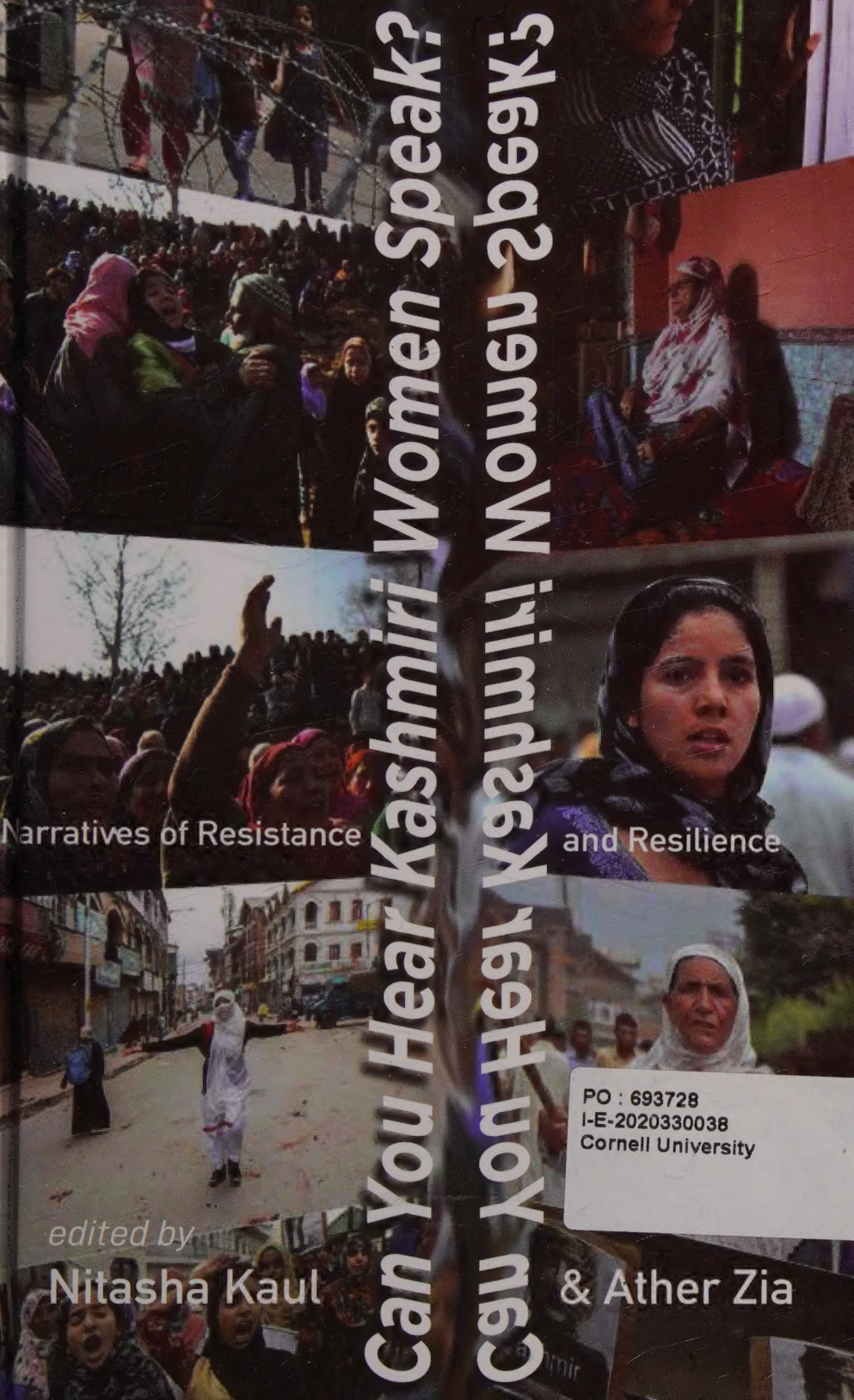


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Can You Hear Kashmiri Women Speak?

To the people of Kashmir, with love

Can You Hear Kashmiri Women Speak?

Narratives of Resistance and Resilience

edited by

Nitasha Kaul & Ather Zia

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Preface
&
Introduction

In December 2018 we put together the first-ever collection of essays on women and Kashmir by Kashmiri women themselves. This milestone in scholarly work fostered the hope that we would begin the process of 'Knowing in Our Own Ways', which was also the title of our introduction to the historic special issue of the *Economic & Political Weekly* Review of Women's Studies.

Barely a year later, an unprecedented set of events in Kashmir focused world attention on the resounding enforced silencing of Kashmiris. In August 2019, after a second general election victory earlier in the year, the Modi-led BJP government pushed through a key manifesto promise of the Hindu nationalist political formation: the revocation of Kashmir's autonomy, via the abrogation of Article 370. In addition, the state was bifurcated and converted into a Union Territory, a move unprecedented in the history of independent India. All this was undertaken without any determination in, or by, the Kashmiri legislature or in consultation with the Kashmiri people themselves. It was also preceded by tens of thousands additional troops being flown into a region which was already very heavily militarised, followed by a complete communications lockdown. In subsequent months, some restrictions were lifted, but at the time of writing, Internet and post-paid cellphones remain shut, and mobility is perodically curtailed. Pro-India politicians who historically propped up the client governments have virtually all been detained and placed

under house arrest. Resistance leaders, activists, and civil society members are also under detention.

The Indian government has argued that the revocation of Kashmir's autonomy was undertaken to pave the way for development and to root out nepotism and 'terrorism'. However, among a host of other reasons that the BJP advanced for the revocation one stood out distinctly: that the annulment of special status would alleviate gender discrimination in Kashmir. The banner of saving Kashmiri women was advanced to maximum effect by the Indian government, walking in the footsteps of colonial powers which utlilised such gendered pretexts for the annexation of indigenous lands. While women's rights were much-hyped on the one hand, on the other, Indian politicians and the people at large had no hesitation in celebrating a manifestly patriarchal militaristic victory over Kashmir.

Against this backdrop, the question of gender and Kashmir continues to have unparalleled significance. It is also why the words and voices of Kashmiri women themselves deserve the most serious attention. In this volume, we bring you the eight original *EPW* essays, together with four new essays by Deepti Misri, Aditi Saraf, Nishita Trisal, and Asiya Zahoor.

When it comes to international conflicts, ignorance is as much an ally in their prolongation as ill-will. The vested interests entrenched in profiting from conflict unsurprisingly seek to limit the range of possible political options that might lead to demilitarisation, dialogue, conciliation, a just peace, and eventually, resolution. However, the means through which the conflicts are prolonged relate just as much to the usually effective embargoes on what kind of knowledge can be produced about the conflict, by whom, and with which kind of visibility.

This is acutely so in the case of Kashmir, where ignorance and ill-will work synchronously to produce a simplistic understanding of the region that belies its complexity in terms of its history, politics, competing claims, traumatic memories, divided populations, lack of justice, denial of rights, loss of homes, and cycles of extremism, corruption, and occupation. The mainstream understanding of Kashmir outside the region and globally, is predominantly through the prism of a statist Indian and Pakistani narrative. There is little space for Kashmiris and their knowing in their own ways, even less for Kashmiri women speaking about women and Kashmir. In that sense, this volume, with all its limitations, provides Kashmiri women this space.

The word 'Kashmir' is hypervisible in Indian discourse today, but in specific and limiting ways. Most Indians and others internationally have a received understanding of Kashmir largely based on media reports, which again tend to be significantly state-centric. Thus, the signifier 'Kashmir' is enormously powerful in the contemporary Indian imaginary and, depending upon the qualifiers attached to it, can be made to carry different political meanings and messages. For instance, when used in the public discourse, the terms Kashmiri Pandit, Kashmiri Muslim, Kashmiri men, and Kashmiri women, all perform different discursive functions. Kashmiri women, as part of that hypervisibility, are often presented as passive victims of their men and of the overarching political violence. Our remit and motivation here is to initiate the reader into a more complex understanding of women and Kashmir—women of Kashmir, women in Kashmir—as a way of further interrogating the significance of gender in situations of prolonged conflict.

At the outset, we reflect on some of the issues of grouping the themes, and the challenges we faced in putting together this work. As co-editors, as Kashmiris ourselves, our motive has been

to include the 'herstories' of Kashmir. We have, deliberately and with intent, included only work by Kashmiri women. We do not claim to be representative of, or speaking for, all Kashmiri women; our motivation is to bring a heightened visibility to at least some Kashmiri scholars who are actively thinking about the intersection of gender and political dispute. The women writing in these pages are scholars, professionals, and activists who present their analyses in the light of history, anthropology, law, and feminist studies. Undoubtedly, there will be other endeavours in which we can include a more diverse array of Kashmiri scholars and scholars of Kashmir across gender. We consider this volume, and the earlier *EPW* review issue as part of an ongoing endeavour which will prioritise Kashmiri voices that have usually been sidelined. We are aware that in this volume there is a relative absence of gender concerns as they relate to Kashmiri Pandits and other Kashmiri minorities, the Kashmiri and Indian economy, as well as the disputed parts of Kashmir administered by Pakistan and China. It is not that we did not attempt to find such voices, but it that was not always possible to find or to retain them. In that context, much more work needs to be done, and this is only the beginning.

Each essay in this volume refers to the conflict, and relies on a wide range of narratives and sources. The aim here is not to provide a definitive account of what Kashmiri women think, or say, or want, or experience; indeed, for us, as editors, selecting and finalising the essays was a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, it is not always possible to request a citation for the experience of being marginalised or of witnessing marginalisation and, on the other, scholarly work cannot rely entirely on assertions. We have attempted, wherever possible, to walk this line between acknowledging theoretical feminist insights and making sense

of the empirical realities faced in the colonial periphery of the postcolonial nation.

In a protracted conflict, as the one in Kashmir, the life of people frequently remains suspended in time between the next encounter, killing, arrest, or curfew. When men become direct victims of state violence, it falls to the women to hold together the remaining vestiges of the community. Samreen Mushtaq's essay engages with the ways in which Kashmiri women form part of a more overt and wider political struggle, but also part of the everyday resistance where the binaries of home and outside do not hold, and where the home is not an indicator of safety. She looks at the ways in which everyday resistance can be understood through visibility, resilience, and dignity in the reproduction of the daily existence of Kashmiri life. Ordinary life also features in Mona Bhan's essay but in an extraordinary manner. Bhan shows us how the daily life of ordinary Kashmiris is threatened as Indian policies increasingly weaponise nature. Bhan specifically locates her essay in the aftermath of the floods of 2014, when Kashmiris, en masse, challenged the notion that the flood was an act of nature and thus apolitical. Kashmiris linked the questions of nature and ecological and resource sovereignties to their struggle for self-determination against Indian hegemony. Bhan's essay situates Kashmiri women's narratives of dispossession and the proliferation of Indian investment in mega hydroelectric dams on Kashmir's rivers within this context. Uzma Falak's essay is a lyrical analysis of affective female alliances, *vyestoan*, and their liberatory potential. She theorises women's mobilisation in friendships that emerge during protests, demonstrations, and the funeral processions of militants and civilians alike, who are killed by government forces. She analyses these linkages not just as a form of support, but also as the creation of a gendered

resistance. In Inshah Malik's essay, we see how funerals have become spectacular sites of feminist resistance. She challenges the myth of the grieving mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism, and meaningfully theorises Kashmiri women's agency in the public sphere.

Mir Fatimah Kanth excavates the history of gendered resistance, illustrating a continuity when it comes to women. She views women, politics, and subjectivity in relation to the state and its arbitrary exercise of power, and in relation to society and its gendered expectations of women. Kanth's tracing of this history makes it clear that resistance to Indian authority is not a post-1989 phenomenon and has certainly not been bereft of women's participation. In the context of the empowerment of Kashmiri women, Hafsa Kanjwal's essay takes us back in time, alerting us to how state-sponsored women's empowerment programmes in the early years of post-partition Kashmir resulted in feminist projects which were affiliated with the state and, in time, became deeply contested and politicised. In this context, women's mobility and education were geared more to the service of consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state, rather than allowing indigenous movements, political or social, to grow and flourish. Essar Batool's essay tackles the issue head-on by focusing on sexual violence under intense militarisation and patriarchal norms. Batool, who is also a co-editor of an important volume entitled, *Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?* analyses the sexual violence against women, men, and transgender persons in Kashmir at the hands of government troops, emboldened by the legal immunity provided by laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. While militarisation-related violence works differently for men and women, issues of 'shame', 'honour', and reprisals mean that fear results in the under-reporting of such violence for both men and women. Batool also makes the important point of how the

structure of patriarchy can act as an ally of state violence and oppression. Alliya Anjum's essay makes sense of how militarism and militarisation are linked to a denial and loss of rights, and investigates the gendered effects of this in terms of how violence is experienced and why it is perpetrated. She thinks through the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm in the context of Kashmir, calls into question the government response to human rights abuses in Kashmir, and urges the need to end impunity, especially in the context of international legal policy which is stringent and clear with regard to sexual violence in conflicts.

Deepti Misri, in her essay, engages with a critical juxtaposition of two digital feminist interventions protesting sexual violence against women and girls in Kashmir. One case relates to the brutal gang-rape and murder of Asifa Bano, an eight-year-old Bakerwal girl in Kathua district in 2017, and the intervention in the case of the 2018 collective statement entitled 'Decolonial Feminist Statement (DFS) on #MeToo in Kashmir'. This statement was issued by a transnational network of Kashmiri feminists, of which we editors were a part, and was co-signed by a large cross-section of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri feminists and allies. Misri believes that the modes of address and forms of solidarity mobilised in each individual intervention were distinct. She traces the limitations of the activist celebrity campaign in solidarity with Asifa and how, by projecting little Asifa only as India's daughter, the rape was disconnected from her being a Muslim Kashmiri child, and thus disconnecting it from the larger struggle in Kashmir for sovereignty and indigenous rights. Misri also highlights how this contradiction was addressed by the DFS, which exhorted Indian feminists to be in effective solidarity with women and girls in Kashmir, not by projecting their troubles in a vacuum but by keeping in perspective the Kashmiri struggle and the Indian military

occupation. Indeed, feminist solidarity needs to be aware of the dual play of gender and nation.

Aditi Saraf's essay is written from her vantage as a non-Kashmiri native with paternal lineage from Rajouri and Mirpur. Her family history in the borderlands provides her with a unique view: of interrogating questions of community, territory, and belonging, and how their erasure from mainstream political discourse has taken place. In the face of an aggressively masculinist, nationalist, and increasingly communalised ethos in India, which not only reinforces the bifurcation in Kashmir but seeks to annex Azad Jammu & Kashmir post the abrogation of Article 370, Saraf suggests, as a corrective, considering the history of Kashmir as part of a 'long frontier'. She contends that rather than the aggressive imaginary of 'borders' which lay claims of sovereignty, the 'frontier' is both a physical space and a symbolic threshold which can be deployed to question normalised assumptions about the nation-state's master narratives of both identity and gender.

In her essay, Nishita Trisal, too, finds herself questioning a disjuncture around her position as a Kashmiri Pandit woman in the aftermath of the revocation of Kashmir's autonomy. She underlines how the reaction of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have been largely contradictory, with most Muslims 'mourning the decision while the majority of Pandits celebrated'. Her essay traces how the pain of the Kashmiri Pandit community, following the exodus in the 1990s, has been weaponised by India.

Some of our authors were in the region during the traumatic silencing post August 2019, and some are still under siege. The inclusion of Asiya Zahoor's essay has been nothing short of a miracle and tells of the restrictions imposed upon Kashmiris. Her essay was emailed to us from a district magistrate's office, the only place where Internet facility was available. Following that, the

revisions passed through several hands and different emails to get to us. Since she wrote this essay, Asiya has not been directly in touch with us as she does not have access to the Internet.

Her essay brings the aftermath of the revocation of Article 370 into her analysis. In her exploration of the Kashmiri English novel she makes the authors (Mirza Waheed and Nitasha Kaul) serve also as analytic lenses, arguing that the categories of 'woman' and 'gender' are not collapsible into each other. She illustrates that women's images in Kashmiri English literature should be read as markers of difference in Kashmir, in perspectives on survival, resistance, tenacity, and indifference. Zahoor concludes that the amalgamation of a fantasy of desire for women and landscape is a manifestation of Indian colonialism. For the people in Kashmir, as their territorial sovereignty has been forcibly ended, the longstanding fear of settler colonialism is looming large. In that context, the open attack on women is seen as a patriarchal battle-cry directed towards Kashmiri women and territory.

Understanding women's experience

While the structure of a military occupation cracks down equally on all genders, feminist scholarship has shown that the interlocking nature of militarism and masculinity means that competing patriarchies of oppression and resistance become mutually constitutive, and that women are at the sharp end of both. Understanding and analysing the life experiences and agency potential of women in disputed zones such as Kashmir becomes difficult, and also crucial. In addition to the complications of a globally ubiquitous patriarchy, there is the question of how war and occupation are an exercise in gendered hyper-masculine power in the context of a conflict zone. Against this backdrop, Kashmiri women deserve to be recognised for their influential role in challenging the narratives and impact of occupation;

these are generational struggles, at once poignant and powerful. We think of inspirational women like Parveena Ahangar, who is the co-founder and chairperson of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), an organisation which brings together those searching for Kashmiri men who have disappeared in the custody of the Indian armed forces. We think of the 55 Kashmiri women who came together in 2013 under the banner of the Support Group for Kunan Poshpora, and have been key to the annual commemoration of 23 February as Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day. We think of the Kashmiri women of the past, the present, and the future who have spoken truth to power, stood up for their rights, braved all odds and persevered, disrupted both patriarchy and occupation, and have lived to tell their stories, to laugh, sing, and love.

Even so, innumerable Kashmiris have had their lives brutally cut short by conflict and violence which has been orchestrated to humiliate them and render them bereft of relatives, homes, and hopes. Do you know how Kashmiris remember? Kashmiris, of any and all kinds, map their timelines not merely by running through the years chronologically, but by recalling the years through what they brought. The summers of massacres, months of mass blindings, humiliations of human shields, ceaseless curfews and bans, repeated uprisings, political upheavals, impositions of governor's rule, India–Pakistan border hostilities, rigged elections, mass exodus, and mass rape. Srinagar has flowers which grow on mass graves, lanes littered with ruined houses, and torture centres which have been turned into official residences. There are soldiers and guns everywhere. In 2018, the United Nations produced its *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.* The reception of this report in the

Indian media was overwhelmingly one of rejection and ridicule. The illegitimacy of the Indian state's actions in Kashmir is aided by a common-sense public opinion among the Indian majority, which only allows the Kashmiri struggle to be viewed through the lens of paternalism and jingoism.

Which serious scholar of Kashmir can deny the simultaneous existence of human rights abuses and a political problem that requires a political resolution which must involve the Kashmiris themselves? Yet, even something as basic as this is difficult to find being reflected in Indian mainstream media, through which most Indians form their opinions on Kashmir.

We urge the readers of this book to move beyond the comfort zone of merely acknowledging the vulnerabilities of marginalised Kashmiris; by not equalising the illicitness of the military and the militants; by thinking past the self-serving machinations of Indian power-brokers at the centre and Kashmiri mainstream politicians at the periphery; and by asking the difficult question: how long must ordinary Kashmiris suffer their traumatic history as ceaseless memory before their calls for freedom and justice are taken sufficiently seriously to warrant a political resolution?

The Kashmiri women here speak of myriad things: of spectacles and street protests; of women's companionships and female alliances; women's movements and imaginaries of resistance. Of the links between militarisation, militarism, and the creation of impunity by the law. Of competing patriarchies and sexual violence. Of all these as they seek to break Kashmiri communities; the infrastructures of control that limit their mobility, bodies, and experiences; of public grief at funerals as a challenge to Indian sovereignty over Kashmir; and of autobiographies, oral histories, and the textures of political memory.

The years ahead are crucial. Kashmiri women, within and outside Kashmir, have always been speaking, but their voices

have not always been heard. Now, they are actively silenced in the name of their liberation. In these tragic moments, we offer these essays about Kashmir and its women in the words of Kashmiri women themselves. Come what may, our work is part of an ongoing and resilient endeavour that will not stop speaking truth to power.

In the powerful idiom of postcolonial criticality, the question we should ask is not 'Can Kashmiri women speak?' but rather, 'Can you hear them?'

We ask from you, the reader, to pay close attention to their words. If you claim to care about the women of Kashmir, it is their voices that you must hear.

NITASHA KAUL & ATHER ZIA

1 Reflective Personal Narratives

The Intimate World of *Vyestoan*

affective female alliances and companionships of resistance in Kashmir

UZMA FALAK

The ceaseless rhythmic thumping of the *tumbakhnaer*[1] filled the autumnal night air with a strange possibility. Whiffs and the silence of tall pines coalesced with smoke and the sound of burning wood of the *verr*[2], as food for celebration was being prepared. Women who had gathered in the colourful tent sculpted the night with their handclaps, beats of the *tumbakhnaer* resting in their laps, the clinking of keys and the copper *nout* (a pot used as a hand drum). Incessantly, the women whirled, singing in the traditional call-and-response style, where one group of women sing to 'call' for a 'response' from another. Their antiphonal singing turned the hours of the night into a rhythmic conversation. Endless cups of brewing *nunchai* (Kashmir's everyday, salty milk tea) from the samovar were passed around. Sleep was as distant as the Pir Panjal, the hazy contours of which were visible amidst the dense night fog. The bride's friend sang *cheshman che gaashnevaan,* the refrain travelling to the distant mountains, as we all sang together *yeti bhaer bhaer kaet malguzaar yewaan.*[3] An obscure sense of longing persisted.

Women covered Rukhsana's hands with intricate patterns of henna, as if inscribing secrets on her palm. Rukhsana's confidante, Parveena Ahangar, sat beside her and sang along. Rukhsana was a little girl when, accompanied by her grandfather, Jamaal

Dar, she would travel every month from their village Pahaldej in Handwor for the sit-ins and protests of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP),a collective of relatives of those subjected to enforced and involuntary disappearances in Kashmir. There, in Srinagar's Pratap Park, they would demand information on the whereabouts of her father, Fatah Muhammad, who was subjected to enforced disappearance in 2000. It was there that she met Parveena, Haleema, and Sabia who, along with other women from her village, were now singing at the *maenzraat* (night of the henna) of her wedding.

As the women sang, a strange haptic moment, a certain haunting bound us, evoking a different time and a different space. It seemed as if everyone's loss and mourning had survived a body search, crossed a certain checkpoint, a certain border, and were now in an assembly; each articulation was distinct yet coalesced into an ephemeral collective, manifesting itself into a longing and a cry. Several such cries echoed that night from the colourful tent. Suddenly, a woman in the gathering beat the *tumbakhnaer* in a discordant way, signalling a change of rhythm. The song of grief and mourning was punctuated by a swift change of rhythm and tune from a certain drum accompanied by an impromptu humorous verse, and thus the otherwise crying congregation suddenly burst into a song of laughter. Soon, women began dancing, bodies oscillating, arms and feet moving. These movements engendered an affectivity which one could, as it were, touch.

This women's gathering, of which I was a part at Pahaldej village in 2013, brings us to the heart of my undertaking in this essay in which I reflect on women's congregations, female alliances, friendships and embodied practices, arguing that these constitute an alternate affect and episteme in Kashmir. Here, I attempt to bring these discussions to life through ethnographic vignettes and auto-ethnographic fragments of women's

intimate worlds in Kashmir. One of my major undertakings will be working through a concept of critical female alliance of resistance, which I call *vyestoan.* In Koshur, Kashmir's native language, *vyes* refers to a female friend and *vyestoan* is a term for female friendships. I hope to delineate notions of that which is in-between, and liminality which come closest to an indefinable and obscure, yet powerful, force which I have felt amidst women gathered at weddings, funerals, protest marches, mosques, and myriad other spaces and times, and beyond. Therefore, in some sense, this essay represents a site of struggle with (and within) the confines of language to articulate the embodied, particularly this affectivity of a women's gathering, which I first felt as a child when my grandmother took me to the mosque for women's congregational prayers, and which continues to hold me in its tender and poignant grip.

The women's congregation at Rukhsana's *maenzraat* created several translations and transformations. As women sang, *Zanei soi koor yemis daydi jaan ravaan, yeti bhaer bhaer kaet malguzaar yewaan,* a different time and space of collective mourning was evoked, intersecting the space and time characterised by celebration.[4] The gathering of women, their 'appearance', was haunted by the enforced disappearance of Rukhsana's father. Her wedding celebration was haunted by mourning and commemoration not only for her missing father but for Parveena's son, Haleema's husband, and many other *cheshman hend gaash* (light of the eyes) evoked by the song, who remain buried in the endless *malguzaar* (graveyards) of Kashmir.[5] These translations between bodies, acts, the living, the dead, and the disappeared, and this embodiment of several spatialities and temporalities form one of the anchors of resistance in Kashmir.

A similar transformation takes place during the monthly protest meetings of the APDP in Srinagar. Those who were

subjected to enforced disappearances 'appear' through the bodies of members of their families, who wear their images, certifying both their presence and absence. As women assemble, greet, hug, laugh and talk, a space of protest, mourning and remembrance is transformed into a space of celebration; not only of persistence and struggle but of alliance, friendships, and also mobility.[6] The women, thus, enact memory and collective trauma, initiating intergenerational 'acts of transfer' (Taylor 2003).[7]

The night of fellowship at Rukhsana's *maenzraat* ended amidst laughter, chit-chat, and whimpering. Morning light filtered through the window and reflected on a mud wall contouring the window itself. In this window of light on the wall, I saw Rukhsana's silhouette, disentangling her hair. Her bridal dress still neatly folded, coloured shiny bottles, hair clips, mothballs, and knick-knacks were scattered like her hair. This visible and invisible portrait, this silhouette sculpting the light, is how I was to remember Rukhsana years later: an intense portrait of-presence and absence.

Women's assemblies as political enactment

Walking back from a milkmaid's shop across the road, Nasreena Akhter greets me and we walk through the remnants of an expansive military bunker in Batmaluen towards her home. A few stairs lead up to a blue-walled room. On the window, hangs a garland of dried chillies. She describes how, at the onset of the mass armed struggle for liberation in 1989, homes turned into centres of violence:

> Men were taken out during crackdowns. We were caged inside our homes. Troopers would lock us inside and shout swear words. They broke our doors, walls, windows, took our belongings, even pliers and screwdrivers. They would frisk

> our trunks, rice, and flour canisters, coal, sugar, clothes, water storage tanks, chicken coops. [Personal interview, 2013.]

A thin wooden frame, the only adornment on the wall, holds a vivid colour photograph of one of the women's rallies in Srinagar from the 1990s. Women in their black veils, white butter-crêpe burqas, and coloured scarves stand together in a cluster. A young Nasreena stands at the centre of the gathering, her fists defiantly raised, her slightly open mouth ready to pierce the air with a freedom slogan. The tension her presence creates in the photographic composition extends beyond the frame. It appears as if the photograph will either come alive or the tension will tear it apart. I look at an older Nasreena across the blue-walled room. She smiles, reminiscing:

> How much can one put into words? I would travel miles to join funeral processions of the martyrs. *Mei ous jazbe* (I had passion). I would leave home without thinking twice. I was an ardent sloganeer. In 1992, when the call, *Tchar Chalo*[8] was announced, everyone left their homes—men, women, children. Homes were deserted. Freedom appeared very near.

As the notion of home, conceived as a safe space, was ruptured, women found a new home where they felt safe and strong—in togetherness.

> A perpetual mourning lingered in our homes. Sudden crackdowns were announced. We couldn't stay indoors. We would occupy the streets, alleys, and be together. We felt safe and strong in that way. We braved many nights on the streets. We would march and sing for our martyrs: *Kya tse marnukh goi bahano, janano bei walo* (How did death overtake you? Come back my beloved, won't you?)
>
> [Personal interview with Neelam, 2013.]

Emphasising the corporeality of a persisting and resisting body, Judith Butler (2015: 161) significantly argues that assembling or coming together is already an enactment of a popular will and has an 'expressive function prior to any claim or utterance it may make'. In other words, as she notes, 'the enactment of "we the people" may or may not take a linguistic form; speech and silence, movement and immobility, are all political enactments' (2015: 172).

During long spells of crackdown, women would spread mats and blankets on the streets and assemble, organise community kitchens, or distribute food in neighbourhoods under relentless curfews and crackdowns. They contributed money to buy bread and food for men who would be forcibly asked to assemble outside their homes during the long hours of search and cordon operations. In instances such as these, where the boundary between the public and private crumbles, where people stand, sit, breathe, sing, sleep, mourn, cook, and eat on the street, Butler asserts that the demonstrators put their bodies on the line in 'insistence, obduracy and precarity, overcoming the distinction between public and the private', challenging not only the legitimacy of the state 'but also maintaining themselves as persisting bodies with needs, desires, and requirements' (2015: 9–8).

Rasheeda and Nayeema, two sexagenarian sisters, correct each other for details, pausing intermittently, negotiating the vagaries of memory, the tellings and retellings as they describe decades of their underground and resilient lives. They are bound in a *vyestoan* which strengthens and, at the same time, transcends their blood-sisterhood. Rasheeda serves tea and peeled almonds while they sketch their militant lives for me. While a few stories get them laughing and animated and some make them cry, they

narrate others in hushed voices, and many others perhaps defy language. Rasheeda narrates:

> We would bang roofs and tin drums in defiance to communicate we were fearless and not scared of their bullets. We confronted the troops with sticks, *kanger* (a portable earthen fire pot encased in woven wicker used to keep warm in winter), shoes, whatever means we had at hand. The troops would go on a rampage in our homes looking for guns. I once dared them by saying that there were no weapons in the house. I told them: Perhaps we are the weapons you are looking for; arrest us and your hounding will end! [Personal interview, 2013.]

Recalling the protest and solidarity rallies of the 1990s, Rasheeda remembers how they tore off black veils when, given the stringent restrictions they did not have flags to carry to a procession.

> We tore the black burqas, stitched them into flags and marched on the streets shouting: *Hum Kya Chahtey? Azaadi!* (What do we want? Freedom!) Our passionate slogans stirred the earth.

Her sister Nayeema interjects:

> Those were our years of youth, hope, and spirit. Everyone walked together. The poets walked with us. Marching on to the streets, we sang songs of loss and revolt. *Yem vedaakh aeis andrei vezaan* (a fervent gush coming forth from some intrinsic source found words).

Songs of resistance

Women's songs in Kashmir form an important repertoire of resistance. Enacting cultural agency and encoding resistance into cultural memory, women's intimate worlds of singing translated (and continue to transmute) the political struggle into poetry. Songs which women sang in Pahaldej or those which Nayeema

and Neelam referred to are songs of collective loss and longing, a media of protest, mobilisation, and solidarity, and significantly, an enactment of a collective articulation of freedom. Offering alternate ways of knowing, these songs challenge 'established practices of remembering and forgetting' and 'insurrect the perspectives that culturally hegemonic practices have foreclosed' (Medina 2011). In the words of Ariel Dorfman (2007) in his epilogue to *Poems from Guantanamo*, they emerge from a 'simple, almost primeval, arithmetic of breathing in and out' which keeps us alive. What Butler in her *Frames of War* says about the 'written' poems of the Guantanamo detainees, holds true of the songs in Kashmir:

> To say that the poems resist that sovereignty is not to say that they will alter the course of war or will ultimately prove more powerful than the military power of the state. But the poems clearly have political consequences—emerging from scenes of extraordinary subjugation, they remain proof of stubborn life, vulnerable, overwhelmed, their own and not their own, dispossessed, enraged, and perspicacious. As a network of transitive affects, the poems—their writing and their dissemination—are critical acts of resistance, insurgent interpretations, incendiary acts that somehow, incredibly, live through the violence they oppose, even if we do not yet know in what ways such lives will survive. (Butler 2016: 62.)

Understanding these songs as challenging statist knowledge production and as offering alternate ways of knowing offers several critical possibilities. These songs, for example, not only enact embodied memory but may also offer nuanced reflections on resistance and embodiment itself. For instance, '*Hum Kya Chahtey? Azaadi!*' is a popular slogan enacting a collective longing for freedom in Kashmir, and in one of its renditions, freedom is inscribed on the mountains, rivers, soil, body, and soul (Ahmed

2012). A nuanced reading of the song, I argue, enables us to read it as a critical reflection on embodiment itself. The notion of embodiment moves beyond an understanding of the body as a physiological entity and explores the 'phenomenal' body, focusing on unified experiences and potentials, beyond rigid binaries and dualisms such as the Cartesian split of the body and mind. The song of *azaadi* inscribes 'freedom', transcending various binaries—body/soul, material/spirit, reason/emotion, nature/culture, history/memory, life/death, individual/collective—and creates a porosity between these dualities and other evocations of landscapes, proximity, intimacy, desire, promise, voice, and movement in relation to occupation and resistance, thus offering a poetic thesis of embodied resistance.

In a historical continuum, the political uprising of the 1990s too catalysed women's mobilisation, and new friendships emerged from chance meetings during protests, marches, assemblies, and funeral processions.[9] These gathering also brought together women from different socio-economic backgrounds overcoming the barriers of caste, class, and region, thus forging a critical intersectionality. However, no sphere can claim to be entirely inclusive. As Judith Butler (2015: 51) notes, 'every form of appearance is constituted by its outside and there can be no entry into the sphere of appearance without a critique of the differential form of power by which that sphere is constituted'. However, she explains, this is not a reason to abort the struggle, only a reason to insist upon the struggle as being ongoing. Moreover, 'appearing' is not understood as synonymous with resistance; not 'appearing' or assembling may indicate the strategic possibilities and methods of persistence.

In Kashmir, such assemblies are not understood within the democratic logic of the right to freedom of assembly, rather, they enact a rejection of the Indian state as the guarantor of rights.

As demonstrations turn into funerals and vice versa, every death in Kashmir indicates and enacts the death of the state.[10] It is an enactment understood beyond the language of constitutional law and rights, even though the region and its people's lives are complexly involved and interlaced within the structures of law. Moreover, although such assemblies are ephemeral, their 'transience is linked to their critical function' (Butler 2015: 20).

As women gather, assemble, and forge alliances and companionships, their bodies, embodying and enacting several alternate temporalities and modalities of being, give way to a liminal, timeless space abounding with possibilities of liberation. The in-betweenness constituted by their bodies and modalities of being characterised by a liminal space and time, is the site of an alternate affect, one of the bedrocks of resistance in Kashmir. While bodies are arrested, killed, maimed, and violated, this in-betweenness and its affectivity escapes the grip of the state's power and persists as an articulation of a collective longing and struggle. While this in-betweenness is constituted by intimacy and proximity, it goes beyond both, reclaiming what the state renders unfamiliar through its complex repressive mechanisms of control. Liminality and in-betweenness not only mark people's time and space in Kashmir, but also characterise their lives. Kashmir and its people are however complexly entangled within the framework of the Indian state's law and legality, yet they refuse to embody a statist temporality and modality of being via a profound articulation of self-determination and liberation. The 'liminal' bodies create a 'timelessness' where freedom and its possibilities are articulated. These critical linkages between liminality, in-betweenness, and the resistance movement in Kashmir are manifested in what I call a hauntology of liberation; an anti-occupational liberatory praxis characterised by alternate ways of knowing, which allows us to imagine and

navigate alternate temporalities, spatialities, and modalities of being and, thus, alternate selfhoods.

Misra, an elderly woman, who narrates to me the courageous stories of her confrontation with the troops during the 1990s, poignantly articulates what it meant for women to assemble:

> No one could afford or bear to stay in isolation behind closed doors. We were alive and we had to communicate that.
>
> [Personal interview, 2013.]

Dreams and their 'share in history'

Parveena Ahangar recounts to me the only dream she has had of her missing son, Javaid Ahmed Ahangar. The sun has set and the lilting azaan from a local mosque intersperses her dream narration, as she warms her hands over the *kanger.* She recalls:

> It was a long time ago, on the night of Qadr, when we still lived at our old house in Batmaluen. I dreamt of him. 'I am alive, I am in their custody, they have hidden me, mother,' he said to me in my dream. 'They tell me, your mother is searching for you. Only your mother.' [Personal interview, 2013.]

After her son's disappearance, Parveena wept ceaselessly and felt she was unable to carry on. She says she travelled to far-off places, to every prison, every interrogation centre in search of her son and was unable to pay attention to her family and the household. In her absence her neighbours attended to household chores.

Parveena's daughter, Saima, who was four years old at the time her brother was picked up, was intensely disturbed not only by her brother's sudden absence but also by her mother's grief. She says:

> Loss almost turned her [Parveena] mad. I couldn't bear my brother's absence and my mother's grief. Home was the last place where I wanted to be. I spent several months at my relative's places. [Personal interview, 2013.]

Gradually, Parveena, in search of her son, met other women who, too, were searching for their 'disappeared' family members. They began meeting regularly on the 15th and 30th of each month at Parveena's home where she would prepare tea and food for everyone, or in public parks where they would hold dharnas and sit-ins under chinar trees and write their protest messages on pieces of paper. These small initial meetings and individual struggles forged into a collective, giving birth to the APDP in 1994. Over the years, it has emerged as a vibrant political space primarily of women's mobilisation, solidarity, and friendship. Parveena remarks that APDP is her only *rishte* (family) now. The APDP family comprises of about 1,000 members who meet every month in protest and commemoration. Saima says:

> Soon after my mother began meeting other women regularly, she slowly resurfaced from the depths of grief into which she had plunged. It gave her strength and we saw a visible change in her. She forged new bonds. I too joined this collective struggle and began participating more actively. APDP has become a new family for us. I am particularly fond of a little girl in the collective. Her father is among the disappeared. She too hates going to her home as I used to. I understand her as no one else can. While she has found a friend in me, she too gives meaning to my life. We often talk for hours over the phone. Her internal battles remind me of my own. [Personal interview, 2013.]

