to articulate it in the form of political empowerment and an independent agenda that would make Kashmir an “entity of consequence”. Yet while appealing to the Kashmiri Muslim’s insularity and natural desire for self rule after an eon of oppression, this very narrow identity carried innate discord with its stated goals of secularism and regional equality as outlined by its anti imperialist leadership in the 1930s. The sovereignty notion progressively narrowed over the years and emerged by the time of the armed conflict, as one of which only the Kashmiri Sunni Muslim would be the real inheritor.

The role of special conditions – Cementing the new identity

The special conditions and the accession drama of two nations fighting over the Valley *solidified* this privileged identity into an article of faith especially *vis-a-vis* India. Going with Pakistan would mean a dilution of the Valley centric nature of this new political identity created around racial and imperial legacies of the past and forged in the fire of anti imperialism. Pakistan offered no special concessions, in fact, clarified that there would be none as all Muslims were equal, making the fear of Punjabi Muslim¹² domination very real. To a political leadership and monarchy both toying with the idea of independence, one imbued with fulfilling a destiny of historical greatness, the other desperately trying to

¹¹ The Pahadis in Indian administered Kashmir believe the Kashmiris tricked them out of power that would have been theirs in an undivided J&K state by manipulating the ceasefire line in 1948 so that *they* would be the majority in the new, carefully divided state. Interviews conducted by author at Tangdar in October 2007.

¹² Punjabis dominated government posts along with Dogras and Kashmiri Pandits in the pre 1947 monarchy – a situation that led to the demand for “state jobs for state subjects”. Historical memories of the Mughal, Afghan and Sikh rules also remained strong. To a just rebuilt newly strengthened Kashmiri identity – this threat was a key deterrent to accession to Pakistan.

retain his empire, India's deal with the possibility of unique terms¹³ looked ideal and therefore persuaded Muslim Kashmir to sign on in the belief that these would protect its ethnic identity and give it the power it yearned for in the form of an almost – independence. Decisions made in 1947 therefore *seemed* to reject the logic of the Two Nation theory – Kashmir's accession to India, its decisive nod to secular intentions, its rebuff of Jinnah's overtures, and later, the tribal raiders etc.

But actually these just fitted into the communal paradigm laid out by the Two Nation theory. Its logic implied that once a country *existed* for Muslims, its opposite must exist basically for 'Hindus' – an opposing 'other'. If this was so, then the accession of a Muslim majority state in to a 'Hindu' country was seen as an exception – possibly by both sides – and the deeply influential (at the time) western powers. The perception deepened that Kashmir got special terms *because* it was the 'exceptional' Muslim majority, going *against* its 'natural' choice (according to the Two Nation paradigm) *not* because it pro actively chose, in the normal scheme of things to be with a country it wanted to belong to. The erosion of these terms later then, would force the obvious Two Nation inspired conclusion – that Hindu majority India was discriminating against Muslim Kashmir because it was *Muslim* rather than making ham fisted, blundering attempts to draw it into the mainstream or control firstly, the separatist lure of Pakistan that had started to look threatening almost immediately after the accession and secondly, the Kashmiri leadership's own ambitions that had sharply accelerated after the powerful legitimacy it had acquired post 1947 with the removal of the monarchy and the neat division of the state that accentuated the position of Kashmiris as numerical majority.

In fact the understanding of the role these terms would play was mismatched from the start. The tribal invasion by Pakistan resulted in a hurried accession which stated that India committed to its ratification

¹³ The accession deal India signed with the princely state was the same as the one it signed with all princely states. It had three areas that would clearly belong to the Centre – Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. Yet the hurried accession signed in the midst of the tribal invasion in 1947, allowed the Maharaja to insert several clauses that would become the core of the mistrust between Srinagar and Delhi. They specified that J&K would be governed by its own state law, not Indian law and Constitution and that no land could be acquired by the Dominion without the express intervention of the state. It was these clauses that the Kashmiri leadership ferociously guarded. When questions arose on this "discrimination" in favour of J&K in the Constituent Assembly in 1949, a drafting committee member replied that the government hoped "that in due course even Jammu & Kashmir will become ripe for the same sort of integration as has taken place in the case of other states." See M.J. Akbar: Kashmir, Behind the Vale p. 136.

by the people of the state once the state was reunited. This accession underlined the supremacy of the princely state's own laws. While the Indian leadership possibly saw these concessions (not given to any other princely state) as *incentives* to win over the Kashmiris that would decline in importance as they got absorbed in the mainstream; Kashmiris saw them as non negotiable absolutes, *conditional* to their future with Hindu majority India¹⁴. It was how the leadership sold them to the populace who then had no real need to identify more closely with a larger Indian identity.

Its *self* image then became that of a cosseted, special community that the international community coveted for its strategic importance and one that both India and Pakistan fought bitter battles over. This notion of 'specialness' pervaded all its dealings and interactions, translating into a sense of ethnic and historical 'superiority' often articulated in the overused cliché of two grooms fighting over a beautiful bride. It also led to inflated expectations that resulted in inevitable setbacks. To the ordinary Kashmiri bred on these expectations, the setbacks became crushing "humiliations" that denied him honour and dignity and turned into important building blocks for his leadership to rouse public sentiment and take it further on the path of the 'historic injustice' motif.

The 1947 legacy: Communal filters and two nation 'truths'

The Two Nation legacy also powerfully shaped the entire process of Kashmiri nationalism and identity. After Partition,

- The *fact* of Pakistan's existence as a nation,
- Its claim to Kashmir and
- The wars fought to conclude 'unfinished business' were Two Nation '*truths*' that exerted a powerful influence. They gave the Kashmiris a dangling sense of *choice* – officially stamped by the actual UN promise of plebiscite in 1948.

This choice was notionally defined in terms of shared *religion*. Few Kashmiris felt a sense of shared *regional* destiny with Pakistani

¹⁴ Since the plebiscite could only be held as per UN terms in the full state once it had been cleared of the invaders and law and order restored; and half the state was in the hands of the Pakistani aggressors, it was thought wise to ratify the accession to India through the state's own Constituent Assembly. Nehru thought the Assembly would ratify more integrationist terms than the Maharaja had signed and regarded Article 370 as a temporary provision, Abdullah thought it would reduce terms even further and envisaged "complete internal sovereignty".

communities like the Punjabis, Pathans or even their ‘own’¹⁵ like Baltis, Gilgitis etc in the Pakistani half of Kashmir. But the currents of Islamic consciousness and Muslim nationhood were strengthened by these Two Nation ‘truths’ over the decades. They also heightened the sense of *self* in religious terms, processing long time class and power issues with Dogra rulers and Kashmiri Pandits – the traditional elites of the feudal, monarchical state – and later political issues with India – through a *sharper religious filter*. While the largely peasant population was receptive to religious constructs and mythology, it could hardly have had the sophisticated understanding of concepts like secularism, democracy etc needed to explain fully the accession to India once it came under a cloud. Though Abdullah repeatedly referred to these concepts initially, he was disinclined to explain them when he himself switched focus later to securing independence by leveraging both India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile Pakistan’s Two Nation theory – always hovering in the Kashmiri mind space since 1947; claimed Kashmir as a ‘right’, taught them that Muslim identity was supreme, that coexistence was a falsehood and that discrimination would be their natural lot if they stayed with a Hindu majority India. This not only promoted a highly insular and suspicious mindset towards accommodation with the ‘other’ – aggravating a historical trait, it also fuelled exaggerated and unrealistic hopes of Pakistan as a Muslim brother and white knight.

Emotional ambiguity and constructed imagery

Therefore, Punjabi speaking Muzaffarabad (in Pakistan held Kashmir) may never have been the heart of Kashmir as Srinagar was, historically, culturally and in every way but the barrier of borders promoted a yearning amongst many sections – a sense of *real* destiny lying elsewhere, and the notion of a more advanced, developed *jannat* just across. Its heroes were their heroes, their Muslim identity giving them a brave heart like flair the Indians could never manage so that the

¹⁵ As outlined earlier there was little contact between various isolated parts of the J&K imperial state divided by language, race and religion. Hardly any Kashmiris for example, had ventured or nurtured close ties with Gilgitis or Baltis – or even Ladakhis for that matter, those in the Northern Areas had no idea of communities in Jammu etc. As such, there were no sentiments of *regional* brotherhood uniting the state and no real post Partition divided communities (certainly not the Kashmiris) that “yearned” for unification – as usually portrayed in the western press quoting the separatist view of events. Except for those uprooted in the Partition violence in Jammu and Mirpur who crossed over according to their religious identities to India or Pakistan respectively, those who migrated because of their ideological orientation like the leaders of the Muslim Conference or a limited number of Pahadi and nomadic Gujjar communities caught on the actual ceasefire line, most communities were left intact and whole in the separate parts of the state.

Kashmiri Muslim's sense of belonging to India was never strong enough for a full *emotional* commitment.

Altaf Malik,¹⁶ a Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) supporter from an old National Conference (NC) family says, "I remember my father with tears whenever he would see that photograph of (Pakistani General) Niazi signing the surrender document (in the Indo Pak 1971 war). It was only later I found out about the butchery of (Pakistani) General Tikka Khan in East Pakistan (who played a key role in the killings of Bengali civilians). In school, there was this poem going around about a plane that came from Pakistan, bombed the airport –

*Dal Maz tulnai Khilvathra
Tehtos likhit Ya Allah*

– and on the way back, the pilot nosedived into the Dal Lake, picked up a lotus leaf and on it was inscribed *Ya Allah!!!* All of us were thrilled by this story – Oh look at that pilot – he's so daring! – *that* was our reaction."

It also helped create an image of Pakistan as a complicated mix of option, ideal, saviour and almost-within-reach ultimate homeland. Therefore, though India's crimes were political, though Kashmiris may say even now that Islam was never in danger in their Valley, though the Indian Army lived happily among locals pre 1989 without any allegations and though the Kashmiri could freely travel through India, work in any part of it or avail of his specially subsidized 50 paise a kilo rice – India could never command the *popular imagination* of the Kashmiri Muslim.

He was not anti Indian *as much as* he was in a constant process of weighing options, crippled by an overbearing, never ending choice, (exacerbated further by the lure of a mythical independence dangled by his leadership). India may have been a strong contender for his affections but had to vie with a rival that had a competitive advantage of religion it could never possess. As journalist Ashiq Malik puts it, "It wasn't anti India, it was pro Pak." The poet Mahjur – the voice of Kashmir, described its conundrum best in a much quoted line:

*Zu Jaan vandaha Hindustan as
Dil chhum Pakistanas saat*

"I would give my life to India, But for my heart which beats for Pakistan."

¹⁶ In an interview with author, part of nearly 300, conducted on identity and nationality issues between 2006 and 2008, in various parts of Jammu & Kashmir specifically for this project.

Swinging identity: The inability to stabilise

The Kashmiri identity was thus placed in a situation of continuing and relentless nationality choices – Indian or Pakistani – and began its erratic dance of wild swings from one side to the other. The old rump of the Muslim Conference¹⁷ that favoured Pakistan had its sections of support and the Kashmiri leadership had to keep these in check by gestures and directives that appeased their concerns but sent out mixed signals to the other communities.

The ambiguous leadership was also suspicious of newly independent India's intent towards Muslims, unwilling to give it space and time to sort its gargantuan problems after Partition¹⁸. Gunning in the short term for total independence and flirting relentlessly with keenly interested international powers¹⁹ to achieve this; it perhaps misjudged India's will to prevent secession.

¹⁷ After the Muslim Conference was transformed into the secular, broad based National Conference in 1939, one section that believed in its Muslim-first identity and merger with Pakistan regrouped under the original name in 1941. Its leadership and following was from the Jammu Muslims and most of it ultimately settled in Pakistan but its followers in the Valley included wealthy orchard owners upset by Abdullah's communist influences and his radical land reform programs as well as the conservative religious elites led by Yusuf Shah, the granduncle of the present Mirwaiz Umer Farooq that looked upon Abdullah's secular ways, Sufistic followers and liberal beliefs as threatening and blasphemous.

¹⁸ The land reforms of the National Conference implemented immediately granted no compensation to the Dogra landlords who owned most of the land as grants from the feudal monarchy. The loss of Empire followed so soon by the loss of economic power aroused a powerful anger in the Jammu Dogras who formed the Praja Parishad that was behind the agitation against the special terms of Kashmir's accession and Abdullah's secessionist efforts. The snowballing of these events at the national level played a critical role according to Balraj Puri (various works) in taking Abdullah further down the path of communal mistrust and suspicion against Delhi and his accelerated flirtations with foreign powers for the independence of Kashmir which in turn raised mistrust and suspicions against him.

¹⁹ By 1949 itself Abdullah had started seriously pursuing the possibility of Independence with the help of foreign powers. Meetings with US ambassadors, UN representatives centred around this till Nehru could hardly ignore the signals coming his way of a separate state challenging Indian sovereignty. Abdullah's famous speech at Ransbirsinghpura in Jammu 1952, rejected the application of the Indian Constitution to J&K as "lunacy" and warned of the dangers of Hindu communalism in India that might necessitate that Kashmiris be prepared for "any" situation. Ambivalent expressions that were articulated according to the audience in front of him and stances that contradicted his position for the last decade and a half; characterised the years before his arrest finally in Srinagar, after a long meeting with US Secretary of State Adlai Stevenson that set the state afire with rumours of Kashmir's impending Independence. After his release in 1964 he met Chou En Lai and the Pakistani leaders in this continuing bid much to Delhi's irritation and was rearrested later.

It stirred and subdued public sentiment in insistent, turbulent oscillations by rousing speeches, emotional hysteria and the fear of the 'other' as seen through the Two Nation filter. It played one country against the other in rallies, meets and statements, giving contradictory cues, sometimes embracing, sometimes denying Kashmir's link with India. It hammered in its independent identity, provoking fears about the threat of the Hindu right wing, the need for a separate state etc.

While this strategy may have given it the necessary 'trump cards' to deal with the Centre's gradually tightening authority over the state, it played havoc with the simple, religious, peasant Kashmiri. The fears expressed by his leadership tapped into deep, insular, historic anxieties of alien rule and domination. Unable to trust anyone, never quite sure where he truly belonged, he shrank his identity to the old, insular, comforting limits of the Valley, unwilling to expand it in the spontaneous ways that Nehru hoped for, to the broader space of an Indian identity. Nor could the 'natural' appeal of a religious construct next door ever really gain the critical mass needed to *fully* identify with Pakistan – a factor in the Kashmiri passivity during the '65 and '71 wars. Yet neither could it ever be *diminished* or consigned to irrelevance.

The Kashmiri therefore remained unwilling to fully commit to bigger constructs beyond his basic Valley-centric identity that demanded allegiance on nationalistic or religious grounds. But he was also open and subject to being mentally yanked *without* true commitment, by whichever side pulled the cord. These contradictory strands in a largely uneducated populace created an unstable, inconsistent, confused identity susceptible to *any* forceful rhetoric in the name of religion or insecurity from the 'other'.

Secondly, after the UN resolution of 1948, the authoritative steps taken by New Delhi after 1953²⁰ and the formation of the Plebiscite Front

²⁰ The Delhi Agreement of 1952 allowed the continuation of special rights for state subjects, Kashmir's own flag (that would not be supreme to the tricolour), limited jurisdiction for the Supreme Court and the state appointed governor's assumption of office only after the consent of the President of India. After Abdullah's arrest, the process of integration continued relentlessly, extending Supreme Court jurisdiction, removing the titles of Sadr e Riyasat, making Governor's Rule and dissolution of the Assembly possible without the consent of the State etc. It was not these integratory mechanisms imposed that were essentially flawed – it was the manner in which they were bulldozed through by those perceived as 'agents' of Delhi, who managed to alienate the Kashmiri population even further. Rather than affirming the salutary effects that they could bring about, they were seen as the tightening noose around Kashmiri aspirations.

that vowed to fight for the dream of an independent state, leadership cues suggested to Kashmiris that nothing was final and there was ‘more’ – a situation that completely destroyed any possibility of allowing his identity to stabilise.

The Indian ‘betrayal’ – The final component of Kashmiri identity

The geostrategic conditions of war, the trauma of a recent Partition, its million deaths and population exchanges, a fragile Hindu-Muslim consensus and a hostile, Muslim neighbour notwithstanding; the Indian government’s fear of another split based on religious identity soon after Partition and the enormously biased international climate it faced at the time that looked upon Kashmir covetously in strategic terms; fashioned its hard line response. Its repeated erosions of promises (always seen as a temporary sweetener that would eventually melt away) made at the time of Kashmir’s accession – that sought to tighten the central grip over a wayward province threatening to break away – were instrumental in adding yet another layer of isolation and mistrust of the ‘other’ in the Kashmiri’s already deep rooted and insular identity. Most searing in its indictment of India even today, is the trauma of being dangled a dream of that very sovereignty it had defined for itself in the 1930s and then watching its immediate destruction by the exact *prototype* of high handed ‘alien’ rulers it had internalised as “oppressive” in its history.

Kashmir’s leaders were installed or removed after the Sheikh’s arrest on suspicion of secessionist intentions in 1953, they agreed to chip away at its “sovereign” powers as granted in 1947-52 till little remained of their original form, central institutions were steadily granted greater jurisdiction in the state, its autonomy was restricted by an overarching Central authority etc. Many of these political laws brought Kashmir simply to the level of other ‘ordinary’ states in the federation that accepted a higher central authority, leaving intact several other laws that protected its land and unique cultural heritage. Yet given its Brahminical sense of history, its inflated expectations of ‘specialness’, it was inevitable that these ‘betrayals’ would shape identity with even greater impact.

India’s installation of strong leaders after 1953 too, was unable to give ordinary Kashmiris the sense that they were in charge of their own

destiny even *within* a more cohesive arrangement with the Centre²¹. While initially it could possibly be argued that these were necessary in the national interest to prevent the challenge to the Union, the Indira Gandhi period was simply a repressive and unjust exercise in humiliation of the state and trampling of its sense of dignity and self esteem *after* it had reached a reasonable level of adjustment to new realities in the subcontinent. By then unseating its popular leaders, installing deeply unpopular puppet rulers and contemptuously undermining its political freedom, it aroused the Kashmiri's deepest historical anxieties and anger about the repetition of 'occupation' forces and 'alien' rule.

By these actions India portrayed itself as Big Brother – as one who could authoritatively shape and mould Kashmiri destiny by its ruthless actions - and the Kashmiri identity internalised this definition of it. By its policy of piling concessions and 'packages' for Kashmir to soothe its angry political grievance, India's image became that of a monolithic, Central superstructure from which 'concessions' had to be extracted – a Big Brother who would dispense wealth and punishment in equal measure. Many of its representatives – whether Kashmiri Pandits or bureaucrats from Central services – would command the power few locals could have.

This image merged with the essentially feudal construct of India as seen by a predominantly agrarian population, where land had not yet necessitated the need to adapt to a more modern society or practice. As a populace not yet fully cognisant of democratic tradition, it could not identify with the notion of India as a federation where each unit could contribute its own weight. Nor was it realistically such a federation in the first three decades after Independence. India therefore became a monolith – and in the light of eroded promises, was sold by the leadership as such – no different from the earlier oppressive imperial rulers.

This monolithic image became such a key building block of the DNA of Kashmiri identity that by the time things changed and regional parties

²¹ Bakshi and Sadiq, the two chief ministers placed on the hot seat after Abdullah's removal remained committed to the state's integration with the Union but their coercive actions to ram through the legislations (perhaps because of their failure to attract a sizeable section to go along with them), their establishment as state leaders using Delhi's strength and use of corruption as a tool to further the Central agenda and keep the Kashmiris acquiescent, boomeranged on the Indian state; producing further alienation instead of integration.

became worthy coalition partners at the Centre and underprivileged communities like OBCs and dalits started commanding key electoral spaces, Kashmir was already deep in its armed conflict. It would be this very notion that prevented Kashmiri leadership from differentiating the Indian people from the Indian government, led them to forge an anti Indian articulation that expressed hostility and contempt for *Indians*, vitiated the atmosphere and opened a vast space for communally charged Pakistani paradigms to take over the key notions of its struggle.

The Armed Conflict 1989 onwards

Wavering identity and imprecise *azaadi* notions

The legacy of ambiguity and indecision shaped the portrayal of the three players at the start of the armed conflict in 1989 in crucial ways by creating roles for all involved. India became slotted as the colonising ‘Hindu’ government or the ‘natural’ anti Muslim player in the drama, its political lapses merely evidence of its ‘anti Islamic’ nature. Kashmir became the oppressed Muslim ‘sufferer’ fighting against democratic injustice by yet another colonising non-Muslim power. Pakistan was positioned as a natural ‘brother’ while the notion of Muslim brotherhood had already proved itself in earlier wars that Pakistan fought ‘for’ Kashmir.

But perhaps the most powerful impact of this wavering identity was the *imprecise* role assigned to *azaadi* itself. Its leaders were unable to define clearly what this ideal meant and why it was crucial for the Kashmiri people. This lack of clarity had dangerous implications. Firstly, it allowed space to Pakistan to control *its* movement. The willing Kashmiri hence cast the staggering aspirations his leadership had exhorted him to believe over 40 years, into the shape that Pakistan created for him based on the tenets of *its* own Two Nation theory. Schooled by Pakistan, he therefore disengaged the Kashmiri Pandit first from this new Kashmiri identity that powered the armed struggle.

Hence, though the armed struggle was positioned and derived legitimacy nationally and globally, as an *ethnic/regional* one, fighting for political rights against an ‘unlawful occupying’ power, it had a *religious* configuration, sense and motivation at the very start. “It *started* off as a Muslim struggle – a totally wrong start,” says Farooq Bhat, a senior government official. “Removing Pandits was suicidal (for the cause of *azaadi*).” The lack of echo in Pakistan administered Kashmir where no democracy existed at all belied its moral high ground on India’s democratic lapses.

Secondly, it allowed space for the infrastructure of radical Islam to flourish in the Valley that distorted any movement that might have truly existed for Kashmiri identity – and that overwhelms it today. In the face of this guilt inducing onslaught that told Kashmiris they were not ‘real’ Muslims, a fearsome, threatening foreign militancy and

a strong community bias towards social sanction - individual dissent was almost impossible. The Kashmiri thus shrank back into his evasive, protective, basic identity, becoming almost incidental to his own struggle, now just another Islamic conflict zone for *jehadis* to wage battle.

Today his cultural heritage or true identity is devalued and deprioritised, even as separatists battle for the political value of the legal instruments that were created to protect it. A section of his younger generation buys into the *jehadi* rhetoric and has contempt for its own local culture. It considers its Kashmiri identity as second rate and far less relevant than its Islamic identity. It has no space for the 'other' and barely any for its 'own' that might still follow old ways of life.

The separatist leadership therefore, has been a major factor in this wavering identity and imprecise *azaadi*. It has taken a short term view at every step of the armed conflict, starting with the decision for armed struggle in the belief of a quick *azaadi*. It has miscalculated the response of both its mentor Pakistan and its adversary India²². Its fuzzy, contradictory goals, its short term vision and injudiciousness have led the Kashmiri people into an undefined, confused struggle, unprepared for the sacrifices or long haul ahead, unable to identify exactly what it is they are fighting for, what they will lose and gain in such a battle etc²³. This has kept their identities fluctuating, encouraged them to think in narrow terms, roused them to extreme passions and a competitive hysteria and deliberately obfuscated issues.

²² Led to think that Pakistan would fight a war on its behalf, the separatist leadership rushed in to an ill prepared insurgency against India egged on by the Pakistani articulation that the fighting would be all over in a few weeks once the cowardly Hindu Army wilted under the onslaught of the aggressive Islamic warriors. Instead poorly trained Kashmiri youngsters barely able to throw a grenade took on a 150 year old professional Army with the expected results even as their society expecting a quick victory, initially goaded them on by extolling them as *mujahids* and martyrs.

²³ The Kashmiri still doesn't know whether he will join Pakistan or be Independent or be part of a secular dispensation or a communal Islamist one. He has no idea of what this independent state will include since Jammu and Ladakh are vehemently against his visions and even Gilgit and Baltistan have shown no desire to be part of his Kashmiri centric rule. Beyond vague, dreamy references to the 'Asian Switzerland', he has not been told in hard, detailed terms how he will exist economically as a land locked state surrounded by interested powers, how he will defend himself against their overwhelming might or those of non state actors like the Taliban and how he will acquire leadership of a theoretically united J&K state when he will be numerically outnumbered once it unites.

More importantly, it has created and kept alive old isolationist, unchanging idioms like ‘past glory’ and ‘monolithic India’ even when times have changed. By its chronic revisitation of these essentially dated constructs, the leadership keeps the privileging of Kashmiri history alive, not allowing newer generations to escape its oppressive burden, rather egging them on relentlessly to live up to its constructed ‘expectations’.

By remaining suspicious of ‘betrayal’ and ‘humiliation’ trapped in this old paradigm, it has been missing the momentum of not just development but of its own younger generations that have different objectives and motivations. By keeping this generation tied up with its frenzied, narrow agenda it keeps it out of step with global trends towards broader identities – a void, it is keenly and despairingly conscious of, worried about missing the opportunities that other states have grabbed.

Controlling the identity swings, moving towards a stability – of sorts

Yet despite this poor leadership, the Kashmiri identity *has* moved towards stability through the years of violence on its own and especially through the years of peace. During the 90s, violence levels were too high for any real commitment to anything except survival. But in the years since 2002, various factors like representative government, peace process and the comfortable dominance of the armed forces²⁴ have combined to give the Kashmiri a respite from the daily, doorstep conflict and improved conditions drastically.

Yet as the Amarnath controversy showed, separatist sentiment can get centre stage billing within days, highlighting and recalling the ugly hostilities of the early 90s and the runaway pro Pakistan street sentiment. In accordance with the Kashmiri’s recent past, this is a consistent expression of his chronic, vacillating identity, subject to the dominant force prevailing. It is a *valid* indicator of how much the *jehadi* element controls the expression and articulation of Kashmiri ‘nationalist’ sentiment. It is *also* an indicator of just how much the Centre’s defensive paralysis after its democratic blunders, its terrible failure to rebut frenzied separatist paradigms and explain the idea of India – has in fact been *as critical an element* as the unclear *azaadi* ideal in the continuing wavering of the Kashmiri identity.

²⁴ See chapter on Rural Kashmir about how the *currently* comfortable dominance of armed forces has helped peace and governance reassert themselves.

The Amarnath controversy is however, *not* a valid indicator of how much society has stabilised or changed during the years of peace. These years of peace have cooled temperatures, allowed space for invaluable, daily, normal life and given people space to think. More importantly, they have revealed the limits of Kashmiri fantasy, forcing people to concede realities they have not been keen to believe for almost 60 years. For example, that it will be difficult to get the exact *azaadi* that their leadership imagined for them and propelled them to violence for, that Pakistan is a fragile nation state that cannot be relied upon and that India has wider alternatives to offer.

These realities have also exposed the limits of a swinging identity. As more people have crossed the Valley's traditional isolation to school in far away parts of India and as new nationwide job options have opened up, this swinging identity is shifting in multiple ways and even stabilising in some. Governance and administration and the link between these and democratically elected governments, has been responsible too for these very concepts slowly registering quiet progress post 2002 – thus filling the gaps in the uncontested narrative of identity inherited by the Kashmiri from his 1947 leadership and shaping it in ways far more open to current realities. One example is the gradual realisation of the necessity of working together with non Kashmiri Muslim constituents of the state.

