Youth Activists in Kashmir: State Violence, Tehreek, and the Formation of Political Subjectivity

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By

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Youth Activists in Kashmir: State Violence, Tehreek, and the Formation of Political Subjectivity

By

Mohamad Junaid

Advisor: Vincent Crapanzano

This dissertation is an ethnographic and historical study of youth activism in a space of geopolitical conflict. It examines ways in which young activists in Indian-administered Kashmir, caught in chronic conditions of state violence and traversed by transnational discourses of identity, experience precarity while desperately seeking to constitute themselves as political subjects through their involvement in Tehreek, or the movement for independence. Toward a theory of political subjectivity as a process of autopoiesis, understood both as a historically contingent yet critical form of reflexivity and as practices of protest, and precarity as a condition marked by persistent vulnerability to state violence made possible under a legally mandated state of emergency, I analyze youth activism and state violence as necessarily interlinked objects of ethnographic and historical inquiry. Keeping in view the anthropological critique of positions that treat ethnographic subjects as culturally-bound passive objects of violence or as trapped in the logics of state power, and inspired by emergent anthropological attempts to engage with theories of subjection and becoming, I study how youth activists, carrying injuries on their bodies and memories of violence, persistently engage in multiple genres of criticism and contestation. Kashmiri youth activists give counter-narratives to the official histories of Kashmir, reinterpret critical events from the past in the present, scoff at inconsistencies between state-managed elections and the professed norms of democracy, and highlight contradictions between
the official secularist claims and the state’s religious majoritarian tendencies. These activists seek to escape the official categories that make them liable to punitive government control, while, at the same time, aiming to fashion an alternative discourse of emancipation within Tehreek. I examine critical events, like a natural disaster or an election, to show how youth activists navigate the fractured landscape of politics in Kashmir. At the same time, by looking at the fault lines within the movement, I analyze how ideological fissures within Tehreek have remained like an open wound for the activists. Based on fifteen months of fieldwork, my study contributes to the growing body of anthropological scholarship that analyzes how marginal groups come to contest relations of power and articulate alternative political projects that traverse local moral systems as well as the global languages of justice. Taking these projects as “politics on the periphery,” I trace how precarity is constructed and overcome at the intersection of postcolonial state violence, political mobilization, and contestations of history, gender, and religion. While this dissertation is a study of activists, it is as much a history of the long-standing Tehreek movement, its roots, dynamics, and internal schisms. I locate this history of Tehreek in the broader politics and history of dislocation and despair among non-dominant nationalities that have been denied political self-determination by postcolonial nation-states. As such, the dissertation expands inquiry into new hierarchies of power and forms of inequality that emerged in the aftermath of decolonization.
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I am moved by the belief my family has placed in me. Growing up in Kashmir in the late 1980s and 1990s was hard. Under a protracted occupation, it is easy to let a sense of fatigue and loss of motivation creep into one’s life projects. Yet, not only did I and my sisters survive, we persistently rebuild our lives and took lines of flight into the world of knowledge and learning. Andleeb Said and Masroor Pasha are perseverance personified. Ghulam Nabi Rather, my father, and Tahira Bano, my mother, made it all possible, despite their very limited resources. Thank you, for everything.

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Note on Naming

The names which appear in this dissertation, including youth activists, human rights activists, students, flood relief workers, members of Tehreek groups, and volunteers, have been changed to protect their identity. Others whose names have been changed are election campaigners in Chapter 5 and ex-members of the Ikhwan in Chapter 5. The names of key Tehreek leaders, Tehreek history-writers, former leaders of the Ikhwan, dead armed activists or youth activists, and top government leaders have not been altered. While I have changed names of precise neighborhoods and villages in the dissertation, but not the names of large towns. The names of organizations and political parties have not been changed. I have changed the names of the local charity and the community organization that appear in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, respectively.

The politics of naming regions in Kashmir is fraught with political consequences. In India, the Pakistani-controlled part of Kashmir is officially called “Pakistan-occupied Kashmir,” but Pakistan as well as Kashmiris call it “Azad Kashmir” (Free Kashmir). In Pakistan, on the other hand, the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir is called “Indian-held Kashmir,” but India and Kashmiris call it Jammu and Kashmir, and sometimes just Kashmir. To avoid confusion, I will use “Azad Kashmir” for the Pakistan-controlled side of Kashmir, and “Kashmir” for the Indian-controlled side. I will distinguish Jammu or Ladakh regions from Kashmir, when the clarification is necessary.

The Indian state and media describe Kashmiri politicians who endorse Indian control over Kashmir as “mainstream,” while those opposed to Indian control as “separatists.” Tehreek activists, however, tend to call the former “collaborators,” and don’t see them as representing the mainstream of Kashmiri opinion. To avoid the charged connotations of both these positions, I will use the term “loyalist” for pro-India politicians (like the National Conference and People’s Democratic Party) and “Tehreek” for those who are part of the Tehreek movement (Jammu
Kashmir Liberation Front, Tehreek-Hurriyat, Hurriyat Conference, and others). Here “loyalist” is simply taken to imply those who take an oath to remain loyal to the Indian Constitution, and includes members of political parties that contest elections for seats in the (Jammu and) Kashmir Legislative Assembly or the Indian Parliament. Tehreek parties do not accept the validity of Indian Constitution or elections in Kashmir.

At various places, I have shortened names of different organizations, groups, or charities for smoother reading. In each chapter, I have given full names before I shorten them:

Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front — JKL

Hizbul Mujahideen — the Hizb

Jama’at-i-Islami — Jama’at

Bharatya Janata Party — BJP

Indian National Congress — Congress

Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen — the Ikhwan

Muslim Mujahideen — MM

Syed-us-Sadaat Foundation — SSF
INTRODUCTION

Two images

It is a sunny June morning in Srinagar in 2014. Atif and I are sitting on a bench under a chinar tree on the Bund, a touristy embankment along the Jhelum river that meanders through the middle of the city. Across the street from us is a papier-mâché gift store. A framed black and white photo is hanging in its window. Atif, a young political activist from downtown Srinagar and a student at a university, has been telling me about how he has been borrowing money to fight a “PSA case” against him. He has just spent six months in a prison, where he was sent under the Public Safety Act, a law that allows the state to imprison Kashmiris without a trial, sometimes for up to two years. I notice Atif has stopped speaking as he intently looks at the framed picture in the gift store window.

“Do you know that picture?” he asks me.

I shake my head.

“Neither does the store owner. This picture depicts the source of our misery.”

Intrigued, I cross the street and read the caption:

The first meeting between the Sheikh ABDULLAH, Kashmir's first minister, and the UN Commission sent to investigate Indian claims of Pakistan aid to Moslem raiders invading Kashmir. Meeting takes place in the Sheikh's garden and the group gets down to business around a map of Kashmir.

The picture is from July 1948 and was taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the pioneers of photojournalism. Since the previous year, Cartier-Bresson had been covering the
After his tours to the border areas embedded with Indian soldiers fighting a war with Pakistan over the region, he was in Srinagar following the activities of a newly appointed United Nations commission. The commission was there to “investigate and mediate the dispute” and to “recommend various measures including the use of observers to stop the fighting.” However, Cartier-Bresson’s caption (“investigate Indian claims of Pakistan aid to Moslem raiders invading Kashmir”) adopts the Indian position on the events.

In the picture (see figure 1), a group of Western UN officials appears to have moved from their lawn chairs and are lounging on a hand-woven carpet laid out on the sloped lawns of the hillside home of Kashmir’s “Prime Minister” Sheikh Abdullah. Two local officials are busy showing the officials lines on a large map placed on the opposite end of the carpet. In the foreground, another group of officials is sprawled on the carpet, lazily chatting under the sun. One official seems to have just dozed off. A Kashmiri attendant is carrying a tray of drinks into the garden. Cartier-Bresson believed photography must give a “proper expression” to “the decisive moment,” or that instant which captures the “significance of an event” (1952, 1-14). This picture, however, apprehends a moment that appears anything but decisive.

Looking intently at the picture, Atif tries to find a meaning in the scene depicted. The store owner walks out to join us. “This is just for tourists,” he says, smiling, “They feel reassured when they know that people from their countries have been coming here.” Kashmir was, until the late 1980s, a popular tourist destination. Not so now. Yet, he wants to continue linking his store with “the colonial times,” which is more a nostalgia for past patronage by his Western clientele

1 Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004), a world-famous French photographer and co-founder of Magnum Photos, was travelling in the subcontinent (1947-48) to cover India’s “birth of a nation.” See also fn 277, p. 331.
2 Initially set up under UN Security Council 39 (1948) as “UN Commission on India and Pakistan” in January 1948, it was later enlarged in April 1948, under UNSC Resolution 47 (1948), to become “UN Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan.”
rather than colonialism itself; Kashmir was never really under direct British colonial rule.

Figure 1. A group of UN officials in Srinagar, Kashmir. July 1948. © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos

“Maybe the photographer wanted to show to the world that the conflict in Kashmir was winding down,” says Atif, engrossed in the picture. “Or, that the UN didn’t take the plight of Kashmiri people that seriously,” he adds, with a discernable bitterness. Then his sense of disquiet grows: “Maybe he wanted to show that Kashmiris were not part of the decisions that were leading to the division of their country.”

Maybe. The picture is eerily tranquil for its time, given that a major war was going on just fifty miles northwest of Srinagar, and an ethnic cleansing of tens of thousands of Kashmiris had taken place on the southwestern border of the state. We can’t decide if Cartier-Bresson’s placid picture is hiding the truth (the intense violence all around), or revealing in a profound way the casual manner history was unfolding in Kashmir.
My friend AH, a journalist, has an office nearby. There is a framed picture on the wall. The picture, which a Kashmiri photojournalist Aijaz Rahi has taken in South Kashmir, is from 1996. In the middle of a muddy village road, a frail, older-looking man is standing, spread-eagled and crouched forward. His feet are bare and his trousers rolled above his knees. Even though his back is facing Rahi’s camera and we can’t see his face, it is evident from his posture that he is agitated and afraid. A large, angry looking group of youths, including a few women, are fast moving toward him. Their object of anger, however, seems past him and past the photographer. Moments before the picture was taken, AH tells me, Indian soldiers had shot dead a villager, and the protestors were marching toward the military camp, ready for a confrontation. It is not clear if the older-looking man is pressing the crowd to keep moving or if he is pleading with them to turn back, fearful that more people might lose their lives.

However, before one can make sense of Rahi’s photograph, the picture projects the kinetic force it visually represents—the Kashmiri bodies moving chaotically forward—on the viewer’s senses. A raw intensity courses through the picture, spilling out of the frame, catching the viewer at a visceral level. AH, who was a young university student in the mid-1990s, describes a similar sensation when he first saw the picture. “Even now I feel something intense rising in me when I look at it. I removed it several times, but I keep bringing it back,” he says. The photograph captures the decisive moment of an uprising that began in 1990 in Kashmir, an uprising that was primarily led by young Kashmiris intent on upending the geo-political order established in South Asia in 1947. It seems—the moment when the picture is taken—as if people
have burst forth against history itself; at least against the history they have been told to accept as
an immutable fate.³

“Tehreek is about reclaiming our right to decide our future as a people.” This is what most of my
primary interlocutors in Kashmir have been saying. Atif tells me: “Tehreek is about moving
ahead, and not remaining trapped in the past when our aspirations for freedom were ignored.”
Tehreek is the region’s long-running “struggle for freedom.” The word literally means
“movement.” There is a word for freedom as well: azadi. It is more than a mere word, though;
azadi has been a rallying cry for several generations of Kashmiri activists, especially since 1931,
when the first mass mobilization began in Kashmir. For my primary interlocutors, whom I call
Tehreek activists, most of them young men and women, azadi is polysemous, and might even
appear as a signifier for a multiplicity of political visions, projects, and potentialities.⁴ Before
1947, azadi meant freedom from the despotic Dogra monarchy, demand for a responsible
government, and a call for a socialist program of land redistribution. After 1947, azadi meant
right to self-determination and an end to the military occupation in Kashmir. Azadi is at its
foundation, as most of my interlocutors would agree, underpinned by a shared, historic desire for
Kashmir to become independent.

“We are telling the world to recognize our voice,” says Atif.

This is probably why Cartier-Bresson’s photograph is poignant. It captures a moment that
appears to deny the existence of Kashmiris as political subjects. It is as if Kashmir’s history has
been settled, with the region’s residents pushed to be mere spectators in the unfolding drama.

³ The picture was destroyed in the September 2014 flood. Unfortunately, no negatives could be found either. The
picture was taken with an SLR analog camera.
⁴ “Azadi” is a Persian word, and has been incorporated into several languages, including Kashmiri, Urdu, and
Kurdish. See also footnote 57 in Chapter 2, p. 186.
There is no regard for the almost two-decades long Tehreek that had begun in 1931. In a way, the photograph, with the map and the sedentary mood, encapsulates the molar politics of nation-states (India/Pakistan), preoccupied with dichotomous identities (Hindu/Muslim), coding territory as “India/Hindu” or “Pakistan/Muslim.” In this binary scheme, overseen by the UN, Kashmiris find no place.

Rahi’s picture, in contrast, depicts something that erupts into the scene as a primal force; as Kashmiri youth claiming political subjecthood in defiance of the nation-state logic as well as the cautious older generation of Kashmiris silenced by years of political repression. The picture’s power is especially heightened by the absence of any visible object (of people’s outrage) in the scene. People, it appears, have taken a line of flight towards a destination unknown and unforeseeable. This line of flight can turn out badly in the end. The politics of azadi may still lead to repression in the future, if not of the same scale as under the military occupation in the present. And some Tehreek parties could become authoritarian in precisely the way the Indian state is in Kashmir. After all, Tehreek has its own internal segmentarities that erupt occasionally as sectarian and gender fault lines. Yet, to youth activists like Atif, Tehreek appears to be a “liberatory” line of flight, a path to become something other than what the dominant nation-states, India and Pakistan, would like Kashmiris to be.

In the governing accounts of Kashmir’s modern history, neither of these pictures, Cartier-Bresson’s or Rahi’s, might be considered iconic. Indian accounts often hail the moment of the Dogra monarch signing the accession treaty with India in 1947 as the decisive national event; it

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5 I draw the concepts “molar” and “lines of flight” from Gilles Deleuze’s essay "Many Politics" (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 124—147). Deleuze defines molar politics as defined by binary divisions, rigid segmentarity, territorialization, homogenization of difference, and preservation of dominant power. Molar politics is contrasted with molecular fluxes, the third which is neither this nor that, but an asymmetrical becoming of the two, and disturbs the order. Lines of flight are movements toward the unknown and unforeseeable.
is an event that Tehreek activists, in turn, see as “catastrophic.” In Indian accounts, the military repression in Kashmir since 1947, and which intensified after 1990, remains invisible. The two pictures, if anything, introduce us to a mode of seeing that help understand how the molar politics of nation-states is entwined with the lines of flight of youth activism. Rahi’s picture pierces the history of Kashmir as it has often been told, but more importantly it destabilizes the senses this history has sought to cultivate, the senses which take the primacy of the nation-state order in South Asia as axiomatic and *a priori*.

For youth activists in Kashmir, the point of their activism is not simply to challenge the state’s “official accounts,” confront the “military occupation,” or claim Kashmiris as “victims” of history. They want to enfold their visions of azadi into the historic movement they have inherited. I call this mode of simultaneous contestation of the terms of subjection in the present and the visionary politics of the future as *political subjectivity*, and explore, in the coming pages, its conceptual parameters based on my ethnographic work with Tehreek youth activists. The two images, Cartier-Bresson’s and Rahi’s, signify for me a tense historical space within which I explore what it means for youth activists in Kashmir to become political, and to claim participation in the unfolding history of the region.

There is no easy way to tell the story of Kashmir. As would be expected of any space of political contestation, all linear narratives remain contested. Yet, to understand the perspectives of youth activists in Kashmir, a story, as accurate as possible, must be told—*or, at least, the way youth activists tell it to themselves*.

**History, treaties, and violence**

“So much of my childhood was spent learning about the beauty of this place,” says Zarine, a young woman, who has been busy compiling data on Kashmiri women affected by
militarization. Again, she is looking at a picture, one of the stock postcard pictures of Kashmir, the kind that are sold to tourists along the shores of the Dal Lake in Srinagar. Kashmiris also buy these scenic pictures of Kashmir as keepsakes for their homes, suggesting an aesthetic underpinning to the idea of being “Kashmiri.” Kashmiri landscape itself becomes an iconic recipient of devotion, over and above any ethno-cultural ideal of Kashmiriness. Zarina’s thoughts bring back my own memories. Everyone, it seems, had the same thing to say about the region’s “beauty:” the imposing Himalayas, the verdant valleys, the innumerable springs, the life-giving river Jhelum, and the crystal lakes. In school, we spent years recounting the “magic of Kashmir’s four seasons.” We knew about the almond-blossoms of the Spring, the festive but hard work of paddy sowing in the Summer, the harvest and the fiery red Chinar leaves of the Autumn, and the warm stories and carpet weaving during the icy Winter. We were, of course, only rehearsing what visitors to Kashmir had written about the place before us, or what its kings, queens, and their court poets had said. Kashmir was beautiful. Yet, the repertoire of the discourses of its beauty had erased its people’s history, the history of violence that formed the backdrop to their present condition, as well as made invisible their aspirations and the history of their struggle. Kashmir had become, as Ananya Kabir (2009) has called it, a “territory of desire.”

Many travelers had come and gone over the centuries, leaving behind their impressions of the place. The condition of Kashmiris often evoked a sense of tragedy and pity, but the topic would quickly shift back to the descriptions of its beauty. Before 1947, the Dogra monarchy had ruled with an iron fist, which was inevitable since the regime was singularly devoted to extracting maximum tax and free labor from its subjects. There was another reason why the Dogra rule was primarily coercive. An upper-caste Hindu clan from Jammu, the Dogras were granted dominion over Kashmir by the British East India Company in 1846 as a reward for
turning against the Sikh rulers of Punjab during the Anglo-Sikh wars. Sikhs had also ruled Kashmir briefly before 1846. The Dogras were their vassals, or local enforcers. As the British and the Dogras signed what came to be called the Treaty of Amritsar, Kashmiris, who were mostly Muslim, opposed it. Those in Kashmir who knew a few things about the Dogras, saw the treaty as a commercial “sale deed,” which had sold Kashmir and its people to a rapacious clan infamous for their cruelty. The Dogras had paid, by their own reckoning, a large sum of money to the Company officials. Kashmiris resisted the treaty, and for a while kept the Dogras from claiming their prize. The British threatened an invasion, Kashmiris flinched, and the Dogras walked in on Srinagar triumphant without even having to conquer the region. Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), a Kashmiri-origin poet, whose family had settled in western Punjab, would later write of the Treaty of Amritsar:

O morning breeze, if you happen to pass by Geneva
Carry our word to the League of the Nations
They have sold the tiller, the fields, the orchards and the flower-gardens
They have sold an entire nation, and for what a cheap price! 

The Dogras, instead of setting up a tolerant order, which had historically marked principalities across South Asia facing similar or opposite (Muslim ruler, Hindu subjects) scenarios, chose to rule by force. They were zealous in espousing the primacy of Hinduism over a non-Hindu population, and established what the historian Mirdu Rai (2004) has called a “Hindu State.” In this state, Kashmiri Muslims were heavily taxed, socio-politically marginalized, and repressed. To support the regime, Dogras had deployed the services of

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6 The original poem is in Persian and appears in Iqbal’s famous work *Javid Nama*. This couplet has been translated into Urdu and English by several anonymous sources, all of whom seem to go beyond the original. The version I use is my effort to bring it close to Iqbal’s poem. See also Rai (2004, 19).
Kashmir’s tiny Brahmin population, called the Pandits, as well as upper-caste Hindus from Jammu and Punjab and a few Pir Muslims. Creating an enduring fissure between Muslims and Pandits, religious identity gradually came to overlap with class identity. In Rai’s terms, Hindus were the ruling class, and Muslims the subjects. As I argue in Chapter 6, the schism between Muslims and Hindus was a result of the Dogra state’s discriminatory policies and not some essential religious conflict between the two.

The Dogra system had, despite its obvious contradictions, endured. In 1931, Muslims finally organized first into the Muslim Conference, then, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, into the National Conference. Initially, the Muslim Conference demanded an equitable “responsible government” and “elementary, basic rights” under the monarchy. But then, as the British Empire in India was beginning to come to an end, Abdullah questioned the continued validity of the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar, called for an end to the feudal, monarchical order, and the establishment of a secular, socialist Kashmir with popular sovereignty. The events were, however, not under his control, as the larger forces in South Asia were carving the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Yet, despite his good intentions, his political naiveté got the better of him. Abdullah’s shadow would be cast on the subsequent events in Kashmir and beyond.

Abdullah was closer to Indian National Congress leaders, like Jawaharlal Nehru, than to the Muslim League’s Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Jinnah, who had called for Pakistan, did not like Abdullah much either. Nehru and his Congress had supported Abdullah’s contentions: “princely rights” (like those of the Dogras) were subservient to the “will of the state peoples;” treaties between princes and the British should be annulled; and, the people’s will should be determined.

Jinnah’s Muslim League had, on the other hand, remained vague on the question of the difference between the princes’ rights and the will of state peoples.\(^9\) Congress had effectively cornered Jinnah as a proponent of “communalism” (politics based on religious identity) and presented itself as the secular mainstream within the anti-colonial movement. This political scene, and his own personal likes and dislikes, blinded Abdullah to the real nature of events unfolding in the subcontinent. Nehru’s Congress, while accepting the will of the people, had also passed a resolution for the “Unity of India,” which opposed any state’s or people’s decision to “secede” from “the Indian Union or Federation.”\(^10\) Abdullah had also ignored the vehement domestic opposition to Congress’s claims on Kashmir. Important parties in Jammu and Kashmir, like the Kisan Mazdoor (Peasant Worker) Conference and the Muslim Conference, had passed resolutions in favor or endorsement of independence,\(^11\) while the Kashmir Socialist Party endorsed accession with Pakistan.\(^12\) This was especially true in Jammu, where Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas was the most prominent Muslim leader, even though during the crucial months of 1947, the Dogras kept him in jail. In short, while Abdullah was no doubt an important leader in Kashmir, popular for his socialist rhetoric, his word was not the “will of the Kashmiri people.”

The four months from August 1947 to November 1947 were traumatic ones in the region’s history. As the British empire in India came to an end, the Dogra ruler, Hari Singh,

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\(^10\) *Ibid.*, 75-165. ‘Resolution of the “Unity of India” passed by the All India Congress Committee.’ (April 29-May 2, 1942). Legal document 74. Since the “union” or “federation” in 1942 was just a notional entity instead of an actual one, the idea of secession was meaningless. The resolution, however, makes clear the Congress’s attitude toward the future of the states.


found himself scrambling for a kingdom his ancestors had received as a gift and in which its Muslim subjects had toiled to support a lavish life for a tiny class of people affiliated to Hari Singh’s clan. Since the mid-1930s, Hari Singh had envisioned for his kingdom a quasi-sovereign status within a federal “India of the future.” At the same time, a dream of “independence” for his kingdom had also begun to grow inside him (Guha 2007, 77), a dream he simultaneously wanted to crush among his subjects. In a series of carefully planned steps that included a genocide, the ruler crushed the aspirations of independence among his subjects in a final act of cruelty, even though he lost his kingdom as well.

Writing about those fateful months in Kashmir, historian Alex von Tunzelmann (2005: 281-304) notes that the king saw his interests as opposed to those of his subjects. First, he dismissed his Prime Minister, a Hindu who had recommended accession to Pakistan, and briefly took advice from his Astrologer, who recommended independence (in which the Dogras would rule in perpetuity). But eventually he listened to his wife and brother, both of whom recommended accession with the Hindu-majority India. Second, he started disarming his Muslim soldiers (who were mostly from Poonch, a region close to the border with Pakistan), and who, as a result, began deserting his army. He simultaneously bolstered his Dogra units with men and weapons. Third, as von Tunzelmann (2007: 286) writes:

During September and October 1947, the Maharaja’s Dogra-led troops carried out a campaign of sustained harassment, arson, physical violence, and genocide against Muslim Kashmir in at least two areas—Poonch, right on the border with Pakistan, and pockets of southern Jammu…(M)ore or less the entire Muslim population of Jammu, amounting to around half a million people, was displaced [into Pakistan], with around 200,000 of those disappearing completely.