Like other members of the collective, Parveena and Saima, bound by a similar (not same) loss and struggle, forged a bond enriching not only their mother–daughter relationship but also extending beyond it, into a *vyestoan*, as confidantes in a common political struggle. The members of the collective formed enduring bonds, creating a new 'social network of hands' towards the sustenance of the struggle (Butler 2015). It is perhaps this network of hands to which Parveena hinted when she, referring

to the larger APDP family, expressed her hope and wish—*myaen aathe gasan palzin*; using the metaphor of hands she implied that she (her hands) wished to be of assistance and succour.

The waiting, remembering, and longing of the APDP is strung into a song which many women sing as an articulation of their struggle. Parveena sings it to me:

Ma tou raav tam, venye chuko vaense kam
[Do not go, you are still young]
Ma tou raav tam venye cheya maenze namm,
[Do not go, my bridegroom]
Naad laye myani Yusufo walo
[I call out to you, Oh my Yusuf, come!]

This song, and its several versions, are in circulation within women's oral traditions in Kashmir, and have multilayered references.[11] However, one of the two obvious references in popular circulation is Kashmir's sixteenth century poet, Habba Khatoon's longing for her husband, Yousuf Shah Chak who, as the last ruler of Kashmir, opposed Mughal expansion, was tricked into parley, and thereafter exiled to Bihar. The second reference is to the Quranic story of Prophet Yusuf, son of Prophet Yaqub. The Quran refers to the intense patience, faith, and waiting of Prophet Yaqub for his favourite son Yusuf, who is a master at interpreting dreams and whose envious half-brothers throw him into a well. The story is poignantly structured, beginning with a dream and ending with an interpretation of the dream. Encapsulating several temporalities and spatialities, the song of Yusuf in Kashmir thus encodes hope and resistance into a multilayered cultural memory.

This memory work in songs is closely related to the embodied practice of dreams. Like Parveena, for many women dream-visions remain significant ways of maintaining ties with the dead

and the disappeared. Walter Benjamin (1996) reminds us that 'Dreaming has a share in history'. In this context, I understand dreams as everyday practises of resistance and memory which are shaped by political conditions and, in turn, have political implications. Dreams are particularly significant in understanding the complex engagement that a resisting people have with time and space, challenging statist notions and manipulations of both. Understanding dreams beyond the subject-centred paradigms as a form of 'ethical-political engagement' helps us understand the visitational dream (such as Parveena's) as 'ethically compelling precisely because of its dialogical nature' (Mittermaier 2010). Such dreams, Mittermaier expounds, call for a response; they address the dreamer, and they simultaneously constitute her as an ethically responsible being. Dreams compel us to look at 'in-betweenness' as opening critical possibilities (beyond the Cartesian split of the body and mind and other dualisms) of interrelational ethicality, as opposed to a statist notion of individualism and neo-liberal rationality.

An articulation of the essence of Parveena's struggle, in her own words is, I propose, a possible interpretation of her dream (with which I opened this section) which I offer here, and which restates the counter-hegemonic possibilities of dreamwork. She says:

> Our pain is the same and so is our struggle. There is a closure in death. But the disappeared have no graves. It is a festering wound. The state thinks we will get tired but we won't. We will keep walking tirelessly. It has been two decades but the hope, to hear my son knock at the door, persists. Sometimes when there is a knock, I think that perhaps it is him. I share this feeling with the other women of the collective. We will not forget and we pledge to fight together. [Personal interview, 2013.]

Intimate spheres and subversive solidarity

As the fierce Chenab flows into Kishtwar, a shrine stands in gossamer silence, broken only by the mutterings of a woman sitting on its steps near the threshold. Within the shrine is a small door separated by a curtain. I try to peek in but cannot see through the dense darkness. I bend my head and step inside, as my eyes negotiate the darkness in this small chamber which seems to be a private prayer room only for women, honouring a local woman saint buried there. I see a group of women sitting alongside one another, whispering, reciting verses in sing-song tones, and moving their bodies in a rhythmic to and fro, akin to a pendulum. In the seclusion of this room, several coloured threads are tied in a close embrace, holding on to one another as if in a moment of emergency. Suddenly, a cry by one woman punctuates the antiphony of silence and lilt. The woman sitting beside her joins in her lament, as do the other women in the circle, one by one, carefully crossing a barricade. The whimpering which began in an ascending tempo now becomes a sustained cry, as if all the women have transcended. I feel like an intruder and escape from the dark room to watch the flowing Chenab, light gnawing at my eyes.

Such women's 'intimate zones of everyday life' overcome the dichotomies of the public and the private space, and give way to critical spaces of radical possibilities (Berlant 1998). These constitute cóunter-hegemonic 'intimate publics', to use Berlant's term. For Berlant, 'intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and an ideal of publicness'. Weber (2009) notes that, for Berlant, intimate public spheres are 'an amalgam of primarily woman-produced, woman-consumed, and woman-coded texts, functioning to create an elaborate imaginary of intimacy that assumes women share a bond of communal longing'.

Several such everyday intimate spheres characterise women's life worlds in Kashmir. Trips to collect wood and wild herbs, assembling at the *yaarbal* (riverbanks), working in the fields, gathering to spin yarn. Husking, winnowing, pounding chillies, or separating stamens from the saffron flower to extract the spice. Going to the mosque or swimming in the village pond, singing during weddings or mourning rituals, protest rallies, sit-ins and marches. All these activities bind women not only to each other, but forge a relationship of love and labour, bodies and landscapes, liberation and support.

One such intimate world, for instance, is the *yaarbal* (literally, a place for friends), where women, young and old, fix a time to meet other women. The *yaarbal* will buzz with activities and friendships. Women wash clothes and utensils, collect water, bathe, and also use this as a meeting place for conversations and songs, stories of grief and endurance. Large stones and boulders lying around naturally become resting places and hours flit by. Together, women collect wood and herbs such as *hand*, *liss*, *nunar*, *gul*, *kretch*, *bhum*, mobilising them on an everyday basis, beyond the occasions of *khaer* and *sharr* (celebrations and difficult times). While intimate spaces such as *yaarbal* helped sustain older friendships, new companions were welcomed into this subversive fold of support and solidarity. Similarly, during threshing and winnowing, women come together and sing long narrative poems to help them through the working day (personal interview with Mubeena/AG, 2018). The singing and dancing practices of *roff*, *wanwun*, and *hikat* also make way for intimate proximities; women hold one another's hands or wrap their arms around each other's bodies, or hold on to one another's shoulders, coordinating the movements of their bodies and entrusting themselves to one another, while gyrating and

swirling, holding one another firmly, creating an intimate trellis of trust and support.

The military presence in the region and its several manifestations, on the one hand, interrupted some of these intimate worlds but, at the same time, the resistance movement forged new ones, imbuing them with new meaning and catalysing others. During curfews and crackdowns, for instance, women constituted these intimate spheres to derive strength, carving out a shared space of telling and retelling, forging communication and navigating across people's resistance networks, thus fostering a critical fellowship.

I argue that women's embodied practises and intimate worlds, or, to invoke Connerton (1989), the bodily acts and commemorative practices, such as assemblies and marches, friendships, dreams, songs and mourning, among others, constitute an episteme and offer counter-hegemonic ways of knowing. These signify vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity. Through Taylor's thesis, which aims to decolonise our understanding of 'knowledge' and dismantle the conventional equation of memory with what is written, we could aim to decentre the centrality of the written word (which has been the monopoly of the state and its powerful structures in Kashmir) as fas as history and historiography are concerned, and thus expand our understanding of what constitutes knowledge or episteme (Taylor 2003).

A companionship of resistance

Women's embodied practises, everyday memory projects, and intimate worlds shape and are shaped by, give way to, and are informed by what I have called *vyestoan*, a critical and affective female alliance and friendship, a companionship of resistance.

Significantly, this alliance, I suggest, hinges upon the notion of witnessing—*vyestoan* is an alliance of witnesses, in life, death, and beyond.

In this essay, I have attempted to describe this *vyestoan* through an exploration of women's worlds in Kashmir. In one of the poems of Habba Khatoon, whose poetry continues to nourish and articulate a collective yearning, this *vyestoan* is eloquently brought to life. *Wale Vyes* (Come O Friend), a call to a female friend, is a repeated occurrence in the poem; a similar call to a female confidante also forms a marked feature of several other everyday songs sung by women in Kashmir.

This critical female alliance, I argue, is an alliance against several interlocked forms of domination. *Vyestoan*, rather than the notion of sisterhood, is a useful term for feminist scholarship, in understanding intersectionality and criticality, especially in the context of Kashmir. The notion of sisterhood has been critiqued (Hooks 1997; Mohanty 2003) for overlooking differences among women and not employing a critical lens where race, class, colonialism, and militarisation are concerned. Also, while sisterhood indicates a common source emphasising kinship, *vyestoan*, as I have shown, extends beyond the claims of kinship. In the context of Kashmir, if a mother and daughter, for example, share a good relationship, it is said that they are like friends (*vyes*). Therefore, the notion of *vyestoan* has radical possibilities, beyond the notion of kinship and blood relations.

Vyestoan may be ephemeral and transient, constituting itself strategically in moments that demand such alliance, or it may be enduring and forged into lifelong friendships. It is potently latent or active. The claims of *vyestoan* could extend beyond life, too. For instance, the expression, *mei vaedze yele ba marai*, mourn for me when I die, is often a wish expressed by women to their close friends. It creates and flourishes on the critical possibilities offered

by liminality and in-betweenness, that coalesce into a hauntology of liberation. It enacts myriad manifestations of agency and resistance against the state's exoticisation, victimisation, and pathologisation vis-à-vis the resistance movement. It could be understood as a rejection of the statist notion of empowerment, interlaced within which is its ideological project of territorial integration.[12]

This critical alliance is not hinged merely on common pain or common victimhood, it is a plural sharing of strengths, struggles, and resistance against oppression and its multiple structures and manifestations.

Mogal Maas was one of the first members to join APDP. She had come searching for Parveena's house when they 'had only three photographs'. Over the years their friendship, an exercise in hope, grew stronger. Mogal Maas and Parveena Ahangar's bond is a profound reflection and manifestation of this *vyestoan*. Mogal Maas would often slip into spells of soliloquy. She would talk to the walls or her *jajeer* (hubble-bubble or hookah), her faithful friends. That is how she fought time and the waiting it entails. Mogal Maas and Parveena Ahangar's *vyestoan* emerged from a shared struggle and a mutual longing. Both were fighting time.

Having separated from her husband, Mogal Maas was a single mother of her lone son, Nazir Ahmed Teli. Nazir, a school teacher, was subjected to enforced disappearance in 1990, and since then she has kept waiting for his return. She died in October 2009 and rests close to Kashmiri poet, Abdul Ahad Zargar's grave. When waiting weighed her down, she would long for Parveena, her confidante, her companion. Mogal Maas often played little pranks by requesting her neighbour to phone Parveena and announce that she had died. At her behest, her neighbour would switch on the phone loudspeaker. Mogal Maas would then lean her ear towards the phone and silently await her friend's response.

Parveena was well aware of this prank which would invariably end with the women bursting into laughter.

Mogal Maas shared a close bond with Parveena, entrusting her with her secrets, fears, joys, and sorrows. When she left for Hajj, Parveena packed her clothes, readied her, and ran her errands. In her last months, she was not keeping well and Parveena visited her at home a couple of times. She recalls the last time Mogal Maas came to the park for a sit-in protest:

> She wailed. She was inconsolable and told me she felt suffocated and her heart was heavy. I had never seen her like that. She beat her chest, pulled her hair in grief. [Personal interview, 2013.]

Parveena poignantly recalls a haunting memory of her *vyes*, Mogal Maas, emphasising the affective alliance of witnesses that constitutes *vyestoan* in life, death, and beyond:

> Mogal Maas had made preparations for her death. She didn't want to be dependent on anyone. She had bought her *kafan* (shroud), *isband* (wild rue seeds), stacked away a bar of soap for her funeral rites. She came home once and showed me her shroud, saying she had exchanged the older one which she didn't like and bought a new one. She gave me her son's file. 'Look for my son; he is like your brother, as you look for your own after I die,' she told me. I tried to calm her down but she said she felt that she was going to die soon. 'I have no one. You are my daughter, my friend. Wash me up during my funeral bath and please mourn for me properly,' she said.

Postscript

As a child, my grandmother would often take me to a neighbourhood mosque, embraced by ivy. Before the prayers, a rhythm of its own would emanate from the mosque hall: women greeting each other, sharing everyday anecdotes, dream

narrations, joys, maladies, fears, laughter, and grief. The hall reverberated with women's supplication and recitation of the Quran in a sing-song manner. After adjusting their scarves, hems, and sleeves, they would stand together and begin to pray in unison. While bowing down on the ground for *sajdeh,* I would steal glances, secretly lifting my head to watch a spectacle I never tired of observing: heads bowed, in neat rows of coloured scarves. It looked as if women shared secrets in whispers. This is my foremost memory of women's gatherings. It was my grandmother and her friends who, through their bond, introduced me to the magical world of female friendship and bonding, and to intimate women's worlds.

In conclusion, I offer a poetic commentary on *vyestoan,* a succinct and poignant articulation encapsulated in a song I first heard at the *maenzraat* in Pahladej:

Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,
Aes che vedveneye te paan ven kuneye,
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,
Aes che asvenye, paan ven kuneye,
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar

(We are the flying birds
Together, we take flight
We are the flying birds
We, the joyous companions
We, the flying birds.)

Endnotes

[1] *Tumbakhnaer,* a membranophone, is an earthen hand or goblet drum with animal skin as its base, notably played by women during celebratory occasions such as weddings. It is played with a rhythmic movement of hands and fingertips while held under the arm or resting on the knee or the lap. Beats of the *tumbakhnaer* accompany collective singing in Kashmir, and it is one of the principal instruments that sustains rhythm in these songs.

[2] Logs of wood arranged in a particular way for cooking elaborate meals for a large number of people.

[3] Roughly translates as 'the light of our eyes'.

[4] Roughly translates as 'knows of loss, the daughter who lost her father/ here graveyards vast, fill too quickly'.

[5] Parveena Ahangar's son, Javaid Ahmed Ahangar, was subjected to enforced disappearance on 18 August 1990, and Haleema Begum's husband, Abdul Rashid Ganaie, was subjected to enforced disappearance on 5 January 1998.

[6] For work on mourning, memory, and resistance of women activists of APDP, see Zia (2014) and 'Khoon di Barav' (Blood Leaves its Trail), a film by Iffat Fatima. Also see, 'Till Then the Roads Carry Her', a film on women's resistance in Kashmir by Uzma Falak.

[7] As opposed to pathological and clinical approaches to trauma, the focus here, drawing from Taylor (2003), is on 'non-pathological cause and canalisation of trauma'.

[8] A call to march towards Tchar-e-Sharief, the mausoleum of Kashmir's mystic poet, Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali.

[9] For an insight into the historical continuum of women's resistance in Kashmir, see Gazi (2017). Also see Malik (2015); Manekshaw (2017).

[10] For a similar argument on funerals and demonstrations, see Kaul (2016).

[11] For example, the fifteenth century Persian poet, Jami, who uses the trope of Zulaykha's longing for the beautiful and moon-faced Yusuf, interpreted mystically, or Kashmir's eighteenth century poet, Mahmud Gami's Yusuf and Zulaykha.

[12] For a discussion on the statist narrative of empowerment and its critique, see Bhan (2014), and Mushtaq and Bukhari (2018).

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Reflecting Upon Frontier Inheritances

ADITI SARAF

I make this contribution with some diffidence as I am not a Kashmiri woman, but my family histories place me somewhere on the anxious frontiers of a region which was once another Kashmir. I have inherited a family history punctuated by the region's fragmentation, and my investments in Kashmir draw upon this legacy. I grew up in Delhi, the child of a mixed marriage, soaked up in the life of the sprawling migrant metropolis and straddling the cultural-familial spheres of Jammu and Bengal. Both my sets of grandparents were part of the massive dislocation that followed Partition. My mother's parents were born in villages now in Bangladesh and moved in various spurts first to Kolkata and eventually to Delhi. My father's parents, who were from Rajouri and Mirpur, areas which fell within the former princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, bore the brunt of the violence. For the most part, my knowledge of that past remained inchoate and fragmentary and, as in many families with similar inheritance, it was a silent cocoon of loss and anguish.

After my paternal grandmother's death, my grieving grandfather cleared out material collected over the years—pamphlets, newspaper clippings, other memoirs—and recounted stories which my mother wrote down, translated, edited, and disseminated to family, friends and descendants as a self-published account entitled *Rajouri Remembered.* The experience of reading that work was revelatory for many of us. I was struck

by how narratives from borderlands could unsettle questions of community, territory, and belonging, and how they were erased from mainstream political discourses.

Scholarship on the post-Partition exchange of women between India and Pakistan demonstrated the gendered process of nation building, by showing how the figure of the abducted woman enabled the construction of 'order' as an attribute of the masculine Indian nation (Butalia 1993; Menon & Bhasin, 1993, 1998; Das 2007). At the outset, the state activated a sexual symbolic in the project of self-affirmation and boundary-making through the exchange of 'abducted women' between the two nation-states of India and Pakistan and their proper restoration—to the patriarchal family and a bounded homeland defined in religious and communal terms. The Kashmir Valley appears to have been similarly configured:[1] like the women who were 'violated' and 'restored', the land of Kashmir was gendered through the idiom of loss, recovery, desire, and honour within the highly charged claims of ownership and control during Partition (Kabir 2009). A glance at writing produced about the region reveals phrases like 'The Rape of Kashmir'[2] and the polyvalent 'Behind the Vale' (Akbar 1991). Kashmir thus constitutes a feminised space within a masculine nation; a space of sexualised violation as well as of a fierce desire for possession and protection from rivals (Kaul 2018). Like the abducted woman whose wishes in the matter of post-Partition exchange were deemed 'irrelevant', the aspirations for self-determination of the people who dwell in these areas is denied.

As an organising principle of hierarchical social relations and cultural intelligibility, and due to the embedded emotional responses they evoke, gendered tropes are usefully deployed in projects of violence and domination. During military occupation they take on grotesque forms in collective punishment through

mass rape (Batool et al. 2016) and in marking dissident bodies as deviant and feminine through sexualised forms of torture (JKCCS 2019: *Torture*; Sonpar 2007). At the same time, gendered categories of analysis also illuminate the contradictions inherent in such projects of governance. In the particular context of Kashmir, feminist scholarship has explored how 'competing patriarchies of oppression and resistance' can be mutually constitutive, while simultaneously dismantling the 'binaries of home and outside'; and how the collective and intimate damage inflicted by war and militarisation sits alongside the persistence of women's resistance and the fabric of female solidarities (Kaul & Zia 2018)

In my research, I pursued unsettled questions of borders, identity, and community by exploring histories and practises that had to be discounted in order to establish the self-presence of more dominant forms of space and identity, particularly that of an aggressively masculinist, nationalist, and increasingly communalised state. I suggest that another way of reclaiming sovereignty, identity, and gender from the suffocating clutches of masculinist and nationalist discourses is to seriously consider the history of Kashmir as part of a long frontier. The term 'frontier' designates putatively peripheral physical spaces and symbolic thresholds with long and violent histories of colonialism, imperialism, and resistance. As sites of struggle where control by metropolitan elites is absent or uncertain, frontiers invoke ideas of separation and contestation, conquest and negotiated exchange, identity and difference. As such, frontiers have become important concepts for social movements to question normalised assumptions about nation-states' master narratives of identity and gender.[3]

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), set in the US-Mexico borderlands, Chicana writer and activist, Gloria Anzaldua

poetically examines how forms of ethnic and gender identity which were sought to be separated (Latinx/non-Latinx, men/women, heterosexual/homosexual), were instead combined or mixed up through economic, cultural, and imaginative practises which transgressed given boundaries. More recently, fields such as postcolonial, indigenous, gender and sexuality studies have conceptually engaged frontiers for examining the construction, dissembling, and rules of engagement between socio-spatial power relations and different identities (Arondekar & Patel 2016; Massey 1994). After all, frontiers and borders, like sex and gender, are historically constructed, performed, reinforced, and disintegrated, but are nevertheless real and have concrete and often devastating implications for the everyday lives of people (Green 2012).

Besides, the political struggles at frontiers are rendered legible through the very frameworks of national and international sovereignty which they contest. Particularly in Kashmir, the political dispute is seen in terms of territorial rivalry between India and Pakistan, correspondingly acquiring communal overtones of warfare between antagonistic categories of Hindus and Muslims. However, while conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the markets of Srinagar, I came across ideas of space and identity which questioned and subverted such statist discourses. They gestured towards alternative political claims and attachments forged in the distinctive regional histories of trade. For instance, through a striking riparian metaphor, one of my interlocutors urged me to visualise Kashmir as a tributary of the Silk Road imagined as a river:

> Imagine the Silk Road as a big river connecting Europe to Russia. Every river has tributaries (*shaaqh*). One of the tributaries comprised of the 'Kaaf' states [the Urdu letter *kaaf*,

with the sound 'k']: Kabul, Kashgar and Kashmir. That's how we used to remember it in our childhood

I constantly encountered representations of spatial imaginaries that bypassed the cartographic entities of India and Pakistan to express affinity with the historical network of trans-Himalayan trade entrepôts spread through the south-central Asian highlands. It is also striking how many of these places—former trade partners such as Kabul and Kashgar, as well as Yarkand, Khotan, and Lhasa—strain against forms of contemporary nationalism imposed upon them.

My fieldwork in Kashmir was provoked by the question of how quotidian activities of buying and selling are publicly and privately sustained during prolonged political violence. Pursuing this query in the marketplaces of Kashmir, it became clear that one way of maintaining public lives and relationships in a perpetual state of emergency (Duschinski & Ghosh 2017)—marked by massive public protests met with the blunt force of state violence—was through a reliance on historical trade relationships. Cutting across rigid categories of communal identity and militarised boundaries, such networks are based on diverse religious and ethnic communities engaging in the common goals of exchange and provisioning. Intersections of trade, commerce, and livelihoods in Kashmir, as elsewhere at frontier outposts, produced internal logics of autonomy and self-sufficiency that did not depend on external recognition for legitimacy (Hansen 2005). Notwithstanding the hardening of de facto boundaries and trenchant prohibition and criminalisation of cross-cutting connections, frontiers cannot be made coincident with national borders. The alternate geographies of belonging are also signalled if we ponder on the differences between between *qaum* (a collectivity based on

shared language, religion or both) and *mulk* (the geographical boundaries of a country).

For me, the greatest challenge of conducting fieldwork lay in the space of the marketplace being predominantly male.[4] In the first few months, I struggled to balance the protocols of research with the expectations and constraints of gendered deportment. Across the counter from the traders, my fieldwork entailed inhabiting the space of male labour and sociality, where first as stranger, but always female and non-customer, I was a misfit. The bazaar etiquette of male comradeship over tea and cigarettes was closed off to me, and while there was much to learn and keep me busy, I missed the ease and banter of female company. Most of my regular interlocutors were senior traders, relatively well-positioned and considered sufficiently respectable to emerge reputationally unblemished from having a younger woman conspicuously hanging out in their shops. When they left Srinagar for brief spells of business, some asked me to refrain from visiting their shops, as sons who took over would too closely approximate my age. Besides younger men, I also had to curtail my interactions with hired labourers and apprentices.

Besides, the space of the bazaar in a zone of occupation must be navigated with care. Traders have a reputation for secrecy which is only intensified in a war overrun by military and intelligence personnel, spies, spooks, informers, and double agents. Initially, when I introduced myself as a researcher from Delhi, I was often asked which 'agency' I was from. While I strove to navigate the space of the bazaar respectfully and unobrusively, my interlocutors initially struggled to make sense of my anomalous and continued presence, before it became evident that I was neither businessperson, nor journalist, nor an official from the income tax department. When hearing my last name, many mistakenly concluded that I was Kashmiri Pandit. I

would then explain that I was neither Pandit nor Dogra, but that my father's family was from the Pahari community. Deriving from the Urdu word pahar/hills, Pahari is a linguistically defined group ('Pahari speaking people'/PSP), comprising both Hindus and Muslims, principally located in the districts of Rajouri, Poonch, Kupwara, and Baramulla districts. Once, when we were discussing my ethnic admixture, my Punjabi Hindu landlord gently cautioned me against identifying myself as pahari: 'Don't go around revealing that; we don't look upon them very positively here in the Valley.' He said this with a twinkle in his eye, indicating the low-ranking status of the Pahari community within the socio-economic hierarchies of Jammu & Kashmir.

From the few women friends I made, and the few women I met who worked in the bazaar (mostly replacing husbands killed or incapacitated in the continuing war), I learnt forms of address and strategies of mediation useful for conducting myself in the marketplace. I became increasingly comfortable in aligning my attire and bodily comportment to the class and gender norms of public spaces. As time passed, my regular presence in the marketplace became less incongruous, further blurring the insider/outsider boundaries that I straddled. One afternoon, a year into my fieldwork, as I was being questioned by a policeman about my presence and purpose in a bazaar in downtown Srinagar, one of the traders called out, 'She belongs here, but has been living in Delhi for twenty-thirty years.' On another occasion they joked about how 'Kashmiri' I had begun to look. 'You can easily be mistaken for a Kashmiri girl,' said one of them, laughing. 'Not Kashmiri, she looks more Afghan,' his friend chimed in.

This kind of banter would transpire during the afternoons when the pace of work tapered, particularly in the month of Ramzan when traders deliberately slowed work in deference to

spiritual contemplation. '*Yeh bahut achha samay hai, bahut shanti hoti hai. Kaam toh aata rahega.*' ('This is a good time, a time of so much peace. The work will keep coming anyway,') Hajisahed would say.[5] 'Just as well; people do not have much endurance during *roza*s, they fight easily,' his friend demurred. They began teasing me about the lenient conditions of Hindus fasting during the *navratra*s: 'You guys drink tea in the middle of fasting, we don't even drink water! But yes, you do avoid onion-garlic the entire time. Come *iftaari,* we eat the best food during Ramzan: dates, fruits, gosht, kheer, and ice-cream.'

The downtown Srinagar bazaar which I frequented was an old wholesale market which once hosted a diverse mercantile community, comprising Kashmiri Muslim, Punjabi Khatri, and Sikh traders. Although this heterogeneity had dwindled considerably since the rise of the armed movement in the 1990s, I was awed by how they could hold forth on the fine distinctions between Muslim and Hindu modes of fasting. They described all this without once using the term 'Hindu' or 'Muslim', instead referring to 'those who keep *roza*s' and 'those who don't' (*roza-rakhneyvaale / roza-nahin-rakhneyvaale*). They often reminisced about shared celebrations during festivals, about the annual 'group photograph' for which the traders of the *mandi* would get together. When recounting the past, the nostalgia was accompanied by an intimacy in their modes of knowing and relating to others. This was in stark contrast to the forms of knowledge expressed by younger men and women I encountered who had grown up in Kashmir after 1990. For the latter, recognition of the Hindu materialised in the form of the Indian soldier who could search, incarcerate, and brutalise with impunity; and as caricatures in *saas-bahu* (mother-and-daughter-in-law) teleserials which commanded avid viewership in the Valley.[6]

I do not wish to suggest a linear experience of becoming familiar from being a stranger: rather, the thickness and texture of intimacy and distance shifted in accordance with political events. After Afzal Guru's execution in 2013,[7] there was a transformation in the rhythm and tenor of interactions in the marketplace. I felt a deep sense of shame amidst the public mourning and paralysis of social life; a feeling heightened by the alienation fostered and entrenched by the state-imposed communications blackout, and the nationalist gusto in Indian media which accompanied the news of Guru's execution.

My observations and experiences highlighted that just as forms of provisioning and exchange defy the territorial and regulatory regimes of the nation state, everyday life too challenges the over-determined placement of different religious groups, away from their masculinist and communalized presentation of the kind that is dominant in the Indian political mainstream. One afternoon, I was travelling through downtown Srinagar in a crowded local bus, squeezed on a square platform next to the driver's seat. The man sitting next to me suddenly addressed me in rapid-fire Kashmiri which I could not understand. I replied in Urdu:

> '*Maaf kijiye, mein Kashmiri nahin hoon*' (I beg your pardon, I am not Kashmiri).
> He replied; '*Koi baat nahin, Musalmaan toh ho na*' (Never mind, you are a Muslim aren't you.)
> Smiling at him, I confessed, '*Darasal mein Musalmaan bhi nahin hoon*' (Actually, I am not Muslim either).
> Without missing a beat he shot back '*Koi baat nahin, insaan toh ho na*!' (Never mind, you are a human being aren't you!)

These lessons on the fluidity of boundaries and the conviviality of recognition, drawn from Kashmir's history as part of a long frontier, are the lessons of fieldwork that have remained with me.

Endnotes

[1]By 'Kashmir Valley' I refer to the 135 x 38 kilometre stretch of land drained by the river Jhelum which intersects the high Himalayan and Pir Panjal range, long-extolled for its remarkable beauty and presently the centre of the self-determination movement. 'Kashmir' however is also frequently used as shorthand to refer to geographically adjoining regions. In this essay I use 'Kashmir' in this dual sense, as an allusion to a particular place and as indexing a wider region whose boundary coordinates keep shifting.

[2]For example, consider the title of the piece published by N.M. Ahmed at the Media Monitors Network website (https://www.mediamonitors.net/the-rape-of-kashmir/), retrieved 28 November 2019. The phrase also refers to widespread violations committed by the Indian armed forces in Kashmir (Eric Margolis, *Sunday Sun,* 12 April 1992; cited in Tabassum 2012, p. 14); as well as for the incursion made into the Kashmir Valley by tribal militia and irregular forces from Pakistan in October 1947 (Heptulla 1991: 172).

[3]Kashmir's political boundaries are simultaneously irrepressibly disputed and violently entrenched. The highly militarised Line of Control (LOC) divides Indian-administered from Pakistan-administered Kashmir, although both nations claim the region in its entirety through distinct framings. Although not an internationally recognised border, the de facto nature of the LOC has dire implications for inhabitants on either side. (See Aggarwal 2004, Bhan 2013, Kira 2011, Robinson 2013, and Zia 2019.) For the use of 'frontiers' in anthropology as a heuristic for studying political, economic and ecological struggles, see Saraf 2020.

[4]Fieldwork, the anthropological method for knowledge production, entails long-term participant-observation in a social milieu. My research focused on the relationship between trade and politics in Kashmir, for which I conducted fieldwork in Srinagar's marketplaces.

[5]Hajisaheb was a senior trader. The term 'Haji' is an honorific for men who have completed the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca.

[6]I thank Sarbani Sharma for drawing my attention to the popularity of tropes peddled by *saas-bahu* teleserials in the Valley.

[7]Afzal Guru was a Kashmiri man who had been convicted of abetting an attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. Although the evidence against Guru was openly admitted in court to be circumstantial, and despite grave

doubts surrounding the trial and appeal process that led to his conviction, the Supreme Court of India upheld his death sentence on grounds that only capital punishment would satisfy 'the collective conscience of society'. *State (N.C.T. of Delhi) vs Navjot Sandhu & Afsan Guru,* 2005, Appeal: Case No. 373–375. See also Roy 2016/(2006).

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Women in the Literatures of Kashmir

ASIYA ZAHOOR

The apparently marginal issue of 'woman' is the ground on which literature from Kashmir, a region claimed by several nationalisms and denied its own, is implicitly constructed and thereby concretised as the experience of a people. Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, Mirza Waheed's novel, *The Collaborator*, Nitasha Kaul's novel, *Residue*, powerfully announce the entry of Kashmiri literature in the world of global English. Within South Asian English literature, these writers are compelling figures because they are representative of many important faultlines, be it the religious faultline, the national faultline, or most of them by virtue of being in the diaspora, an East West faultline. They focus on issues of nation, nationalism, colonialism, resistance, and collaboration. Here, I will argue that an underlying thread of these literatures in English by male and female Kashmiri authors is the figure of the woman. We may argue, by reading passages from the work of these writers that the 'woman' cannot be collapsed into 'gender', as is frequent in much contemporary feminist criticism. A novel with a female protagonist does not guarantee that it is a novel about women. Even in the male author's text, we can uncover the role played by figurations of the woman which cannot be simply reduced to gender. In a context where the political situation saturates women as images of either resistance or suffering, we need to comprehend the text's use of women, not simply as characters but as markers of difference in

Kashmir, i.e., differences in perspectives on survival, resistance, tenacity, and indifference. These nuances can be detected through the narrative frame, linguistic choices, and subtle codes that the novelist or poet uses. Their texts can then be read not just as an engagement with the political realities of Kashmir, but in terms of how that engagement is premised on the different figurations of the woman in the text and in Kashmir. That is, by dissecting the tropes, the language, and the frames of narrative, we can investigate how the text positions the issues of femininity.

Contesting femininities

An intervention in the discourse on women in Kashmir as figured in the Indian imagination derives its relevance from the contemporary political situation in India. An aggressive fascist assertion by right-wing Hindu nationalists has resulted in an unprecedented polarisation of Indian society and polity into various ethnic and religious identities. A day after the Indian government moved to scrap the special status and autonomy of Kashmir (Article 370) and downgraded it from being a state to a union territory, a BJP MLA named Vikram Saini from Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district, in a passionate address, exhorted his party workers to buy plots of land in Kashmir and marry *gori* (fair) Kashmiri girls. The racism and sexism in such a statement is overt and does not need explanation. While the population of Kashmir remained under siege on the occasion of the Indian Independence Day, the prime minister of India in his address to the nation declared that revoking the autonomy of Kashmir would liberate Kashmiri women. The prime minister's brand of masculine nationalism found expression in Bhojpuri songs that flooded the Internet, celebrating the 'victory' over Kashmir. The lyrics of these songs also expressed happiness over the possibility of obtaining 'fair' Kashmiri girls.

This amalgamation of a fantasy of desire for women and for a landscape is not new. It is as old as colonisation itself. The fabled beauty of the women of Kashmir as an excuse for an imperialist agenda can also be traced back in history. Many representations of Kashmir therefore come from European travellers who visited as early as the sixteenth century. These travellers eulogised Kashmir for the similarity of its clime with Europe and its geographical disconnect with the rest of the world, leading Europeans to compare Kashmir to an Oriental Woman who is excessively seductive, but behind a veil.

In 1664-5, when Francois de Bernier, a French physician, came to Kashmir in his capacity as physician to Emperor Aurangzeb, he expressed his views on the women of Kashmir in his letters as follows:: 'Women are very handsome; and it is from this country that nearly every individual, when first admitted to the court of the Great Mogol, selects wives or concubines, that his children may be whiter than the Indians and pass for genuine Mogols' (404).

It would be helpful to understand Bernier's epistolary travelogue in the light of his other writings, such as his classification of humanity into races or 'species' in his anthropological essay, *A New Division of the Earth, according to the Different Species or Races of Men who Inhabit It* (1648). Geographers up to this time, says Bernier, 'have divided the earth according to its different countries or regions'. He bases his classification on his observations during his travels. Bernier has remarked that there are four or five species or races of men 'whose difference is so remarkable that it may be properly made use of as the foundation for a new division of the earth' (1916: 1-2).

Describing the salient features of humans, he assigns the first rank to Europeans, and among these, his own country, France is crême de la crême. The second species he says is the whole of

Africa, except the coastal regions, and he comments derogatorily about their bodies and features. Describing the women of the Indies he says they were highly prized. Imagine a beautiful and young French girl who is only just beginning to get jaundice, and instead of that sick, pale visage and those yellowish eyes, dull and languishing, give her a healthy face, soft, laughing, with beautiful, brilliant and very amorous eyes. Even before Bernier, the Mughal idea of Kashmir was no less imperialistic. In Persian literature, the fascination with Kashmiri women goes as far back as Sheikh Sadi who gave expression to the seductive beauty of Kashmir in the following couplet:

badan kamal nadarand husun dar Kashmir
channel ballet nadarand sheer dar babal
The beauties of Kashmir are the neighbour
Of sisters of the enchanting witches of Babylon.

The Mughals made many unsuccessful attempts to rule Kashmir but had to face severe resentment and rebellion by Kashmiris till the year 1586, when Akbar deceitfully seized power from Yusuf Shah Chak, a very popular emperor of Kashmir.

Four decades ago, Edward Said identified and articulated the processes of Orientalism, a relationship of power and dominance whereby the Oriental was subjected to being made the Oriental. To illustrate the concept, Said used the example of Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan which produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in which way she was 'typically Oriental'(Said 1978: 6). Said advanced the idea that

a discourse about the Orient by the Occident systematically attributed femininity to the Orient, and thus by a binary logic, masculinity to the Occident. The hierarchical binaries of power (understood in Foucauldian terms) feminise that which they seek to control and subdue.

Mythical feminine

The *Rajatarangini* or 'The River of Kings' is believed to be the oldest historical account of Kashmir. Written originally in Sanskrit in the twelfth century by Kalhana, it was translated by M. A. Stein, as *Kalhana's* Rajatarangini*: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir* in 1900. There are many other translations available as well. Kalhana's resources were varied. Whenever he fell short of resources he took recourse to myth. The story of the genesis of Kashmir, for instance, is drawn from the seventh century epic, *Nilamata Purana*. According to this myth, Kashmir was initially called Satisar (Lake Sati), named after Sati, the consort of Lord Shiva. The only inhabitant of this lake was a demon called Jalodbhava (meaning the water-borne). Shiva and his consort wanted to keep the lake and get rid of Jalodbhava. With the help of sage Kashyapa, the water was split into two halves, draining the lake near Baramulla. This exposed Jalodbhava, who was subsequently killed. By churning and casting aside the great waters to kill the demon, Kashyapa inadvertently stumbled upon land which, unlike water, could be demarcated. This land was named 'Kashmir' after Kashyapa, who had tamed its waters. In other ancient texts, Kashmir was called Uma (after a local goddess), Sarda Devi, and many other feminine names (Stein 1998: 7).