The key element of these subtle shifts is the hesitant ability to make up one's *own* mind in a vastly insular, collective society that has usually followed its leadership unquestioningly. Some of this individualist opinion making is in the *Islamist* direction where children, seduced by *jehadi* worldviews are alienated from traditional shrine going parents.

But some of it *also* separates religion from Pakistan, tries to understand the nature of the nation state and questions the quality of this vacillating identity thrust on it by its leadership²⁵. In this, Kashmiri identity is challenging old paradigms and inching closer to some sort of resting place. Yet this process is a slow one, encompassing mostly but not only, the more educated and younger sections of the population.

It is handicapped by the fear of losing social sanction – so critical to Kashmiri (and/or Islamic) society – that holds community opinion as a

²⁵ See chapter on Rural Kashmir for stabilizing of identity and hesitant assertions of independent thinking

central pillar. It is certainly not one that will show its hand in public. However it *is* one in which the silent fence sitting majority is being subtly changed from within. While outwardly the spectacle may be still loud, ostentatious and aggressively separatist, inwardly, the years of peace, democracy and education seen by a new generation not as wedded to the *azaadi* ideal as before, have changed identities *within*, in crucial subtle ways. In fact its leadership caught up in the paradigm of conflict for sixty years has mined neither its secret yearning for order, progress and quality guidance nor its abhorrence for the hysteria of protest that the leadership compels it to show.

This slowing down is certainly formulating new paradigms of Kashmiri identity. Yet this just-shaping-up identity is highly fragile at the moment, needs mentoring and support and a more sustained period of peace and normalcy to consolidate – a space that it may not be allowed if the leadership takes it continually in directions of instability and frenzied demands.

Indian interlocutors of Kashmir too have shown a crushing inability to provide that guidance or clarity and sell the idea of India as a participative whole effectively²⁶. Neither have they retooled force levels or their anti militancy stance in the Valley to suit more peaceful times. This systemic reluctance has led to the same outbreaks of hysteria driven protest over periodic episodes of violations that trigger the old prolonged cycle of upheaval and hamper daily governance and the return to at least a basic normalcy (even in the absence of a final resolution to the conflict).

The space blindly given away to radical Islam by Kashmir's ever changing and undefined notions of *azaadi* will also clash with this fragile, consolidating identity and it remains to be seen which of the nascent identities finally distinguish the next generation Kashmiri. If neither of the two (Islamist or vacillating-separatist) is challenged or adapted, the Kashmiri may well see himself carried away on a tide of vague and imprecise *azaadi* that he never asked for but was compelled to go along with.

²⁶ There is no large scale, consolidated effort to sell the idea of India as a participative whole with space for diverse communities, nor to explain India's version of the Kashmir dispute or answer the many accusations leveled against it by the separatist leadership. As a result the separatist paradigm is left unchallenged even though it is invalid and unrealistic in several ways and the individual thinking Kashmiri is left on his own to figure out truths if he wishes to, unaided by institutional support from the state.

Part – II

Pandits and Muslims: Exploring the Kashmiri Identity through the Prism of the ‘Other’

Introduction: The Image in the Mirror

At the heart of the conflict in Kashmir lies the key relationship between the Kashmiri Muslim and his ethnic twin the Pandit even though violence and politics stake their claim more forcefully. Any documentation of shifts in Kashmiri nationality and identity accordingly, requires focus on this crucial historical paradigm – the mirror image tie between the two.

In fact, the event of migration has been a turning point in these shifts of identity not only for those who left (the Pandits) but also for those who stayed back (the Muslims). For the Pandits, identity and home acquired new layers because of the trauma of exile and the enormity of leaving home. Mapping these shifts through pivotal nodes like their uprooting from the soil, their sense of racial and historical superiority and its fallout and the impact of these on religious and national identities, *also* reveals their defining sense of the ‘other’ – the Kashmiri Muslim – and the fluctuating nature of this definition.

The Pandit exodus was no less a defining moment in the changing nature of the Muslim identity and *his* defining sense of the ‘other’ because of the core, binary nature of the relationship between the two. Its impact, in fact, has been almost as severe on those left behind. It shows that even though the Pandit migration has become a smaller part in the Kashmir issue and not been adequately represented in the priority of the conflict – it is actually the key to analyse the shifts in the Kashmiri Muslim’s sense of self.

Finally the overwhelming shadow of Partition and the Two Nation theory that hangs over the political issues (UN resolution etc) of the conflict, also casts its influence over the sense of identity of both the players, though in different ways. Its role as the structural starting point of identity has driven the armed conflict since 1989. It would be a travesty to downplay its very potent sway over this shifting play of identities through the conflict.

Similar Histories, Different Pasts

Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have a common ethnicity, cultural roots, histories, miseries and survival. Yet to understand their conflicting identities today, it is essential to place them in the framework of their conflicting historical *memory*. Many eras of Pandit dignity and well being are remembered badly by the Muslims and vice versa.²⁷ Centuries ago therefore *within* Kashmir, for scholarship, class and other reasons, religion had already become instrumental in defining a community and its power and status or lack thereof; and in setting up a conflicting historical memory of Us-Vs-Them.

It is important to emphasize here however that peace in the Kashmir Valley during Partition when all of North India was aflame, underscored the Kashmiri Muslim's essentially secular behaviour. So too did the changeover²⁸ of the anti imperialist Muslim Conference to the National Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah and its inclusionist efforts to bring other communities to its fold, supported and influenced by the Indian nationalist forces fighting for freedom from the British.

²⁷ Religion inevitably became a marker of identity that determined who would be treated well and who wouldn't. There are endless examples. During Sultan Sikandar's fanatic 14th century rule, Pandits were treated so barbarically that only eleven families were left in the Valley. There were forced conversions that form origin of many of today's Muslims, the demolition and loot of the finest temples, the destruction of ancient texts, bans on music and *tikas* and the hated *jaziya* tax. "There was no city, no town, no village, no wood, where the temples of god were unbroken", laments Jonaraja, a contemporary historian. Afghan Governors treated all Kashmiris with fearsome cruelty but were especially partial towards Pandits. Many were tied in sacks and thrown in to the Dal for amusement. Muslims rode Pandits like asses when allowed by their Pathan overlords. During Sikh rule, the peasants were so severely taxed that there was starvation and famine in most areas. The system of *begaar* or forced labour, the banning of *azaan*, closure of mosques and punishment of death for cow slaughter were indignities heaped on the Muslim. The Dogra rulers continued many of these policies even using mosques to store grains and kept Muslims away from the administrative posts. See Prem Nath Bazaz: Kashmir in Crucible.

²⁸ The Muslim Conference changed its name to National Conference in 1939. A year later it split – and the old rump of the Muslim Conference regrouped under its old name again. Its members were pro Pakistan and the party became an adjunct of the Muslim League. Its key leaders finally migrated to Pakistan but many of its followers in the Valley still adhere to its Muslim First construct of identity unlike the NC's Kashmiri Muslim First construct that gives slightly greater weight to Kashmiri *ethnic* identity as well as its Muslim identity. Its outlook also embraced other communities in a secular, broad based framework (even though its priority remained the Valley Muslim) unlike the solely Muslim oriented Muslim Conference that actively dismissed cooperation or partnership with non Muslims.

Even so, today's identity issues cannot be established without the understanding of a previously low key but very much *existent* religious distinctiveness that asserted itself in critical areas of a mixed, shared society. Therefore even though Kashmiri society remained fairly peaceful in its behaviour and in dealings with the 'other', religion was the key arbiter of the two identities historically as well as in the during conflict over nationality later.

Religious underpinnings of Kashmiri nationalism

The low key religious distinctiveness accelerated during the anti monarchical struggle of the 1930s in Kashmir by virtue of the separate religious identities of the monarchy and those opposed to it. The struggle may have been defined as Kashmiri Vs Dogra but it was also by default, a Muslim struggle against non Muslim (in this case Hindu) rule. Larger subcontinental forces shaped it further. Religious identities set up by the Muslim League in the 1930s, their articulation as the Two Nation Theory and its culmination in the Partition of India in 1947 – positioned the ethnic community as the 'other'. These sharply accentuated the religious distinctiveness in Kashmir, took it into high gear and would also define positions taken in the armed conflict forty years later. By privileging religion over ethnicity, the Two Nation Theory put in place religious filters through which identity was to be seen; placing both communities in an identity straitjacket neither side would be able to free itself from. In Kashmir where the majority was Muslim yet economic and political power lay with the Dogra rulers and the Pandit intelligentsia, this notion had particular resonance.²⁹

A key factor then for both communities, was the historical memory of the Pandits as the privileged, landed, elite minority that enjoyed royal

²⁹ Class issues characterised the relationship between the two communities in a feudal monarchy – the Hindu as the oppressive ruling elite, the other as the Muslim colonised mass. The communal Two Nation theory then suddenly made a lot of sense to many Muslims yearning to overthrow this arrangement. It seemed 'natural' that Muslims needed their own country to be free of their second class status – especially in areas where *they* were in a majority. Though the NC with its broad based concepts and India's ideas and commitment to democracy carried the day, the 'natural' part never quite lost its original appeal especially with Pakistan aggressively promoting it; *despite* the Kashmiri Muslim's permanent assumption of power (even if flawed by central erosions) over the state.

patronage, especially during Sikh and Dogra rules³⁰ as bureaucrats or scholars, at a time when Muslims were largely poor, illiterate and landless peasants. Muslim insecurity and aggression stemmed from this historical memory of them as the face of authority, power and scholarly superiority. The Pandit's own amplified sense of historic and racial supremacy contributed no less to this. These issues of class and power then became tied to and identified by the religious community – more so, after Pakistan's existence.

As a result, the 1930s and 40s Kashmiri Muslim believed in the Muslim community as a political entity, defined it religiously as much as ethnically and saw its 'natural' inclinations as lying in an Islamic direction though not necessarily towards or against a separate state (later defined Pakistan). Notions of power were critical in this belief i.e. the Muslim wanted a strong Kashmir *because he could be in power* – a key notion for a people who deeply internalised the notion of sovereignty aggressively articulated by their political leadership of the time.³¹ It inspired in them a yearning for “self rule” after an “eternity of oppression and tyranny” by ‘alien’ rulers.

Therefore too, the elitist Pandit's *non identification* with Kashmiri nationalist aspirations despite the fact that it was several Kashmiri Pandits who laid down concepts of Kashmiri identity and rightful claim to power.³² Their lukewarm attitude to the anti monarchical struggle before accession, remained an abiding irritant for the Muslims despite

³⁰ Sikh rule took over from the Afghans in 1819 and lasted till 1845 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire was falling apart and one of his Dogra commanders Gulab Singh made a deal with the British who wanted to carve out an area of influence against Czarist Russia's creeping encroachment southwards. The Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 sold the Valley to him for Rs 75 lakh and created the new patchwork state of Jammu & Kashmir that the Dogra Empire as a subordinate of the British, would rule over till 1947.

³¹ See Introduction for how Sheikh Abdullah created an identity fashioning it from old glorious constructs.

³² Pandits as self perceived inheritors and standard bearers of Kashmir's ancient legacies were the natural propagators of its glorious Brahminical past. It reinforced their right to be in the elite position they were, hold the powerful posts they were entrusted to in large Empires despite their tiny minority. The concepts of 'state subjects', the sole right of land for them, the notions of independent kingship and the right to rule, the inheritance of a racial superiority – these are all constructs articulated by Pandits initially to preserve their own authority. Later they were also skilfully used by the 1930s Kashmiri Muslim leadership (helped by key Pandits who partnered with them) to inspire the Kashmiri Muslim population at that time, oppressed, depressed and ignorant. Many Pandits had the sense because of the vast gap between the two communities; that they would continue to be the standard bearers of the society and the Muslims would follow their lead – as they had for centuries.

the participation and sympathy of key Pandits. Majority rule would spell out the end of their special dominance, in effect losing an empire they never physically had but which granted them its power for many intents and purposes. Ground realities would make it clear too, that *religious* identity would also be a key component, critical to regional aspirations.

A second component was a strong, recently defined Valley-centric ethnic identity articulated by the leadership that invoked past glory of Kashmiri rulers, and the oppression of ‘alien’ rule even though the last Dogra rulers before 1947 were very much part of the imperial state that the Kashmiri leadership claimed as its ‘nation’ – an indication of their essentially feudal view of self rule that would simply make the Kashmiri Muslim the new Maharaja of the state who would dominate the others. This classification points to both the Kashmiri centric and Muslim centric definition of identity that the Kashmiri leadership privileged in its propagation of the Kashmir nation idea.

Both of these components then made up the Kashmiri Muslim’s *essential* identity that remained prioritised along religious lines. Yet he feared the threat of a Pakistani Punjabi influx and the dilution of his ethnic identity. India, though ‘Hindu’ offered protection against this. The promise of eternal and inevitable majority rule was appealing in contrast. There is no doubt then that it is because of the Kashmiri Muslim that Kashmir is with India. He opposed the Pakistani tribals and he acceded to India.

Despite these factors, the construction of a Two Nation prism through which power was essentially defined by the religious community and where the ‘other’ was by default, defined by his; *had* penetrated deeply into the political landscape of the time. The labyrinth of two competing identities – one religious and one ethnic - would remain a complicating and contradictory strand of Kashmiri Muslim identity and would haunt him in the early choices he made in the armed conflict. In 1990, the popular, underlying itch to see the Pandits being knocked off their perch would feed into the communal ideology pitched by the Pakistan directed armed conflict which saw the tiny minority as an obstacle to Kashmir’s ultimate Islamic destiny with Pakistan and prioritised their removal as the first step in the conflict.

Independence and accession – The opportunity not taken

Indian Independence and the secular structure of the new nation state represented the *single* window of opportunity for these conflicting historical memories to be left behind by both communities. It was an opportunity not taken. Though Kashmir acceded to India, the special conditions limited the Kashmiri Muslim's nascent sense of nationalism solely to the Valley and made the accession of a Muslim majority state to a Hindu majority country an 'unnatural', deeply conditional process. Loyalty to an Indian nationalist construct remained, therefore, always a matter of conditions, not any real convictions.

The sense of national identity formation with the newly independent India was already disadvantaged – as it was with *other* parts of the state like Jammu and Ladakh, creating a regional imbalance. The Hindu right wing noted this sense of inequity in Jammu and reacted to it politically within a few years decrying the one nation two flags, *Ek Vidhaan Do Pradhaan* (one government, two heads) situation that Kashmir's accession had brought about. The resultant tension created new strands of conflict as the Kashmiri leadership used the discord generated to drive home its own message to the people of mistrust and historic fear of the 'other' – in this case – India.

Meanwhile, the overwhelming reality of the Two Nation Theory in the shape of a living Pakistan provided a constant alternative vision with its 'natural' religious appeal. Even though the ruling dispensation included Pandits and professed a strong variety of secularism – it was Kashmiri Muslim centric by default and would project itself in that manner. Within a few years the dramatic political events of Sheikh Abdullah's efforts for secession, his subsequent arrest, the imposition of 'Delhi's men' as leaders, the encroachment of Central authority and the erosion of the 'special' terms provided further reason to freeze this Kashmiri Muslim centric identity in place and go no further on the India path.

The Pandit was equally hostage to this Partition defined identity. Several concepts of Kashmiri nationalism that ultimately emerged as the special terms of accession to India were in fact spelled out by Pandit ideologues as people who had for long, a sense of being in *charge* of Kashmiri destiny, perhaps charting the path for the uneducated Muslim majority to follow and imagining their historically elite positions would place them in charge of any emerging state dispensation. Yet post 1947 when

the Muslims took over Kashmir, the more powerful 'India' became the country they would identify with to guarantee their position in a now 'disadvantaged' environment. This loyalty was defined in national terms but based in *religious* identification. Pandits who could be at the receiving end of the smaller stick within Kashmir could counteract it with the bigger stick of India.

“We had a phobia (in the sense of article of faith) that if one Hindu is killed then a hundred Muslims will die in India”, says Aiman Raina a migrant Pandit in Jammu. This was in essence, a variation of the Two Nation legacy that held minorities of one country as hostages to the 'good conduct' of the majority in the other.

The Two Nation theory, therefore, forced both communities to put their shared ethnic identity on the backburner and seek identification with fellow religionists. In the Muslim case it was couched in regional terms, in the Pandit's case in national terms. For the Muslim, Kashmir came first – where he was in majority and held the reins of power. He also held out the unspoken threat of Pakistan. For the Pandit, India came first and with it, *its* unspoken counterbalancing threat. Therefore his deep identification with India even when the dilution of special promises made to the state evoked sharp Muslim anger. He became the personification of India and from then on, a fifth columnist and a potential target of anger against it.

Post-'47: Competing for jobs – majority and minority

Post Independence, the oppositional tug between the communities sharpened once the Muslims came to power. Education had been the historical weapon of the scholarly Pandits to retain their powerful positions in Court even while being minorities. Post 1947, successive governments took this weapon away. It was essential to uplift the less educated Muslim majority and Pandits were sidelined from state government jobs with an unspoken quota that encouraged Muslims with lower benchmarks to enter. A radical land reform³³ programme to unshackle the Muslim peasantry took away Pandit (and other elite Muslim) lands overnight without compensation.

³³ Land reform without compensation was initiated immediately after Independence as part of the *Naya Kashmir* agenda espoused by National Conference. The Pandits who were beneficiaries of the Dogra largesse had the maximum to lose both ways – by the unspoken, sidelining quota and by the taking away of their lands that literally left them with no options.

However, these measures were not enough to soothe the majority over the years that still bristled from the historical memory of the powerful Pandit and his lacklustre support in their struggle. The class tensions ensured that the image of the Pandit, still visible in many high positions, *remained* that of an elitist, illegitimate usurper of benefits that Muslims should rightly enjoy. This image gained ground after Indian authority eroded the special terms of accession and tightened its grip over the state – measures that were now acceptable to the Pandit community. The fragile relationship between the Centre and state politics itself was negotiated by prominent Pandit interlocutors – encouraging the belief amongst the Muslims that the Valley’s fate remained in their not quite neutral, hands. The Pandit’s inherently patrician self perception perhaps enhanced these powerful images of injustice and they held particular sway in the situation in ’89-90 when the community fled from the Valley.

At the time, central government jobs in the Valley where recruitments continued to be on merit were still dominated by Pandits. Many Muslims recall with rage that State Bank of India had to be shut down when they fled – it had simply no staff left as there were no Muslim employees. This and the fact that all central government posts are fully filled by Muslims today is seen as verification of the ‘truth’ that Muslims *could* do the job but were never hired due to some insidious discrimination exercised by the ‘Hindu’ Central Government protecting Hindu Kashmiris.

Pandits dismiss this Muslim angst about discrimination pointing to their own sidelining. “Where’s the issue? Kashmiri Muslims got jobs in the public sector – we were told, ‘Face the competition!’ The majority was treated like a minority,” says Vinod Razdan, a migrant Kashmiri Pandit in Jammu. “If they are there in meritorious jobs today, it is because *we* are not in the picture to offer them competition,” adds another.

Yet it is symptomatic of Partition’s straitjacketed thinking that issues of class, power, merit and competition were formed and viewed only through religious identity.

Indian patriots, Kashmiri traitors Vs Kashmiri patriots, Indian traitors

Given this identity straitjacketing, the definitions of ‘nation’, ‘patriot’, ‘nationalist’ etc lacerate the two communities in their self images and

the image of the 'other'. The Muslim anger that the Pandit has never been with any Kashmiri popular movement makes him essentially a Kashmiri traitor. "Kashmiri Pandits were not brave enough to face the fact that Kashmiri identity comes first, then India", says Jehangir – a Kashmiri student at Jammu University.

To the Pandits however, it is the Kashmiri *Muslims* who are *Indian* traitors. Their self image is one of a heroic minority upholding the Indian presence in Kashmir without whom there would have been no Indian flag flying there.

"We don't come out on the streets" says Subhash Kak. "We believe in democracy and nationalism."

"I cannot support the movement. I am Indian first - not for autonomy," says Raman Kaul, a migrant Pandit student sitting next to Jehangir. For these well off, upper middle class students, religion is a minor issue.

It is among the middle class that a clear division emerges. Most Muslims and Pandits have two entirely opposing constructs of nationality and identity that share *nothing* in common. Middle class Chamanlal, a migrant in Jammu's refugee camps holds the straightforward Indian nationalist construct that Kashmir is an integral part of India. Broken promises that occurred within a context to make Kashmiris a part of the mainstream cannot be regarded in his view, as a justification for separatism or violence. Kashmiri nationalism therefore has no legitimacy in his eyes. He is hence cynical about this interpretation of Pandits as Kashmiri traitors, sure of his moral correctness in being Indian first.

"The point is that when we are Indian and they are Indian, where is the question of giving them support? They are still living in 1947!" he says with a dismissive shake of his head. "Which movement for Kashmiri development *within* the Constitution of India have we opposed?", he demands.

Middle class Altaf from the Valley however says, "Muslim first, Kashmiri second, nothing else third." Indian nationalism – or even Pakistani nationalism – simply has no place in his list and importantly after long years of *jehadi* ideology, even Kashmiri nationalism has started coming second.

Razdan explains this is why Pandits (having lost their historic privileged position) can never be Kashmiri nationalists and the real reason why 'regional' aspirations can never count on support from them. It is the same threat perceived post '47. "*Azaadi* was never the problem. It is the hidden agenda," he says referring to the Islamising face of the movement.

The Beginning of Conflict and the Pandit Exodus: Separate Identities, Separate Views

The historical framework of how the principal players – Pandits and the Muslims - saw each other, established an identity structure for both in which religion was prioritised over ethnicity. How did the legacy of this structure affect choices taken when the conflict began? How did each player see himself? How did he see the other? How did this view of the ‘other’ impact choices taken during the conflict like the decision to remain silent during the Pandit exodus, the construction of a mythology to ‘house’ this event, the sense of betrayal on both sides etc?

Ethnic cleansing or conspiracy: The blame game for the exodus

In the 90s two clear versions existed of the Pandit exodus. Pandits remembered the overwhelming terror of those days, the singling out of their community for public killings, the vast crowds on the streets, the frenzied slogans for *azaadi* – and the collective silence of people who were once close friends, colleagues and neighbours. Kashmiri Muslims downplayed the Pandit terror, highlighted their own terror of the government’s violent crackdowns, had a conspiracy theory to explain the exodus, didn’t protest at this face of the movement at the time very much in Kashmiri hands and (though many helped Pandits individually) at least outwardly, projected indifference as a society to the flight of their fellow Kashmiris.

However this Muslim indifference started turning to passionate denial of responsibility once the act was given a globally recognised badge of dishonour – ethnic cleansing. It was a badge the highly image conscious Kashmiri had not anticipated. The Pandit accusation of betrayal was another reason for some Muslims (not all) to deny responsibility in a keen desire to clear their names. “It is the Kashmiri Muslim who invited Pakistani support and encouraged the cleansing of his neighbours, friends and colleagues from their centuries old home without lifting a finger of protest”. a Pandit accountant in Delhi accuses.

Today this accusation provokes visible discomfort in many Muslims at being thought to acquiesce, in a process of betraying their doppelganger, their past and their race.

A powerful perception was widely articulated by Muslims in 1990 that a conspiracy by Governor Jagmohan for sinister anti Muslim reasons was responsible for the Pandits' flight. Yet it was voiced only after the Pakistani led, Kashmiri executed campaign of targeted Pandit killings³⁴ had already *achieved* its aim of spreading terror in the minority community. From the start of this campaign in the last quarter of 1989 till the exodus several months later, the public silence of the majority community was a powerful statement. Some Muslims attribute this to helplessness in the face of terror and threat. Pandits say it is this very lack of support that drove the tiny minority to migration.

“No one came out to say this is wrong – not one leader, not one civic group, not one journalist,” accuses migrant Aiman Dhar.

In fact the theory is very much a product of the old historical Muslim memory. The Pandit's inherently superior notion of himself, his image as the face of authority and the condescension and aggression with which he had exhibited his Indian nationalism, showing a visible lack of solidarity with the popular *azaadi* ideal was undoubtedly a key irritant. Public sentiment, coloured by images of the past, was not exercised about their departure; at least not enough to make their *collective* unhappiness known then.

“Don't know if they were misled or fear psychosis prompted them to leave – they had no idea we will suffer for 18 years. They thought people from India would come and *just* take care of us like this” (snaps her fingers), says Naseem Rather, a college principal in Srinagar, her face mirroring the anger that her words convey.

Many Pandits have confirmed that this sentiment rested deep in the community, a symptom of the religious straitjacketing of the Two Nation Theory that saw minorities essentially as hostages to the ‘good behaviour’ of the majority in the other country. Yet, clearly also, the Pandit departure suited popular Muslim attitudes on job aspirations and ‘discrimination’ by removing the threat of competition from the scene altogether.

The key to this theory's deconstruction lies in the narrative that alleges Governor Jagmohan told the Pandits to leave so he could *massacre the Muslims in peace*. In fact it is hardly relevant whether he arranged for

³⁴ The exodus was maximum in the first five months of 1990 when 90% of the Pandits left. Varying estimates account for between 168 – 290 Pandits killed between January and August 1990 with a population that was barely 3-4% of the majority.

Pandits to leave ‘temporarily’ because he was unable to collectively protect them in isolated hamlets across the Valley or wanted to tackle the then explosive and violent separatist threat without their presence as potential hostages to state action as the conspiracy theory implies or that they simply left themselves, once fear levels overcame the resistance to leaving an ancient homeland. In the end, the Jagmohan theory camouflages three realities. Firstly, the Pakistani focus on giving the movement an Islamic justification. Secondly, the undeniable – in fact unambiguously clear - Kashmiri support to it³⁵. Thirdly, the anti minority actions³⁶ and symbolisms that held full sway in the initial years – the slogans, the public and targeted killings, the threats and the clear directive to *leave*.

It also served two purposes. It deflected attention from these uncomfortable realities by laying its own accusation of dishonourable anti Islamic behaviour against the secular state. Secondly, it allowed the Kashmiri Muslim to shield his personal discomfort at the memory of his silence and freed him from personal identification with the burden of the Pandit exodus. Which is why it is still alive today, in a much diluted form – at least with those moderate Muslims who have *felt* the discomfort and dishonour.

“The movement lost importance from the time of the Pandit massacres,” says Jehangir. “Higher ups made decisions for them, The Pandits ruined their own future and cut off their nose to spite their face. They disgraced the movement.”, he argues. “The Government of India held their hand and said we’ll take care of you – that’s why they left. Muslims had nothing to do with it.”

³⁵ Typified by the slogan chanted relentlessly in January 1990, just before the Pandit migration – “*Aisi Kya Ghachi – Pakistan!* (What do we want? Pakistan!) *Batav Rochtuy ta Batanyaana saan!*” (Without Pandits but *with* Pandit women!)

³⁶ Targeted killings of prominent Pandits, of ordinary ones dragged from their homes to be killed in cruel and public ways (tied behind a car, sawn in two by a chain saw, rendered headless, eyes gouged out etc), jeers and abuse from loudspeakers attached to cars and mosques, bombs and arson destroying Pandit properties, circulated hit lists with their names and the threats that started a year or so before the migration to ordinary Pandits, many living in scattered ones and twos in rural areas; created an intense psychosis of fear and panic. It is equally true that more Muslims were killed by militants in the same period but the Pandits were a tiny minority, singled out by their identity for whom the symbolic value of roughly 200 deaths was enough for complete terror to set in. Ironically, at a time of total Muslim support for the movement being fought in their name, no one protested the killings either (though for *different* reasons), of prominent Muslims like the Vice Chancellor of Kashmir University, *Al Safa* editor Shaban Vakil, Maulvi Farooq, several old politicians, political workers and ordinary people suspected of being informants.