13 Kashmiri Muslims had never been allowed to join the army or to carry weapons.
The true scale of this ethnic cleansing is hard to know;\textsuperscript{14} but, given the census records before and after 1947, Jammu province, from being a Muslim-majority region, had within a matter of a few months become a decidedly Hindu-majority area.\textsuperscript{15} Von Tunzelmann notes, “India would deny that any holocaust had taken place, perhaps because it had secretly been providing arms to the Dogra side” (2007: 287). Military units from the Indian province of Patiala were already secretly operating in Srinagar (Lamb 1994, 130-32). Then, on October 20 of that same year, the Dogra army attacked Muslim villages across the border in Pakistan, leading to hundreds of deaths.\textsuperscript{16} Across several regions of the state Muslims arose in protest and rebellion, and parts of Kashmir (around Poonch) even declared independence as a “Free Kashmir” state (popularly called Azad Kashmir). On Nehru’s advice, Hari Singh suddenly released his bitter foe Abdullah from jail and appointed him as an “Emergency Administrator.” To the shock of many, Abdullah not only accepted the position, he also declared support for the Dogra ruler’s decision to accede with India. He remained vehement though about Hari Singh’s future and asked him to abdicate the throne, and eventually to remove “Maharaja” even as a ceremonial position.

By late October 1947, the news of ethnic cleansing in Jammu had reached Muslim Pathan tribes in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province. There, Afridis and Mehsuds, two Pathan tribes historically discredited by the British for their “fierce independence,” “religious zeal,” as well as their “appetite for plunder,” assembled and poured into Kashmir in a disorganized

\textsuperscript{14} New scholarly work on the events of 1947 in Jammu and Kashmir that sheds some light on the ethnic cleansing include work by Cabeiri deBergh Robinson (2013) and Christopher Snedden (2013). In recent years, certain eye witness accounts have also emerged, especially the account of Ved Bhasin, a veteran journalist from Jammu, who was himself from a Dogra background (Naqvi 2016). There are also several accounts from Pakistan, including statements issued by Azad Kashmir Parliament, which are discussed in Snedden (2001).

\textsuperscript{15} The 1941 Census of India shows that the Muslim population of Jammu province was 61.19 percent, while the Hindu population was 37.19 percent. The ethnic cleansing of Muslims took place in the western districts of Jammu (Snedden 2001).

\textsuperscript{16} According to British officials, cited by Von Tunzelmann, more than 1750 were killed in these attacks (2007, 288).
campaign in support of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir. There are no independent eyewitness accounts to this “tribal invasion” (Guha 2007, 79), and its latter day historical reconstruction is mired in India-Pakistan diplomatic exchanges in the United Nations Security Council. A few broad observations, however, can be made. Along the way, the Afridis and Mehsuds drove out small groups of Hindus and Sikhs, who began migrating to Jammu. With their victory over the Dogra forces in Kashmir looking close, it seems (although there is no record again) that they also plundered Muslims of Baramulla in Kashmir. Kashmiris, caught between a rock (the image of fierce Muslim tribesmen) and a hard place (Hindu Dogras), were frightened into silence. They were also left leaderless, as most of the leaders had remained in jail much of this time, foolishly, according to elderly Kashmiris who recount these stories. Hari Singh found the perfect opportunity to do what his Indian friends wanted him to do. Toward the end of October 1947, he escaped from Srinagar, along with the vast treasure from the state exchequer, leaving Kashmir defenseless. On his way to Jammu, he sought military help from India, and in return he accepted the Indian demand that Kashmir accede with India. Abdullah, fearful of the tribesmen, endorsed Hari Singh’s decision. Internal opposition in Kashmir to Abdullah’s volte face was crushed.

But what about the legality of the Dogra king’s accession to India? The British, unable to administer their Indian empire after World War II, had asked all the princes under their dominion, including the Dogras, to join either India or Pakistan. It wasn’t really a choice. Rulers who had a majority Muslim subject population in their states and had a contiguous border with

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17 Pathans in NWFP had kinship ties with Pathans in Kashmir, especially the Afridis, and the Kashmiri Pathans, who served in the Dogra army, had been among the first Muslim soldiers to be disarmed, disbanded, and told to go home. It is likely that these kinship ties played a big role in provoking the Pathans of NWFP to make their raids against the Dogra army. But as an alibi for the Indian invasion, Pathans probably changed the destiny of Kashmiris.

18 These primarily included India deputy prime minister Vallabhai Patel and a senior bureaucrat V. P. Menon.
the state of Pakistan were to join Pakistan. Those who had Hindu majority subjects and a
contiguity of border with the state of India were to join India. Under this logic, Hari Singh
should have joined Pakistan. While more than five hundred large and small princely kingdoms
under the British Empire had followed this principle (except Hyderabad and Junagadh, which
were soon resolved through military force and a plebiscite, respectively), only Kashmir’s ruler
made a choice that flouted the logic. Defying the aspirations of an overwhelming majority of his
subjects, Hari Singh signed the Treaty of Accession with India. Whether the decision was
necessitated by the incursion of Muslim tribesmen from Pakistan into Kashmir, or whether the
decision had been impending and actually caused the tribesmen to attack the Dogra state,
remains a matter for historical debate. But it is a fact that Indian leaders made signing of the
accession treaty a legal condition for their military help in securing the Dogra state, which, if
they considered Hari Singh the sovereign, should not have been necessary at all. After all, Hari
Singh could have asked for help as a sovereign ruler, and India would not have broken
international law by providing it. And if they did not think Hari Singh had sovereign rights, as
Congress leaders had repeatedly asserted previously, why was there the need to have him sign
the document at all? Quite plausibly, M.K. Gandhi, and especially Nehru, knew about Hari
Singh’s involvement in abetting the genocide in Jammu, and yet they supported his decision.

Even after accomplishing the political coup against his own subjects, the Maharaja
continued carrying out ethnic cleansing. Von Tunzelmann (2007: 294) wrote:

On 5 November (1947), 120 trucks mysteriously arrived in the city of Jammu. Local Muslims
were rounded up and told that they would be taken to the Pakistan border, then released across it.
Five thousand civilian men, women and children complied and got into the trucks. Instead of
driving to the border, the trucks turned the other way, and took the Muslims further into the heart
of Jammu. The convoy halted, the guards got out, and then, with machine guns and blades,
massacred their charges. A few hundred escaped by hiding in fields or canals. The rest were killed.

These events became the originary wound upon which the post-1947 Indian rule in Kashmir was built. The state has erased the history of this violence from its narrative. Indian postcolonial scholarship has left the subject untouched, and sometimes even gone on to deny its existence altogether. Much Indian scholarship as well as the official Indian narrative, instead tends to recount the violence inflicted by the Muslim tribesmen, which was minor compared to the scale of horror inflicted by the Dogra forces. How was the Dogra state able to carry out so much violence with such impunity? Having deserted his capital and without any shred of legitimacy left among his subjects, did Hari Singh have the authority to accede to India? Some of the answers lie in the nature of the Dogra state itself, a state which was never really built upon any popular legitimacy. I explore this question in detail in Chapter 6.

Given the massive violence against the people whose political aspirations Sheikh Abdullah claimed to represent, it is imperative to ask why he would support the undemocratic decision of a regime he considered his bête noire? His motives remain unclear. Is it possible that Abdullah felt there was a better chance for Kashmir to claim independence from a Hindu-majority India once the dust of the sub-continental partition had settled, than there was from a Muslim Pakistan? Another possible reason is that several of Pakistan’s top leaders were drawn from feudal backgrounds, while India’s leaders (specifically Nehru) proclaimed socialist views. Abdullah, according to his memoirs, had felt that support from Indian leaders would make it easier to carry out the economic redistribution program that he had promised to Kashmiris. He was wrong on both accounts. He did carry out the land reforms in 1949, yet, as he realized, he

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19 Some of Abdullah’s views on these questions are described in his autobiography Atish-e-Chinar (Fire of Chinar), published in English in 1985 after his death in 1982.
needed no hand from India in doing so. In fact, as it became apparent, the absentee landlords Abdullah took land from would soon script his fall, with full support from the Indian state. And independence for Kashmir—or even the “autonomy” that was part of the Treaty of Accession, and upon which he had rested his hope—became a receding mirage under India.

The Dogra king, running from his rebellious subjects, signed the treaty on October 26, 1947. India, with some military units already covertly operating in Kashmir, immediately sent troops to protect the regime and check the advance of the tribesmen on Srinagar. The Indian invasion set off another wave of flight of Muslims from Jammu. Pakistan formally joined the war in May 1948, too late to effect any new changes on the ground. In November 1948, India carried out a major offensive in Kashmir, which pushed thousands of Muslim families from western areas of Kashmir into Azad Kashmir and further into Pakistan. Over the next few years, the forced evictions continued, leaving behind around two hundred depopulated villages; the Indian government would later describe these as “uninhabited villages” (Snedden 2001, 127). Two months later, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) called for a ceasefire along a line that came to be called the Line of Control (LoC). The ceasefire came into effect on January 1, 1949. The UNSC had passed Resolution 47 in 1948, which effectively voided the Treaty of Accession, and called for a plebiscite to determine the will of the Kashmiri people. India initially agreed it would hold the plebiscite, but reneged on the promise soon afterwards.

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20 Under the Treaty of Accession of 1947, India was supposed to only control Kashmir’s foreign affairs, defense, and communication. All the other sovereign state functions were to rest with the Kashmir government. This was called “autonomy,” and enshrined as part of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Within a decade, autonomy was gone, and Article 370 became an empty shell. By the early 1960s, the “elected” governments in Kashmir had very limited authority in the affairs of the state (Noorani 2011, 3). See also Report of the State Autonomy Committee, 2000.

21 According to British historian Alistair Lamb (1994), the actual document was signed on October 27, 1947, which raises another legal question about the nature of Indian military action in Kashmir, which officially began on October 26th: was it a legal intervention or an invasion?
Sheikh Abdullah came out of the fiasco looking weak and losing credibility among Kashmiris. Would it have mattered if, instead of endorsing the Treaty of Accession with India, he had insisted that the Dogras declare Kashmir independent and had approached the UN on his own? It is hard to tell. What is certain is that as India and Pakistan came to occupy parts of Kashmir, Kashmiris began to gradually grasp the true import of 1947. Kashmir was bisected amid enormous violence. The trauma caused by the division was palpable. Abdullah’s National Conference had lost its way at a crucial juncture in the region’s history. None of Abdullah’s biographers appear to have asked if he knew about the scale of ethnic cleansing in Jammu. Given that he was appointed as “Head of Emergency Administration” in the state on October 30, 1947, it is unlikely he didn’t know. In any case, the National Conference could no longer claim the mantle of Tehreek. Not only was the historic opportunity to secure Kashmir’s independence lost, but Abdullah’s party had been utterly unable to negotiate a dignified political arrangement for Kashmir vis-à-vis Pakistan and India.

Alongside the dream of independence, historic westward routes so crucial to Kashmir were suddenly truncated. For centuries, trade, culture, and people had moved back and forth through these routes, from Central Asia and Iran in the north-west as well as the Indian subcontinent to the south. These routes were all but closed. Kashmiris were suddenly trapped in a geographical conundrum, utterly dependent on the whims of the Indian state, which controlled the treacherous southward route. There was some consolation, though. In Kashmir Valley, the

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22 Legal historian A. G. Noorani (2017) notes that in 1948, Abdullah had written a letter to India’s Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, “(Hari) Singh’s mentor,” stating that “I have made no secret of it so far and I repeat it that the Maharaja has generally lost the confidence of the people [who] entertain bitterness against him…There was enacted in every village and town through which he passed an orgy of arson and loot and murder of Muslims. In Jammu, the killing of Muslims all over the province continued unabated for weeks under his very nose.”
most populous of all the regions of the Dogra state, chaos reigned, but remarkably there was no violence against the Pandit minority during this era.

Regarding Abdullah, after nominally anointing (and cultivating) him as Kashmir’s “sole” and “secular” leader, not least a “friend,” Nehru unceremoniously removed him in 1953 (Guha 2007, 76). Not only had Abdullah infuriated the absentee landlords from Jammu with his land reforms, but also the Hindu nationalists from India for symbolically proclaiming Kashmir as a “special state within India.” The question had been about creating a flag for Kashmir and replacing the position of Maharaja, which had somehow continued after 1947, with an elected head. Hindu nationalists in India (led by the Jana Sangh party) and Jammu’s upper caste Hindus (led by the Praja Parishad party) launched the “Kashmir Andolan” movement against Sheikh Abdullah, demanding “full integration” of Kashmir into India (Jaffrelot 1996, 129). All of this was systematically supported by Nehru’s cabinet, which had several Jana Sangh members.

Having realized that his power was nominal, and finally beginning to grasp the dynamics of Hindu nationalism in India, Abdullah started dropping hints about the unimplemented UN plebiscite and independence in his speeches in Kashmir. This did not go over well with his “friend” Nehru, who accused Abdullah of hatching a conspiracy with support from Americans, and put him in jail in 1953.

Abdullah spent the best part of the next twenty years in Indian prisons and political exile. Perhaps the reality of Kashmir’s new geo-political situation had started to make him question his judgment, but it was too late. He would only be allowed to return to Kashmir politics in 1975, on the condition that he drop the plebiscite demand and accept for himself, and for Kashmiris, a severely curtailed role in their own government. Abdullah obeyed—again in a shattering act of bad faith against the sentiments of Kashmiris who had given him unalloyed support during his
years of imprisonment and exile. Tehreek became a void. The National Conference no longer held the people’s imagination. A period of political wilderness in Kashmir ensued (1975-1987), with several revolutionary underground groups emerging, including the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) under the leadership of Amanullah Khan and Maqbool Bhat. The only organized party on the ground at the time was the Jama’at Islami Jammu Kashmir (henceforth Jama’at), a strictly cadre-based Islamist party which had emerged in the region in the 1940s, and gradually come to contest elections. Yet, Jama’at’s petit bourgeois roots as well as adherence to conservative social convictions and opposition to shrine-based popular Islamic devotionalism, excluded peasants, workers, and women, thus restricting its reach—at least until the late 1980s, when it shed its political quietism.

After a hundred-year rule under the Dogras, Kashmiris had come under Indian control. India proclaimed Kashmiris to be “citizens,” but wouldn’t accept their right to self-determination. Both regimes ruled Kashmiris without necessarily bothering to ask their opinion. The Dogras, admittedly, were not under any normative obligation to do so. The Dogra regime was, after all, not a modern polity, and its maharajas had never claimed to be modern. They were intent on keeping their subjects as subjects. The Indian government, by contrast, was a signatory of the UN Charter, which was based on the principle of self-determination for “nations big and small,” as well as morally bound by UN Resolution 47, which had explicitly affirmed the Kashmiri right to self-determination and called for a plebiscite. Nehru had even addressed Kashmiris in Srinagar in 1948 and promised them their right to self-determination. But Kashmir, whose beauty had enchanted him and which he coveted as a land of his Pandit ancestors, was a prize not to be given away (von Tunzelmann 2007, 290; Anderson 2012). When a young political activist from Jammu, Balraj Puri, concerned about the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in
1953, told Nehru it was not prudent to stifle the democratic voice of Kashmiris, Nehru replied unsentimentally: “We have gambled at the international stage on Kashmir, and we can’t afford to lose. At the moment, we are there at the point of a bayonet. Till things improve, democracy and morality can wait” (Puri 1993, 46). As Perry Anderson notes, “Sixty years later the bayonets are still there, democracy nowhere in sight” (2012, 119).

These events in Kashmir are not just a historical background; history is always foregrounded in Tehreek narratives and part of the Kashmiri political subjectivity. History is not something in the past, but always facing the present. For instance, for Kashmiri revisionist history writers sympathetic to Tehreek—and whom I call Tehreek history-writers—history appears as a cruel joke; or, “the eternal return of the same,” to borrow Nietzsche’s metaphor for tragedy (1974, 273). The Treaty of Accession had handed Kashmiris to India just as the Treaty of Amritsar had handed them to the Dogras. Nevertheless, the unfulfilled promise of a plebiscite, the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Jammu, India’s invasion of Kashmir, and the subsequent occupation, as well as Sheikh Abdullah’s short-sightedness, have become poignant themes for Tehreek history-writers. I examine their work in Chapter 2.

**The Uprising and the Occupation**

To be a Tehreek activist is to fundamentally challenge the official historical accounts of Kashmir, especially the validity of accession. But if the revisionist accounts of 1931 and 1947 reach Kashmiri youth activists through the work of Tehreek history-writers, the intensity of political conflict which sustains activist subjectivities arises also from engagement with public memory of the present and everyday frictions with the state. Most Kashmiri youth activists see themselves as heirs to the underground revolutionary dream of Kashmiri liberation that grew in the 1970s and 1980s. Their predecessors were young activists like themselves: Ashfaq Majeed,
Hamid Sheikh, Yasin Malik and Javaid Mir, who led the mass armed uprising of 1990. Some of these youth leaders died in their twenties, while others spent years in jail. Their own inspiration was JKLF founder Maqbool Bhat, a nationalist revolutionary, who was hanged by the Indian government in 1984. Public memory of the 1980s and the 1990s is not under the control of the state; one could even argue that the uprising that took place in 1990 was primarily about the state losing control over the governing narrative of the region’s politics.

By the late 1980s, with the old Abdullah dead (d. 1982) and his descendants establishing their own political dynasty under Indian patronage, a newer generation of Kashmiris was getting restless. Many among this restless social group were in their late teens or early twenties, who spilled on to the streets, mobilizing people and preaching rebellion. As Ali, a surviving JKLF activist of the 1990 uprising, told me, “Before 1947, the National Conference had been a revolutionary party of the Kashmiri people. But by 1980, it was a party of Abdullah’s little princelings holding on to power through electoral fraud and rigging.” His reference to “princelings” is a deliberate allusion to the Dogras and the essential continuity of the pre- and post-1947 order. Only sixteen when he decided to join the armed movement, Ali believes, “There was no other option. It was about our survival as a people. The National Conference represented India in Kashmir. No one represented Kashmiris.”

In 1987, a few Tehreek parties came together as the Mutahhida Muslim Mahaz (Muslim United Front) to contest state elections, and lost amid widespread allegations of rigging by the National Conference, which was in alliance with India’s Congress party. Mahaz’s loss, however, strengthened its political influence more than a win would have. The party had no real agenda, except its opposition to the National Conference. But, in just being an opposition, the Mahaz was riding a wave of a popular upsurge against India and the National Conference’s “betrayals.”
rigging of elections in 1987 (Bose 2007, 236), pushed even the politically quietist parties to gradually accept the logic of the underground leaders. Even the Jama’at Islami, which had been contesting elections locally since 1963, with a limited success, had joined the Mahaz. When Maqbool Bhat was hanged in 1984, Jama’at had mourned his death but also rebuked his call for rebellion against the state as “extremism” driven by “emotions” (Sikand 2002, 746). After the election, however, Jama’at started to face internal pressure, especially from its youth-wing the Islami Jamiat-ul-Tulba (Islamic Students Union, established in 1977), to shed its emphasis on resolution of the Kashmir question through *jamhoori andaz*, the “democratic way.” The Jama’at, nevertheless, was among the last Mahaz constituents to endorse the armed Tehreek.

Then in autumn 1988, as Ali, the JKLF activist, points out:

Indian soldiers shot Kashmiri civilians dead at several places; in one case for protesting electricity cuts. Mass beatings and shootings were a common sight on the streets. The government imposed frequent all-day curfews. In the next few months, almost two dozen of my associates from the JKLF crossed the LoC into Azad Kashmir to receive arms training, and returned to fight the Indian military.

For the initial group of rebels, who became the core of the pro-unification and pro-independence JKLF, armed activism was meant only to break the “stifling political impasse” in Kashmir; as Ali put it, “The goal was to start a mass movement.” They had succeeded. Suddenly, Tehreek was again at the center of the Kashmiri political imagination. So popular was the JKLF and Tehreek that the power of the National Conference on the ground just melted away. In some cases, National Conference members were killed by fringe armed groups that had emerged at the same time. Several state functionaries were also attacked in 1988-89, including a retired judge who had sentenced Maqbool Bhat to death, the city’s police chief known for brutal tactics, and a
leader of the Hindu rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Then in late 1989, JKLF scored a few symbolic victories, like securing the release of fellow activists from a government that had adopted a hardline policy against even unarmed protestors. Kashmiris celebrated these symbolic victories in ever larger demonstrations and rallies. “We had just been losing all the time, our freedoms, our people, our land,” Ali says, “Extracting a small concession from India felt like an achievement.”

The National Conference government resigned on January 18, 1990. The next day, India imposed “President’s Rule,” bringing Kashmir under the direct rule of New Delhi and appointing Jagmohan as the new governor of the region. Jagmohan immediately forced all foreign press reporters to leave Kashmir and gave soldiers a free hand to confront Kashmiri protestors with deadly violence. Jagmohan was an iron-fisted bureaucrat with Hindu rightwing leanings. During Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Emergency rule (1975-77), he had led a forcible sterilization campaign and evicted tens of thousands of poor people from Delhi (Tarlo 2003, 39). His appointment was his second stint as governor in Kashmir. In his first term (1984-88), he had presided over the dismissal of a National Conference government, extensive curfews, mass arrests and beatings of Kashmiri youth, and the rigged elections of 1987. The day he took office for his second term, thousands of Kashmiri Pandit families began leaving Kashmir, feeling threatened by the wave of protests. Immediately afterwards, Jagmohan ordered shootings across several areas of Srinagar in which hundreds of Kashmiris died. Later, he would poetically celebrate his swift action to “save Kashmir” from the “diabolical plan” of the secessionists: “Whether A loses life or B, it is the blood of all of us that spills (sic)” (Jagmohan 2006, 18).23

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23 Jagmohan wrote about his time as governor in Kashmir in 1991. The Indian government faced international criticism over his scorched earth tactics in Kashmir and in August 1990 he was recalled. A loner, he liked to imagine himself as surrounded by enemies. He saw Kashmir as “crawling with scorpions.” He had previously written a book about his time as the vice-chairman of the Delhi Development Authority, which forcibly removed hundreds of
But as the massacres continued, the trickle of Kashmiri youth crossing LoC for arms training turned into a flood. Tehreek mass mobilization had become a full-blown armed movement. To subdue Tehreek, India increased its military deployment in the region to more than half a million soldiers. The main instrument of violence, however, was the enactment of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and a slew of other emergency ordinances in 1990. These emergency ordinances suspended the already-curtailed civil liberties of Kashmiris indefinitely and gave extensive powers to the military to eradicate Tehreek and return Kashmir to “law and order” (Duschinski, 2009). AFSPA gave the Indian military personnel power to kill or arrest individuals in Kashmir, and seize and destroy their property, if they were deemed or suspected to be a threat to the “territorial integrity” of the state. This threat could include questioning India’s sovereignty over Kashmir or showing “disrespect” toward its institutions or symbols (like not standing up for the Indian national anthem, or stepping on the Indian national flag). Quite remarkably, the law gave the power of interpreting such “threats to sovereignty” or the “disrespect toward state symbols” to even low-ranking officers, leaving it to their “opinion” whom to kill, when to arrest, and what to destroy (Government of India 1990, 2-4). Not only did this mean that even serious human rights violations, which escalated rapidly, would become

thousands of poor residents of Delhi out of the city in 1975-77. About Jagmohan’s book, Emma Tarlo writes, “In Island of Truth, he portrays himself as a lone honest man surrounded by hypocrites and buffeted by concocted accusations” (2003: 42). He had been accused of ordering the shooting of protestors during the infamous Turkman Gate episode. Jagmohan eventually joined the BJP. Seema Kazi has documented that in 1990, during the first year of the armed rebellion, there were 150,000 Indian soldiers in Kashmir (1 per 27 civilians). These numbers have grown since, even though the number of armed militants has come down to a handful. By 1994, she writes, the number of Indian soldiers in Kashmir had reached 400,000 (44 percent of India’s total army), and by 2010 to somewhere between 500,000 to 700,000 (1 per every 10 civilians), making Kashmir the “most heavily militarized place in the world” (Kazi 2010, 97). A new study arrived at an exact range of 656,638 to 750,981 armed soldiers, all concentrated in an area of 8639 square miles with a civilian population of 6.9 million (IPTK-APDP 2015). A specialized force for Kashmir, Rashtriya Rifles, was created in the early 1990s, which became the core of the Indian counterinsurgency apparatus. Its officers were drawn from the regular military as well as paramilitary forces like the Central Reserve Police Force and Border Security Force. These “agencies,” which later included the Kashmir police, operated separately and autonomously, even though they were brought under a “unified command” under the overall oversight of the New-Delhi appointed Governor (and later Chief Minister).
immune from legal prosecution, but that the exercise of state violence would also become utterly subject to a soldier’s personal judgment, without any need for accountable or objective rationale, or institutional oversight (Noorani 2009). A 2012 report described the situation as “an entrenched culture of impunity” (IPTK-APDP 2012, 7). Another report noted, “To date, not a single alleged perpetrator of a human rights violation has been prosecuted in a civilian court. Victims and their families routinely face intimidation and threats from the security forces when attempting to bring cases against soldiers” (Amnesty International 2015, 66).