Such mythical accounts of the genesis of Kashmir have not only served as an archetypal plot for many subsequent stories but, in much later representations of Kashmir, been treated as

history. Some writers have gone so far as to argue that there exists 'geological evidence' that proves that the account is fact not fiction. In his book, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, M.J. Akbar says that geologists have blown the myth by 'proving' it correct (Akbar: iv). The genesis story of Kashmir is not treated as fiction, it also informs the historical and political discourse of the land. The trope of a woman who is in the captivity of a demon which leads to a war between the demon and a heroic man—and the importance of demarcating territories—is repeated in several accounts of the origin of Kashmir. Thus, the gendered imagination of Kashmir has been consolidated through the percolation of ancient myths, which impart sanctity to the idea of the feminised landscape by virtue of the timelessness of myths in the collective unconscious.

The representation of Kashmir as a woman is also in contestation with another feminine form, that of the Indian nation as Mother. Historians have argued that the idea of India as mother is absent in both ancient India and medieval Indian history, and was an imaginary which emerged in Europe with the rise of nationalism. Literatures propounding the idea of India as 'Bharatmata' became more visible from the 1880s. Such representational practises attempt to inscribe the nation and endow it with a content, a history, and a meaning beyond technical or scientific mapping, leading to an intensified 'cartographic anxiety' (a term coined by Derek Gregory, 1994) to highlight the theoretical disorientation brought about by geopolitical representation. With such theorisation, cartography becomes nothing less than the social and political production of nationality itself. The Indian cartographic imagination invokes the vision of a woman/a mother, or Bharatmata. The idea of nation visualised as geo-body creates cartographic patriotism and transforms the national territory into an object of piety, even

as it makes the citizen-beholder engage the nation's territory corporeally, affectively, and as the mother(land) worth dying for (Ramaswamy 2010: 151).

As has happened in post-Partition India, such cartographic metaphors render the production of inside and outside along the borders of the country, more pronounced. Besides, Kashmir exemplifies the intersection of two kinds of cartographic anxiety generated in the Indian imagination. The first anxiety arises by virtue of it being a contested territory, one that faces an external threat from neighbouring Pakistan; and the second by virtue of the 'secessionist' sentiment among Kashmiri people, who are seen to pose a threat to the geo-body of the nation.

As has Kaul (2018) theorises, Kashmir figures in the Indian gendered masculinist nationalist imagination in three interconnected realms: first, as the Orientalist staple of the cinematic fantasy; second, as the head of Mother India, Bharatmata, in the cartographic imaginary; and third, as the feminised landscape with a restive population which needs to be controlled, chastised, disciplined, and coerced into affirming its 'marital' relationship with India. Kaul contends that such perceptions are significantly persuasive to greater and greater numbers of people in the ascendant Hindutva climate, where a hegemonic masculinist idea of India of its political leaders, and of its patriotic citizens, is becoming firmly entrenched.

The feminised imagination of Kashmir as an object of desire as well as the feminisation of India as a mother, brings two femininities into contrast. Here, the idea of Bharatmata as a pseudo-matriarch is deployed to control and subordinate an imaginary feminine Kashmir. This form of subjugation in which two kinds of femininities are brought to contestation springs from, and gives rise to, the worst forms of patriarchal contest. In her famous essay, 'The Laugh of Medusa', Hélène Cixous

contends that men have committed great crimes against women, but the worst is that they have insidiously and violently led them to hate one another, to mobilise their immense strength against one another (1976: 878). Moreover, the postcolonial feminist critiques of representations of women have attended to what Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford have called the 'double colonisation' of women, which refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy.[1]

The fabled beauty of Kashmir has long been offered as an excuse for the desire to gain control over it, given the strategic importance of its position vis-à-vis the Silk Route and the locked land where the 'three empires meet' (Russia, China, Persia). The three empires, as contenders for Kashmir, changed periodically; they are now India, China, and Pakistan, yet Kashmir remained the flashpoint and invited a series of tyrannical rulers to rule over its people. Seeking refuge from one tyrant it ended up in the hands of another, and in this way the series of treacherous invasions, annexations and accessions continued.

Rana Kabbani in her book, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (1994) observes the production and depiction of the Eastern female as a figure of licentiousness, which epitomises and promises the assumed sexual joys of the Orient. Kabbani shows how the processes of colonialism and patriarchy complement each other in producing a representation of Eastern women in eroticised terms.

Revisiting the representation of women

However, literatures from Kashmir do not subscribe to the view of women merely as body or substitute for landscape, inviting conquest. The earliest poet of Kashmiri is a woman, Lalded or Lalla, from the fourteenth century. Ranjit Hoskote, who has

translated Lalla's work, says that the first written documentation of Lalla's poetry was in *Asrar-ul-Abrar,* a hagiographical document by Dawood Mishkat, written in 1654, about three centuries after Lalla lived. The image of Lalla as the naked floating female body of a saint-poet is never sexualised. It is pleasantly ironic that the saint-poet transcends the shackles of sexuality by asserting her body. It is also worth emphasising that this was the time when Islam had established itself in the valley. This fourteenth century saint-poet is placed among other mystic counterparts such as Mira Bai in Rajasthan and Andal in south India. Poetry before Lalla was heavily Sanskritised; Lalla used her poetic and spiritual experiences and recreated the *vakh,* a unique poetic form.[2] Lalla's poetical compositions became an inseparable part of the oral culture of Kashmir. There are about 150 *vakh*s in the form of questions and answers. It is believed that Lalla was once asked why she was roaming naked and whether she felt any shame that men might observe her. Lalla responded that there were no men here and if she found any she would clothe herself. Thus, she is one of the earliest feminist poets who disrupted the idea of womanhood as prescribed by society. The fact that Lalded or Lalla was, and is, revered by Kashmiri society contradicts the idea that Kashmir is a place totally hostile to women's liberation and expression, as claimed in popular discourse. Lalded's style was largely mystic, but she was against religious dogma and ritual. While she did, to some degree, voice the inequities in the society of her times, her concern was principally with the internal and spiritual, rather than the external. The mechanism here is of entering into the master narrative to create a counter discourse by means of what Spivak would call 'affirmative sabotage'.[3] Thus, affirmative sabotage does not only ruin, it simultaneously builds new knowledge because so few women have as yet won back their bodies. Women, says Hélène Cixous, must write through

their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations, and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including that which laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence', and, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word 'impossible' and inscribes it as 'the end' (1976: 876).

From the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries the literary landscape of Kashmir was almost barren. Then, in the sixteenth century, during the reign of King Yousuf Shah, emerges another female poet, Habba Khatoon. According to historians, Kashmir during Yousuf Shah Chak's reign was a prosperous land. The Mughals had made and failed in attempts to annex Kashmir to their empire, were driven out a few times before Emperor Akbar deceitfully summoned Yousuf Shah Chak to Delhi and then swiftly took him into captivity, jailing him in Bihar where he eventually died. It is believed that Habba Khatoon was among those Kashmiris who instigated the uprising opposing Mughal rule. Agha Shahid Ali holds the view of many historians who argue that since the invasion by Akbar in the sixteenth century, 'Kashmir has never been free' (173); and that this invasion, as Schofield (2010) notes, marks 'the beginning of Kashmir's modem history' (3). Ali says, when Habba Khatoon's 'husband was exiled from the Valley by Akbar', she went amongst the people with her sorrow and her grief, 'alive to this day', and 'roused the people into frenzied opposition to Moghul rule', adding that, 'since then Kashmir has never been free' (2009; 172–3). In Habba Khatoon's lament there is a kind of protest and dissent, but Kashmiri literature has largely remained oblivious to the political situations surrounding it.

One reason for this could be that Kashmiris came under the influence of central Asian poets who had mostly resorted

to esoteric religious practises. While the popular belief is that the Sayyids from Central Asia came to preach Islam, it is also believed that they came to escape persecution. Unable to resist the extreme violence against them in Iran and other Central Asian countries they turned to *tasawwuf*, an esoteric and artistic practise with a mystical bent. This was not merely an escape into the inner self, but also a passive resistance, a defence mechanism (Bashir 2013: 7). Following the path of *tasawwuf*, Kashmiris, according to some scholars, adopted forbearance. This was inherited by successive rishis as well as by common people. This tendency among them has been observed by Walter Lawrence. In his book, *The Valley of Kashmir* (2001) he says that these people are *zulm parast*, i.e., those who take pleasure in being opressed (2). Many of these Central Asians who came during the fourteenth century were were also poets and artisans. Syed Ali Shah Hamdani, who visited Kashmir three times, is said to have brought with him 700 followers in 1379, including some weavers of carpets and shawls, who taught the local people the weaving of Pashmina and carpets. Some of them were also musicians and poets, and the latter influenced their Kashmiri counterparts. Some scholars believe that it was due to the influence of these mystic saints that Kashmiri poets, rather than giving voice to what was happening around them, turned their gaze inwards.

A significant inspiration for Kashmiri writers was the Urdu poet, Allama Iqbal (1877–1938), who visited Kashmir in 1921.[4] The progressive movement in Urdu, which began in India in the mid-twentieth century stimulated the writers of Kashmir and encouraged them to engage with literature for a social cause. Severing the cord with mystic poetry which they had inherited from the earlier poets, they experimented with an idiom and diction corresponding to revolutionary themes.

Among the earliest Kashmiri poets who championed the cause of the working class were Abdul Ahad Azad (1903–48) and Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor.[5]

Kashmiri writing in English is a very recent phenomenon. Agha Shahid Ali emerged as the most significant literary voice from Kashmir for the global reader. Many aspiring writers from Kashmir, especially those desirous of writing in English, have found an ideal in him.[6]

It is no small matter that the poet of the nation *manqué* is, in a sense, already deprived of the sense of belonging s/he seeks to inaugurate in their poetry. This was sometimes true in the development of the nation-idea in European cases such as Germany (Goethe), but mostly so in the case of the postcolonial nations which needed a poet to become the spokesperson for the national-idea in verse. Mahmoud Darwish is the exemplar here. Agha Shahid Ali, the recently recognised 'national' poet of Kashmir, is an example relevant to the very establishment of a Kashmiri literature amidst the political realities of the late twentieth century, in a national context teeming with 'national' poets from every regional formation (such as Nazrul Islam, Tagore, Subramania Bharathi, Vallathol et al.). The late emergence of Agha Shahid Ali (1949–2001) in the Kashmiri diasporic context needs further scrutiny if we are to fully understand the concerns about Kashmiri identity in his work. Being the first-ever poet of Muslim origin from Kashmir writing in English and addressing a global audience, Ali was aware of the power of his poetic agency as well as the expectations from him as the representative poetic voice of his people. Commenting on this awareness on the part of diasporic poets, Khalid Mattawa (2009) says that by choosing to write and speak for their peoples and their region and cultures, these diasporic writers are 'alternately

celebrating and resisting the burden of representation imposed on them by both their own people and by the outsiders who receive them'.

Ali resisted the representations made about Kashmir from the earliest times and sought to take back agency as a politically conscious poet. His poem, 'A History of Paisley', opens with an epigraph:

> Their footsteps formed the paisley. Parvati, angry after a quarrel, ran away from Shiva. He eventually caught up with her. To commemorate their reunion, he carved the Jhelum River, as it moves through the Vale of Kashmir, in the shape of paisley
> (2009: 217)

In Ali's retelling, Parvati had a quarrel with Shiva and ran away. Shiva however managed to get her back, and to celebrate their love they carve the waters of the Jhelum. When Parvati leaves, her footprints are in the shape of the paisley. This splitting of the river Jhelum, and thus the genesis of Kashmir, is tied to the design on Kashmiri shawls. The story, according to Ali, implicitly foregrounds the violence in Kashmir against the backdrop of the myth. In the infamous 1846 treaty which sealed the sale of Kashmir in exchange for a sum of Rs 7.5 million, the sale itself had some additional exchange agreements, such as those agreed in a ritual re-enactment of the *khil'at,* a Mughal gift-giving tradition, where goats (whose fleece is woven into shawls) and three pairs of Pashmina shawls were also to be given annually to the British.

Shawls and politics were also part of the anti-British political machinations of the day. In April 1865, Kashmiri shawl workers were in the forefront of a unique organised uprising against heavy taxation and exploitation by the Dogra regime. On the historic day of 29 April 1865, these workers joined the struggle and held

processions, and the movement would later be called the 'Shalbaf Tehreek or the weaker movement'. Fida Mohammad Hussain (2012) relates that workers from all parts of the city marched towards Zaldagar in Srinagar, raised slogans and burnt an effigy of Raja Kak Dhar, the Dogra's manager of the Shawl Department (141). Agha Shahid Ali writes:

> O see, it is still the day the world begins:
> And the city rises, holding its remains,
> Its wooden beams already their own fire's prophets.
>
> [218]

In a bitter and despairing mood, the protesting *shawlbaf* workers constructed a wooden bier, much like those used by Muslims to carry their dead to the place of internment. Placing a cloth over the coffin, they carried it to and fro in procession, exclaiming 'Raja Kak is dead! Who will give him a grave?' The procession would pass by the house of Raja Kak Dhar, whereupon the authorities fired at the protestors leading to some deaths. While the *shawlbafs* protested in Kashmir, in the West, Kashmiri shawls were well on the way to becoming a global status symbol.

By compressing this history and taking the fight over Kashmir to that between Shiva and Parvati leading to the sundering of the river Jhelum, Ali wants to revisit the sacred imagination of Kashmir which locates its origins in the mythical. He superimposes various chapters of Kashmir's history in sequential order, from the anklets of Parvati to men fleeing from soldiers: 'her anklets/ still echoing in the valley, deaf to men/ fleeing from soldiers into dead-end lanes' (Ali, 2009: 218). The trails of blood on the streets formed by feet in blood now look like red paisleys, appearing virtually like a long red paisley-patterned carpet at dusk against a backdrop of dim light. People however turn a blind eye

to the atrocities and do not 'hear bullets drowning out the bells of her anklets' (Ali, 2009: 219). The sound of anklets, which is now replaced by bullets, is a relic of Parvati.

Ali thus speaks of a temporal and spatial disjunction between the lived experience of Kashmiris and its representation, which has continually turned them into objects—of state policy and civil society alike—and stripped them of their agency. This distortion of history is acknowledged and brought into language through Ali's prismatic displacement of the light of history as it falls on the apparently frozen, static image of Kashmir, the mountainous valley of the gods. Commenting on the poem 'Snowman' written about his ancestry, Ali said in an interview:

> I'm thinking about my ancestry and the lost women in this ancestry whom we never hear about. I know everything about my father, his father, his father's father, and so on, for nine generations. But I know nothing before my grandmother. So I'm trying to find these lost women. These are difficult questions, there are no neat answers. You can have a feminist construct when you read that poem. [Quoted in Zaidi 43.]

Ali brings into focus one critical but little attended to hypothesis in literature, that migrations were not gender neutral; men were migratory and women were mostly sedentary. Invasions as well as explorations were by and large male enterprises, and migrants from Central and West Asia, too, were primarily men.

Through his poetry, Ali seeks to address the historical under-representation of women. In the poem 'The Blessed Word: A Prologue', Ali seamlessly moves across centuries, and from the reservoir of images creates a mosaic that carries within itself the memories of generations of Kashmiri people. He alludes to 'the blessed women' who gather chinar leaves, 'singing what the

hills have re-echoed for four hundred years, namely the songs of Habba Khatun' (2009: 172); Habba Khatoon, the same nightingale poet of Kashmir, 'the peasant girl who became the queen' (2009: 172) of Yousuf Shah Chak.[7]

Another very significant voice from Kashmir is that of the novelist, Mirza Waheed. The Kashmiri language never had a script of its own. It is a testament to the many political and linguistic vicissitudes faced by Kashmiris over the centuries, that Kashmiri has always borrowed scripts from different languages. Although major steps were taken to bring Kashmiri into the curriculum and measures were adopted by Sheikh Abdullah to standardise the script, after his government was toppled in 1953, Kashmiri was strategically removed from the syllabus and remained largely a spoken language.[8] The imposition of Urdu as the link language between the administrative units of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh during Dogra rule in the nineteenth century had already pushed the Kashmiri language into the shadows.[9] Such a scenario discouraged writers from writing in Kashmiri because only an insignificant number of people could read the script. The development of the literary novel was thus delayed.

Mirza Waheed's, *The Collaborator* is an account of Kashmir in the wake of an uprising and the violence wreaked on the people of a frontier town, Kunan Poshpura, in Kupwara. The narrator uses the word *ghairat* (honour) in connection with women on multiple occasions in the novel. Noor Khan, the village grocer, tells us about the Poshpura tragedy in relation to its menfolk: 'All boys from Poshpura are gone, no one left in the village, and it is empty now, all empty' (Waheed 2010: 274). However, the writer is also alive to the fact that there is no singular femininity in Kashmir. The violations of women's bodies are extended to men's psyche in such a way that the men

become effeminate. Masculinity and femininity in an occupied space then become fluid and cross over. This is illustrated in a scene where the narrator doubts whether all the women of Kunan Poshpura were actually raped. He says, 'You have no idea what people look like when their women—all their women—have been raped. I realise I can't see a single raised eyebrow now' (Waheed 2010: 274).

In another scene in the novel, the governor, 'Curfew King', lectures a 'cordoned-off, searched and combed gathering of men women and children and babies' who have been under curfew for a long time. The governor says that the village has become a 'gateway of militancy' and it is for security that they have imposed so many restrictions. He makes a pedantic display of his scholarship in his speech, when he relates to an unlettered audience of shepherds, the poetry of Lalded, Nund Reshi, Kalhana, and Emile Zola and Iqbal. The masculinised imagination of a feminine nation is on display when the governor says, '*Dosto*, these forces' (the narrator grinds his teeth wondering why he does not say Pakistan) 'want to sever the crown of Bharatmata's head! They spread propaganda, accusing our innocent soldiers of rape, plunder, and murder, while they themselves are soaked in blood, carrying the Quran in one hand and a dagger in the other' (Waheed 2010: 231). The representations of gender in the task of nation-building are highlighted here. In understanding the 'production' of an Other in international politics, the concept of the security 'imaginary' becomes useful.

The narrator in *The Collaborator* quotes the lecture by the governor, 'I see that your women are also here, out in the open, and I can understand if you are not happy with that'... It's not something we desire, something one of the most civilized armed forces in the world would like to do. *Haalat hi kuch aisie hain* (the situation is such) that it forces us' (Waheed 2010: 230).

The governor goes on to explain that if they let the women stay at home while men are under crackdown (which used to be the case during the earlier crackdowns) our 'most disciplined' armed forces will be charged with raping women, which had frequently happened in the past. The narrator goes on to say that while they were forced to be an audience for the long speeches of the governor and his 'VIP brigade' (Waheed 2010:234), he was utterly bored and uncomfortable, 'shifting his buttock' that hurt from sitting on cold earth for so long. In the yearning for a comfortable home, the narrator is eventually driven to thoughts of adopting violent means to extricate himself from the exile brought about by ceaseless crackdowns. He cannot reconcile himself with the idea of the 'new home', the open ground where, during most crackdowns, the people of Kashmir had to sit for days, feeling humiliated, leading to the disruption of the very idea of home. This condition brings about a dissonance that is internalised by these temporary migrants.

Thus, by providing a detailed account of the experiences of people subjected to crackdowns, search operations, and sexual violence as war strategy, Waheed brings to light various contesting femininities in myth and other historical representations with the actual situation of real women in Kashmir. He uses the discourse in the popular imagination as an entry point only to subvert it. The governor ends his speech with, '*Namaste Shardadevi, kashmira Mandala vasni*'. Later the narrator asks the elderly principal of the college, Jagranath Kaul, a Kashmiri pandit, the meaning of the last line and he explains that it means, 'I salute the goddess Sharda who resides in Kashmir' (Waheed 2010:234). Here, the gendered imagination is constructed through a masculine memory which is at work in two different ways. On the one hand, there is Bharatmata, the feminine personification of the nation; and on the other, Kashmir is envisioned as Kashmira,

and Shardadevi, the goddess of knowledge. Thus, the idea of the piety of nations (both Kashmir as well as India) is advanced as an inevitability for the protection of Kashmir from 'external forces'. As this is also seen as a part of the 'geo-body' of the nation, the governor says it is 'a concrete indivisible part' of India. Kashmir, he continues, 'for innumerable eras has been an important ingredient of the holy Indian vision—a placid, yet sacrosanct and solid and concrete piece, an intrinsic and indivisible part' (Waheed 2010: 233). By making the place sacrosanct, a claim over the land is inevitable. That is why both the Buddhist past and the Muslim present of Kashmir are sidelined. As the governor is about to conclude his speech, a woman in the crowd begins screaming, having endured the crackdown all day long, and the curfew having been imposed for months. The narrator wants to enquire about this but his father discourages him from doing so. It is hinted that the woman is having her period. Here the writer wants to juxtapose the idea of the imagined feminine that is praised and cherished to subdue the real flesh-and-blood woman. Waheed, in order to dismantle the feminised representation of the nation, juxtaposes it with the oppressive treatment of women in militarised Kashmir in order to highlight how the former is used as an excuse for the latter. By bringing the real woman's suffering in contrast with the imagined womanhood of 'Bharatmata'and 'Shardadevi', the narrator highlights the clash in the contesting femininities, deploying Spivak's 'affirmative sabotage'.

Nitasha Kaul's novel, *Residue* was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary prize in 2009. It is interesting that she, a Kashmiri Pandit academic, creates Leon Ali, a male protagonist who is a Kashmiri Muslim. This choice of protagonist suggests that Kaul wants to break free of the set notions of women's writing which expects women to write from a feminine, autobiographical perspective, while men are expected to tackle the experimental

and avant-garde. Kaul's master-stroke in her choice of protagonist sets the stage for a borderline between male and female writers' domains, followed by several other borders that are crossed and walls that are broken in her novel.

At the very beginning, an identity crisis is apparent when Leon wonders, 'What sort of a name is Leon Ali?' Leon's father is a Kashmiri engineer who left his mother when she was pregnant with Leon. In Delhi, Leon's mother forbids him to speak about Kashmir or his father. 'I got a better grasp of topics that cannot be broached with Ammi—"Father", "Kashmir", "Politics"—and to that I added my own—"Career" and "Home"' (Kaul 2014: 2). The very fact that Kashmir, politics, and father are prohibited words make their absent presence all-pervasive. The clash of identity because of a lack of fatherhood, as well as of a nation, are expressed through the restlessness that the protagonist experiences. Leon and his mother are denied accommodation in Delhi. The inability to find an apartment there is symptomatic of a lack of accommodation in the nationalist imagination. In Delhi, Leon is bullied and ridiculed, and is therefore keen to search for his identity and his father. When Leon is in Europe, 9/11 occurs; and just as he was dealing with his Kashmiri identity in Delhi, he now has to deal with his Muslim identity in the West. He finds a confidante in another major character, Keya Raina, who is a passionate researcher and gatherer of stories. She is a Kashmiri Pandit who meets Leon Ali in Berlin and joins him on his journey.

The narrative uses Kashmir as its backdrop but sets the specific struggle against the 'war on terror', manufacturing a universal narrative in which Muslims are viewed as terrorists. At times, Leon Ali finds himself in a fantasy of escape, such as when he says: 'I am a nobody, I want to scream in their faces. I don't know

any of you. Just let me be invisible. I don't want to be marked. I want to be free. I want to do what I have done before. Escape.'

In Berlin, Leon, searching for his father, meets Keya. The search and struggle for identity of the various characters finds objective correlatives in border crossings, the fall of the Berlin Wall, railway passages, transits, and the changing colours of passports. The novel weaves a tapestry of interesting characters all of whom are in search of one thing or another. Even though the narrative largely takes place outside Kashmir, the characters eventually take their final journey to Kashmir. This novel is unconventional and bold in many ways. First, by virtue of the choice of a male voice by a female writer; second, Kashmir is a presence in absence. Kaul does not dwell on framing the green mountains of Kashmir or the surrounding romanticised landscape; Kashmir is the absent addressee, an identity marker.

In her essay, 'Three Women's Text', Spivak offers a reading of a woman as a womb holder in Frankenstein. In this narrative, however, she argues that the woman in the book is neither tangential nor encircled, nor yet encircling. The woman is the addressee in the novel, she who will decipher all the codes in the epistolary work of fiction. She is the feminine subject rather than the female individualist and performs the irreducible recipient function of the letters that constitute *Frankenstein*.

Similarly, in *Residue*, Keya is the collector of stories and their interpreter, and Kashmir is the all-pervading reference point, although the concerns are global.

On the cover of the book is a map of the world set ablaze against a green background. The mapping, however, in Kaul's case is essentially the process of the spatialisation of power relations and negotiations which Foucault has theorised in his 'Space, Knowledge, and Power' (1991). The burning map here is the

crossing over of the division of political, social, communal, and gendered spaces in which not only the geographies, but also the bodies, are located. Kaul, thus, crosses over the same borders that Lalla's poetry crossed centuries ago, and the borders which the nomadic characters in Waheed's *The Collaborator* are trying to negotiate. The same protocols of inclusion and exclusion are given voice through the revisiting and recasting of history in Ali's poetry. The poet's battle for memory is no less than a battle on the ground, because a lack of memory obliterates any reason to fight back.

At a time when attempts have been made to promulgate laws forbidding the utterance of words which bring the past alive and when names of places are changed, one must allow remembrance as a powerful weapon against imposed and strategic amnesia. The writers discussed here have successfully portrayed the women of Kashmir beyond gender. When analysing these literary texts it becomes clear that the writers have been sensitive to distinctions of gender and representation, and have delved deeply into the history of representation of Kashmir and Kashmiri women. They have taken these representations as a reference point to produce a creative counter discourse. In such creative counter discourses, women are not objectively positioned as synecdoche for land waiting to be possessed, but as people with agency and self-expression. These writers subvert the idea of nationalism rooted in patriarchy and gender hierarchy.

Endnotes

[1]In the Foreword to their edited collection, *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writings,* Peterson and Rutherford have argued that colonialism celebrates male achievements by propagating male-oriented myths concerning 'mateship, the mounties,

explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries' (quoted in Mcleod, p. 9).

[2]In the fourteenth century, Shaivite saints such as Lalla expressed their mystical poetry in Kashmiri in four-line stanzas (*vakh*, from the Sanskrit *va:kya,* 'saying'). The Shaivite traditions in Kashmir are believed to have originated after 850 CE. It is worth noting that along with the myth of genesis, the state narrative has always reinforced Kashmir as Shardapeth, as a site of Sanskrit writing, which is by and large correct, and its coexistence with the Reshi tradition is projected to celebrate the Hindu-Muslim syncretic idea of coexistence. However, it needs to be emphasised that the Shaivite tradition retained some elements from Buddhist thought which was prevalent in Kashmir prior to Hinduism.

[3]Gayatri Spivak refers to the process of entering the master's discourse, understanding it fully, and reading it intimately in order to be able to alter it from within and turn it upside down.

[4]Rabindranath Tagore, too, visited Kashmir after winning the Nobel Prize in 1915, and this served as an important impetus for a reawakening of Kashmiri writers.

[5]Azad was very popular among the masses, and Sheikh Abdullah in his speeches appropriated Mahjoor a great deal. Sheikh often began them with a couplet or two from Mahjoor's famous poem, *Walo ho bhagwanu nov baharuk shan payda ker/Pholan gul ti bulbul tithe saman pyada kar.* (Come, gardener! Create the glory of spring! Make flowers bloom and bulbuls sing—create such haunts!)

Azad's most ardent desire was to see his society redeemed from political subjugation, social injustice, economic deprivation, cultural degeneration, and sectarian hostility. He wished the Kashmiri people to prosper under a system which was guided by egalitarianism, freedom, unity, and mutual love and respect (Bazaz 1950).

[6]Waheed opens his book, *The Collaborator* with a poem from Agha Shahid Ali. Mirza Waheed, Sidartha Gigoo, Nitasha Kaul, and others place their narratives in the most transitional phases of the recent history of Kashmir. The English writing of these writers veer away from dominant narratives which have ignored the human story of Kashmir, especially women in Kashmir. These literatures have attempted to bring to light the plight of the Kashmiri people, and both commented

on and critiqued the idea of paradise, the feminised landscape, and other dominant narratives, thus unravelling the layers of signification associated with these discourses.

[7]This finds common ground in the reverberations of grief and protest in both Mandelstam's Petersburg and Shahid's Srinagar.

[8]Immediately after the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953, the Kashmiri language was taken off the syllabuses in schools, and Kashmiri textbooks were sold as waste and burnt. A holiday celebrating the birthday of Habba Khatoon was also cancelled from that year onwards. These two steps are very symbolic and clearly reflect the attitude of the state towards Kashmiri ethos and culture. Until recently, Kashmiri was not taught in schools, was pushed to the margins, neither being considered a language fit for the composition of literary works nor suited to education.

[9]Since Jammu & Kashmir emerged as an autonomous state as a result of the Amritsar Treaty of 1846, and comprised several heterogeneous linguistic, geographical, and ethnic entities, the state needed a common language as a medium for official work. Although Urdu has no area of occurrence in the state, the language was easily understood by many because thousands of Kashmiri labourers went to northern India in search of work during the winter months. They could understand Urdu, which they called Hindustani or *paerim* (language beyond the mountains), but they could not speak it, or any other Indian language, correctly because Kashmiri is radically different from Prakrits (Sanskritic variants). Kashmiri, unlike all the languages of South-east Asia is a subject-verb-object (SVO) language, and has a very different phonetic and morphological structure. Indians referred to Kashmiris as 'hatto' derogatorily, as they could not speak Urdu. Urdu was declared the official language of the state in 1888 by Maharaja Pratap Singh.

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This is (Not) a Betrayal

notes from a rogue Kashmiri Pandit

NISHITA TRISAL

When I speak of Tehran, I end up at the sea
When I speak of myself or of you,
When I speak of the sky, I end up at the sea.
When I distance myself from it, forgetting,
Starting afresh, I end up back at the sea.

Where is the leak in this sea
As all of my relationships turn tender?
Drenched, they end up at the sea.
—Roja Chamankar, 'The Start'.

I had begun drafting this essay immediately prior to the 5 August, 2019 revocation of Jammu & Kashmir's special constitutional status. It began with two sentences: This essay is a betrayal. It is also a reckoning.

I had inténded in the essay to write about the complexities of doing research in and on Kashmir as a U.S.-based academic whose political views diverged radically from her Kashmiri Pandit family's. In particular, I had planned to write about a recent experience during my dissertation fieldwork, when I felt singled out and humiliated by a male family member because of my Kashmir politics. I had hoped to use that fraught encounter—which occurred at my great-aunt's funerary rites in Delhi in

September 2016, not long after Burhan Wani's assasination and the subsequent uprising in the Kashmir Valley—to think through the familial tensions that have animated my relationship to Kashmir. Although the essay risked betraying family privacy, which good daughters dare not do, I felt I needed to reckon with both the encounter in question and the larger matter of familial and community patriarchy that it represented. Little did I know that a more immediate reckoning was just around the corner.

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In the days following 5 August, it became abundantly and painfully clear that the Indian parliament's decision to read down Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution would be experienced by Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims in diametrically opposed ways, with most Muslims mourning the decision while most Pandits celebrated. That day, through tears and panicked calls, I kept a silent watch on my phone, waiting to hear from my close family members who, I had felt certain, must have heard the news and were equally shocked. When, however, that call eventually came, from my mother, it was clear we were not going to agree. We ended with pitched voices and more tears. The two Kashmiri worlds to which I belonged—my Kashmiri Pandit family and my Kashmiri Muslim friends—were yet again in direct conflict, almost inhabiting separate realities. The disjuncture felt intolerable.

The only thing it seemed one could do in the face of this surreal and seismic moment was to record and to document. While in the past, I had self-censored for fear of both state and familial backlash, in the aftermath of 5 August silence simply did not feel like an option. Encouraged by a friend, I began to write about the Pandit-Muslim impasse. As I tried to find a place from which to begin the narrative, it became clear that this

would be a deeply personal essay, one in which I would draw from the difficult work of belatedly processing my father's death 22 years earlier in order to reckon with the Pandit community's trauma. In the piece I would suggest that, like personal pain and trauma, intergenerational Pandit trauma needed to be engaged with directly, with compassion and understanding. There was simply no other way forward.

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India Must Stop Weaponizing the Pain of Kashmiri Pandits[1]

Washington Post
22 August 2019

This month, the Indian government unilaterally abrogated Kashmir's special status, in a move that disregarded multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions, which call for a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kashmir dispute.[2] With this sleight of hand, the government has resuscitated an old strategy of instrumentalising the pain and loss of Kashmiri Pandits to legitimise its violence against Kashmiri Muslims. As a Kashmiri Pandit, and first and foremost a Kashmiri, I unequivocally oppose this position.

Kashmiri Pandits are a minority Hindu community who fled Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region controlled by India, in the wake of the 1989 armed insurgency against the Indian state (Duschinksi 2008). Official accounts of the number of displaced Kashmiri Pandits vary greatly, from 150,000 to 300,000 individuals (Essa 2011), but arguments over these calculations of suffering obfuscate the deeper truth: The events of 1989 and those that followed have radically altered Kashmiri Pandits' self-understanding and their relationship to Kashmiri Muslims. They have created a trauma that refuses to be buried and a rage that it is time to address.

I grew up in a family where this rage and trauma were visceral. Though we lived in the United States, Kashmir remained ever-present in our lives—in the lotus root and *kohlrabi* we cooked with asafoetida; in the mellifluous Koshur language which bound us intimately not only with one another but also with Kashmiri Muslims, of whom I had only heard; and in my family's stories about a vibrant home in Srinagar, the capital city.

That home was, however, no longer ours. In 1997, with no sign of being able to return to Kashmir, my maternal grandfather reluctantly sold the house he had built 40 years earlier, windowpane by windowpane, with the help of my grandmother and local labourers. In a conflict in which so many countless lives have been taken and so many others disappeared, it might be difficult to understand the significance of a single house. However, losing our family home, 25 Balgarden, symbolised the loss of so much more. It was the loss of an identity, a history, one my family saw as being deliberately taken from them.

This sense of loss and erasure is precisely what Hindutva, or Hindu nationalist, forces have capitalised on since 1989. Rather than treating Kashmir as a political matter, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies have turned it primarily into a communal and economic one (Kaul 2017, 2019). They have stoked Kashmiri Pandits' felt experience of injustice by pitting Pandit and Muslim suffering against each other.

Current Hindutva strategies of divide and rule in Kashmir (Matharu 2019) echo techniques of imperial conquest which far precede the rise of the religious right wing in India. Such strategies were present during the pre-colonial period as well as following Indian independence, as the Congress party—now part of India's opposition—played its part in systematically eroding Kashmir's constitutional autonomy, rigging elections, and splintering the political field (Donthi 2016; Duschinski and Ghosh 2017). The BJP has however managed to push us to a

precipice: it is using the Kashmiri Pandit exodus, in addition to arguments about 'development', to justify an undemocratic, illegal annexation of Indian-controlled Jammu & Kashmir and to instate one of India's most severe sieges.

Given this historical backdrop, it is no surprise that the circumstances of the Pandit exodus have never been properly investigated. Nor is it surprising that Pandits feel such rage and lack of acknowledgment, even as consecutive governments parade their cause. To break out of one's pain and suffering is difficult when that trauma remains bodily and psychically unprocessed, as has been the case for many Kashmiri Pandit families. It becomes nearly impossible when that trauma is made to do the dirty work of governments intent on maintaining territorial sovereignty at the cost of human lives, political freedom, and reconciliation. However, the way to address intergenerational Kashmiri Pandit pain is not through the oppression of Kashmiri Muslims.

The work ahead for Kashmiris is to change the scripts we have inherited. For decades, the loss and suffering of Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims has been treated as a zero-sum game. Now, more than ever, young Kashmiris need to chart a path toward reconciliation, solidarity, and allyship with one another. We can begin by actively seeking out one another's truths and stories; resisting statist manipulations of our suffering; and reading deeply and widely into Kashmir's complex history. We can do so by calling out bigotry and hate in our families; denouncing Indian atrocities in Kashmir; and imagining a Kashmiri political community which accommodates and celebrates difference without simply being reduced to competing identity claims.

Reaching beyond oneself may feel like a betrayal to our respective communities but it is not. It is the only path to our collective healing and freedom.

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Although I had expected to encounter some inevitable criticism for my stance in the Op-ed, I did not expect the intensity of the reactions that emerged during the following weeks. In addition to the bots, trolls, and Facebook messages from strangers that simply said 'shame on u', one particular response in the *Washington Post* Comments section stayed with me:

> This is clearly a case of a community child gone rogue. It is akin to a Jewish kid denying that holocaust [sic] ever happened. Perhaps a combination of psychological insecurities and low self-esteem drove this grown-up woman to desecrate the memory of her elders (Kashmiri Pandits) who were either killed, brutally savaged, or fled from the Islamic insurgency of 1989–1990 in Kashmir....Nishita, like the rest of us, will meet her Maker some day. I hope the ghosts of Pandit victims haunt her for the rest of her life.

Soon after seeing this comment I learnt the author's identity, which he disclosed in an email written to the listserv of a US-based Kashmiri Pandit advocacy group. In the email, he encouraged other members of the group to 'blitz' the Op-ed with reader responses before the *Post* closed the Comments section. It turned out his anger towards me was especially personal. A prominent elderly Kashmiri Pandit who lived in the United States, he had provided me with several important contacts in Kashmir for my maiden research trip to the region in 2006, as a college student. Thirteen years later, with no communication with each other in the interim, he expressed a sense of betrayal, 'as if my own child has stabbed me in the back'.

Many Kashmiri Pandits who wrote to me conveyed this sense of betrayal—that my words had deeply hurt them, that I had minimised Kashmiri Pandit pain or suggested that Pandits should simply bury their trauma and move on. Besides, many suggested that I had no right to speak *as* a Kashmiri Pandit,

especially on such a prominent forum, if I did not speak *on behalf of* the Kashmiri Pandit majority opinion (which, in my understanding, rejects any stance on Kashmir that does not name the Pandit exodus a premeditated ethnic cleansing/genocide). This anxiety to speak in one voice has meant that Kashmiri Pandits, especially female Kashmiri Pandits, who do not toe the community line are subject to vitriol, ad-hominem attacks, threats of 'ex-communication', and sometimes far worse (Ali 2019; cf. Salim 2018). Importantly, these attacks are not only lodged by Hindutva trolls but also, as the small example above demonstrates, by Kashmiri Pandit men and women themselves.