“Rubbish!” laughs Razdan. Adds fellow migrant Sanjay Dhar, “When Kashmir erupted they only wanted Muslims – *they* threw out the Hindus. But exodus was a blot – they couldn’t get international support after this ethnic cleansing. Hurriyat now comes to meet us. “How come they suddenly need us now?”

Wanchoo, a prominent Pandit, son of famous Kashmiri ideologue-activist HN Wanchoo³⁷ who was assassinated by militants and who stayed on in Srinagar even after that, interestingly feels other Pandits needn’t have left. “It was like a fire in your house – you think it will burn down the whole house but actually after some time you can put it out and carry on the same way.”

Others disagree with his reasoning. “*Now* that nobody is left except a few Pandit families, they will go out of their way to ensure I have everything I want - my festivals, weddings, rituals – everything is done the way it should be,” says Badrinath Pandita who also stayed back. “Now I am too powerless to make a difference.”

Even Wanchoo however, agrees that “The agenda behind this (migration) was to create a 100% Muslim land and fear was the key reason for the flight”.

The desire to escape culpability in a struggle designed around the themes of ethical righteousness and high ground as well as the understanding that *Azaadi*’s moral standing suffered a credibility blow from the label of ethnic cleansing has made the Muslim far more open today, to reexamining it. There is no doubt that the culpability question is a deeply discomfiting one for many especially GenNext that was too young to be active in 1990 yet has to bear the burden of its indignity especially outside the Valley.

Looking at each other – Or what does the face in the mirror look like?

This contradiction has created a juggling of identities in constant flux along with the conflict’s twists and turns. Despite the trauma of exile,

³⁷ Hridaynath Wanchoo a Pandit human rights activist had filed a writ in Court charging the government for the murders of the VC of Kashmir University and HMT General Manager Khara and disputing claims of destruction to Pandit property across Kashmir. He was killed in December 1992. There were claims the government was responsible yet the then Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen publicity head said his chief had ordered the hit because he suspected Wanchoo of being an agent and did not want any Hindu associated with the movement. See Manoj Joshi: *The Lost Rebellion*

Pandits have had a stability and continuity of identity. They are reasonably sure whom to blame, what is right, who they are and where they belong. For Kashmiri Muslims as the torchbearers of their 1930s constructed identity, *none* of these questions have certain answers.^{3,8} In fact their identity issues remain unstable and volatile, compounded by the fact that it is they who face the violence *inside* the Valley and they who bear its stigma *outside* it.

Two types of emotional strands predominate. The first is *distress* at the dishonour especially since it inevitably feeds into the post 9/11 global imagery of Muslims as terrorists. Young Muslims *outside* Kashmir where education or professional opportunities lie, are more willing to look at the ‘other’ through *his* lens.

“Jammuwallas call us terrorists. “But only some people took up arms – you can’t label a whole nation (Kashmir) terrorists”, defends Darakshaan, a Valley student at Jammu University.

However most inside the Valley have the second, simpler view. They see *themselves* as victims of a ‘foreign power’ and *rage* against this relentless image. Bearing the burden of twenty years of violence and insecurity only creates the resentment of the Pandit who fled before and anger at the power of the ‘ethnic cleansers’ tag to tarnish and typecast. At a time when they themselves feel deeply threatened and frightened, constantly under suspicion from security forces and harassed by militants, Pandit suffering in camps provides angry satisfaction and serves-them-right sentiments.

“Absolute rubbish!”, says Prof Taher. “Pandits are stooges of BJP, duffers, idiots. It is because of Kashmiri *Muslims* that Kashmir is with India. *We* were the ones who fought against the Pakistani tribals. They lost barely 10-15 people, we have lost 80,000 (both, his figures). We carried on, they fled. Kashmir will always haunt them”.

³⁸ For Muslims, the dilemma of choosing which identity to prioritise – ethnic Kashmiri or Muslim and lately Islamist has been a hugely damaging conundrum that has brought severe trauma and confusion. Having seen Pakistan as a saviour and then as an exploiter or India as a much hated entity that started looking more attractive, even more desirable over the years in comparison to Pakistan; are twists in the 20 year armed conflict that Kashmiri Muslims – especially the young – have to deal with. They bear the burden of their inherited historical angst and the difficulties of dealing with changing emotions in the face of the new realities they see today. Pandits who have no pull between religious, racial and larger national identity remain comfortable and have been spared this trauma. They have no need to change their perceptions or adjust to new realities on identity.

“Yes, the ordinary Kashmiri *was* overtaken by this movement, yes, they became the helpless silent majority, yes, they too were killed – but they did not confront it collectively. All those who went across came back with arms, ammunition was dumped in mosques. They allowed it to happen – that’s why we feel betrayed,” says Mattoo, a Pandit accountant in Delhi.

“Their bitterness is not wrong – they had to face the consequences of their own policy says Chamanlal. “They had to reap what was sown for *us*.”

In a mirror imaging, the Muslim agony today has mellowed the rage in Pandit hearts too. Clearly the suffering of the ‘other’ provides solace to both communities.

Gen next – Inheriting the burden and lightening it

These stereotypes of betrayal and violence pass on to the next generation. Young Pandits can view Muslims with a range of emotions, from suspicion to outright hatred, contempt and fear.

“Yes, I believe they were lured off the path”, says college going Raman Kaul. They thought, “We’re getting something – let’s just grab it.”

There is little effort to re-examine the past or wonder if the Pandits went wrong somewhere, perhaps because the community has stuck to its belief in the moral *righteousness* of their ‘Indian’ nationality and the unworthiness of the Kashmir-First ideal of their Muslim counterpart. Nor do they face the daily violence and labelling that prompts rethinking of traditional beliefs. It is unwilling to see where this righteousness can be tempered or to look back at old histories – possibly the Pandit’s stage for rethinking will come later.

Young Muslims too have inherited those serious charges of betrayal and selfishness against the Pandits passed on from their adults. However there *are* glimmers of rethinking and re-examination of handed down knowledge on the issues, *especially* from those who are mingling freely with the ‘other’ outside, in a lively and open churning of beliefs – between the two – and even between themselves. The mythology created by Muslims that blames Pandits for fleeing arguing they “should” have stayed on for their ‘motherland’ even if they were being killed – because Muslims were killed as well – sidelines the fact that the struggle was always in the *name* of the Muslims and it was they who publicly

participated, supported and wholeheartedly welcomed the ‘foreign’ aid that started the violence targeting first Pandits and then later, the Muslims themselves. Yet young Kashmiri Muslims are open to debating this reconstruction amongst themselves today and questioning these passed on ‘truths’.

“Muslims are not to blame,” defends Jehangir against Pandit charges. “Pandit migration was overhyped because of religious affiliation with India but killings are not good enough reason for them to flee. If your mother says you should die then you should die. We are being subjected to the same tortures.”

But Darakshaan whose father was threatened by militants while at work and forced to shift the family overnight (within the Valley) takes on this reasoning. “Life is precious for god’s sake. If your mother says I will kill you – you *have* to run away. The Muslim community didn’t support – they *should* have said we will support you.”

These student responses reveal how far attitudes have travelled through generations and how GenNext is processing new perceptions and making up its own mind on deeply complex questions. Eighteen years into the conflict, they have begun the process of reshaping old ways of looking at the ‘other’.

But “My friend is different!”

In all the suspicion, anger, resentment and bitterness from both sides, there are memories so strong, friendships so loyal that they are automatically excluded from the litany of injustices about the ‘other’. The older generation Pandits just cannot forget the sweetness of their earlier life and its shared flavour³⁹, neither it seems can the Muslims

³⁹ The Pandit bride is traditionally accompanied by a Muslim lady to her new household, the use of mehendi and innumerable commonalities in marriage rituals etc. Other traditions like shared worship at shrines – anathema to Islamists, shared names from a common ancestry, shared myths and legends etc – these delineate the tight bond between the communities of the same ethnicity that is usually ignored in the telling of their religious tales. The template of mixed religious practices like the singing of *naats*, the references to *Ishvara*, all indicate that the new faith retained its old cultural idioms and modes of thought. Sir Walter Lawrence wrote in his classic *The Valley of Kashmir* that many Pandits did things that would horrify traditional Brahmins – “They will drink water brought by a Mussalman; they will eat food cooked on a Mussalman boat; the foster-brother often obtains great power in a Hindu household.” He also wrote how the Dogras tried their best to curb these practices but “to no effect”. See Premnath Bazaz.

left in the Valley. Individual bonds and collective antagonisms characterise the strange relationship between the two.

The mention of Chamanlal's childhood friend who helped him escape, physically softens his expression. Daughter Neema describes the friendship glowingly. "That's a particular family – not a general situation", Chamanlal cautions her but this friend is clearly excluded from the circle of bitterness.

"No grudge against them as individuals," emphasizes Razdan, his face softening like Chamanlal. "All Kashmiri Muslims are not like that – they are victims *bhai*, I miss them. This is only because of Pakistan, otherwise they are *so* good, *so* caring."

Naseem Rather, a Valley college principal says – "They are part of us – we feel their absence very strongly. And this talk of division on religious lines – we don't want to go anywhere – we are very comfortable with Jammu. We *cannot* be separated from it, *must not* be separated from it."

It is interesting to see in what form these diverse and contradictory emotions have been passed on to GenNext. The strange brew of the individual and the collective has kept attitudes towards one another, unstable and confused. The strong views of the past passed down by adults – negative or positive – are tempered by the current reality of friendships and ties with the 'other' – especially those outside Kashmir who have the full chance to interact.

Those families who have had the positive emotions expressed above, especially Muslims have passed them on to their GenNext.

"My parents introduced me to the mixed social setup – the same as India, of which Kashmir is part," says Jehangir. "No Kashmiri Muslim can forget the Kashmiri Pandits". "Parents don't talk about these things – they had very, very close bonds," says Darakshaan when asked if her parents told her anything about the Pandits.

For those (usually the Pandits) who come from families where emotions are separated in watertight compartments – one for friends and one for the general community – friends break barriers set up at home. Raman Koul whose family fled when he was an infant, blames the Muslims, from his elders' passed on wisdom. Yet at Jammu University he hangs out with them despite the fact that his elders hold them responsible for their misery.

“I feel I am amongst my own. We are just like each other. I feel very comfortable— which is not the same with the Dogras.”

Yet these are essentially voices of upper class Kashmiri youngsters with second or third generation access to education and government jobs. The Muslims among them never really had more than an old historic angst against the Pandits, shared space with them in jobs and deep friendships. They feared the violence even as they were ardent supporters of the *azaadi* dream and mourned the Pandit exodus of friends and colleagues, helping them individually, even as they did or could do nothing collectively to protect them.

Those for whom the militancy has created new wealth or whose rise to middle class and education has been over the last 15-20 years – have little time for notions of loss of this shared society. This class was the engine driver of the 90s demonstrations, still sees Pandits as rivals, has a consciously Islamist attitude towards political issues and regards pluralism or composite culture with distrust. Its influence in the Valley is strong and will not allow the easy return or rejuvenation of the old society.

Similarly, many Pandits (not all) in Jammu are hardly left untouched by Hindu right wing that fuels their bitterness and their sense that their lives hang in the balance, cut off from their own soil. Individual relationships apart, the collective anti Muslim sentiment is high and it is perhaps impossible to prevent their narrative from being sucked into the larger Hindu right wing narrative. The Amarnath controversy has shown that a common cause with co religionists is not merely limited to the Valley’s separatist politics. The deepening of the communal divide occurs beyond the Valley and is, perhaps not unexpected.

Living Outside the Valley – Conflict Migration and Identity Changes

How has this cataclysmic event of exodus changed the Pandit and his markers of identity? For example, the outlook towards the world outside the Valley, the viewing of opportunities for the first time, the adaptation of different traditions, and the dissemination of their own, simply the enjoyment of living a life without insecurity.

One unchanging self image is the overweening pride in a scholarly past and the accompanying of superiority notions – revealed in the condescending attitudes towards their hosts, the Dogras of Jammu. A proud martial community that lost an empire; they have accommodated them without discord perhaps because as entrepreneurs, they have no real economic conflict with the historically bureaucratic Pandits. Yet a Pandit leader in Jammu says, “We have improved these *Jammuwallas*. Dogras are crude – we have made them a better society.”

This condescension makes it easy to understand the historic Muslim anger – even though the scholarly past of the Pandits is one that Muslims eagerly stake claim to – especially vis-à-vis non Kashmiris. The Dogras speak of both Kashmiris interchangeably and tolerate their superior airs with cynical amusement and mild contempt. Razdan concedes this Dogra attitude of can-do is something the Pandits have benefited from – they have got rid of their “laziness” after migration.

Yet ‘going back’ is a terrain fraught with obstacles. The Pandit community itself is one. In twenty years it has developed roots everywhere *but* in the Valley. For all the grief and nostalgia, migration has moved them far ahead of their sheltered, insulated world in the Valley, coloured by the limited worldview of a minority. Many of GenNext like Neema are simply disinterested in going to a place they have never seen, where they have no stakes, economically or culturally. Security is another obstacle. “Kashmiri Muslims themselves say don’t come back – it’s not safe, says Razdan. “If they won’t even spare their own people how can you expect them to spare us?”

Twenty years is also enough for a generation’s trauma to seep in to the next. The trappings of exile and the voices of remembrance have done their work to communalise mindsets and narrow views to a strictly limited space where only the odd friend may be allowed in as the

exception. Neema is dead against going back, terrified by the tales she has heard from voices in every part of the camp. “We are not going to adapt to them and live with them. They don’t *want* to adapt to us or see us in Kashmir so how can we live with them?”

Yet other, older voices have tasted the world, adjusted to crisis and emerged; determined not to concede their inheritance in the land of their forefathers. The Dogra spirit has rubbed off enough to think about going back – if at all – only as *employers* not employees. “Just like the (post reservations) Tamil Brahmins – because being employees will just give the Muslims a chance to throw us out again – we don’t want to be in competition with them,” says migrant Sanjay Dhar.

But he is also clear he will go back. “I am a fifty percent stakeholder. No settlement can be made without me!”

The Larger Picture: The Relevance of Identity and Nationalism

Yet the battle over ‘nationhood’ and ‘patriotism’ is essentially an exclusive, isolated scuffle between these two communities with competing notions of power – one that has had it and doesn’t any more, the other that has it but is subject to a higher authority of the Centre that it chafes under. Neither of the two includes other ethnic, racial and religious communities of the larger state in his vision whose passive support for either construct – whether Indian nationalism or Kashmiri nationalism – is taken for granted. They are excluded from consultation or debate about their definitions of ‘nationalism’ and ‘patriotism’.

While the Pandits are a tiny minority whose scholarship or inputs may no longer matter, the Kashmiri Muslims as the leader-generators of the conflict and perhaps its only backers, have not yet envisaged a situation where others’ views may *have* to be taken on board. Therefore, despite their claim of *Azaadi* for the complete old imperial state – their formulation of power and nationalism is focussed solely on the Valley and its minutaie, oblivious to the pitfalls of its non representative, non inclusive character. As such, the scuffle between the two communities, despite its central role in the configuration of the conflict, despite being given such weight and importance by both, is not even relevant in the larger, more long term scenario.

Part – III

**The Conflicted
Islamic Identity:**

**The Upsurge of Radical Islam
and the Response to it**

Introduction: Winning Hearts and Minds in the Battle for ‘Pure’ Islam

The historically unique form of Islam in Kashmir has enjoyed widespread acceptance and legitimacy over centuries. Its Sufi legacy has given it *ziarrats*, pagoda style mosques, unique methods of prayer that can be distinguished from the standard Muslim codes and a broader interpretation of Islam that have kept its culture and population largely tolerant even when extremism was purportedly at its peak. What this signified was that even though the Pakistan factor exerted its ‘pull’ of ‘natural’ brotherhood, Islam in Kashmir never quite gave up its distinctive identity to the stricter, ‘purer’ version that packaged itself as the global and morally righteous, ‘real’ Islam.

It is this distinctive set of beliefs and inclinations that is part of what is called Kashmiriat – a political term coined to describe it and one that has been much maligned especially during the conflict as an irrelevant construct, dreamt up by India to draw Kashmir deeper into its fold. However, like its equally derided counterpart Punjabiati in pre partition Punjab, it does *not* imply that the two communities are one or that they have nothing to divide or separate them politically. Its real meaning is simply to give a name to the shared, tolerant and easy going ethos in which both communities live, where they share language, culture, food, behavioural traits, poetry and close knit neighbourhoods.

At the same time, the conflict was never merely an ethnic configuration and its narrative was very much constructed around the premise of Islam. Foreign fighters⁴⁰ that took over the militancy’s leadership by the early 90s advanced this ‘purer’ Islamic ideology that treated ethnicity as a liability and region specific Islam as sacrilegious. They established their writ especially in the rural areas with diktats on dress codes, male female relations, type of worship, mosques etc and disparaged elements of Kashmiri Islam like *ziarrats* as blasphemous personality based worship while they acclaimed their own Arabised version as the ‘real’ Islam.

⁴⁰ Harkat ul Ansar and the Harkat ul Mujahideen were just two of the foreign *jehadi* outfits that operated under various cover names to enable the execution of high profile abductions of foreigners and attacks on Indian troops and civilians. Later the Jaish e Mohammed and Lashkar e Taiba became the two most prominent *jehadi* outfits in the Valley.

The essential commodities of the *ziarrat* experience are personality based worship of ‘saints’, shared religious spaces with those of other faiths like Hindus, rituals like music and *dhagas* etc. Proponents of global Islam reject all of these elements as *shirq* or paganism and believe solely in the ‘basics’ of Islam. The burning⁴¹ of the Char e Sharief shrine in 1995 during a stand-off with the forces was a high point in this process where Pakistani fighters displayed their disdain for the shrine system considered sacred by the Kashmiris.

Since then an entire infrastructure for this ‘global’ Islam has been unpackaged and established. Big money has been pumped in to set up mosque committees and local *darzgaahs* for the poor. Islamic ideological organisations⁴² have set up their establishments getting land from the government and aid from different sources for schools and mosques pitching their ideologies. All these have a common goal – the battle to win over hearts and minds to the ‘real’ Islam.

Guilt and contempt for the past are its cornerstones while culture is its biggest target. Along with the Pakistani fuelled militancy, it has accelerated the old rift between the largely tolerant, secular majority (mostly but not all shrine enthusiasts) and the minority Islamist, revivalist parties and their followers (which disparage the shrines). Islam’s global crisis and its Internet & TV powered Wahabi version add to it as do the rise of a first generation educated, still conservative middle class over 20 years of conflict

Interestingly, this is no one sided battle even though it may outwardly seem so. Like the deceptive identity shifts so visible in Kashmir at various points, the appearance of an easy, showy Islamic radicalism must also be seen alongside the energetic attendance at *ziarrats* and the essentially evasive identity of the Kashmiri Muslim when confronted with committing to any permanent or unyielding construct like nationality – or ‘pure’ Islam.

⁴¹ Char e Sharief was mined by Pakistani fighter Mast Gul leading the Hizb ul Mujahideen group, with gas cylinders taken from the local shop keepers in anticipation of a clash with Indian security forces who had surrounded the ancient wooden shrine. Locals had first claimed Indian troops had sprayed gunpowder over the shrine with a helicopter to set it alight but later said they were too fearful to reveal what had actually transpired. Interviews with residents and shopkeepers in Char e Sharief in 2005.

⁴² The Jamaat e Islami and Ahl e Hadees (AeH) are leaders in the field. Their schools dot the entire Valley. Though there is no overt radical agenda visible, they follow the Central Board curriculum and boys and girls often study in the same building in separate classes, the views expressed by some students had uncomfortably strong Islamist overtones. Equally though, a few others had individualist opinions that did not tread the Jamaat line.

The Process of Fracture from the Past: Violence as the Catalyst

The old face of Kashmir's traditional Islam and the challenge to it

The pre-conflict, mystical face of Islam in the Kashmir Valley is today more dependent on memories of the old than visible in reality.

Yousuf Magrey, 55 years, recalls, "In the old days we'd go to the mosque in the morning during Ramzaan, girls would be singing *Ruff* (folk music). On *Shab e Barat* we would light candles in the graveyard and chant the verse of *Nuruddin* and *Lal Ded*". It is difficult to separate this traditional Islam from shrines, saints or poetry by Kashmir's historically beloved medieval poet-saints sung out loud in praise of God. It had ample space for spiritual notions absorbed from Hinduism and Buddhism and created an individualistic culture around itself, defined by its isolated region, its language and the unusual circumstances of conversion.

This conversion was largely peaceful thanks to its Sufi saints who through a gentle mix of the old culture and the new managed to draw converts to the new fold.

Ghulam Mohammed Bhat, the more moderate face⁴³ of the Jamaat e Islami says, "When Islam came to Kashmir, the converts were Hindus – idol worshippers. So it had to build an inclination in them to understand true Islam especially among those who came from a totally different belief system. Changing a man's influences, culture, ideology is very, very difficult."

Many of the old customs were therefore allowed to continue to reassure anxious new converts drawn by the promise of equality in the new religion.

⁴³ Some of the more moderate views within the Kashmiri Jamaat e Islami that tried to change its image away from the violent and hardline direction of Syed Ali Shah Geelani – the face of the Jamaat for many years; belong to Ghulam Mohammed Bhat who has been the two time *Emir* of the Jamaat e Islami at crucial moments in its history – its public renunciation of armed militancy in 1998 and its resolve to adopt peaceful and democratic means for the Kashmir issue – and the historic ceasefire of the Hizb ul Mujahideen in 2000 when the largest militant group in the Valley, known as the Jamaat's armed wing, agreed to a ceasefire after ten years. His focus today is on education.

The graves or *ziarrats* of the Sufi saints became pilgrim centres, as guides or intermediaries to God. Followers, both men and women, often recite prayers in loud musical intonations in accordance with ancient tradition and ask for blessings with folded hands. Practices like tying a *dhaaga* (thread) and asking for a *mannat* (fulfilment of a desire) as an intercession from the saint are commonly followed as are all basic commandments of Islam like *namaaz*, *roza* etc. *Ziarrat* attendance and following took a dip during peak militancy days but have more than recovered now. A reason is that a majority of Kashmiri Muslims follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence that allows broader interpretations of the holy text.

Followers of the more rigid *Jamaat e Islami* or the strict *AeH* who abhor the shrines have – till now – remained a fairly *insignificant* minority, politically and socially. Yet today their views have acquired fairly decent acceptability, muscle and widespread exposure. Either way, everyone has been made fully aware that these practices are anathema to the Islamist whose Arabic inspired radicalism makes a sharp distinction between Kashmiri Islam and ‘real’ Islam and seeks to forcibly break up these ‘mixed’ influences. In fact the very fundamental sense of identity with the land proudly defined as *Pirvar* or *Rishivar* – the land of saints – is being threatened by this ‘real’ Islam. Through a mix of pressure and guilt, it is divorcing the Kashmiri from his past, his history, his literary achievements, his intellectual pride and culture because in the eyes of ‘true’ Islam, *all* of it is wrong.

Ironically, modern times, Internet access and Kashmir’s rigidly hierarchical society have also played a role in speeding up the natural relegation of shrines in the religious space that created the room for the smooth entry of radical Islam to take its place. The Pirs, descendants of the Central Asians who introduced Islam in the Valley have commanded the top positions in this hierarchy in their role as a religious and landowning elite. The traditional Sufi strands that allowed Islam to flourish peacefully in the Valley gave way to a coercive, ritualistic set of beliefs that exploited the simple religiosity of the ordinary Kashmiris and is still visible sometimes in the obligatory collections in *ziarrats* from worshippers.

The spread of the Quran written in Urdu, the clarifying and informative role of Islamist organisations, a more democratic age and even the Internet are factors that have vastly reduced the dependency and regard

of traditional shrines and Pirs especially of the young that look upon their traditions as backward and are impatient with their dense ritualism or exploitative tendencies. Those touched by the Islamist fervour are openly contemptuous and downgrade the *entire* tradition including its precious heritage of syncretic ways as worthy of derision and hatred.

Violence has been the catalyst in disrupting the process of inheritance in two ways. Firstly, the lifestyle changes ensured that the young couldn't pursue or inherit traditions in the natural way because they were either in Pakistani training camps, studying outside the Valley or sitting at home because of fear, *hartals* and curfew. In the absence of violence, the natural relegation of shrines in the face of modernity too, would have been a far more gradual and far less permanent process. Secondly, the role of the Pakistani ideology riding on the *azaadi* ideal as the guide-mentor of the conflict, providing direction created a hospitable *space* for the new interpretations of Islam. This was equally fervent – but vastly different from the old, simple, soaked-in-culture religiosity of ordinary Kashmiri Muslims. The accompanying infrastructure of this ideology pushed its agenda ahead in several ways.

Class impact – The different targets

The impact of this has been felt differently across Kashmiri society especially on the new generations that have grown up during the conflict. The young elite have had stable, educated, secular minded parents, usually former National Conference (NC) or Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) supporters and senior government officials. Several with exposure outside the state have ambitious aspirations, a distinct distaste for the militant and his ways and even a nostalgia for the old multi religious Kashmir – inherited from their parents' fond memories of the Pandits – even if they themselves know none. For them the Kashmiri identity 'whole' is more precious than its Islamic identity 'part'. They assign a value to it – though the presence of radical Islamists ensures that till the violence exists; this value cannot be very high and cannot be too openly defended. This is an important yet low key segment of the population.

In contrast, the new young middle class that has prospered during the militancy years has different priorities. Like all newly prosperous classes, it is highly visible especially in the cities where many have moved to the new suburbs of Srinagar or Baramulla from downtown areas or the village and are the first generation in the family to acquire

an education. Many study in Muslim countries that colours their worldview already impacted by the overarching Pakistani ideology of the conflict. They believe that Pandits ‘betrayed’ their ‘cause’ even if they don’t really know what this ‘cause’ is. They assign no value to their own religio-cultural ethos but access the Internet for literature on Wahabi Islam. Many are first generation learners or at least first generation urban dwellers.

It is this section whose semi rural, less educated parents may not be able to answer the questions raised in their minds that have absorbed the full impact of the hostilities in their society. The violence of life in a conflict zone, competing ideological mythologies, the inflammatory reporting of incidents in the local media and the *lack* of a strong, mentoring atmosphere at home that clearly delineates rights and wrongs, have all caused a confused mindset, open to latch on to any firm, aggressive beliefs. It is a vacuum that radical Islam easily steps into due to the lack of any other *equally* firm ideology or logic – even *azaadi* itself.

The mother of Kashmir’s first suicide bomber from Khanyar⁴⁴ remembers her 19 year old boy’s passionate involvement in religious activities just before his disappearance and death. It is clear that she never foresaw the danger, nor could she advise him differently due to her own back of awareness of the radical beliefs and pressures he was subjected to.

“He was such an obedient *namaazi* – I thought this is a *good* thing – I should keep up. Next thing he calls up his father and says I won’t be coming home. We had no idea of his plan – would I *ever* have let him go?” she cries.