Effectively, AFSPA and military control turned Kashmir into a state of exception, and the region came to resemble a typical “late colonial occupation.” Achille Mbembe has described such regions as spaces where the exercise of state sovereignty takes on the modality of a “splintering occupation”—it fragments the territory into zones of control and surveillance, where new boundaries and hierarchies are created, and where, more generally, new “social and spatial relations” are inscribed on the ground (2003: 25-26). A vast new architecture of control and surveillance grew in Kashmir, which the Indian military enforced primarily through coercion. What emerged in Kashmir can be described as a military occupation—an ensemble of spatial strategies and violent practices that the occupier state employs to dominate physical space in a region where its rule lacks, or has lost, popular legitimacy and thus faces the imminent challenge of being popularly supplanted (Junaid 2013, 161). Of course, this is based on the historical premise that India’s presence in Kashmir has not been endorsed by a popular will. Nevertheless, under this occupation, while everyday life activities were throttled, spectacular forms of violence took place regularly. Public massacres of Kashmiris increased dramatically, so did enforced

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25 On the de-facto impunity that the military enjoys in Kashmir, see Yale Law School, The Myth of Normalcy in Kashmir. On the history of exceptionalism in India exercised under AFSPA, see McDuie-Ra (2009). See also Chapter 5.
disappearances and deaths in custody. Thousands were sent to prisons or tortured in notorious “interrogation centers.”

The armed movement, however, could not be easily defeated, at least not until the Indian state realized Tehreek’s fatal flaw. Tehreek, since the early 1990s, was represented first by the JKLF, and then by a new political formation, the Hurriyat Conference. The Hurriyat Conference was an amalgamation of dozens of parties, and as such it did not have a coherent vision of its own beyond the basic premise of all its constituent groups: Return to the UN resolutions and hold the Plebiscite. It stayed away from committing fully either to independence or to a merger with Pakistan. Only the Jama’at Islami, which after its initial reluctance began patronizing the Hizbul Mujahideen (“Army of Mujahids”), or the Hizb, had a cohesive ideology. Jama’at had since 1947 seen Kashmir as a “natural part of Pakistan” because of Kashmir’s Muslim identity. Yet, it had contested state elections and even entered the state legislature, which was a subtle, if pragmatic endorsement of the post-1947 political order. Jama’at described itself as a socio-political organization guided by the sharia Islamic code and was opposed to popular shrine-related Muslim practices. For the small, newly-emerging Kashmiri Muslim middle class, especially the Pir community, the Jama’at had provided a vehicle for their cultural and political advancement (Sikand 2002, 720). The party, however, spent its resources on mundane issues of

26 Nevertheless, Jama’at always remained socially and politically flexible, as compared to more orthodox Islamic groups in Kashmir like the Ahl-Hadees. It sought what it called a “return to tauheed” or unity of God, and opposed shirk, or “associationism,” which granted the power of intercession, illumination (kashf), and miracle (karamat) to Sufis (Sikand 2002, 7-9). Yet, unlike Ahl-Hadees which takes a literalist stance and rejects everything beyond the Quran and Prophetic Sayings (hadees) as authoritative religious sources, Jama’at in Kashmir sought to revise the hagiographic tradition of writing about Sufis, known as tazkiras, and reinterpret Sufis as trying to enforce Islamic principles (shariah).

27 Sikand (2002) notes that almost all the original founders of Jama’at’s were Pirs. Pirs claimed direct descent from Prophet Muhammad and possessed considerable social capital in Kashmir because of their control over Muslim religious establishments. While they had retained their traditional status during the Dogra era, in the wake of land reforms, the community suddenly found themselves faced with an assertive peasant and working class who no longer accepted the self-anointed social status of the Pirs. See more on Pirs in Chapter 6.
everyday life (government jobs, salaries, and inflation) and on setting up schools, where Muslim children (girls and boys) could get both modern scientific and Islamic moral education; this helped the Jama’at build a strong cadre base across Kashmir.

The National Conference had always been weary of the Jama’at, seeing the latter as a threat, who could invoke religious passions against its power, and as fifth columnists for Pakistan. The Indian government imposed a ban on Jama’at in 1975, which was lifted two years later. In 1979, when Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul-Haq hanged Pakistan’s former prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, sections of Kashmiris attacked Jama’at properties. But Jama’at emerged from these setbacks rather unscathed and remained a powerful social force. Its influence largely came from its extensive investment in its strong network of schools and charities, which it had started in the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1970s, a new generation of Jama’at activists who had studied in its schools emerged. They were driven by the notion of an “ideal Islamic order” (nizam-e-mustafa) as well as a desire for “worldly advancement” (Sikand 2002, 727).

While the Jama’at had been confined by national boundaries and was committed to social “reform” and elections, its youth wing, the Jamiat-ul-Tulba, took on an increasingly international revolutionary Islamic line. The Jamiat youth enthusiastically celebrated the Iranian revolution of 1979, organized international Islamic conferences in Kashmir, and in later years became the leadership of the Hizb. The Jama’at, the Jamiat, and the Hizb were pro-Pakistan and

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28 Jama’at was banned as part of a wider repression in India by Indira Gandhi who had imposed Emergency in the country (1975-77).
29 It is a bizarre episode in Kashmiri political history. Bhutto was popular among some sections of Kashmiris, especially for his political rhetoric on Kashmir as well as his leftwing populism. General Zia was an Islamist close to the US, and had the support of Pakistan’s Jama’at Islami. The Jama’at in Kashmir was thus seen as colluding with General Zia. Some have blamed the National Conference and the Indian agencies for rioting against the Jama’at. Among Jama’at leadership, however, it was widely known that the provocation had come from local ulema (“religious scholars”) who were resentful of Jama’at’s anti-shrine propaganda.
30 Like its counterpart in Pakistan, Jama’at in Kashmir had become autonomous from its parent body Jam’aat Islami Hind (India) in the early 1950s, and confined its activities to Kashmir and Jammu.
strictly opposed to the pro-independence JKLF, whom the pro-Pakistan factions discredited as “secular leftists.” This was, therefore, the broader shape of political formations as they existed at the start of the 1990s uprising.

Watching with some surprise the mass uprising in Kashmir, Pakistan had ramped up support for militants, but specifically for the Jama’at-related pro-Pakistan Hizb. Under pressure from the Indian military as well as attacks by the Hizb, the JKLF wilted within a few years. But while the Hizb displaced the JKLF as the dominant armed group, it could not replicate JKLF’s popularity. Hizb had highly trained cadres, some of them recruits from Pakistan and even Afghanistan. Although still an insurgent group on the run, it became powerful within Tehreek and sought to dominate other groups, especially the JKLF (Bose 2007, 235-237). Culminating eventually in open hostilities, Hizb’s tactics led to divisions within as well as exits from Tehreek. This infighting, as I argue in Chapter 5, emerged as a split in the Kashmiri political subjectivity, something youth activists are still unable to suture. One consequence was the emergence of the counterinsurgent militia, the Ikhwanis, who fought with the Hizb and wreaked havoc in the countryside.

By the late 1990s, the armed Tehreek was finally over, or restricted to isolated areas. Yet, the military occupation had lost none of its intensity. Counterinsurgency had led to more than 70,000 Kashmiri lives lost, and around 8,000 disappeared; many more were left maimed, or with grievous bodily and psychic scars, and thousands were in jails (IPTK-APDP 2012). Pakistan, whose support was welcomed by Tehreek activists, turned out to be a double-edged sword. Pakistan’s involvement, like the fateful arrival of Pathan tribesmen in 1947, had split Tehreek. Yet, in a way, the fate of armed militancy was sealed by its own ill-conceived logic: what was

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31 Pakistan had previously attempted to rouse Kashmiris to rebel in 1947 and then in 1965, but it had not drawn significant support from Kashmiris.
supposed to be a momentary tactic in the eyes of its pioneers had turned into a protracted guerilla campaign. Armed insurrection was meant to provoke a popular movement, which it did. But, when the military occupation responded with overwhelming violence against the movement, armed tactics became Tehreek’s central dynamic, creating space for the Pakistani state to intervene in Kashmiri politics even more.

The prominence of armed groups had gradually reduced the participation of Kashmiri intellectuals, poets, writers, and others, who had been important ideological proponents of the JKLF. What this meant was that young Tehreek activists, who were the main social group driving the movement, became politicized within a space where the pro-unification, pro-independence stance was no longer the central Tehreek ideology that they could inhabit. Pro-Pakistan perspectives were based on mutually contradictory notions of “unity of Islamic ummah” (which was opposed to nationalisms per se) and Pakistani nationalism. As was clear, these multiple political stances—as visions for Kashmir’s future—were inherently exclusive of each other; the only point of convergence being their opposition to Indian control over Kashmir.

The Indian state, emboldened by its success in first exploiting the split and then defeating the armed militants, chose to aggressively embark on integrating Kashmir into India; often through projects specifically oriented to claim Kashmir as Indian or even sacred Hindu territory. This involved, for instance, turning the traditional Hindu religious Amarnath pilgrimage in southern Kashmir into a nationalistic event. These integrationist projects had already been pre-figured by earlier campaigns, like the Jana Sangh’s Kashmir Andolan in the early 1950s. Although, the Andolan had not enjoyed direct state support, by the 1990s these mobilizations received full state backing. For instance, the BJP launched an India-wide movement, *Ekta Yatra* (Pilgrimage of National Unity) in 1992. Garnering much public support across India, the yatra
was to culminate in Kashmir, where its leaders were to raise India’s national flag in the heart of Srinagar city (Jaffrelot 1996, 450). The Indian government provided the organizers with a full spectrum of logistical support and security, and ferried the BJP leaders to Srinagar in helicopters. In Kashmir, the yatra was met with cold anger. Dramatically, JKLF militants launched rockets toward the venue bringing the event to an early end (Awasthi, Baweja and Bamzai 2013). JKLF in Azad Kashmir had also started a counter-procession to cross the LoC which was met with violence by Pakistani border guards (Agence France-Press 1992).

Kashmir Andolan and Ekta Yatra were explicitly political mobilizations, not religious ones. But by the beginning of the 2000s, India saw the religious Amarnath yatra as crucial to the project of “national integration.” The yatra had since the early 20th century become an annual event in Kashmir and Kashmiri Muslims facilitated it by providing services to the Hindu pilgrims. By 2008, India had expanded the scope of the pilgrimage considerably: extending the traditional fifteen day-long event in the summer to two months, allowing hundreds of thousands of pilgrims (where there had only been a few thousand previously) to ecologically fragile glacial regions, and building large-scale permanent infrastructure deep in the mountains. Tehreek activists saw these developments as ideological projects meant to entrench Indian control over Kashmiri land. Successive waves of popular protests erupted in Kashmir in 2008. Indian soldiers killed dozens of Kashmiris and injured thousands in response (Associated Press 2013). The protests marked a new phase in Tehreek: a turn to non-violent mass mobilization and a cessation of armed violence.

But the moment was short-lived. In the summers of 2009 and 2010, and intermittently afterwards, more blood was spilled on the streets of Kashmir, especially in the urban centers
State violence pushed many youths to join the armed militancy, while others, like Zarine, to drop traditional life-goals and take up the dangerous work of human rights activism. Summers in Kashmir had again ceased to be the season of sowing paddy, or as a welcome relief from the harsh Himalayan cold. They had become, in Zarine’s words, a “season of fear,” a premonition of a return of the *halaat*, or “bad conditions.” Among the dead and the disappeared since the 1990s, most were young Kashmiris. Evoking the trauma of losing an entire generation of youths in his native land, poet Agha Shahid Ali (d. 2001) wrote:

> And the night’s sun there in Srinagar? Guns shoot stars into the sky, the storm of constellations night after night, the infinite that rages on. It was Id-ul-Zahta: a record of God’s inability, for even He must melt sometimes, to let Ishmael be executed by the hand of his father. Srinagar was under curfew. The identity pass may or may not have helped in the crackdown. Son after son—never to return from the night of torture—was taken away (Ali 2009, 172).

In the summer of 2016, two years after my meetings with Atif and Zarine, when a young militant activist Burhan Wani was shot dead by Indian soldiers, during the Muslim celebrations of Id-ul-Zahta, I sat sleepless, contemplating what the summer had in store for Kashmir and its youth. There was not only the fear of soldiers yet again mowing down young protestors that kept many Kashmiris in a state of anxiety, but the geopolitical situation had also made Kashmir a dangerous place. In the years since the 1947 war, India and Pakistan had fought each other in Kashmir in 1965 and 1971. In 1998, the two countries exploded nuclear test devices, and the next year fought a gruesome battle in the icy mountains above Kashmir. Then again, in 2001,

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32 While the 2010 protests started after three youths were shot dead by soldiers in Kupwara, the 2009 protests were a response to a case of rape and murder of two women in Shopian in Kashmir. While independent reports confirmed what the people had suspected—the involvement of Indian soldiers—the government claimed the reports to be fabricated (Independent Women’s Initiative for Justice 2009 and Majlis-e-Mashawarat 2010).

33 While 1965 was primarily fought over Kashmir, the 1971 war took place in East Pakistan (which soon became Bangladesh); the fighting, however, had spread to the Kashmir border.
they came close to a nuclear war, which, if it had started, would have begun first with the
annihilation of Kashmir.

During all these years, India had justified its control of Kashmir to the “international
community” based not only on the accession treaty of 1947, but also by ideologically investing
the notion of Muslim-majority Kashmir being part of India as critical to maintaining the country
as a “secular state.” This was a position, for instance, laid out by Indian political scientists Sumit
Ganguly and Kanti Bajpai, who claimed that if Kashmir broke away from India, it would have
serious consequences for “secularism, democracy, federalism and nationalism—the four pillars
of India’s political structure” (1994, 405-409). For the most part, the international community
had accepted this seemingly liberal view from India, even though nothing India was doing in
Kashmir showed the state’s commitment to these “pillars” (except nationalism). As Anderson
notes, “Held fast by Nehru to prove that India was a secular state, Kashmir has demonstrated the
exact opposite: confessional expansionism” (2012, 175). Questioning the veneer of India’s
official secularity, he argues further: “What is hidden within India is Hindustan (India as a land
of Hindus). It is that which shapes the state and determines the frontiers between freedom and
repression, what is allowed and what is forbidden” (Anderson 2012, 145). Pakistan, on the other
hand, saw control over Kashmir as critical to its water security (all the rivers feeding Pakistan’s
agriculture flowed from Kashmir), as well as ideologically central to its founding logic as a state
for South Asian Muslims. For both, Kashmir was ideologically the “unfinished business of
Partition,” but in truth they saw it as a “territory of desire” and its residents as incidental to the
landscape.

Kashmiris were, as Zarine put it, “always trapped in someone else’s dream.”
Political subjectivity and youth activists

Recent works on the political conflict in Kashmir have focused on the dynamics of state terror (Mahmood 2000), intensive militarization (Kazi 2010), and the legally sanctioned impunity the military enjoys in the region (Duschinks 2009). These works critically examine how the regime of a national security state and the juridico-political logic of exception in Kashmir lead to a punitive subjugation of Kashmiris. By revealing the repressive uses of the state’s institutional power, this scholarship destabilizes the self-image of Indian control over Kashmir as the guarantor of “peace” and “democracy” (Ganguly and Bajpai 1994, 416). It also breaks from traditional state-centric writings on Kashmir that take Kashmiri subjectivity as uniform and pre-given, politics merely as elite transactions, and the question of sovereignty in the region as settled in 1947 (Jha 1991; Ganguly 1996 & 2003; Ganguly and Bajpai 1994; Akbar 2002; Behara 2007; Guha 2007).

Yet, this emerging scholarship has left unanalyzed the dynamics of Tehreek in Kashmir, which, instead of seeing the Indian state as just a set of institutions, signifies it as an external “empire” (Kaul 2011) with no legitimacy to rule Kashmir. If, as Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, the state’s capacity to shape subjectivity depends on how the state becomes part of the “social imaginary” (1987, 81), then we need to consider the counter-hegemonic discourses and practices as the limit of state power (Muegller 2001, 4-7). This is especially true in the case of Kashmiri youth, who often refer to Indian policies in Kashmir as sāmrājiyat, or “imperial” (Urdu). It is my contention that understanding politics as either elite transactions or as an expression of the state’s internal rationality tells us very little about youth activism, its perseverance, or even the nature of “conflict” in Kashmir. Instead, we need to study youth activism in terms of an agonistic contestation of discourses and practices between the state and its subjects.
The centrality of Kashmiri youth activists in my work is not meant simply to foreground a marginalized social group caught in a conflict that is often understood just as an inter-state territorial dispute. Understanding youth activism is to trace the historical and contemporary contours of politics in the region. Youth activism is the primary locus of the state and Tehreek discourses and practices, yet it is never fully determined by them. The state and Tehreek leadership try to reshape Kashmiri youth in their self-image as either submissive “Indian citizens/nationalists” or as resistant “Kashmiri/Tehreek supporters,” respectively. Of course, Tehreek possesses no comparable means as the state to affect Kashmiri youth. The state has at its disposal a vast phalanx of institutions, besides the military, which perform these functions; these functions may range from seemingly “depoliticized” arenas of public engagement, like environmentalism mediated through the courts (Bhan and Trisal 2016) to “social services,” such as helping substance-abusers recover, carried out by the police (Varma 2016). These institutions strategically coordinate to entrench Indian control over youth political imaginaries.

Kashmiri youth activists, however, see the actions of the Indian state (and Tehreek) within a perspective that is shaped by alternative historical narratives and violent everyday experiences. It might be useful here to take a contrasting look at the model of belief and perspective Clifford Geertz put forward in his examination of religion as a cultural system. He argued that “religious belief involves not a Baconian induction from everyday experience…but rather a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience” (Geertz 1973, 109). While religious beliefs are qualitatively different from political beliefs, there is a resemblance in

34 As Mona Bhan and Nishita Trisal point out, for instance, environmentalism centered on Dal Lake conservation in Srinagar and its mediation through courts, “allows for a different kind of state making in Kashmir, one that in addition to the boots on the ground also deploys affective registers of desire and loss to mourn for a place once celebrated for its pristine land and waterscapes” (2016, 3). Saiba Varma, in her work on Kashmir Police’s Drug De-addiction Center in Srinagar, also shows how the clinicians aim to “transform unruly Kashmiri citizens into docile, grateful subjects” (2016, 51).
form. Broadly speaking, if belief is the structure, experiences are events. Experiences make sense only within the frame of beliefs. Kashmiri youth activists frame the actions of state forces within a political perspective that defines the state as “exterior,” “illegitimate,” and “without moral authority.” Consequently, they see their experiences as “injustice,” “unfair suffering,” and as “resistance.” They try to develop and confirm their political frame through their engagement with the political history of the region.

Unlike a religious perspective, however, a political belief is not always available a priori. It may evolve over time and even suddenly disappear. That is why, it is hard to dismiss the constitutive role of everyday or critical experiences. A political belief may become unsustainable after a period of time, for instance if there is a vast discrepancy between the experiences of people and their beliefs/perspectives. It is plausible to argue that youth experiences are shaped by Tehreek “frames” they have already received. Yet, experiences of chronic state violence, both individual experiences as well as shared ones—experiences confirmed in the accounts of fellow activists, in the stories that circulate on social and the news media, and even in the self-glorifying militarized discourses of state authorities—reinforce Tehreek frames. This is equally true in the case of those I call “Tehreek history-writers,” who write about Kashmir’s past from a perspective sympathetic to Tehreek. Their engagements with the past are shaped by the logics of the present-day struggle, but what they see in the past also resonates in their experiences of the present.

What this suggests is that it is productive to keep the tension between “experiences” and “perspectives/frames” ongoing. I argue that the concept of subjectivity is critical to understanding activism among Kashmiri youth as it captures this tension well in a space of conflict like Kashmir.
Let me distinguish the concept of subjectivity as I use it. First, in contrast to “identity,” which is often simply a non-problematic alignment of the individual interiority with the molar logics of social relations (Indian/Kashmiri; oppressor/victim), subjectivity is a fluid, dynamic process, which is never truly aligned with dominant logics or binarisms. If identity is a self-same relation, subjectivity involves friction and non-conformity. Second, subjectivity is also not the same as “subject position” or “subjection.” Subject position is created or assigned by the state or any other vertical structure of power. Louis Althusser theorized subjection in terms of “interpellation,” which occurs when a cultural/political agent “hails” a person with “ideological information” and the latter subjectively recognizes him or herself in the speech (2001, 174-75). Reproduction of such subject-norms or positions happens if they habitually become part of the lived experiences of subjects (Comaroff 1985; Bourdieu 1977). In Kashmir, the state criminalizes Tehreek, divides Kashmiris into “loyal” nationalists and “subversive” anti-nationals, and creates categories of youth “role models.” These are subject positions. Indeed, they significantly shape how people may perceive themselves or others, but activists do not necessarily inhabit these categories as the state would like them to. Instead, they may “turn” these terms/positions from within.35 An injury or scar from a confrontation with soldiers may become a badge for peer-group respect; death from state violence becomes martyrdom; and a “PSA case,” like the one Aqib was facing, a sign of political integrity.

What this means is that while Kashmiri youth are caught in the logics of state power, their activism signifies a limit to those logics. Military occupation is a pervasive feature of Kashmiri public space and its violence seeps deep into interpersonal and social relations, often

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35 I use this idea of “turn” from Judith Butler, who has argued that for the subject and its perspective to emerge, the analysis of subjection must trace both the conditions of subject formation as well as the turn against those conditions (1997, 29).
splitting individuals from within (for instance, by making them doubt the possibility of emancipation or azadi). Yet, occupation is not hegemonic; it is fundamentally marked by coercion rather than persuasion or a natural acceptance.\textsuperscript{36} Youth activists are, however, not only conscious of the conditions that impel them to keep in abeyance ordinary life projects and join Tehreek, they also resist those conditions and formulate their own political projects. They question the governing assumptions of the occupation and the dominant historical narratives, while producing alternative accounts of the past and distinct visions for the future.

What is “subjectivity” then? Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman have usefully formulated subjectivity as the “historically contingent consciousness of individuals situated in fields of relational power,” and which is produced through “critical encounters with violence” and “entanglement of global flows of images and discourses with local logics of identity formation” (2000, 1). This conception of subjectivity responds well to two anthropological concerns: first, the imperative to re-investigate the relationship between violence, power, and subjectivity, especially in “unstable places” in the context of post-Cold War eruption of ethnic violence (Greenhouse, Mertz & Warren 2002; Das 2008); second, to understand how globalization enables transnational imagery and discourses to undergo mutations for locally situated struggles (Bowen 1993). Elsewhere, Das relates subjectivity to violence, which is conceptualized as having occurred within the “weave of life as lived in the kinship universe” or as “sudden and traumatic” violence; while the former is “past continuous” and narratable, the latter remains “frozen” and unspeakable (2006, 88-89). She sees “frozen” violence as a product of events that cast their shadow from the past. To me, not only is this a passive conception of subjectivity in its encounters with violence, but traumatic violence is also assumed to have fallen into the

\textsuperscript{36} Here the Subalternist historian Ranajit Guha’s (1998) idea of “dominance without hegemony” aptly describes this situation.
background. What happens in those societies (like Kashmir) where violence is “chronic” rather than episodic or transient (Vigh 2008) and produces its own unique and persistent forms of sensing it (Green 1999; Taussig 1992; Jeganathan 2004), and where there is no pre-existing world to remake nor an imminent aftermath of violence? How do we account for activists who challenge the terms of their subjection, rather than let the work of time heal trauma?

Let me briefly suggest three interlinking paths toward conceptualizing subjectivity that is necessarily political. Slavoj Zizek, in examining Hegelian ontology, suggests that subjectivity as “self” emerges only in a “mad gesture” of radical withdrawal from “reality”—a reality whose ontological status is too chaotic. This withdrawal is followed by its symbolic reconstitution. In a way, Zizek is suggesting that we fall into subjectivity from madness, instead of the other way around (2000, 35-37). In a broad sense, then, this (theological) fall from “nature” (madness, chaos) to “culture” (finding self) is connected to the idea of a rupture, or Event.