It has given me no joy to observe the ways these vitriolic reactions have only confirmed one of the Op-ed's principal arguments, that Kashmiri Pandit trauma is alive and well and must be grappled with. Crucially, however, my argument was not that such trauma can be neatly buried, nor that 'burial' is necessarily the end goal or indeed desirable. If we know anything about trauma or about inter-community conflict, it is that repressing memories of violence and injury is never so simple. Rather, mine was a plea to find a way to one another again, to understand what we have lost, and what might yet remain for us to save.

The affective work required for this political and psychic healing—listening, empathising, and in the words of scholar-translator, Sonam Kachru, à la Dina Nath Nadim, *making human again*[3] does not sit well with the muscular nationalism that marks our contemporary political moment. However, the capacity to engage in this difficult work is surely within us. Drawing on Nadim's poetic invocation, 'I've got to make humans of Hindus and Muslims again', and his subsequent doubt, 'Are even we human? Who says we are?', Kachru suggests that we think of *being human* as an 'indefinite imperative, resisting the

smug comforts of knowing or the despair of unknowing'. I see the work of healing and producing solidarity as lying in the interstices of this indefiniteness—of being willing to change our minds, of tolerating another's repugnant viewpoint, of revising, and yes, betraying, our previous selves in the service of our shared humanity.

You're fraught with words, better go sit in water;
For they swell with meaning and glow more in water.

Look for the heart in the chest and roast it on embers
Look for the blood in the liver and drink it in water.

Tomorrow Kashmir will stretch in the sun like a desert,
The day after Ladakh and Leh will float in water.

Under the hollow banks frightened waves take refuge;
Lord Jaldev is born with fire in water.

At midday, even the sun gets soaked in sweat;
At the end, even the moon catches fire in water.

Even in excitement, sometimes, people set towns on fire;
Even for fun, sometimes, people pour poison in water.

The lost cow is looking for the eleven-some, would someone tell her?
Five drowned in dry land, six are aflame in water.

The peddler of ghazals, this Kamil, makes fiery calls
But the fate frost people are coldly sleeping in water.

—Amin Kamil, 'In Water'[4]

Endnotes

[1]The original text, published on the *Washington Post* website, included a number of hyperlinks, of which I have only retained a handful as in-text citations. The complete, original version can be found at https://www.

washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/08/22/i-am-kashmiri-pandit-india-must-stop-weaponizing-pain-our-past/.

[2]These include UN Resolution 47 of 21 April 1948 (http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/47) and UN Resolution 91 of 30 March 1951 (http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/91).

[3]See Kachru's blog, Make Humans Again, http://makehumansagain.blogspot.com/, which is part of a larger in-progress manuscript of translated Kashmiri poetry.

[4]Translated from the Kashmiri by Muneebur Rahman. Available at http://kamil.neabinternational.org/In_Water.htm.

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Home as the Frontier

gendered constructs of militarised violence in Kashmir

SAMREEN MUSHTAQ

The recognition of violence is no longer restricted to interstate conflicts characterised by war, but extends to its prevalence in what is the changing 'landscape of combat' (Cock 1989). Notwithstanding international humanitarian law drawing a clear distinction between combatants and civilians—the former being direct participants in hostilities and receiving certain privileges as prisoners of war, and the latter not being made objects of any attack under military operations (Watkin 2003)—the lines have been largely blurred; these neat categorisations do not stand in the face of modern armed conflicts, where both the public and the private spaces are militarised and violence does not remain confined to the combat front, but enters people's safe havens.

This essay highlights how the home–outside binary becomes indistinct in conflict, with homes becoming frontiers where people's lives and spaces are subjected to militarised control making gendered constructs of identity especially conspicuous. It builds upon existing research that brings to the fore the linkages between gendered identity and violence in the context of armed conflict, and utilises the intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (1989) in order to understand how Kashmiri women become the 'other' in terms of the varied sites of identity they inhabit, and how everyday forms of violence

play out with their bodies, psyches, and spaces becoming sites of conflict. My essay includes interviews with women survivors of violence, presenting their testimonies in a single narrative without identifying the survivors.[1]

Proceeding from Scott's (1985) understanding of 'everyday forms of resistance' among Malayan peasants, I also bring to the fore the subtle ways in which Kashmiri women are reclaiming their spaces and how these attempts construct them as frontliners resisting the brutal onslaught of a militarised state. In eliciting their narratives regarding violence, struggle, and survival, this essay seeks to highlight the multiple experiences of women living in a conflict zone beyond the binaries of victim and agent, and how they negotiate their days under a militarised code of conduct.

Gendered constructs and armed conflict

In areas of militarised conflict, gender relations are utilised to 'incite, exacerbate, and fuel violence' (Giles and Hyndman 2004: 4). The body becomes a site of violence, marked by relations of gender, religion, class, race, ethnicity, and the like. The idea of the nation posits masculinity and femininity in certain ways. As Enloe (2014: 93) argues, the construction of nationalism springs from 'masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope'. In such a project, women are symbolically seen as carrying the notion of honour and the identity of the nation on their backs for men to protect.

> Men living in a dangerous world are commonly imagined to be the natural protectors. Women living in a dangerous world allegedly are those who need protection ... relegated to the category of the protected ... commonly thought to be safe 'at home' and, thus, incapable of realistically assessing the dangers 'out there'. (Enloe 2014: 30.)

It would however be wrong to assume 'male' and 'female' to be homogeneous categories, and to ignore the wide variety of meanings that social categorisations assume when they are placed in relation to the various other identities an individual is seen to represent. Thus, gender, class, caste, and race do not simply have to be viewed in terms of the additive effect; we need to understand the complex, complicated, and intersectional effect of these categorisations as they form a part of the 'intersectional wheel' (Anthias 2001). Intersectionality (Crenshaw) helps bring to the fore the varied strands of identity to explain how various forms of oppression occur as a consequence of specific experiences and contexts. It focuses on the ways in which an individual experiences, reproduces, and resists social divisions in everyday life and how they go on to reinforce inclusions and exclusions (Taylor et al. 2010).

The promise of democracy and nationalist ideals to be all-inclusive and egalitarian has found the starkest contrast in the lives of women and other marginalised groups. They exist on the fringes of the nation-building exercise, in contrast to those seen as the principal actors in the process. Thus, we see how, as symbols of the nation's collective honour, women become the 'other', as they represent particular gendered, racial, ethnic, and religious identities, which intersect to subject them to particular experiences. In situations of conflict, this works to make people into the 'other' and to be dehumanised by violence. It is a war of 'us' versus 'them' and, therefore, as a means of defeating the enemy, women's bodies are used like slates to convey the message of victory of the 'self' and the defeat and 'dishonour' of the 'other'. Such violence is not indiscriminate but systemic and deliberate.

> During times of conflict multiple binary constructions are formed; not only is 'masculine' contrasted to 'feminine' within a group and 'us' contrasted to 'them' between groups, but 'our

> women' are contrasted to 'their women' and 'our men' to 'their men'. (Alison 2007: 80.)

The masculinist and femininist constructs are such that violence becomes an act of proving one's masculinity, the reason why men are thought to be the protectors of the 'nation', again thought of in terms of the image of a vulnerable woman needing protection from 'other' men.

Writing in the context of Palestine, Kassem (2011: 157) notes that the metaphor of the nation as a woman conflates 'the political control of territory with the control of the female body and female sexuality'. This use of the nation as a metaphor has also come to be increasingly used in the Kashmir conflict by the construction of identities of the 'self' and the 'other'. This is achieved by evoking a sense of protection for the nation, spoken of in terms of Bharatmata—the image of a woman—threatened by the Kashmiri 'other' which demands freedom, seen as akin to attacking the very honour of the 'motherland', and of the male warriors who come to defend it. Slogans such as 'Bharatmata ki Jai' and 'Mera Bharat Mahaan' are inscribed outside military bunkers and roadside hoardings to glorify the nation. Others, such as 'Ajeet Hain, Abheet Hain' (We are victorious, We are invincible) in addition elicit the use of the protectionist discourse: the Indian soldiers in Kashmir, intended to protect the integrity of the nation, are invincible. One might ask: who is the protection needed from and who are they victorious over? As these slogans and military installations are integrated into the civilian spaces, the message goes out to the Kashmiri 'other', who would otherwise be disciplined by violence.

Women and militarised violence in Kashmir

Kashmir has been a matter of long-standing 'dispute' between postcolonial India and Pakistan. There are varied accounts of

what happened in Jammu & Kashmir during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, who the invaders were, their motive, and whether the Pakistani government was officially involved. These questions are, however, beyond the scope of this essay.[2] What needs to be emphasised in the territorial aspect of the dispute is the human cost of the conflict.

Since 1989, especially, armed insurgency took on an ethno-religious character and the Indian state, dealing with a severe crisis of legitimacy, came down with an 'iron hand'. The war not only saw the state brutally attempting to curb the insurgency, but also crushing its support structure, an entire civilian population (which also had cross-border support from Pakistan). In the Indian state's attempt to gain an upper hand against Pakistan in the territorial conflict, militarisation in relation to Kashmir became the norm, and in its endeavour to create an Indian idea of the nation in Kashmir, militarisation became the procedure (Kazi 2009a: 67). Over 70,000 people have been killed and over 8,000 men been subjected to enforced disappearance by the state (IPTK and APDP 2015: 3). Beyond these statistics, militarisation has affected every aspect of people's lives, subjecting them to constant surveillance and humiliation. As Mohanty (2011: 78) argues, 'militarised conditions privilege certain populations (the bona fide citizen–subject) while simultaneously dispossessing others', who are relegated to the status of 'bare life' (Agamben 2005).

An important part of the state's militarisation process has been a concerted counter-insurgency mechanism where 'winning hearts and minds' of people is sought to be achieved by providing them with incentives and welfare services through projects such as Operation Sadhbhavana (meaning goodwill). This military operation has been 'the state's way of building legitimacy even as coercion continued' (Mushtaq and Bukhari 2018: 83; Bhan 2013). The aim here is to acquire an even stronger presence in the

everyday lives of people by gaining access to their social spheres, setting the standard for the services they receive and, in certain cases, even restricting or directing their choices of employment (IPTK and APDP 2015: 16). This has gone hand in hand with violent manifestations of the militarised state and its institutions and processes.

Quite importantly, militarisation as a process in Kashmir has worked to manipulate and exploit the meaning and interpretation of sexual difference (Kazi 2009b). Wars are fought in the name of protecting women who become its justification as well as the objects to be saved or to be 'dishonoured'. Elshtain's (1987) work on the First World War, Enloe's (1993, 2014) work on the Cold War and the first Gulf War, Eisenstein's (2004) on the Iraq War, and Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2009) on Palestine have all focused on underscoring this relationship between gender, conflict, and militarism. Militarism does not simply extend the militarised code of conduct into civilian life; it erases the binaries between combatants and non-combatants, war and peace, home and outside, and frontline and safe havens. It privileges masculinity and a devaluation of women and marginalised men, subjecting both to violence.

Gender-based violence as a feature of the Kashmir conflict has led to gendered identities becoming sites where power is inscribed in violent ways, both subtly and overtly, in all its physical, sexual, psychological, and socio-economic manifestations. Women have been subjected to violence not just because they are women, but because they are seen as the 'other', being the women of those 'others' who are a threat to 'our' national security. Women are also seen as repositories of the honour of the Kashmiri community which is at war with the Indian state, owing to their belief in, and struggle for, their right to self-determination on which they are vocal, and are viewed as having collaborated with India's historical

enemy, Pakistan, to demand *azaadi* (freedom). The national interest, 'heavily laden with the symbols of masculine power' (Horn 2010: 60), works to dehumanise an entire population, 'emasculating' the 'other' men by attacking 'their' women, thus relying on a complex web of violence.

As Asia Watch (1993: 1) notes, women have been subjected to physical violence, including torture and beating, on accusations of links to militants or during crackdowns. Women have also been subjected to psychological violence in terms of constant threats to their lives and dignity in a militarised environment. This is in addition to the exacerbated economic deprivation faced by them in such a system.

Women's testimonies

The testimonies of women survivors of violence, which I present here in narrative form, point to the varied and widespread nature of their experiences.

> During the 2010 uprising, there were protests going on in our area. My mother and I were returning home from the hospital. The forces fired; my mother had 6–7 bullet injuries in her spinal cord. She was bedridden for seven months, handicapped. Then she died. (Personal interview, 2015.)

> My brother-in-law was a militant. The army came looking for him. I was at the house. They took me instead. I was held at the nearby camp for 13 days. Inside the camp, I was beaten with rods, held by my hair and dragged around.
> (Personal interview, 2015.)

> My husband and I were accused of giving shelter to militants in our house. We were taken separately to an army camp. I was tied with ropes; electric shocks were administered on my body. They made me drink excessive water and would then torture me. (Personal interview, 2014.)

> There was an encounter in our area in 2001 and an army man was killed. The army and the Special Task Force were furious. They entered our homes and beat up the women and the elderly. These things from them were expected and common during crackdowns. Nowhere is it safe. (Personal interview, 2015.)

Acts of physical violence like those narrated by my interviewees often happen during cordon and search operations, or when forces barge into the houses of people after an attack by militants, or during encounters. These violent practises are deeply embedded in the militaristic structure and form a part of people's everyday experiences. While the quotidian humiliation at regular checkpoints that Kashmiri men have faced over the years has been documented (Qureshi 2004: 6; Duschinski 2009: 704; Kak 2017), highlighting women's experiences of the everyday violence *they* face in a highly militarised environment is important. History is often 'his-story', and interpreting women's experiences in historical narratives questions the masculine hegemonies that otherwise 'efface women as a category of analysis from the areas of public memory, transforming them into dispossessed and non-historical beings' (Kassem 2011: 3).

In the case of Kashmir, the human cost of the conflict is reflected in terms of the numbers of dead, the disappeared, and the orphaned, while the extraordinariness (extra-legality) of the everyday is seen as ordinary. Also, the foregrounding representations of Kashmir tend to be of the physical landscape, thus leading to an erasure of the centrality of the people and their everyday experience of a militarised life which has 'transformed the social landscape into an arena of violence and repression' (Hoffman and Duschinski 2014: 511).

> Girls and women, when they leave their homes, often have to hear the directive, *Avoid the bunkers that house the uniformed*

> *men. Take an alternate road. Don't use that road unless you have to* (Batool et al. 2016: 4; emphasis in the original).

However, as I have stated previously, the mere cautious avoidance of the outside does not mean that 'home' is a safe space. This was evident in the 1990s and early 2000s when militancy was sought to be subdued by the state through violent counter-insurgency. Government forces cordoned off areas for crackdowns on suspicion that militants were in the area.[3] They did this also to get the *mukhbireen* to point out the people they suspected of being militants, or having militant links, or sympathising with the militants.[4] Male members would be asked to assemble in a nearby playground while the women would stay back at home. Government forces would conduct house-to-house searches and, in these situations, would frequently resort to sexual harassment of the women. In a harrowing memoir, a Kashmiri woman recalls the events that took place during such cordons and what they meant for women.

> They played a different kind of war with us. Only they knew where they pinched; only we knew how it felt. There was no name for it, like for rape or murder. So what happened when the same women saw Indian soldiers playing with their intimate things and taking sexual pleasure under the guise of search operations? (Yousuf 2014.)

As noted in *Kashmir Imprisoned*, a report published in 1990 (quoted in Butalia 2002: 79):

> There seems to be a deliberate attempt to make women the primary target of attack by the security forces. The manner in which searches and interrogations are conducted smacks of a planned strategy to break the morale of the people.

With a high military presence even in civilian areas, the 'masculinist military gaze', where women become the 'objects'

of the male gaze, is another form of violation. During the early 2000s, even when the militant presence was low, harassment continued. Saja (name changed), 65, recalls that period:

> Army men from the nearby camp or men from the Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry would patrol the area at night and then peep in from the windows, looking at women as they slept, teasing them. Had they found an occasion when the windows were not closed, God knows what they could have done to us. But we feared them a lot, knowing how they kept peeping in all the time at night. We could not sleep properly.
>
> (Personal interview, 2015.)

It is reported that the Indian armed forces have used rape as a weapon of war in Kashmir (Human Rights Watch 1994). In conflicts, the physical as well as sexual violence against women is intended to send a message to the opposing group or community that the perpetrator is the victor as it attacked the very 'honour' of the opposing group. In other words:

> …displays of machismo are enacted through violence against women who are associated with the target males. The rape of women carries a man-to-man message, showing that the targeted men are not able to protect their women. Men may interpret the sexual assault of 'their' women as a direct attack on their manhood and their own integrity. In this way, women are used as political pawns, as symbols of the potency of the men to whom they belong. (Reid-Cunningham 2008: 282.)

Although there is no evidence to suggest that sexual violence by Indian armed forces in Kashmir is a part of the state's official policy, such acts have been carried out with the state providing absolute impunity to perpetrators and dismissing testimonies from the survivors as propaganda and 'recorded rotten stereo sounds that play rape all over again'. Parvez (2014), points to a

systemic and systematic way in which such acts occur with the silent complicity of the state.[5] Women in Kashmir have been subjected to sexual violence, including individual acts of rape by soldiers as well as mass rapes, both of which point to a larger system of oppression and the impunity that the state provides to its forces. Such acts of violence have been committed to feminise the victim and, thereby, seek to dominate the sexual as well as the religious, ethnic, and political identity to which the victim adheres/belongs, while at the same time seeking to empower and enhance the masculinity of the perpetrator.

> I was tied up to the table, naked, in a nearby camp, after they asked me to provide details of a neighbour who was a militant. They poured hot polythene over my private parts. I don't remember what happened after that. (Personal interview, 2015.)

> My husband was taken to the camp. We were accused of sheltering militants. It was just the two of us; we have no children. Then they came on the pretext of searching the house and raped me inside my own home in the dark of the night. (Personal interview, 2015.)

Cases like Kunan Poshpora provide telling examples of the use of mass rape to terrorise an entire population, as Skjelsbaek and Smith (2001: 5) write, 'Those who are ruthless enough to launch a war in which civilians themselves are the target are therefore likely to find that rape can be a convenient and effective weapon.'

On the night of 23-4 February 1991, soldiers from the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the 68th Brigade barged into homes in this north Kashmir hamlet and raped around 53 women while the men were interrogated in the cold outside (Batool et al. 2016: 80). 'Our homes suddenly turned into centres of violence. Rooms remind us. Our bodies bear witness. Our wounds bleed and they will speak.' (Falak 2013.) The subsequent reopening

of the case has only seen denials from the state and accusations against the survivors as well as the petitioners. In addition to Kunan Poshpora, the accusations against Indian soldiers of raping Kashmiri women have been levelled on numerous other occasions; the Mubina Gani case (1990), where a bride was raped on her wedding night; or Pazipora (1990); Haran (1992); Handwara (1992, 2004); and Shopian (2009), not only highlight a legacy of sexual violence against Kashmiri women by the Indian forces, but also a lack of prosecution. This implies that the state is not averse to using it as a strategy to break the will of the Kashmiri people in their struggle for freedom from occupation.[6]

Kashmiri women as frontliners

Notwithstanding the violence faced on several fronts, the story of Kashmiri women needs to be heard beyond the victimhood discourse in order to understand how they have survived the violence over the decades. In this context, Manchanda (2001: 20) writes, 'Women's negotiations with violent conflicts create historically and situationally specific economic, social, cultural, ethnic and national realities that form a new knowledge base and resource.'

While, historically, the frontline has been looked at as a place where the 'actual' fighting between warring groups occurs and where most damage is done, feminist analysis over the years has challenged this notion of the 'frontline'. Both in a physical and symbolic sense, they have reinterpreted the 'frontline' as a 'space where the traditional boundaries of public and private space are blurred' (Dowler 2002: 162), and as transformative spaces where 'women's voices challenge and enrich simultaneous struggles' (Waller and Rycenga 2002: xxii). Thus, as women's bodies are marked violently in 'safe spaces' and as they chalk out ways to resist militarisation, the frontline becomes the home, which is

militarised but is also transformed into a site of resistance. The frontline becomes the body, psyche, and memories where the war is played out. What Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009: 34) writes about Palestine is also applicable to the Kashmir scenario.

> The frontliner can be a woman who is lining up or is humiliated at a checkpoint, a woman singing her children to sleep in the middle of night raids and incursions, one selling yogurt to make some additional money and buy food for her children, a woman giving birth at a checkpoint because she has been prevented from reaching a hospital, or one screaming and crying in court while refusing to accept the law's failure to protect her rights.

The popular understanding of women's agency in conflict often tends to see it as women who are fighting in struggles for national liberation or simply surviving as hapless victims (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009: 50), but it is in these ordinary acts that the forms of everyday resistance become clear. As Scott (1985) argues, it is a constant struggle and may not even account for collective action corresponding to infrapolitics as against the conventional forms of political resistance. This is not to assume that these acts are not political or that a clear demarcation can be drawn between what is outright and overt in the form of armed struggles, and what is subtle and covert in the form of everyday struggles. These exist on a continuum and in relation to each other in developing a broader culture of resistance.

As Aaliya Anjum (2011) notes, in the early years when the Kashmiri armed movement began, women took to facilitating the men in their fight by acting as couriers who took arms from one place to another. As they could clear checkpoints without being suspected, they could inform militants about the position of the forces and help them flee in the event of sudden cordons. Women heightened their participation in the protests in the 2008–10 and 2016 uprisings, taken out all-women marches,

shouting slogans for freedom, and joined the stone-pelting men. This 'gendered resistance', as Ather Zia (2017) notes, has been integral to Kashmir's social fabric. Kashmiri women have a long history of protesting atrocities and resisting in their own ways, right from the time of Mughal rule in Kashmir (Gazi 2017).

The women also 'brought the private act of mourning into the public space, politicising it into a formidable tool of moral protest against state injustice' (Banerjee 2008: 150). This is epitomised by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons headed by Parveena Ahangar, which brings together families of the disappeared, who stage a sit-in on the tenth of every month, seeking the whereabouts of those subjected to enforced disappearances. During the funerals of militants, women 'break out into a *wanuwun*, the traditional Kashmiri song of celebration, intertwining couplets in praise of local *mujahids* (militants)' (Manchanda 2001: 51). Not only do the women use the 'public space' to register their protest against the oppressive state structure, their resilience is evident in the everyday in terms of how the home, rather than being a private sphere in statist terms, becomes a site where they struggle on a daily basis. These struggles, visible or invisibilised, overt or covert, institutionalised or random, indicate how the home-outside binary does not indicate safety, nor are women simply to be placed in the binary categorisations of victim and agent.

Women have also used the law for memorialisation. A case in point is the public interest litigation filed by 50 women in 2013 in the Srinagar High Court seeking a reinvestigation into the Kunan-Poshpora mass rapes. Although the Supreme Court later stayed the proceedings, what the petition was aimed at was not to seek justice per se, but 'to expose the judiciary as being part of state oppression, to make use of law in order to preserve memory

which is a powerful weapon, for it is in our remembrance that our resistance lies.'[7]

Conclusions

It is not the case that women who suffer violence have no ability to act, nor does a recognition of women's agency mean that they have overcome the violence and that it no longer affects them. Surviving the everyday tribulations of militarisation and facing its multifaceted gender-based violent manifestations means that women have to cope with having their bodies treated as battlegrounds. They have to hold their families intact and 'construct counter-spaces that allow them to survive and to envision that they might someday attain the justice they have so longed for' (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009: 187). In this essay, I have argued that women cannot simply be placed between the binaries of 'victims of violence' and 'agents of peace', and even when seen as survivors, witnesses, and/or frontliners resisting militarised violence in the everyday, our analysis must not fall prey to romanticising a notion of resistance that invisibilises the violence, despair, and resilience of women's lives in conflict.

Endnotes

[1]The interviewees' names remain anonymous. Interviews were conducted by the author as part of her PhD fieldwork during 2014 and 2015.

[2]The departure of the British colonisers from the Indian subcontinent in 1947 witnessed the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, ruled by a Dogra maharaja, acceding neither to India nor Pakistan. However, a popular uprising in Poonch which had begun prior to Partition gained increasing momentum following the division, resulting in the maharaja's forces massacring 2,37,000 Muslims (Naqvi 2016) even as a provincial 'Azad Kashmir' government was proclaimed to have been formed in Rawalpindi. This was followed by a 'tribal invasion' (Lamb

1991; Snedden 2013) resulting in the maharaja signing a temporary Instrument of Accession with India which brought the Indian army to Kashmir. India later took the matter to the United Nations to complain against Pakistan.

[3]The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) gives security forces the right to enter or search any premise in order to make arrests (of anyone who has committed cognisable offences or is suspected of doing so), or to recover any person wrongfully restrained, or any arms, ammunition, and/or explosive substances and seize them.

[4]Plural for *mukhbir*, which is used in Kashmiri parlance for informers, i.e., local people who provide Indian forces with information about the whereabouts of militants or their supporters. Usually, during crackdowns, men would be paraded in front of a masked *mukhbir*, who would then point out any suspects to the forces, and they would then be bundled into a vehicle and taken to undisclosed torture cells for interrogation, in many instances to return dead, or severely tortured, or just disappeared.

[5]Not only has the state, over the years, rejected such allegations of sexual violence as baseless and as an attempt by militant sympathisers to defame the Indian forces and bring international attention to Kashmir, it has also ensured that the forces are not prosecuted. Even in cases where first information reports have been filed, prior sanction is needed for prosecution. The entire system, from the laws to the courts to the institutions and procedures form 'structures of violence' which provide absolute immunity to the forces.

[6]For more on this, see Asia Watch (1993), reports by IPTK and APDP (2012, 2015).

[7]Personal interview with one of the 50 women petitioners, 12 August 2016.

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2 Conflict and Gender Violence

Gendered Politics of Funerary Processions

contesting Indian sovereignty in Kashmir

INSHAH MALIK

In 2016, several huge funeral processions were held for a 22-year-old Kashmiri militant, Burhan Wani. Thousands of people walked many miles from different parts of Kashmir to the streets and alleyways of Tral (Wani's hometown) leading to impromptu mass funeral processions (Qadri and Shah 2016). Mourners were fired upon by the Indian army, killing hundreds of funeral-goers, blinding thousands of mourners, and, in effect, criminalising public mourning (PTI 2016). The entire Kashmir Valley was threatened with cyclical targeted violence for the next several months. The colossal moment of Wani's death and many of the spectacle funeral processions that followed, raised questions about the nature, culture, and history of public mourning in Kashmir, and challenged the cogency of the Indian state's sovereignty claim (Mathur 2016). Why were so many people willing to die just to be able to mourn someone whom the Indian authorities had declared a 'terrorist?'

The answers offered by the Indian government were largely inadequate. The national media kept circulating the state's official stance of holding Pakistan responsible for a mourning that was essentially indigenous. Indian media repeatedly informed us that Pakistan was implanting ideologies of terrorism, which created troubled and dangerous people like Wani and those

who were grieving his death (*The Hindu* 2016). The mourners were dubbed misguided juveniles or deemed to be under the influence of foreign propaganda. These assertions were insufficient explanation, because they offered no understanding of how political figures are fashioned and why those grieving for them encountered fatal violence at the hands of Indian troops. Moreover, the complexity of the situation was apparent when women, too, attended these prohibited funerals in large numbers. All this immediately pointed to the inadequacy of official narratives.

The moment of Wani's funeral brought to the fore the question of the Indian state's sovereignty and a challenge levied against it by the Kashmiri people, yet again challenging the state's narratives about Kashmir politics. Since then, Kashmir has witnessed a dramatic increase in young men taking up arms. The renewed politics of disagreement is shaping another armed resistance, and funerals are increasingly becoming contested spaces of power, grief, and mourning. Earlier, in January 2016, when the then chief minister and the People's Democratic Party patron, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, passed away, his funeral attendance became a subject of rigorous debate. The low turnout of mourners was seen as a symptom of waning political support for pro-India parties in Kashmir. On the other hand, huge funerary processions for both militants and civilians killed in police action have become a cause for concern for the security establishment. When, therefore, mourning for Wani soared, the state declared it to be a sign of rising support for 'terrorists' among the people. The government's response to the funeral demonstrations was lethal and resulted in the killing and blinding of mourners. Ever since, targeted violence has become a normalised response to public grieving at such sites. The continued normalisation of the violent response to these funerary

demonstrations points to a striking identitarian polarisation in public discourse through which the support of ordinary Indian citizenry is garnered by the Indian state. The question that arises is: how do the majority of people in India simply lap up these assertions made by the state about grieving Kashmiri people? What rationalisations are offered by the government about the nature of this grief, and what were its justifications for civilian deaths and the blinding of children?

In the Indian political culture, which is increasingly becoming defined by its religious identity politics, the question of Kashmir often evokes undifferentiated responses. Hindu right-wing politicians claim that India's sovereignty is in grave danger in Kashmir because of the strategic conspiracies hatched by neighbouring Pakistan to divide India. However, contrary to the Hindu nationalists, their liberal or left-wing opponents invoke the law to urge that the human rights of the Kashmiri people be upheld. Nevertheless, these different political groups agree to varying degrees that Kashmir is an inalienable part of India. Those trying to hold the Indian state accountable in Kashmir through legalistic means demand that the human rights of the Kashmiri people be respected. This however fails to recognise the exceptional nature of the military occupation in Kashmir. The unprecedented grief for Wani did not simply raise questions about the legitimacy of the present form of Indian governance, it presented a moral challenge to India's basic claim to sovereignty in the region.

Thus, in the broader Indian political culture, a Kashmiri has come to signify one who is in a complicated relationship with the state's sovereignty, to whom the rule of law does not apply, and whose political action is labelled as misguided or constituting terrorism (Noorani 2011). Simultaneously, a Kashmiri can be killed but cannot be sacrificed (Zia 2018). A Kashmiri signifies

something primitive; body sans the capacity to think and reflect on his/her political condition. Someone full of vengeance but unpatriotic, a body that can be corrupted but not trusted. In the case of Kashmiri militant bodies, the state is making decisions about who can live and what the political meanings of a liveable life are. When the state makes such a decision about the dispensability of people in strengthening its political claims, it assigns 'grievability' to such bodies (Butler 2010). Thus, the media and political class in defence of the state create the distinction between whose death is to be grieved (soldiers) and whose should not be (in this case, Wani).

The Indian state, through regimens and technologies of power, creates acceptable forms of citizenship, and Kashmiri bodies, militant or not, are consistently struggling to reject these imposed political frames. Public mourning envisages grief as a political possibility to register a protest against the order of sovereignty in its current form. Thus, the politics of mourning is a reclamation that signifies a contest for political power, where people who attempt to ascertain their rights demand that they share or overtake that sovereignty. The public mourning at funeral sites requires us to acknowledge the deep aspiration for Kashmiri sovereignty and rejection of the Indian state.

Funerals as affective sites of feminist politics

At traditional funeral sites, the gendered division of labour is visible. Women perform obituary rites and eulogise the dead in the inner familial circles. They testify whether or not the deceased performed their gendered role to the satisfaction of their kith or kin. This is a political dimension of the gendered roles of grief, and it operates in the constituencies of establishing and producing cohesive social bonds or animosities, while keeping the rank and file of a social community in place. The final pronouncement of

application of 'grievability' is in the hands of women and is in direct conflict with the state's claim of sovereignty.

Collective grieving in Kashmir is traditionally assigned to women, but lived culture shows that exceptions to this rule are available. Throughout several decades of strained political conditions, mourning men have become emblems of helplessness signalling emasculation. Grief is redistributed in society by the unprecedented political turmoil engulfing Kashmiri society from the early 1980s. The gendered culture of grieving in Kashmir restricts women to their complementary role as grievers. The Islamic law, as it is applied in Kashmir, prohibits women from attending final funeral prayers at cemeteries, and even forbids a public or prolonged display of grief. Additionally, the state attempts to monopolise women's gendered traditional role that involves the application of grievability, which translates into determining who deserves to be mourned. The huge number of deaths under continuing military occupation testify to the precarious nature of life in general, the curtailment of political expression, and limitations on women's agential role. Women work under these limitations and script their own political action in a way that can embolden their voice. The traditional culture of mourning in itself limits women's agency and cannot respond to the realities of a military occupation; not does it have a language in which it can process a response to the everyday violence. The localised phráses and idioms of lament remain within the ambit of reflecting upon the gendered role of the deceased.

When an event such as Wani's death happened, it brought into the open the crisis of traditional mourning culture—people responded by improvising the culture itself. At Wani's funeral, a widespread redistribution of grief occurred and people, irrespective of their gender, felt overburdened by sorrow. We saw women in large numbers transform the traditional

grieving culture into a potent funerary processional grieving for slain militants and civilians. The improvisation introduced into traditional cultures of mourning brought women's grief into the public sphere (prohibited by tradition) and then by women's grieving bodies (which the state prohibits). In doing so, they provided a new political cohesion to their Kashmiri political community, while creating a more progressive role for themselves.

However, other than providing political cohesion, women, as they actively work in the public redistribution of grief, also attempt to transform gendered meanings of such political action. In requiems and laments, the mourners' invocation of the gendered masculinity of *boi* (brother), in order to refer to Wani, reconfigured meanings of familial relationships. How could people call someone whom they do not know personally and have never met, their brother? In doing so, women sought to transform Burhan Wani from an inaccessible Internet icon into an emblem of identifiable masculinity. He was a brother, like any other, who would protect or fight against injustice meted out to his vulnerable siblings. He was a brother who fought for and lost his life defending his homeland. When people identified with these qualities of Wani they sought to make him relatable. His extraordinariness was thus scripted in the ordinary idiom of a personal relationship to make him immediately identifiable. The slogan reverberated in Tral on 9 July 2016, '*Tera bhai, mera bhai, Burhan bhai, Burhan bhai*' (Burhan is your brother and my brother) symbolising this transformation. Without placing Wani in the context of the history of repression in Kashmir, the meaning of this invocation of 'brother' is inaccessible. There is a long history of the persecution of young people and, over the years, most Kashmiris have experienced the violent death of relatives, friends, or acquaintances. The sudden and

unfair nature of political deaths forces Kashmiris to recognise the precarious nature of life in Kashmir. It is this affective potential of Wani's body that helped it transcend the masculine meaning of a 'brother' in people's slogans and provided symbolic representation to collective suffering.

Mourning and the grieving mother

The realignment of the culture of mourning has seen a transformation of the traditional symbolic icons of Kashmir's Muslim nationalist movement. The mourning mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism has long been a contentious subject in feminist theory. Rita Manchanda has noted how the figures of grieving mother and the martyr's mother have become iconic in Kashmiri nationalist imagination, the public grief of mothers becoming a powerful aesthetic resource for the nationalist conception of *azaadi* (Misri 2015). However, in the transformative culture of mourning in Kashmir, mothers make private this very public grief. This was very visible in the subsequent funeral of Sabzar Bhat, another militant affiliated with Wani's militant group, Hizbul Mujahideen. Sabzar was popular in his village, Rathsun, for his bravery and will to fight against injustice (Naqash 2017). He was killed in an encounter in a nearby village along with 16-year-old Faizan Bhat, a young boy who dropped out of school in May 2017 and became part of the group, after having successfully snatched a rifle from a Central Reserve Police Force personnel in Tral. In an account, 'A Militant's Mother' published in a local newspaper, *Kashmir Life*, Shams Irfan recounts the scene when Sabzar's body arrived at his home, noting about his mother, 'She didn't react at all', amidst thousands of mourners who had gathered at her house. Instead, she took her son's body into her private quarters and grieved by his side, away from the public gaze;

in the morning she plainly informed her husband that the time to bury their son had come (Irfan 2017). This account challenges what is taken for granted about a mother's grief in self-determination movements. By emphasising the different modes of a mother-son relationship, women's connections to their political community, under these political conditions, offer them spaces for self-articulation and an opportunity to demand more freedoms. The account of Sabzar's mother is not an isolated one; there is a pattern visible in many mothers' responses to their militant sons' deaths. The image of a grieving mother is further complicated by the disturbing silence around women as casualties. In 2017, two women, 22-year-old Mysra Bano from Kopwour and 24-year-old Beauty Jan from Shopian, died of gunshot wounds, leaving behind their toddler daughters. The iconic images of the toddlers engendered the normative ways in which the ethno-nationalism of military occupation is understood (Muhammad 2017).

In a compelling interview with Wani's mother, Maimoona, we see a woman who does not publicly display her pain (Amin 2017). She uses discretion, talking intermittently about the recognisable humanity of her two sons, both killed by the Indian army. Similarly, the mother of Faizan Bhat hides her trauma. She tells the journalists that they took a collective decision to donate her son's books and school uniform much before his death, as she was convinced that he would not return (Ahmad 2017). In media accounts, militant mothers move away from their traditional victim image to more robust representations. They ask tough questions about the political conditions prevalent in Kashmir and link their children's lives to political issues in myriad ways (Nabi 2017). With the shift in the gendered practises of political mourning, between privatising public grief and publicising what tradition asks be kept private, Kashmiri women are piecing

together a radical framework that makes possible an even bolder entry for younger women. The contemporary gendered politics of mourning is nestled within a long history of women's resistance in Kashmir.