“These people are trapped with negative emotions and live moment to moment,” says psychiatrist Dr Margoob. “They have poor impulse control, easy access to guns, no security for long term planning. The violence produces a feeling of total helplessness that doesn’t match with your sense of self – you are not in control. This leads you adrift with no support.”

The access to dangerous influences is then inevitable amongst the more sensitive or unstable. It has changed the way many look at issues of religion and nationality.

⁴⁴ In an interview with author, September 2006.

Samir Qasim and his friends who are college students in Baramulla look up to the Taliban, express anger with Indian security forces and are deeply affected by incidents of violence they have seen on the streets or in papers. It is unclear whether they are affected first and reinforce this with media reports or vice versa. The empowerment effect of Islamisation at this stage is enticing. Defeated or humiliated here, the larger Islamic world offers winnability, revenge and group identity – the direct benefits of being more Islamic.

The flashy islam – signs of change

A new showiness of religious fervour and the appearance of visible ‘Islamic’ markers are the first signs of this radicalisation i.e. the moustache less long beards, the high *salwars* above the ankle, the full veils or chin clipped scarves for women etc.

Shia leader Iftikar Ansari whose community is visibly wary of this radical Islam says, “Whatever happens in Arabia, they want to implement here. They have the *chifiyā* (checked head scarf) there to protect the neck from the desert sun. Now all *maulvis* have a *chifiyā* here – they’ve made it an Islamic dress! No one asks why are you wearing this for God’s sake?”.

Other indicators are the changes in the way the past is viewed and the issues that society starts considering important. The birth of new historical ‘heroes’ like the *hajjam* or barber who bust Kashmir’s “first prostitution ring” 100 years ago is the retelling of an old story twisted around to fit the new mood of piety and punishment. Kashmir’s own ‘sex scandal’ in 2006 was sold by Islamists as a ‘punishment’ for a society that had wandered off the path of real Islam

There are many to argue this flamboyant, showy Islamisation is empty from within – merely a strategic reaction or role play to show something or gain something. Says Shakeel Bakshi, President, Islamic Students League, “This is a strategy, to make India understand.” S.H. Muzaffar, a government official and occasional writer says, “Islamisation is posturing. Reasons are Islamic bashing by US and insecurity.”

Yet the younger generation exposed to it is hardly equipped to differentiate between the posturing and the real. To those who have embraced it, it is real, worth defending and sets a template for their behaviour or view of society and politics. Though the extent of its spread is definitely not universal, the commitment of many of its believers is strong and unyielding.

The Faultlines of the Divide: Religion vs Culture

Cutting the cord cleanly – An imperative

Islamists focus sharply on the distinction between religion and culture. There is no debate that one has to come above all and the other has to be stamped out - forcibly if needed. Their basic priority is to change local custom to Arabic style, Islamic commandment.

“Sufis have done good service for Islam but AeH means life to be lived *exactly* by the Prophet’s way. That is the practical example of what the Quran says,” says Mohd Maqbool Akhreni, who spearheads the movement in the state.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, till recently the hard line face of the Jamaat e Islami and radical Islam’s most visible ideologue says, “There should be no effects of the old culture especially Hindu culture, *naat*, (religious chanting in shrines) *ziarrats* etc. – these are not Islamic. In Islam religion and culture are the same – you have to cut cleanly.”

Aasia Andrabi⁴⁵, militant woman leader adds, “I don’t believe in Kashmiriat. There is only one nationality – Islam.”

Says Zafar Qadri from a group of Baramulla college goes from middle class families presses for ‘real’ Islam. “Islam in Kashmir is not of the true type – it’s the *dargah* (shrine) type.” “I don’t like the merging of two things. You can’t mix, you have to leave one.”

There are others who contest this version too.

“Islam came and said no differences between tribes – and a new society formed on this law,” says Iftikar Ansari, Shia leader. “But despite this, tribal pride remained the bedrock of identity. Arabic poetry is all about ancestral pride (that these people want to wipe out). Till you don’t have an identity you can’t play your role in life.”

⁴⁵ Aasiya Andrabi, a fundamentalist female Islamist leader was seen as a bit of an annoying sideshow in the early years of Kashmir’s insurgency when she ‘outed’ young boys and girls meeting in restaurants and attacked women for not wearing Islamic dress but graduated to more respect during Kashmir’s ‘sex scandal’ in 2006 when her fiery allegations of young Kashmir going astray under Indian rule found a more receptive audience.

The moderate Ghulam Mohd Bhat from the Jamaat e Islami is willing to wait for ‘real’ Islam. “In the process of conversion (that lasts centuries) there are several influences. In Kashmir these were Hindu influences. But that doesn’t mean Kashmiris are not Muslims. They will get on the right path (he means Islam according to the Book) – and even if they don’t, it’s their personal choice, we can only try. We cannot use force in any way.”

Andrabi however urges ‘force’ to take away choices from man and decimates the idea of regional variations. “Area culture has no effect in Islam.”

Adds Ashrafi, a senior government official distinguished as a dedicated *namazi* by the violet bruise on his forehead, “Faith is a way of life for Muslims 24 hours. 500 out of 6600 Quranic verses are direct commands. Islam comes first – on *top* of the culture of the soil. Culture has to adjust to Islam not vice versa. Since Islam is the best – it *should* absorb local culture.”

Devalued/objectionable elements of local culture

The neighbourhood Pir has rendered a service in the conflict that not many have accounted for. Different from the big Pir elite dominating the *ziarrats*, he is a small yet unique Kashmiri institution. His followers come to him for *sukoon* – literally ‘peace’ – but actually a kind ear and divine help through God’s ‘messenger’. He listens to their burdens and stresses, ranging from children’s exams to a disturbed housewife’s unexplained stomach pains – not uncommon in a conflict area. His soothing voice dispenses reassurance while he cuts up holy verses printed on long strips, blows lightly and distributes them. The scene is the very antithesis of ‘real’ Islam as preached by the Islamists. It is an example of the local culture they seek to remove.

Language is another area of discord. Urdu was chosen as the state’s language because it served all diverse constituents of the state like Ladakhis, Baltis, etc and Kashmiri was neither taught nor read till very recently. In its absence, Urdu has acquired a status greater than the state language – it has cemented its position as the language of Islam.

Says Geelani, “Kashmiri as a mother tongue is okay but Urdu is the language of contact. Islam says language should be used to good purpose. Since the Kashmiri language is being misused against Islam

to promote Hindu influence under the name of Kashmiriat, it shouldn't be used."

Junaid Hasan, the JKLF supporter however says, "Kashmiri is a Sanskrit offshoot. I feel so disturbed when I see the old name changed. You're disturbing the old culture when you rename. Anantnag is so perfectly named but its name has to be Islamabad to suit these times."

Zafar, the Baramulla college boy says, "We don't read or write Kashmiri or use it except for friends and family. Urdu is global. There is no need to rescue culture or language – if it is good it will survive itself."

The dress of the land too is seen as unIslamic – the Kashmiri *pheran* is out of favour with Islamists "because it is worn for performing *ruff* in front of people especially Army generals". Intermingling with non Muslims is dangerous for fear of picking up unIslamic traditions like the *bindi* or sari etc.

"Our duty is to preach to non Muslims. There can be no mixing of religions but social relations are allowed. However if their culture is expressed through unIslamic forms like song and dance at weddings – I cannot go", says Andrabi.

Women are the big battleground viewed in the patriarchal stereotype as a potentially hazardous entity that left on its own, can induce men off the path of morality and therefore must be treated as a possession of the males of the house.

"We want full coverage", says Zafar. "We boys go after vulgar things. If she's in *pardah*, (veiled) she won't seduce me."

Disconnect with family and peers

The extreme moral strictness of the Islamist contrasted with the liberal Kashmiri attitudes produces a disconnect *between* Kashmiris – old and young, men and women, friend and friend, liberal and conservative.

"Too few of them (peer group) feel same way", bursts out Zafar angrily. "According to 'true' Islam we know it's wrong. They do it but say its fine – like music and dancing – we will *never* permit it. They say 'Oh! It's okay – see the Ajmer *dargah!*' Culture should be destroyed completely". His friend Obaid is horrified – "No, how can we? My father goes to *dargahs* – there is nothing wrong in that."

Several Kashmiris are torn *within* too by this disconnect between their lived Islam and the strict version laid out by the Islamists. The less self confident, more religious ones feel the pinch of guilt and non conformity. The horror of ‘confusion’ or a ‘mixed’ set of traditions is a distinctly articulated strand of Islamist thought since everything has to be black and white as laid down. Eminent professor Ishaq Khan, a self confessed ‘reconvert’ to Islam, says this ‘syncretism’ is just a “*stage* in the process of conversion. It is not the culmination. We cannot call it fusion of religions – that would be distortion and confusion.”

As a Kashmiri, the neighbourhood *dargahs* are an immutable part of life. Yet his ‘reconversion’ as he puts it, deposits him on a path of direct clash. Troubled, he personally justifies it on the grounds of ‘*neeyat*’ or intention. “I am uneasy with *ziarrat* life, singing, the *urs*, the loud recitation of the *Awrad e fateha*. But Allah says *neeyat* is important and when I go to the *dargah* I think of Allah not the saint and take him only as a true follower of Allah.” His dilemma is not unique among Kashmiris.

“Our Islam is in no need of ‘correction’ ”, asserts Shakeel Bakshi, President of the Islamic Students League, his words indicative of a rethinking from earlier days. “Whatever evolves naturally cannot be changed by man.” His self confidence is borne out by the reassertion of *ziarrat* life. Packed with worshippers their muscular attendance since the decline in the peak militancy years, has kept the unique features of Kashmiri Islam reasonably intact. Yet as this rethinking is not publically asserted to debate Islamist rhetoric, the fight back to protect heritage is a passive one at individual levels. The question that Kashmiris confront therefore is clear. Should they protect their culture or risk the burden of going against their religion as spelled out by the moral keepers of Islam? The answers however, remain ambiguous.

The Path towards Radicalism: Why and How

The articulation of an Islamic agenda at the start of the conflict

Kashmir's own swinging, ambiguous identity that *allows* the space for radicalism has had a critical role to play in its growth. The *Azaadi* ideal has itself proved inadequate to stand up to its challenge mainly because the Kashmiri himself has not given it strongly defined parameters and remains unsure what it contains. The history of Kashmir's accession, its lack of true commitment to anything beyond the Valley Muslim identity and its confusion over its Islamic credentials since 1947 ensured that choices made during the armed conflict in 1989 had equally inadequate foundations – a prime example is the Kashmiri acquiescence to Pakistan's articulation of their movement through an Islamic agenda that shifted the focus from its ethnic or political issues.

Since then, *Islam* has been the aggressively visible face of the movement – whether through militant actions, symbolisms, diktats, through the slogans and actions that led to the exodus of Pandits or through the articulation of grievances that 'justify' the cause. There is little wonder then that the bar for 'real' Islam keeps getting higher and higher in the conflict. It is the ultimate arbiter of moral righteousness – any act committed in the name of Islam *has* to be good for the movement. It cannot be questioned.

History too plays a role in the rise of radicalism. The 1947 split between the National Conference and its left over component the Muslim Conference bears significance even today⁴⁶. Ideologically, the Muslim Conference was pro Pakistan, a section whose view world did not change to the broader, more inclusive orientation of the National Conference. It thus never learned to reach out or work with other communities. Somewhere its belief in the Two Nation theory also tapped a deep vein in certain sections, that it was 'natural' for Muslims to be part of a Muslim land at the expense of their ethnic, regional or cultural affinities. Economic realities, notions of power etc may have been at

⁴⁶ The Muslim Conference had its followers in wealthy landowners, traders and conservative elites who all opposed Abdullah's National Conference for various reasons – See Introduction.

the actual core of this but its outward articulation came out in Islamist terms.

Says Muzaffar, the government official, “Maulana Masoodi’s group authored the alienation against the Sheikh because *Muslim* landowners lost land because of the reforms. These are the very same people who are now in the forefront of radical Islamic thought.” Adds Kashmiri Pandit Kumar Wanchoo, “These are the remnants of the old Muslim Conference that promote radicalism. It doesn’t mean the whole Kashmiri society is radicalised.”

Indeed it is not, yet the influence, power and reach of the Islamist superstructure in Kashmir has increased manifold since 1990. Its power is felt most strongly during street protests in recent years that are whipped into uncontrollable hysteria over any issue thought to have an anti government potential. Its followers are the moneyed orchard owners, traders, trade groups, religiously conservative followers of Islamist separatist leaders like Geelani etc and even some mainstream political parties that utilise their mobilisation power and street visibility aggressively. This aggressive visibility and frenzied articulation scares off any challenge from more moderate views and it is the Islamist view in the end that triumphs due to its sheer takeover of the public space.

Unpacking the infrastructure of radicalism – The cash influx

The armed conflict performed the function of bringing together these already present historical communal elements with a current day ideology that supported them and a supportive environment, pro Pakistan militants, foreign *jehadi* mercenaries who actively expressed contempt for the old Kashmiri Islam of *ziarrats* and *naat*, violence and cash that accelerated their profile and support. It led to an upsurge in the various schools of Islam and their speedy physical establishment across the state. It was strengthened by the spread of Pakistan’s brand of Islam and their foreign mercenaries.

Coupled with the influx of cash from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and India itself, the rise of Islamic organisations in the 90s and their penetration into society through schools and other services, (the AeH runs 93 schools in the Valley – up from four, 10 years ago), the proliferation of mosques with dome like roofs instead of the traditional Kashmiri pagoda style, the mushrooming of *mohalla* or neighbourhood leaders who get a good

sum to build them and earn political mileage, the use of the *jehadi* bank of militants by mainstream leaders, are important factors for radicalisation. Islamic TV channels that bring concepts of global Islam⁴⁷ home use modern technology without bringing in modernity.

Gradually these educated, middle class Islamists acquire jobs and penetrate the system and quietly do their job. They formulate or influence policy decisions, give land to their own, propagate the Islamist view in decision making processes, concessions on militants, teach students etc.

Abdul Hameed, the government school teacher who has flirted with militancy and spent time in jail, for example, tells his “*ziarratwala* students” as he defines those who go to *ziarrats* – ‘All this is not allowed in religion’.

“They are in a *state* of ignorance,” he assures. “*Once they learn, all this will be gone.*”

Similarly though the AeH schools give a secular education, they are effectively teaching an entire generation of Kashmiris that their ancient culture is blasphemous and putting pressure and guilt upon them to stay away from all aspects of it. The Kashmiri’s own indecisiveness and drift over this, both enhances this process and detracts from it – resolution about what type of society is desirable remains in a state of limbo.

The global story

The other major factor is the global scenario. Islamists who seek to mould community opinion position non Muslims in the dock together as a monolith, whether they are the Americans in Iraq, Russians in Chechnya or Indians in Kashmir – since the Islamist world view is limited to Islam and the ‘other’. Muslims therefore are also put in to a monolithic structure that responds ‘collectively’. In any kind of communal conflagration hence, or during issues that pit Muslims against non Muslims in other parts of India for example, this collectivisation

⁴⁷ Zakir Naik, a prominent Indian Muslim preacher and charismatic televangelist has a massive popular following among Muslims of the subcontinent though his views that Islam is superior to all religions have resulted in multiple controversies over his statements. He has variously claimed that the Afghans had every right to destroy the Bamiyan Buddhas as it was their own property since there were no Buddhists in Afghanistan and that sexual attraction was the main feature of coeducation, among other pronouncements.

ensures there is no movement towards seeking a broader view. There is only one side – the Muslim one.

The community's collective sense of grievance is exacerbated when injustices like involvement in conflagrations or leniency towards anti Muslim perpetrators are highlighted in state behaviour, as in the Gujarat or Bombay riots – but like all rigid ideologies, it also consolidates a stiff opposition to assigning accountability for Muslim intransigence in other conflictual issues.

It easily seeks the routes of 'justificatory' mechanisms to overlook these but denies the other, similar 'justification' or simply 'blocks' it out. It is difficult to then achieve a stand alone, issue by issue judgement based on merits of each case – this process is easily swept aside by the 'collective' experience of 'injustice' at the hands of 'others' because this is 'collectively' assigned a religious, anti Muslim motive. Economic, social or other parameters simply never enter this narrow and non nuanced discourse. Unlike other communities, the balancing moderation of other sections *within the community* is hard to come by too because of the fear of being perceived as anti Islamic or not following the true tenets of Islam.

In Kashmir especially, the lack of a minority means a whole generation has grown up in an insular, homogenous society without exposure to the 'other' that might have blunted this collective discourse of grievance imported from outside events and the way they are positioned by Islamist rhetoric.

"We never had Pandit friends, we don't miss them either," declares Farhan. Says Zafar Qadri, "India is one for us – a big block, a huge Hindu country."

This monolithic group identity promotes a self indulgent feeling of group victimisation. Political solutions that factor in regional elements are deprioritised. Not surprisingly Kashmir is deprioritised too.

"There is no end to this problem. India and Pakistan can buy calm not peace – because it's global", says Obaid, one of the Baramulla boys.

The global conflicts also promote a sense of self flagellation. Islamists say since Muslims have strayed off the path of 'true' Islam they will suffer.

Says Dr Margoob, “You get the feeling that you are not thankful enough to Allah. The coping mechanism is increasing Islamisation”.

Ashrafi, the *namaazi* government official, echoes his diagnosis, his voice high pitched with rage. “Kashmiris aren’t religious, that’s why they have shrines. They LIE every day. Disobedience will have to be punished – they LEFT the Will of God. Islam is best but those who follow it are not the best. That’s why we’re punished and beaten everywhere – we DON’T follow!!”

On the other hand victory pumps up the collective ego to dizzying levels. “Muslims will think of battles the Prophet fought and defeated others when they think of Russia,” says Junaid Hasan, the JKLF supporter. “ ‘We defeated Russia’ they say, *not* that US fought a multi pronged attack for 50 years using all their resources. The rise of Hamas and Hezbolla – the Masood Azhars and Geelanis can sell it for the next five years to the Muslims in our small Valley. And people buy it!”

As a cop out or thumb sucking device then, radicalisation prevents the acceptance of reality and prolongs resolution. Pakistan’s injection of foreign militants that radicalised the movement in the early nineties itself was symptomatic of this.⁴⁸

The Senior Superintendent of Police Anantnag says, “Foreigners are keen to spread this beyond the frontiers of Kashmir as well. Mostly *jehad* is in the minds of the *motivators* not the actual involved people – hardly 10% are *jamaatis*.”

The response of the state

As anger against the state increases, the crutch of religion becomes an appealing one. When security excesses like fake encounters are exposed, Kashmir’s tangled past involving the two nation theory creates a messy, ideological confusion. This translates the state’s violent response to an insurgency to a Muslim versus non Muslim situation that easily plugs into a global Islamic feeling of wretchedness that remains temptingly accessible. Stereotypical explanations especially from the media or Islamists then create the acceptance of radical Islamic ideology as a source of comfort and final truth.

⁴⁸ The Kashmir rebellion had been defeated by the early nineties but Pakistan was unwilling to step back from its investment. Instead it revitalised the flagging insurgency by an injection of *jehadi* fighters that emphasized Islamist ideology over Kashmir’s own Azaadi ideology and took over the struggle, sidelining the Kashmiris and their concepts.

Relates Zafar Qadri, “Once a soldier stopped both of us and asked us to show our IDs. We showed him our Baramulla college ID and he said show me an ID with India written on it. I told him Baramulla is not in Pakistan – it’s in *India* only. He made us go over to the riverbank – I thought he was going to ‘encounter’ us. When he left us finally we didn’t speak to each other. We felt hurt. We felt we needed freedom.”

Dr Margoob, the psychiatrist says, “Moral codes of conduct, family support are all adrift. Therefore you try to latch on to people with a group identity – for example; Islamists. Then even sporting a beard provides identity. This is an individual coping mechanism – it gives a group feeling”.

Samir provides a textbook case. “Islam gives solidarity that you are not alone – we are with you,” he says. When a soldier is pointing a gun at you, you seek refuge. It comes from Islam.”

Besides state brutality is the ‘Hindu’ face of the professedly secular Indian government that Kashmiri Muslims say reveals itself in the bureaucracy, administration and forces’ attitudes. Two decades of fighting a ‘Muslim’ insurgency has not left *it* unaffected. Shakeel Bakshi, head of the Islamic Students League objects to the use of religious symbols “India introduces itself in the Valley as soft Hindutva. The army flaunts religious symbols everywhere It results in fundamentalism as a response to this. *You* are the faithless ones, why blame us?”

Kashmiris also refer to the historical disdain shown towards the ‘local’ in the power hierarchy where the man from Delhi always has the real clout and say in the state power structure. But even here the real clash between nationalist and separatist or central versus federal discourses is translated, fought on and overshadowed by a non Muslim versus Muslim platform.

Muzaffar, the government official says, “A Hindu IAS officer or IPS *wala* has more power than a minister. You can see how this will harden Kashmiri Muslim sentiment.”

Order and Chaos

In the pre militancy years the influence of outside culture, movies, tourists and women was strong. “When tourists came everyone was *too* busy with them – no time. Then we’d watch movies, Holly, Bolly...

Now the influences are mosque, ideology, Zakir Naik and unemployment, says Junaid. So you see all this....”

Says Dr Margoob at 7 pm with 30 patients in his clinic, “At this time my seniors would be in the Club. Your perception of life changes whether you face it or not. Priorities then would have been different – now there is nothing. The vacuum has to be filled. So this radicalisation is a way of coping.” Into this chaos steps order.

“Islam gives a path to follow,” says Zafar Qadri. “There is no left, no right, no confusion, no crossroads. It’s very clear.”

The Contradiction Within – Radicalism as a Threat to *Azaadi*

The dangers of passivity to this radicalism are not unknown. Its emphasis on universalism transforms religion and nationality into interchangeable quantities that Islamists say is natural and correct according to the Book.

Says S.H. Muzaffar, “This is an attempt by other side (Islamists) to influence. We have to take care not to fall into the trap.”

In fact this concept transforms the ideal of *azaadi* itself – the bedrock of the conflict. It now runs the increasing risk of coming second and slowly becoming irrelevant altogether as in the larger struggle for Islam across the globe. The danger is well recognised by moderate leaders yet there is no forceful stand to reclaim the Kashmiri sub nationalist identity in the face of this aggressive radicalism. Taking on the ‘moral’ high ground of radical Islam’s claim to being the ‘real’ Islam is a task most would resist for fear of the gun and of being painted as ‘unbelievers’.

Ironically, in this situation, the only entity that has a stake in preserving the old ethos of Kashmir is the state. Television programmes extol the virtues of shrines and saints through folk songs and encourage Kashmiri folk traditions. Yet this endorsement and aggressive hard sell by the state also raises more suspicions about it especially when Islamists disparage it. In the battle for mind space, the fence sitter is torn with guilt, starts denying his past and tries harder to conform to this ‘real’ Islam. This denial of its basic essence and past remains a peculiar choice for a cause that bases itself on its unique identity yet wishes to wipe out those very components that make it so.

The lack of pride in Kashmir's unique, mixed ethos or its pre Islamic elements means the young devalue their inheritance and have no regrets at its loss. Even those who recognise its value are passive in its defence, wary of reclaiming it. Therefore, even though *ziarrats* see thronging crowds, the number of those who believe in their unworthiness is growing and significant. Ironically, the only rethinking of sorts and courage has been in hard line Islam's ideological heart – the Jamaat e Islami – that has *itself* plunged into misgivings and gone through a very public struggle between moderates and extremists *within* its fold. This ongoing battle is symptomatic of the future picture in Kashmir.

Modernity: Responses & Challenges

Escape Valves from Islamist Micromanagement

The biggest challenge to Islamic radicalism in Kashmir comes from the ready availability of several *other* options – aspirational, leisure and educational. High school teachers in Anantnag discuss an unlikely steam valve in a conflict area – *Saas-bahu* or mother in law-daughter in law serials – immensely popular despite their Hindu oriented content of rituals, festivals and clothes⁴⁹.

“They are popular because the old traditions of Kashmir involved the Dada around whom the household would revolve – he laid down the rules,” says a teacher. “Youngsters also like this *gharelu* or homely atmosphere.” With their depictions of clear, organised family hierarchy they cut across generations to elicit nostalgia and longing for an older, firmer, more structured order and more peaceful times that poses a challenge to radicalism.

It is no wonder that Ashrafi complains that the “Government of India has encroached our mind space by introducing TV.” Yet if preacher Zakir Naik spews a more isolating worldview, these serials connect the Kashmiri to the rest of the country and allow him to see the similarity in their lives. One of the teachers tries to say “watching TV is a sin....” but the others laughingly admit, no one sleeps before 11:30 (when the serials end). In fact there are few who can live in the austere, extremist pitch that these radical motivators demand.

Says Andrabi, “You cannot do what Aasia says – you have to do as you are *told*. When you sleep, how to turn over, when you go to the toilet, which foot should come first, everything is written in Islam. *You cannot choose!*”

Education and the India Alternative – the Counter Challenge

The options to move out and acquire education expand the mind beyond this Islamist micromanagement. Qazi Yassir, the religious head of South

⁴⁹ The biggest response to television entertainment was when Qazi Touqeer, Kashmir’s own boy became one of three finalists of Fame Gurukul in 2005, a voter based popular musical competition show that he finally won because of the tremendous backing from his state that voted over text message votes to help him grab the top spot.

Kashmir, a young boy when his father was assassinated went to Aligarh for his schooling. “There were lots of non Muslims there. At first, I didn’t like it, but later I felt, if *they* can adjust, then why can’t I? I learnt that four religions can prevail in one society not vice versa. We were a society in school – people from 3-4 religions – all part of it.”

The opposite effect is also easily visible of young boys radicalised by their stints in areas where anti Kashmiri sentiment may be perceptible. Yet many take the odd incident in their stride because of the cushion of friends, mostly non Muslim and the modern lifestyle they aspire towards. In fact it is *parental* emphasis on education in the last several years that has caused the drastic fall in the number of urban boys in the militancy unlike the 90s.

So much so, that even the bastions of hard line Islam - the Jamaat and the Ahl e Hadees are highly conscious of the immense power of secular education over *madrassahs* that churn out fanatic *jehadis*. The moderate Jamaati G.M. Bhat who looks after education in the Jamaat schools says Kashmir is different from the Pakistani *madrassahs*. “Sheikh Abdullah made education compulsory and lots of poor kids got good positions. In Pakistan, there was less education and more eating and drinking and a ‘special’ kind of teaching – it attracted wrong people. Here no school can succeed without conforming to the Central syllabus. There is total emphasis on science. Islamic studies are optional. Our schools are extremism free, not channels of extremism. Salauddin (chief of the militant Hizb ul Mujahideen, the largest existing *Kashmiri* militant group) is a product of government school,” he ends pointedly.

Similarly, the AeH leader may insist on fully *purdah* clad women but his schools are models of ‘normality’ except for the Arabic style compulsory headscarves for girls. Both Hindi and Urdu options are offered. The Kashmiri language is a brand new addition to the syllabus – a step that will inculcate a long missing pride in Kashmiri heritage and attempt to resist the radical tide. Yet Class 9 AeH girls resolutely identify themselves as Muslims first (all). Kashmir comes second (all), India (only 6 out of 23-4) or Pakistan (only 3) third. In a choice of supporting a team of Kashmir Vs Pakistan, some are so drastically conflicted in a contest between Muslim country and motherland that the result is exactly half and half. One is unable to make a choice and asks if she can support both. On the other hand, region is so unimportant

that even the anti India majority (2/3rd of the class) will support India against Jammu or Ladakh. These trends point to the fact that modern education cannot mask or dilute the original intent of the Ahl-e-Hadees – to take people back to the “basics” of Islam and inculcate an ever narrowing space for the other. These are the qualified people who will move into government and private jobs, but will choose their Islamic identity over their regional or national one.