More pertinently, Alain Badiou opens a way of linking the idea of event to subjectivity at the level of politics. For Badiou, "Event is something that brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable.” Opposed to structure, especially the dominant structure—which is the state power and which governs the real as well as pronounces that which is possible and impossible—the event (always a political event) creates a possibility that escapes the prevailing power’s control over “possibles.” Political involvement, for Badiou, means to seize the possibility, and to be seized by it. To become a political subject, thus, is to be prepared for an event, to become “subjectively disposed to recognizing new possibilities,” and to “criticize” the established order. As Badiou argues, criticism is a matter of showing that the possibilities offered by the dominant power are insufficient and inhuman; “inhuman,” in the strict sense, Badiou says, because “the system does not propose to the social collectivity…possibilities that do justice to
that of which it is capable." Criticism here is not an intellectual exercise. The political subject’s “fidelity to the events” is found in "practical procedures and in organizations, in the taking-up of positions and in an activism that conserves the memory of things.” Political subjects act, and formulate a political project, in the name of the possibility, which might be denoted by a general idea (Badiou 2013, 9-16). In Kashmir, such an idea is “azadi” (freedom), which becomes the horizon of political activism for Tehreek activists, who question the inhumanity of military control.

Finally, subjectivity is akin to “critical political experience” as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu contrasts political subjectivity to the state, which he defines as

An organizational structure and authority regulating practices, which institutes and inculcates common symbolic forms of thought, social frames of perception, understanding or memory, state forms of classification, or in other terms practical schemes of perception, appreciation, and action (2000, 174).

Political subjectivity is, in contrast, constituted through “critical political experiences,” which Bourdieu describes as “suspend(ing) the suspension of doubt” as to the possibility that the “social world could be other than what is implied in the experience of the world taken-for-granted” (2000, 175). Suspending the suspension of doubt is not a passive act, or something that takes place automatically; it requires, in Bourdieu’s terms, actual “conceptual work,” and is cultivated as a “disposition” over time. Belief in azadi or independence among youth activists requires a sustained critical political work in the face of hegemonic projects of the state as well as the overwhelming sense of exhaustion the perception of defeat might entail. The youth activists I worked with often felt pressures from their families, peers, and social norms and obligations (like furthering their education, finding jobs, and getting married) to withdraw from
their activism. To be caught in the crosshairs of the state, for instance, meant a significant setback in planning life according to traditional cultural norms.

To be sure, therefore, subjectivity is a problem. It is not a priori, or given; it is formed (through a radical withdrawal from the given reality, in response to an event, or by doubting what is taken-for-granted) and is cultivated (through symbolic reconstitution of the self, bearing fidelity to the event, and conceptual work). It requires not only an openness to possibilities but the active work of criticism and political organizing. Through this work, subjectivity becomes self-organizing. As Rosi Braidotti has argued, subjectivity is “a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values” (2013, 52). Crucially, Braidotti considers the elements of creativity and imagination, desires, hopes and aspirations, which I argue are also key to understanding youth activism in Kashmir.

Let me point here, then, that political subjectivity in Kashmir is a subjectivity in crisis. On one side, this crisis is the ontological condition of a social world that has been falling apart under the occupation; on the other, it is a crisis of language, as the dominant interstate paradigm of political discourse denies Kashmiri claims of political subjecthood. Political subjectivity in Kashmir emerges primarily from traumatic experiences with state violence. Here subjectivity is “traumatic” in the sense that experiences of violence, for the most part, are either not fully articulated, or are silenced (by criminalizing dissent, making claims of violent experiences liable to further violence, or naturalizing punitive containment in the name of state security).

These experiences, of course, acquire meaning within Tehreek frames, but they also renew these frames. Experiences of violence among the activists I worked with started as individual experiences, but they could make political sense of their experiences by listening to or
witnessing those of other activists. Given this, I see experiences of violence as *political* when multiple singular subjective journeys collide and begin to overcome or generate frictions and differences around new ideas, practices and social relations, and when they begin to make incisions into dominant discourses based on commitments to ideal horizons of politics, as the activists define them: *insāniyat* (“humanity”), *insāf* (“justice”), *azadi* (“freedom”). Frictions and differences, as Ernesto Lacan has argued, are not weaknesses but sources of strength, as the reveal new sites of struggle within a movement (2000, 45-46 and 1996, 20-21).  

Political subjectivity in Kashmir responds to events. It falls and heightens in relation to dramatic political events that transform key assumptions about society, state, and social relations (like the 1947 or the 1990 uprising in Kashmir) or *everyday* political events (like confrontations between soldiers and youth activists on the streets) that keep the governing relations of power visible on the surface. Amid the intensity of the historical conflict in Kashmir, political subjectivity has become embedded in the way militarization of space and acts of memorialization of resistance have come to define the political geography of the region, and embodied in the way Kashmiris relate to this geography in their daily lives. Crises of ontological and discursive worlds, however, leave activists perpetually on shaky foundations. They may bristle in outrage or be led into self-doubt. They often use the arsenal of one ideology against the other, without fidelity toward either. For instance, “Islam” may provide the language against nationalism at one moment; the critique of “nationalism” may become entangled with the discourse of “global justice” the next moment; while, at another time, religion setting limits on public discourse may itself appear as a problem to be resolved.

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37 Laclau points out, contra Zizek, that “Subjectivity” is already there, yet it becomes politicized in the process of differentiation and contestation. Differentiation and contestation happen with the “death of Subject” (the absolute Subject), which is the precondition for the emergence of multiplicity of identities. He calls these identities “concrete finitudes,” whose limits are their strengths, for they become sites of struggle (Laclau 1996, 20-21).
Nevertheless, activism in Kashmir demands continuous engagement and understanding from youth activists, and involves an exacting ability to be simultaneously within (to live under occupation) and without (to understand its mechanisms). Martin Heidegger’s idea of “thinking” takes the form of sustained “attentiveness,” or of staying with entities (1968, 4-5). But in spaces of chronic conflict human experience and attention is taxed heavily, and staying with things is hard. For instance, under the occupation, youth activists find it tough to consistently engage and remain attentive. It is draining to keep up the fight, commit to one strategy, or maintain focus on the “goal.” Activists would often sigh and say tha’ek waen (“it gets tiring”) or recite a poetic verse to suggest a loss of umeed (“hope”). Yet, in the same breath, announce yi chu karun (“it must be done”) or yi chu naseebas (“it [struggle] is our fate”). Each time a protest ends or an agitation bears no “result,” or even when a fellow activist is arrested or hurt, it strains their ability to continue. And while a sense of fatigue with persistent violence is natural, activists become even more weary amid the “one-sided nationalist din” amplified by 24/7 Indian news channels.

For my purposes, I see political subjectivity as a process of autopoiesis that takes place within spaces of crisis. It is a disposition formed amid historically framed critical experiences that arise from events, both as radical ruptures as well as everyday violent encounters. It involves critical conceptual and organizing work, which demands a consistent engagement with the past and a public contestation of the social terms of subjection. But it also considers the everyday difficulties, beyond the threat of violence, in carrying out such work. Understanding the formation of political subjectivity among Kashmiri youth activists, then, is to examine it in

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38 Heidegger wrote about why our presence in the world matters. Things in general, he said, come into presence and then withdraw, suggesting that interesse, to be among things, as they unfold affects the way they appear.
relation to the history of the discourses of identity in Kashmir, youths’ contestations of dominant narratives of history and norms of politics (elections, for instance), as well as their critical encounters with violence and its effects. One begins to get a sense of political subjectivity among youth activists by recognizing their shared models of recounting personal life stories, the modes through which they narrate critical events in contrast to the official accounts, the forms and repertoires of their protests and claim-making within Tehreek, their poetic and literary constructions of the self and forms of belonging, and their practices of remembrance and social commemoration. Even their bodily practices may signify political meanings, like when youth activists assemble in protest or during demonstrations, or when they walk within militarized urban spaces.  

**Tehreek, sovereignty, and Indian nationalism**  

My research began with a few simple questions: Why do Kashmiri youth become involved in Tehreek when such an involvement exacts heavy costs on them? What are the modes in which this involvement or engagement takes place? In what forms do they express their sentiments and aspirations? Are their private aspirations, for instance, different from their public ones? Is it possible to keep private and public separate in understanding the dynamics of the occupation and Tehreek in Kashmir? Instead of taking the politicization of Kashmiri youth as a given, or centering the inter-state dynamic involved in the so-called “Kashmir-Dispute” in my analysis, I chose to analyze the perspectives, practices, and political projects of Kashmiri activists, as well as the conditions within which they live and try to make themselves visible through their politics.

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39 On how assembled bodies signify political meanings, see Butler (2015).
40 “Dispute” refers to the interstate legal contestation between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in the UN.
Indeed, in challenging the post-1947 order in South Asia, these activists inhabit a political space shaped by historical forces that had created that order. They are animated not so much by a politics of “citizenship rights” under India’s constitutional system, as by a politics of self-determination that aims to disrupt state claims of sovereignty over Kashmir. Tehreek discourse does involve the question of rights, but it calls instead upon international covenants on human and political rights. Tehreek activists see the Indian constitution as an infringement, “a Trojan horse,” which has been used to undermine even the “autonomy” that Kashmir had been “promised under the treaty of accession.”

Yet, while it is uncontestable that Kashmiri youth activists and Tehreek have kept the question of sovereignty in tension, the dissolution of the post-1947 order looks far from imminent. What, then, explains Tehreek’s influence? Even though they robustly criticize Tehreek leaders and their personal politics, Tehreek has a hold on youth imagination larger than its actual strength to change facts on the ground. Clearly, twenty-seven years of struggle have not positively changed the Indian government’s policy; the Indian state has grown more uncompromising toward Tehreek than ever. Nevertheless, to examine political subjectivity in Kashmir is to retell the history of Tehreek. The movement occupies the center of Kashmiri social, cultural, and political imagination; almost every aspect of Kashmiri society relates to it. Most organized groups in Kashmir—labor unions, women’s rights groups, religious formations, professional associations (like the Bar Association, Doctors Association, or Teachers Union), newspaper guilds, human rights groups—participate in the movement in one way or the other. Even the electoral parties, generally opposed to Tehreek, must engage with political

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41 Among these, Muslim Khwateen Markaz (Muslim Women’s Center) and Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of the Nation), are both active constituents of Tehreek.
themes that arise from Tehreek’s key political positions. The movement also significantly shapes the contours of cultural production in Kashmir, be that in music, literature, film, or theatre. Indeed, among the artists or writers most popular are those who produce music or novels with themes from Tehreek at their center. In colleges or schools, youths take an active stance on the politics of the movement. Most support Tehreek vigorously; those who don’t often tend to be from families connected with the government or electoral parties.

What I intend to do in this dissertation is to analyze the formation of political subjectivity among youth activists in relation to the origins, dynamics, and the fault lines within Tehreek, as well as how youth activists understand their own position within the movement. Basically, I intend to tell an account of Tehreek from the perspective of those who have been involved in it. It is important not to see Tehreek as simply a “social movement.” Social movements, in their broadest sense, are “collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, outside of institutional…channels for…challenging or defending extant authority…in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part” (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004, 11; cf. Edelman 2001). Tehreek is a “collectivity” but it is made up of several organizations with sometimes contradictory political projects. The movement has also seen wide discontinuities, which sometimes makes it difficult to trace its precise origins. The “extant authorities”—from the Dogra state to the Indian state—have also changed, and while there are similarities between the way the two have used coercion as a primary modality of rule, there are

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42 There are now several electoral parties, but the largest ones are the National Conference, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the Congress, and the BJP. These parties contest elections, and affirm Indian sovereignty in Kashmir, but have significant differences in terms of Kashmir’s political status within India. While the NC and the PDP, both centered in Muslim-majority Kashmir, stand for “autonomy” or “self-rule,” Congress and BJP, with significant support in Hindu-majority Jammu, stand for full “integration” with India.
significant differences in the kinds of polities these two entities are. At the same time, different key organizations have represented the movement in different eras.

At the same time, some Indian political scientists have claimed Tehreek to be a “sub-nationalist movement,” thus positioning Indian nationalism as mature and natural, and Kashmiri nationalism as unreasonable, if not completely illegitimate (Mehta 2011; Varshney 1991). Others see it as “illiberal” and “secessionist” movement without normative claims to national statehood (Chandhoke 2012). These arguments are ahistorical (and deceptive); and, yet, Tehreek cannot be easily categorized within the dominant frameworks of understanding nationalism. Its leaders and intellectuals have not shown an abiding interest in arguing for Kashmiri “nationhood” based on shared memories, myths, or territorial belonging—or what Anthony D. Smith (1991) called ethnie—even though there is a case to be made that such elements of nationhood do exist in Kashmir. Nor has there been an investment in imagining Kashmir as a nation that would be in line with the modernist or constructivist formulation of Benedict Anderson (2006). Tehreek has, all these years, been unable to give Kashmiris even such symbols of their collective struggle as a flag—a source of angst to some youth activists, if not all. Language and religion also offer only shaky, unstable foundations to imagine the nation, though religious identity (as I argue in Chapter 6) became salient in the early 20th century, if only in response to Dogra policies of religious discrimination.

Indeed, there has historically been a place-based and geographical notion of what it is to be a “Kashmiri” (in relation to such regional identities as Punjabi), but it simply suggests that to be Kashmiri is to be from Kashmir. It is tempting to argue that the assertion of Kashmiri identity has increasingly become solidified as a negative political identity, that is in opposition to the

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43 Party flags have existed and there are even flags that transcend party lines, but there is truly no one flag that can claim fidelity of all Tehreek activists.
dominant, overarching “Indian” identity, and to some extent “Pakistani” identity. As one Kashmiri intellectual, expressing frustration at, what he called, this “state of national incoherence,” told me:

Tehreek leaders are shy of telling people to remain tied to a cultural notion of Kashmiriness, and people are not sure whether religion provides a sufficient ground for identity. Our identity is not based on what we are, but on what we are not.

Some Tehreek constituents have a rather legal/technical definition of what it means to be Kashmiri: all those people who were and are legal “state subjects” of the State of Jammu and Kashmir before 1947. This definition is tied to the UN Security Council resolutions which calls for all the people of the historic Kashmir state to vote in a plebiscite. A legal definition of the self, however, is not always sustainable, especially in the face of historical experiences. Muslim experiences under the Dogras, the events of 1947 that split Kashmir as a geopolitical arena in which different ethnic or religious groups had previously contested and co-existed, and the present-day military occupation have all put countervailing delimitations on defining Kashmiri identity in terms of a language, region, or religion.

However, as will become evident in the coming pages, Kashmiri political subjectivity has become deeply enmeshed with the cultural-political forces undergirding the occupation itself. What does that mean? Occupation in Kashmir is not just an objective form or a material structure made of camps and pickets, checkpoints and interrogation centers, soldiers and informers, or even emergency laws and violent practices. Occupation is invested with a nationalist desire to attain control. Anderson’s description of the Indian occupation in Kashmir as “confessional

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44 “State subjects” are those who were permanent residents of the Dogra state before 1947. The Dogra monarchy had instituted state subjecthood into law under the Permanent Residence Act of 1927.
expansionism” (2012: 175) brings crucial attention to the two constitutive elements of this desire: the dense undercurrent of Hindu nationalism, and the “imperial rule” that mark India’s link with Kashmir (Chatterjee 1997). It is plausible to contend that the occupation in Kashmir is a manifestation of the Indian nationalist desire to overcompensate for historical memories of colonial and pre-colonial control by “foreigners”—a trope often invoked in the Hindu nationalist discourses. It is not enough to achieve independence as a Hindu nation, but to act upon “others,” just as Hindus were once acted upon.

It is useful to dwell longer on the question of Hindu nationalism and how it shapes the dynamics of the occupation. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, the ideology of prominent Hindu nationalist formations, like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which aggressively pushes for an integration of Kashmir into India, rests on three pillars: “geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture” (1996: 26). First, RSS claims primacy of Hindus in India because; according to its ideologues, India is their “fatherland” (pitrabhumi) as well as their “sacred land” (punyabhumi). While Muslims and Christians may live in India, their sacred land is in “Mecca” and “the Vatican,” respectively. Second, even though upper-caste Hindus see themselves as racially superior to lower-caste Hindus (and non-Hindus), in general, the idea of “Hindu unity” is based on shared racial features (like “blood”)—which is also shared by some

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45 This is not just true of India’s relationship toward Tehreek, but also of its own loyalists in Kashmir. In an essay titled “Regional Dimension” written on 3 November 1986, Partha Chatterjee had this to say about the Indian state’s relations with regional players (in particular the pro-India National Conference): “As more power concentrates in the hands of the central executive…the chief executive personally negotiates a settlement with the regional leader…The same method has been followed with Dr. Farooq Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir. It seems a somewhat new phenomenon in Indian politics…(I)t is an old technique, received from the days when Hindustan was a sprawling empire, where provincial rebels who could not be put down by force were simply incorporated into the imperial structure of government by recognizing them as regional satraps. Indian democracy is, in more senses than one, a system of imperial rule” (Chatterjee 1997, 137).

46 RSS, or Nationalist Self-service Organization, claims it is not involved in politics, but is merely a cultural organization. But its cadres are and have been part of other major Hindu nationalist organizations, like Jana Sangh, Vishwa (World) Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Mazdoor (Workers) Sangh, Bharatya Janta Party, etc.
Muslims and Christians. The ancestors of these latter Muslims and Christians are seen to have converted from Hinduism, and Hindu nationalists would allow them to be “Indianised” simply by “reconversion.” Third, the notion of “common culture” presents Hinduism not just as a religion but as a “way of life.” Those Muslims and Christians, whose ancestors came from “outside India”—in medieval times—could claim Indianness only if they shed their own religious culture and embraced Hindu culture. In some RSS formulations, non-Hindus can claim “citizenship” but they could never be accepted as Indians (Jaffrelot 1996, 25-33; and 2007).

For Ashis Nandy, Hindu nationalism is a “modernist project which seeks to retool, on behalf of the global nation-state system, Hinduism into a national ideology and the Hindus into a ‘proper’ nationality” (1998, 283). He argues the project is a response of the “Brahminical, urban, westernizing Indians to their uprooting, cultural and geographic,” that, at least in part, arises from a sense of “inferiority” in relation to Semitic faiths (Nandy 1998, 294). Elsewhere, Nandy claims, “Since about the middle of the nineteenth century…there has been a deep embarrassment and discontent with the lived experience of Hinduism” (2002, 131). RSS’s public statements echo this sentiment, and claim its objective as the “restoration of the Hindu psyche to its pristine form” (RSS Vision and Mission). In other words, a sense of resentment courses through the Hindu nationalist project, which, according to Nandy, seeks to “militarize” what Hindu nationalists perceive as “effeminate, disorganized Hindus” (1998, 294).

It is not my contention here to ask if Nandy is correct or not, nor is it to make claims on the “psychology” behind Hindu nationalism. But when it comes to Hindu nationalist discourse

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47 On its main webpage, RSS claims: “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has resolved to fulfill (the) age-old national mission by forging the present-day scattered Hindu Society into an organized and invincible force…” (RSS Mission). Ashutosh Varshney has argued that Hindu nationalism is a reaction to “separatist nationalisms” like Kashmiri nationalism. It is hard to prove this argument because, while Kashmir is one of the important questions Hindu nationalists mobilize around, they also mobilize against Muslims (who don’t demand separation) and Christians missionaries in India, and for “Hinduization” of indigenous communities in central India, not to speak of the deep investment in macro-economic questions from economic nationalism to market liberalism. I agree with
on Kashmir, it is clear that it forms the most militant ideological force behind the occupation. It is worth quoting at length from RSS’s “Vision and Mission” statement to understand its position on Kashmir:

The State of Jammu & Kashmir, with its oppressive Muslim-majority character, has been a headache for our country ever since Independence. The forces inimical to Bharat [India] never wanted Kashmir to integrate itself with Bharat, and in October 1947, immediately after Independence when Pakistan’s forces invaded Kashmir, these elements conspired with the enemy to defeat every move to save the situation from our side. However, thanks to the timely collaboration of the entire Sangh [Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a close RSS affiliate] force then present at Jammu with the Armed Forces of Bharat, Kashmir was saved. Had it not been for the premature and insensible cease-fire declared unilaterally by our own government, even while a large chunk of our territory was still under the siege of the enemy, our Armed Forces would then itself have driven out the latter completely beyond the borders and there would not have been this problem of 'Pakistan-occupied Kashmir' (POK), which even now continues to be a scourge undermining the sovereignty of Bharat. The problem of Kashmir, in fact, is one of our own making, since, keeping in mind its unique demographic character, unlike other States, it has been conferred a special status under Article 370 of the Constitution, even after its total accession with Bharat. In 1952, Bharatiya Jan Sangh and Praja Parishad, in those days the political front of the Sangh in Jammu & Kashmir State, jointly agitated against this special status; and the BJS had to pay a heavy price in the death of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder-president of the party, in Srinagar jail. He died under dubious circumstances, after being incarcerated there for having led a batch of satyagrahis defying the ban on his entry into the State. However, because of this agitation, the game plan of the conspirators with Sheikh Abdullah as the kingpin, after being

Varshney, though, that on Kashmir, Indian and Hindu nationalism remains undifferentiated (Varshney 1993, 227-261).
exposed, was thwarted and Kashmir was once more saved, for the time being [in 1953]. The endless appeasement of the Muslim population, especially in Kashmir, practiced by the successive governments at Delhi, has been the bane of our government’s Kashmir policy. Just as too much mollycoddling and lack of discipline spoil the child, so has been Kashmir, a problem created out of our own folly. With about one-third of the State territory illegally occupied by Pakistan, a hostile neighbour, the alienated area has virtually become a haven for subversives. Knowing fully well that an open war with Bharat may prove too costly and also with chances of winning unpredictable, Pakistan is waging a cold war, abetting the militants, supplying them with arms, training them for armed revolt from within. [Unaltered text].

To any independent observer, the state violence in Kashmir would hardly appear as “appeasement” or “too much mollycoddling,” however, RSS and its numerous affiliates would prefer an even more aggressive control over Kashmiris. The uprising of 1990 in Kashmir has coincided with the dramatic rise of Hindu nationalism in India. As is obvious from the statement, Hindu nationalists have always had a major presence in the Indian state’s policies, but over the last quarter of a century, RSS has come front and center. Its numerous, high-profile think-tanks give “strategic guidance” to government and military officials on Kashmir and on national security. It organizes events within and outside of Kashmir that project Tehreek as an affront to Indian nationalism. It organizes shastra puja or “arms worship” for Hindu youth in Jammu, while claiming to change the “minds of Kashmiri youth” away from activism. RSS’s political face, BJP, has been in power several times since 1996, and the current prime minister is an RSS member, as are many others in his government. Under the occupation, thus, Hindu nationalist projects, aided by its control over the government, gather enormous force in Kashmir.

Kashmiris, in short, are the perfect “other” that the Hindu nationalism has constructed: as Muslims, they are conflated with the pre-colonial Muslim rulers of the subcontinent who, the
RSS believes, oppressed Hindus once (although Kashmiri Muslims were themselves subjects of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu rulers from “outside”); and, as Kashmiris, they are seen as ungrateful subversives within modern India, who are conspiring to break apart the organic unity of India’s sacred geography. The ongoing project of constructing India as a Hindu nation puts deep pressure on Tehreek. Tehreek groups tend to spend considerable effort holding on to Muslim symbolism, even among those groups that are not Islamist in orientation per se.

It is this complex historico-political landscape that youth activists in Kashmir navigate and inhabit, even as they contend with state violence that is pervasive, and contest subject positions that the state imposes. Youth activists in Kashmir, with whom I worked, are often aware of the Hindu nationalist projects in Kashmir. Interestingly, they find it “easier” to deal with Hindu nationalism conceptually, as it makes sense of the violence of the occupation; at least, better than the secular narrative. Indian discourse on “secularism,” with its simultaneous inclusive potential (Muslims as citizens) and exclusionary premise (Kashmiri Muslims as latent anti-nationals) is harder to grapple with. In critiquing the Hindu majoritarian politics behind the Indian state’s policies in Kashmir, many youth activists often tend to uphold “secularism,” but they don’t want to sacrifice their own aspirations for independence for the sake of India’s secularism, as some Indian liberal experts demand from Kashmiris.

And yet, not everything makes sense. Kashmiri youth activists who read about the anti-colonial movement in India, are often left baffled by the desire behind India’s occupation. It is not an analytical bafflement. They see why India might want to control Kashmiri territory: there is the “geo-strategic location of Kashmir,” there is the “cheap hydroelectricity,” and, perhaps “in the future, some rare mineral might be discovered”—Aqib’s words. It is more a moral bafflement. “How can they colonize us, when they fought against colonization of their country
by Britain?” “How can they call Maqbool Bhat a ‘terrorist’ and hang him, when they celebrate figures like Bhagat Singh, who was called a ‘terrorist’ by the British and hanged?” “How can they celebrate the leaders of their national movement, like Gandhi and Nehru, but send our leaders Geelani and Yasin to jail or keep them house arrested?” These are Zarine’s words, who feels that the occupation ultimately cannot be rationally explained, and arguments therefore may not suffice; that, occupation is “evil.” William Connolly sees “evil” when “the opponents use violence against you when you have not sought to colonize or silence them” or they “without provocation, violently impose their faith on the unwilling” (2005, 35). This conceptual evil is the dark knot outside of politics; that is, normal conceptions of political action fail to address it. Zarine sees why some youth activists have taken up arms, even though it seems clearly a tactic that would end in self-annihilation. Maybe reminding the occupation of its own colonized past might be a better, non-violent way to open dialogue. As Irfan, a survivor from the 1990 uprising, told me in 2014, “What is the point of freedom when no one is alive?”