In April 2017, women from prominent Srinagar colleges came out to break the hegemonic dominance of men in pro-freedom protests. The violent protests against the Indian state in Kashmir which had remained largely a monopoly of young boys, found a rejoinder. Girls donning school uniforms, headscarves, and sometimes, long robes, thronged Srinagar's roads, armed with stones, taking aim at the bunkers of Indian soldiers and at armoured vehicles. They were undeterred by the tear gas canisters and PAVA (Pelargonic Acid Vanillyl Amide) shells which are routinely used to disperse public protests in Kashmir (Ashiq 2017). One of the young militants from Hizbul Mujahideen, Zakir Musa, admonished them for resorting to violence saying, 'Abandon stone pelting; your brothers are alive' (*Kashmir Watch* 2017). These girls made it clear that they were representing their own selves when, notwithstanding these warnings, they continued unafraid, fighting Indian forces in sundry parts of Srinagar city (Krishnan 2017). In a photo that surfaced on the Internet on 5 March 2018, two women were seen alongside men offering funeral prayers for a young militant. It was a scene that further confirmed a silent feminist revolution which is enabling women to fight both the cultural patriarchy and the military occupation of Kashmir. The photo was not an anomalous event, but the product of a long history of women's political action in Kashmir (*Outlook* 2018).

Conclusion

The case of women's participation in militant and civilian funerary processions is a feminist political formulation in the

Kashmiri context. This is easily understood when we review the politics of funeral attendance in two actions by the women—they publicise grief by bringing the private out into the contested public realm, stretch the religious law, and simultaneously resist the state's sovereignty by grieving for lives that the state has designated as being 'non-grievable'.

The expression of public grief in Kashmir demonstrates fractures in Kashmir's relationship with India, and brings to the fore a long history of aspiration for Kashmiri sovereignty. Moreover, gendered grieving becomes central to the cultures of public protest, as Kashmiris attempt to uphold a demand for self-determination in the form of a civilian protest against the Indian state. The gendered culture of grieving itself undergoes a transformation to bring about a more robust pro-women politics within the resistance movement. Indeed, women understand their complex subjectivity and find ways to contest different patriarchal forces for political power. They contest the state over their traditional role to grieve for those bodies which the state prohibits, and they also contest cultural patriarchy in public spaces. The politics of women's mourning symbolises people's moral right to self-determination as well as their right to the public realm.

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Moving from Impunity to Accountability

women's bodies, identity, and conflict-related sexual violence in Kashmir

ALLIYA ANJUM

Kashmir is one of the most militarised conflict sites in the world, with over half a million troops populating its streets and borders (*Kashmir Times* 2013). The heavy presence of troops and a legal apparatus which provides them immunity signifies that 'militarisation' and 'militarism' pervade the state's response to conflict in the region. Militarisation in its normal sense can mean 'expansion of the relative size of some integral part, scope or mission of the armed forces', visible either in terms of military spending or through the number of soldiers on the streets (Bowman 2002: 19).[1] Militarism, on the other hand, is a system of thinking where military 'institutions and ways' are valued more than 'civilian life',where life includes its inextricable signifiers such as dignity, freedom, and health (Lutz 2002: 723). This hierarchical valuation in Kashmir's case, for instance, is most visible in the operation of laws of immunity, and the resultant impunity accorded to the armed forces for the smooth functioning of ostensible counter-insurgency operations and the maintenance of law and order (Rediff 2011). Although war is the ultimate manifestation of militarism, militarisation is a wider process which permeates the 'institutions, values and practices' of the state (Sjoberg 2013: 96). The deeply penetrating and far-reaching effects of

militarisation and militarism, on even the everyday lives of civilians, include processes through which 'military practices extend into the civilian arena' (Peterson and Runyan 1999: 258), for example, military-sponsored civilian activities such as educational tours.[2] A conceptual extension of this analysis of militarism helps locate its pervasiveness in militarised societies such as Kashmir, where the distinctions between combatant and non-combatant, and war and peace, soon begin to dissolve into each other, making rights a natural casualty.[3]

The association between militarisation and denial of rights, thus, has remained an enduring feature of conflicts across time. As Richard Falk (1977: 231) points out, where state power is maintained through military control, a regime insensitive to human rights' compliance is a natural outcome. The processes of militarisation and conflict are, at the same time, not a gender-neutral phenomenon, in that they inherently rely on heteronormative ideas of masculinity and femininity. The conventional, culturally constructed view of this position is that men, the 'just warriors', make war, and women, as 'beautiful souls', provide 'succor and compassion' (Elshtain 1987: 4) and promote peace. This, however, is challenged by studies which indicate that be it peace, political conflict, or war-making, these cannot run without women's participation and support (Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001). Relatedly, the memory archives of twentiethcentury conflicts also make it amply clear that the experiences of men and women in conflict are gendered in nature. In other words, women experience conflicts differently. Sexual violence against women, for instance, has been a common, if not unavoidable, feature of conflicts (Chinkin 1994) including that in Kashmir. Although men, too, are subject to sexual violence, the rationale for men being the targets of such violence may differ from that used for women.

Cynthia Cockburn (2013: 434) explains this difference in the following words:

> A woman who is raped in war is raped *as a woman*, a despised category. A man who is raped is assaulted as a man, to reduce him to the status of a mere woman, and thus destroy his masculine self-respect. (Emphasis added.)

In the case of Kashmir, survivor testimonies have indicated that the 'interrogation techniques' utilised by the Indian armed forces have included electric shocks to their genitals, forcible performance of sexual acts on others, and rape, thus confirming that men, too, have been the targets of sexual violence (Hoenig and Singh 2014).[4] These instances of male sexual violence in Kashmir are however not as well-documented as those of violence against women, given their heightened stigma and shame. At the same time, there is significant reportage available on instances of sexual violence, including rape, against women, largely committed by the Indian armed forces since the beginning of the armed insurgency in the late 1980s. Apart from gendered experiences, the wars of the twentieth century—for example, in the Balkans and Rwanda—have provided us with historical knowledge that men and women also become targets of sexual violence because of their ethnic or national identity. That is why systematic rape in the context of war was categorised as a 'war weapon', (Kohn 1994: 199), a tactical tool used to harm and dominate not only individuals but also their communities.

Against the background of these conceptual frameworks, this essay aims at analysing sexual violence against women in Kashmir in the light of the law and policy developments of the twentieth century, particularly those that have occurred in the post-Balkan wars period. The first part of the essay aims at examining how sexual violence in Kashmir is significant, particularly in view of

the changed and strengthened human rights policy on sexual violence in conflict following the Balkan wars. The second part, while referring to instances of sexual violence against women in Kashmir in general, engages with the drivers of conflict-related sexual violence against women and their application in the Kashmir context. The third part highlights how, because of the distinct import of sexual violence in conflict zones, the state's international human rights obligations are implicated.

From regrettable excess to crime against humanity

Sexual violence in conflict zones is a long-existing phenomenon. An all too well-known, yet partial, list which is still fresh in popular memory, includes the close to 60,000 rapes of Bosnian women in the former Yugoslavia (1992-5); 40,000 in Liberia (1989-2003); 2,00,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (since 1998); and a staggering 1,00,000-2,50,000 rapes committed within just three months of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (UN Outreach Programme on the Rwandan Genocide 2018). Rape has often been used as a euphemism for sexual violence in conflict. At the same time, historical evidence from victim accounts illuminates how women suffer such violence in forms including, and other than, rape, for example, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and sexual humiliation (Leiby 2009). This enhanced understanding of the nature of conflict violence to which women are subjected has led to gradual law and policy developments. For instance, the United Nations acknowledges this broader strain and context of violence as 'Conflict-related Sexual Violence' (CRSV) rather than confining it to the commonly used 'wartime rape'.[5] The term 'wartime rape' refers to the context of an 'armed conflict', which is a legal term for war, whether declared and acknowledged or not. This may involve fighting between states or between states and armed groups

(Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs). Jurisprudential tests and legal thresholds are used in order to ascertain that the latter variety of conflicts are NIACs and, thus, will entail application of the international laws of war (read expanded protections and accountability for violations of rights of civilians including women). (*Prosecutor v Dusko Tadic* 1999; Vite 2009).[6]

It is, therefore, not surprising that states, including India, attempt to avoid conflicts being categorised as NIACs; in order to elude international scrutiny and accountability, they would rather refer to such conflicts as internal strife at best. In Kashmir's case, for instance, the Government of India's declared position at the UN is that no international or NIAC exists (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2013). This contradicts the existence of heavy militarisation in Kashmir and the continuance of special security laws which grant extensive powers and immunity from prosecution to the armed forces. Nonetheless, the prevention and protection of CRSV entails broader state responsibility for upholding human rights, as it relates to a strain of sexual violence which is 'directly or indirectly linked to *a conflict*', which need not be an 'armed conflict' in the technical sense cited above (UN Secretary General 2017). In any case, as has been argued elsewhere, a conflict or a 'conflict zone' is also a spatial or political concept which is capable of many revisionist possibilities and interdisciplinary interpretations, and may not necessarily be confined to legal technicalities (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009).

Therefore, the protective ambit of the concept of CRSV seeks to include prevention and prohibition of 'incidents *or* patterns' of sexual violence, including 'rape', or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity against women, men, or children, occurring in 'conflict or post-conflict settings or situations of political strife' (UN Secretary General 2010). This highlights that human rights policy does not mandate legal and

or strategic interventions by the state until such violence escalates to a certain (grave) magnitude; and an incidence–conflict nexus is what sets this strain of violence apart, say, from sexual violence ordinarily suffered by women qua women alone, that is, rape as an exercise of masculine power and dominance over women. The incidence–conflict nexus is visible in the profile of the perpetrator (state or non-state actor) and the survivor/victim's membership of a group, often within 'a climate of impunity' to make it context-specific (read conflict-related) sexual violence, and not mindless male sexual aggression run amok (UN Secretary General 2010). Therefore, experiential knowledge of sexualised violence against women in conflicts clarifies that they are targeted not only because they are women, but because they are *certain* women—it becomes an act of intersectional discrimination implicating gender, ethnic, and national, etc. identities—a cause for international human rights law concern (Pitaway and Bartolomei 2001: 27).

Before the conflicts of the 1990s—such as the Balkan wars—sexual violence, unlike other forms of conflict violence, such as murder or torture, was often dismissed as a by-product of wartime activity, as 'collateral damage' (Brownmiller 1975: 31). It was frequently downplayed as a private (sexual) act by soldiers (the boys-will-be-boys argument), or was completely denied (this never happened). For example, Peruvian army commanders, in their counter-insurgency operations against the Shining Path called it a 'necessary excess' (Brownmiller 1975: 31). Radovan Karadzic—now convicted, among other crimes, for the Srebrenica massacre, by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia—is quoted to have dismissively stated that of the few cases of rape by Serbian soldiers that he knew about, they were '*not organized*, but [were] done by psychopaths' (Iacobelli 2009: 270). With reference to an incident in Kashmir,

an Indian army officer was quoted as stating in a similar, flippant vein: 'A soldier conducting an operation at the dead of the night is unlikely to think of rape when he is not even certain if he will return alive' (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993: 17). It was soon realised that it is this acceptance, dismissal, or condoning of rape as an inevitable consequence of conflict, that lends itself to being utilised as a 'weapon of war' in an armed conflict context, and as a political tool in conflict situations other than those of the armed variety (Cockburn 2013: 441). Therefore, this dismissiveness and resultant lack of accountability for a violation of rights had to be addressed by gender-and ethnic-identity sensitive policy changes.

The Balkan wars and the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s, in particular, redefined the way sexual violence against women in conflicts has come to be understood. The carefully garnered evidence from the former Yugoslavia, for example, revealed that Bosnian women were raped as a project of ethnic cleansing and humiliation, and as a 'weapon of war' (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). Among other motivations, women were raped in order to impregnate them with Serb babies, in furtherance of the Serb national project of creating a Greater Serbia (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). The rapes of Tutsi women in Rwanda were systematically carried out as an act of genocide to breed out the Tutsi people in the country (Alvarez 1998–9: 359).[7] Due to media attention focussed on the horrors of this violence, coupled with feminist lobbying, conflict-rape, when systematically committed in the course of armed conflicts, came to be recognised as a crime against humanity, a war crime, and also as an act of genocide before international courts (Park 2007: 13).[8] These developments changed the way sexualised violence and rape in conflict are perceived worldwide. Given this heightened understanding, that ethnic and national identity are often central to the violence

suffered by women in conflicts, to now refer to this violence as a regrettable by-product of wartime or of conflict, or as an isolated event of aggressive male sexuality, is to speak of it cursorily. Understanding sexual violence against women in Kashmir has to be placed within this broader continuum of historical, legal, and policy transformations.

Kashmir in the CRSV framework

A brief sketch of the incidence, nature, and extent of sexual violence in Kashmir will help place things in perspective in relation to the preceding discussion. Since the outbreak of the conflict in the late 1980s, such violence has regularly been reported. Of the conflict-related rapes reported from Kashmir, an overwhelming number indict the Indian armed forces.[9] Rapes by militants, although rare, have also been reported; however, as has been noted elsewhere, the armed forces as the representatives of the state violate human rights, while militants violate law (Varadarajan 1993: 5). Unsurprisingly, an accurate estimation of the number of rapes in Kashmir is difficult to obtain; the available information however indicates that the practise is regular. A 2006 Médecins Sans Frontières study on rape in Kashmir found that the number of people witnessing or hearing of a rape between 1989 and 1990 was far higher than that in high-intensity conflicts such as in Sierra Leone or Sri Lanka (Médecins Sans Frontières 2006). Eighteen documented cases of rape by Indian armed forces ranging from the Jamir-Qadeem, Sopore case in 1990, to the Gujjardora-Manzgam case of 2011 have been recorded (Kazi 2014: 14).[10] The most frequently cited examples, however, remain the mass rape at Kunan Poshpora and the Handwara and Mubeena Gani rape cases. In Kunan Poshpora, during a cordon and search operation, about 800 soldiers of the Indian army gang-raped between 20

and 60 women. The ages of the survivors ranged from 13 to 60, including a young pregnant woman, who later delivered a baby with a fractured arm (Batool et al. 2016: 82; Jha 2013). In 2004, in a village in Handwara, a mother and her 10-year-old daughter were raped by a major of the Rashtriya Rifles (Peer 2016: 200–2). Mubeena Gani, a young bride, was raped by a group of Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on 16 May 1990, the evening of her wedding, when she was on her way to her husband's house with the groom's entourage (Varadarajan and Joshi 2002).

These instances provide an indication of the prevalence, nature and scale of the rapes in Kashmir. However, these parameters, too, have to be placed within the CRSV paradigm, in order to understand their salience in a particular context. It has been argued that the prevalence and scale (quantitative information) of rape and sexual violence may no longer be the sole compelling methodological driver for provoking human rights interventions at the state or international level. It is now thought that even isolated incidents of sexual violence (quantitative information) when complemented with contextual factors (qualitative information), such as conflict history or the politics and motivation of perpetrators, will warrant legal action and protection, even at the international level (Boesten 2017: 506). Scale assumes significance when sexual violence occurs in mass numbers during armed conflicts as part of a systematic policy, and cán be prosecuted as a crime against humanity or war crimes (Meron 1993: 424). Otherwise, even sporadic, regular incidents of sexual violence necessitate stricter enforcement of human rights guarantees, scaled up preventive measures, and stringent accountability mechanisms and outcomes if the victim and perpetrator profiles remain unchanged within a charged political context, and the incidence–conflict nexus is established (Boesten 2017).

Women's bodies as symbols of the nation

Although sexual violence is a gendered violation committed against women qua women, the evidence from conflicts since the 1990s brought to cognisance that *certain* women suffer sexual violence by *certain* men for particular purposes (MacKinnon 1993: 64-5). In the case of Bosnia and Rwanda, this form of violence was inflicted for annihilating the group to which the women belonged, with forced impregnation and genocidal rape being the modus operandi for achieving that end. In other conflicts, where mass, systematic rape as a weapon of war may be absent, sexual violence becomes a tool for achieving political goals, namely control and repression.

Scholars have sought to explore the rationale behind the deployment of sexual violence as a tool to further political ends in conflict. Ruth Seifert (1996: 39) observes that, in many cultures, women are viewed as an embodiment of the nation, in which case, the rape of the women of a community is intended as the 'symbolic rape' of their entire community. This symbolic association of a community's women with their nation's essence is used for a specific function in a militarised imaginary: for instance, it has been argued that the position of a woman as a mother is a dominant symbolic imagery that becomes visible in conflict situations (Mookherjee 2008: 36). In other words, the woman is 'encoded' as the 'collective womb' of the nation (Raven-Roberts 2013: 50). That being so, the 'physical and emotional destruction' of women of a nation functions as a vicarious 'rape of the body of that community' and is employed in undermining the morale and strength of the community (Seifert 1996). This sense of 'violation' is compounded by the physical, social, and psychological effects the violence may have within the particularity of a social setting.

The practical impact of this in the Kashmir context can be garnered from some of these examples. A report by the Centre for Policy Analysis (CPA) on the Kunan Poshpora case highlights the general and long-term social and psychological implications of sexual violence for women in Kashmir (*Kashmir Times* 2018). The report highlighted that women from Kunan Poshpora have faced strained relations in their marital homes and ostracism by a deeply patriarchal society, which treats women as an embodiment of family 'honour', the violation of which amounts to the loss of such honour. In a context where loss of virginity and consensual or forced sex outside marriage are stigmatised, unmarried women from villages who have, or are presumed to have, suffered sexual violence, cannot find suitors after an incident of mass rape. The report also detailed that the women suffer from trauma, physical ailments, and that many have had to undergo hysterectomies as a consequence of the violence (*Kashmir Times* 2018). By losing their capacity to provide reproductive labour (which is one of their primary functions in a patriarchal imaginary) an additional strain of isolation from the community is foisted upon them. In another instance, the case of Mubeena Gani mentioned above, even though her husband, resisting social pressure, did not abandon her after the rape, the couple was ostracised by their relatives and villagers who were ostensibly influenced by ideas of purity and pollution (Peer 2010: 149).[11] Often, thus, the isolation of the survivor or her family begins within close kinship and community ties, where 'honour takes precedence over victimhood' (Bhasin Jamwal 2017). The social, psychological, and physical consequences of this violence, therefore, result in the 'shattering' of its victims and 'driving a wedge through the community' (MacKinnon 1993: 66), thereby fulfilling the

militaristic goals of control and domination of a community by weakening its constituents.

Women also become targets of sexual violence by being primarily identified as sympathisers of dissidents and, therefore, 'subversives' by association or through lending support. Cynthia Enloe (1990: 1) refers to this category of militarised rape as 'national security rape', or a form of sexualised violence inflicted to punish and humiliate 'subversive' women for what are perceived as threats to national security. This may be due to their direct or indirect support or participation in a 'subversive' movement or through their relationship with 'subversive' men. A Human Rights Watch report detailed these types of rape in Kashmir where women were targeted for being militant sympathisers, or became targets in reprisal attacks after a militant ambush (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993: 1). In this form of violence, therefore, sexual violence is inflicted on women in their primary capacity as sympathisers and, therefore, subversives, by actual or perceived association.

Additionally, as Catherine MacKinnon (2006: 223) has argued, rape in conflicts is also used as a 'humiliation rite' by perpetrators for the men on the opposing side, by underlining their failure to 'protect' their women. In this manner, women's bodies are encrypted as vessels through which masculine messages of 'rape as exercise of power' by the perpetrator are transmitted to the opposing side. Although this may be true for the rape of women by armed forces in any set of circumstances, certain survivor accounts make this argument particularly cogent. During personal interviews with rape survivors in Kashmir, many respondents stated that they had been 'raped in the presence of their own families, their own husbands, and their own children'; (Kazi 2014: 14). Rape as a spectacle assumes the character of a 'humiliation rite' as women are stereotypically associated with

the 'need for protection' and men with providing that protection. Such associations underlie sexual violence and rape being used as tools of domination (Enloe 1990). Relatedly, the inability to 'rescue' and 'protect' their women evokes a sense of 'emasculation' (in terms of masculinity) on the part of the men of a community. A reservoir of emasculated men, through this and other forms of everyday humiliation in a conflict zone, may have long-term societal effects. For example, it has been argued that this can be a contributory factor behind increased domestic violence against women within a region (Amnesty International 2004: 18); a community's aggravated and helpless men are likely to project a sense of power where they are most able to, i.e., in their homes.

The emphasis on women being targeted for sexual violence because of their national or ethnic identity may not necessarily mean that women lose their subjectivity as women. That is, crimes against them as women may not become secondary to crimes against their group. Rather, this parameter—that of their identity—has to be an additional feature in calibrating responses to sexual violence. Rhonda Copelon (1995: 197) proposes that 'surfacing gender', that is, acknowledging the importance of their gender alongside the significance of their identity in theorising sexual violence against women in conflict, may help to take care of subjectivity as a concern.

Immunity, impunity, and elusive justice

The juridical backdrop against which sexual violence occurs in Kashmir has been referred to as a 'legal civil war', a situation in which the operation of immunity laws, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1990, enforces an indefinite 'state of exception' or emergency, and has an impact on everyday lives and processes of justice (Duschinski 2009: 692). This means that because of the legal immunities afforded to armed forces, any

reporting and redress of sexual abuse is stonewalled. One of the key contributory factors behind this lack of access to justice is that any prosecution of the armed forces by civilian courts entails seeking executive sanction, which is never granted (Amnesty International 2015: 27). Usually, in situations of extreme public pressure, court martial proceedings may be initiated, as was done in the Handwara rape case, for instance. These have however been severely criticised for falling short of international standards of fair trial and natural justice. Additionally, the process is inaccessible and opaque for victims, and has been condemned for treating perpetrators too leniently (Peer 2016). Pertinently, in the Handwara case, the Supreme Court ruled that court martials could not be subject to the superintendence of the high court, hence reinforcing their nature as impervious and inscrutable forms of justice (*Union of India and Others* v. *Major A Hussain: 1998*).

Within such a constraining legal apparatus and a judicial process which is unresponsive to restoration of rights and to accountability, a survey of the state's response to prominent cases of sexual violence in Kashmir becomes important. These will help illustrate the applicability of the CRSV paradigm in the Kashmir context. In the case of the Kunan Poshpora rapes, the state's initial response was to deny that the incident had ever occurred. An inquiry by the Press Council of India, a non-judicial body, three months after the rapes, exonerated the army by discrediting victim testimonies, finding contradictions in their statements, or downplaying what had happened to them, by stating that these 'abrasions are common among Kashmiris'. They termed their narratives 'tutored' and 'coerced', while calling the incident a 'massive hoax' (Press Council of India 1991: 146). Independent judicial enquiries observed that normal investigative procedures were ignored in this case, indicating the state's active

attempt to brush the incident under the rug (Noorani 1991). After reinvigorated efforts by Kashmiri women to revive the case, in 2011, the State Human Rights Commission ordered its reopening and investigation, followed by a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court seeking compensation for survivors and monitoring of the investigation (Masood 2014). Although, in an unprecedented move, the high court ordered compensation, the Supreme Court has stayed further proceedings in the case as on date (Masood 2015). Similarly, because of the state's efforts to thwart a fair investigative procedure in the rapes of Asia and Neelofer in Shopian, it has been termed a cover-up (Fazili 2014). A Yale Law School (2009) report has also noted that notwithstanding litigants approaching courts against the armed forces in cases, including rape, not a single conviction has been achieved, spawning a culture of impunity for such and other forms of human rights abuse.

Given this impunity and the vulnerabilities of Kashmiri women to sexual violence in a charged political context, in the ways described above, a redefinition of the concepts of 'accountability' and 'redress' needs to be attempted within a CRSV paradigm. This would involve a feminist redefinition of the concept of 'security', which requires the bringing about of an absence of military, economic, and sexual violence specific to women (Tickner 1992: 66). This position accommodates the broader concept of 'human security' which emphasises guaranteeing freedom, dignity, and an 'absence of fear' to individuals to enable them to develop their full potential (UN General Assembly 2012). A critical feminist understanding of 'human security' also acknowledges intersectional identities of women involving their gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc; identities that underlie conflict violence against women (Hudson 2005). Considering these, it was thought important that women in

conflict situations receive special human rights protection, so that state behaviour and structures do not make it impossible for them to achieve the end of 'developing their full potential'. That is why Security Council Resolution 1325 was passed, which recognised the specific effects of war and conflict on women, and called on states to take measures to prevent sexual violence, apply international human rights law, and end impunity (UN Security Council 2000). These cannot happen unless structures of immunity, impunity, and denial continue to thrive. The CRSV paradigm also mandates that the rights of women to equal protection under law and access to justice be ensured in a conflict setting. This is currently elusive, in the absence of a comprehensive approach to ending impunity for CRSV (UN Security Council 2008). Besides, international legal policy acknowledges that when sexual violence in conflict is directed against civilians, it in the first place impedes a just resolution to the conflict (UN Security Council 2010).

The institutional response to sexual violence in Kashmir also needs to be seen within the larger framework of the tripartite human rights obligations of the state: the responsibility to 'respect, protect and fulfil' (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). The obligation to 'respect' means that states must refrain from interfering with or curtailing human rights. The obligation to 'protect' requires states to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses, committed either by its own representatives or by private actors. The obligation to 'fulfil' means that states are mandated to take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights, including the existence of robust institutions and accountability mechanisms to ensure access to justice. When CRSV occurs in Kashmir and is followed by the lack of meaningful redressal mechanisms, these fundamental tripartite human rights obligations of the state

towards the survivors remain unfulfilled. This is exacerbated by the fact that official apathy and even acquiescence is evident through certain recorded instances, for example, military authorities terming sexual violence by the armed forces in Kashmir as a 'regrettable excess', or soldiers recorded to have acknowledged that they were ordered to rape (Kazi 2014: 29). This scenario seriously calls into question the current mechanisms of redress, as well as underscores the need to place sexual violence in Kashmir within the perspective of global debates and transformations on human rights policy on CRSV, which treats both gender and national identity-based targeting of women as a matter of international concern.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the fact that sexual violence is so pervasive in conflicts, it has often been underplayed as an atrocity. At most, it was described as the personal act of soldiers. The law and policy transformations of the twentieth century have however changed that perception. Such a portrayal is now not only considered narrow and depoliticised, but is seen as ignoring how sexual violence can be, and is, deployed in conflict situations for the fulfilment of political goals. The learning from past conflicts has given rise to the CRSV paradigm, which encompasses this understanding and helps to adequately evaluate institutional responses to such violence once it occurs. In the Kashmir case, therefore, we need to call this violence by its rightful name, and gauge institutional responses within this paradigm. The fact that the state responds to such violence with de facto and de jure immunity militates directly against the intention and directive of its mandate. As Brownmiller (1975: 31) has argued, men do not rape because they can but because they are explicitly or implicitly encouraged to do so.

Endnotes

[1]A more complex analysis of militarisation, however, understands it through its involvement of, and impact on, society and institutions. In that sense, it entails discursive and material processes through which societies prepare for war, including the 'shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals'. See Lutz (2002).

[2]For details of the military's engagement in civilian life as an avowed policy of counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir, see Anant (2011).

[3]For an understanding of how the lines between these concepts can blur, see the Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990, Section 4(a), and how its operation facilitates this. Any commissioned or non-commissioned officer: 'if he is of the opinion that it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area'. Also see Human Rights Watch (2011).

[4]In the Kashmiri lexicon, 'interrogation' is often used as a euphemism for torture, given its prevalence in questioning by the armed forces. For details, see Mathur (2016: 16–20).

[5]'Conflict-related sexual violence' and 'sexual violence' will hereafter be used interchangeably.

[6]Sylvian Vite (2009) finds that one of the tests for declaring a conflict as an NIAC is the 'collective nature of fighting' or the state being obliged to use its army because the police is unable to deal with the situation 'on their own'.

[7]See, particularly, the judgment in the Akayesu case where rape was adjudged a weapon of war and an act of genocide when systematically undertaken against a community in an armed conflict. For details, see Alvarez (1998–9).

[8]For these and other related changes brought about by international tribunals established after the Bosnia and Rwanda conflicts, see Park (2007).

[9]In reply to a question in the legislative assembly, the then chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), Omar Abdullah, placed the registered number of rapes in J&K between 1989 and 2013 at 5,125. The number of rapes by

state forces far outnumbered those by insurgents. Besides, abuse by armed forces as representatives of a state invites international legal obligations, such as enforcement of human rights, which are not enforceable against insurgents, who violate law, not human rights (Abbas 2013).

[10]For the full list of cases, see Kazi (2014).

[11]Basharat Peer provides comprehensive details of Mubeena Gani's rape, as well as her subsequent life.

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Sexual Violence and Patriarchy in a Militarised State

ESSAR BATOOL

Kashmir's armed struggle has been a matter of serious concern for the Indian state which has been claiming Kashmir as an 'integral part' of itself contrary to the political aspiration of many Kashmiris. The embarrassment caused to the world's largest democracy by the movement for self-determination and the resistance to military occupation by the people of Kashmir has been retaliated against with extreme violence and gross human rights violations. In different cycles of both armed and civilian resistance, hundreds have been injured, killed, and maimed as a consequence of direct physical violence perpetrated by the Indian state, with absolute impunity for these crimes (Human Rights Watch Report 1993a). People across the divide of age, religion, and gender have protested against the occupation in Kashmir. While researching and writing about human rights violations in this region, widely believed to be the consequence of military occupation and army operations against armed rebellion, the widespread use of sexual violence by the armed forces—which remain protected by the guarantee of legal immunity under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958—deserves serious attention.

Sexual violence has effectively been used as a weapon across the world to crush resistance and break the morale of people in conflict zones. In Kashmir too, such violence has been used as

an important part of a strategy to crush support for the popular armed rebellion in the Valley. Families of militants, mostly women, have obviously been attacked, but the families of non-combatants and civilians have also been victims and survivors of this violence. It is often incorrectly assumed that sexual violence is directed only against women; men have equally been victims of a sexualised form of violence but the motive for perpetrating sexual violence against them is distinct from that against women (Kazi 2008).

Gendered shades

Sexual violence against women by men is not about male desire for sexual gratification but a proven assertion of sexual power to subjugate, given the unequal power dynamics between genders in society. Many cases of sexual violence committed by civilian men against women end with the woman being killed or mutilated, proving that aggression and a display of masculinity form the basis of motivation for such crimes. Coupled with the social structure, where blame and shame are directed towards the victim, sexual violence against women becomes an instant tool to break a woman's sense of self, forcing her into victimisation (Bhugra and Kalra 2013: 244–9).

Sexual violence against women which manifests itself in the context of militarisation, is a fatal combination of unquestionable power and absolute impunity, as is the case in Kashmir. The military has used sexual violence against women as a means to punish those who resist them and the communities to which they belong. It is an attack on 'collective honour', not just of individuals and their immediate families, but of a collective identity (Human Rights Watch 1993b). In a state of militarisation, the idea of the 'other' or the 'enemy' is strongly and actively nurtured, and sexual violence by this 'other' is seen

as aggression against the entire community. Kashmir's history is replete with examples of how the Indian state, through its armed forces, attacked the entire Kashmiri community. In 1991, a unit of the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the Indian armed forces raped women within their homes in the twin villages of Kunan Poshpora, while the men were being tortured during a cordon and search operation. This was intended as an attack not just on the 'honour' of the people of these villages, but on the entire Kashmiri community,which has been supporting the armed struggle against the Indian state, as a representative action capable of breaking the community (Batool et al. 2016).

There are other manifestations of this state-sponsored sexual violence, ranging from everyday harassment on streets to trying to embarrass women during search operations by displaying their undergarments, to the outright rape of individual women and collective mass rape (Qadri and Haziq 2016). Limiting the definition of violence only to rape or penetration would result in negating the everyday experiences of thousands of women subjected to institutionalised violence supported by impunity. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as

> any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (Krug et al. 2002: 149.)

Of impunity and denial

Sexual violence follows the impunity that the Indian armed forces have in Kashmir under the protection of AFSPA. The Act was passed in some states of India on 11 September 1958, but was

extended to Kashmir in July 1990. Under the Act, army personnel can enter and search houses to make arrests without a warrant, and fire to injure or even kill any individual 'suspected' to be acting against the law. Fake encounters, custodial and civilian killings, detentions and disappearances are a consequence of the impunity, which this Act provides to the Indian armed forces (Wani et al. 2013: 62). In addition to the impunity that AFSPA grants, there is an extended cover of legal impunity, as proven recently when the Supreme Court of India stayed investigations against Major Aditya Kumar accused of firing on and killing three civilians in Shopian in January 2018 (Soni 2018).

Accusations of rape and sexual violence are met with bland denial. To date, no accused from the army has been tried in a civilian court, even when there are provisions for them to be so tried for crimes such as rape, murder, and culpable homicide. Even in cases where there have been trials in a military court, the accused has merely been suspended from service, as in the case of Major Rahman, who raped a mother and daughter in Bader Payeen in Handwara in 2004 (Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society Report 2015). He was suspended after a court martial but reinstated later (Jaleel 2018). It is abundantly clear that punishment for sexual violence is only an eyewash, intended to deceive people. The Indian armed forces have used sexual violence against women to generate a sense of fear among the people, and to establish a norm for punishing people who might support resistance against the state. As in the case of the mass rape in Kunan Poshpora in 1991, the incident was a collective punishment against the villagers for 'sheltering militants'. By violating the bodies of women a message was sent out, and not just once, that the community would be broken in any way possible for an act of defiance. These offences have not been limited to just the Indian armed forces, they were used as

a tactic by the government-sponsored militia known as *ikhwan*s, to consolidate their power and instil fear amongst Kashmiris. Their crimes went unchallenged and unquestioned (Human Rights Watch 1996).

While sexual violence against women in Kashmir has received attention, countless men in Kashmir are also victims of sexual assault perpetrated by various apparatuses of the Indian state. Sexual violence works on similar lines of power and subjugation among both men and women, especially in conflict zones where it is a more explicit weapon against a certain population. Within the patriarchal structure, however, sexual violence against men tends to break an individual, bearing in mind the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Sexual violence against men, mostly boys, is also a reality in both conflict and non-conflict zones, but is largely neglected, as it is erroneously thought to be a rarity (Kapur and Mudell 2016: 11–14). This further complicates the gender equations underlying the idea of why sexual violence is prevalent and perpetrated. Gender relations in sexual violence are largely seen as men perpetrating violence against women, but the vulnerability of men to sexual assault in conflicts results in both men and women being victims. Sexual violence against men in conflict areas such as Kashmir has been used primarily as a torture technique; being sexually violated has been reported as routine by those who have been detained by the Indian armed forces. Common techniques include the mutilation of genitals, forced sodomy or insertion of an object into the anal canal (Qadri 2016). When used against men, sexual violence is a tool to break the man, to induce a sense of shame, and to dent the victim's masculinity, so that he breaks down into revealing what is required of him, or as punishment for defying the state. The sexual abuse, torture, and mutilation of male detainees or prisoners are frequently carried out to attack and destroy the

victims's sense of masculinity or manhood (United Nations report 2002).

A step ahead in this discourse around sexual violence against men and women would be discussing the much ignored sexual violence faced by transgender persons in Kashmir, which is not considered even a remote possibility, given the focus on the gender binary. The transgender from Maisuma, Javed Ahmad, also called Jave Maam, is famous for his style of protest. Jave Maam adopted the term *ragda* which became the hallmark of protest sloganeering in the 2008 protests. Jave, like other Kashmiris, faced sexual violence when he was stripped naked as a punitive action for protesting (Rashid 2017).

Patriarchy as an ally

An understanding of and critical research on how sexual violence has been used by states against people in armed conflicts worldwide, clearly establishes that sexual violence is an effective tool to break people. Militarisation in Kashmir has led to a climate of impunity and lack of accountability, in which people are unable to report to or engage with institutions which would otherwise provide them with redress. The low incidence of reporting of cases against the Indian state can be attributed to the fear of reprisal against the people concerned, as there are no precedents of punitive action against perpetrators. There is no denying that militarisation provides the cover of impunity to its apparatuses, but a critical ally in the effectiveness of a weapon such as sexual violence, is the patriarchal structure of society. The state, and the military itself is a patriarchal institution which morally covers up for its crimes by using patriarchal excuses, especially when it comes to sexual violence. Apologists for the Indian armed forces have used the plea of armed men being jawans, young men who are bound to commit sexual

misdemeanours which have nothing to do with the state, but is a commonly accepted aberration of male behaviour. It is an exoneration of perpetrators using what is a universal system of oppression, justifying male dominance and excesses.

The deeper problem is that men appear to use sexual violence not only in times of war against the 'enemy', but also when their role is perceived to be that of protectors. An example of widespread unchecked sexual abuse by UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, Cambodia, Congo, etc., against women and minors, demonstrates that, combined with a military/armed forces backdrop, sexual violence is bound to be used to terrorise and abuse those who are vulnerable (Anderlini 2017). The state understands the patriarchal character of Kashmiri society which makes sexual violence effective. One example of this is considering the bodies of women as repositories of the 'honour', 'chastity', and 'chivalry' of men which, when violated by the enemy, psychologically breaks the men of the community, highlighting their inability to 'protect their women', a role which patriarchy assigns to them (Coomaraswamy 2002).

Similarly, when sexual violence against men is used to break their 'masculinity', and to 'feminise' them, it is in accordance with the patriarchal notion that a man will no longer be fit to be a protector as he is now 'feminised', a helpless individual overpowered through infliction of sexual violence. The refusal of men to report or document cases of sexual violence against them for fear of losing their reputation in society and of the stigma of being mocked as 'effeminate', is strong evidence of patriarchy helping the larger occupation. 'Men may also be loath to speak about being victimised, considering this to be incompatible with their masculinity, particularly in societies where men are discouraged from talking about their emotions' (Sivakumaram 2007: 255). This is similar to women victims of

sexual violence who would rather not report the violence against them for fear of reprisal, given the social stigma attached to rape and sexual violence. A glaring example of this as was the Kunan Poshpora mass rape in which many unmarried survivors preferred not to be named in legal documents for fear of their future. The entire scenario of the experiences of transgender persons missing from the broader narrative of occupation is also an example of how, as a society, we are yet to open up beyond a patriarchal gender binary.

The idea is not to exonerate militarisation and occupation as reasons for and as a system to perpetrate sexual violence against Kashmiris, but to understand that patriarchy has been effectively used against Kashmiris to break and silence them. Questioning the structures of patriarchy in Kashmiri resistance is important, especially as women and transgender persons have come together in this movement, both as contributors to resistance and as victims of violence. The recent image of young college girls on the streets with stones in their hands, should lead the way; they did not merely scare the occupation, they broke gender norms to foil a plot and the narrative of the Indian state, of portraying women as victims whose actions are directed and dictated by men.