Still, modern education willy-nilly provides tools for creative thinking and individualism. The class has a pro Indian group – 6-10 who persistently put up hands for India over Pakistan despite agreeing their identity is Muslim first. Their reasons for defying the majority in the class are interesting. “Because Kashmir is part of India and we have to love our nation,” says one. They also agree with the poet Iqbal’s inspirational hymn *Saare jahaan se achha Hindustan hamaara* (Our India is the best in the world) while the others disagree.

As always, the aspirational model, the bigger dream challenges the radical forces. Sharing the India success story is a tempting, accessible alternative. It offers status, respect and pride – all in short supply in a conflict area. So much so that when Zafar Qadri, the most radicalised of the Baramulla boys outlines his ideal fantasy Islamic state of *abayas*, segregation etc, he also includes growth in IT; welding the growth model of India, the understanding of modernity’s challenge and the necessity of meeting it.

In the 90s the creamy layer fled the state and got jobs outside but now there are plenty who have followed too. Says Hasan, “Inside the *masjid* the Kashmiri will say yes to Geelani but outside he’ll think ‘but my daughter’s job is there’....” The continued access to good quality job and education options and the freedom to move in and out of the state is a significant challenge to radicalism unlike other conflict areas like Chechnya or Palestine. As always, when radicalism restricts dreams – modernity wins.

Part – IV

Rural Kashmir

**Veiled Fractures, Changing Paradigms
and Diverse Voices**

Introduction: Changing Identities in Conflict, Transformative Shifts in Peace

Identity shifts in rural Kashmir have followed a trajectory dependent on its unique conditions of conflict. As the theatre of some of the most brutal and hidden violence; rural Kashmir has suffered intense changes that have remained *veiled* from the media and the public discourse. Its daily life has also been vastly more fractured due to anarchic violence and destruction of infrastructure.

While urban Kashmir retreated soon after raising the slogans and the temperature – and deserted the battleground to send many of its children to safe places outside – rural Kashmir continued losing its young to the militancy, effectively trapped in the ferocity of the battle between the forces and the militants in their isolated hamlets, where government was virtually missing for years and media didn't venture. This has meant that its shifts in identity or mindset patterns have been somewhat distinctive from the main cities and towns.

The role of a gradual and 'forcible' peace imposed in the face of local passivity, fear of the gun, limited resistance and the vacillating persistence of the *azaadi* sentiment in the last eight years has reshaped this terrain. Laboriously wrested by *three key criteria* – the security forces' gradual domination and the resultant reduction in violence, the ceasefire and finally, representative government in the state; it has powered the emergence of several crucial gains in the last eight years.

A giant wave of education⁵⁰, a massive state powered developmental thrust in the rural areas, the awareness of political rights and democratic systems since 2002 and the consciousness of identity as a role player in concessions from the state – these have all engineered transformations in the rural areas. Minority voices emerging from their remote,

⁵⁰ The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan website has a report dated 2005 for J&K that claims the percentage of out-of-school children in the age group of 6-14 years was only 7.31% while later press reports in 2007-8 contradictorily claim that primary enrolment fell from 62.52 per cent in 2006-07 to 59.29 per cent the next year in the whole state including Jammu and Ladakh. Though it was not possible to check the particular Valley figures with the SSA authorities in the state, the sheer physical evidence of active SSA schools in the Valley and the sheer number of private schools with names like Little Star, Angels etc mushrooming in rural areas is indicative of the palpable fervour for education apparent in the answers and attitudes of numerous people I interviewed and schools I visited.

geographical isolation to make their own community/ethnicity based demands have also changed the impression of a homogenous landscape.

The old paradigms of identity and nationality are simply too inadequate to deal with these new issues and are fast being swept aside for new ones. Sometimes these manifest in hesitant, temporary, unstable, pacy *swings* in identity that go back and forth. Over time they settle down to become more enduring *shifts* in more aware sections of the populace. Yet like all conflicts, sustained peace is essential for these shifts to stabilize. The gains of the forcible peace can easily be eroded if any of its key criteria is disturbed or interrupted. Even so, it is difficult to see them being totally reversed. The process of stabilising identity swings may slow down but the gains of peace will make it difficult to bring it to a total halt.

Section A

Violence and Loss in the 90s

Countryside and Later

The Creation of the Countryside as the Theatre of Conflict

The Shift of Militancy and its Transformation

At the start of the armed conflict in the 90s, its leadership, articulation and vision, however limited, were mainly local and urban. Within 2-3 years this changed with the rise of the rural based Hizb ul Mujahideen⁵¹, the arrival of the foreigner and the setting up of the security grid across the state that mapped every city and street closely. Militants retreated from their base in the towns to villages, jungles and mountains that were compelled by natural factors to be less intensely secured. Areas near the LoC came on the infiltration routes and entry points, providing shelter. This transformed the militancy from its public and local character to its remote, inaccessible and alien one.

This key change meant that rural Kashmir became the *actual theatre of conflict* though ideology or ‘cause’ monitored by Pakistan, remained in urban hands. The threat to the city resident shrank to certain areas of operations – public spaces, forces’ posts etc. The village didn’t have such a distinction. The large presence of armed militants in the countryside and its role as the *main* arena of their challenge to the security forces destroyed the rhythms of daily life and home as it had existed. Caught between the two, their lives and property remained at stake and their young became the recruiting pool for foreign groups. The collapse of the state left them isolated in a violent, backward and destroyed environment with no one to turn to. As a result, rural Kashmir suffered deeply and in virtual *obscurity* in ways that urban Kashmir did not.

⁵¹ The JKLF’s *Azaadi* slogan was quickly trumped in the early nineties itself by the pro Pakistan Hizb ul Mujahideen, the Islamist *tanzeem* that advocate merger with Pakistan and systematically attacked the JKLF cadres. See Navnita Chadha Behera : Demystifying Kashmir and Manoj Joshi: the Lost Rebellion. The urbane ideologues of the idea of *Azaadi* retreated to give way to the rural, semi literate yet disciplined, committed cadres of the HIzb. The HIzb was superseded too by the mid nineties, its leadership and force dominated now by foreigners – veterans of the Afghan War, pumped in by the ISI to keep the insurgency going in high gear.

Similar brutalities and tensions are *still* commonplace in currently ‘active’ areas where thick forests or inaccessible zones limit the number of forces and sustain a large (mostly foreign) militant presence and organization, especially in North Kashmir. These offer insights into the mayhem of the 90s. Militants, mostly foreigners,⁵² still roam visibly in the upper stretches of Bandipora, the mountain district on the LoC that is ‘active’; and no one goes out after 8-8:30 “even if a brother calls”.

As an example, in 2007, Mansoor, an ordinary daily wager was ordered outside his house by unidentified masked militants and his throat slit. Frequent attacks on the forces in such ‘hot’ zones also tend to ensure a response that prioritises the militant’s *neutralization* rather than civilian life and property – as in other more peaceful areas that are ahead on the conflict curve. This inevitably leads to heavy handedness and harsh dealings between the security forces and the people and the levelling of human rights allegations.

Key Differences in the Rural-Urban Nature of Militant Violence

Brutal and public killings: Militant killings in urban areas were mostly selective, political or involved civilians as collateral damage accidentally or deliberately as a matter of strategy while targeting security forces. Those in rural areas were often showy, brutal and many times public – to teach lessons and spread terror. Many of these epitomized the swagger of newly powerful young men who had the supreme clout of life and death over the villagers. Some villages lost 15-20 people to such killings at the peak of the militancy – mostly in the 90s. Retired serviceman Khaliq Sofi and his entire family are an example of this ‘publicness’ of killing in Marhama village of Kupwara that lost 22 people to militant killings⁵³. Sofi’s family including the women was wiped out in three incidents over six months, on the road and in their own homes. “There were no men left at home – they all ran away. They (militants) just wouldn’t spare them.” says a local.

⁵² By the mid nineties foreign groups such as the Harkat ul Ansar and Harkat ul Mujahideen had entrenched themselves in North Kashmir and announced their presence by high profile abductions and killings of foreign tourists and a stepped up insurgency with sharper fighting skills and tactics and a radical Islamist/jehadi thinking.

⁵³ I travelled to Marhama in Kupwara district after I requested specific information from the DC Kupwara’s office on the last major attack in the district that involved a multiple loss of civilian lives inflicted either by militants or security forces. The numbers were given in interviews with Marhama locals

Ordinariness of the targets: A second feature was the ordinariness of militant targets – labourers, ex soldiers and their families, low level government employees etc. Disappearances, midnight abductions and killings illustrate this ordinariness. Altaf, a teacher at Arin High School in Bandipora lost his brother who went on duty as a Forest Guard in 1998 one morning and never came back. His body was never found and his presumed death put down to unidentified gunmen.

Young boys as recruits: Young rural boys *continued* to be a mine of militant recruits long after they had ceased to be so in the cities. They often turned upon their own communities, creating deep fissures within the village unit. Their own deaths at the hands of forces brought home personal tragedy to many of these communities. In the initial years children became vulnerable to militant propaganda or succumbed to the monetary lure unless safeguarded by parents. Soon *after* the initial years, their entry into militant ranks started being governed by elements of coercion and brainwashing especially by foreign groups. In Bandipore, Budgam and other forested areas, age groups as young as 14 years still remain fodder for recruitment.

Backwardness, lack of education, remoteness and simple religious fervour make rural hamlets easy targets for foreign group recruitments. Unlike city boys or those in peaceful areas with their determined focus on education and grand ambitions; these young village boys are often stuck in dead end situations. With no one to rein them in or offer alternatives, they are vulnerable to *jehadi* influence and have no knowledge or expertise to combat it. The active militancy denies them the shield of leading a normal life that gradually opens up these alternatives. Once recruited, there is no going back. Surrenders were possible only with local groups. Today, the foreigner will kill him if he tries to leave and Army will kill him if he doesn't – the average life of an average active militant is barely a year or two at the maximum.

The Transformation of ‘Home’ from Refuge to Place of Danger

A common factor in rural Kashmir has been the threat to life at a place regarded as ‘home’ but which offered no sanctuary. In this way, the militancy’s blanket and transformative nature in rural areas was different from the better guarded urban areas where the distinction between ‘home’ and ‘outside’ still remained and daily life did not change as dramatically.

Domination and Unaccountable Authority of the ‘Other’ at ‘Home’

A key factor in this transformation was the establishment of a powerful *force* in the area – whether militant group or security forces – and its domination over the local villages. The race for information against the other, the recruitment of villagers as informers, the turning of one local against the other and their ‘punishment’ by arrests or killings as ‘*mukhbirs*’ or informers by these competing centres of power within the area; made the isolated interior hamlet a place without escape.

More importantly, these dominating power centres were *unaccountable in the absence* of the civil administration. Because of this absence, there was no recourse to a higher authority – *they* were the authority. Unlike the urban areas with governance and media presence, a villager’s home and personal spaces were therefore subjected to an authority that *could not be challenged*. Rape, unaccounted arrest or custodial death allegations against security forces of the early 90s can almost certainly be attributed to the abuse of this authority. Troops visited their fury upon residents if they had suffered casualties in the area recording instances of civilians being shot in their homes. They opened fire like the BSF reportedly did in Handwara and Sopore destroying entire built up zones and killing civilians in large numbers. Custodial deaths, illegal detentions and disappearances were regularly documented by human rights organisations and as the intensity of the battle increased, things got worse before they got better with the formulation of institutional responses in the form of court enquiries, punishments, service dismissals and other excesses that brought in some form of accountability at a later stage though many were often challenged as being too lenient.

Yet the graph started curving downward in response as the Forces tried to tinker with systems and tighten procedures to avoid excesses and the fallout they brought with them.

However militant violations till date remain unchallenged and unaccountable. *Namaloom afraad* (unknown gunmen) could kill anyone, anywhere, anytime with the excuse of *mukhbiri*, ‘unIslamic’ talk, blasphemy or just personal enmity. They could do so publicly, cruelly and randomly, without assigning justification for their actions. The public fear would ensure silence and the lack of any authority to rein them in would support their impunity.

“The 90s were a chaos of abductions, extortions and killings - a class of criminals masquerading as *mujahids*”, as Prof Jameel from a district Degree College describes.

They were so – because they could be. They remain so even now.

Being forced to remain *inside* this theatre of conflict was the personal cross of the rural Kashmiri – home became a jail. Poverty, land and livelihood limitations meant the suffocation of being forced to continue living inside the havoc and brutality. Unlike many from the urban population who fled or sent their children out of the state including the Islamists, escape was not possible nor shut away the slaughter and havoc outside. The villager therefore lost the mental concept of ‘home’ as refuge or place of safety and comfort in a way the urban population didn’t really have to.

Being a forcible witness or participant at home

In fact the conflict and bloodshed entered the very core of home and hearth. Children and the family as a unit witnessed killings, beatings, large scale battles and the possible loss of family members on their doorsteps as a daily occurrence. In 1993, Pakistani militant leader Mast Gul and 30-40 well armed militants who were well ensconced for weeks in a well populated village in Anantnag were surrounded by the army. A fierce gun battle was fought for three days. All those inside the village were forced to *remain* in their homes and grounds *even as they were being used* as staging arenas and vantage points for the battle. In Pattan, orphan Waseem Ahmed 11; saw his father being killed in a similar gun battle in his fields simply trying to reach home close by.

The Mahigeers⁵⁴ of the Wular Lake from the lowest sections of society, talk of a bloody incident where armed STF personnel or ‘Ikhwanis’ chased 3 boys through the neighbourhood one evening, in full public view. Their bodies were found in a nearby nursery the next morning. Whether they were militants or innocent, the extra judicial killings brought the brutality in to the heart of the community’s most private space.

“The STF (J&K Police’s Special Task Force) would kidnap people and ask for a ransom of a lakh or two. Whoever couldn’t pay was killed,” adds an Arin villager. “If two people in the village have a personal issue – I can go to them against him, (and say he’s a militant) and they will pick him up.”

Secondly, operating in isolated or far off rural areas also forced militants to be dependent on locals for logistical support and use homes as shelters even as their presence endangered the host – a situation that may have been voluntary to start with but soon became coercive. Scarce resources including food and facilities were forced to be on offer. Beyond these lay the darker reality of forced sexual favours from the women of the house. Along with forced marriages, abandoned ‘wives’ and unwanted pregnancies these militant depredations transformed even the ‘home’, the extended ‘home’ or village/community into places of danger and terror.

⁵⁴ Interview in Bandipora in 2007

The Veiled Aspect of Countryside Militancy

An important characteristic of militancy in the rural areas was the *veiled* aspect of its operation unlike that of the urban areas. After the shift in the early 90s, entire villages could be taken over by militants who lived in village homes and invited armed challenges from the forces in a way that was impossible in easily accessible, high profile urban areas with well guarded interiors and well functioning channels of information including the media. During these years, militant activities hostile to the villagers remained covered up behind a conspiracy of silence. Fear, isolation and survival were definite motives behind this but these came a little later. The initial silence was wrapped up in the *ambivalence* of the Kashmiri – rural or urban. The heroic image of the iconic ‘*mujahid*’ and his awe inspiring ‘moral’ authority inspired little or no critical response at first to these depredations because of attempts to *protect* their image as saviours and swallow this ambivalent pill quietly.

Even the tragedy of the village was an obscure affair. The anonymity of deaths in remote locations where even the government presence had disappeared made them a lonely, unsung affair of a village community left to its own fate. There was no one it could go to for succour. In Bandipora, three members of a family were gunned down one night in their own home by militants while next door a neighbour’s son who had vanished at the age of 14 to join the foreign *jehadis*, had just returned two years later as a corpse handed over by the forces. These deaths were not peculiar to rural areas but the frequency of their incidence and their obscurity in the larger conflict *were*.

The Obscurity of Violence

Media neglect: Because of its far-off, isolated locations, this theatre failed to generate the kind of media exposure and debate that urban Kashmir managed to achieve right from the start of the conflict. Unless there were prominent assassinations like Qazi Nissar in Anantnag or large numbers involved as in the Kunan Pashpora rape allegations, killings or violations in rural areas *especially* by militants remained hidden or simply unreported. This was especially true of the early years when the sheer intensity of the militant challenge made it impossible to venture into certain areas.

Secondly, class issues played a role in this media neglect – the Srinagar based newspapers and the young elite of the well to do towns were mentally and physically removed from the scene. Once the militant lost his iconic status in the urban *mohallas*, so too did the interest of the urban residents in the militant, how he fought or died etc. Later when the militant became a foreigner and his image started changing to that of a predator and earned upper class, urban disdain, these class issues created a further distance. The poverty or ordinariness of his targets or his young recruits made them the poor fodder still dying for the cause that the urban class had long stopped physical sacrifice for. It prompted little hysteria the way urban *mohalla* militants did in the early 90s – nor any showy funerals as before (or like those still occurring in rural areas for iconic militant leaders, many of them foreign).

Inarticulation of dissent, frustration and suffocation: The choice to articulate dissent publicly was throttled by the threat to life. In the case of the forces, especially in the early 90s this could take the form of arrests, disappearances or retaliation. In currently ‘active’ areas the level of fear remains high.

Says Abdul Nazir from Arin village in Bandipora, “We cannot say anything to the forces. If we criticise them, they arrest us under false charges of being a militant. We can’t say a word about them. They have shut our mouths just like the militants.”

Yet though large scale demonstrations in the earlier days were impossible once the forces achieved domination, the small/medium sized rural protest *was* a standard motif of that era to voice dissent against the security forces whenever such incidents occurred; especially those involving large numbers. Once the incident *was* picked up by the media, condemnation was harsh and prolonged, demanding full accountability – for example Bijbehara, Kunan Pashpora, the Sopore market incident etc.

However in the case the militant, there *was no question* of articulating anger against their presence or killings – especially by the ordinary rural Kashmiri. An important element of the trauma suffered by rural Kashmir therefore remains the *inability* to voice grief and anger, to identify and apportion blame when the militant has been involved. Unlike the forces that could be identified in several cases – through official channels or a pro active, ultra vigilant media – the militant could not be identified even when he *was* identified. If they did, there were ‘consequences’.

In 1993 when the Mirwaiz of South Kashmir Qazi Nissar was killed by the Hizbul Mujahideen, his mourners shouted anti Hizb slogans at a giant funeral procession, possibly the first time in the insurgency when militants were openly *opposed* by a large section of the public. They were immediately threatened and had to suppress their anger. The media who reported the slogans was also threatened. When I interviewed on the same day, the Mirwaiz's killer - whose identity was an open secret – he *also* mourned his death and offered his condolences even as he warned those who had taken the Hizbul Mujahideen's name. At the accession ceremony of the Mirwaiz's son the next day in the public park, militants lounged openly outside the barbed wire fence displaying their arms but were still not allowed entry by a disapproving public.

Yet this was disapproval was rare – and made safe by numbers. Individual dissent was unknown especially in rural areas – the Mirwaiz himself was killed for criticizing the pro Pakistan direction of the militancy. The death of well known politician and JNU PhD Dr Ghulam Qadir Wani inside his own front door in Arin, Bandipore by gunmen in 1998 too, was attributed to his criticism of the Hurriyat at that stage.

A local Arin villager says “He was killed for saying what the Hurriyat is saying today - that ‘There should be peace’. He brought the Hurriyat's mistakes out into the open, asked them why they had so many killed?” says another.

A niece who rushed down to protect him was also killed and others suffered injuries. The gunmen melted away into the night. Nazir Ahmed Wani his brother recalls the protest demonstrations after the killing with slogans like ‘Haul out his killers before us!’. Yet even though everyone knew who they were, he says, “There was so much pressure! We just *couldn't* reveal the names. When these people kill they don't even let us cry for our dead. The fear overcomes the pain. We do get angry but can't take names even if we know everything. Because if we say anything they come in the evening to kill us”

In short, democratic opinion was throttled and fear ruled the expression of the public discourse.

The ultimate obscurity: The ultimate obscurity however, was of the one issue that almost no Kashmiri will talk of even today – the exploitation of women by militants inside the rural homes they took

shelter in. The incidence of rape was such an expected motif of the fear and the violence that few had the audacity to resist. It was this factor that eventually prompted many Kashmiris to covertly assist the security forces and aid their intelligence efforts. Once again it was rural Kashmir that bore the brunt of this particular humiliation and pain. Though cases involving rape allegations against the forces have received widespread publicity and forceful demands for inquiry commissions and punishment through the years; there is an unnatural silence on the widespread militant depredations even though these are widely acknowledged in private.

The Destruction of Rural Daily Life, Infrastructure & Institutions

Destruction of the Pillars of Rural Life

The militancy also destroyed the institutions that *sustained* rural life by razing pillars of local infrastructure like schools, health centres, Panchayats etc. Governance was brought to a complete halt in the 90s unlike the city where a semblance of order still prevailed.

“Panchayat offices were bombed or set on fire first because they are the first source of all information about peoples’ comings and goings”, says Hasan, a junior employee in a Rural Development office. “People came from outside and destroyed the system itself so that no one would know of their presence in the area and official channels could not be activated.” Their revival is still a half hearted affair. Several lie locked up and obviously long abandoned.

“No officer would come here then”, adds Hasan as we traverse the rural areas of Chadoora. “Militants would roam freely, snatching cars, demanding money, terrorising people. Official cars would be taken away at gunpoint to be used. No one would go into the field for any work”

Education suffered greatly too as schools were burned down in virtually every part of the state – the Lolab, Chadoora, Bandipora, Anantnag etc. Children stayed home for long stretches and became vulnerable to militancy. When the Pandits in the rural areas fled, an invaluable pillar – the local schoolteacher – in the Kashmiri’s educational life was removed. Health Centres and rural development activities were affected too. Employees of Animal Husbandry Centres⁵⁵ would not leave office to go to locations for treatment of animals. Governance in the rural areas was replaced by a staggering degree of corruption that sustained the rural economy through those years. No local official could verify the disbursement of funds, schemes or expenses for instance in the actual field areas. These were simply distributed at the DC’s office with no idea about their actual implementation. Militants instead acquired control over village resources like the forests, timber felling etc and took upon themselves the authority of dictating official action

⁵⁵ Based on interviews conducted in Budgam district at various Government centres including Panchayats, Rural health centres and Animal Husbandry centres.

through local officials who had to comply with their orders to divert funds or distribute contracts etc.

The disappearance of the local political representative/worker was another pillar removed from rural life. Under threat or actually eliminated by militants, the politician or party worker lay low or was forced to migrate to safer areas. With him, the chain that connected the villager to the outside world was snapped. So too, the articulation of the discomfort and grievances of his daily life. Small day to day requests – on property matters, for resource allocation, for medical facilities/treatment – these had no link to higher authorities.

This had a ruinous fallout during the times of severe conflict. The prominent local voice that could have vouched for the anonymous villager, whose word might have been given credence by army authorities, on whose guarantee sons or brothers may have been released; had vanished from the area or stayed firmly out of the public eye. His personal knowledge of the villages and their people vanished with him. In such difficult times the absence of a knowledgeable intermediary who could have facilitated the contact between the army and the rural public was a critical disaster. His place was taken by the militant whose diktats on social, economic and all other issues ran supreme. It made the conflict even more difficult to bear.

Section B

Change in the Violence Paradigm of Rural Areas

Transformation of security environment – the coming of a forcible peace

Yet the 90s story dramatically changed in the new millennium. The peace process, representative government and the Army's domination of the area were the building blocks that brought about a forcible peace *in spite* of factors like local passivity, helplessness or active involvement - though people's weariness with violence was also an undeniable facilitator. In several frontier areas like Bandipora and Kupwara, the coming of peace was a series of cumulative, incremental small changes that added up to a drastic improvement in the security environment. With the coming of this peace, daily life was transformed.

The physical retreat of the militant

The major factor in this transformation was the gradual receding of the militant's overarching role in daily life since 2000⁵⁶. The squeezing of resources from Pakistan, the choking of routes by the fencing at the border and the ceasefire and the increased comfort levels of the armed forces; have shrunk his role and visibility, forcing him to forego the safety in numbers he had earlier. The possibility of Mast Gul's 1993 style encampment in a local village with 40 of his fighters is very, very limited today - like the issue of diktats or the unaccountable yet easy 'public' killings of alleged *mukhbirs*. In fact, the militant consideration of local priorities and potential harassment has been greater in the past few years *because* the cushion of a supportive local environment has been far less accessible. Seeking logistical support in villages well mapped by the security grid has been a hugely difficult task⁵⁷. Another

⁵⁶ According to the Indian Home Ministry, the number of violent incidents in 2008 was the lowest in twenty years at seven hundred, a 40 per cent drop compared to the number of incidents reported in 2007. The South Asia Terrorism Portal reports that 2008 also marks the first time civilian casualties have been under one hundred since 1990.

⁵⁷ Based on several interviews with serving police officers and Armed forces officers who were posted at various times in the rural areas of the Valley and built up the grid themselves or could see a declining graph within its parameters.

strong indicator is the drying up of *new* recruits for his ranks – a remarkable change in areas that were prime recruitment centres after the urban *mohalla* flow dried up early.

The return of daily life – the restoration of ‘home’

The restoration of ‘home’ for the rural denizen was thus an important indicator of the militant’s physical retreat. In villages where peace has largely returned, the return of daily life as it was *before* militancy has been significant. In Marhama, there is gossip at the tea stall, schoolchildren and elders hang about and a woman lies on a *chaadar* in the sun, chatting with her neighbours. The abandoned Sofi house is the only reminder that terror existed. Where people can walk in the dusk and not worry about being killed or when children start attending school regularly and when women feel free to go out of their homes or travel by bus, peace need not be a fragile, tentative achievement. It *can* have longer term repercussions – even for better off, educated rural sections like Prof Jameel.

“Things are much better now,” he says. “Pseudo Islamists would barge in asking questions or laying down procedures - things like boys and girls can’t sit together, women have to behave in a certain way etc. You can do things as an administrator that couldn’t be done earlier.”

The Return of the State in Rural Areas

Finally the strong return of the state in overwhelming ways in education, governance, health or rural development has been gradually driving stakes in to this forcible and hard won peace. (See Section D)

Invisible Changes – Tracking Shifts in Perceptions of Militants

With the coming of this forcible peace, the images of the two biggest shapers of the rural environment – the militants and the security forces - have also undergone dramatic and subtle shifts. Many of these reflect the changing realities on the ground.

Change in Image of Militants with Coming of Forcible Peace

In the urban areas, the concept of the heroic militant underwent an important shift due to 9/11. It showcased the innocent victims of militant activity through foreign eyes and put in place the legitimacy of retaliatory violence or the right of the soldier to fire back. TV screens showed there was little global support for violence. This deflated the hysteria and aggressive sense of grievance to more realistic levels.