**Rural/urban difference and the women’s question**

Let me restate that youth activists are not a homogenous group who all possess an undifferentiated and uniform consciousness. They are divided ideologically by questions of sect, the meanings they attribute to azadi, or preference for one set of political practices over another. However, they don’t fall neatly into one set of positions over others. They remain internally split, and take multiple positions, sometimes mutually contradictory ones even. What unites them is their shared opposition to the occupation and their participation in Tehreek, which provides a unified space for their activism.

While youth activists may contest state-imposed subject positions, social identities are harder to contest. Social identities, like those based on the rural-urban divide or gender relations,
are less fluid than ideological positions. For instance, urban youth activists and rural activists face differential degrees of state violence. Violence on urban youth is intense but also more visible, unlike in the countryside where violence remains invisibilized. At the same time, warding off social pressures, like starting an “adult” life (job, marriage, children), is harder for rural youth than for urban ones. These pressures sometimes lead more rural youth than urban ones to join state forces or become conduits for electoral parties, for sometimes these are the only viable paths toward a conventional life. Urban activists often tend to taunt rural youth over making such life choices (“lining up for army jobs”), something I witnessed regularly on university campuses where rural youth face ridicule, especially during election time. The rural populace tends to vote more than urban populations, and urban activists treat voting in elections as a “betrayal” of Tehreek. (I discuss this dynamic in detail in Chapter 4). At the same time, rural youth are also more likely to join armed militants than urban youth; becoming an armed militant may ward off social pressures, bringing respect even from urban youth, but it drastically cuts short their lives.

Women activists, limited by older Tehreek leaders’ traditional patriarchal attitudes toward gender relations, regularly face not only gendered state violence (Kazi 2009; Chatterjee 2012) but also the burden of domestic continuity in the absence of men, who may have been killed or jailed.\footnote{Several Indian scholars have contended that Tehreek has been oppressive toward Kashmiri women (Butalia 2002), often ignoring the constitutive role of the Indian militarization of public spaces in limiting women’s participation in Kashmiri socio-political life.} Sexual violence against Kashmiri women by state forces has been rampant, though often denied by the government (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993).
life. It is arguable, however, that the rise of some Islamist groups since the mid-1990s has had an adverse effect on Kashmiri women. Despite these pressures, more women have entered public spaces with jobs and higher education, and as political activists, in the last twenty-seven years of Tehreek overall than ever before. Kashmiri women not only participate in, but also organize Tehreek protests. In many instances, women actively confront soldiers in street battles, or even to save men. Several Kashmiri women have taken leadership positions in Tehreek (Habib 2011), actively participated in combat as armed activists (Shekhawat 2015), or become, what the state calls, Over Ground Workers. At a wider scale, through everyday practices of remembrance and commemoration, they turn memory and mourning into a potent political force. For instance, women deploy unique cultural practices, like singing wanwun (songs sung collectively during weddings) at the funerals of fallen armed militants, thus intensifying the affective politics of mourning. All these practices of resistance remain within the register of Tehreek politics, yet may be invisible to those disconnected from Kashmiri women’s worlds.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that major Tehreek parties have not produced explicitly progressive agendas for gender justice in Kashmir—especially, in the overall context of a military occupation that has been viciously violent toward women. Many youth activists I worked with saw this disregard for the “women’s question,” beyond the discourse of “honor,” as a failure of Tehreek. It is in this context that young women activists, like Zarine, have sought to fashion an identity beyond notions of “passive victimhood” or “glorified sacrificer” (Waiting

49 For instance, in the book, Voices of Kashmir (Butalia 2002), written primarily by Delhi-based writers (but presented as “voices from Kashmir”), only one essay, by Hamida Bano, a Kashmiri woman, directly addresses the question of state violence, militarization, and gender.

50 For an insightful and insider look at the women’s participation in Tehreek, see Habib (2011). Anjum Zamrooda Habib is a founding member of the Hurriyat Conference and chairperson of the Muslim Khawateen Markaz (Muslim Women’s Center).
Mother, Half-Widow). By participating in the discursive contestations within Tehreek, they push fellow male youth activists to see contradictions within their own gender ideologies.

Another obvious question that arises, with my focus on youth activists, is the question of older activists. While youth activists remain the key social group behind Tehreek as well as the main sufferers under the occupation, older activists hold positions of status as leaders of Tehreek parties. The leader of an important faction, Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, is eighty-five-year-old Ali Shah Geelani, who began his activist journey as a young teacher and journalist aligned with the National Conference, and then in 1953, when Abdullah was arrested, joined Jama’at Islami. Several older activists, including Geelani, have spent multiple years in prison, and suffered violence at the hands of the state (and in some cases, at the hands of armed militants too). Yet, in numerical terms they don’t form a social group by themselves within the movement. Some older activists narrated to me their activist biographies centered on their politicization as youth activists—either before 1947 or before 1990, which suggests their own investment in affirming youth activism as key to Tehreek. Additionally, there are not any clear lines of influence from older activists on younger activists—Geelani, despite his stints as a state legislator, is one exception; he remains popular among many Kashmiri youth.

Map of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of six chapters, which investigate Kashmiri youth engagements with Tehreek in the present, historical narratives of Kashmir’s past, critical events in modern political history of the region, dominant norms of politics, and the fissures within the movement.

Chapter 1 is based on ethnographic portraits and activist biographies of four Kashmiri youths. It describes how the formation of political subjectivity is intersected by experiences with state violence as well as through self-reflexive paths taken out of its terms of subjection. Through
an analysis of their life trajectories, their senses of precarity, and their political engagements, I examine how Kashmiri youth desperately constitute themselves as political subjects within a violent context that has criminalized their politics and desires. I analyze the implications of my empirical data and analysis for contemporary understandings of youth activism and political subjectivity in Kashmir.

I examine the work of *Tehreek history-writers* and their counter-narratives to the dominant Indian nationalist accounts of Kashmir in Chapter 2. As non-professional writers, Tehreek history-writers produce revisionist accounts of key historical events and figures in the modern political history of the region. Based on interviews with these writers and analysis of their writings, I examine how the dominant modes of postcolonial history writing in South Asia become a subject of critique in the margins of the postcolonial state, and how Tehreek history-writers look to the past to produce an alternative understanding of Kashmiri political identity.

I analyze the visual politics centered on the catastrophic floods of 2014 in Kashmir in Chapter 3. While the government’s disaster management plan fell into disarray, images of the Kashmir valley under water and the Indian military distributing food and blankets became a center of public debate. The images evoked calls for empathy outside Kashmir, but in TV studios, they were displayed as exemplars of military humanitarianism. In Kashmir, where the civilian relationship with the Indian military is ridden with political tensions, and often underwritten by violence, I describe how the flood as a dramatic event brought into view the infrastructure of military control in the region and accentuated the rift between the state and the people.

In Chapter 4, I follow the work of Kashmiri youth activists involved in the election and the boycott campaigns of the 2014 elections, to describe how the idea of “elections” comes to be
contested in a space of historical conflict. The elections brought to light the normative incongruities, particularly in how state authorities present elections as a substitute for the right to self-determination. Youth activists stressed these contradictions to argue that elections in Kashmir were intimately tied to the continuation of the state of emergency, and invoked a symbolic language of sacrifice and betrayal to call for a public boycott. Through an analysis of how Kashmiris understand the history of elections, then, I explore the social meanings of “democracy” in Kashmir. The normative incongruities in “democracy under the occupation,” I argue, also sheds light on the aporias in Tehreek’s own politics of representation.

In Chapter 5, I look at a group of Kashmiri youths who were part of a violent counter-insurgency militia, the Ikhwan, in the mid-1990s, and who now find themselves caught in a space of inescapable despair. The state has abandoned them, while Kashmiris fear and distrust them. Based on accounts of surviving members of the now-disbanded group, the chapter examines how the state’s counterinsurgency campaigns and the unresolved fissures within Tehreek combined to produce a split within the Kashmiri political subjectivity.

Finally, Chapter 6 involves a critical reading of colonial and postcolonial era tracts on Kashmir to trace the formation of Kashmiri Muslim identity under the Dogra state, and how this past continues to resonate in the present. The chapter looks at the modes of taxation on Muslim cultivators and artisans, alongside the state’s discriminatory policies against Muslim practices, as forming the key context in which mass mobilization of Muslims in Kashmir occurred. It also revisits the main reasons behind the “debacle of 1947,” when, as Tehreek history-writers argue, a “historical opportunity was missed by Kashmir leaders to create an independent Kashmir.”

This dissertation, then, is an interplay of history and ethnography. It is about resonances. Resonance is the relation between the “concrete universals” and “generic immanences,” (Casey
1996, 29) or, in other words, between the event and the everyday. The nature of ethnographic research often privileges the everyday over the event. Events are seen simply as momentary tears in the seamless fabric of the everyday. In places like Kashmir, events are embedded within, and continuously disrupt, the structure of the daily life. The everyday itself is eventful, while events cast their long shadows laterally across time into the past and the future. Yet, events are not self-contained; there are multiplicities embedded within them, which bring to fore the underlying relations of power in society.

Like the two images that I described at the start and the feelings they evoke, I attempt to show how the past lives on in the present. History, as already stated, is not in the background, but at the forefront. It structures the contemporary political subjectivity in Kashmir. Kashmiris return to the past not only to comprehend the sources of endemic violence in the present, but also because events from the past resonate strongly, beckoning comparisons and evoking uncanny resemblances. Even though the past becomes irrecoverable in the aftermath of events, events become something of mnemonic markers within political narratives. Tracing political subjectivity, I suggest, calls for reinventing the tools of critical historical anthropology, and considering such questions as space and place, discourse and practice, ideology and language, affect and meaning, and the existential and the unconscious, not as separate inquiries, but together, as intertwined analytical threads that shape political subjectivity.

Concrete universal, a concept taken from Hegel, is that which is operative in contingent circumstances and has no life apart from those circumstances. Or, as Edward Casey puts it: “It is endoskeletal to what happens in a given time and place, yet sufficiently generic to be immanent to occurrences in other times and places” (1996, 29).
CHAPTER 1
YOUTH ACTIVISTS: SUBJECTIVITY, PRECARITY, AND THE POLYSEMY OF AZADI

in this country we step out with doors in our arms.
Children run out with windows in their arms.
You drag it behind you in lit corridors.
If the switch is pulled you will be torn from everything

—Agha Shahid Ali (2009, 176)

“Azadi is freedom from fear,” Zarine had said:

There is uncertainty about the future everywhere in the world, but here we live with a certainty
that the future is not good. We know our family’s turn will come: we will lose someone, my
brother will be tortured, our house will be dynamited. It is just a matter of time.

Outside, cars were honking incessantly.

“Looks like another traffic jam,” I said, shaking my head.

The city was bustling. But traffic congestions had become longer and noisier. She looked
out of the window and said, smiling: “You are annoyed with the cars now; you might miss these
sounds soon.” [Conversation recorded with Zarine in Srinagar in early May 2016].

How easy it is to misread halaat, or “conditions,” in Kashmir. They can be normal (sometimes),
bad (frequently), or just too-hard-to-guess (most of the time). When people are shopping in Lal
Chowk or tourists flock around the Dal Lake in the capital Srinagar, it is easy to assume, as the
pro-government media does, that “normalcy” in Kashmir is the same as “peace.” But normalcy
can be forced upon a situation teeming with violence and simmering with outrage, as is often the
case in Kashmir. It needs only one spark to explode. It always explodes.

For the two months since I returned to Kashmir in May 2016, I have been listening
carefully to the statements of Indian government representatives in Kashmir and those of their
opponents in the pro-independence Tehreek movement, as well as to everyday conversations among youth activists on college campuses, in the countryside, on the streets, and on social media. Anger and anxiety have been building up against the government’s plan to establish permanent colonies for Indian military personnel and segregated settlements for Kashmiri Hindus. Many Kashmiris see these plans as India trying to entrench its military occupation in the region and to territorially break up Kashmir based on religious identity. Some youth activists have described these plans as a prelude to “Israeli-type settlements” and even “ethnic cleansing.” A groundswell of anxiety has pushed even the sometimes-discordant leaders of Tehreek to issue “joint statements.” Yet, tourists from the Indian planes have arrived in droves, and Srinagar’s hotels and houseboats are full.

A new government came to power in March in 2015. The Kashmir-based People’s Democratic Party (PDP) sought votes to keep out India’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party in power in India. But once the results came and the PDP fell short of a majority, it joined hands with the BJP. The BJP had won a majority in the province of Jammu, a traditional rival to Kashmir. Immediately, one after another, the PDP’s “promises” fell apart, as the more assertive BJP embarked on its long-standing program of erasing Kashmir’s “special status” within the Indian Union. The “special status” is enshrined in the Indian Constitution as Article 370. Negotiated in the heady years between 1947 and 1952, Article 370, in principle, guarantees Kashmir “autonomy” in most areas except defense, foreign affairs, and communication. In practice, Article 370 has become a shell. In the seventy years of Indian rule in Kashmir, various Indian administrations have eroded Article 370 of all its promised substance, leaving it an empty symbol of Kashmir’s distinctiveness as a state within India. The BJP, however, wants to undo even the symbolism associated with it. The party’s guiding ideology,
since the colonial era, has been Hindutva. As a nationalist paradigm, Hindutva demands an erasure of all cultural and political identities besides “Indian,” which it equates with being Hindu. Hence, the outrage in Kashmir, which is predominantly Muslim and possesses a historical memory of being a political realm distinct from India. PDP’s volte face has further delegitimized “elections” as an institution in the eyes of Kashmiris, and vindicated youth activists who had campaigned to boycott the elections.

It is in this context, that the events that are about to unfold snowball into months of protests, repression, and deaths. The events reveal how Kashmiri youth find themselves in the cross hairs of state violence, and how this violence becomes intertwined with the formation of their political subjectivity.

This chapter has essentially two parts. In the first part, I describe the event of a death of a young rebel and how it unleashed violence that, while always latent within the occupation, sheds a critical light on what it means to be young under a state of chronic violence. I tell this account in the form of a diary description to present a slice of the politically charged context to which Kashmiri youth become regularly drawn into and how they come to stage themselves as key political actors. The second part is based on my engagement with two youth activists, one a former militant and now a “social worker” (a man) and another a human rights activist (a woman). Based on an analysis of their life and activist trajectories, I argue that youth activism, while shaped by experiences of state violence, is not merely a reaction to it, but involves transforming the terms of violent subjection that the state has instituted to criminalize Kashmiri youth. Activist narratives and practices reveal that while young Kashmiris share experiences of violence, their modes of engagement with Tehreek are varied and dynamic. In the face of state violence that severely limits the public sphere and politics, Tehreek becomes a fraught arena of
political engagement that gives youth politics meaning beyond what the interstate conflict over sovereignty in Kashmir would suggest. Tehreek also becomes the political site in which two marginalized subjectivities—young Kashmiri men and women activists—constitute each other in everyday contexts of precarity.

Ominous news

Friday, 8 July 2016: It is the third day of Id in Kashmir. The month of Ramzan is over, and those who fasted sixteen hours daily in this year’s unusually hot summer are rebuilding their strength. The attendance at the local mosque has thinned. I am hoping the pious would broadcast their piety over the loudspeakers placed on top of the mosques only during prescribed prayer times—five times a day—and not all the time as has been the norm since the beginning of Ramzan. Between honking cars and blaring loudspeakers, the sounds have been incessant. Most people won’t return to their offices until tomorrow, even though only the first day of the Id is listed as an official holiday. Shopkeepers too, after the pre-Id hectic sales, are slow to reopen their shops. Schools have been closed for the summer break, and children are spending time playing cricket, or picnicking in one of the many Mughal Gardens along the region’s foothills. Despite smoldering tensions, Kashmir is quiet. It is an almost perfect setting for the devastating news that is about to come and turn everything upside down.

I have come to visit my parents for Id at their home in Anantnag town in south Kashmir. In the evening, I hear women gathered outside in the street speaking in raised voices among themselves. The men are in the mosque or perhaps milling about in front of shops. My mother calls me downstairs. She looks ashen and her voice quivers.

“They have killed Burhan…”
The voices outside grow louder. I look out of the window. Some women are wiping tears. Burhan, a militant commander of a Kashmiri group that the Indian government has banned, was just twenty-two years old. I have heard people speak about him, many passionately, some in a tragic tone. Kashmiri armed militants—locally known as mujahids—generally have a life-span of a few months before the government kills them, but Burhan survived six years. Unlike other mujahids, who prefer to remain in the shadows, Burhan had uploaded videos and photos of himself and his comrades on social media. His legend had grown, irritating the Indian government. Kashmiri youth circulated his pictures widely, often captioning the pictures and videos with laudatory messages. Some called him “brave,” others prayed for his safety. The Indian media called Burhan a “poster boy for Hizbul.” Hizbul Mujahideen or the Hizb (Party of the Mujahids) was his group, which has historically been a pro-Pakistan organization and emphasizes Kashmir’s Muslim identity. Yet, many Kashmiris speak about Burhan and his group not so much as representing Hizb’s pro-Pakistan ideology, which in itself is not as popular as the idea of Kashmiri independence, but as a “pious rebel” fighting na’haq qabza or an “unjust occupation.”

But there have been so many young mujahids since Kashmir’s mass movement for independence began in 1990—even charismatic ones—that initially I am unable to understand the import of the news of Burhan’s death. My mother, however, senses trouble almost instinctively.

“This is different. You don’t know.”

I return upstairs to look at my phone. More than a dozen messages have appeared on the screen. News has spread fast. Burhan has been killed in a hamlet close to Anantnag, and my Kashmiri friends want to know if I knew anything about the hamlet. “Is it an Ikhwani village?”
Ikhwanis are Kashmiris who broke with Tehreek in 1994 and joined the state as a counterinsurgent militia against the Hizb.¹ Some villages and towns had come to be associated with Ikhwanis because they had allowed them space or been forced to accept them. Now “Ikhwani” has become a general term for “collaborator” or “informer.” I did not know much about the hamlet.

On the Facebook page of an online news site, I see the picture of Burhan’s dead body. The body has blood spots, and the mouth and the eyes are slightly open. The picture was probably taken by his killers soon after he was shot, and then uploaded on the Internet. The picture follows the established governmental routine of representing Kashmiri militants as wild, hunted felons whose deaths should be considered unremarkable and serve as an example for others. But, in this case, it seems not to have worked for the government so well. Alongside the picture of the dead young mujahid, people are circulating Burhan’s other pictures in which he looks rather intrepid and even flamboyant, with guns slung over his shoulders as he stands smiling amid the mountains around his native Tral town. For his killers, the body of a dead rebel is a trophy. Promotions and cash rewards are given to those who kill Kashmiri rebels. Special Task Force personnel of the Kashmir police often get rewards and their Deputy Superintendents are fast-tracked to become Superintendents. It’s the same with the officers of the Indian military’s main counterinsurgency arm, the Rashtriya Rifles, or the other branches of the Indian security apparatus in Kashmir, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF).

I confirm the news to my mother.

“No one in the neighborhood is cooking meals tonight,” she says.

¹ As I explain in Chapter 5 the question of Ikhwan was in fact much more complex.
Soon afterwards, one by one, loudspeakers on top of mosques turn silent. This is a bit unusual. The prayer time is not over, and normally at this hour there is an unremitting hum of religious *kalimat* blaring through loudspeakers. From the mosque in the locality, someone clears his throat on the loudspeaker, reads a few Quranic verses, and then asks people in the locality to wait for an important announcement: “All the people in the locality are requested to come out of their homes and assemble near the mosque. Tehreek-i-Kashmir’s young and dynamic leader, Burhan Wani, has been martyred.”

Instead of describing Burhan simply as a commander of the Hizb, the man calls him the leader of the broader Tehreek, the movement for Kashmiri self-determination. For a young man, who has lived six years in hiding, this public recognition in the locality is only the beginning. In the days to come, Burhan’s legend would have reverberated beyond Kashmir, bringing India and Pakistan almost to the brink of war, and threatening to dissolve the regional interstate bloc SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation).

The man repeats the announcement, and ends it by praying for azadi (freedom from India): “Ya Allah, liberate us from this *zulm o jabr* (cruelty and oppression)!”

“Amen,” respond those inside and outside the mosque, vehemently.

In the distance, cars, motorbikes, trucks, and tractors full of people, are crossing the bridge on the stream that flows behind my parents’ home. They are chanting slogans: “*Hum kya chahate, Azadi!*” (We want, freedom!)

“*Burhan waali, Azadi!*” (Like the freedom, Burhan wanted!)

“*As-salam as-salam, ae shaheed-o as-salam*” (Salam o-martyrs!).

“They are all going to Bamdoor,” a neighbor tells me. Bamdoor is the hamlet where Burhan and his two comrades were killed earlier that afternoon.
Around 10 pm, the Internet slows down and then is completely off. Half an hour later, mobile phones are down as well. My phone displays a “No Service” message. From then on, news would only travel by word of mouth, or through raucous Indian TV news-channels, which lose no time in describing Burhan as a “terrorist” and his death as a success for the Indian military. Panels of TV experts on Kashmir are quickly assembled, and their consensus is that Wani’s death is the final nail in the coffin for Tehreek.

“Kashmiri separatism will now die,” claims one expert.

“Youngsters must now leave the path of confrontation against the state,” suggests another.

“Resistance is futile,” announces the discussion moderator.

But the Indian TV channels are so discredited in Kashmir that, as one of my parents’ neighbors describes it, only Kashmiris with low-blood pressure find it suitable to watch them.

“They talk as if they care about our *nawjawan* (youth),” he says, “Their soldiers have killed tens of thousands of our brightest over the years.”

The sounds of slogans and mourning from different parts of the town travel over the stream behind the house. I close my eyes, but can’t sleep.

**Burhan**

I must have fallen asleep some time deep into the night. The next morning, I am awoken by wafts of teargas and chili-gas smoke coming in from an open window. My eyes are heavy and itchy. From the distance, I hear light thuds of teargas canisters bursting, followed by occasional bursts of gunfire. Slow wind must have carried the noxious gases to the neighborhood. Bilal, the milkman, has arrived somehow.

“They are shooting straight at people. Don’t go out.”
Bilal is in his mid-twenties. He lives with his mother and young sisters nearby. When he was nine, his father went missing. The man had a thriving small business; he supplied milk to several neighborhoods in the area. Neighbors had seen paramilitary soldiers push Bilal’s father into their van and speed away. The business was lost, and the family fell on bad times. However, Bilal, with help from his mother, picked up the pieces. He started supplying milk in the mornings, and went to school and then college during the day. His sisters were in school as well. But business was never the same again, nor the family.

Bilal lives nearby, but on the way to our neighborhood he has to cross a paramilitary camp housed in a cinema. Soldiers occupied the cinema in 1990 only a few years after it had been opened. No movies were ever played after that, unless one considers the horrific scenes of torture some people describe having witnessed (or undergone) in its box sections. On its front wall, the huge cloth poster for the last Hindi movie played has gradually frayed from time, and the bullet holes from years of guerilla attacks on the camp has left the poster in tatters. It was a popular place once, not so much for the ludicrous Bollywood movies, but for the novelty of watching something on a large screen. Children used to steal apples from its adjoining orchard, which was part of the cinema. The owners, Kashmiris from Srinagar, tolerated them; the children tolerated the milling crowds of cinema goers who had suddenly invaded this quiet part of the town. But now, hardly anyone outside the neighborhood remembers the cinema. It became yet another place in the town to be feared. People were taken in, tortured, and many never returned. Bilal believes his father was one of those people. To reach the neighborhood, where he supplies milk to a few houses, he has circumvented the cinema by walking through the woods around it.

“You shouldn’t have come. It is too risky,” admonishes my mother.

“The milk will go to waste,” he replies, “It hardly lasts a day in the summer.”
Despite the shootings and teargas, I see many people, mostly young, from the neighborhood leaving from the back-lane.

“They are all going to Tral,” my mother says.

Tral, fifteen miles north of Anantnag, is Burhan Wani’s hometown. News has spread that his body has arrived there.

“They will perform *jinaza* (Muslim funerary rites) and then return.”