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3 Political Imaginaries

The New Kashmiri Woman

state-led feminism in 'Naya Kashmir'

HAFSA KANJWAL

During the last decade of the twentieth century, as the Kashmir Valley was in the midst of an armed uprising against the Indian state, Shamla Mufti (1928–2008), one of the first female Muslim educationists in Kashmir, published her autobiography, *Chilman se Chaman* (From Darkness to Light) in 1994. Mufti was the former principal of the premier Women's College in Srinagar, and was also one of the first Muslim women to receive her master's degree from Aligarh in the 1950s. In the beginning of the autobiography, Mufti states that her target audience is the new generation of girls in Kashmir, a generation whose experience has been refracted primarily through the prism of armed conflict. She wants this generation to learn about their recent history and is afraid that they are being raised without an understanding of the sacrifices and struggles of their predecessors.

Mufti's autobiography is structured alongside three important moments in the history of modern Kashmir. The first, which encompasses the final two decades of the repressive monarchical rule of the Dogras in the state, describes her family background, childhood, and early marital and home life, and speaks about the multiple ways in which she, as a young Muslim woman, was restricted both in relation to the Dogras as well as the prevalent conservative norms of the emerging urban, middle-class Kashmiri Muslim society of the time. Mufti was married at an early age,

before she completed her schooling, and much of her narrative revolves around how she continued her education and gained employment, in the face of criticism from her family and her in-laws. The second moment, which arises in the immediate aftermath of Partition and Kashmir's disputed accession to India, as well as the rise of the Kashmiri-led National Conference (NC) government, narrates her experiences of obtaining higher education and working in a number of schools and colleges. It traces an 'opening' that existed for a number of Kashmiri women who were able to leave the confines of their homes under the new policies of the state government. Finally, the third moment, which is not covered in as much depth as the other two, provides a brief overview of the increasing political instability in the state and its implications for everyday life, including the closures that it enforced on the period of 'opening up'.

While I will briefly address the first and the third moments, it is the second moment—the construction of the new NC state government and its policies for female empowerment—that will be the focus of this essay. In doing so, it is argued that state-sponsored feminism—while providing an upwardly socially mobile group of Kashmiri women opportunities for education, employment, and mobility—was paternalistic and ideologically motivated in its vision. As a consequence, no indigenous, independent women's movement emerged in the state, and women's issues became contested and linked to what was increasingly seen by them as illegitimate rule.

Building a 'Naya Kashmir'

The NC was an anti-monarchical, left-leaning, secular, nationalist Kashmiri political party which, with the support of the Government of India, came to power in Jammu & Kashmir in 1947, in the aftermath of Partition and the accession of Kashmir

to India. While the leadership of the NC had links to the Indian National Congress, the party retained a distinct political identity which emerged in the late Dogra period, and was instrumental in formulating a unique brand of Kashmiri nationalism. In 1944, the NC published *Naya Kashmir*, a Soviet-styled manifesto which sought to pave the way for an independent, modernising, socialist welfare state which would reduce the monarch to a titular figurehead. Addressing the dire social conditions prevalent under the Dogras, it incorporated important interventions, including free education, the abolition of landlordism, and land to the tiller.[1]

The manifesto also had an entire section dedicated to women's issues. Indeed, its cover, set against a red background, featured a Kashmiri Muslim woman, Zuni Gujjer, an activist in the NC (Whitehead 2017). Using Zuni Gujjer's image was no small matter; the party sought to be the voice of the most marginalised in society. On the question of women, the manifesto 'advocated equal wages, paid leave during pregnancy, and the right to enter trades and professions, to own and inherit property and to consent to marriage' (Whitehead 2017). It also promoted girls' education and opportunities for women's employment.

While Kashmir's political context shifted after 1947, the NC state government, which had approved of the accession to India, nevertheless attempted to implement various sections of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, and also struggled to maintain political autonomy for Kashmir. Women's education, and later employment, became a primary target for intervention by the state government, being committed to creating a citizenry which would be able to paticipate in the development of the region. One of the important legacies of Sheikh Abdullah's government is the founding of the Women's College in 1950, which was the first institution of higher education for women in the state.[2] In 1953, Abdullah was deposed from power and his successor,

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, became the second prime minister of the state; he continued to implement the ideals of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto in his project of state building and reform. Thus, using the manifesto as a frame of reference, I refer to the period of state building, post 1947, as 'Naya Kashmir'.

Shamla Mufti's autobiography provides an important lens through which to view Naya Kashmir. This is primarily because it goes beyond the realm of political intrigues in Kashmir, and speaks directly to issues of social and cultural transformation within families, homes, schools, colleges, and workspaces. Her account, therefore, gives us a unique perspective on Naya Kashmir, absent in the existing narratives of the male Kashmiri political and religious leadership of the time.[3] Through her personal observations of the changes in Kashmiri society at the time, we are able to envision the impact of Naya Kashmir on Kashmiri women, in particular.

Historiographical limitations

The limited historiography on Naya Kashmir deals with how it was a particularly liberating moment for Kashmiri women. Shahzada Akhter (2015) writes how the NC upheld women's equality and involved all sections of society, especially the lower classes, through free education, land reform, modernisation and development programmes. Andrew Whitehead (2017) mentions the Women's Self Defence Corps of the NC in 1947 which received training against the invading tribal army from Pakistan, describing the military-style drill as 'a moment of political empowerment just at the eruption of the still unresolved Kashmir conflict'. Farida Abdullah Khan (2005: 136) compares the situation in Kashmir with that of other states in India, and says that in contrast to the colonial context of the nineteenth century, education for women in Kashmir began

> under a socialist programme rather than by elite groups of philanthropic organisations with their own agenda for women's education ... The goal was ... to produce ... partners in the development and progress of the region and its people and the emergence of a 'new' Kashmir.

Nyla Ali Khan (2010) also notes how the Women's College was an emancipatory forum for women, allowed them to broaden their horizons, and also mobilised women from various socio-economic classes to enhance their educational and professional lives. In another work, Khan notes how Begum Akbar Jahan, Sheikh Abdullah's wife, paved the way for the empowerment of women, stepping out of ascribed gender roles to create a presence for women in public life. As women broadened their horizons, Khan (2014: 12) argues that they were 'mobilised to avail themselves of educational opportunities to enhance their professional skills, and attempt to reform existing structures so as to accommodate more women'. Yet, none of these authors provide the broader context for NC's rule: the secular, democratic, 'nationalist' NC agenda was also deeply contested in the state, given its ties to the Government of India, and there was a significant degree of coercion that was exerted to maintain its rule, even in schools and colleges. For example, as Akhter details, the fact that Kashmiri women were allowed to vote obscures the context that elections in the state were held under the most undemocratic of circumstances, where only NC candidates were 'elected' to positions of power.

While portraying the NC government as being particularly empowering for Kashmiri women, most of these scholars place the blame for the decline in women's empowerment on the armed militancy in Kashmir. For example, Khan explicitly (2010: 115) attributes it to the militancy, given that women's activism in Kashmir was reduced to 'their identities as grieving mother,

martyr's mother or rape victim'. She also mourns this period as one in which the voices of civil society were relegated to the background and dissenting voices were suppressed, giving the impression that such a clampdown did not exist earlier when Abdullah was in power.

Both Krishna Misri and Rita Manchanda, who have also written on the relationship between gender and the Kashmir conflict, concur with this assessment. For example, Manchanda (2001) argues that in the recent past, the pro-freedom groups have instrumentalised Kashmiri women, using them for propaganda purposes. Misri (2002: 25) suggests that the 'post-Independence era opened new vistas for the emancipation and empowerment of women', and that the 'new political and institutional milieu encouraged women to look forward to the future as equal partners in the reconstruction of the socio-economic matrix'. Kashmiri women thus became partners in the struggle to generate greater political consciousness as well as better economic and educational opportunities for all. This allowed them to step out of their usual familial, caste, and religious identities.

> The changing landscape saw them making their own small choices and this was reflected in their dress, demeanour and deportment. Breaking free from purdah, many donned [the] sari which did not symbolize a particular identity then. (Misri 2010: 311.)

Misri affirms that 'women had come into their own ... Reconstituting themselves, they exhibited confidence to break the shells of stereotype images and projected new images of modern and professional women.' Once more, the 'secular' and 'democratic' state government is seen as enabling women to break away from the cultural and religious shackles that bind them, and propelling them towards modernity.

In these analyses, the Kashmiri state prior to the 1980s had made significant progress in women's emancipation, as evidenced by increased economic and employment opportunities, a greater presence of women in public life, and the shedding of the burqa/purdah. Nyla Ali Khan, Misri, and Manchanda lay the blame on right-wing Islamist movements that emerged during the militancy, for effectively curtailing the progress that had been made (Khan 2010: 122). Although Misri does take into account how patriarchy reconstitutes itself in male-initiated processes of social change, she does not critically examine the state's project for Kashmiri women.

Far from being a feature of the post-militancy period, however, I contend that the nature of Naya Kashmir's state-sponsored feminism, in and of itself, restricted the full potential of women's emancipatory projects. I wish to focus on the ambiguities of the state project by highlighting the openings that were created for women at this time, but also noting how they were curtailed. My attempt here is to sidestep the binaries of empowerment/disempowerment, underscoring both the nature of the state project as it related to women at this particular historical moment, and the multiple effects it had on the ground.

Given that women's empowerment was intrinsic to the development of a socialist, modernising state, the vision for the 'new woman' in Kashmir was linked to, but also separate from, the 'new woman' who emerged in social reform projects in India and Pakistan, which were centred more on foregrounding woman's spiritual/religious difference from that of her Western counterpart (Chatterjee 1989). As Reza Pirbhai (2014) argues in the case of Pakistan, the non-clerical male leadership affiliated with the Muslim League promoted an ideal for the 'new woman' which was grounded in Islamic principles, promising the right

to inheritance, divorce, and property, while also challenging customs such as purdah and polygyny.

Nirmala Banerjee (1998) argues that modernisation in Nehruvian India failed to eradicate gender discrimination between men and women because, rather than introducing radical economic measures, the policies of the post-Independence Indian state continued to see women as targets for household and motherhood-oriented services. She contends that 'challenging the patriarchal ethos of society has never been the agenda of the Indian state'. One important parallel between the Indian case and that of Kashmir is what Banerjee refers to as the 'exclusive dependence' on the state by women's movements, which 'neglected mass mobilisation and remained blind to subtle class and patriarchal barriers' (Banerjee 1998: 2). The Kashmir case remains unique as there was no indigenous women's movement to speak of, or even one that was dependent on the state. The state *was* the movement. Besides, the state had no interest in cultivating a new *Muslim* woman as it did in Pakistan, rather a new *Kashmiri* woman who could implement the state's socialist programme for Kashmiri society. Women's empowerment was, thus, inextricably linked to the ideology of the new government.

Life under the Dogras

As many scholars have noted, the Dogra period served as an immediate counterpoint to the Naya Kashmir era (Rai 2004; Zutshi 2004). It is, thus, important to recall that the changes engendered by the Naya Kashmir project occurred in the context of significant illiteracy in the state, especially among Kashmiri Muslim women. Under the Dogras, while a small number of Kashmiri Pandit women began getting educated, education for Muslim women was lagging behind. Even in 1941, the literacy rates for Muslims overall were staggering, with only 1.6 per

cent of Kashmiri Muslims being able to read and write (Sikand 2002). The figures for Muslim female literacy were even lower.

The bitter memory of life under the Dogras can be evidenced from the first half of Shamla Mufti's autobiography. She laments the position of Kashmiri Muslim women in the late Dogra period; women had little financial independence and were completely reliant on their husbands. Their days were spent in cooking, washing, raising children, and sometimes spinning thread. Parents would worry about their daughter's marriage, and once a girl was married, she was beholden to her in-laws' wishes. *Khandani* women, or those with a higher social status, were especially restricted in terms of mobility and access to education. Although some girls from *khandani* families, such as Shamla Mufti and her sisters, went to school, this practise was generally considered unacceptable. Mufti narrates how her father received significant criticism from his friends and family for sending his daughters to school. In contrast to some reforms in women's education made in colonial North India, education for girls was still perceived negatively in Kashmir. *Khandani* women were primarily restricted to the domestic space.

Mufti describes how, from her window, she could see the activities of the Hanjis, lower-class families, who lived in boats along the river. Unlike the women in Mufti's family, the Hanji women could be seen walking outside, performing menial labour. She writes of the intimate social relations that developed between the women in the neighbourhood, describing the proximity of the houses and how women would sit at their windows and talk for hours amongst themselves. This closeness enabled them to develop familiar social relations with one another. Mufti is ambivalent about this closeness, however, as it also created unwanted interference, gossip, and idle chatter. She attributes this to the constriction of their mobility. 'Women would remain

in their own four walls,' she writes; 'they were not aware that their land is like heaven' (Mufti 1994: 16–17). She also bemoans the fact that women were largely unaware of what was going on in Kashmir beyond their homes. With restricted mobility, *khandani* women were only able to go from their in-laws' home, where they lived with their husband and his extended family, to their parents' home, usually with a guardian. On special occasions, they would visit the gardens with their families. Some elderly women would also visit the shrines of local Sufi saints or attend sermons held by religious leaders (Mufti 1994: 16). On the whole, they remained enclosed in their domestic spaces, and their activities in the public sphere were severely limited.

Women's educational and economic empowerment

After describing the dismal state of life for women under the Dogras, Mufti's account marks women's changing roles in society, precipitated by the post-1947 NC government's policies. She recalls how they were increasingly able to challenge, overcome, and/or negotiate existing gender norms in ways that allowed them to participate in the social and educational realms. The opening of schools and institutions of higher education for Kashmiri women allowed for their active presence in the public sphere. Mehmooda Shah, who was an active female member of the NC, is referred to in Mufti's autobiography (alongside the oral histories of a number of women who attended schools and colleges in Naya Kashmir), as an important figure in the rise of women's education in the state. As a lecturer, and later as principal of Women's College, she would personally visit Muslim families in the city and encourage them to send their daughters to college.

After working as a teacher for some years, Mufti went on to receive a bachelor's degree from Women's College at Maulana

Azad Road, much to the initial dismay of her in-laws and family. Because of a lack of higher education institutions for women until the establishment of Women's College, there were very few Kashmiri women who were qualified to teach in schools and colleges. Mufti writes that most of the female teachers were from outside Kashmir. The NC government, acknowledging this deficit, began to send Kashmiri women outside the state to receive higher education, promising them teaching positions after they returned (Mufti 1994: 116). In 1953, Mufti, along with a select few other Kashmiri women, left Kashmir for Aligarh Muslim University. In an act almost unheard of at the time, she left her 10-year-old son, Altaf, with his father and her in-laws in Srinagar. She obtained her master's degree in Farsi within two years and returned to Srinagar.

After she returned, Mufti was posted as a lecturer in Farsi at Women's College. She was later transferred to serve as the principal of Nawa Kadal College, the second women's college which was established in 1960 to serve the girls in the Old City. She was there from 1966 to 1974. Eventually she returned to Women's College, where she served as the principal from 1974 to 1982.

The founding of Women's College marked a pivotal moment in Mufti's personal development as well as in the development of women's education in the state. The government, she says, 'wanted to create a new soul and new life for Kashmir's downtrodden girls' (Mufti 1994: 122). Describing her first day at the Women's College in Srinagar, she recalls:

> The college was an awesome building, beautiful gardens, magnificent Chinar … I saw many girls walking, running here and there. They were all dressed in clean and smart uniforms. Some girls had a hockey stick in their hands … some were talking about badminton matches. Some went towards the field

> to play netball. Some girls were coming from the classroom. Some were in a hurry to go to the library. Some had to go to a drama practice and they were running around for that reason. (Mufti 1994: 119.)

Muftis's account describes the variety of options available to the students. Not only were they exhorted to focus on their studies they were also involved in a variety of sports and in theatre. These activities were intended to increase their confidence. Students at Women's College would also go with their professors to nearby villages or downtown Srinagar on various social service projects.

> In a week they would free up two hours to go from house to house in the village. They would bathe the kids, clean the houses, they would pick up garbage from the courtyards, they would give the people in the village lessons on health and cleaning, they would let the women know about how to take care of their health and let the mothers know how to keep their children away from different sicknesses. In addition to this, they would tell them the importance of keeping women educated. (Mufti 1994: 196.)

These extracurricular activities played an important role in the government's cultivation of the modern Kashmiri woman. They propagated an emphasis on discipline, service, and a well-rounded personality. All of these qualities would help women play a critical role in the construction of a Naya Kashmir. By transforming the mentality of women students, the government envisioned that they would be able to make inroads into broader Kashmiri society, as they would then be able to influence their families, relatives, and neighbours. The shift, in just a few years, in societal perceptions of women's education and their role in society was notable. At home, too, Mufti realised that, over time, her in-laws also became more accepting of her career.

Young women were enthusiastic and disciplined, and it appeared that the environment was bustling with activity. According to Neerja Mattoo, a Kashmiri Pandit who went on to serve as a professor of English in the college:

> The years from 1950 to the '70s were the kind of years when everything seemed within reach, anything possible with hard work and determination. The achievements of women during these decades were so significant that they altered the gender landscape of schools, colleges, offices, courts, police stations, hospitals, hotels and business establishments. Women were everywhere, making their mark in every field. This revolution had been brought about, surprisingly, without there being an organized women's movement in the state. (Mattoo 2002: 164.)

Mattoo's reflection on the 'surprising' nature of the developments for women without there being an organised women's movement in the state, is important. As I will discuss later, the paternalistic attitude of the state creates its own limitations for women.

Through her description of the atmosphere in the college, Mufti ascribes a form of cosmopolitanism to the educational space. Indian dignitaries, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, would come to Women's College on their visits to Kashmir. Regular cultural programmes in multiple languages would be held for these important guests. Even so, it was not just the space of the college that gave the female students greater exposure to the outside world; for the first time, the young women were able to travel to places within and even outside Kashmir. The college would take the girls on field trips and camps; Mufti describes these visits in great detail, including the initial hesitation from families to permit their daughters to travel, the various modes of transportation, and the scheduled activities. The novelty of mobility, especially for girls in that period, is

particularly significant. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these trips were curtailed, and families were less willing to allow their daughters to venture afar, given the prevalence of sexual violence in the region by the Indian armed forces, including the mass rape that occurred in the villages of Kunan and Poshpora (Batool et al. 2016).

Mufti discusses how Bakshi's government soon realised that the college catered to a more elite and upwardly mobile class of women. Many families who lived in the Old City would not send their daughters to Women's College. In seeking to uphold its socialist and egalitarian vision, the government established a separate Nawa Kadal College in 1961, catering to the population of the Old City. Nawa Kadal also held debates, plays, and competitions, to which the girls and their mothers were invited. Mufti states that the activities enabled the women in the Old City to think critically about the role of women in society and the importance of education for their daughters. Both colleges were similar in their efforts to promote women's education in Kashmir. It is evident that this was a time of great improvement for those women who were able to attend these institutions, gain an education, and acquire greater mobility. It was also a moment in which the benefits of education were not limited to a particular social class.

The state was able to utilise women's emancipation as a way to empower the Muslim middle class, in particular. As a number of scholars have noted, gender is intrinsically linked to class, as particular class-based formations have defined ways of being male and female (Sarkar and Sarkar 2008; Banerjee 2004; Fernandes 1997). Frequently, in elite or middle-class formations, the construction of womanhood is relegated to the private and domestic spheres, while manhood is defined as being in the public sphere. In post-1947 Kashmir, however, these formations

were linked to the socialist ideological underpinning of the state, and demanded a particular political inclination. For the state, the new Kashmiri woman, much like the new Kashmiri man, was educated, progressive, and a secular nationalist. In many ways, the space of Women's College reflected this gendered construction. The government was in charge of appointing its professors, lecturers, and principals; ideally, those it saw as being politically loyal. The individuals involved with Women's College, as well as a number of other institutions set up by the NC, represented a form of Kashmiri nationalism which was not opposed to increasing identification with the Indian state, and to suppressing those who argued otherwise.[4]

State-led feminism

Notwithstanding the important shifts in increased opportunities for education and employment for women, our understanding of this time as ushering in a new era of women's liberation must be tempered. It was certainly empowering for a group of women who were willing to ascribe to a particular brand of Kashmiri nationalism, including those who were close to the leaders of the NC. Even so, their agency was effectively curtailed by the constraints of a paternalistic state apparatus. Those possibilities that were opened up for them were still constructed by the state and were in the service of state ideology, which Partha Chatterjee (1989) has referred to as the 'new patriarchy' embedded in nationalist movements. Indeed, the Kashmir context translates into additional limitations, given the politically coercive and thus illegitimate nature of the state, where any form of opposition to, or alternative visions for, Kashmir, including those that were pro-Pakistan or pro-plebiscite, were effectively reined in.

We see a subtle example of this in Mufti's autobiography in her description of her time at Nawa Kadal established to inculcate

the ideology of Naya Kashmir in girls in the Old City, too. The politics surrounding the locality of the college, however, were different from the brand of Kashmiri nationalism at Women's College; as a majority of the families who sent their daughters to Nawa Kadal were not members of the bureaucratic class, its students were more significantly critical of India and vocally sympathetic to pro-plebiscite groups such as the Awami Action Committee and the Plebiscite Front.

Mufti narrates an incident in which the students protested against official Indian presence at Nawa Kadal. In an effort to quash the tension, the Department of Education appointed Mufti to serve as the principal of the college. As a Kashmiri Muslim originally from that part of town, she was seen as a safe candidate for the position. Nonetheless, Mufti admits that the government used her; although they appointed her as principal, they still paid her as a lecturer. Her appointment was purely political. Here, we see the paternalistic attitude of the state; had women's empowerment been the primary motivation, Mufti would at least have received the salary that was due to her.[5]

This paternalistic attitude was experienced at Women's College, too. Asmat Ashai and Nighat Shafi Pandit, both sisters who attended Women's College at the time, spoke of how they resented having to perform during cultural functions in front of Indian delegations, but they had no choice. Pandit recalled how Mehmooda Shah, the principal, would ensure that students attended college on the days when important figures were visiting, including Indira Gandhi, who visited the college a number of times.[6] They remembered having no interest in meeting her, but punishment for not attending was severe. Neerja Mattoo also mentioned how pro-Pakistan sentiments were suppressed. She recalls an incident when students were

knitting sweaters for Indian soldiers. One girl 'raised the slogan for Pakistan ... and Miss Mehmooda slapped her'.[7] In addition, students were not allowed to express any critical views in the college magazine or in newspapers on the subject of Kashmir's ties with India or on the NC government. From these examples, we can see the coercive nature of the state, and how women's empowerment was inextricably linked to subscribing to a form of secular modernity and pro-India sentiment.

This tension came to the fore in 1973, when the government proposed that the name of Women's College be changed to Kamala Nehru College, the mother of Indira Gandhi and the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru. Students from Women's College, in addition to other students from nearby Sri Pratap and Amar Singh colleges, protested this plan.[8] Women students 'smashed the signboard that was installed on the main building of the college', and also pelted stones at Sheikh Abdullah's vehicle as he was approaching the college to preside over an official function (ud-Din 2017). The protest at Women's College was important as it revitalised the movement for a plebiscite. This incident, however, is remarkably absent from scholarly accounts which have focused largely on women's unequivocal acceptance of the state government's agenda and subsequent 'empowerment'.

I suggest here that women's empowerment, although an important aim of Naya Kashmir, became embroiled in the political compulsions of the state. State-sponsored feminism had other goals in mind, including consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state as an integral part of India. Thus, even while Mufti describe the many openings from which these women benefited, we must understand them as being reflective, and not independent, of the broader political developments under the NC-led state government. One of the shortcomings

of this period of state-sponsored feminism is that no indigenous, grass-roots women's movement emerged in Kashmir, given that those working on women's issues in Kashmir were dependent on the state. Cosequently, the mass mobilisation of women's rights groups which arose in a number of other postcolonial societies was relatively absent in Kashmir. This was to have important ramifications for women's movements in Kashmir in later periods, as state-led women's empowerment initiatives remain contested given the groundswell of resistance to the state.

Endnotes

[1]There are debates about the reasons why the National Conference issued the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, with some suggesting that it wanted to regain its popularity, which it was losing to its rival, the Muslim Conference.

[2]Sheikh Abdullah led the Kashmiri nationalist opposition to the Dogra monarchy. He was the first prime minister of the state after its accession to India.

[3]These include the writings of Sheikh Abdullah (prime minister) and Syed Mir Qasim (chief minister), and the writings of Munshi Ishaaq, the former head of the Plebiscite Front, and Qari Saifuddin, the former head of the Jamaat-i-Islam.

[4]The autobiography is largely silent on these contestations, except in the section where Shamla Mufti discusses how her appointment was a political one, to quell the level of distrust that existed within the community. Here, I also draw upon my conversations and oral interviews, and an understanding of the broader aims of the state project.

[5]While Mufti does not use the term 'paternalistic' in her autobiography, she does describe her disappointment with what happened. She did feel that she was just a political appointee, as the neighbourhood would be more amenable to having a Kashmiri Muslim as the principal.

[6]Interview with Nighat Shafi Pandit, Srinagar, 5 May 2014.

[7]Interview with Neerja Mattoo, Srinagar, 24 May 2014.

[8]This incident is mentioned in detail in Mir Fatimah Kanth's article, 'Women in Resistance: Narratives of Kashmiri Women's Protests' in this volume.

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Women in Resistance

narratives of Kashmiri women's protests

MIR FATIMAH KANTH

In late 1973, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, pioneer of Chipko Andolan, the Indian forest conservation movement, witnessed Kashmiri women standing on rooftops and throwing stones at the police in central Srinagar, during a period of intense and valley-wide anti-India agitations sparked off by students of Srinagar's Women's College. He described it as a *mazedar tamasha* (entertaining spectacle, Guha 2009). Four and a half decades later, in April 2017, young female students chanting anti-India slogans took to the streets across the towns and districts of Kashmir to protest against police brutalities. These young women, photographed in moments of aggression and rage against the state, became hyper-visible on digital media platforms.

Responses to these images, both from within and outside Kashmir, expressed surprise, disapproval, and resentment at the emergence of the 'female stone-pelter' and more generally at the presence of young women on the streets demanding *azaadi*. From Chandi Prasad's sardonic dismissal to the contemporary characterisation of these protests as 'unprecedented', the history of Kashmiri women's participation in resistance movements against the Indian state in the region has often been rendered invisible or treated as insignificant.

This essay traces the trajectory of Kashmiri women's participation in student-led street protests in two different time

periods—1964 to 1974 and April 2017—and reveals the selective amnesia regarding women's role in the resistance movement within the terrain of social memory in Kashmir. In contrast, I locate the protests of April 2017 on the continuum of a largely undocumented and intergenerational history of Kashmiri women's participation in the struggle against the Indian state, spread over the last six decades. I use media analysis to describe gendered representations of the contemporary student protests, and oral history narratives to recover and contextualise them against the backdrop of the wider history of Kashmiri women's political agency.

In the final section, I draw on debates and theories of gender and nationalism to explore why women's narratives of resistance are rendered insignificant in the social narratives of the Kashmiri freedom struggle. These theoretical debates also help in understanding how gendered relations shape the popular mobilisation and imagination of the struggle. While women of all age groups have played an active role in the movement during both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Gazi 2017; Qayum 1989), the period between 1964 and 1974, defined by large-scale mobilisations of students across Kashmir, is a particularly striking historical moment for analysing women's participation.

Women's protests as 'spectacle'

On 15 April 2017, students in large numbers clashed with the state forces while protesting against the creation of a checkpoint outside south Kashmir's Pulwama Degree College (Khan 2017). State forces barged into the college premises, resorted to tear-gas shelling and pellet-gun firing to disperse the students, injuring over 50 of them (Kanwal 2017). Soon afterwards, students from various districts in Kashmir organised protests and marches as a mark of solidarity with the students

in Pulwama, chanting pro-freedom slogans and demanding the right to self-determination for Kashmir (Bhat 2017).

Female students participated actively in these protests, at some places leading them, at others throwing stones at state forces who were attempting to prevent the marches and public gatherings. In public, women students frequently articulated their participation against the backdrop of Kashmiri oppression and the wider politics of resisting the Indian state. For instance, in a media report, one student stated that human rights violations committed by state forces pushed her to participate in the street protests, and another explained that while the recent police brutalities at Pulwama may have been the provocation, the 'anger is deep-rooted' (Kanwal 2017).

The protests were widely covered in the media: locally, internationally, and by the Indian media (Khan 2017; NDTV 2017). Women students' protests received headline coverage on Indian news channels like NDTV and AajTak for days, repeatedly showing looping videos of the protests. Images of students with their headscarves on and faces covered, caught in the act of stone-pelting and sloganeering, were circulated as representative pictures of protests in Kashmir across various media platforms. They also went viral on social media, with many people sharing them. Social media was abuzz with commentary, both celebrating and criticising the presence of Kashmiri women students on the streets, referring to their willingness to participate in protests alongside their male counterparts.

Indian media's portrayal of these protests was almost exclusively in terms of the 'emergence' of a 'new phenomenon'. News channels like AajTak expressed outrage that even young women were now sufficiently 'radicalised' to pelt stones during demonstrations (AajTak 2017). In the local media, these protests were framed in terms of the new generation of Kashmiri women 'redefining'

political agency, having arrived at a level playing field with men within the resistance movement (Kanwal 2017). The media hype and commentary around the way these young women pelted stones at the police, kicked armoured vehicles, or got into altercations with the armed forces, construct them as 'poster girls'; exceptional, yet representative, symbols of women's participation in the movement.

One particularly widely circulated image was that of a group of girls pelting stones at the police, with one of them in the foreground holding a basketball in one hand while aiming a stone at the police with the other (Hussain and Saha 2017). The contrast in this image between a student's everyday life (the basketball) and the exceptional figure of a young woman pelting stones, created what Guy Debord analyses as 'a spectacle': 'a social relation among people, mediated by images' (1967: thesis 4). This media-oriented spectacle of young women taking over the streets—a singular moment in history—obfuscated other histories and realities of women's long-standing protests, as well as other modes of women's resistance to the Indian state (Debord 1967: theses 11, 143). Commenting on the dearth of visual documentation of past protests by Kashmiri women, Khurram Parvez, a human rights defender at the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) stated:

> Women massively protested in 2008, 2010. Now the difference is that the girl had a basketball in one hand and a stone in the other. This was something new that the media harped on. Otherwise, it's not new. In 1950s, '60s, women would come out with sticks. The only difference remains, it is being documented now. (quoted in Gazi 2017.)

The power of images to shape emotive responses became clear in the manner by which iconic photographs of young women became popular symbols of the 'new' spirit of resistance

in the Kashmiri imagination, and of the threat of 'Islamic radicalisation' in the Indian media. However, the circulation and deployment of these images as representative symbols call for a deeper analysis of women's agency as political actors.

Everyday resistance and survival

Media hype around the spectacle of street protests by young women renders invisible everyday acts of resistance by Kashmiri women. The group of girls in the 'basketball photograph', when asked about their motivation for pelting stones at the police, said, 'We were going for basketball practice, but the forces provoked us into pelting stones by assaulting us. Otherwise we are not stone-pelters' (Kanwal 2017). The obsession with the transgressive and gendered act of pelting stones—as reflected in media framings—overshadows the ubiquity of resistance in the daily life of these young women, which van der Molen and Bal (2011) characterise as 'small' acts of dissent.

Van der Molen and Bal analyse dissent practises against the military occupation among Kashmiri youth, particularly by young women, and draw attention to the threat of militarised gendered violence that constrains and shapes these small acts of dissent. For instance, on a regular school day, a walk to the high school basketball court across the militarised urban space of Srinagar can, for a young Kashmiri woman, encompass a range of such public and private dissent practises: from markedly and deliberately crossing the street to avoid walking below a nearby checkpoint they may have to pass; to continuing to play basketball under the gaze of the Indian soldier from a watchtower close by; or refusing to take off their headscarves when playing to evade this military gaze. These are only some of the many other possible and unstated ways which women in Kashmir adopt to survive and resist.

The beginning of an armed uprising in 1989 ushered in a decade of widespread violence and human rights violations by the Indian state in Kashmir. This is often referred to as the darkest period of contemporary Kashmir's political history. During this period, Kashmiri women's bodies became sites of both, intense militarised violence and also resistance (Batool et al. 2016). As the 'picking up' (illegal and arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance) of Kashmiri men and boys by the Indian armed forces became a daily occurrence, women of the neighbourhood would gather in spontaneous protest outside the army camps, demanding the release of their loved ones (Sikander 2011). Announcements from local mosques, specifically requesting the women in the locality to gather outside their homes to protest against particular human rights violations and atrocities, were also common (Zia 2017).

These acts of everyday survival, refusal, and dissent articulated by Kashmiri women through the 1990s, become invisible when juxtaposed with spectacles of the 'stone-pelting' street protests, framed as both exceptional and exemplary political resistance by a 'new generation' of young women. Societal discussions about women's street protests as a 'never before avatar' of women's political agency indicate the underlying assumption that women had hitherto not played a significant role in the Kashmiri resistance movement (Zia 2017).

Indeed, notwithstanding the ways in which the intense militarisation of the region has constrained Kashmiri women's lives (Kazi 2009), they have engaged with the popular resistance in creative and passionate ways. Their resistance to the Indian state in the region has been shaped by circumstances at the time and the political context. Street protests by young female students may not have been a constant feature during the past three decades but, given the varying levels of intensity of the conflict

(which has a direct bearing on women and children) women have hardly been absent from the public space in Kashmir.

The exceptional framing of women's role in April 2017 as a spectacle not only disregards the many ways in which Kashmiri women have exercised their agency as political actors by being 'rooted in the ordinary' rather than escaping it (Das 2007: 6), but also obliterates the specific political circumstances—intense and violent militarisation of lives in the 1990s—within which Kashmiris have resisted the Indian state across time.

Hidden stories of Women's College, Srinagar

In her book about Moroccan women, Alison Baker (1998: xix) draws attention to the exclusion of women's contributions in histories of nationalist struggles in Morocco during the 1940s and 1950s: 'What men say is called "oral testimony"; what women say is just "stories".' The invisiblisation of Moroccan women's experiences is reflective of the larger absence of women and their views in modern history, which is dominated by men's consideration of what is worth recording and recalling from the past (Bleiker 2004: 156). Such a system of exclusion also obscures women's agency as political actors.

In the following section, I reproduce ethnographic narratives from women who participated in the student street protests during 1964–74, to reflect on the ways in which collective social memory and history are constructed in dominant Kashmiri 'his'stories of resistance, framed in terms of courage and sacrifice. I also map how the absence of a recorded history of Kashmiri women's participation in the resistance movement both worsens and hides such exclusions in social memory.

Over the course of several conversations, spanning three weeks, I interacted with Shagufta Qayoom,[1] a 69-year-old retired educationist and former student of the Government

Women's College at Maulana Azad Road, Srinagar, about the students' movement of the 1960s. It was a period of intense cross-border hostility between India and Pakistan (Operation Gibraltar), which eventually led to the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. I have edited and translated our conversation for the sake of brevity. Qayoom said,

> In the year 1964, I was enrolled as a student at the women's college at M.A. Road. In the last week of May, all the students were asked to assemble in the auditorium for a condolence meeting. We were then told that Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, had died of a heart attack and we must mourn the sad event.

I asked her about the reaction of the students to this announcement.

> The principal stressed that our beloved Chacha Nehru had passed away. However, the consciousness among students about the political situation in Kashmir was quite high. We were generally not allowed to express our political consciousness about Kashmir, but in this instance, felt forced to mourn the death of an Indian leader. We decided to organise a small-scale protest within the college campus. Our college uniform comprised an all-white kameez-shalwar. On the first day of the protest, we instead wore green-coloured shalwars and dupattas with our white kurtas, followed by pink-coloured shalwars and dupattas the next day. The staff noticed this immediately, as a huge group of girls was dressed in colours other than the white of their uniform. When asked why we weren't dressed in our proper uniforms, we replied by saying that our white shalwars are dirty.

She continued:

> At around the same time, we had heard news that mujahids have come from across the border to fight for Kashmir. Huge

> demonstrations were being organised near the Jamia Masjid in support of the mujahids. We felt that we should also participate in these protests. A group of us marched to the Jamia Masjid, to a friend's house to borrow burqas, so that we wouldn't be recognised in public. At the site of the protest, I remember a tall man asked us to chant slogans which would pierce the skies. We used all our strength to chant slogans and express our support. One of the slogans I remember clearly was 'Azad Kashmir Zindabad'!" (Long Live Azad Kashmir, a part of Kashmir administered by Pakistan).

Later, I asked her about the response to these protests by her family, and the college.

> Two days after the protest, my father was called to the college by the principal. She told him that his daughter participates in street protests and chants slogans. My father responded by saying that during school hours, it's not his responsibility to take care of my whereabouts. This irked the principal, and the very next day, my father, an employee in the state government's department of education, was transferred to a new location as punishment for his daughter's participation in protests. In the college campus, some faculty members openly took a position against the students. One of the professors failed me in my final exams because of my involvement in the protests, but another professor took my side and graded my exam fairly.

Shagufta Qayoom's experiences provide an insight into the hidden history of young Kashmiri women's political subjectivity, and modes of bodily resistance and political participation. While the burqa could not save young Qayoom from the wrath of the principal, Nighat Shafi (2017) in her memoir in a local daily, recounts how the same burqa saved her from the principal in the same college during the 1960s; she took part in a students' protest at M.A. Road (close to her college campus) which was

tear-gassed, and students were assaulted by the police (Shafi 2017). Like Qayoom and Shafi, many other young Kashmiri women continued to organise themselves through the 1960s and well into the 1970s.