In the rural areas that unlike the cities bore the *brunt* of militant depredations in silence accumulated weariness and fear resulted in a large scale aversion to the militant and his activities in the years of the forcible peace. Here too, not only did the militant physically retreat, his image did too. Fear and ambiguity did prevent the open expression of anti militancy opinion, yet a trend visible some years ago has been more apparent because of the establishment of some sort of peace and breathing space – the decisive image of the once heroic militant is that of a trespasser-predator indicated by the aversion with which locals view militancy. More importantly, peace has brought about a certain amount of public consensus *against* violence, visible in various ways – whether it is parents envisaging different futures for their children or the amount of support a militant gets in a neighbourhood.

Senior police officer, J&K Police, SM Sahay says, “In the last few years, if there is a man with a weapon in a village or *mohalla*, he will make an effort to conceal himself from the villagers because they no longer protect him. He will only go to his confidant’s house not roam around openly.”

Marhama village in Kupwara on an infiltration route from Pakistan and the site of the Sofi family massacre is a good example.

“So many became militants in the early years – saying ‘we ‘ll go to Pakistan and fight the enemy’”, informs the village elder at the tea stall whose owner is a former militant.

At one time, 50-60 outfits with about 200 armed men roamed in the area. At the moment, there is no active militant from the village and no one wants to join. An Army camp close by is treated with mutual wariness and non interference. Yet its presence brings the empowerment to voice an opinion earlier suppressed.

“Today there is no militancy. No one *wants* to become a militant. Nobody goes to *paar* anymore, the conditions are very different now,” clarifies a local from Bandipora where militancy is ‘active’.

Utterances like this are increasingly commonplace especially in the rural areas. Kashmiri militants are less frequent especially in the North, and new recruits scarce.

The paradox of showy militant funerals

Despite this visible, strong aversion to violence and militants, a paradox continues in the rural areas. Funeral processions of slain, mostly foreign militants continue to show a muscular attendance and they are laid to rest with full honour and respect, often as an Army officer puts it, “with the civil administration dancing in attendance, ensuring their smooth arrangements.” He believes this is a fraudulent, competitive ‘grief’ put on for others and has no real core. Separatists believe the opposite – that this grief is proof of the support for separatist sentiment.

A senior politician explains the paradox thus. “Firstly, it is obligatory for a Muslim to participate in another Muslim’s last rites and he even earns moral rewards for it. Secondly till we (politicians, *imams* and Muslim society’s standard bearers) continue to use the idiom of martyrdom or sanction for militants in our speeches or sermons at the Friday *namaaz*, the rural Kashmiri will take his cues from us. Then it becomes difficult for him to operate outside this social sanction and clearly show his indifference or dislike. His absence will be noticed and commented upon – that he didn’t do his duty at Shaheed (martyr) so-and-so’s *janaaza*(funeral procession) . So he is forced to come out and ‘show’ his ‘grief’. There is no doubt, that militancy is no longer a real option – no one wants it. Once this idiom of martyrdom is also removed from these militants – no one will be bothered about their funerals. Till then, the Kashmiri is unsure and will not take chances.”

Invisible Changes – Tracking Shifts in Perceptions of Security Forces

Change in image of Army role – greater legitimacy

The overturning of the militant image has also hugely affected attitudes to the Army which have undergone a key shift too. Unlike the past when even genuine operations against bona fide militants were resisted as being somehow unfair to heroes who shouldn't be targeted, the legitimate *right* of the Army to target them started being recognized once the *need for protection from them* emerged. However expectations *still* continued that this should be a sort of sanitized affair between the forces and the militants, leaving the civilian population undisturbed – even if there were sections within that were clearly actively involved with the militants.

Secondly, once the militant was seen as a source of peril, there was far greater understanding of the Army's job and its *intention* was no longer seen as vicious or *consciously* murderous. Routines that seemed unbearable have got a greater accommodation from people, especially the semi urban rural elite even as the forces have consciously tinkered with them to ensure greater consideration for locals.

Says Salim Shaikh, a trader in Kupwara, “Human rights violations, have reduced a lot now – it's not like before. Besides you can't really say it was their fault. If women carried weapons you *have* to start checking every woman.”

These ‘understanding’ perceptions were unthinkable in the earlier days. They owe their genesis to the militants’ demise as a hero and his transformation over the years as an interloper whose presence meant the destruction of peaceable daily life. Greater interactions with Army headquarters and a systemic building of convenient partnerships in rural areas where the Army has a large say in the environment; have led to a greater understanding of their role and a forced, mutually wary, daily relationship between the two that keeps the situation reasonably controlled and the channels of communication reasonably open.

The first paradox – antagonistic Army image in “active” areas

Despite this ‘understanding’ of their job and the ‘mandate’ given to them to target the militant however, the old high profile, anti Army

image is very much alive. A critical reason is the enduring existence of ‘active’ areas of high militancy like the 90s where the security forces are still relentlessly targeted by the militant – far *more* than in more peaceful areas. Like the 90s hence, they still prioritise his elimination *more* than keeping the civilian population comfortable. Local militancy and over ground involvement of Islamists keeps mutual suspicion levels high and empathy levels low from both sides. Incidents of crossfire or allegations of human rights violations are higher here and have the expected fallout.

Nazir Masoodi a journalist says crossfire incidents increase the anger against the forces. “There is shock, trauma and anger against the state. It kills your son, doesn’t punish the guilty and offers you money instead.” (The government grants compensation to anyone who is killed whether by militants or the forces.) Another local implies he cannot speak against the Army either because of fear of retribution and compares them to militants. “If some militant fires at the army, even by mistake, *we* are the ones who have to live in fear. During the day we face one and during the night – the other. They’re both like each other.”

The forces’ role in fanning the militancy flame in their relentless pursuit of militants in such areas is exemplified by Bilal, a young 14 year old boy from Budgam district’s militant prone Sunni belt who is harassed by the Army. His militant brother’s weapon was never found after he was killed by the forces and the Army believes *he* has hidden it. He sees no option but to follow his dead brother in to militancy, something on open offer from *jehadi* militants in the vicinity.

Ambiguous realities of Army role, shifts *within* the high pitched rhetoric

Yet there are situations where this relentless pursuit is welcomed. Even in such “active”, militant infested towns therefore there is vast *ambiguity* towards the forces’ role and contrary strands, symptomatic of the terror matrix these infested villages are caught in. One force seems barely better than the other. However when peace returns to stay as in the other areas, the Army’s role perceptibly fades in to the background. Its role of eliminating militants is also seen as leading towards a permanent peace, unlike the militant.

“Foreigners come – Pakistanis. You just feel scared – they’re very dangerous. If they knock on the door it *must* be opened. If they say

something is wrong, then it *is* wrong,” says Shaukat, a shopkeeper. He has covert hopes from the Army.

“If the army finishes them off there is peace”, he says. “If they decide to get after them, they will keep at it – they never give up.”

The two perceptions of the Army – one from a harassed potential militant and the other from a covert backer betray the schisms that violence and losses beget in rural Kashmir. *Clearly then, there is more at work here than the high profile anti Army rhetoric implies.* Several sections of the rural population have gone *beyond* the traditional high pitched rhetoric of the media, as realities have *changed* in their immediate surroundings – and the media, fixed in its old paradigm, has not reflected these subtle shifts or really looked for them.

The second paradox – the selective visibility of the high profile rural protest

Another indicator of this anti Army image paradox is the increasingly shrill visibility of the rural protest against Army violations – vigorous, highly vocal and well organised – creating the impression that *it is living up to* its ‘traditional’ role as portrayed in the media. In the old, obscure, remote landscape of rural Kashmir, inaccessible and media neglected; these violations would have remained unaccounted for. In today’s tightly scrutinised, accessible world, that is far less possible. Army violations are selectively seized upon and brought in to the public domain *immediately*. Kashmiris have felt a certain amount of freedom to demonstrate against it, complain to the media about it in a way they cannot do for militants whose violations remain veiled with little organized protest against them (as outlined in an earlier section).

Therefore despite his earlier assertion that he *couldn’t* name the Army for fear of retribution – Arin resident Abdul Nazir also presents a contrary view. “If the army does something, they can’t run away from India – where will they go? They *will* be found”

In fact it is *this* understanding (they *will* be found!), coupled with the foreknowledge of media’s leverage and the selective taking up of protests against the Army that ensure their high visibility. This has changed the nature of the anti Army rural protest and ensured a high profile anti-Army image.

The high visibility rural protest as an indicator of peace

In fact these larger than life demonstrations that single out Army violations are possible and highly visible *only because of the forcible peace*. It allows much greater leeway to such expressions.

- Firstly these areas are more or less instantly accessible (danger wise, roads wise, telecommunication wise) now to 24 hour local and national media that transmits the news in hours – an impossibility earlier.
- Secondly hectic political activity allows leaders to visit the site of the violation and condemn it in the most unforgiving terms and/or inflame local sentiment.
- Thirdly, the Army is now no longer the sole institution dominating the area even though it may still be the most powerful – but only *just*.
- Fourthly the civil administration is in place to deal with its fallout, set itself up as the good guy against the Army and soothe tempers with promises of enquiries, punishments and compensation. It is perceived by the people as their own – an ownership the forces do not possess in large measure or *at all* in some places.
- Finally the rural protest is increasingly a well organized protest with strategy for greatest mileage, not a ragtag bunch of locals who spontaneously rise up in anger against the perceived violation and are quickly disbanded like the 90s. It has support and organisational muscle now.

All these have drastically transformed the anti forces rural protest itself. After the Bijbehara massacre in 1993⁵⁸, the forces cracked down on the press, disbanded the collected villagers, imposed curfew on the town and blocked the highway to prevent other groups gathering here. The burial of bodies took place hurriedly, away from the media glare. In today's forcible peace conditions, everything has changed. From this hurriedly cracked down, *lathi* charged, preventive arrests made & Army censored or media-ignored event, it is now an item worthy of national coverage, political mileage and high pitched anti government/pro *azaadi* sentiment.

⁵⁸ I was witness to the crackdown after the episode and the hasty burials of the victims as their bodies returned to the village filmed from a hidden vantage point in a haystack in a Kashmiri villager's house unknown to the security forces supervising the clean up after closing the national highway to the media.

In fact, media remains a crucial reason for the high profile anti Army image. The local media template of Army violations is rooted in the ‘old’ traditional mold of a predatorial, “colonial, occupation army” oppressing “legitimate freedom fighters”. Rather than locating it in a broader context, such an image focuses sharply on the incident/violation at hand, linking it to previous incidents/violations. It rarely strays from this tight focus and it has remained at the same high pitch since the early/mid 90s when such violations were at their peak. Forces’ violations therefore continue to experience high profile publicity that acts as a force multiplier and remain headline news for days even though their number and severity have plunged.

In Tregam, North Kashmir, in October 2007, the killing of a teacher in a scuffle with a soldier at a checkpoint led to a week long protest where, ironically, the *people* blocked the national highway for four days, overturned and burned government vehicles, manhandled the SP of the area. Separatist leaders made aggressive, provocative speeches. Though such a protest is outwardly packaged in hostility and extreme behaviour, many in the government believe with some reason, it is actually an indicator of peace and a democratic, supportive environment for the expression of grievance. They do so because they can – with far *less* or *no* fear of forces’ over reaction and *with* the reinforcement of many other supports like media, civil administration and politicians.

Going beyond the surface high profile anti Army image

Therefore these protests or media hysteria are no black and white gauges of the people's response to the Army since this high profile cannot be taken only at face value or as its *sole* representation. In fact in areas where militancy has mostly vanished, serious complaints about the Army date mostly from the 90s era. There are no new sagas. The response to demilitarisation gives an indication of this underlying complexity towards the security forces. While generally favoured, many are alarmed by the thought of *total* demilitarisation. They would like it to be selective and the Army to be on call. There are sections in 'active' areas that are reassured by their presence and want them to be visible *till the threat of militancy is alive*. It is the reason why sections of the young especially in several parts of the Valley will persistently stick their necks out even in defiance of peer pressure to defend the Army.

Shifting images from children, GenNext offers a clearer view

This is contrary to all popular perceptions in the public domain yet in school after school⁵⁹, many sections of children perceive a sense of *security* from the presence of the forces so long as they are left alone to lead their lives. Less burdened by the obligation of their parents to 'protect' the militant image, the young tell their story without the ambiguity of adults. In this complex tale there is both the indictment of the security forces in cases where they are perceived to have done wrong – but also, a strong streak of appreciation for the purpose they serve – to provide security.

In a discussion about demilitarisation, children nuance the situation intelligently, forsaking any extremist cues from political leaders or media debate. In a class in Bandipora, children want the forces to not harass innocent civilians and above all focus on their job of protection and defence.

⁵⁹ Based on 17 schools and colleges visited in diverse rural and urban areas including Srinagar, Arin in Bandipora, Puranatelail and Baduab in Gurez, Tangdar, Kupwara, Lolab Valley, Anantnag, Brenwar, Jedan and Mahwara in Budgam district, Poonch, Jammu University etc.

Q) What would you tell the forces if you were Chief Minister for a day?

A) We will tell the army, not to kill anyone without cause. And to protect the country

Q) From whom?

A) From the danger of the *other* country. (Emphasis mine)

Q) Should the Army leave Kashmir?

A) Not from everywhere. They should go only where there is danger. If they can help the people with jobs and employment, they should.

A sizeable section of children in frontier areas in particular are pro-Army, a fallout perhaps of the immediate help they received after the 2005 earthquake. The pro-Army students in a Kupwara college are confident and vocal enough to even urge me not to believe the naysayers.

“Army is cool. Whether there is a fire in Kupwara or an earthquake – they are the first on the spot! We have not yet reached a situation where we can tell them to leave”

Yet cutting across age levels, the language used for militants is unambiguous and clear. There are no conditions attached and no illusions about the country they come from and the one that children want them to go back to. In Arin High School:

Q) What will you tell the militants if you were Chief Minister?

A) Leave Kashmir alone and go back to your country, Pakistan. Whenever the militants come to Kashmir, that’s when the riots and troubles start. so we say ‘Go back to Pakistan’.

In a Jamaati school in a non ‘active’ area, all children in the class favour demilitarisation. The possibility of the militant’s return is then discussed.

Q) What if militants return once there is demilitarisation and the Army retreats?

A) We’ll bring back the Army and finish them off!

This implies a significant shift. It means that even if there are occasionally bad incidents that reflect poorly on the Army, young Kashmiris are gaining a sense of entitlement of the Army for *their* protection – against the militant; *when it was exactly the reverse in the 90s.*

Creating an Army constituency in rural areas

Rural attitudes to the Army are important to its continued presence in the area. Recruitment and the Sadbhavana Hearts and Minds campaign are the two projections of its image in the rural areas. The first is overwhelmingly welcomed. The second gets mixed reviews because many perceive it as a threat to the civil administration despite its obvious value. Yet though attitudes are still partly skeptical, the younger generation is far more willing to see the positivity of such projects for fulfilling community needs even if they do not understand the larger context of goodwill creation their elders are so suspicious of.

The essential core of the attitude paradoxes:

Violence and sentiment

At the base of all paradoxes and ambiguity lies the Kashmiri's basic contradiction. Two decades of the essentially failed violence paradigm have created a decisive shift against the *infrastructure* of violence – whether army or militant. Yet notwithstanding the antipathy to violence, the *sentiment of Azaadi* – not the ideal itself – is an underlying factor still amenable to exploitation because it can be made to touch a chord among certain highly visible sections. This accounts for the paradoxical strands outlined earlier in attitudes towards militants and forces.

When peace returns in large measure as it has in the post-2000 years, the Army's image is subject to diminishing returns. The infrastructure of violence present in a fairly militant-less atmosphere is then resented as being unnecessary. Its extra constitutional authority, the fact that it shapes the environment that an ordinary man has to conform to makes it a constant irritant that assumes larger than life proportions during peace time. It is difficult to understand in the average view, the need for such high visibility force levels when peace has clearly returned in large measure and elected governments are in power.

Unable to climb down from the high alert anti militancy stance of earlier years to a more civilian oriented policing mode, their use of force is reactive to the slightest hint of a threat and has proved to cause unnecessary and repeated loss of lives especially when facing public protests – unlike state police in other states. Being entrenched in the state for twenty years at the frontline of its counterinsurgency and having first priority even now in assessing the security paradigm of the state, the forces are also disinclined to relinquish this authority or deprioritise it.

The Kashmiri feels this all the more since he is less and less involved in the violence *himself*. However no government has been able to reduce them despite very public vows to do so. At best there have been cosmetic changes that make no actual difference. The threat from Islamist militants is no fantasy and force levels need to remain high to ensure no space is yielded to them due to a lowered guard. It is only the Kashmiri involvement that has decreased significantly in certain areas. The Catch 22 situation will therefore persist in the near future and episodic incidents of alleged violations and protests continue to convulse the state

However wherever the threat is omnipresent, the Kashmiri *wants* the Army to target the militant whom he is scared of *without* targeting him. His fateful welcome to violence and participation in it in the 90s notwithstanding, he is unwilling to mop up the mess it has created twenty years later. Having outsourced both the attack to Pakistani irregulars and the defence to the Indian Army, he would like to remain sanitized from the enduring violence while others do the job for him and still retain his political options of the *azaadi* sentiment.

Even so, the understanding of this sentiment especially in rural areas is quite different from that of the early 90s. Time wise, it is far more realistic – it may mean simply an honourable exit, for example or a final agreement that signals a decision. Generation wise, especially to more educated rural youngsters, it is barely understood at all – few have an idea of what it is and where it will or should lead. Consequently, their solid commitment or full emotional investment to it is an unstable proposition *as it competes with their other options* – though it does remain subject to emotional manipulation when collectively demanded in the larger society they live in.

This contradiction and passivity of the Kashmiri contributes the largest component to the continuing of the violence even if he has backtracked considerably from direct participation. It lies at the heart of the paradoxes and proves that the Army presence is no black and white affair but a complex, nuanced one. After twenty years the Kashmiri *does* understand the professional duties of the forces in a far more justifiable and essential light. He denies today, a similar understanding to the militant even if he still idealises the *Azaadi* sentiment. Such paradoxes in attitudes to militants and security forces therefore must be explained *within* this paradigm.

Section C

Identity Changes Brought About by Forcible Peace

Swinging Identities of the Country Citizen – Difference from the Urban Citizen

The changing patterns of Kashmir's beliefs and articles of faith like *Azaadi* or Pakistan may have a few overlaps in the urban and rural scenarios. But the breakdown of rural society and the ordeal of *load bearing* militancy's deepest ruptures unknown and unseen, has given the rural Kashmiri identity a certain *distinctive* trajectory from its urban counterpart. Yet how exactly does it differ from the urban identity swings? How has the violence of two decades impacted them differently? Does the separatist struggle really have deep ideological roots as it does in the cities i.e. is the rural population really aware or interested in this separatism or are they merely the simplistic fodder for its ideology and the carriers of this ideology – its urban citizens?

The definition of urban citizenry here is not those who stay in cities. It includes the ideologues and educated, well traveled, prosperous elites whose propensity or articulation for the *Azaadi* cause in some form or the other remains strong even as they stay aloof from its *violent* manifestation in the relative safety of cities like Sopore, Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag – or even less urbanized, semi rural centres like Kupwara and Bandipora towns. Despite their *Azaadi* sentiments they utilize the choices available to them in the system to educate their children inside or outside the state and freely travel and expand their businesses in different parts of the country where they own or rent properties, benefit as employees from participation in Central government professional events like seminars, learning tours or deputations etc, invest in the stock market and so on.

The village or country citizen simply does not have the luxury of utilizing these choices because of various reasons (Section One of this paper). In fact he may not even have such a sharply defined view of *Azaadi* and/or its nuances and indeed may *never* have had it because of his relative isolation till some years ago. Yet he is deeply caught in it firstly because it is *his* locale that is today's theatre of conflict. Secondly

because *he* bears the burden of its motion/progress by virtue of being its foot soldier or militant recruit. If he drops out – it will mean a serious blow to the *violent* options in the separatist movement. Thirdly, his mindset has been damaged with the aggressive, frenzied appeals of Kashmiri political leadership over the years and is now far less capable of logical decision making. Because of this he is far more susceptible to be molded by the dominating force of the area because it is this force that controls his daily life and he will simply do what makes it happy. During peak violence it was militant diktats or Army controls. During frenzied protests over issues like Amarnath or rights violations, it is the shrill political leadership that can take him to the brink without his really knowing why.

Therefore though the country citizen's identity is deeply susceptible to the rhetoric of the *movement* because of his poverty and/or lack of choices/poor education/simplistic beliefs he is also susceptible to the *other side* for the same reasons. He has no core, central convictions or deep seated ideological moorings. Historically – and currently, he is swayed by *every* emotional appeal to religion or Kashmiri identity – as also fluid enough to bend to the dominating force of the region when required – till now that is. This fluidity manifests itself in erratic swings in identity. Some of these swings *solidify* to become shifts over a period of time.

As the forcible peace deepens and accessibility to media and cities increases, there is evidence that this has started happening. Long years of exposure to violence, loss and the sacrifice of his young have meant that he has tentatively started assessing his *real* needs and asserting its *own* mind. The recent gains of democracy, governance and the return of the civil administration – a time when he finds his demands for development, roads and jobs are getting a responsive ear – have also changed some dynamics in deeply ingrained beliefs and mindset patterns. The villager can now use the government by his threat to turn to militancy even as he starts rejecting the militant's dead end job as an investment with no returns. These physical and mental changes have opened up a world of options where none existed, giving hope and a vision of a future where there was none earlier. *They* are the decisive catalysts in turning a swing into a shift.

The two areas where these are most visible are in **religious** identity and **ethnic/nationalist** identity.

Shifts In Religious Identity Due to Violence and Islamist Forces

Shifts in religious identity in rural areas are visible in **two** largely contradictory trends. The rampant appearance of radical Islamic forces and their guilt inducing “basics” rhetoric is one. This has had an eroding effect on old traditions of Islam in the Valley. Though *ziarrats*(shrines) still dot the Valley, Arabised Islam is here to stay.

In the Lolab Valley of Kupwara, school teacher Izhar ul Hassan says “We don’t light lights for Shab-e-Baraat anymore (an old tradition that pays respect to ancestors’ graves). “The holy men (Pirs) used to do all this. Now we read the Quran ourselves”

In Bandipora, where the foreign *jehadis* predominate, all the schoolgirls *even in government school* wear abayas or Arabic style headscarves tied at the chin – not visible in Kupwara, Anantnag or Baramulla (except in Jamaati and Tableeghi schools). Fear plays a large part in such ground changes but so too the nonstop barrage of information on this.

Yet Kashmir’s cultural heritage and cluttered religious traditions incorporating diverse strands of its Brahminical and Buddhist past – plus his ability to swing one way or another when confronted with an unbending force; has also ensured that a basic secular structure of thinking *has* survived even if a multi religious society has *not*. This is especially so in rural areas where the loss of the Pandits was far more keenly felt than the cities. It was possibly also less desired since the cities saw them as economic rivals whose removal would only be advantageous – therefore the silence when they fled.

In rural Kashmir where *land* was the wage earner rather than government jobs, historical reforms had already corrected the Pandit imbalance. Though they remained higher up the class chain – they were too few in number to really be rivals or matter. Secondly their value as scholars of the community – in a sense the leading lights in a still backward society (unlike the cities where the Muslims were fast catching up and ideologically determined to equal the Pandits in the knowledge arena) – *remained* at a premium as did their need in the immediate community. Thirdly, because the villager’s ideology is not as sharply nuanced or

debated as his urban counterpart, the appeal of ideological Islam is not as sharp as it is in the more intellectual urban areas.

These two contradictory strands of susceptibility to radical forces and basic secularism produce giant, wild swings in religious identity. Which then become shifts? Why does this happen and how do they differ from the urban?

Entrenched Jehadi infrastructure in the rural areas – education, arms and lack of choices

The final jump to becoming an actual militant separates rural Kashmir from urban. Though rural areas are subjected to the same forces of radical Islam; it is in the *infrastructure* and *targeting* that they differ from the urban areas. Religious education from *darzghahs* (religious school) or *madrassas* led by outsider teachers or Kashmiris schooled in seminaries of UP and Bihar is popular here and poverty makes them a fertile source of recruitment of young locals. The poor in rural areas are also more susceptible to this *jehadi* rhetoric *because of the non-availability of other choices unlike the urban* – a scenario which is slowly changing (see Section Four on education). Thirdly militants are *available* in ‘active’ rural areas to encourage this process of recruitment. Weaponry, ideological and physical support and the mentoring of a senior *jehadi* is always available.

The Budgam boy harassed by the Army for his militant brother’s weapon is a classic example. He sees no choice but to follow his brother who was recruited at the local *darzghah* in to militancy. He will be aided in this sign-up by the militants in the vicinity and the propaganda he has been relentlessly subjected to.

“God willing, I’ll definitely go. Our Islam urges us to become martyrs. Everyone has to die (one day) I’ll take a bullet from the *kaafir* (non believer). There is nothing left for me here.

Still secular rural society

Radical Islam’s “purifying” aspects have penetrated deep in some sections of rural society and succeeded in sharpening the sense of Muslim identity as distinct and uppermost. However, old rhythms of life including a strong *ziarrat* attendance and the inherited attitudes expressed by the second generation to Pandits whom they have never

seen; uphold rural Kashmir's basically secular nature. "Education has been ruined after their (Pandits') departure" is a sentiment parroted so often that there is obviously deep regret at their departure, even if articulated in public only recently. Obviously passed on by parents who experienced the Pandits foremost in their role as traditional teachers in the Valley, it means that memories of an earlier society and culture have managed to survive – the respect for Pandits as teachers has been passed on to a younger generation deeply conscious that they are missing something special.

This implies that the *jehadi* rhetoric targeting a pure Islamic society has *not succeeded in fully communalising this space even after it has been operating for nearly two decades*. Even a young girl in a full *burqa* in Kupwara's Degree College who has been vociferous about her Islamist leanings when I question the class, comes up later to ask me guilelessly about Pandits because she thinks as a Hindu I might have the answers.

"Hindus are very intelligent – can you tell us how they study? Our parents say when Hindu teachers left, education *was ruined*."

Pandits, though rare, still live in a few rural pockets like Budgam but their number is miniscule.

Class hierarchy affects the Islamisation process too. As people move up they acquire more options, mobility and accessibility- and *shed* this image gradually.

Says Prof Jameel, "The upper middle class uses Kashmir and Kashmiri sentiments in terms of upward mobility it can get through it – politics, NGOs etc. The lower middle class (often rural) is the one really involved in the militancy. My friend was an activist of an Islamist party – I was always mortally afraid of him, always watched what I said. He got an opportunity, moved out of his circle, trimmed his beard and as people forgot his earlier image, became a clean shaven man walking in higher circles, talking of different things. Now he philosophises, his concerns are more economic."

However the young of the rural families who move in to the semi urban middle class (see Section Four on rural economy) are the most vulnerable at this juncture. Many are pulled in to the *jehadi* mindset at this very stage. (See paper on Islamisation) They can evolve in to the Over Ground Worker or OGW whose *jehadi* mindset is masked behind

his regular government job and demeanour. They will use the poor, barely educated rural youth to do the actual violent work who is ideologically innocent.

Says the SSP Anantnag, “*Jehad* is in the minds of the people *behind* the scenes – it is not in the hearts of the people actually involved”.