Only a few will be able to reach, though. Soldiers force many to return. For a moment, I had wanted to go as well to witness the event, but my Birkenstock sandals, the only ones I have carried to Anantnag, thwart me. I wouldn’t be able to run in them, and might become someone else’s liability if soldiers chased us. Then there is also the possibility of getting shot.

“Soldiers and police are shooting at crowds on the highway!” yells a man in his forties who has returned but has lost his slippers while running away.

Why do people want to go to Tral? I ask. Funerals of young militants have become mass emotional events. This used to happen in the early 1990s when the armed Tehreek began. Tens of thousands would gather, offer *jinaza*, and carry the bodies of fallen JKLF activists to the martyr’s graveyards—specially designated grave sites for mujahids—in large processions. Then, for years, the Indian government refused to hand over militants’ bodies to the people, and would dump them in rivers, forests, mass graves, or along the LoC. In the last couple of years, people, especially in the countryside, began encircling “encounter sites,” or places where soldiers would surround militants and kill them, and then refuse to budge until the bodies were returned. They would even try to save besieged militants by coming in between soldiers and militants engaged in gunfights. A few months ago, Indian authorities decided again not to return militants’ bodies. But people would have none of that.
From several people who have returned from Tral after the jinaza, this is what I heard had happened with Burhan’s body: On Friday night, after his killing, the body was taken to a police station in Kokernag, which is close to Bamdoor. Soon after, the news reached Burhan’s parents, who set off for Kokernag from Tral. There the police told them they could not get the body of their son back. By that time thousands of people were marching toward Kokernag’s police station. Burhan’s parents were told that the only way the body could be returned to the family was if they quietly buried their son that very night. The body was then carried to the Indian army’s ammunition depot in the hills of Khundru above Anantnag, airlifted from there to Badamibagh Army Cantonment in Srinagar, and then driven to a Rashtriya Rifles camp near Tral. Having traced a part of the geography of militarized space overnight, the body was finally handed over to the police in Tral. But while the police in Tral were preparing for a quiet funeral at night, the townspeople had assembled in such large numbers that Burhan’s body had to be turned over to them. And then an extraordinary thing happened. By early morning close to three hundred thousand people, from places as far as the isolated Lolab valley in north Kashmir, had arrived in the usually sleepy Tral town. A series of forty jinazas would be offered during the day to accommodate all of them.

Meanwhile, people in other towns and villages of Kashmir are also offering jinazas in hundreds of small and large gatherings. One such gathering took place on the main road near the cinema. While soldiers and the youths glared at each other, no words were exchanged. The soldiers inside the camp didn’t react and stayed inside. The meeting dispersed peacefully. However, news coming from other places has not been so good.

By early afternoon, soldiers had shot dead five mourners and injured more than a hundred. By evening, the number reached eleven. In response, a wave of protests has swept
South Kashmir. Young men and women are attacking paramilitary camps and police stations with pebbles, brickbats, and stones. They have “looted” a police armory in a village near Kulgam, and set the station on fire. News of the armory loot could be a rumor. Ironically, in the absence of phones, rumors tend to spread faster, which defeats at least part of the government’s logic as to why phones and the Internet in Kashmir have been shut down. The other part of this logic, that shutting down communication will prevent organization of protests, also appears tenuous: people seem to be organizing spontaneously. As one activist will tell me later, cutting phone networks actually helps Tehreek activists on the ground as they can work without the fear of informers tipping off government forces.

Gradually, more news about the events surrounding Burhan’s killing starts trickling in. He had escaped the military dragnet for six years despite a massive manhunt by the army, paramilitary forces, and police, who had put a million-rupee cash reward on his head. In the end, he had been accidentally traced and killed. Details of the encounter do not sit well with the people who claim Burhan couldn’t have let himself get trapped so easily. Shaken by popular mood on the day after Burhan’s death, the Kashmir police announce they were surprised to find Burhan’s body among the dead militants at the encounter site. They had information there were militants present but they didn’t know who it was. It was a “lucky coincidence.” Party officials of PDP in Srinagar evade responsibility for the killing. They say, they wish he could have been caught alive.

Yet, on Friday evening when mourners had reached the house in which the “encounter” had taken place, they had found bloodied bed sheets and walls, and heard from locals that the encounter had lasted only a couple of minutes. Almost all encounters in Kashmir last hours, sometimes even days, before the soldiers blast the house or the building. The house in Bamdoor...
was intact, not a bullet hole in the walls or doors or windows, just clean shots. The killer party, it
was clear, had arrived at the right door, opened it, and found their victims lying unconscious in
the room. It was a “fake encounter,” the mourners concluded. A fake encounter is said to have
taken place if soldiers or police catch a militant and then shoot him dead at close range, but stage
the event in a way that suggests there was a crossfire. While, from time to time, the Indian
counterinsurgency in Kashmir has involved explicit policies like “Catch and Kill,” fake
encounters are “dishonorable” for the police. They are, however, hard to resist when cash
rewards and promotions are at stake. In Indian courts, fake encounters are called “extra-judicial
killings.” But emergency laws in Kashmir, like AFSPA, make such killings impossible to
prosecute. Human rights advocates use the term “custodial killings.”

The suggestion of a fake encounter has outraged people. Some say the house owner, a
relative of one of the dead associates of Burhan, had mixed poison in the juice and fish served to
them, knocking the three unconscious. The poison, they believe, had been supplied by the
Kashmir Police’s counterinsurgency wing, the Special Operations Group (SOG), which arrived
on the scene, along with a posse of federal commandos from New Delhi, and finished the three
rebels quickly.

A few days later, an angry mob will descend on the village and burn the house down,
along with a few others in the locality. Those who witnessed the arson believe that the mob was
led by provocateurs from pro-Indian parties (Congress and National Conference) who are now in
the opposition in the Kashmir government. Others say the arsonists included those ruling party
(PDP) activists who are not happy with their party bosses allying with the Hindu-nationalist BJP.

It is hard to tell rumors from facts when facts in a place like Kashmir often sound odd.
Like the story of how Burhan became Commander Burhan Wani, whose death would drive the
region into months long frenzy ending in deaths of close to a hundred youths and injuries to more than fifteen thousand others, and, as stated already, open the possibility of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

A Tehreek activist familiar with Burhan’s story told me that six years ago, Burhan, then fifteen, and his slightly older brother Khalid were “humiliated and beaten regularly” by the SOG personnel in Tral. There was no apparent reason for why they should have been treated like that, but the culture of impunity that the state has cultivated among its forces since 1990 makes these incidents routine. The SOG men had seen the two brothers on a motor bike and hadn’t liked their “boyish nonchalance.” No one would, of course, have remembered the reason behind the incident, as simple as the motorbike incident, if what happened next hadn’t happened. After all, many teenage boys and young men in Kashmir experience some form of violence and humiliation at the hands of government forces at one point or the other. And, since the entire government machinery—from its courts to its bureaucrats—are singularly devoted to writing off the violence of the state forces, youths find it better to keep quiet or fight “stone battles” with soldiers on the streets, rather than risk seeking justice in the courts, which could lead to further harassment.

That evening, while Khalid went home, Burhan took off to join the Hizb. This was not an unusual journey for a Kashmiri teenager, but it was not what he had wanted to do with his life. Burhan’s family was a middle-class rural family and he was, as some of his friends would remember, a “bright student” at school. Joining Hizb was a death sentence. Even with guerilla training across the LoC in Azad Kashmir, Kashmiri militants often expected to live no more than six months. Burhan didn’t even cross the LoC. He probably never received any arms training. He just disappeared into the mountains above his hometown.
He didn’t hide for too long. In the fall of 2010, a five-month long protest movement had just ended. Indian forces had killed more than a hundred Kashmiris. The protests ended with a deep sense of despondency, as senior Tehreek leaders were unable to turn the sustained protests into a tangible political outcome. Then, Kashmiri youth activists began appreciating the possibilities of anonymous activism on the social media. Social media had emerged as a nascent space in Kashmir to express outrage and reach out to a global audience interested in human rights. Kashmiri writers, journalists, poets, artists, students, and Tehreek activists began posting their writings, memoirs, notes, short stories, poems, pictures, videos, and comments online, as well as creating new web-based networks. This was a few months before the so-called Arab Spring protests began and turned the Indian government’s attention toward “subversives” using the social media. By 2011, the government had launched cyber cells to target online Kashmiri activists, which drove many into an anonymous mode.

For Burhan, since he had already joined the Hizb, anonymity had no meaning. In fact, what he did surprised the government. He started posting pictures and videos of himself online, and speaking directly to Kashmiri youth. The government had always controlled the flow of information in Kashmir (with perhaps radio in the early 1990s being an exception, but that too in a limited way). Tehreek leaders could communicate with people only in mosques and sometimes through the Urdu press. But their audiences had always been fragmented. By the late 1990s, the government came down hard on even the mosques. On several occasions, I had heard that the government was importing pliant new imams from Indian nationalist-minded Islamic seminaries in North India to preach in Kashmiri mosques. While this was probably a minor phenomenon, the government sought to regulate of mosque sermons and profile preachers (Early Times 2017;
Nevertheless, Burhan soon became a household name, especially in the countryside in South Kashmir.

The Tehreek activist, who was fond of Burhan, remembered him for his “defiance” of the government, even though he had apparently never fired his gun or hurt a soldier or a policeman. Just the fact that he had frustrated the government’s efforts to kill him for six years came to symbolize his defiance. To the activist, he did not become a rebel due to the resentment from his experience as a fifteen-year-old boy, but because he had consciously chosen to “stand up to the occupation.”

“It is easy to morally crumble when faced with constant humiliation,” said the activist, who had reached Tral to attend Burhan’s funeral, “but he chose the path of a dignified life.”

A few years before they killed Burhan, the Indian military had killed Burhan’s brother Khalid, even though he was not a militant.

Youth

The short lives and political deaths of the two brothers are a tragic metaphor for Kashmiri youth in the present. What does it mean to be a nawajawan, or a “youth,” in Kashmir? I am reminded of an exasperated response of a group of sangbāz, or “stone-pelters”—young boys who often clashed with soldiers and police in the streets—when I met them in 2010, and asked them what they were hoping to achieve putting themselves in the path of harm:

What are we supposed to do? They kill us, break our bones, blind us, and keep us in prison. So many of our brothers are in jail under PSA. Most will be held for two years in a row without trial. Then they will be let go and arrested for two more years. When they finally let us go, they harass us, and our families, and ask them to keep paying money to keep us out of the jail. If our leaders hadn’t sold Kashmir for their personal power, we could have lived a dignified life.
They were talking about the Public Safety Act, under which the government imprisons Kashmiris for months without trial (Amnesty 2011). I had immediately regretted my patronizing question, but couldn’t help noticing how their understanding of the past and experiences of the present shape their political actions. The weight of history and a violent state machinery had fallen on the shoulders of Kashmiri youth early on in their lives, a time when their “nonchalance” should have been seen as the norm instead of it provoking the wrath of state forces. The weight of history was two-fold: first, the external geo-political scenario in which India and Pakistan laid territorial claims on Kashmir and ignored the aspirations of Kashmiris; and second, the humiliation of being held hostage through the “connivance,” “collaboration,” or “incompetence” of Kashmir’s own politicians (PDP and NC), as an activist described it. As we will see in Chapter 2, several Kashmiris had been making conscious efforts to engage with the past, trying to understand the motives of leaders like Sheikh Abdullah, and give Tehreek a much-needed historical perspective.

For most youths, daily confrontations with the apparatus of occupation were the norm. This apparatus, in the form of camps, pickets, bunkers, and patrols, frequently reinforced by a mechanism of round-the-clock curfews and restrictions, was ever-present in daily life. It was hard to leave your house and not be confronted by armed soldiers minutely observing you, making you stand in lines to be frisked, demanding your identity papers, or even making you feel threatened by driving their vehicles recklessly through the town’s narrow streets. Often, entire neighborhoods would be besieged, houses searched, and women assaulted as men were forced to assemble in open areas for identity parades. Confrontations were inevitable. For younger Kashmiris, especially, these restrictions were degrading. Since there was nothing they could do
about them—electoral politics was stage-managed by the Indian state to put the compliant segments of society in power—their protests would devolve into stone pelting.

The category *nawjawan* or “youth” emerged in Kashmir roughly in 1990 as Tehreek became an armed movement with mass support, and then again in 2008 and 2010, when the movement returned, this time in the form of large-scale non-violent protests. Although the wider Kashmiri society was involved in the movement throughout, many Tehreek activists describe the events of 1990 and later as “youth uprisings.” Most of the leadership in the beginning had been young (mostly) men. Even the older leadership (those who had a history of political engagement before 1990) would claim Tehreek to be the movement of Kashmiri youth. The older leaders, who gradually took over the leadership of the movement, described Kashmiri youth as *ba-sha’oor*, or “socially and politically conscious.” Yet, while youths remained their main political constituency—it was the efficacy of youth activism in the streets upon which the power of Tehreek leaders depended—youths could, by the same token, be a source of danger, especially if the youth activists refused to follow the leaders’ programs or constrained their room for negotiations with the state.

On the other hand, the Indian state also claimed that the uprisings in 1990 and later were driven by Kashmiri youth. Of course, for the loyalist government in Srinagar, these youths were either *gumrah nawajawan* (Urdu: “wayward” or “impressionable youth”), who had been easily manipulated by the Pakistani government, or, in the eyes of the Indian government in New Delhi, *desh-virodhi* (Hindi: “subversive anti-nationals”), who needed to be contained, punitively if that is what it took. Government functionaries often spoke of “role-model youth” and “undesirable youth.” Most often, in their eyes, the role models were those who joined the Indian armed forces,
the civil services, or were civil service aspirants. Burhan, the now dead rebel, and his brother Khalid, were archetypical “undesirable youth.”

Post-1990, a prominent stream of Indian writing on Kashmir became centered on analyzing the so-called “Kashmiri mind,” which, it was claimed, refused to accept the political “reality”—that is, the permanence of Indian control. Some of this mentalist tradition goes back to the early colonial writings on Kashmir, which after 1947 seeped into Indian writings. The quintessential exponent of this argument is the influential Indian writer Pratap Bhanu Mehta. Drawing from Ashutosh Varshney’s (1991) argument that the Kashmir problem arose because there were three incompatible nationalisms jostling together (Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri), Mehta says it was “inevitable” Kashmir bore the “burden of two military establishments” (2010, 3). In his view, while the “Pakistani establishment would foment violence at all costs, without limit or compunction, (t)he Indian state, by contrast, simply could not think of a way of keeping order that did not have the appearance of a military occupation” (Mehta 2010, 3). Leaving aside the not-so-subtle contrast in imputing mal-intent behind Pakistan’s support of Tehreek and good intent behind India’s military occupation, Mehta sees military control as occupation but only in appearance and its continuation as inevitable. Accordingly, he states, “politics in…Kashmir is more deeply psychological rather than ideological or interest-driven,” and as such Indian “interventions in Kashmir have to be therapeutic, more than technical or political” (Mehta 2010, 7-8). Mehta then turns to the subject of Kashmiri youth:

There is, amongst Kashmiri youth, an odd combination of romanticism and disillusionment. It is romantic in the sense that they are refusing to bow to a larger logic of history; they are refusing to bow to the factual logic that the large nation state in which they reside is bringing to bear upon them. But they are also in the process caught up in an identity trap that has no resolution. They are looking for a horizon of possibility that does not exist. Combined with the daily depredations
the Indian state imposes, there is no room for any ordinariness in Kashmir. What can solve this impasse? No one knows. But one can only hope that these youths will redirect their energies and horizons. Rather than remain trapped in the narrow confines that history has condemned us to, they will be the agents of reimagining a better India. It will imagine a future where azadi will liberate us from our identities rather than condemn us to fight over them (2010, 11).

To his “liberal” credit, Mehta acknowledges the “depredations of the Indian state,” yet, as a nationalist, he refuses to accept that the military occupation (even in its “appearance”) has an utterly illiberal core at its heart (the specifically “Indian” desire to control Kashmiris). He puts the burden of liberating the “Indian polity” from the “trap of identity” on Kashmiri youth, even as he presents their critique of and protest against the occupation as delusional. It is arguable that occupation and identity conflicts are related in a sort of positive feedback loop-system, reinforcing and intensifying each other, but the “fight” over identity is not the originary reason behind the occupation (before 1947 there was no fight between the “three nationalisms” per se); occupation is the reason why identities became politicized and conflicted in the first place. Why should, one might ask, Kashmiri youth “bow” to the occupation, to defend, what Mehta calls, “the normatively defensible idea of India?” What would Kashmiri youth find so appealing in the “idea of India,” which is clearly indefensible as an idea in Kashmir, that they will not be able to find in the “idea of Kashmir?” What could be more “therapeutic” than the end of the occupation and conceding the democratic right of self-determination? How can “ordinariness” exist under a state of emergency? I quote Mehta at length here because this supposedly “liberal,” moralizing point of view pervades the Indian public sphere beneath Hindu rightwing nationalism, which, of course, does not even acknowledge the existence of the occupation.

As is evident, generalizations about the “psyche” of Kashmiri youth remain a key subtext of these writings. Much of Indian writing on Tehreek had heavily relied on these governmental
tropes of “immaturity” and “resentment,” and a nationalist invisibilizing of the occupation. Some saw the movement’s turn to arms in 1990 a result of “economic frustration” of the Kashmiri middle class (Jha 1991). This argument was hardly sustainable, because, in 1990, a Kashmiri middle class had hardly existed beyond pockets of urban Kashmir, many of whom were, in any case, tied to the pro-Indian establishment. In direct contradiction to the middle-class thesis, others understood the 1990 uprising as having been led by “subaltern youth,” who were “economically alienated” from India (Prakash 2000). Still others saw “educated youth” as the prominent Tehreek actors, those who could not be accommodated within the “decaying institutions” of the state (Ganguly 2003; Wildman 2002). Of course, subaltern youth were most active in Tehreek mobilizations, but their subaltern status was neither new nor was it simply based on their economic alienation from India. The notion of economic alienation not only distracts attention from the Tehreek’s political contestation of India’s sovereignty in Kashmir, but also puts the burden of alienation on Kashmiri youth, who are represented as culturally and psychologically incapable of adjusting to the “new economy,” like traveling outside of Kashmir for jobs. In short, the classes under analyses kept changing but the mentalist tropes remained.

In Kashmir, after the period of armed Tehreek had subsided in 2001, the pro-India loyalist parties like the People’s Democratic Party and the National Conference, adopted elements of this mentalist discourse and deployed it alongside discourses of “development” that were borrowed from the Indian military’s counterinsurgency doctrine. Confronted with a legitimacy crisis, with widespread opposition to their status as legitimate actors within politics among Kashmiris, these parties insisted that a Kashmiri obsession with the past was coming in the way of the region’s development. This was the high period of neoliberal optimism among the
Indian elite, and the Indian military had presented itself as a “force for civilian development” in Kashmir. The pro-India Kashmiri elite borrowed that language of military governance and neoliberalism to depict young Tehreek activists as a dangerous underclass structurally separate and culturally distinct from mainstream Kashmir. In economic terms, this “underclass” of youths were those who had fallen behind, and who, thus, needed to be absorbed into the workforce. In behaviorist terms, they were seen as deviant, quasi-criminal, and anti-social, with a distaste for work, and who, therefore, needed to be stopped from disrupting the supposedly self-regulating market economy (cf. Macdonald 1997).

Toward the early 2000s, the Indian government started a process of employing thousands of Kashmiris in extremely low-wage jobs (even by India’s own very low standards). These “jobs” kept youths under the poverty line, paying as little as 1500 rupees (around USD 20) a month. A minute fraction of these jobs turned into slightly higher paying jobs, but most were a ladder to nowhere. And, as it turned out (especially in 2008 and 2010), Kashmiri youth wanted to work and build their lives, but they also protested everyday military repression and continued to aspire for independence. The government, with its well-oiled apparatus of military control at hand, therefore, found it more efficient to contain and coerce Kashmiri youth rather than “absorb” them into the economy. Prominent government functionaries, military and civilian, began describing Kashmir youth as “drug addicts,” thus linking the discourse of counterinsurgency with the “Global War on Drugs” narrative (cf. Hayden. 2015). The Kashmir

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2 During the 1990s and 2000, India went through major “structural adjustments,” shifting from a planned economic system to a market-oriented economy.
3 See also Chapter 3.
4 The roots of this framework lie in both economic and behaviorist sociological theories of late capitalist societies, which tend to see underclasses as “dangerous” and “welfare dependent” sections of society, separate from traditional working classes. For a critique of the idea of underclass, see Macnicol (1987) and Macdonald (1997).
5 While some have uncritically accepted the governmental claim that there is a “drug problem” among Kashmiri youth, there is no real data that has ever been produced in Kashmir on the question.
police, employing the services of the state-employed clinicians and non-governmental organizations, even went about creating “drug de-addiction centers” for Kashmiri youth, presenting its mandate as “social service” (Varma 2016).

Not surprisingly, in presenting Kashmiri youth as immature, resentful, subversive, as well as psychologically unstable, and thereby criminalizing their activism, much of the Indian scholarship on Tehreek, liberal apologia for the occupation, and, of course, the military and civilian government functionaries, discounted the effects of pervasive state violence, especially the way Kashmiri youth experienced this violence in their everyday lives. Kashmiri youth were, instead, held responsible for provoking violence against themselves, because, as the argument went, they had chosen to confront the state. Pronouncedly failing to address the question of occupation, these arguments also discounted the history of the movement and its discourses of emancipation, and how these had become part of Kashmir’s cultural memory. There was in fact hardly any studies which took into view the experiences and perspectives of Kashmiri youth.

Considering these critical gaps—as well as deliberate obfuscations—in studies of Kashmir,6 I was curious to understand who the subject of the governmental enunciations was when it referred to “youth.” In Kashmir, the meaning of “youth” had historically changed; the term itself was a kind of “linguistic shifter” (Silverstein 1976) that received its meaning from situated use. The meaning of youth in Kashmir went beyond the logics of age. For instance, many Tehreek activists, who were part of the 1990 movement but are now in their forties, were also sometimes called youth leaders. The traditional nawjawan (or “budding adult”) in Kashmir used to be the liminal, floating state between childhood and adulthood; but after the Uprising the

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6 Studies of Kashmir, not to mention Tehreek, has curiously been missing in the work of Subaltern Studies Collective, which was centered on questions of subaltern subjects of the Indian state raising critical questions around sovereignty and on the nature of power in the postcolonial nation state.
term came to represent a position of *historical* responsibility. The traditional rites of passage (cf. Van Gennep 1960), like marriage, for instance, no longer indicated a transition into adulthood, even though many youths, like Bilal, have had to take on *family* responsibilities, such as caring for their disrupted families, from very early on. *Nawjawan* was one who grasped the importance of the historic movement, Tehreek. In exploring Kashmiri youth subjectivity, therefore, “youth” should neither be taken as a given category nor as an in-between stage in the formation of self-hood. Youth is a processual identity, which must be understood only after analyzing its evolving cultural and political uses (Bucholtz 2002; Diouf 1996; Durham 2000).

Kashmiri youth, I argue, are primarily *subjects of violence*. Caught in chronic conditions of state repression, however, young Kashmiris are not its passive recipients. They desperately constitute themselves as *political subjects* through their involvement in Tehreek. They do so broadly through a dynamic engagement with the region’s history, which I discuss in Chapter 2, and through public contestations of the military occupation. On an everyday level, they respond to the occupation with consistent argumentation and criticism, or with creative expressive forms like writing, art, and poetry (largely focus of middle class urban youth), but also with street confrontations and armed militancy (largely working class or rural youth). While public contestation of the occupation as verbal criticisms is a predominant aspect of activist life, direct confrontations with state forces become more intense during times of heightened political tensions. Below I describe a direct confrontation, involving what are called *sangbāz*.

**On the streets**

The incident takes place on the sunday morning, three days after Burhan Wani’s death, as protests become intensified. News of deaths in paramilitary shootings on Saturday has spread. On the bypass road across the river from our neighborhood in Anantnag, a dozen youths
assemble in small groups. Some of them are probably only ten or twelve-years old. At the end of the road, soldiers from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), an Indian paramilitary force, look on. The soldiers are in full body armor, armed with rifles, bamboo sticks, teargas, and pump-action pellet guns. I anticipate trouble, but keep looking on. A few soldiers start walking towards them, ready to give chase. The protestors stop and heckle the soldiers in Hindi:

“Goons, show us what you have got!”

“Modi’s pups, go home!” (Modi is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi).

To the Kashmiri police officers mixed among the CRPF soldiers, the protestors shout the most pointed taunts in Urdu and Koshur:

“Traitors, listen, we will take our azadi!”

“Apoligize and join us!”

“How cheap did you sell yourselves!”

“Do you have no shame!”