A longer view of women's political mobilisation in Srinagar's Women's College resonates with coincidences and continuities which point to the flow of intergenerational social memory and political consciousness. In early November 1973, an event was to be held at Women's College to change its name to 'Nehru Memorial College', in honour of Jawaharlal Nehru (Qayum 1989: 337). Sheikh Abdullah, a key political figure of the time, was to preside over the function. However, when he arrived at the venue, Abdullah's entourage was attacked by protesting students—both male and female—and he was forced to retreat (ud-Din 2017). The protesting students chanted anti-Abdullah slogans, burnt effigies of him, and smeared mud on his photographs (Qayum 1989: 337–38). Young women destroyed the signboard that had been affixed to the main building, and remnants of it continued to hang until as recently as 2009 (ud-Din 2017).

Soon after, these protests spilled over from Srinagar to other districts in Kashmir: Islamabad, Sopore, and Baramulla. In order to control the protesting students, the government closed all schools and colleges (Qayum 1989: 338). Similar scenes were witnessed on M.A. Road four decades later, in April 2017, when protesting students, especially young women, were tear-gassed by state forces. The '*mazedar tamasha*' of 1973 and the 'new phenomenon' of the spectacular female stone-pelter can, thus, be located not as exceptional, but as woven into the fabric of the popular resistance and the movement for self-determination across the decades.

Given the long history and extant social memory of Kashmiri women's participation in the resistance movement, why have women's narratives of resistance been invisible?

Gender, nation, and memory

The protracted violence and militarisation of Kashmiri lives has often led to women playing unconventional or non-normative gender roles. For instance, they have long acted as 'chaperones of men' in Kashmir to protect them from violent state intrusion when travelling; they have gone to courts, army camps, and police stations in search of their disappeared sons and husbands; and taken on men's roles in the household in their absence (Manecksha 2017; Zia 2017). They have also engaged, as we have seen above, in a range of 'small' acts of political agency, both everyday and revolutionary (Zia 2017, 2016). What then might explain why narratives of resistance by women are largely framed either in biological terms of 'motherhood' and 'sisterhood', or as 'victims or survivors' of violence and suffering?

Simona Sharoni (1995: 31) argues that 'gender, like other such structures of social identity as culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality' affects the way we engage with 'the social and political world'. Gender, as an analytic, brings to light the 'often taken-for-granted distinctions between what it means to be a man or a woman' and the power relations that are constitutive of these distinctions (Sharoni 1995: 31). These power relations shape the 'dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena' (Cockburn 1999: 3). Within nationalist and anti-colonial struggles, gender ideologies play out by ascribing different roles to men and women. However, the centrality of these ideologies to women's experiences and histories is neglected in the collective imagination of nationhood (Cockburn 1999; Enloe 2014; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989: 7) locate five major ways in which women are seen as participating in national processes, chief among them being 'as biological reproducers' of nations;

'as transmitters of its culture'; and 'as signifiers of national differences'. These roles are constructed differently across historical contexts in acccordance with the specific circumstances of these processes. As biological reproducers, women are burdened with the task of delineating boundaries for ethnic or imagined national communities, whereby an attack on their bodies is seen as attack on the nation.

In the sphere of cultural production, women become the embodiment of the cultural traditions they are expected to pass on: the nation as a woman in danger, or as a 'mother who lost her sons in battle' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 10). The nation is projected as the motherland, whose honour and dignity need to be protected (Kaul 2018). This casts women as beings whose honour needs to be defended and protected as a national priority. In the context of resistance or nationalist struggles, women are thus pressurised to 'articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse' (Kandiyoti 1991: 432). Yet, these ideological constructions also open up a space for both men and women to derive strength from community bonds and ways of belonging.

While all Kashmiri bodies have suffered brutal violence at the hands of the state, the infliction and effects of such violence are gendered, as men and women are 'tortured and abused in different ways' primarily because of the 'different meanings culturally ascribed to the male and female body' (Cockburn 1999: 11; Robinson 2013). Conflict adversely affects women's lives, especially when the impunity for violence committed by state forces is so high, as in Kashmir (JKCCS 2015). Women's resistance to such violence is often expressed as the strength to survive after having experienced bodily harm.

During the student protests of April 2017, Zakir Musa, a commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen—a Kashmiri militant

organisation—urged female students to refrain from participating in street protests as their 'brothers are still alive' (*Kashmir Reader* 2017). This appeal projects the protection of women's honour, as Kashmiri 'sisters', as a central matter of concern for the liberation struggle of Kashmir (Robinson 2013). A feminist analysis brings to our notice the ways in which gender relations intersect with the popular discourse on the struggle for self-determination. It also alerts us to the context-specific gender relations in a militarised society, which have constructed Kashmiri women's bodies as sites of violence, victimhood, and suffering. The framing of women in familial terms as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, constructs the state's widespread and threatened violence against them as a matter of shared national and family honour.

Women have, across contexts of different political mobilisation, been active participants in 'national, economic, political and military struggles' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 7). Cynthia Enloe (2014: 87) argues that nationalism as an ideology provides space to women and 'energises them' to participate in nationalist movements. However, scholars opine that in this space for political participation, women have been treated as mere symbols by male nationalist leaders (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Enloe 2014). In other words, women have scarcely had any negotiating power in defining the terms of their inclusion in anti-colonial and nationalist projects (Sharoni 1995: 32). Popular representations of Kashmiri women conform to the tropes identified by feminist theorising: as the nation in pain, and sometimes as the nation in an active act of rebellion and uprising. However, viewing women's participation merely as symbol or spectacle denies them an acknowledgement of their position as genuine participants in anti-colonial and nationalist struggles.

Young women's participation in the street protests of April 2017 involving acts such as stone-pelting—generally viewed

as being undertaken by angry young men rebelling against state forces—were framed in terms of an extraordinary display of aggressive, non-normative resistance by women, or as a transgression into a public, non-familial space constructed as masculine and out-of-bounds for women. In both framings, they were seen as the angry or agitated symbols of the nation. As these images proliferated and were circulated on social media, they became representative of a particular historical moment and social reality.

The protests of the 1960s and '70s, however, which unfolded in a remarkably similar fashion, reveal older political histories and the political space that women have occupied in the struggle for self-determination. The interpretation of women's political acts as unique spectacles denies them their role as genuine political actors with their own creative and subversive engagement with the resistance movement. In doing so, it conforms to gendered power dynamics and ideologies of nationhood.

Kashmiri women have played sundry roles within the resistance movement over the past few decades. Yet, their participation both within and outside their defined gender roles and capacities is rendered invisible and apolitical in collective memory as well as in Kashmiri nationalist histories, especially when compared to those of men, whose contributions are remembered as those of heroes, martyrs, and brave sons of the nation. Women's protests from two different time periods reveal the ways in which their political agency is both celebrated and denied at the same time. Paying attention to the hidden histories of women's political participation also allows us to see the ways in which discourses about imagined nationhood in Kashmir speak differently to men and women's experiences of resistance and survival.

Endnotes

[1]Shagufta Qayoom is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the interviewee. I interviewed her in October 2017 to derive an insight into the Kashmiri students' movement of the 1960s.

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Jinn, Floods, and Resistant Ecological Imaginaries in Kashmir

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In a popular cartoon by the Kashmiri artist, Mir Suhail, the map of India is suffused with the golden hue of electricity, while Kashmir, hanging precariously on the map, is suffocated by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation's (NHPC) noose, turning it ominously dark (Suhail 2015).

The NHPC is India's premier hydropower generation corporation which, Kashmiris assert, has been 'stealing' Kashmiri resources to power the Indian economy for the past several decades (Bhan 2014). In April 2013, Jammu & Kashmir's National Conference (NC)-led state government asked New Delhi to pay Kashmir for its water resources and stop depriving Kashmiris of their most valuable resource and prized economic asset (Parvaiz 2013). This was not the first time that Kashmiris had demanded ownership over their water bodies, or recognised that the control of economic resources was key for India to maintain its political control over Kashmir (Hakeem 2014). In 2011, Taj Mohi-ud-din, a senior politician in the Congress party, accused the NHPC of acting like an imperial power and thwarting local industry and entrepreneurship (Umar 2011). According to a Right to Information application filed in 2016, J&K was the 'second largest buyer of electricity produced in its own territory' (Parvaiz 2016). Even as Kashmiris have frequently drawn meaningful connections between territorial and resource sovereignties, tropes

of electricity theft, resource misuse, and hijacking of Kashmiri rivers gained even more traction after the floods of 2014, making questions of resource control and ownership critical components in the Kashmiri fight for *azaadi* from the long-drawn out military occupation in Kashmir (Junaid 2013; Kaul 2013; Duschinski and Bhan 2017; Duschinski et al. 2018; Suhail 2018).[1]

In the summer of 2012, I was in Gurez, the northern-most frontier tehsil in Bandipora district, conducting the first segment of my ethnographic fieldwork on dam-related displacements in the villages of Badwan and Khopri.[2] By 2016, these villages in J &K were expected to be submerged by India's 330 megawatt (MW) dam on the Kishanganga river, a tributary of the river Jhelum, which courses through Gurez before it enters Pakistan, irrigating vast swathes of its prime agricultural land. Gurez, much like other border provinces in the state, received three hours of electricity daily through a diesel-powered generator which was not connected to the northern grid which supplies electricity to nine Indian states, including India's capital city, Delhi. The irony was not lost on Gurezis, who saw their rivers being repurposed to power the Indian nation while their villages remained relegated to the 'dark ages', with no immediate government plans to electrify them. In addition to lamenting the loss of their rivers, with no visible tangible benefits, Gurezis were also concerned about losing access to critical resources, such as sand, wood, glaciers, animals, and highland pastures, because the dam and its related infrastructure now populated the landscape. The situation was worse for Gurezi women, who no longer felt 'free' to pursue their livelihoods or venture into the forests in search of medicinal herbs, vegetables, and mushrooms. For them, the dam had not just 'stolen' their resources but also their freedom and ability to move freely in a space already scarred by years of military control.

Gender, space, and borders

In this essay I discuss questions of resource sovereignty within the context of Kashmir's prolonged military occupation, foregrounding how resource access and dispossessions are deeply gendered processes, and how the Kishanganga dam's reconfiguration of space in Gurez imposed new immobilities on communities already hemmed in by the densely militarised line of control that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Moeckli and Braun 2001; Peluso and Watt 2001; Gururani 2002). In doing so, I show how gender, space, and borders were continually co-produced through militarised infrastructure, and how, far from being inert, the dam established new mechanisms of social and spatial control, further reinforcing stricter regulations on women's movement and their ability to seek independent livelihoods. I build on feminist interventions which outline the centrality of space to gendered subjectivities, a mutually co-constitutive relationship in which space is not a fixed or 'independent dimension', but relies on and is 'constructed out of social relations' (Massey 1994: 2, 3; Gururani 2014). As power courses through built infrastructure, it reproduces militarised geographies of domination and resistance, as well as a continued renegotiation of the meanings and materialities of space, place, and gender (Low 2009). Finally, I discuss how, in a context where the military occupies vast tracts of prime agricultural land, and meadows, forests, and grasslands, women's narratives, especially after the 2014 floods, combined political and ecological metaphors to reimagine Kashmir's war-torn and lifeless landscapes as vibrant and alive, and, in the process, offered a way to rethink Kashmir beyond its securitised geographies.

I first outline how the devastating flooding of river Jhelum in 2014 made questions of resource sovereignty central to

questions of *azaadi*. As mentioned earlier, misgivings about the NHPC's imperial control over Kashmir's rivers were widespread even in the 1990s, with a few strident voices cautioning against the central government's increasing control over hydropower projects as a means to erode Kashmir's 'capacity for self-reliance' (DN 1991: 1959; Hakeem 2014). However, until 2014, questions of resource control and access featured sparingly in public conversations about Kashmir's economic future and its viability as an independent entity. The 2014 flood altered this substantially. Several civil-society groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kashmir began asking if the Kishanganga river was another 'disaster waiting to happen', as the NHPC was diverting the waters from the Kishanganga to Wular Lake, raising its water level and reducing its future capacity to soak surging waters from river Jhelum. Kashmiris increasingly situated 'natural' disasters within their larger political fields, in order to extend Kashmiri resistance to environmental issues (rather than just territorial ones) and, at the same time, dislocate perceptions of nature as apolitical. Dams were increasingly seen as critical instruments for maintaining the Indian state's control over Kashmir's water resources. They were, as Bonnemaison and Macy (2003) claim, 'statements' or 'ideologies' in concrete, which revealed the intersections between gendered dislocations and India's masculine infrastructure (which included both men and equipment) in the context of Kashmir's military occupation.

In order to trace these connections, I turn to the floods of 2014, which played a critical part in alerting Kashmiris to the ways in which resource disenfranchisement and 'natural disasters' were deeply political events, with consequences for how they transformed the logistics and experiences of occupation and resistance in Kashmir.

A fight for identity

Long considered a source of life and livelihood in Kashmir and its 'cultural symbol', the Jhelum, into which the Kishanganga merges, is seen both as a witness to the ongoing brutality suffered by Kashmiris, and as its direct victim (Ahmad 2012: 66). For instance, a famous Sufi rock song, entitled 'Jehlumas' by the band Alif, which became popular in the post-flood years, foregrounds the loss of love and certainty, pangs of terror and solitude, and the horrors of violence which the Jhelum has witnessed and documented through time. A refrain from the song goes thus: 'Is anyone listening? Who can I tell? My river is on fire! And I fear I shall slip into its waters.' Despite being burdened with decades of despair—much like the men and women of Kashmir who have lost their dear ones, their kith and kin, to military camps, extrajudicial killings, detention facilities, and unknown mass graves—the crossing of the river carries the message of a hopeful reunion (Chatterjee et al. 2009). Kashmiri poets have often relied on using Jhelum as a 'symbol of motion and change', deriving from it 'profounder lessons of life like consciousness and continuity of Kashmiri identity' (Ahmad 2012: 92, 93). Therefore, in the aftermath of the massive floods of 2014, the Jhelum became a metaphor for the resilience of Kashmiris as they drew strength from its defiant flow while also fearing its fury.

The flood of 2014, which killed at least 557 people and submerged 2,600 villages across many districts in J&K, was one of the worst to hit the state in over 100 years (Pandey 2014). It was the consequence of torrential rain, unchecked urbanisation, mismanaged floodplains, and Kashmir's extensive and prolonged militarisation (Kanth and Ghosh 2015b). In a human rights report released by the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society in April 2015, Kanth and Ghosh (2015a: 43) write that 'while

poor regulation and bad planning certainly had a role in this destructive pattern of growth, what is rendered invisible in this map of land use is the pervasive military occupation of the city's hillsides and the *karewas*' (plateau-like terraces filled with rich sand and clay deposits) and its water bodies, glaciers, and forests. At the same time, the Jhelum did not just carry copious amounts of silt and mud, it also ferried the tortured and mutilated bodies of Kashmiris (Mathur 2016: 61). A witness to the past three decades in which the Indian military has used brutal counter-insurgency tactics to quash widespread dissent, a flooded Jhelum was a grim reminder of the accumulated violence on Kashmir's body politic which did not spare the Jhelum either. Amidst Kashmir's violent turmoil, the complete mismanagement of the river by a series of puppet governments wreaked environmental havoc. Layers and mounds of silt and mud, and massive construction on critical wetlands in and around the river or on its critical tributaries had suffocated it. The government, Kashmiris claimed, had purposely choked the river. The fight for Kashmir's rivers, particularly for the Jhelum, considered to be Kashmir's lifeline, was a fight for Kashmir's identity (*vajud*). In the years following the flood, questions about Kashmir's rivers and their centrality to Kashmir's *azaadi* assumed centre stage. Kashmiris demanded that river Jhelum be properly dredged. They challenged the state of Kashmir's rivers and their ecological vulnerability in the context of the intense militarisation of their land and rivers, and the commodification of their water resources.

The flood of 2014 was, thus, a turning point in many ways, both in terms of how civil society groups envisioned the relationship between environmental and territorial sovereignty, and how Kashmir's struggle for *azaadi* became tied, even if loosely, to the reclamation of its rivers and water bodies. Even

before the flood, Kashmiris had repeatedly argued that the numerous hydroelectric dams in the region had contributed to the inundation of Kashmir's most fertile rice-growing regions. Its agricultural sector, they claimed, was deliberately being weakened so that regional food sovereignty could be undermined and Kashmir could once again be turned into a spectacle for tourists. Indeed, in a prescient commentary, only several months before the devastating flood, a senior engineer said to me while sitting on the banks of the Jhelum:

> We can clearly see the distinction between land and water right now. But if and when the flood comes, this entire area will be submerged. Now if you build a barrage to contain water, you are creating a flood artificially, which will obviously submerge the areas it spans.[3]

The unstable distinctions between land and water, especially in Kashmir which owes its origin to a 'lake' (Paray 2016), were obvious to people who view dams as 'artificial floods' rather than as facilitators of development and self-sufficiency. Indeed, for many Kashmiris, the 'artificial flooding' of their land caused by massive hydroelectric projects on the Jhelum, Chenab, and their tributaries, was a purposeful move to ensure Kashmir's continued reliance on India. According to the chairman of the Kashmir Economic Alliance, a consortium of various traders' bodies,

> The Government of India does not allow us to grow on any front economically, be it power, tourism, or any other sector of the economy. If we need a rupee to survive, they will only give us 75 paisas. There were times when we relied on our milk, eggs, and chickens. Everything that India does here is a conspiracy against Kashmiris. Why shouldn't I think like that? We were a haven for small industries. And now we don't produce anything. Our water sources have been colonised and exploited.

Politicising the flood

After the floods, the Indian news and government agencies worked overtime to present Kashmiris as objects of Indian largesse. Mainstream news channels celebrated the Indian military's benevolence during the floods even as Kashmiris were left stranded in their flooded homes with little or no help from the military (Kanth and Ghosh 2015b). Indeed, as a Kashmiri reporter remarked at the time, 'everything is political in Kashmir, even a flood' (Mubarki 2014). In the post-flood narratives which I collected from several Kashmiri men and women, it was clear that the floods of 2014 had collapsed familiar ethical, moral, and ecological worlds, while laying bare the relationship between politics and ecology.

In the next section, I present stories from my interviews with women from Srinagar a year after the flood had destroyed their homes, and added yet another layer of fear and anxiety to their already precarious lives. By no means were these stories limited to women, nor do I claim to offer a gendered perspective which is divorced from differences of class and location. Notwithstanding these differences, my conversations with women across Kashmir foregrounded the gendered nature of Kashmir's military occupation and the state's masculine infrastructure which has occupied its roads, alleyways, mountains, lakes, and buildings. India's military intervention in Kashmir has for the most part included defence installations such as roads, bridges, railway lines, and more quotidian forms of control and surveillance in the form of bunkers and checkpoints, which have implications for how men and women can go about their everyday routines or access certain spaces and places. Stringent forms of militarised control are also routinely imposed through legal provisions, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFPSA) and Public Safety

Act (PSA), which grant the Indian military impunity against war crimes in Kashmir, including enforced disappearances, extra-juridical killings, rape, sexual violence, and torture (Duschinski and Hoffman 2011; Mathur 2012).

In a geography heavily structured by the logic of militarism, the flood, too, according to many Kashmiris, was an extension of a military state: a silent instrument of death and destruction which had weaponised nature. Kashmiris remained deeply wary of India's selective rescue missions and its rejection of international humanitarian help, under the pretext that India was sufficiently equipped to rescue its citizens. Within this context, Kashmiri women volunteers along with their male counterparts came out onto the flooded streets and alleyways, to rescue their neighbours and take on the task of saving, rehabilitating, and rebuilding communities in the post-flood period (Reshi 2014). Contrary to mainstream portrayals of Kashmiri women as victims, recent scholarship has documented their active role in the politics of Kashmiri resistance (Kaul 2013; Malik 2015; Ghosh 2016; Zia 2017). Kashmiri women have resisted the military occupation in Kashmir as mothers and wives whose sons or husbands were killed or disappeared in the three-decade long brutal counter-insurgency war (Zia 2016). As human rights lawyers, activists, photographers, filmmakers, and reporters, they have tirelessly documented military crimes, and fought to re-open cases of rape and sexual torture against the Indian military (Batool et al. 2016; Manecksha 2017). In certain instances, Kashmiri women have also assumed explicitly political roles to demand the right to self-determination (Malik 2015). In their post-flood narratives, too, women offered a trenchant political commentary to establish the predatory nature of the Indian state in Kashmir and its intensification under India's right-wing BJP government.

'The water was a *balai*, a demon'

The women I spoke with shared their sense of disquiet and horror by focusing on the 'nature' of the water which snaked into their houses on the evening of 5 September 2014, leaving behind mounds of mud and rubble. According to Nusrat, a middle-aged woman from Bemina, 'that was not water, *ye ais balai* (it was a demon, a curse). The water corroded our fingers. We had to take tetanus shots to get rid of the corrosions.' I had spent many days and nights in Nusrat's living room, which was bedecked with bright red sofas and cushions and Nusrat's carefully curated set of family photos before the floods took it all away. Tearfully, she pointed to the walls which were still damp, even after eight months, with the paint on them peeling off to reveal the damage the floodwaters had caused. She had cleaned the walls with phenyl several times but the grime refused to leave. This was not water. 'It was a strange mix of urine, faeces, and dead fish.' Scariest of all was that the 'water was screaming, it was lamenting'. Nusrat had been sitting with her daughter in a room on the second floor of her house when she heard a sound, which she mistakenly assumed come from her husband's activities downstairs. It transpired that the water had already entered her house before she realised it. Nusrat's mother chimed in to say that 'people were running away from water but it followed them'.

The other stories I heard from women spoke of the floods being 'directed' by a group of non-Kashmiri men, who were either seen on horses or on buildings, wearing long white robes. For Sameena, a middle-aged woman from Safakadal in the heart of Srinagar city, the water was strange. 'During nights, the water would scream so much; it felt as if we were being attacked by demonic forces, *kos tyam balai aai hamlas*.' In their stories, which seamlessly combined spiritual and political metaphors, women spoke of their pirs (spiritual mentors) who had warned them

of the calamitous future that awaited Kashmiris once Narendra Modi was elected to power:

> I know a very pious soul, who had seen visions of Modi directing water and crushing people and property, and throwing them helter-skelter on the sidewalks and pavements. And this is exactly how it felt when the deluge finally came.

Sakina, another middle-aged woman who was visiting from a village in northern Kashmir, chimed in,

> Mona ji, you won't believe it when I say this. But I saw how a giant man, whose arms must have been at least a kilometre long, was directing the flow of water in my village.

Thus, for Nusrat, Sakina, and Sameena, the flood was an orchestrated design by outsiders (read Indians) to drown Kashmiris in their own water. Indeed, in the aftermath of the flood, a journalist described the flood as a 'genocide in the skin of a natural calamity' (Sheikh 2014). As I argued earlier, such perceptions emerged within the context of the Indian government's unwillingness to accept international aid for Kashmir, and its exaggerated and strategic emphasis on military benevolence in post-flood rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Kashmiris believed that water was the most benign weapon in India's counter-insurgency kit, especially as most 'mainstream Indians', particularly the Hindutva right-wing groups, refused to see the flood as an outcome of extensive militarisation. Instead, as Ashraf (2014) describes it, they called the flood a 'come-uppance for Kashmiri disloyalty to India, a divine chastisement for their quest for freedom and allegiance to Pakistan'.

Post-flood stories were poignant testimonials of a jolted world in which women's relationship with land and water had been profoundly altered, and in which women used their water-soaked walls and damaged material artefacts as repositories of

a familial world which had now turned eerie and unfamiliar. Their stories of Srinagar city populated with men on horses, or with water that 'shrieked and yelled' remained with me, shaping how I heard women's anxious tales of an imminent flood which the Kishanganga dam would unleash, submerging their villages and devouring their highly fertile land. Similarly, women's stories from another border region in Uri, where the consequences of the 2014 flood had worsened because of NHPC's hydroelectric dam on river Jhelum (commissioned over a decade earlier in the 1990s) established the long-term social and ecological consequences of mega dams. Such stories also offered radical ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir was no longer barricaded with dams and military installations, but presented as vibrant and free, empowered by extraordinary forces that animated its land, forests, and rivers. These narratives confronted the 'ecological dread and disenchantment' generated by years of violence and militarised confinement (Palmer 2017: 2). In the following two sections I rely on ethnographic narratives from Kashmir's border regions—Gurez, where the Kishanganga dam is currently in its final stages of completion; and Uri, situated on the banks of the Jhelum, where a 480 MW dam was commissioned in the 1990s—to analyse how mega dams shape women's anxieties about flooding, resource alienation, and social and economic freedom.

The Kishanganga dam

In Gurez, which is roughly 50 miles from Srinagar city, people were spared the wrath of a flooded Jhelum. Instead, Gurezis dreaded the man-made flood which would forever alter their worlds. The Kishanganga had flooded many times in the past, devouring large tracts of land or slicing it into fragments. People's accumulated wisdom had taught them to work with the ebb and

flow of the river. Nothing, however, could prepare them for the deluge that awaited them (Baruah 2012). Gurezis would often say that the dam was their *sehlab* (flood), which would drown their villages and leave them at the mercy of government-sponsored rehabilitation packages. Gurezi women experienced a deeper sense of dislocation because they felt terribly disenfranchised in an already altered landscape, disrupted by men and materials which were both seen as 'foreign' entities. Since 2009, Gurez had been populated by officials of the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) and the NHPC, most of whom were from the Indian plains. In addition to setting up makeshift camps and settlements on land which once belonged to the villagers, the HCC and the NHPC had also set up a stone-crushing plant in Badwan village. The incessant sound from the crushing of rocks, I was told, and the air they breathed which contained specks of dust and smoke, felt 'foreign'. Outsiders, all of them men, dug the earth, crushed rocks, and drilled their mountains to redirect their water to produce electricity in faraway places. Instead of horses, it was men who were doing this; and instead of using sticks and batons, there was heavy machinery and equipment that was stealing their water. Women worried about the deluge which would submerge their homes, land, trees, and orchards, and forged a close connection between the impending flood and the loss of their freedom and independence.

In the summer of 2015, as the date for the commissioning of the dam drew closer, Gurezis experienced increased fear and uncertainty, which sometimes turned into anger and bitterness within the community. No longer would I find women gathered outside their homes, soaking in the summer sun or taking intermittent breaks between household chores and working on their land. Many homes were already deserted and families were scattered between Gurez, Srinagar, and Bandipora. Men

and women were engaged in heated discussions, most of them tied to the issue of insufficient compensation for their land which had been acquired. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, women refused to abandon their land even though there were government sanctions against cultivation that year. 'Women love the land more than men do,' Nafeesa told me as she loosened the earth with her hands, flattening it a few seconds later after she had removed the weeds. 'We work on it more than men do, and it takes care of us and our families.' A few other women who were working alongside Nafeesa spoke about their uncertain futures, a routine conversation among women when they gathered together in their homes or fields to socialise or to share updates regarding land acquisition and compensation. 'When the HCC came and offered money, our important leaders did not ask the right questions. They accepted the money thinking that the world was coming to them.' I asked them if they had resented this decision, to which they promptly replied, 'We were told that the dam was not women's business and the men were enough to tackle this issue.' Given their active participation in political rallies and speeches, the absence of women's voices in dam-related matters, at least in the early years, was striking. The women I spoke with attributed this to the 'misconception most men carried regarding what the dam might bring in terms of money and other benefits'. Many of these proved to be illusory as people realised that 'they were not just losing their land, water, trees, fruit, and vegetables', but also an 'entire way of life'. Now, people are *hushiaar* (vigilant), especially women, who feel terribly anxious about raising their children in unfamiliar environments, without access to farmland or forests. 'What will we do without this air, this water, and this land?' chimed in Haseena, a young woman in her 30s. She went on to say,

> If we have 50 kanals here, we can only buy a few kanals in Srinagar from the compensation money. And the patch of land will mostly be used for building a house, with high walls and a solid gate. Those houses will confine us to the four walls. We will have to fight for inches of land for our graves (*marguzar*). Here, we are free to move. There is so much space. We can go to the forest to get wood, herbs, and zeera. We will miss our forest trips where we sing, chat, and play.

Conceptions of freedom

The theme of 'openness', of the fields, forest, and their homes, unencumbered by concrete walls and iron gates, was recurrent in women's stories of dispossession. Older women recounted spending hours, sometimes from 9.00 a.m. until 2.00 p.m., in the forest, gathering wood, grass, fruit, and herbs. For many younger women, who went to the forest for picnics and not always for work, the openness of their orchards in Badwan offered occasional and welcome refuge from the confines of domestic life. Haunted by the uncertainties of the future, however, the present was punctuated with fear and remorse. The thought of abandoning their land, their *watan* (homeland) and 'mother', made them tearful as they asserted how the openness of their lands and forests meant that they too were 'free' (Maggi 2001). Women's freedom was their ability to do *chakraat* (walks or picnics), to roam in their fields and their highland pastures, a freedom they would lose in the city. This freedom was place-based and, therefore, also precarious. It was structured by local regulations and cultural codes, most of which would change once people moved into towns or cities, leaving women vulnerable to new and unfamiliar modes of order and propriety. 'Living their lives with 10 *marlas* (160th of an acre), thus made them terribly anxious, as they saw it as an assault on their right to freedom and mobility.

Scholars have shown how displacement intensifies relations of power instead of reconstituting hierarchical relationships between men and women. As displaced communities struggle with the loss of their homes and identities, such social crises can potentially translate into stricter regulations for women, considered to be repositories of community honour and integrity (Srinivasan 2012). For Gurezi women, thus, the cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity of neighbouring towns and villages (given that many older women spoke Shina, not Kashmiri), filled them with uncertainty about their ability to sustain their social freedoms elsewhere.

Besides, this freedom was as social as it was economic. Women cringed at the thought of having to buy rajma (kidney beans) or potatoes, part of their staple diet, and crops that Gurezis deem to be the 'best and sweetest in the entire state', from the market. 'Here, we grow these ourselves, care for them. It is our wish if we want to eat or sell them, but in the towns we will have to buy these from the bazaar.' Most women recognised that, contrary to what government officials were promising, forced migration to cities and towns would not automatically translate into 'opportunities for upward mobility', especially for women who would not enjoy the bodily freedom or forms of economic self-sufficiency which living close to a river or a forest afford.

Dams as military apparatus

Gurezi women's care and labour translated into 'love' for a vibrant landscape, which was now drenched in unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells. The muck and the concrete had diverted the water and contaminated their routes of travel. In addition to the concertina wire installed by the military—an ubiquitous presence in Gurez—there was now mesh and slabs of iron, rusted trucks and rotting jeeps in the vicinity of their apple orchards,

and mountains reduced to rubble and dust. If anything, the dam was an assertion of masculinity and control over a vibrant landscape. Much like Nehru's writings, in which the Himalaya figured predominantly in gendered narratives of self-realisation and nation-building, for the engineers and geologists of the HCC too, dam building was deeply connected to conceptions of heroic masculinity in the face of difficult weather and harsh mountainscapes (Holden 2003). The 'cool rationality of modernity' which the Himalaya represented for Nehru was only enhanced by the HCC's investments in 'meticulous planning, precise execution', and cutting-edge technology which helped the engineers and geologists to establish domination over mountain valleys (Holden 2003: 7; HCC 2014).[4] Scores of men donning their yellow helmets and fluorescent safety jackets, many of them from outside Gurez, considered themselves to be 'pioneers' who were building India's prestige project in an inhospitable terrain where it was often difficult to breathe, especially if they were trapped inside the long and cavernous water tunnels. Even so, the work of engineering persisted, notwithstanding the hardships. Embedded in the tropes of hardship and difficulty were celebrations of their hardiness, the enormity of their efforts, and proof of 'national greatness', which lay in transforming nature and bringing it in line with visions of national destiny.

The masculine nature of infrastructural work and the walls, tunnels, adits, and concrete in Gurez produced a new set of gendered immobilities, forcing women to alter their movements and restructure their sense of space and place.[5] In the frontier zones of Kashmir, where movement is heavily surveilled by the Indian military, infrastructural interventions such as large dams also end up multiplying and extending borders which limit people's, especially women's, access to critical spaces and resources. In doing so, infrastructural forms shape social domains

by imposing new geographies of movement and restriction, and violating pre-existing rights and claims to particular spaces. Also, in the process, what arises are borders within borders, and infrastructure that reproduces the logics of border surveillance and enforcement (Weizman 2007; Lambert 2013).

Dams, thus, become extensions of a military–security apparatus, widening their reach into new social and ecological domains, and intensifying everyday levels of policing and surveilling, while ensuring that even less physical space remains for public use. For instance, concertina wire is no longer confined to military installations, it is also used to enclose dam sites; there is posted signage at non-military sites prohibiting the use of cameras; there are no-entry signs placed strategically near the dam site preventing civilians from accessing walled-off zones. Similarly, power stations built underground remain inaccessible to the general population, and worker camps installed on prime agricultural land make it difficult for women to walk across their fields after sunset.

The Uri dam

In the frontier tehsil of Uri in north Kashmir, where the construction of the 480 MW Uri-I project coincided with the onset of Kashmir's armed rebellion for *azaadi*, dams were not mere material extensions of a military–security apparatus. In a bid to grab land, several people were 'disappeared' by the military in the 1990s, often, as many villagers recount, at the behest of the NHPC. For instance, Razia, a 40-year old woman and a community leader, recounts the horrid tale when her father, a landlord, was disappeared in 1990 when she was 16 years old (Bhan and Bukhari 2017). She claims that her father, who the family was unable to find despite their best efforts, was reluctant to sell land to the NHPC, and was therefore seen as

an impediment to the upcoming hydroelectric project. Hardly anyone at the time could speak against the project, recalls another villager, 'because the military could silence us at any time'.

Thus, for Razia and other villagers, the dam was a disciplinary tactic to reorder spaces, communities, and ecologies, divide land, and force a recalcitrant population into submitting to the new demands of corporate and military labour (Bhan 2014). At the same time, the dam dispossessed populations of their land and resources, a phenomenon they saw repeating itself during the 2014 floods, when Uri suffered massive destruction because of a flooded Jhelum. The villagers complained that the NHPC, instead of disposing the debris from the dam in environmentally-safe places in the 1990s, had dumped it haphazardly in the village in the form of huge mounds that had loosened due to the flood and damaged their homes and fields (Bhan and Bukhari 2017). The water had eroded the debris which consisted of boulders, mud, and pebbles, and dumped it on people's agricultural land. The dam, it was clear, had lasting ecological consequences for Uri, which the 2014 flood had both intensified and made visible. The intervening two decades could barely hide the irreversible impact of the dam and its debris on their land, rivers, and water bodies. The situation in Uri, thus, corroborated Gurezis' fears that the Kishanganga dam would eventually flood more areas than the NHPC had estimated and trigger lasting ecological impact in the area, such as modified temperatures, stunted vegetation, greater cloud cover, and less sunshine (Bauer and Bhan 2016, 2018).

The flood and its jinn

For many women like Razia, the flood, while catastrophic, opened up alternative ecological imaginaries in which the gushing waters of the Jhelum river made explicit the connections

between land and water, and human and non-human forms, reminding them of the lived landscape which had existed before it was burdened with concrete and concertina wire. Here, I describe how Razia, a community leader and the daughter of the disappeared landlord, sutures a fragmented landscape through tales she recounts of the flood and her encounters with non-human figures who remind her of Kashmir's *garam* (spiritually potent) landscape, and the ways it has been mauled and desecrated by decades of violence.

> The waters came from a *sar* (source), which gives birth to seven rivers. Out of those seven rivers, four flow into Kashmir and three into Pakistan. The four rivers were responsible for the flooding in Kashmir while the three rivers were responsible for the flooding in Pakistan. Humans were not the only ones affected. There were jinn, too, and it is their shrieks that we all heard. They, too, lamented the destruction of their homes. The floodwater was so furious that it sliced the village into three parts. People had not yet set up makeshift bridges which limited people's movement, and yet there was a person, I was told, who would move across banks with immense ease. Sometimes villagers saw him on this side of the river, sometimes on the other side. I decided to find this person and set out for the village the third day after the flood, after the rains had stopped. After walking a mile or two, I arrived at a spot where a villager had sacrificed a cow to stop the flooded river. It was here that this 'man' came to me. I asked him the reason and purpose of his visit. He wanted to see the level of destruction in our village as the flood waters had destroyed his world as well. He said he had come from a border village, which was located on the banks of the *sar* and was about 25 kilometres away.

After recounting her encounter with the jinn, Razia spoke in detail about her relationship with the *sar*, a place she had frequently visited. As a community leader and also the daughter

of the local landlord, Razia visited many sites which had once fallen within her father's sphere of influence. Indeed, her interactions with the jinn and his directives to her must be understood in the context of the important position she occupied in the village as a well-known social and political worker.[6]

> The first time I went to the *sar* was after a few Bakarwals (pastoralists) who live in *dhok*s (small mountain houses) complained about the military's continued harassment. Although living in a tightly-surveilled territory in the higher reaches of the Himalaya, Bakarwal *dhok*s were frequently raided, sometimes in the middle of the night. Men were routinely asked to leave the *dhok*s and sit outside during cold nights while women were instructed to stay back. I took my mother along and a few other villagers to visit the site to figure out a way to help the community. I mobilised at least 25–30 Bakarwals and went to the camp commander. I told him: 'You have such high surveillance during the day, so why is it that people are harassed during the night; their identity cards and other official documents demanded at arbitrary hours?' Seeing the size of the crowd, the commander assured us that he would look into the matter. The Bakarwals lived in peace for some time after that.
>
> After we left the military station, we went to the *sar* with the Bakarwals and their horses, many of them used for military portering. When we arrived, a feast was ready for us. A Bakarwal family had cooked a meal for us and sacrificed a goat for the feast. I can never forget the picturesque *sar*, with its blue waters dancing under gleaming sun's rays. We could hear faint music coming from the other end of the *sar*. As I trained my ears, an older Bakarwal told me that the *sar* is home to jinn, too, and these are old and pious jinn. The *sar* is deep, and according to legend contains a mosque. He used to visit it with his grandfather and once a *barāg*—a winged steed used by the prophets to travel—appeared from under the water.