Options determine the measure of Islamisation

The return of governance, participation in Central and state schemes, the knowledge of democracy, the exposure to the ‘other’ in whatever limited form through government jobs or the need for education – all these draw people away from radical Islam even as its widespread ground infrastructure *keeps* them conscious of their presence always – in the form of guilt inducing rhetoric, new Tableeghi schools in his area that harp on the pure Islam, *darzgaahs* with outsider *maulvis*, fearsome foreign *jehadis* etc. The rural citizen therefore is on a knife edge of choices from different sides that *keep him swinging*. Yet where the ‘options’ start predominating, inclinations for radicalism keep decreasing. Currently he is in this state.

Shifts in national/ethnic identity: Changing attitudes towards India and Pakistan

Tied up with religious identity in Kashmir is the existential debate on *national* identity. Should the Kashmiri be an Indian, a Pakistani or a Kashmiri? In the matrix of national/ethnic identity, being Pakistani or Indian is deeply connected with being Muslims or rather, with being different *types* of Muslims. It is also inextricably intertwined with religion – i.e. in the minds of many Kashmiris, an inclination to Pakistan is natural because they are Muslim. In the minds of some others, this is an assumption to be challenged. Therefore determining attitudes to India and Pakistan, why they shift and the manner in which they shift; is important in determining how rural identity is shaped.

Unlike religious identity, these are not wild swings subject to continuous movement but subtle shifts that gradually grow in importance, stabilize themselves to a reasonable extent and start influencing *other* paradigms or status quo patterns. For instance once a person starts aligning with India for example, his attitudes – to say, Army violations – change. He becomes more tolerant and forgiving, places them in a broader context and doesn't confuse the individual with the institution. If the opposite alignment occurs, he seizes at the smallest transgression and sees it in the narrowest context as yet more proof of Indian iniquity.

Professor Mushtaq, Principle Kupwara Degree College describes the layered identity of his semi urban college students as an indicator of the crisis that Kashmiris have gone through in the years of militancy.

“On the surface there is a normal adolescent worried about dress, type of T shirts, music, films, games. But given a provocation a different layer emerges from very deep in their psyche that shows there *is* a problem. For example the ‘shock’ at Pakistan’s World Cup defeat was deeper than losing dear and near ones. They may discuss India and Pakistan but even if India benefits them more, Pakistan strikes the deeper chord.” He describes this response as ‘undoctrinated’ and ‘natural’. “No one has told them at home that you should do this. Yet this is what comes out”

‘Sirf cricket’: Pakistan as a habit

The Professor’s assessment has plenty to back it up – Pakistan is deeply ingrained in various ways in Kashmir. However it is debatable whether this is ‘natural’ as he describes or a ‘created’ habit due to several factors. There is firstly the hangover of the Two nation theory and its existential debate on Kashmir, secondly, the ample societal indoctrination through the ‘crutch’ of Pakistan as a backup factor since 1947 and thirdly the Islamist political beliefs pushed through over the last two decades of armed conflict that *provide* the conditions that Prof Mushtaq describes as ‘natural’. Yet the questions to really examine are:

- Is this really a deep attachment to Pakistan the nation or a conditioned response because of all the factors listed?
- Secondly what shape is this ‘natural’ response in after two decades of violence and conflict? Does it remain the same as it was when the conflict started or has it shifted? If so, what are the factors that have shifted it and in what is the shape of this ‘new’ response?

Many come up with the phrase “*Sirf cricket*” that defines the rural attitudes towards Pakistan much more so than the urban that have pretty much made their choices even if they won’t articulate them clearly. There is almost *no* support for Pakistan except during cricket matches when there is almost *total* support. This is ascribed to ‘habit’, Muslim brotherhood and the non identification with India.

In fact the shackles of this blind religious loyalty force illogic even when sense and education question it. In an exercise to find out which identity comes first – ethnic or Islamic – I asked the boys at Government High School, Arin – an ‘active’ zone – whom they would support in a cricket match between Kashmir and Pakistan. All 30 odd said Kashmir except for one boy who said Pakistan.

Q) Why?

A) If Kashmir Vs Pakistan are both Muslim brothers, then I will support Pakistan.

Yet this pro Pakistan boy is also emphatic (like the rest of the class), that he wants to send militants back to Pakistan (as recorded earlier in this paper).

Q) Why d’you want them to go back?

A) Because they create tension and riots.

Q) But you will still call them your ‘brothers’?

A) (Pause) Yes! (laughter from the whole class, including the pro Pakistan boy, embarrassed)

Separating religion from Pakistan

There is also critical evidence that things go beyond this apparent ‘natural’ or ‘habitual’ response. Through a series of interactions with several school and college students, it becomes evident that there is a curious group of passionately pro Indian students in every class ranging in numbers from 20-30% who are firm in their convictions despite the overwhelming separatist (mostly *Azaadi*, few pro Pakistan) sentiment of the others. This is an urban as well as rural phenomenon. This pro India section wages passionate arguments against the *Azaadi*/Pakistan crowd. About one third of class or one fourth will stick its neck out for India.

Almost all the students of Kupwara Degree College describe their identities as Muslims first and Kashmiris second. In a class of roughly 35-40, 12 choose *Azaadi*, the rest settle roughly equally for India and Pakistan. The vociferous group that includes both Pakistan and *Azaadi* elements is led by a *burqa* clad girl. I ask her what she means by Muslims First.

“Muslims First means – Muslim is superb, perfect in all spheres.”

Yet the formation of a pro-India section implies a crucial *development* in this Muslim-First identity. This section of students has completed the process of separating their religious identity from Pakistan i.e. Pakistan does not get their automatic loyalty because they are Muslims. Secondly, they feel comfortable being Muslims and Indians. This experience is repeated across the state in several small towns and villages and *even in schools set up by the Tablighi Jammāt and the Jamaat e Islami*.

Why are they ready to defy their classmates with their assertive pro India opinions I ask a Tablighi Jammāt school pro India student?

“Because religion is not Pakistan,” she replies.

Possibly also, as Pakistan’s image has declined it has become obvious that being anti Pakistani doesn’t automatically mean being anti Islam. If the two *can* be divorced at this stage, the next step is a natural corollary – that to be pro Islam doesn’t automatically mean being anti Indian. Similarly, to be pro India doesn’t automatically mean being anti Islam.

In Kupwara Degree College too, there is such a raging division in class once the World Cup topic is started, that several come outside the class to follow up their arguments with me. Many agree with Prof Mushtaq's assessment that Pakistan's exit was a 'shock' – but not all. The *burqa* clad girl says she felt the 'shock' – and the 'happiness' too when India crashed out later. The pro India group stridently disagrees. The argument broadens to India and Pakistan themselves and who the Kashmiri should support.

Girl: The feeling for Pakistan is because of religion.

Boy: Muslims have to see where are the maximum number of Muslims – India or Pakistan. Then why are you saying Pakistan? They just talk! (tosses his head). Indian Muslims are better behaved than Pakistani Muslims!

Girl (and a friend): Kashmiri is a Muslim. Why is he ill treated in India then?

Boy: (group of 5-6 friends join him): We have seen what Pakistan does to its own people like its own Chief Justice. (Defends India on charge of discrimination against Kashmiris) We have seen for ourselves. Students are not harassed. They look after them very well outside – so many have gone. If they were harassed would anyone go? (Referring to Kashmiri students who study outside the state)

Girl: What can you do if there is no other option for education? (*Changes tack*) I am against the foreigners and their militancy but I feel we should carry on the fight against India in a peaceful struggle.

Boy & group: (enraged) "What is the fight for What is the fight for..ask her? Talking about non violence! (tosses his head dismissively). She won't be *able* to answer – fight for what? Why? We are fine! These are just her emotions, she knows nothing. She's confused. The fight carries on between the two groups till the girls walk off in a huff.

Shifting attitudes to Pakistan

In fact there are several Pakistan backers in rural Kashmir whose 'habitual' or 'natural' feelings for Pakistan are undergoing a tremendous process of transformation. Part of the reason is the violence and trauma of the last 17 years during which certain illusions about Pakistan have been ripped away. Yet this transformation is a traumatic, hesitant and

uneven process and demands a fairly tortured mindset change. For these reasons, many experience the emotion of guilt and betrayal while cheering for Pakistan and a tremendous struggle within.

In Marhama in Kupwara district, a young government school teacher who lives on a state income is deeply conflicted by his own conscience and expresses flashes of self hatred while describing his pro Pakistan feelings when watching a match. Education has given him firstly the conscience to feel a certain guilt and secondly, a critical acceptance of the reality of Pakistan. Its image as a failing/terrorist/non-progressive state has impacted him already. Yet his heart still rules his head – but only just.

Schoolteacher: I live off the government but even I don't know why Pakistan flows in my veins.

Shopkeeper (Pro Pakistan, intervening with fierce loyalty) – They are our brothers. They read the *namaz*.

Schoolteacher: (ignores him) "I just don't watch the matches." (shuts his ears with his hands and squeezes his eyes tightly) "I *hate* matches. But... if Pakistan loses – I **feel** it. How does a child know what Pakistan is? He will learn according to the environment around him. If we say Pakistan then he will say Pakistan. If we say India, he will say India. (Points to a young boy) This boy will see TV, he'll leave his studies because of Pakistan, he'll become a labourer - *then* he will realize, the damage that Pakistan has done to him."

Unlike the urban, educated elite; some of whom have already reached this clear conclusion and others who live comfortably with dichotomy (by still pampering the essentially distant *Azaadi* ideal but showing little desire to *actively* work for it anymore through either violence or public commitment); this villager *still* has to travel a small journey before he can reach either of those stages. Unlike too, the pro-active stance of the small but focused section of younger college/school students who have gone beyond dichotomy and wild swings by actually *shifting* to the aggressive pro India identity, he is still going through the trauma of mindset swings that will mature in due course only with peace, education and the space they give him to think on his own *without* the threat of violence or the badgering shrillness of his political leadership that can whip him in to hysterical, mechanical responses if opportunities arise.

It is at this point that the conditioned, automatic, habitual ‘crutch’ factor starts operating and pro Pakistan slogans package the dissent that the leadership wishes to articulate in an anti Indian idiom. However this is not necessarily a true indication of any steadfast leaning, ideology or inclination. It is simply a prototype expression of protest or dissent against a particular violation, policy or decision. The Kashmiri political leadership especially the separatist one is content to continue to cast it thus but its basic components – the people – may well take it in other directions at other points in the future.

The post poll rural Kashmiri identity

The polls of 2008 were a watershed in this swinging, shifting rural identity that is easily susceptible to whichever dominant force prevails. The massive voter turnout that caught everyone by surprise was in fact a validation of the rural voter’s story – his immense hidden trauma, unsung and unarticulated, his acute horror of the return of the bad old days, the enjoyment of development rewards that he has been getting in the last 5-7 years, the eagerness and determination to give his children a better deal with the help of any state assistance that can be garnered etc.

It is equally clear that his swinging identity has started stabilizing in to a key shift within the last seven-eight years of peace. This is reflected in his newish ability to make up his mind *decisively* despite pressures and to reject an ideological framework configured for him if he believes it is of no use to him – *even* as he is still subject to the community or social sanction in his village unit and cannot throw it off totally.

This explains the paradox of huge voter turn outs and continued frenzied protests over incidents and episodes. The rural Kashmiri will *covertly flout* the ideological directives at voting times when ever larger numbers provide him safety and a common determination to reap the benefits of development and new options protects his identity and validates his courage in rejecting separatist directives.

As long as this equation is not disrupted, he will also *overtly support* support frenzied outbursts over alleged violations or local anti state issues – even if many have no conviction. Essentially this means the frenzied protest, shorn of rhetoric, is fairly purposeless within. It will not go beyond a particular temperature of violence that the rural Kashmiri has no intention of investing in. It is therefore not really an

indication of conviction to an ideology any more but the fear of community sanction that still has high visibility *jehadi* influences. This indicates his gradual shift of identity has found a point around which it can finally stabilize even if the process is a long term one.

Section D

Education & Governance Changes Brought About by Forcible Peace

Rebuffing the militant option: The education tsunami

The takeover of new ambitions

A mini revolution in Kashmir has come about in this forcible peace – the obsessive desire to educate one self and better one’s prospects. The last time Kashmiri society was visibly impacted so strongly was by the *Azaadi* slogan in the early 90s. Critically, this wave targets the educational awakening of thousands of *first* generation learners in the rural areas. It foregrounds the development issues of the community and creates a class who wants to fight for them. It also poses a serious challenge to the militant agenda by its rebuff of militancy – choking local recruitment from traditionally poor, rural recruiting grounds making even separatists conscious that they are fighting a difficult battle in this direction.

The Tehrik e Hurriyat (Geelani faction) head in Kupwara Mohd Yusuf Lone admits this reluctantly. “Yes.....compared to past times...there *is* a gap”, he says.

This “gap” is clearly visible in the changed job aspirations and modern ambitions of children (many of whom are first generation learners) in which the government job is the most coveted like the J&K Police or government schoolteacher and the seriously ambitious want to aim for national level positions - the IAS/IPS and even the National Defence Academy. In Tangdar, besides these, five want to become cricketers and seven aspire to be “*fauji*”(soldier) – because of the dominant influence of the Army on the area.

Not a single person wants to be a militant – it is almost unthinkable to mention it in class after class of clean cut young boys and girls for whom his persona is fearful, violent, ignorant and importantly – *foreign*. The Amarnath controversy may have shown the ease with which angry sentiment could spill on the streets again but whether it has any substantial impact on decelerating militant recruitment can only be

assessed after few years. It is difficult to imagine those in the thick of this education and aspiration wave abandoning it to join militant ranks again in *significant* numbers. For most Kashmiri youth this iconic symbol of earlier heroism is worn out as an *aspiration*. Those who take it up are the forgotten, poor rung of society or the Islamised educated youth as the dangerous OGW who shies away from undertaking the actual violence.

Contrast to the 90s' wilderness and destruction in rural areas

This is in stark contrast to the wilderness of the 90s when schools were burned down or destroyed by militants and *hartals* kept students at home for long stretches – a situation often forgotten today when the world media focuses on the tragedy of Swat valley in Pakistan that was subjected to the systematic annihilation of schools by the Taliban. Hulks of burnt, abandoned school buildings – reminders of this destructive spree – are visible all over rural Kashmir even though the government has rebuilt several of them.

At the Brenwar Govt Girls School, Chadoora, a teacher recalls burned schools in nearby Kashwari and Kaitch. “Few kids would come or not come at all,” she says. “They ruined the school”. The breakdown of the education system and the corresponding squeeze in choices preys strongly upon memories. There is a sense of urgency to make up for lost time and considerable anxiety that it not happen again.

Kashmir's Great Leap Forward

The mad rush for education

Today the zeal for education has overtaken everything else. Though it already existed in the urban areas that had an older infrastructure like schools, private and government, colleges and Degree colleges, it is *most visible* in small towns, rural areas and frontier towns. The government schemes of the Rehbar e Taleem (ReT) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) where teachers are taken from the local community make schoolchildren conspicuous in literally every corner of the state – *including militancy infested areas*. In Bandipore, Kupwara, Lolab, Budgam, Chadoora, Anantnag or on the highway from Sopore to Handwara and Rajwar – they can be seen in classrooms, sitting under trees, on mountainsides and tiny schools on the road.

This is Kashmir's Great Leap Forward. The stakes are high and everyone is aware of the value of education even the poorest like the Mahigeers or fishermen of Wullar Lake, living in an 'active' area, vulnerable to the lure of easy money. The fragile tenuous peace existing in Bandipora has made even *them* aware of education's power to open up opportunities. Many are determined to ensure their children don't follow their traditional livelihoods.

A Mahigeer fisherman whose brother has moved up to become a police officer says, "I can't earn enough through thisI *have* to educate my children more."

The fisherman father of a young Mahigeer boy has enrolled himself and studies in Class 9 with teenage children. The community is proud of him and urges me to write about him.

The education is hardly of the best standard – taught by ReT teachers who have to barely just qualify to get their jobs; with intense pressure from less educated communities to further lower standards. At the Mahwara girls' school in Budgam district, not a single one can explain what they are studying in history. At the Jedan school further up – one boy can read Urdu well, the other not at all, indicating the unevenness of the student body and the paucity of teachers. Malik, a Kupwara trader complains there is only one MBBS from the entire district, "that too not on merit". Yet the important thing is that the entire community

at large is abuzz with the mantra of education. It has been driving the militancy away as an option almost completely.

However it also has a major drawback. Ten to fifteen years later, rural Kashmir will be transformed in *not* always positive ways, with new demands for government jobs and lower priorities for land and agriculture. These demands will be incompatible with the poor quality of qualification and the availability of jobs on offer – especially if the militancy continues and investment stays away.

The Rural Economy: Massive Government Presence

The massive spread and presence of government all over rural Kashmir is the element that has sustained it through the nightmare years. This governmental infrastructure supports every aspect of rural life. The rural economy, lifestyle and fragile peace cannot function without it – it is its central pillar, the reason why it may become a sustainable peace at all. *It provides options in rural areas* – the single biggest difference since the militancy began in 1989. Education is the most visible thrust of these schemes but there are several others for every aspect of rural life - health, housing, sanitation, animal husbandry and sewage.

In one day of travel through the Chadoora sub district I came across thirteen different schemes for rural upliftment from vocational training, plant and seed aid, small establishment aid, roads etc. Sadbhavna (Hearts and Minds) schemes from the Army have chipped in too with small community level projects spread all over the remote areas. Together, these have had a gigantic impact on the switchover of priorities from violence and militancy to development and political issues. The geographical and population reach of the government and the Central and state sponsored schemes is truly staggering. Even if there is immense corruption, even if standards are low, an investment like this *has* to yield results and it is already yielding them. It *also* has its deeply negative side and this too is evident in full force. Yet for the moment at least, the good outweighs the bad.

Positive Effects of Presence

Effect of representative government on community

The spin offs of representative government are unapparent to the eye but gradually transform attitudes that make it a long term attraction. Even non participants realise its power, see this advantage and desire its spoils even though they claim disinterest and opposition. Tehreek e Hurriyat Kupwara leader Lone wants his community and region to get the fruits of the very system that he is fighting against. He questions why the vote from Kupwara is not rewarded by ministers from the region.

“12-13% (his numbers) cast their vote. You say this is a very great thing - then why don't they get the share? We are discriminated against,” he complains, forgetting for a moment his anti Indian sentiments in the competition within the Valley between districts for maximum representation.

Rural areas are far more connected to this process than the urban areas simply because they are dependent on them for benefits and development in their daily lives – roads, health centres or schools matter where there are few choices. The rural vote even in 2002 revealed this urban-rural disconnect when it ignored the call for boycott (Kupwara was 45% according one estimate). The polls in 2008 of course broke all turnout records in the rural areas.

“In the early 90s, voting was anathema. *One* person voted from 1200 in my village – earlier whatever led to the credence of Government of India in Kashmir had to be negated even if it was against your own interests,” says Professor Mushtaq. “Post 2002 the voting is seen as means for local governance – it has nothing to do with being pro India – and as an instrument of change – that the old, corrupt, insensitive government *has* to be voted out.”

This usefulness in throwing out the old and ushering in the new and the involvement in the busy exercise of governance, stakes and rewards creates a community of aware stakeholders in the system that acquire a new understanding of the spoils of democracy like development infrastructure, reservations or office. It is therefore impossible *not* to see representative government as somewhat beneficial to the Indian

scheme of things. It also cannot run without Central assistance, schemes and formulations that draw Kashmir's remotest parts in to the matrix of government systems as they exist *all over the country*. Any settlement down the road will make it difficult to extricate the Kashmiri from these systems, schemes and representations of the democratic system that work well.

For example, constituencies, another element of the 'system' are the other power broking arenas being recognized, fought over or debated in the rural areas. Budgam is not a Shia dominated district though Shias are a large minority. Aga Hassan, the Shia leader is bitter that the new reorganisation of *halkas* (a grouping of villages) ensures there is no Shia dominated electoral constituency and no chance of Shia representation "as a Shia."

"The planning agency has done it or been misguided by motivated Kashmiris here and they have made such a structure, that mainstream or separatist; *no one* will feel the need to carry the Shias with them. It doesn't matter whether we exist or not – we become irrelevant." He is gearing up to engage in the battle – a battle that he recognizes as crucial to his community's interests.

Negative Fallout – The Price for Loyalty

The identity of the rural Kashmiri has been strongly affected by this huge governmental presence/effort. While the urban areas had greater existent infrastructure and saw less destruction, the rural Kashmiri has witnessed a sudden and newly visible effort over the last 5-6 years *replacing or creating* the infrastructure (roads, health centres, colleges) he had lost through militant destruction or never had. Highly desirous of this sudden, substantial endowment and dependent on it because of his lack of other choices (private investment, normal gradual upgradation over the years etc), he is conscious of his power today to demand development and get a receptive hearing he has not got in sixty years.

Yet the notion that the Indian government would like to promote in its keenness to listen – an ideological ‘attachment’ to a ‘progressive’ state - has not hit the target yet. Two reasons can be attributed to this. Firstly it has reintroduced a historical predisposition. Since Kashmir’s accession to India, events have encouraged the Kashmiri to think he will get ‘rewards’ for his ‘loyalty’. This is then not a loyalty borne out of conviction but one of convenience. This syndrome continues to dominate Kashmiri thought processes and patterns of belief till date. While government policy to use development as the means to promote Kashmiri attraction to the ‘mainstream’ is a policy that *does* work in part, it also makes the ‘rewards’ syndrome larger than life.

Says walnut trader Mohd Ashfaq Malik, “People are used to being corrupted by Government of India. If someone is giving without taking back what else is it? *It is a bribe!* Till two years ago, my electricity bill was Rs 240 a year with 200 bulbs, geysers, heaters. Now meters have been installed – I go around telling my wife to switch off. Ever since accession everyone has been bribed. Everyone wants that same corruption of free rice and free flour.”

Secondly staggering corruption vastly reduces the efficacy and public good of the lavish schemes or funds and excuses state incompetence in maintenance and *actual* governance. During the years of peak militancy the Government of India kept its footprint in the Valley through corruption, even during the operation of high levels of fear and the virtual breakdown of the state. Now that representative government

has taken root, at least for the moment, corruption carries on through *its* institutions, schemes, development works etc. – no different in this aspect from the rest of India. Yet here, the difference is the Kashmiri expects this state of affairs as *natural* and the resultant cushion of prosperity he enjoys as *normal*.

It therefore breeds frighteningly unrealistic, sky high aspirations and expectation that the government and institutions should produce on demand. It is the price he's learnt to insist on for his willingness to stay within the system. It is the price the government is willing to pay even if it creates a self centred, avaricious, deluded set of beliefs and aspirations among the people that are more dangerous in the long run. If it is taken away from him, he will yell – and this distress is generally translated on the Kashmiri street as 'discrimination', 'injustice' or the 'anti Muslim sentiment of the Indian government'. In Tangdar where the Army, (basically for its own needs) has constructed a road 5-6 years ago that the state has not in sixty years, the complaint is that brand new cars acquired by Tangdar residents after their generous earthquake relief and aid, get damaged on the badly maintained road. Yet the state is not held accountable as it should be. It is simply ascribed to "Army discrimination against local people".

Prosperity in rural Kashmir – corruption and cash inflows

The old prosperity of the cash rich rural orchard owning elite in Kashmir led to the militant Sopore township of wealthy apple traders being popularly called 'Chhota London.' But today, the lack of poverty in the state is highly visible *across* classes and regions. It still rules the higher mountainous regions like Gurez or the large Gujjar belt in Bandipore etc but these are areas where minority, non Kashmiris considered 'inferior', live and their poverty is not counted when Kashmiris speak of the issue. Physical living conditions in the *Valley's* rural areas cannot be compared to other states. The poorest, low caste Kashmiris like the Mahigeers live in large red brick, *pucca* houses with linoleum floors. Several villages in the Valley are reasonably accessible to the National Highway or a road head. Most have the money through land and orchards, to live a decent comfortable life – something that sustained them even through the years of militancy.

In fact the visible lack of poverty in the state prompts section of well off Kashmiris to aspire to a belief that they are subsidizing 'Indian' labour. The Tehreek e Hurriyat's Mohammed Yousuf Lone – who is

sensitive to the notion that only the poorer sections become militants – argues that there *are* no poor sections and claims an opposite picture.

“Look at your own –those who are half dead with hunger – they are all roaming around here. We are supporting *your* labour class – *we* pay them. Here a farmer has *bagh* (orchards), land, he earns 1.5 lakh a year – so how can we be economically weaker than you? In India the population is BPL (Below Poverty Level) – in J&K everyone has at least a house to live in.”

Ashfaq Malik, the walnut trader agrees that there are no Kashmiri plumbers or carpenters, no labourers for sampling work or harvesting which is why a Bihari face even in the farthest, terrorist prone regions of Kupwara and Bandipora is not uncommon at all. Many Kashmiris feel these jobs are below their dignity. But he says, this is also one of the fallouts of massive corruption especially during the violent years when there was no accountability.

“This is the reason why everyone wants a government job at any cost even if they are financially well off,” he says. “One man came to me asking me to fix him up as an SPO. I told him your father pays Bihari labour Rs 7000 per month to cut his crop – and you want a job for 1500/- a month? Every teacher has a side business – our local Star channel is owned by a teacher – for God’s sake you are a teacher – go to your school!”

BPL status is eagerly sought after for the benefits that accrue to the holder and the schemes that are then available to him. As Farooq, a Rural Block Development Office employee says, “Haryali scheme is for BPL (Below Poverty Line) people but rich people too register themselves as BPL.

The end result is that money is flowing in to the rural areas with generous state support and creating a class of ‘money’ stakeholders whose interest it is to maintain the status quo that allows it to access several types of largesse. The militancy too has created a huge section of beneficiaries – guides, over ground and underground workers, local militants etc. Even the lower levels like Gujjar guides or informers are well paid by agency funds from both sides. The presence of the Army along the entire Line of Control has also been a boon to the economies of these rural belts. Their daily rations drive the sales of local traders. Their supply chains need to be ready and available.

“The soldier will smoke at least one *beedi*, buy at least a cake of soap and eat at least one egg every day,” reasons Ashfaq Malik.

Job creation remains an objective of the state. Many in the higher regions are still employed by the Army even though technology and money have made their employment redundant – for example suppliers of goods who come via roads and horses or donkeys when choppers do the job better. The end result is the rural Kashmiri is slowly transforming himself and moving up the chain.

The transformative element of this massive thrust

The Central strategy seems to be of a thick skinned adult picking up an unwilling, screaming, wriggling child, impervious to insult or hostility and aggressively forcing him to upgrade himself. Money *will* flow, regardless of corruption, waste and the perceived ‘ungratefulness’ of the Kashmiri people as often articulated by outsiders who work in Kashmir. *Sadbhavna will* carry on, regardless of the ‘suspicion’ of quid pro quo goodwill. At the end of the day, this forcible aid and development means a better, upgraded lifestyle. The thinking seems to be that even if corruption is staggering, *someone* is benefitting and may become a stakeholder. Similarly, better roads, more roads, better education etc are ambitions that India can try to fulfil if it is competing with religious and ideological slogans on the other side. Islamic/pro Pakistan appeals then need a massive effort to maintain the perception of a constant threat to Islam which most Kashmiris do not see.

Several of these militancy-acquired cash rich stakeholders are buying up property in the new suburbs of Srinagar like Bemina, Peerbagh etc. This leads to its own rural-urban dynamic as the peasant class acquires political clout and inspires resentment among the urban elite and middle class as usurpers of their land, city values and political leadership.