The Indian soldiers hurl back abuses, and use expletives:

“You will get azadi in your asses!”

“Go to Pakistan, just leave your mothers and sisters here!”

This is the shape of the “dialogue” on the streets, which, as one would expect, quickly breaks down.

The soldiers shoot teargas shells. A teargas canister makes a long arc, lands near the protestors, and spurts noxious gas. A young boy picks it up and flings it back. It doesn’t reach the soldiers. More heckling, taunts, abuses, and expletives follow. Suddenly, a large armored CRPF van swerves right onto the road, and charges straight toward the protestors at high-speed. The protestors scatter just in time to prevent being run over. Some jump into the stream, others
fall into ditches on the side of the road. No one is hit. The van stops ahead but is unable to turn around. It reverses at a slower speed. The protestors pick pebbles and stones from the stream’s banks and hammer the van with a deafening clangor. The soldiers fire more teargas canisters, some of which fall at the feet of the protestors, who immediately kick them into the stream. The soldiers and police charge and fire pellets. The protestors turn their backs and scatter again. They are trying to protect their eyes from pellets. A few shots are fired as well, some in the air, some at the protestors. No one is hit. But pellets have hit a few youths. These are lead pellets, which scatter at high speed and become embedded in soft tissue. They severely deface the body and can cause blindness. They cause a severe burning sensation. The youths yell in pain, and run to the back. The pattern continues late into the afternoon, when suddenly at six o’clock both sides withdraw and all I can hear is water flowing gently in the stream.

Sangbāzi often starts from minor confrontations, and then the two sides get locked into a fury of violence, which frequently spirals into scenes of bodily injuries and even deaths. While the example I described above took place in the context of the death of a Tehreek militant, in an outlying neighborhood in Anantnag,7 typical sangbāzi begins in the interior areas of old towns or Downtown Srinagar, either when youths mock soldiers patrolling the streets, or when soldiers smash vehicles or store windows, or harass walkers.

These scenes are “stylized sets of acts” that take a “repetitive” form, and would thus fit well into what Judith Butler calls a “performance” (1999, xv-xvi). They reproduce discourses about youth activists as “subversive” and “undisciplined” who must be punitively contained, even though most youth activists are not sangbāz. Do these acts become part of activist subjectivity through an interiorization of the conflict that is enacted on the streets? At some level,

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7 That it took place in an outlying area of the old town Anantnag points to the widespread nature of the 2016 protests.
sangbāz seem to aspire for a certain “notoriety” in the face of a powerful and violent enemy. They want to appear recalcitrant and obstinate. In listening to sangbāz describe their fellow stone-pelting youths, one gets a sense of how street prestige accrues from circulating legends about one’s brazen fearlessness and brash disregard for authority. “X has baed gorda” (big kidneys). “Y is syod hoon” (a straight dog). “Z chu ne pateh path bronth wichan” (doesn’t care for anything).

Some of this self-fashioning is, in fact, directed as much toward the shareef (“noble”) people or Kashmiri middle class, as toward Indian soldiers. Sangbāz youth in Srinagar sometimes address shareef youth as “chocolate-aa” or “hyo, pizza-hut-ta” or “burger-bacha”—taunting, with a Kashmiri twist on English words, the new consumerism of the middle class. “Shareef” people see sangbāz as a nuisance and call them khaer, which means “undisciplined;” yet they often concede that sangbāz are brave for standing up to India’s might. Even Tehreek leadership sees them with a weary resignation, yet acknowledge that, like the armed mujahids, sangbāz keep the occupation and its violence from normalizing itself.

While the state (especially local authorities) present stone-pelting as exhibits for extensive incarceration and justification for the use of deadly force, stone pelting is clearly a “weapon of the weak.” The pointed verbal barbs and taunts of sangbāz toward the soldiers and the shareef suggest an assertion of agency, a moral critique, as well as a sense of humor. A few years ago, when I witnessed another such street battle, I had heard sangbāz shout “pandah sheth te bateh” at Kashmiri policemen (Junaid 2014). It meant “fifteen hundred rupees and a plate of rice,” which is what Kashmiri policemen deployed on the streets were believed to be paid each month by the state. Mocking them for their low wages (USD 20/month) was part of the general ridicule for the government plan to give jobs to “stone-pelting” Kashmiri youth, but the scorn for
bateh or rice was a remark with deep historical resonance. It went back to the Dogra era when the state had instituted grain-control restrictions for the artisans in the towns to keep them dependent, while subsidizing cheap rice for the urban idle classes (see Chapter 6).

Post-1947, when Sheikh Abdullah was still seeking plebiscite, he had asked Kashmiris to eat potatoes and avoid imported rice, if they wanted azadi. After his arrest in 1953, his pro-India opponents called him aelweh bab or Father Potato, and Ghulam Ahmed Bakshi, a National Conference turncoat, who was installed as Kashmir’s Prime Minister by Nehru in Abdullah’s place, was granted generous imports of rice to keep the urban classes in good humor. Rural cultivators, who supported Abdullah, derided the urban idle classes for developing a dependence on “imported rice”—or chaendi bateh. In the 1990s, bateh continued to resonate as a figure of speech. Those armed militants seen as slack in morals or suspected of intending to “surrender” were called bateh mujahid or “Rice-plate Mujahids.” Rice had acquired a metonymic association with “collaboration,” “idleness,” “moral slackening,” as well as “dependence on India.” In their homes, however, sangbāz themselves are subject to a similar moral critique and humor. Their kin sometimes call them bateh jinn or rice demons, because, “They just eat rice and don’t know a trade.”

There is, thus, another dimension to sangbāz life, which is marked by social suffering. If the charged confrontations on the streets are furtive moments that may last a full day or an evening, what do sangbāz youth do the rest of the time? Many of them are formally in school or even college. Some run errands for their family-run stores, or apprentice for others. Most sangbāz youth do these things in tandem. So, in truth, they are not slothful or unwilling to work. But the school and college education in Kashmir is centered on annual tests, with emphasis on seasonal “cramming” of “notes,” thus leading to an endless supply of idle time (cf. Jeffrey 2010,
Work is also contingent and unrewarding. Most of the time, therefore, is unstructured and empty. Often, when I greeted youths by saying kyah chukh karan (“How is it going?” which, in Kashmiri, is just part of the greeting and usually no exact answer is expected), they made self-deprecating jokes about how they “just sit there and kill time.”

Throughout my fieldwork from 2014 to 2016, I spent a considerable amount of my time with Kashmiri youth, but it was mostly at their homes. There, the female household members would joke about boys becoming domesticated, and would ask them to contribute more to the chores, like the “rest of the women” do. Yet, the women would become anxious when young men stepped out of homes, and would plead with them to return. If they stayed out longer than expected, women would go after looking for them. Several times, I saw mothers search for their sons in the streets, and bring them back home from shop-fronts, where young men sometimes lingered around. Some women told me they would prefer their sons to be home than go out and risk getting shot or arrested. Women ventured out on streets more often. They would put on burqas and walk in public spaces less apprehensively, and thereby give their sartorial practices a very different meaning under occupation than is normally presumed. Young men at home, however, spent a lot of time watching and sharing videos with each other on their phones. Videos related to Tehreek activism or of soldiers attacking Kashmiris would affect their mood and bring a sense of solemnity to their demeanor. But there were also videos about piety or morality, as well as “funny videos” that were regularly shared and shown to others.

There were no safe public spaces for young men to meet, share in conviviality, or express identity. In the South Asian context, much has been written about the cultural significance of spaces like addās (Chakrabarty 1999) and “tea-stalls” (Jeffrey 2010), where young men meet,

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8 A cape-like loose garment, often black and ornate, with a front-falling face-covering with slits for eyes.
spend idle time, and fashion distinctive masculinities. These spaces also become sites of affirmative culture. The military occupation of public spaces in Kashmir has erased such possibilities. Kashmiri youth still met each other, but in transitory public spaces, like shop-fronts. There wasn’t a predetermined or culturally-specified space outside home where they could gather. In Anantnag, such public spaces were even more limited, because of the overbearing presence of the military snipers and bunkers on the hill that overlooked the town. Each time, friends had to be summoned to the home of one youth or the other. Parents became anxious when young men assembled at a home and would admonish them from going outside.

While mostly cloistered at home, the occasions when sangbāz youth came on the streets to protest changed the scene completely. The news of the assembly would pass spontaneously by word of mouth, and youth groups would take their positions. For a while they would control the inner lanes of their neighborhoods or even roads. Sometimes, such occasions, when soldiers withdrew, the streets became sites of spontaneous warmth. Men and women spoke loudly and called out to each other. Youths walked idly and aimlessly, with arms thrown over each other’s’ shoulders. Women walked briskly, but without burkas, often stopping to greet each other, or telling annoyed men that they were being summoned home. These moments lasted into late evenings.

But during the state violence that started after the death of Burhan Wani even the homes became unsafe for friends to gather.

I can’t stay in Anantnag anymore. It feels claustrophobic. I will take a chance and try to reach Srinagar, where, hopefully, the phones might be working. Monday morning, I wake up at four and go outside to start the family’s old car. It sputters and stops. Bad sign. I try again and it
works. On the highway to Srinagar, I don’t spot any soldiers or protestors. There is just a ghostly silence all around. Midway to Srinagar, near the town of Avantipora, I run into a caravan of buses carrying Hindu pilgrims. They are headed south to India. The buses are going fast and do not dim their strong headlights. I stop the car. After the caravan passes, the car refuses to start again. It is approaching six in the morning. The military would be deployed soon to enforce the curfew, and if I don’t leave I might be stuck there till midnight. I knock at the gate of a nearby house, and ask for help. The lady of the house opens the gate for me, and lets me keep the car inside. She says I must either stay the day or leave immediately.

I decide to walk toward Avantipora hoping to hitch a ride to Srinagar from there. I wave down a small car. The driver turns out to be a Kashmiri police officer in civilian clothes. He agrees to drop me near Avantipora. On the way, he tells me:

I am afraid to travel in my official car these days…And, I don’t want to be seen in my police *wardi* (uniform). People are afraid of us, and we are afraid of the people. I have never felt I am Indian, and because of my job people here don’t think I belong to Kashmir. We are just Kashmiri slaves of a free India.

Voluntary slaves, I want to say, but curb my tongue— and feel sorry for thinking that thought.

“This is just a job for me,” he keeps repeating, as I get out of the car in Avantipora.

It is indeed just a job; a job he feels almost sorry to have. I have no words to commiserate with him. I thank him for the ride. I wait for a while, then walk. There is no one on the road. Finally, a car comes along and stops. The man driving is from Tral. He describes the scenes at Burhan’s funeral in detail, and then says:

Burhan may have kept the armed movement going during his brief lifetime, but in his death, he will produce a revolution. Indians on TV are saying he was just a “social media phenomenon.”
They are wrong. Burhan was a political activist. He would go around, speak to ordinary people, and convince them of the need for freedom from India.

Having witnessed the scenes at the funeral, the man says Tehreek had taken a new turn:

Now only the really committed individuals join the armed struggle. They are educated and politically mature, even if young. They know they will only live six months to a year, but they are just too tired of the humiliation they face every day.

Is it imperative to pick weapons and die because one has been humiliated, or for a cause, however just the cause may be? I want to ask him, but again I keep quiet. He turns pensive and speaks, as if he had anticipated my question: “Will the soldiers stop their oppression here if our youth kept quiet? Will they leave our land on their own?”

By the time we reach Srinagar, it is already seven in the morning. I part ways with the man, and head straight to meet two of my friends in the city. Srinagar is tense, but not as grim as Anantnag. Some phones are working, but now I don’t know what I need a phone for.

Both my friends are journalists, and it seems always prepared for the worst. Their Internet is working, and they are taking personal risks filing daily reports of killings and protests. The government has just imposed a ban on the Kashmiri press—a “press emergency,” as the local journalists call it. The printing presses are sealed, newspapers have been confiscated, and reporters’ passes have been revoked. Only a few TV journalists, the ones working for Indian TV news-channels are allowed to move around freely and report. Their reports are often slanted, and use the language of the state to describe the protests. No Kashmiri journalist would call Burhan a “terrorist” or see the protests as the “handiwork of Pakistan,” the way the Indian journalists would. Even though journalists working for Indian TV might report accurately, their editors
sitting in Delhi determine how the reports are represented. Frustrated with such journalists, Kashmiri youth have recently engaged them in acrimonious exchanges.

In contrast, Kashmiri journalists working for international press are a relatively accurate window into what is happening in Kashmir. If not for them, no one outside Kashmir would truly know how brutally the state is crushing the protests. The international press has its own censorious mechanisms and discursive filters, but they have an appearance of “neutrality.” Nevertheless, their reports force even some journalists working for Indian TV to visit hospitals and reluctantly report on pellet injuries. Another group of reporters who have worked diligently are those working for the local press—many of them are Kashmiri youth sympathetic to Tehreek. They go and bring reports from the ground, even from the distant countryside where the Indian or international press hardly ever reach. Their reports are often laced with themes of suffering, pain and mourning.

By Tuesday, more than thirty Kashmiris have been shot to death, while hundreds carry grievous wounds. Distressed reports arrive from inside crammed Kashmiri hospitals. Little boys and girls, as young as four, have been left pock-marked and pierced by lead pellets. Many have lost their eyes. Huddled together in Kashmiri hospitals, which are running out of beds for the injured, pellet victims have dark glasses covering their bandaged eyes. Many have their backs covered in pellet injuries with blood still oozing from the wounds. The doctors and nurses are stretched thin. They have had time to remove only those pellets which have pierced critical areas of the body, not ones stuck inside soft tissues. A doctor, who has arrived from India, says he has never seen this number of “peacetime casualties,” and that the situation inside the hospital wards resembled a “wartime situation.” It is a war: a one-sided one.
“The Indian state is at war with us Kashmiri people,” a Tehreek activists tells me, “punishing us for attending the funeral of a ‘terrorist.’ We see Burhan Wani as a martyr, who gave his life for Kashmiri liberation.”

Wednesday is no different. More people are dead. Many more injured—thirty-five hundred people, by some estimates. The injured include soldiers. Many injured Kashmiris have bullet wounds above their waist, or pellet injuries to their backs, legs and eyes. These casualties suggest the state forces have not even followed their own Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for crowd control. Use of lead pellets is not part of the SOP, nor is use of live bullets. Shootings above the waist and use of pellets suggest the intent has been to kill and maim.

Figure 2. As a Kashmiri child is blinded by soldiers shooting pellets, the region’s Chief Minister is blinded by her loyalty to the Indian state. Courtesy of Mir Suhail.
Some soldiers have been hit by stones. The Indian news-channels regularly broadcast reports from the Army’s 92 Base Hospital in Srinagar, where soldiers and police officers are lying in bed with bandaged foreheads. Seeing such reports often evokes pain and anguish from Kashmiris, even from those who throw stones. There is an etiquette of street battle. When sangbāz youth and Indian soldiers confront each other, they clearly treat each-other as opponents. When they are not confronting each other, the relationship becomes somewhat less clear. At several places over the years, youth activists have come to the aid of policemen or soldiers if the latter are in an accident or need assistance. A lone police vehicle skidded off the road on the highway a couple of days after the protests began, and sangbāz dropped their stones and ran to help. During the flood in 2014, villagers swam to help drowning soldiers whose boat had capsized. Context determines the antagonism in their relationship.

“A hurt soldier is no reason for celebration,” an activist had told me a few years ago, “We don’t know them or what they are like when they are not attacking us. India has dehumanized us, but the occupation has dehumanized the soldiers too.”

I wonder what conversations go on among soldiers when they are back in their camps.

“Most of the injuries are minor,” the army doctor tells the TV reporter, “the jawans will be up and about soon.”

Aamir

In the afternoon on Wednesday, I come to know of the death of Aamir Latoo from Bijbehara. He was twenty-two. His picture is carried in a news-report, which also mentions his Facebook posts. I am drawn toward his face. He has taken the picture himself. His face looks genial, if slightly comical—like someone who is trying to make fun of himself. I try to imagine Aamir in my thoughts. I look for his profile on Facebook. It is “public.” Profiles of the dead on
social media must raise critical ethical questions about the world of social media, not to mention cause awkwardness. I wonder if there is a way to tell the California-based Facebook executives that the person they have “active” on their open network has been shot to death, and that they must close his file now.

On Aamir’s Facebook wall are an assorted range of couplets from the famous 13th century Sufi poet Jalal-ud-Din Rumi; these are mostly about the unity of the universe, the entwinning of life and love, and the eternity of the soul. There is light banter with his friends. There are pictures of his fake stunts on a motorbike. There are Id greetings. There is a prayer for “peace and prosperity” for Kashmir—but also sent to his friends in India. I close it down. Even though I want to imagine him, I want to leave his world to him.

Aamir’s posts are moving. Of course, they have not saved Aamir from an untimely death, but I hope the world sees his posts so he may not die anonymously or become just another statistic of this invisibilized war. I hope he defies the kind of numerical death the state has consigned him to, the kind which forces the living to keep an ongoing count of the dead. Aamir, I would come to know later, was a Delhi University student, who had come to visit his parents a few weeks before Burhan’s death. While watching a protest, Aamir was shot by paramilitary forces outside his home in Bijbehara. As he was being taken in an ambulance to a hospital in Srinagar, soldiers dragged him out and beat him, resulting in further loss of blood. A youth volunteer at the hospital, where most of the injured have been brought, tells me the doctors gave Aamir a blood transfusion but he had too many lacerations through which the blood would come out. “This one has been a year of death through too many wounds,” the volunteer says, “Several have died after being hit by pellets, multiple bullets, and trauma from fatal injuries in mass
beatings.” Just three days before his own death, Aamir had mourned the death of Burhan Wani on his Facebook page in words that seemed to express a deep sense of intimacy and emotion.

Aamir’s Facebook posts do not stand entirely for the person who wrote them, nor do I take them to represent the perspective of all Kashmiri youth. The intertwining of his mundane longings and his political aspirations, his desire to dwell in the profundity of Rumi’s poetic thought as well as partake in the lightness of his own social world, is a small portion of the world he inhabited. He seems to have been comfortable writing as intimately to his “Indian” friends as to his “Kashmiri” friends. Of course, the post about Burhan appears to have rent this conviviality vulnerable; his “Indian” friends are unsure how to respond to his affection toward a rebel which the Indian government has declared a “terrorist.” They appear lost for words even more when a Kashmiri friend announces on his wall that “Aamir is no more alive.” The shock of violence that befell Aamir had made these interpersonal dichotomies visible, and given them a grotesque new meaning. To be considered a “normal” youth, whose death may be uniformly mourned, would it have required Aamir to sanitize his feelings from the violence in Kashmir? Now he was a martyr in Kashmir, and at best an enigma to his Indian friends.

The hospital volunteer gives me detailed descriptions of Aamir’s injuries, delivering them in a prosaic tone. He has seen the number of dead rise in the mortuary, and seen the injured being brought in to the hospital in their hundreds each day. I notice how his descriptions are subtly reconstituting my own senses. When I return, and try to write down my notes, I wonder what I should do with what I had come to know. Could I, in my writing, “bracket off” violence unfolding all around, violence in which most of those I was working with were caught? In writing about youth political subjectivity, where does one place their close experiences with violence within the matrix of their life experiences in general?
I look at my notes. The question of “violence” has vexed social theorists. Anthropologists have shown how violence can be understood better within specific, historicized contexts than as a transcendental category of analysis (Whitehead 2004). However, violence is a product of an interplay between discourses and practices of order and disorder, and as such takes on a certain overarching character (Arendt 1969; Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). The general dialectic of order and disorder tends to create zones and discourses of exception (like military occupations, counterinsurgency, “cultures of violence,” or even “inner city”), in which violence becomes normalized and even morally acceptable to those in whose name such a violence is carried out (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2003). These names—underpinned by notions of racial supremacy or concepts of national order or ethnic solidarity—institutionalize violence, while violence further

Figure 5. Even the ambulances have been attacked. Courtesy of Mir Suhail.
consolidates the power of these categories (Davis 1983; Mamdani 2001). Be that as it may, violence remains critical to the making of new subjects (Das and Kleinman 2000; Butler 1997). Violence is spectacular, present, and evental, but it also creeps into the everyday recesses of social life, often as fear (Foucault 1995; Das 2006; Green 1999). It traumatizes the body, psyche, and senses, as well as reorganizes their constitutive power (Scarry 1985), and yet might even be productive of totally new political forms (Clastres 2010).

While “violence” performs enormous conceptual work in scholarship on human social condition, it remains an unwieldy category. It is hard to define. On one side, it is corporeal and evident; on the other, it assumes reality only when it is *narrated* as violence by its victims (Kleinman & Kleinman 1996). This is equally complicated by the tension between the actuality of violence (the act of violence and its narration by its victims) and the forms and ethics of its scholarly representation, especially in ethnographic writing. An allegorical reading of violence might blind one to its shattering or gradually corrosive effects on bodily, psychic, sensual, and social aspects of human life. Yet, even descriptive writings about violence provoke charges of voyeurism, and might be self-defeating. Charged imagery of violence may objectify the suffering and might turn the sufferer into an object of pity. Indeed, we need to be cautious against the aestheticization of suffering, but should it also mean anesthetization to violence in our writing?

Anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes call for “barefoot anthropologists” who must produce “politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith that allow the suffering and the deaths to continue” (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 416-17). Other anthropologists like Allen Feldman (1991) argue that violence, as pain and suffering, is not “pre-cultural” or a self-evident

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9 Some of the issues revolving ethics of representation of violence have been discussed by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2009, 25-27). See also, Whitehead (2004) and Taussig (1987).
category of experience, but a complex cultural phenomenon, which draws from both the “viscerality of violence” and the “way violence is represented” (cited in Valentine 2007, 209-10). And, yet, as Valentine Daniel points out, “violence is an event (marked by) excess…The very attempt to label this excess is condemned to fail…Everything can be narrated, but what is narrated is no longer what happened” (1996, 207-08). In essence, Daniel’s argument is in line with Feldman’s, who calls for analyzing representations, discourses, and “stories” about violent social realities, yet ultimately the decision to “label” being an ethical choice for the anthropologist—which affirms Schepers-Hughes’ proposal. In this light, what is the appropriate stance for an anthropologist to take—as a distant observer or as a political activist? Is there a stance possible that is neither oriented to instrumentalizing people’s experiences toward the theoretical ends of knowledge nor instrumentalizing knowledge towards the political ends of human struggle? Or, is it possible that the two stances, as Daniel seems to suggest, are one and the same, even if they remain split within the disciplinary rhetoric?

In reading Aamir’s words and listening to those of the volunteer who witnessed Aamir’s death, I ask myself who I am in their midst. Why did the hospital volunteer earnestly give me the details of Aamir’s death, when I told him I am a Kashmiri anthropologist? Of course, Aamir did not leave a digital record of his life for any anthropologist to reconstruct it after his death. Perhaps, if he knew, he would have erased it. But it is there, the words and the record, now smoldering inside me and inside many others who came to know Aamir from his Facebook account after his death. There are many stories like Aamir’s, but is there a point in listing them all? The deaths will be listed in the reports of endless “fact-finding commissions,” of which there is no dearth in Kashmir. Instead of Aamir or Burhan, one could write about the killings of

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10 See also Valentine (2003), for another good summary of these debates.
Yasmin, a young woman in Pulwama, who was trying to save her cousin from soldiers, or about Insha, a twelve-year old girl blinded by pellets, all in the summer of 2016. To me, these lives and deaths are the costs the state of emergency and the history of denied rights imposes on Kashmiri youth. Indeed, there is a need to delimit the self-anointed role of the anthropologist as an authoritative witness whose texts bear the aura of ethnographic realism, yet if violence shapes our senses, our writing must not be cleansed from its traces in a narcissistic embrace of “distance.”

The key thing to remember is this: Violence is an excess within everyday life; since violence is evental, it is assumed that in writing about the social, violence can be bracketed off. Scheper-Hughes and Phillipe Bourgois argue that, “People everywhere have an enormous capacity to absorb the hideous and go on with life and business as usual” (2009, 26). I tend to disagree. While it may be true that many people carry on, business is never as usual. Some lives, like Aamir’s, are extinguished, or, like Insha’s, drastically reduced in quality. The social itself is never the same. Violence as excess becomes interwoven into the everyday.