> The *barāg* instructed his grandfather to visit the site one more time but the latter pleaded that he was too old and might not be able to make the journey again. The *barāg* however insisted that he visit one more time, and carry with him a bag of rice. As instructed, the grandfather visited the *sar* and was told to dump all the rice in the *sar*. Later, he was asked to visit Chasmashahi and see the rice sprout there.

Razia continued to reflect on the 'mysterious' and 'magical' powers of the *sar*. The *sar* was not always visible, she said. 'Even when the weather is clear, the *sar* often refuses to show up. There is too much *gunah* (sin) in Kashmir, but many lands and water bodies remain pious.'

Razia's narrative is filled with references to a particular *sar* she is deeply fond of, one located in the highest reaches of Gulmarg, 25 kms from her village. She attributes the floodwaters to the *sar*, which she calls a magical place, one that reveals itself to only a few people. Indeed, the shepherd she meets on one of her trips there confirms this. The weather turns in a second, he claims, making it difficult for people to spot the *sar*. There are places in Kashmir that resist being 'revealed'. Kashmir, Razia says, has many 'secrets', with lands and waterscapes that dance and sing, bless and curse, and those that disrupt or exceed the confines of the human imagination. Rivers and *sar*s also know no boundaries; they traverse the militarised borders between India and Pakistan, causing flooding in Kashmir and in Pakistan, and in doing so they resist reductive representations of Kashmir as India's volatile frontier.

The rice grains that the Bakarwal's grandfather immersed in the *sar* sprouted far away in another water body, in Chasmashahi, located at least 60 kms from Gulmarg, establishing the connectedness of a landscape which has been cut, sliced, split, mined, and fragmented—through walls, borders, dams, roads,

landmines, and checkpoints—and rendered lifeless and inanimate. Such connections extend from the human to the non-human world, which include the jinn who, dislocated by the floods, visited Razia's village to assess the damage. In her narratives, the jinn, disguised as a human, comes from the same *sar*, making it obvious to Razia that he was indeed a jinn, as he possessed non-human capabilities to travel across flooded roads and bridges.

The jinn, bestowed in Islamic cosmology with a long life and the faculties to move swiftly, while also continually able to change form (Khan 2006: 238), says to Razia that the deluge is a *kheher* from *khuda* (wrath from god) and it will come again, but that she should try to stop it. Razia claims she is powerless in the face of such calamities, although the conversation inspires her to immediately begin post-flood recovery work in her village. Razia's constant invocation of the space as already heavily surveilled and guarded by the military, and the litany of atrocities against the Bakarwals, particularly their women and children, foregrounds a morally corrupt geography of militarism in which the *sar*, standing here both as a metonym for Kashmir and its sacredness, is contaminated with *gunah*. Even so, although being scarred with militarised violence and located amidst dense geographies of surveillance, the *sar*, which guards a sacred mosque and is also home to the jinn, dances with joy as fountains of water erupt from its womb. In her post-flood recounting of Kashmir's morally laden geographies, in which jinn and humans are both victims of the deluge, Razia's story restores lost connections—human and non-human, natural and social, as well as spiritual and political.

In his extensive study of jinn in Delhi, Anand Taneja (2017: 10) argues that 'jinns are linked to deep time, connecting human figures thousands of years apart'. In doing so, they serve as 'magical figures of memory', and by virtue of the long lives

they lead '[connect] human beings centuries and millennia apart in time' (Taneja 2017: 11, 25), while also challenging an amnesiac state's concerted attempts to efface Muslim artefacts and sacred sites in post-Partition India. For Razia, too, the jinn reminded her of *garam*, spiritually potent, spaces, or of the connectedness of spaces and water bodies that militarised infrastructure—bunkers, camps, dams, and checkpoints—had fragmented. Such connections represented alternative social and material histories and spatial imaginaries which now lay buried under dense layers of a military occupation. In doing so, the jinn restore some form of mystique to Kashmir's land and water forms, for instance, through their ability to not 'reveal' themselves fully, notwithstanding the structures of surveillance which attempt to map every inch of the region's surface. At the same time, the jinn stand witness to the connections of the past; they speak to different modes of being and belonging in a space, where both are structured by the spatial logic of a military occupation. The jinn also prod Razia to 'do something' and 'stop the flood'. Realising her charge, she assumes the task of rebuilding her community by setting up teams and equipment to clear her muck-damaged agricultural fields, and reclaims what is left of her land and village.

Conclusion

In this essay I have analysed how the intersections between dams and more quotidian forms of militarised infrastructure shape women's anxieties about their environment, and their ability to seek opportunities for social, political, and economic freedoms. As exercises in border enforcement, the dams in Gurez and Uri intensified the structure and logic of a military state by imposing new limitations on women's freedom of movement and by literally disappearing people who refused to conform to the

NHPC's brutal land-grab policies. In a space where the military exercises various degrees and forms of spatial control, the flood of 2014 was both a stark reminder of how environmental and territorial freedoms are interlinked, and how Kashmir's river resources were being exploited to power the Indian economy. This triggered a series of conversations on Kashmir's resource sovereignty and the fate of its rivers and water bodies. The flood, it was clear, was a political event, which laid bare the state government's apathy and callousness towards Kashmir's water resources. For Gurezis, who had not experienced the 2014 flood, it served as a reminder of what was to come: the dam, often called the *sehlab,* would inundate their villages and also their way of life, and the consequences of this disenfranchisement were deeply gendered. In women's narratives across Srinagar, Uri, and Gurez, I heard a trenchant critique of a militarised state which was abusing Kashmir's resources and using them against the local populations. This had the effect of revealing women's vulnerabilities, but also spurred resistant political and ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir's land and waterscapes were reimagined and re-spatialised through allusions to jinn, spirits, and Kashmir's mystical and enchanted geographies. Such alternative conceptions of Kashmir's geography, which presented it as unfragmented, undivided, and spiritually potent exceeded the militarised logic of border enforcement, and can be read as the political renditions of a landscape scarred by decades of violence and bloodshed.

Endnotes

[1]The term 'occupation' encompasses both the affective and legal dimensions of the existing Indian state in Kashmir. Kashmiris overwhelmingly resent and resist the presence of a hostile, largely Hindu, military force and their violent tactics to suppress popular demands for self-determination. Indian military presence can justifiably be called an occupation based on Article

42 of the Hague Convention, which states the presence of a 'hostile' army and the exercise of its authority over the local population as a fundamental characteristic of an occupation (Ferraro 2012: 7). The ICRC report notes that, in recent years, the meanings of, and the laws governing occupation have undergone many shifts, mainly because 'in addition to the persistence of traditional forms of occupation', extraterritorial military interventions 'have given rise to new forms of foreign military presence on the territory of a state, sometimes consensual, but very often imposed' (Ferraro 2012: 7; Bhan and Misri 2015).

[2]Badwan and Khopri are two villages in the Gurez tehsil, which is approximately 85 kms from Bandipora district. According to Census data from 2011, there are around 479 families in Badwan-Wanpora and the total population is 3,327. Khopri-Mastan, a village considered to be the seventh least populous in Gurez, has 97 households and a total population of 520 (GoI 2011). Notwithstanding these official statistics, data on the total number of households in each village was contested by the villagers who felt that their *chula* or household was not represented in the data, which made them ineligible for dam-related compensation. Badwan, which means big forest, I was told, was the 'face of Gurez' as many of its residents have excelled in the bureaucracy as well as in medicine, arts, and poetry. The villages once used to be at the heart of the Central Asian Silk Route and memories abound from the time when Gurez was not a border, but an entrepôt, and a thriving cultural and trade centre. Similarly, villagers were also arbitrarily separated from their families and relatives in 1948, when the UN brokered the ceasefire line soon after India and Pakistan's first war over Kashmir.

[3]Interview with the author, 5 June 2014.

[4]HCC is the acronym for Hindustan Construction Company, a Mumbai-based contracting company, responsible for building the Kishanganga dam. For more details, see HCC (2014). Also see Bhan (2014).

[5]Unlike in other Himalayan regions where women are an integral part of the workforce in mega-infrastructure projects, such as roads and dams, women in Gurez did not participate in similar forms of construction work.

[6]By no means were jinn-related stories limited to women. In Gurez, for instance, both men and women spoke about them, worrying that the jinn were now harder to spot because human intervention had weakened the pre-existing moral and spiritual worlds. In writing about the world of jinn,

some scholars express the concern that a widespread belief in them among South Asian Muslim communities might be used to reinforce stereotypes about Muslim irrationality (in this case Muslim women's irrationality; see Naveeda Khan 2006: 239). Such stereotypes, they caution us, can miss out on the secular character of jinn, or their significance among non-Muslim communities in South Asia and beyond. In many instances, such as in the Feroz Shah Kotla ruins of Delhi, as Anand Vivek Taneja notes, non-Muslims, too, visit the dargah, petitioning the jinn to resolve their personal and professional predicaments. Besides, such stereotypes erase how jinn are dynamic entities, and the ways in which the relationship between jinn and humanity is also constantly evolving. Jinn can be seen as political figures, offering a nostalgic view of the past, and as a yearning and potential for inclusive and moral futures (Taneja 2017).

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From Appropriative to Transnational Solidarities

#JusticeforAsifa and #MeToo in Kashmir

DEEPTI MISRI

In this essay I consider two very different digital feminist interventions focusing on sexual violence against women and girls in Kashmir. The first, originating in India, comprised the involvement, in April 2018, of a number of Bollywood celebrities in popularising the hashtags #JusticeForAsifa and #JusticeForOurChild, protesting the brutal rape and murder of an eight-year old girl from the nomadic Bakerwal community in Kathua district of Jammu & Kashmir. The second intervention, which appeared just a few months later, was a collective statement entitled 'Decolonial Feminist Statement on #MeToo in Kashmir' initiated in October 2018 by a transnational network of Kashmiri feminists, and co-signed by a large cross-section of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri feminists and allies. I situate these interventions as two examples of a vast and varied continuum of popular feminisms today, to ask what modes of address and forms of solidarity are activated by each. Reading the #JusticeForAsifa hashtag campaign alongside the 'Decolonial Feminist Statement' (DFS) first posted on the Critical Kashmir Studies weblog, I consider the limitations of the activist celebrity campaign, presumably in solidarity with Asifa, while highlighting the opening created by the DFS for Indian feminists to be in effective rather than nominal feminist solidarity with women and girls in

Kashmir. Such a feminist solidarity, as the DFS had suggested, must necessarily be approached as transnational in nature, rather than forged within national boundaries.

Appropriative solidarities: #JusticeforAsifa

On 12 April 2018, Kashmiris opened their social media feeds to note, not without some confusion, that many Indians had woken up to a matter about which Kashmiris had been vocal in outrage and anguish for about three months. The hashtag #JusticeforAsifa (JFA) had begun trending, following the publication of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) charge-sheet detailing the horrifying rape of an eight-year old Bakerwal girl, Asifa, within the precincts of a temple in Kathua district. The facts of the case were indeed blood-curdling. On 17 January the girl's body had been found in the forest near Devisthan temple, a week after she had gone missing while grazing her horses in the area. As the CBI chargesheet detailed, she had been kidnapped, held hostage, drugged, repeatedly raped, and eventually killed within the precincts of the temple by a number of men, including a local Special Police Officer, Deepak Khajuria, and the nephew of the mastermind, Sanji Ram.

The chargesheet itself was filed amidst massive local opposition by Hindus in Kathua. The Hindu Ekta Manch (Hindu Unity Forum), an organisation formed with the exclusive purpose of defending the accused perpetrators, led processions protesting the arrest of the prime accused, and two senior BJP ministers appeared in open support of the Manch. Several lawyers of the Kathua bar association attempted to block the presentation of the chargesheet in court. Indeed, it is likely that the compilation of these details in the published chargesheet, as well as the fraught context of its release eventually shocked the Indian public into a mass expression of outrage, cutting across 'liberal' and non-

liberal populations, reminiscent of the cross-cutting public fury which followed the Delhi Nirbhaya rape in 2012.

In the days following the release of the charge-sheet, Bollywood's top stars, musicians and directors played a considerable role in energising the outrage around the Asifa case, tweeting under the hashtags #JusticeforAsifa and #JusticeForOurChild, and also showing up for a public protest held in her name. Of interest here is one particular strand of this larger outpouring of anger by Bollywood celebrities, encapsulated in the following iteration:

> I am Hindustan. I am Ashamed. #JusticeForOurChild. 8 years old. Gangraped. Murdered. In 'Devi'-sthaan temple. #Kathua

A number of women in the Hindi film industry, including Swara Bhaskar, Kareena Kapoor, Sonam Kapoor, Huma Qureishi, Kalki Koechlin, Gul Panag, Konkona Sen, and Radhika Apte appeared in photo posts on social media holding up placards bearing this text, their social media posts then being reported in the Indian media and celebrity news outlets, and generating considerable public discussion around the case.[1]

Meanwhile, online responses sought angrily to separate the rape of Asifa from any association whatsoever with Hinduism, either by claiming that the rape had nothing to do with Hinduism, or by suggesting that this was a far cry from 'real Hinduism'.[2] A few days later, when a number of Bollywood personalities appeared together at a protest for Asifa on 16 August in Bombay, Bollywood actress Aditi Rao Hydari—who was not one of the participants in the feminist celebrity photo campaign discussed above—addressed the controversy which had by then exploded around the role religion had played in the crime: 'Why is it about religion, why is it about community, why is it about caste; it's not about any of those things, it's about humanity; it is about a basic thing: girls in our country need to be safe.' Her comments

represented a widely prevalent sentiment, that the rape of Asifa be treated as a gender crime alone, exemplifying a resistance to a structural critique and intersectional feminist perspectives which feminist media scholar Sarah Banet Weiser (2018) identifies as a hallmark of 'popular feminism'. Even as gender is allowed to become a 'universal' concern, with the blessings of celebrity feminism, categories of religion, community, and caste continue to be seen as too specific to be admitted into a universal understanding of 'humanity'.

Among the many types of popular responses to the Asifa case discussed above, the variant 'I am Hindustan. I am Ashamed' was perhaps unique in expressing shame on behalf of the Hindu nation to a Muslim child from a nomadic community. Unlike Hydari's statement above, it implied a rare willingness within Indian popular discourse to name sexual violence as motivated by an idea of a Hindu nation and not by gender alone. At the same time, however, even as the campaign embodied a critique of Hindu nationalism, it remained anchored to the idea of a better Indian nation capable of providing adequate protection to the Kashmiri and Muslim child, a gesture anathema to Kashmiri feminists who had been working towards decolonisation rather than mere inclusion in the Indian nation-state. The hashtag #JusticeForOurChild smoothly subsumed Asifa into Indian nationhood, claiming her as the child of conscientious Indian citizens. Like #BringBackOurGirls, the viral hashtag adopted globally to highlight the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram in Nigeria, #JusticeforOurChild relied on the appropriative pronoun 'our', effectively erasing the specific historical and political context of occupation in which the rape had taken place. As such, it became a gesture that lent itself to an ongoing settler colonial project in Kashmir, a process which was consolidated by the removal of Articles 370 and

35A on 5 August 2019.[3] Furthermore, as #JusticeforAsifa began to be rapidly rolled in with other trending hashtags like #JusticeforUnnao and #JusticeforTwinkle, it began getting reframed through the issue of child sexual assault in India, detached from the framework of rape as a weapon of war. While that issue was undoubtedly important, Kashmiri feminists have long maintained that their aims are distinct from other people-led movements in India. For example, Ifrah Butt, one of the 50 Kashmiri women who, in 2016, petitioned the Indian Supreme Court to reopen the investigations in the Kunan Poshpora mass rape case, noted a core distinction: 'Events in India do impact us, especially movements led by the people. But while most other agitating groups do not want freedom from India, Kashmiris want self-determination' (Butt and Rather 2016).

Many Kashmiri feminists noted the epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) underlying the gestures of what I am calling 'appropriative solidarities', which took Kashmiri belonging to the Indian nation-state as a given, whereas the crime was inextricable from 'the larger issue of the militarisation, occupation and systematic use of rape as a weapon of war in the region' (Zia 2018). They also questioned the particular outrage around Asifa's rape: 'Ironically, to make A's case the centre of their outrage is to purposefully condone the violence that is perpetrated against Kashmiri bodies on a regular and systematic basis' (Bhan 2018). As Kaul (2018) noted, the defence of the rape of a young Muslim girl by the Hindu Ekta Manch may have shocked some Indians, but for Kashmiris it was a continuation of a larger culture of impunity around mass rapes, enforced disappearances, and other forms of violence at the particular intersection of 'Hindu fundamentalism, militarised masculinity, and economic dispossession in a conflict zone.' Indeed, as the chargesheet had detailed, the principal accused, Sanji Ram, had plotted Asifa's kidnapping and rape as

a way of intimidating the Bakerwals, who grazed their animals in the area, on the apparent suspicion of cow slaughter and drug-trafficking. Situated within a longer history of the Jammu region which had seen a massive demographic shift from Muslim-majority to Hindu-majority, following the mass killing of Muslims by the Dogra state in 1947 (Chattha 2016), the rape of Asifa as a way of securing Hindu control over land must be understood as an aspect of the long and ongoing settler colonial history of the region. From a Kashmiri feminist point of view, intersectional solidarities also entail accounting for the specific factors of class and tribe which distinguished the Bakerwal Asifa's vulnerability, even from the instances of violence and harassment charged by the professional class of Kashmiri women mobilising under #MeToo—a specificity which must remain in focus even as a transnational feminist analysis rightly restores Asifa to view as a Kashmiri, and not Indian, girl.

The evolution of the #JusticeforAsifa hashtag exemplified some of the classic risks of hashtag activism, whereby critique is offered within a neoliberal framework of individual redress. The expressions above of 'selfie humanitarianism' from Bollywood stars may also be understood as an extension of celebrity advocacy, which arose in the West as a way 'to engage western publics with faraway others', as humanitarian NGOs came to depend increasingly upon such media strategies for their survival (Koffman, Orgad and Gill 2015: 159). These strategies frequently run the risk of privileging privatised actions which feel good, rather than challenging larger structures of violence. Shenila Khoja-Moolji observes how such activism, while well-intentioned, sets aside feminist critical tools 'such as a deep engagement with history, understanding the entanglements of the local with the global, and exploring the unequal gendered relations of power that produce violence against women and girls in the first place'

(2015: 349).Thus, the call for 'justice' for Asifa, expressed in almost every solidarity tweet under the hashtags #JusticeforAsifa and #JusticeForOurChild, was anchored firmly and almost exclusively in punitive and retributive action against the rapists.

Exemplifying how 'a highly visible, spectacular feminism often dominates our mediascape', #JusticeforAsifa pushed out of view Kashmiri feminist perspectives grounded in deeper histories of activism (Banet-Weiser 2018). When the 'Decolonial Feminist Statement on #MeToo in Kashmir' emerged a few months later, this erasure of Kashmiri feminist perspectives in popular Indian feminist mobilisations around Asifa was still fresh in many minds, forming part of the context in which Kashmiri feminists challenged Indian women, mobilising against sexual harassment and assault, into entering a more effective form of solidarity, even as they extended their solidarities to them.

Transnational solidarities: the decolonial feminist statement on #MeToo in Kashmir

Only a few months after #JusticeforAsifa had been trending, the #MeToo wave came to Kashmir, implicating a number of Kashmiri Muslim male journalists, and from there, writers, artists, and activists. In October 2018, the Critical Kashmir Studies blog posted a statement entitled 'Decolonial Feminist Statement on #MeToo in Kashmir'. Initiated and drafted by a wide transnational network of Kashmiri feminists working across Kashmir, the US, and other global locations, the statement was eventually co-signed by a large cross-section of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri (including Indian) feminists and allies, and was soon re-posted to other news sites and webzines such as *Raiot, Free Press Kashmir,* and *The Ladies Finger*.

Emerging in conversation with the larger movement for Kashmiri self-determination, the DFS must be understood as

a movement document: its aims were as much to shape the terms of gendered engagement within the movement for self-determination going forward, as they were to express solidarity and support to all the women who had been targeted, irrespective of their geographical and political locations. The DFS, while paralleling JFA's use of social media in order to organise a response and address the phenomenon of sexual harassment and violence, differed significantly in the modes of address and forms of solidarity and action it evoked. This was not least because, here, it was addressing the predatory behaviour of the Kashmiri men named in #MeToo, rather than that of the state, or of those whose violence was enabled, implicitly or explicitly, by the state. Accordingly, its addressees were Kashmiris supporting the movement for self-determination and 'Indian women in the MeToo wave', a phrase broadly indicative of the women in India who were at the time participating in the global moment of networked feminism embodied by #MeToo.

Whereas #JFA was addressed to an Indian public in a way which neatly enfolded Kashmiris into the Indian nation-state, the DFS, from its very opening sentence, indicated a distinction between Indian and Kashmiri women: '*We have been witnessing the series of allegations brought by women journalists—both Indian and Kashmiri—against some prominent male Kashmiri journalists.*' The parenthetical phrase 'both Indian and Kashmiri' thus positioned Indian and Kashmiri women, throughout the statement, as two *separate* constituencies whose interests might occasionally overlap, without being entirely collapsible. This suggested the possibility of a negotiated solidarity, whereby Kashmiri feminists could extend solidarity to Indian women, themselves internally stratified by differences of caste and class, while firmly resisting absorption into Indian women's feminist agendas, as had been seen only a few months earlier in the Asifa

case. They insisted therefore that Indian feminists' solidarity with Kashmiri women be envisioned as a *transnational* gesture, not a national one: a gesture which extended *across* national boundaries, rather than one seeking to enfold Kashmiri women and girls into the protective embrace of Indian feminists.

As a collective articulation of a Kashmiri feminist standpoint, the DFS implicitly pointed to an amply-studied relationship of collaboration and friction between feminism and anticolonial nationalisms. As feminist scholars such as Neloufer de Mel (2001), Seema Kazi (2011), Inshah Malik (2018), Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), and Ather Zia (2019) have shown in a range of contexts, women and feminists in anticolonial nationalist movements have resisted *alongside* men in their communities, while simultaneously also combating sexism within such movements. While #JFA's approach focused largely on the liberal framework of 'equality between women and men', the DFS's particular analysis of intra-community patriarchal violence underscored the need to understand gender relations among Kashmiris as irreducibly also a function of colonial occupation, which produces gendered vulnerabilities for Kashmiris of all genders. Kashmiri men, for example, have been susceptible to disappearance, arrest, and torture, including sexual torture, in overwhelming numbers. As one Kashmiri woman testified in a recent fact-finding report, post-5 August 2019, 'We insist that men should go indoors after 6 p.m. Man or boy seen after dusk is a huge risk. If absolutely necessary, we women go outside' ('All-Woman Team Releases Fact-finding Report on Kashmir' 2019). More recently, the vulnerability of transgender people under conditions of occupation has begun to come to attention, particularly in the aftermath of the removal of Article 370 and the unending days of curfew and Internet shutdown, both of which have made transgender populations economically and

psychologically vulnerable by disrupting their communal modes of survival as well as connection (Bhat 2019). Also, of course, the heightened sexual vulnerability of Kashmiri women in a militarised environment, as well as barriers to access to health and natal care, have been widely registered in feminist scholarship (Batool et al. 2016, and Alliya Anjum in this volume).

The DFS negotiated a challenge which was particular to Kashmiri feminists: that of critiquing the predatory behaviour of the named Kashmiri Muslim men, who themselves were already always criminalised and subject to the violence of the Indian state. Mobilising an acute intersectional analysis at this moment, the DFS registered *both*, how Islamophobic stereotyping rendered Kashmiri Muslim men directly vulnerable to the violence of the state, *and* also rendered Muslim women indirectly vulnerable by imposing on them a 'strategic silence' around violence prevalent within the community, rather than only emanating from the state (Crenshaw 1991). While keeping in focus the vulnerabilities of Kashmiri Muslim men, the DFS refused to subordinate the well-being of Kashmiri women, or indeed that of Indian women, to the former:

> Even as we caution against the absorption of these women's complaints into tired Islamophobic and pro-occupation narratives (example: 'they seek freedom, but look at how they will treat their women'), we insist that those who support the movement for Azadi must be wary of dismissing women's complaints and brushing them under the carpet in the name of protecting the resistance.
>
> At the same time, Kashmiri feminists confronted the task of keeping in mind that Kashmiri women are vulnerable not only to the predatory violence of Kashmiri men, but also to the arguably much more widespread predatory sexual violence by the Indian state. The DFS thus challenged 'Indian women in

> the MeToo wave' to situate the sexual violations flagged under #MeToo on the longer historical continuum of sexual violations also faced by Kashmiri women from the Indian state: 'The widespread denial across India of the mass rapes in Kunan and Poshpora must be seen as one manifestation of the refusal to believe survivors.' Here the DFS tapped into #MeToo's powerful exhortation to 'believe survivors' in order to highlight the mass rapes in Kunan and Poshpora, two villages where in 1991 Indian army personnel had been accused of raping almost all the women during a search operation. This was a charge which had been denied not only by the Indian army, but also by the Press Council of India in a report dismissing the charges as 'a well-concocted bundle of fabricated lies' and 'a massive hoax orchestrated by militant groups and their sympathisers and mentors in Kashmir and abroad ... for reinscribing Kashmir on the international agenda as a human rights issue' (*Rape in Kashmir* 1993).

In these subtle yet deeply contextual negotiations around #MeToo, the Kashmiri feminist position embodied in the DFS shares a deep affinity with the decolonial feminist approaches found in Palestinian and Arab feminisms (Abdulhadi 2005), Native feminisms (Arvin, Tuck and Morrill 2013), and also anti-racist and anti-imperialist feminisms (Crenshaw 1991, Abu-Lughod 2002), among many other forms of non-white and non-Western feminisms which have repeatedly resisted a liberal model of feminism and continue to command the lion's share of mass mediated space within popular and digital culture. As such, the DFS proposed that decolonisation is a necessary condition for feminist transformation in Kashmir, and feminism as necessary to any decolonial transformation in Kashmir.

Unlike the #JusticeForAsifa and #JusticeforOurChild hashtag campaigns, attached to Bollywood stars with massive Twitter

following but no connection with grassroots movements, the Decolonial Feminist Statement, emerging from the grassroots, circulated in a much smaller sphere of influence within a larger 'gendered economy of visibility', which typically offers up the bodies of heteronormative, cis-gender women as the commodity on offer in an 'attention economy' (Banet-Weiser 2018: 29, Marwick 2015). If #JusticeforAsifa exemplified a moment of 'popular feminism' in high visibility, attachment to celebrity culture, and its tacit consent to the status quo (in this case an existing nationalist commonsense which assumes Kashmir to be a part of India and allows concern for a Kashmiri Muslim girl to be articulated on behalf of the nation-state); the DFS exemplified that which Banet-Weiser terms 'populist feminism', defining the latter term as being about people and activism, not as a stand-in for far-right movements across the globe (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2019: 18). Examined in terms of its impact, the DFS might even be seen as a striking example of popular feminism from below, arguably registering a deeper feminist impact than the viral social media posts of Bollywood celebrities under the JFA hashtag. This became apparent when a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University came out, only a few days after the statement's release, with a wrenching account of her rape by Talib Husain, the Bakerwal activist who had risen to prominence as a vocal advocate in Asifa's case. Explaining what had emboldened her to speak out after five months following her rape, the student wrote:

> Had it not been for the Decolonial Feminist Statement on #metoo in Kashmir, with its caution that 'those who support the movement for Azadi must be wary of dismissing women's complaints and brushing them under the carpet in the name of protecting the resistance', I may even have swallowed my humiliation and kept my silence forever ('MeToo in India' 2018).

The concluding challenge to Indian feminists in the DFS laid the groundwork for a decolonial feminist solidarity politics around sexual violence and other feminist issues:

> If the movement [against sexual violence] is to truly stand up for women, everywhere, then supporters of #MeToo must move beyond communitarian and nationalistic affiliations to fight against all perpetrators, including agents of the state, and realise the truth of occupation in Kashmir.

Such models of solidarity from Indian feminists are beginning to form, although they are nowhere as 'popular' or visible as the popular feminist solidarities which took off around the rape of Asifa via the celebrity hashtag campaigns discussed above. Within the first 50 days of lockdown following the events of 5 August 2019, a five-member team of Indian women activists, journalists, and members of civil society presented a fact-finding report from Kashmir which sought to explore 'how this 43 day lockdown had affected the people, particularly women and children' ('All-Woman Team Releases Fact-finding Report on Kashmir' 2019). In a context where the Articles 370 and 35 A had predictably been read down in the name of equal rights for women (Mushtaq 2019, Ashai 2019, Zia 2019), the report executed its own feminist charge on behalf of 'women and children' by tearing into the Indian government's narrative of relative normalcy in Kashmir. It documented in detail the closure of shops, hotels, educational institutions, the barriers of access to health-care, and the pervasive mental health distress in which all Kashmiris were now living. It thereby offered insight into the vulnerability of Kashmiri women and children as part of the larger suffering experienced by *all* Kashmiris, but also specifically, as direct objects of violence, and as family members impacted, emotionally and often economically, by the regular enforced disappearance of men in this zone of occupation. Although the report did not directly call the Indian

government's mode of rule in Kashmir an occupation, it sought to move beyond demanding the restitution of Articles 370 and 35A, or an end to demilitarisation and human rights violations. It called for a political resolution which included the people of Kashmir: 'All future decisions about the political future of Jammu and Kashmir must be taken through a process of dialogue with the people of Jammu and Kashmir.' Admittedly, as a gesture of solidarity, such language leaves somewhat open how such a 'dialogue' might be achieved, particularly given that many Indians remain invested in the representational possibilities of Indian electoral processes which Kashmiris themselves have largely rejected.[4] A demand for dialogue is not, in and of itself, a demand for decolonisation. Even so, the women's report may be seen as an incremental gesture, alongside other recent solidarity efforts stretching gradually, albeit imperfectly, towards the possibility of a transnational feminist solidarity politics from Indians to Kashmiris. It gestures towards future solidarities across borders that centre Kashmiri women and their political aspirations, rather than deploying gestures of appropriative solidarity in order to redeem the worn-out soul of the Indian nation-state.

Endnotes

[1]The actresses, all known for their generally liberal bent either in their public positions or in their personal lives (Swara's openly feminist and anti-Hindutva positions; Kareena's marriage into a Muslim family and naming her son Taimur; and Sonam's pro-LGBT positions have all generated public discussion), were met with a swift blowback. Some outraged Indians called for a boycott of the film, *Veerey di Wedding* featuring three of these actresses; others threatened an Amazon.in boycott for the company's association with Swara Bhaskar, who has been particularly vocal in her condemnation of the Hindu right.

[2]One piece of Twitter art expressed this position quite succinctly, presenting the image of an angry, blue-skinned Shiva, his mouth agape in

a furious scream, holding the limp body of Asifa; below the image appear the words, 'Don't blame my religion'. Above the image of Shiva hover the words, 'I want culprits of Asifa to be hang [sic] till death.'

[3]Article 370 had, since 1954, given the state of Jammu & Kashmir a semi-autonomous status shortly after India's independence from Britain in 1947. Article 35 A gave Kashmir the right to define a 'permanent resident' of the state. Both articles were abruptly abrogated by the BJP-led Indian government on 5 August 2019, with significant lip service being paid to women's and LGBT rights as motivating the government's action. In a recent article, Ali et al., caution against a selective focus on 'women's empowerment' which, they argue, 'may, wittingly or unwittingly, normalise colonial projects and thus render them invisible' (Ali et al. 2019).

[4]This was apparent, for example, in the extremely low voter turnout across the Kashmir Valley in the 2019 election.

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DECOLONIAL FEMINIST STATEMENT ON #METOO IN KASHMIR

We have been witnessing the series of allegations brought by women journalists – both Indian and Kashmiri—against some prominent male Kashmiri journalists. Firstly, we would like to add our unqualified and unambiguous support to the women who have been naming these abusive men in the journalistic community. We hear you. We believe you. We are with you.

We would also like to address the current perception amongst some who support the movement for self-determination that the women bringing these allegations are merely lending a shot in the arm to the Indian state's occupation. It is true that the Indian state and its votaries will seize upon anything to discredit the Kashmiri Muslim community, and by implication denigrate the movement for self-determination and freedom. We especially reject the Islamophobic rhetoric that emerges in these moments. It is all too easy to smear the communities these men come from, even though every single passing day yields new evidence of male sexual predators from all communities and countries across the globe. For every Fahad Shah, there is a Tarun Tejpal, a Gautam Adhikari, a Matt Lauer, a Charlie Rose.

However, even as we caution against the absorption of these women's complaints into tired Islamophobic and pro-occupation narratives (example: "they seek freedom, but look at how they will treat their women"), we insist that those who support the movement for Azadi must be wary of dismissing women's complaints and brushing them under the carpet in the name of protecting the resistance. For a due process to take place, it is important that victims be believed, and space is created where women feel that they are able to voice their experiences without censure, stigma, or rebuke. Concern about women's rights should not emerge only in moments when it exposes the brutalities of the Indian occupation but be a parallel social concern; the silence of men in these cases is especially detrimental to the eventual cause and resistance. Thus, as we raise our voice to oppose the Indian occupation, we must prioritize the well-being of all women on an immediate and ongoing basis, rather than placing that agenda on the back burner for "after Azadi." We, therefore, exhort all those who support the movement for self-determination and Azadi to remain attentive to these cases in our midst and to support women who are bravely coming forward with their complaints. A fair and just society for people of all genders must be an integral part of our vision for Azadi.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention of Indian women in the #MeToo wave to the circumstances faced by Kashmiri women, who have had cause for years to say "Me Too" in the face of an overwhelming threat and reality of sexual assault and violence by Indian forces. The widespread denial across India of the mass rapes in Kunan and Poshpora must be seen as one manifestation of the refusal to believe survivors. If the movement is to truly stand up for women, everywhere, then supporters of #MeToo must move beyond communitarian and nationalistic affiliations to fight against all perpetrators, including agents of the state and realize the truth of occupation in Kashmir.

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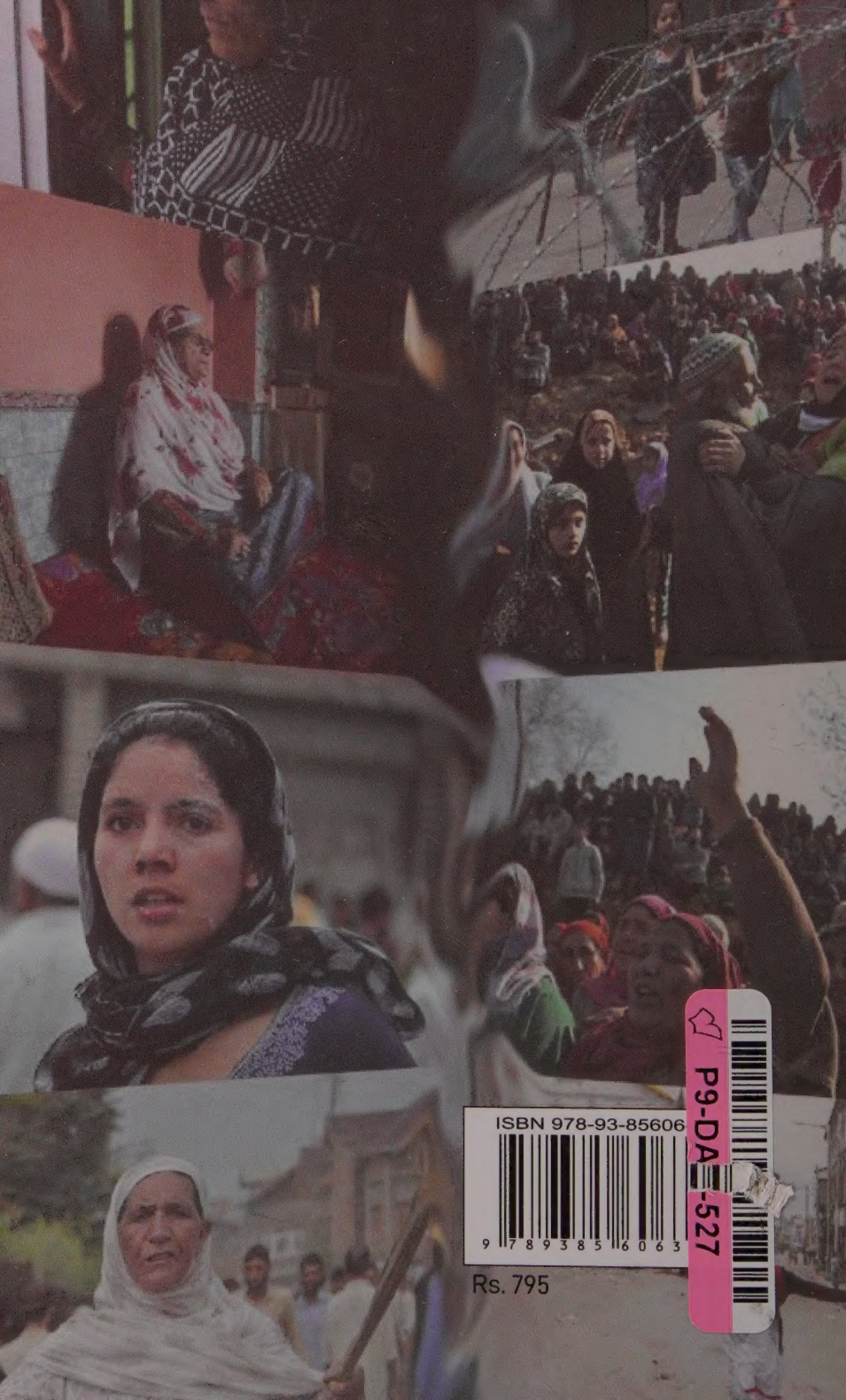
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