“They have money – don’t know how to spend it,” says a contemptuous Malik. “The monkey has the cash – now what will he do?” Srinagar residents are openly hostile to these new suburban settlers and many bitterly regret not voting in the 2002 elections that virtually gave away political clout to the ‘*gaonwallas*’ (country bumpkins).

At this massive level of flow therefore, money has the power to transform society whether it *wants* the transformation or not. The dilemma of the traditional Kashmiri is that he would ideally like to

have its benefits and development *without* the transaction of loyalty that is inherent in its formulation. Yet he may be left behind as a new generation takes over that is grabbing the opportunities given and in significant sections, very happy to pay its price – in fact considers it no price at all – simply a natural state of things. Ultimately however, it is in nobody’s long term interest to create a class of people who believe that hand outs without accountability represent the ‘normal’ state of things and function in a feudal like manner in a complete disconnect with the modern era, believing the state is responsible for them from birth to death. The creation of this crippled persona will extract a high price in the future – as indeed it is already doing so.

Part – V

Minorities in Kashmir

**Emerging from the edges of conflict:
Distinct agendas and unique identities**

Introduction: The emergence of ethnic diversities from a monolith

The project of determining shifts in identity in rural Kashmir throws up unexpected challenges and findings and is complicated by a specific element - the understanding that the undifferentiated separatist Kashmiri speaking voice that has dominated the media and politics in the Valley since the insurgency began; is *not* the whole picture and there are actually numerous points of view and varied voices. These come from its mostly rural, often large, ethnic and religious minorities – big chunks of the Valley’s population that have remained relatively silent, on the fringes of the movement; since the passionate, emotional 90s. Prime causes for this silence or passivity are their common *geographical* isolation from the mainstream Valley on its mountainous, rural edges, and the perceived ‘superiority’ of the Kashmiri over them in the social hierarchy. Other reasons are diverse, ranging from lack of education, indistinct identity, fewer numbers or simply fear of the gun.

The visibly lowered violence levels in the Valley over the last few years are now changing this passivity and silence as minority communities begin asserting their sense of community, understanding the link between democracy and benefits as they haven’t before, demanding their share from mainstream and separatist political structures and articulating their often individual agenda based on community/ethnicity, detached from the main body of the *azaadi* or nationalist discourse. This in turn changes the monolithic impression of a single picture reality and presents several fractured landscapes in Kashmir’s minority villages and mountain areas that complicate and distinguish it from its majority-centric areas.

The key observations and assertions of this paper are based on a series of interviews with local minority leaders and communities in travels through their remote mountainous regions including Tangdar, Gurez, Bandipora, Uri etc as also areas of Shias in the Valley like Budgam district.

Since Jammu is an equally complex mosaic of ethnic and religious communities, its complicated circumstances, history and geography would require a separate paper. The scope of this paper therefore has been necessarily limited to the minorities only in the Valley, due to restrictions of space and focus.

A Framework of Minority Attitudes

Individualistic attitudes belie the appearance of conformity

The ‘monolithic’ nature of Kashmiri society as expressed in the public domain has long camouflaged the diversity of the state – for outsiders as well as insiders. Its stranglehold has perpetuated the myth that the voice of the most visible and numerically largest single community this side of the border – the Sunni Muslim Kashmiri – speaks for the entire state even if it technically claims *not* to do so.

Other constituents of the state, especially within the Kashmir Valley hence, have remained passive in the face of larger than life ethnic, linguistic or religious Kashmiri projections of identity and nationhood – and *have not projected their own*. Indifference to Kashmiri separatist ideology was a key reason for some – a historical lack of involvement denied them any real stakes. Geographical inaccessibility was another. Few minorities therefore really made the investment in violence except for the Gujjars. Dissent against the violence was also impossible yet keeping both separatist and nationalist options open was also a necessity. All these factors precluded any assertive displays of minority identity and aspirations. Backwardness, lack of a collective voice and isolation did the rest.

This is not to say that minorities remained *unaffected* by the armed conflict. Border areas of minority populations were deeply impacted by the infiltration. Some like the Gujjars turned to militancy in a big way. Others like the Pahadis were neutral witnesses to the largest infiltration routes in the state. Yet ideological or emotional; commitment was never on the table. Neither was assertion of an independently negotiable identity.

The return of a reasonably sustained period of peace brought about by the Indo Pak peace process, the relative stability of democratic government over six years and the domination of the armed forces has changed this scenario in subtle ways. The recent building of some roads and the new awareness of educational and other needs that have to be fulfilled outside these remote areas is also relevant.

Specifically, minority attitudes to militancy are now nuanced and openly expressed. Minorities are keenly aware of the new options opened up

by the separatist movement i.e. how loyalties can be independently bargained for concessions. Many such new beliefs are non conformist and point to more than one way ahead. The new generation has also indicated a tendency to individualise its needs according to newer options available rather than thinking as a herd. Traditional social structures (like caste inferiority issues in the case of Gujjars , religious Pirs in the case of Shias etc) keeping them insular, fearful and united are losing their clout and relevance to a new generation increasingly *wanting* to turn in bulk numbers, towards educational goals and job aspirations – like their majority counterparts.

The principal outcome of the sustained peace is that rural issues have decisively shifted from militancy to governance and potential benefits. These have encouraged the following two factors in *minority* communities:

- A clear awareness of *economic* options offered by India i.e. **reservations** and the chance to participate in its growth in education and job opportunities.
- A clear awareness of *political* alternatives to the *Azaadi* paradigm and the emergence of a separate trajectory specific to a community's own identity and interests. This may have no allegiance to any final political outcome but it implies a careful weighing of options. It will not acquiesce in any arrangement by majority default even though it did so when the armed conflict began.

As these communities do a stock taking of the militancy years and the challenges ahead therefore, the importance of their minority identity and it's positioning amongst *other* diverse identities in the hierarchy of benefits from the system, takes a front seat in their calculations.

Reservations Affecting Separate and Emerging Identities

Beneficiaries: Coming of age with the sustained peace

The issue of reservations is a small one at the moment yet it is causing ripples. A generation of beneficiaries has come of age *at the same time* as the sustained peace that throws up this new awareness and options. This generation has already begun changing the face of rural Kashmir and the identity of ethnic minorities till now swept along with the majority Kashmiri tide. Gujjar students who benefitted from ST hostel facilities that provided free education, residential accommodation, food, clothes and even shoes for Gujjar students till Class 12th are now teachers themselves in jobs provided by their ST status.

At Brenwar Middle school, two out of five teachers are Gujjars, both from such hostels.

“The Gujjars want to study,” says one. “If they get the correct environment like us, they will go out (i.e. stretch themselves from their traditional occupations).”

These reservations have had a strong me-too effect among other economic, social or religious minorities looking out for themselves.

Says Shia leader Aga Hassan⁶⁰, “The Central Government takes special care of a community on account of their being backward like the Dalits or the Muslims (Sunni) (sic) but they have not paid any attention to us – we are not on their radar. Like they *own* (sic) the Gujjars – they have not *owned* us.”

He says the militancy interrupted the process. “We were trying to get benefits from the government but during the movement our labours waned a little – *Hamara zara down ho gaya*”

The Pahadis, perhaps the sharpest in this awareness are staging a legal battle to claim these benefits themselves and have even petitioned Prime Ministers in this regard. So acute is their clarity and homework, that

⁶⁰ The Agas are the spiritual heads of the Kashmiri Shias, concentrated in Budgam District, among certain other areas.

they claim *three* different categories of reservations to maximize benefits to the community in different areas⁶¹.

Majority unease

Yet amongst the majority, reservations have created divisions and unease. The Kashmiri Muslim attitude to reservations has been critical and will be more so once these sections become more visible in its society. As the recognised majority, it has set the agenda since 1947. For years it functioned as a psychological minority pitted against the meritorious minority Pandits, demanding that merit as the sole criterion was discriminatory to the less educated Muslims. It now has to yield space to minorities like the Gujjars on the same argument – and possibly others in the future who fight for it.

This is something it is unhappy about. Tehreek e Hurriyat (Geelani faction) leader Mohd Yusuf Lone says “We are absolutely against this. They snatched the rights of the talented and gave it to the illiterate.” He concedes its role in disrupting the separatist agenda. Probably indicating a future separatist dispensation, he says “If Gujjars get reservations, they are temporary here.” Perhaps this is why according to Gujjar leaders, a local Kashmiri law has already overridden Central law to restrict the real advantages of reservations – they have only a one time application. Yet even though the effect is so far tiny, the Gujjar-Kashmiri friction over reservations is taut, visible in interactions between the two.

Claiming ownership of dormant, ‘inferior’ identities – Assertion and political awareness

Traditionally Gujjars have been unassertive about a collective identity and lacked self esteem to the point of self flagellation. Their social status at the bottom of the pile has had a lot to do with this. Historically, the Kashmiri has looked upon the illiterate, itinerant, pastoral Gujjar with contempt⁶². Insecure about his identity in the face of this superiority

⁶¹ The Pahadis have leveraged their demand for reservations carefully so that they can benefit the geographically scattered community in every possible way – by asking for inclusion in the categories for backward ethnic community, isolated border community and language based community.

⁶² The social disdain showed to Gujjars especially and Pahadis by Kashmiris is part of the racial supremacy of the Kashmiri mindset that considers them inferior communities compared to his own Brahminical, ancient past.

many Gujjars and Pahadis don't speak their language in front of Kashmiris, few admit their identity.

“They are considered inferior” explains Waheem from a bunch of well off Gujjar schoolboys. “With our Kashmiri friends we speak Kashmiri. Gojri is not offered in school. We learn it at home with the family.”

There is no doubt however, that reservations *have* had an effect especially in awakening a dormant Gujjar identity and awareness as a community. This has allowed some well educated sections too embarrassed to admit they were Gujjars some years ago, to claim its ownership today and assert their difference. Hamid Bukhari, a privileged young Gujjar boy, a student at the elite Delhi Public School in Srinagar, says “We feel separate as Gujjars. Actually there is a lack of awareness about who we are exactly. We are first Gujjars *then* Kashmiris.

In a Brenwar school, the conversation illustrates an emerging pride and assertion of Gujjar identity and the refusal to be cowed down by Kashmiri social disdain – both visible impacts of reservations. A question on the performance of Gujjar and Kashmiri children in class becomes a political hot potato.

Conversation between a Gujjar teacher & a
Kashmiri Block Development Office employee

Q: What is the difference between Gujjar children and Kashmiri children education wise?

Gujjar male teacher: Gujjar children can't understand as fast as Kashmiri children because of the non supportive environment at home where parents prioritise their cattle over studies.

Kashmiri BDO employee: (explaining to me why Kashmiris students are faster) Kashmiris are not STs, Gujjars are STs. They come in the backward category.

Gujjar male teacher (upset): Not because they're ST. There are some who are even better than Srinagar kids. The Brenwar High School biannual result was 100% pass. Those, whose parents are educated, do very well. Justice Ahmed Kuche, the Director of IGNOU is a Gujjar.”

Kashmiri BDO employee: (telling me) Here ST is given first preference, not Kashmiri. If Kashmiri does TDC (Class 12th) and Gujjar does Metric (Class 10th) then Gujjar gets the seat.

Education and Governance Creating Stakes in the System

Opening up alternatives to backward social structures

Another catalyst for traditionally unassertive minority identities has been the mad rush for education that has overtaken Kashmiri society and awakened minority attitudes as much as the majority's. The consciousness of how they have fallen behind due to their traditional social structures and social backwardness becomes painfully clear among the educated sections of the minority community – the Shias are a good example.

Says a senior police officer from Budgam where there is a fairly large sprinkling of Shias, “Shias have one concept – blind faith in Agas. This faith is slipping because literacy makes a difference but even now, Budgam is the last in literacy of 14 districts in the state. Not just because of poverty but belief in imams. Leaders don't want masses to come up to level.”

A Pattan Shia Nazeer Hussain says “We also want peace, livelihood and education – I also want to become a doctor but how? There's just no chance. Leaders never paid any attention – they only filled their pockets. The Pir would tell father give Rs 100 – he would feel he has to give. The new generation doesn't believe in all this now.”

Effect of education on minority on identity and perceptions of militancy

This wave of education is fuelled by the public eagerness to access multiple opportunities and the plethora of government schemes like the Rehbar e Taleem or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. Regardless of quality, these have targeted first generation learners in rural or far flung areas, generally populated by minority communities like the Gujjars or the Dards in Gurais who have traditionally *never* been educated. Critically, they provide an alternative to militancy in border areas where it is rampant and targets the young.

Rashid Khan a Gujjar in Malangam says his remote area has 3-4 branches. “They yank the kids away from the militancy.”

Education emphasizes instead, the key issues of development – vitally important in the identity formation of minorities who are then conscious of what they are missing in comparison to other parts of the state and gear up, newly aware, to assert themselves for their rights as a community. Gujjar leader Shabnam says “There is no electricity, water and roads for 47 Gujjar villages in Bandipora. There are no Middle or High schools in my area and all 5 classes sit in a single rented space. 300 children have 7 teachers who come from outside because qualifications are too high for us to get our own teacher for ReT – you need a BA.” He is ready with his demand from the government to scale down minimum qualifications for ReT teachers. “If they change to TDC (Class 12) then we can provide.”

Increasing the stakes for peace and governance

Secondly, governance and power create a potent “pull” factor too like reservations, first creating, and then drawing in minority assertions of identity. With the establishment of representative government, minorities understand the democratic system, its functioning and its spoils in a way they have not before. Unlike the past, this creates the motivation to step up and claim a share in power and representation. The community compares itself to others and gears up to fight for those benefits and work the system.

For example, the Gujjars have no representation in the Upper House. Gujjar leader Shabnam is also upset that Ladakh has managed to get a reasonably autonomous status within the state and his community, far greater in numbers, continues to languish without commensurate political clout and representation. “We are spread out over three districts”, he says. “Ladakh being a single district, still gets Hill Development Council status”.

The Shia Aga says “Budgam is the most backward district and it has been kept that way by sectarian bureaucrats. A Degree College was inaugurated just last year but hardly has any courses. If our kids go elsewhere they are told why are you coming here – go to your own College. MLAs and MLCs from Budgam look after their home constituencies – not the whole district. As we are educationally unsound, we can’t get to KAS – barely 2-3 Shia officers in the Secretariat and zero in the IAS.”

The Aga claims discrimination but provides answers himself. Until the Shias are represented in decent numbers at governmental level, their district will be low priority for others. In a vicious circle they cannot be more represented in government till they are better educated and step out of their isolation. While there may or may not be active discrimination, it is certain no one will do them any favours. The realization of this during the last few years of peace is another building block in the Shia identity formation.

Shifting Rural Minority Attitudes: Alternatives to the Azadi Paradigm

Fracturing of common cause through emergence of minority identity after peace

With this awareness of benefits and upward movement in a social hierarchy that has traditionally kept them out of any decision making loop, minority attitudes towards militancy are becoming nuanced and complex. The attitudes of large swathes of minority communities that have never shared the Kashmiri passion for separatism, but went along with the majority tide; have undergone major shifts as militancy diminishes its visibility in the rural, backward areas they live in. Increasingly many are eyeing the opportunities they sense lie in India and are seeing new merit in jockeying for the space they can get in governance and positions of power and patronage. Others are positioning themselves to get the maximum out of *any* possible future outcome, separatist or non separatist; and trying to leverage the influence they have on such an outcome. Ideology or commitment have no place in this scenario – realpolitik does. This is a lesson very well understood by the ethnic and religious minorities in the Valley today.

Minority commitment to *azaadi* ideology passive and ambiguous

This passivity through the years of violence is now retreating in the forcible peace. Minorities are gradually coming out hesitantly with their own agenda to assert their own stakes in the process. The Shia attitude to militancy according to the SSP Budgam, has “not been supportive” of militancy. Supreme religious Shia leader Aga Hassan is part of the Hurriyat while his four brothers are each with various mainstream political parties.

“There was no *mass* Shia involvement in militancy and very few Shia militants,” he says and concedes that the commitment to *Azaadi* isn’t of the same level as the Kashmiris. “.It doesn’t have the same intensity. Our involvement was with the common Kashmiri in the movement, trying to make him understand realpolitik”

The Gujjars in the Valley are another large and significant minority for whom the commitment to *Azaadi* is ambiguous even though *a large*

number were involved in the militancy⁶³. One factor was the border mentality which lends a certain fluidity to identity that permits little affinity with any rigid nationality or ideology.

“There was no commitment to a cause or anything,” says Hassan Ahmed, son of the Gujjar Pir of the Nanga Baji shrine in Malangam, Bandipora. “He’s an illiterate fellow. The army would beat him, so he thought, if I go across, I ‘ll earn some money.”

Their status at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, their migratory nature and their geographical location at the *starting* point of the conflict – its borders - were other factors. The militancy brutally disrupted the traditional Gujjar way of life and destroyed their traditional pastoral skills. “Our suffering was maximum,” says Ahmed. “Our lands became the battleground and our livelihoods were destroyed. We were forced to come down. There was no way of earning a living. Both the militants and the Army exploited his traditional knowledge of the passes. Tragically caught between the two in the upper reaches, many lived a life of terror, crossfire deaths and harassment or beatings by the forces and especially cruel killings at the hands of militants in these isolated stretches.

The Pahadi community has its own historical reasons for staying aloof from the *Azaadi* paradigm. As a large majority in the disputed state’s *other* half across the border, they would have easily outnumbered the Kashmiris had Indian forces *not* stopped where they did in 1947. This they believe was done at the behest of the Kashmiris. The *Azaadi* prospect holds out no great change in this Kashmiri centric power equation unless it offers them the chance for greater ties and connectivity with brethren across.

Pahadis in Tangdar are therefore caught up with their own issues like the shelling on borders, geographical isolation and lack of roads that has kept them cut off from the Valley and beyond; and from educational and job opportunities. A historical dependence on the Army also like in all border areas, rules out taking up arms against them since a large proportion are ex and current servicemen. Aslam Raja, linked to a political family in the area says, “We are concerned more with the

⁶³ Gujjars were particularly fierce militants but equally have shown alacrity in signing up for the Army, showing there is little ideological commitment to a cause but enough poverty and backwardness to take employment opportunities wherever they exist.

peace process because we face the shelling. There is no issue of self determination here.

Unease with radical Islamism of movement

Traditionally the ethnic minorities in Kashmir are also at the farthest end of the religious spectrum, i.e. notions of Islam become less rigid and practices more local and tradition based in such communities – just the type that radical Islamic rhetoric targets. There is therefore, a strong unease at the increasing radicalism of the separatist agenda, and the violence it begets.

The Shias for example are particularly wary of the Pakistani led Islamisation process and its imprint on the separatist cause because of the traditional Shia targeting by Sunni extremists in that country and the influence it will exercise over a possibly independent Kashmir. Aga Hassan, the Shia leader was earlier aligned with Geelani but left his group because he says “I could see there was no way his politics would ever lead us to any solution because they rely on the gun. Till now, he has reposed his faith in the old cultural framework and secular, mixed, religious template of Kashmir.

“Kashmiri people never bought the radical Sunni ideology. When they went to training camps, they told them clean out the Shias first. But they didn’t follow these commands. We have to ensure our youth does not get sucked in to this radical thought process.”

The nomadic, individualist Gujjar’s allegiance to Islam also sits uneasily with radicalism “Any effort to rein him in will prove elusive,” says Ahmed, the son of the Pir of the famous Nanga Baji shrine in Malangam, North Kashmir. He claims the substantial Gujjar involvement in militancy was never Islamic radicalism. “He has the Islamic sentiments – yes, but he doesn’t know why I am fighting and for whom. Gujjar involvement was out of compulsion – they had nowhere to go. Their character, their lifestyle, their thinking – everything is simple. There was no ideological fervor.”

Positioning individual identity for the future

Minority identities necessarily have stayed confined to their own community identities. Larger identities such as Kashmiri or further, Indian and Pakistani or most importantly Muslim; emerge at different times to suit different needs. The sustained peace has brought out an

assertion of a Kashmiri identity strongly linked with any *final* settlement of the dispute – as a stakeholder that cannot be shrugged aside or ignored *but completely irrelevant in other contexts*.

The Shia involvement in fact has been in the nature of insurance for the future. The Agas are involved in every political section, mainstream and separatist, with real loyalty to none, holding out for the best they can get in any eventuality, a sensible path for a minority to follow. Aga Hassan is equally clear that the anti violence thought of the Shias does not mean the community can be sidelined during any final solution.

“We are equally entitled to final settlement as the Kashmiris. Highlight this,” he commands me. “It’s our birthright! It’s not that just because I don’t have the gun, the doors of heaven will be *closed* to me.”

He describes his identity and those of the people he leads, as Shia First, Kashmiri Second, *and then* India/Pakistan according to individual preferences. Ordinary Shias may mix up this order but the leadership is clear about which identity they will negotiate from.

Others use the numbers game to sketch out future scenarios. Shabnam too has started a political organisation known as the Gujjar-Pahadi Dehat Sudhaar Forum. “In Kashmir we are 30-33% but unable to unite ourselves in this 30-40%. We are trying to organise ourselves politically in this Gujjar organisation because if 33% speak together, the Government may listen.

Pahadis still scarred from the Partition experience of becoming a “minority” to the Kashmiris as they say; have their own strategy to position their emerging identity for the future. Today in their view, their non involvement in the militancy/ violence *despite* their legitimate ethnic ties with Pahadis just across the LoC, their contribution to keeping the area free of local militants and their cooperation with the Army have a price that they feel should be paid by India – an indication of their identity coming of age. This could be anything from the desperately desired reservations to a road network. “*Otherwise*”, they hold out the threat of natural allegiance across the border with their ethnic brethren. The Pahadi possibly like *no other* minority therefore, has a community identity very much alive, clearly defined, and sharply aware of its leveraging power between the two competing structures - separatist and nationalist.

The poll turnout in 2008 validates this new, sharp awareness in all minority areas. It is the awareness of the importance of the vote and a strong determination to not let it be hijacked for causes that these communities regard as secondary or unimportant. In this awareness, it is not just the simplistic Development Vs the Gun issue that several commentators have labelled as the reason for large voter turnout but also the fracturing of the monolithic *Azaadi* idea in to something far more representative of the multi ethnic, multi linguistic and multi religious patchwork that is J&K. It is also the unwillingness of hitherto passive voices on the fringe of the loud separatist rhetoric for twenty years to remain there anymore. The turnout announces the acquiring of a hard won stake in the developmental process that will not be so easily set aside, once painstakingly rebuilt after devastation for narrow, ambiguous ideologies.

Minority Attitudes towards Pakistan

‘*Sirf cricket*’ and changing priorities

Minority attitudes to Pakistan are more sharply nuanced than the majority community. Yet it continues to be a major factor in the positioning of identity though the pulls of reservation, education and representation are increasingly diluting the religious/ethnic pull it exerts. The Muslim identity for minorities is therefore one that is assumed usually for emotional or solidarity purposes but has little practical application. The ‘habitual’ Pakistan support of ‘*sirf cricket*’ then holds more true here than in the majority community. That is, the concept of almost *no* support for Pakistan except during cricket matches when there is almost *total* support. The Shias have little interest in what Pakistan can offer and are reasonably certain of their political direction when it comes to the crunch – India. Yet their emotional loyalty has a religious base – Muslims come first.

The Shia support in schools mirrors that of the majority community – about 60-30. Of a class of 20-22, six girls in the Shia dominated school in Budgam would support India in an Indo-Pak match. 12 would support Pakistan, the rest don’t raise their hands. They tease the pro India girls when India loses – “They taunt us” laughingly admits a pro India girl but this is done in good humour. All would support Kashmir against Pakistan or India.

Yet when it comes to politics, the emotionalism is set aside for pragmatism. Aga Hassan, who belongs to the separatist Hurriyat faction, says about Pakistan, He is very clear about his convictions. “I am in movement till *awaam* (people) decide – there I am not bound by any decision. I am not under compulsion to be anti Indian. A real Muslim will never go to Pakistan – even the Kashmiri Muslim. He is secular. At that point he will prefer India”

Gujjars have such conflicting pulls even more often. Several of their ethnic brethren are across the border and the pull of this is strong – and natural. Yet the Gujjar conscience is also pricked earlier and more often too because of the clear cut benefit they get from India - reservations. Consider this conversation among privileged Gujjar schoolboys who are benefitting from the system

Syed Waheem Qazmi: I cheer for Pakistan.

Mushtaq Khan: If I support Muslims (i.e. if *that* is the criteria), then I should cheer for India as Indian Muslims are so many and India is the one giving us everything.

Waheem: India gives to us for its own benefit, because we are the ones who do the work.

Mushtaq: Whatever we eat is India's. Whatever we drink is India's. Whatever we get, we get from India, not Pakistan. Why should we say Pakistan? If Pakistan gives us, we'll say Pakistan.

Q) Why is your support dependant on who *gives* you something. What is your own opinion? If you support India, why India? If you support Pakistan, why Pakistan?

Mushtaq: India is a democracy and its people are decent, cultured.

Q) Who are India's people?

Mushtaq: All – Hindus, Muslims....It is only India where there is no discrimination between communities.

Hamid: I agree with all that but team wise I like Pakistan. Don't know why but I like all the players. But I want to be an IPS, being a citizen of India so for that I love India. Not against Pakistan or India but for *approaching my aim – I am Indian.*

The Army's role in driving up the India stakes for the Gujjars as a recruiter in the rural areas where educational and job options are fewer than the urban areas is one that mops up the opposition and depletes the ranks of potential militants – a danger voiced by the militant leadership. The Gujjars are a particular target because of their physical aptitudes for the mountains in the region and are happy to sign up.

A habitual mindset has prevented them from looking beyond their Muslim counterparts across the border where their higher social status is a cause for envy.

Gujjar leader Shabnam says, "When we hear of Chaudhry Shujaat Khan, Sardar Qayoom⁶⁴, we are of a slightly higher status there so I do feel I wish I was there. We'd be looked at with respect even if today we are in darkness".

⁶⁴ Former 'Prime Minister' and 'President' of Azad Kashmir in Pakistan Administered Kashmir and considered a favourite of the Pakistani establishment who had been a leading light in the state since 1947. He is also known as *Mujahid e Awwal*.

However during the Gujjar agitation in Rajasthan for reservations, Gujjar voices from J&K joined in solidarity nationwide for the first time, creating a stake holding and linkages not necessarily dependent only on Muslim support.

It is these fragile new links that leap over the habitual Two Nation construct of religion as the sole framework of identity and encourage the baby steps towards a more equitable, egalitarian, cosmopolitan framework where the Kashmiri – whether minority or majority – is *forced* to work with other communities once the electoral mathematics is clear to him.

He therefore starts developing a broader sense of *state* identity, builds linkages to cross dimensional networks (like the Gujjars in Rajasthan) and acquires a keener idea of governance and administration in a multi community, secular arrangement and how it can benefit him (like the Pahadis scrambling for reservations or the Shias for reorganization of constituencies). It is *this* arrangement, if coupled with peace and development, that starts making ample sense to him and this that narrows down the space for violence and the very constricted, ambiguous and often incomplete separatist politics that keeps it alive.

While a core separatist ideology therefore continues to exist in key urban centres enjoying the patronage of a certain class, its limits are visible – and the extent to which the Indian state and the idea of it can engage with other sections far more open to its constructs and no longer content to stay in the shadow of a Kashmiri centric *Azaadi*.

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Nationality & Identity Shifts in Jammu & Kashmir's Armed Conflict

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