Precarity

Violence in Kashmir has become routine. It is chronic rather than episodic or transient, and this “chronicity” (cf. Vigh 2008) means violence is felt in a specific way among Kashmiri youth. It is not just the violations of bodily integrity, psychic wounds, or traumas received in the past that many youths experience or carry with them, but violence experienced as a potentiality immanent in everyday life. If this experience is to be given a name, I would call it precarity.11 In

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11 In social theory, precarity has arisen as a concept within the studies of the consequences of neoliberal capitalism and as a platform for organizing social struggles against it (Neilson & Rossiter 2008). “Precarity,” for instance, captures a pervasive sense of peril and risk that subjects of neoliberal states experience in maintaining their position as social beings. Lauren Berlant (2007) considers precarity as an existential problem under neoliberal capitalism,
spaces of endemic violence, precarity is woven into the fabric of social life and generated as general fear in the “mode of anticipation” (Jeganathan 2004, 37). Judith Butler has described it as a function of “exposure” of human sociality, and “disposability” of certain populations whose lives are not considered “grievable” (2004, 19-40). It is a condition in which the infrastructure for the continuation of life has been degraded (Biehl and Locke 2010).

While these conditions obtain under the military occupation, I take precarity specifically as a condition marked by a persistent vulnerability to state violence made possible under a legally mandated state of exception. In Kashmir, an extraordinary concentration of Indian armed forces, allowed to operate with immunity under AFSPA and backed by state discourses that criminalize youth activism and represents Kashmiris as latent or real subversives, makes Kashmiri lives precarious. If, however, violence of the occupation issues from its physical architecture of control and the discourses of exception, it also lurks as an incorporeal potential in everyday life. Soldiers with fingers on triggers or weapons that remain visible and hidden in public spaces, army vehicles that go at threatening speeds on narrow Kashmiri roads, or ammunition depots buried under Kashmiri hills that abut densely-populated villages, carry this incorporeal potential to kill or injure. This potential for violence is incorporeal because it is formless but sensate and palpable; it courses through the architecture of occupation, and erupts regularly.

Precarity is a generalized feeling among Kashmiri youth, but it is not sensed uniformly. Young Tehreek activists are, indeed, the most vulnerable. Urban youth from poorer, working-class neighborhoods or “downtown” live with the fear of state violence more often than their peers who live in affluent “civil lines” areas. The latter generally tend to have connections

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12 In 2007, for instance, the Indian military’s 21 Field Ammunition Depot (FAD) at Khundroo exploded into a ball of fires, engulfing thirteen surrounding villages. Dozens were killed and injured, and its volatile detritus continues to haunt those who have returned to their homes. The depot continues to hold a war-like stock of bombs and missiles.

akin to “slow death,” while Kathleen Stewart presents it as an emergent sense of “frailty” and “falling apart of things” (2012, 519-524).
(through family or business) in the government. Youth in the countryside fear the military and the police more than the urban youth. Rural youth have faced a sustained military repression much longer and more intensely than urban youth, but violence in the countryside remains largely invisible, sometimes even to the Srinagar-based press. At the same time, while most Tehreek activists are men, and thus the primary targets of state violence, violence against women is an important element of the state strategy for the containment of Kashmiris (Mushtaq et al 2016; Chatterjee 2012; Kazi 2010). These distinctions are important to consider, especially the question of women activists, yet it is important not to lose sight of the fact that political subjectivity and precarity are pervasive and interrelated modes of consciousness among Kashmiri youth in general.

It is important to understand that the main object of Tehreek youth activism is the end of the occupation, however, similarities of experience among them may not lead to the adoption of similar forms of activism or emphasis on method. A small number, mostly from the countryside, join armed militancy. When Burhan became a mujahid, there were probably less than a hundred active militants in Kashmir. In 2016, their number had not increased considerably. Compare this to Kashmir in early 1990, when the number of armed militants ran into the thousands. Armed militancy is strictly cadre-based and hierarchical. It has local roots but the leadership are based both in Indian-administered Kashmir as well as in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Sangbāz youth are more in number. They are amorphous and often act in spontaneously formed groups, but these groups are loosely-based and function autonomously. They are mostly concentrated in urban areas, where each neighborhood has a few dozen youths who come out on the streets to confront soldiers. In recent years, sangbāz youth have also emerged in the

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13 Although, often silenced by social codes of honor, gendered violence has been documented in recent years, most poignantly by young Kashmiri women activists themselves, see Mushtaq et al. (2016).
countryside, where they help armed militants escape military cordons or organize funerals for them.

The largest number of Tehreek youth activists, however, are those who may join protests and organize outside the scenes of the street, but adopt an independent stance as individuals.

They identify themselves as “part of Tehreek” and express a “deep commitment to azadi.” Yet, their non-affiliation and non-allegiance to any party or group allows them to critique certain Tehreek practices, like frequent general strikes, or question the leaders of Tehreek parties. They may also support armed militancy and sangbāzi, but not always.

Below I tell the stories, activist-trajectories, experiences of violence, and self-understanding of two such youth activists, which will also show how Tehreek becomes a charged
arena in which gendered constructions might be reinforced but also challenged. Irfan, whose story I recount first, comes from a poor, semi-urban family. If Burhan, who came from a middle-class rural background, became a mujahid, Irfan turned back from it—or, more precisely, became something else than what the state pushes Kashmiri youth to become.

**Irfan**

Irfan was seventeen years old in 1994 when he was blindfolded and lined up along an icy stream deep in the forests of south Kashmir, ready to be shot. As he recalls, five other Kashmiris who had been brought with him and blindfolded had fallen next to him, one by one.

“Under Catch and Kill, they took no prisoners. If they got you, you were dead.”

Thousands had perished under this policy in Kashmir in the early 1990s. Soldiers would lay siege to villages and towns, arrest suspected rebels, and shoot them. That day, however, Irfan was not shot. Here is how he describes his experience:

The brigadier [senior ranking officer in Indian army] pulled me aside and told his men to leave me. I don’t know what moved his heart. I was shorter than the other five, may be that is why. My beard had also only just begun to sprout. I wasn’t afraid. I knew I would drop dead before I would even hear the shot behind my head. By the time the Indian army captured me the second time, I had stopped worrying about dying. I don’t know why I am alive. Allah saved me. But maybe Allah wanted me to work for the poor and the destitute, and bring me to the work I am doing with NuS.

This was, in fact, the second time that Irfan had survived a brush with death.

I first met Irfan in Anantnag after the September floods of 2014. He worked at NuS, a local Islamic charity that distributed small monthly stipends to orphans and widows, trained young women in sewing, or paid their school fees. After the flood that year, NuS became
involved in relief and rehabilitation along with other organizations, and Irfan joined me a few times to help assess flood damage. He was thirty-seven but looked much older. When he spoke, his right hand almost involuntarily covered the large scar that ran all the way down the right side of his face. His beard was thick now and hid the scar partially, yet his hand still moved up to his face. “You see, I spent months in torture chambers,” he says, pointing to his face, “After the brigadier let me go, I wasn’t sent home. They put me in Khanabal’s Joint Interrogation Center for months and then in Kotbalwal jail for a year. Throughout this time, they tortured me.”

Irfan had hardly ever spoken about his bodily injuries to his friends at NuS or to his neighbors. They knew; once when he went swimming in the stream with a few friends, they saw the marks. He never went again. His friends respected him for not “flaunting” his torture marks. But the marks had become a seal of credibility. Though he was young, even senior members of NuS listened carefully to his words when he spoke.

“For a long time, I didn’t speak to anyone what they did to me at the JIC.”

Irfan had even left Kashmir for a while. He was from the generation who had seen the 1990s uprising. After the 2008 and 2010 protests, new, younger activists had become prominent.

Now I feel I need to say these things. Some younger people, who don’t know me, ask me why I didn’t get married. Who will tell them when you go through torture, there are certain things you learn to live without? I passed three months in JIC, almost the whole time semi-conscious. Each time I would wake up, they passed the current.

Irfan had joined a rebel group in 1991, when he was fifteen. He had become politically conscious when he was at school.

I went to a Jama’at school, which emphasized Islamic teachings and behavior. I liked the school as a young boy and felt my teachers were pious and committed to Kashmir’s azadi. But whenever
there was a protest in the town, the police would come and arrest them. Many of them disappeared during the Catch and Kill era. They were not mujahids.

Jama’at Islami, a prominent Islamic reformist party in Kashmir, had established its schools in Kashmir from the 1960s onwards. These schools were banned by the government several times, first during 1975-77 and then in the mid-1990s. Jama’at schools ran without state recognition, but they proved to be popular among “Kashmiri Muslim middle classes,” who felt need for education in both “secular disciplines” as well as “religious sciences,” or more precisely training for worldly jobs and for Islamic moral education (Sikand 2002, 723, 735). Often the teachers were associated with Jama’at or its youth wing Jamiat-ul-Tulba (Union of Students), who questioned India’s claims on Kashmir. These teachers thus often found themselves as targets of state forces (Sikand 2002, 736). While Irfan learnt about Islamic notions of piety in his school, he came to see their importance in his later life, and not immediately in his desire to join militants.

As a young rebel, however, Irfan was a liability for his senior mujahids who were constantly on the move. They tried to send him back, but he persisted: “I told them ‘Don’t give me a gun, I will do paperwork.’ Gradually, they agreed.” He calls this early phase of his life kagazi (paperwork). Only later, was he promoted to do askari or armed work. Irfan was arrested a year later when an informer pointed him out during a “crackdown.” Crackdowns were basically extended house to house search operations during which soldiers forced men to assemble in an open area and pass them in an identity parade in front of masked local informers. An informers nod was as good as a death sentence. Here is how he describes the first time he was arrested:

There was an encounter with the military in K village. I fell unconscious and lost my rifle in the paddy fields. Fellow mujahids carried me back to our hideout. Despite mujahids objecting, I decided to go back and find my rifle. Soldiers caught me, but they didn’t know who I was, until
an informer told them I was a mujahid. They were going to kill me in a ditch. An army officer
looked at me and said I was too young to be a mujahid. He asked me if I knew what petals and
gynoecium were. I knew some botany. I answered correctly. He told me to leave Tehreek and go
to a school instead. They thrashed me, took me to their camp, and kept me there for fifteen days.
My father had to come and give in writing that I will not join the mujahids again. Of course, I did.
The officer was mad. He told people he would kill me the moment he catches me.

That was the first time that Irfan was arrested and had escaped a possible death. The
brigadier who gave him a lease on life the second time did not ask him questions from botany.
He probably didn’t know he had the famous “Urfi” in his hands. Urfi was Irfan’s nom de guerre.
Irfan was by then a tenacious guerilla, no longer a kagazi mujahid who fell unconscious in the
middle of a shootout.

“I never surrendered a bullet to the Indian military, despite all their torture.”

That is why, when he finally heeded his father’s advice in 1994 and left Kashmir, his
former comrades were not resentful. He worked in Delhi for two years and passed unnoticed.
Upon his return in late 1995, however, he found his father had passed away, his mother was ill,
and his hometown had radically changed. The government-sponsored Ikhwan militia had created
an “atmosphere of terror” among the people, says Irfan:

Many mujahid commanders had been killed. Pro-Tehreek intellectuals were assassinated. For the
first time, I felt real fear. Not because Ikhwanis would kill me but because I couldn’t understand
what was happening, what war we were fighting. It was very confusing.

Ikhwanis were former guerillas who had turned against their former comrades. They were
backed by the Indian military. “They were dangerous because they knew all about who
supported us, who gave us shelter and food,” says Irfan, “Indian military did not know much.”
He was angry at the Ikhwanis, but seeing his sick mother, he kept away from Tehreek activism.
“When I was a mujahid, and then during my time in Delhi, military would harass, beat, and threaten my family and relatives. I didn’t want that anymore.”

Irfan decided to train as a dental technician, which he completed two years later. But his troubles didn’t stop. “Police registered a case against me,” he says, “I had to go every week to show my face. I couldn’t start my own practice because the police would have started taking money from me.” Instead, he joined NuS.

“I don’t need money. I live very frugally. Life is like a burning candle. Before it extinguishes, it is better to spend it serving the poor than in desire.”

I asked him during which time of his life did he feel the happiest. He reminisces about his time as a mujahid:

Some younger folks keep urging me to go hike the mountains with them. I lived in the mountains for three years with mujahids, surviving on whatever the mountains had to offer. It was a time of piety. All we cared for was Allah’s gratification. We knew death was near but we were not afraid. We were free of sins. That was the best time.

Was there no other way to be pious than to take up arms? “Nobody wants to die,” Irfan replies. “We had a pious objective: to liberate Kashmir from India’s rule.” But why?

Look we never said India is bad, we just said leave our country. Kashmir is neither part of India nor Pakistan. It is its own small country. That is how it must be. They kill so many people, just because we want azadi. Why should our freedom threaten them? We didn't ask them to give us their home.

Was the armed resistance a successful strategy, I ask Irfan. “Perhaps, it would have been had people remained pious. The government corrupted our own and turned us on each other,” he
replies. Yet, he is also critical of the Pakistan-backed groups who tried to dominate the Kashmiri armed groups.

“We handed Ikhwanis over to India on a plate.”

Irfan believes internal fighting between Tehreek groups led the Ikhwanis to join the Indian counterinsurgency.\textsuperscript{14} While he remains committed to azadi, however, as he says:

Tehreek must become a pious struggle again. Not an armed or a violent one, but a silent movement, where we tell India: “Brother, leave us.” And there will be no bloodshed. No more torture. Soldiers kill us because they don’t think we have families or emotions, or that we want to live. If we think like that about them, then we are no better.

When I ask Irfan what he means by piety, he replies with a broad set of ideas, without emphasizing any particular aspect:

Piety means bringing about Islamic laws, it means non-violent struggle for justice, remembering the martyrs, and not becoming materialistic or \textit{be-haya} (immodest). If people become pious, India will not be able to corrupt us.

After he dropped the idea of opening his dental practice, Irfan had an opportunity to work at a bank, but since he considers “interest-based banking” as “sinful,” he refused the offer.

Younger activists who support armed activism or street battles with soldiers believe it is wishful to think that India would listen to the peaceful appeals Irfan is suggesting. Many are not sure if “Islam” is what Tehreek’s focus should be. They believe Tehreek is a political struggle. Yet, Irfan’s experience in the armed Tehreek has an authority they cannot simply dismiss.

\textsuperscript{14} See Chapter 5 for more on this.
In his transition from armed activism, Irfan had become more religious and focused on notions of piety. Religion had become an anchor. Perhaps, his emphasis on religion was also a way to ward off the peer pressure for him to return to militancy. If he returned to “normal” life as a pious Muslim, it would satisfy both the state forces who wanted him out of militancy, alive or dead, and his peers, who might have seen his return from militancy as an act of “surrender.” Yet, his turn to piety was not new. The values Irfan counts as “pious” came from his time spent in a Jama’at school, where a high emphasis was laid on nurturing a belief in the Islamic system as the ideal socio-political order. This early education also emphasized notions of moral uprightness tied to the idea of *haya* (modesty) and *purdah* (veil).

To Irfan, giving up the armed Tehreek was a conscious decision. He had given it considerable thought, beyond the domestic exigencies that had made the decision an imperative or the fear that Ikhwanis might harm his family. He seemed to believe Tehreek needed to be re-envisioned beyond the dichotomy of violence and non-violence. Violence and non-violence, as he claimed, were not in the hands of Kashmiris; the state set the terms of its engagement with Kashmir. Rethinking the armed Tehreek, for him, required ethically reconsidering its “impact on our own selves,” as he put it. This is borne in the way he describes the process of his thought which led him to not return to militancy:

Both men and women must become modest and veil themselves. But men have a greater responsibility in this regard, especially during a struggle like Tehreek when men have more power. In the early 1990s, I had heard stories of some armed guerillas besmirching the name of the movement by acting toward Kashmiri women like the Indian military did. When you have a gun in your hand you sometimes forget what you are truly fighting for. Working with NuS, especially with poorer or widowed women from the city, showed me how vulnerable and silenced women can become during violence. Men die, but women have to live and carry on the world
behind them. My father died and my mother has had to take care of the home without any support. As a mujahid, I spent most of my time hungry and tired, but I was free and happy, roaming carefree in the mountains. But when I returned home I saw how the families of mujahids had been destroyed by the military and the Ikhwanis. Women bore the cost of the movement. If I had died, my mother would have been left completely alone.

Clearly, Irfan had lived a significant period of his life precariously. He had borne much violence during the years he thinks he had “felt free.” Counterinsurgency experts claim that the “average life span” of a Kashmiri guerilla is six months. Irfan had not defied this assessment, just escaped his fate twice by the skin of his teeth. His life’s experiences had not changed his views about azadi as a just struggle, only that armed aspects of Tehreek needed to be reconsidered. His critique of violence followed not from his own subjection to violence, but his growing awareness of the costs it imposes on others, especially women. As a young man, he had felt himself to be in a position of subalternity to the Indian forces, but the sense of “freedom” brought about by taking up arms had also brought shattering realizations: If resistance allows power through violence to become a political principle, it would produce newer subaltern subjects, like women, as well as “corrupt” the movement from within, producing formations like the Ikhwan.

While Irfan continued to live precariously—his name was still in the police records—his real fear had come from the confusions the logic of armed resistance had brought to the fore. Accordingly, taking up arms was easier than navigating a path toward non-violence. Irfan took care in humanizing his torturers, even presenting the military officer who had ordered five deaths as having a degree of compassion. His belief in a reasoned dialogue as sufficient is not shared by many others, who think the state has no reason to listen to a powerless people. But Irfan believes that Tehreek must not think like the state. In his view, “corruption” is not so much about turning people against Tehreek, as it is about making youth activists accept the vengeful logic of
violence as rational. Thus, making Tehreek a “pious struggle” also means humanizing the “enemy,” even when the enemy dehumanizes you. Doing so is crucial both to the movement as well as for cultivating a new self. Violence is not simply what one experiences on the body or the mind, but what accepting its logic does to our senses of the self. Irfan’s struggle has not only been against a violent, occupier state, but also with the “natural” response this state evokes.

Irfan’s path to non-violent Tehreek had been shaped by his reflections on women. Yet he assumes women to be passive victims of violence. Within a context like Kashmir, women have borne an extraordinary burden of the political turmoil. Women face direct and structural violence from the state forces as well as confront a traditionally conservative Kashmiri society. Tehreek leaders often see Kashmiri women as “vulnerable” to Indian forces, and thus in need of “protection.” Yet, it is women who, aware of the vulnerability of men to state violence, often become the protectors. They protest men’s detention, search for disappeared male relatives, and sometimes even physically shield men from soldiers (Parashar 2011; Bano 2002; Zia 2016).

What about women’s involvement in Tehreek? Sketches of prominent Kashmiri women indicate their involvement in Kashmir’s politics before 1990 (Khan 2010). Some have assumed, however, that the post-1990 violence and the emerging orthodox religious turn in urban centers prevented women’s political involvement ((Butalia 2002; Molen & Bal 2011). This contention is not borne by ethnographic work, which shows Kashmiri women to be active participants both in a traditionally male-centered arena of Tehreek like armed activism (Shekhawat 2015) as well as in the wider field of Tehreek’s politics of protest and organizing (Kazi 2009; Zia 2016). Indeed, Tehreek leaders’ “protectionist” rhetoric creates an overarching discourse that sometimes precludes women or makes their fuller participation difficult. Yet, as Zarine’s account below
shows, young women activists have shaped activist stand-points from where they can simultaneously partake in Tehreek political discourses as well as question the gendered politics of the movement’s leaders.

Zarine

I had known Zarine and her work for a human rights organization for several years. Since 2010, she had visited hundreds of families who had cases of custodial killings, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances pending in state courts. As part of a people’s tribunal she had helped review the work of the courts in relation to human rights abuses claims. As she told me:

Pursuing such cases in courts often ends in frustration. But these families believe keeping the cases open is the least they can do for their kin who have suffered. It is a way to remember them.

I believe there is justice in the world. If not now, then in the future. But if we don’t pursue it, it will not come.

In part, Zarine believed, the cases would become part of an “archive against the crimes of the occupation.”

Tehreek organizations were generally not happy with pursuing cases in the courts, for they believe doing so legitimizes Indian courts in Kashmir. Zarine, however, saw no contradiction between seeking justice in the court and seeking the right to self-determination. She also took an independent stance on other politically fraught questions. For instance, on the question of accepting money in lieu of relatives killed by Indian soldiers, she saw her own position as pragmatic, even though not ideal. Indian government described the payment as a “compensation,” while Tehreek activists called it “blood money.” Zarine saw it in legal terms as a “temporary relief” and argued with her fellow activists that the issue must be considered in relation to the socio-economic situation of the victims’ families, who often tend to be women,
rather than in terms of politically volatile concepts like “loyalty” and “betrayal.” In trying to push these positions to the center of the Tehreek discourse, Zarine and her other young female activist colleagues, had begun to raise questions that had previously not been given serious attention in Tehreek.

In 2014, feeling exasperated with the “stubbornness” of her fellow male activists, Zarine told me she believed women could run the movement better. “Thoughtful women,” she had quickly added:

Not someone like AB, who wants to put all women under dark burkas and teach them to be submissive to men. What is azadi worth if it means we leave India’s male chauvinist occupation and come under a male chauvinist theological state.

Zarine was referring to a prominent Tehreek leader, known for her socially conservative Islamist views.

Zarine’s path to activism had in some respects been like her male counterparts, yet there were significant differences. Unlike most of her female colleagues, she grew up in a village close to where Burhan Wani was from. This is how she narrates her early experiences:

I was an obedient kid; I helped my mother with domestic chores (smiles). I was one of six daughters; we have just one brother; he is the eldest. I was six years old in 1994, when I first saw the military crackdown with my eyes. My cousin was a mujahid. He used to come to our home sometimes, especially around Id. We were very fond of him. He had been training to become a doctor, but he left and joined the mujahids. He would leave his gun somewhere else before visiting us, so we children won’t feel scared. That day when he left our house, soldiers came and surrounded us. They took my father, brother, and other men from the village to the roadside. We were alone. Some soldiers took away my mother’s jewelry, our almonds, and cash. A few soldiers took my mother into a separate room and began torturing her, asking her to tell them about my
cousin. My mother was screaming in pain. What could she tell them, she didn’t know anything. I was so afraid but I could not bear her cries. I took a padlock, which was lying nearby, in my hands, kicked open the door, and hit the soldier who was torturing my mother in his back. He looked at me, mad with rage. Then he lifted me and flung me outside. I hit the wall in the hallway and blanked out. I woke up several days later in the hospital.

Zarine’s mother had survived, but the whole family had been left shaken. Zarine had previously heard stories of torture. Two men in her village had been killed. Her father had mentioned once how one of them had been tortured. She learnt the word “torture” later when she started her human rights work, but it had helped make sense of her experiences growing up.

There had been other formative experiences:

Someone said there was a list of mukhbirs (informers) pasted on the wall of the mosque. Mujahids were looking for the informers. I was fearful that they might say one of my relatives was a mukhbir. After the crackdown incident, I had asked my father, why soldiers did what they did. My father, himself shocked, told me we should all forget about the incident at home. But my mother would fight with him about telling us to forget. Then soldiers would come to the village and give us toffees. My mother would say, ‘Don’t accept anything from them. They are not our people.’ Every time, I saw a soldier with a uniform and a gun, I knew I had to be afraid of him.

As a young girl, I thought about these demarcations. I thought about the line between mujahids and mukhbirs, about us and them, about Kashmiris and soldiers.

When Zarine was nine, her father found out he had leukemia. Within a year, he passed away. Her family was in turmoil when her father’s brother claimed their share of ancestral land. This was the father of the cousin who was a mujahid, and for whom the family had suffered. Eventually, his mujahid son threatened the uncle, and he relented. “My brother took charge upon
my father’s death,” says Zarine, “He missed his youthful years caring for us. But by that time, we were economically stable.”

Zarine’s mother was keen on sending all her children to college. She succeeded. The sisters got postgraduate degrees in fields ranging from Biochemistry to Statistics. Zarine got hers in law. Only her brother dropped out of college and took a job. But getting educated was a struggle, both because of the militarized milieu and the traditional conservatism of her village. Zarine describes an incident involving her older sister Shada:

Shada is good looking. She was walking toward her college once, when soldiers passed some lewd comments. Shada turned around and gave them a mouthful. She told them: “Go tell this to your mothers and sisters.” “You are from India.” “Get out of our home.” In the evening, a local shopkeeper came to our home and told Shada not to go to the college because the army was looking for her. She stayed home for a while. My mother was worried.

The sisters argued with the mother that the shopkeeper was trying to scare them and prevent them from going to college. Shada had claimed she had never argued with the soldiers. Zarine says it was only weeks later that Shada told the family what had happened. While she thinks neighbors, especially women, appreciated her mother for holding the home together, they didn’t like how the sisters were becoming outspoken. Watching Zarine and her sisters go to college or work, some older women would taunt her mother:

They would say “We have seen it all now!” That our “mother was earning off of her daughters.” As if our education had brought on the End of the World. They sat on their verandas smoking hookas and telling my mother to get us married. In truth, they were jealous. But then whenever us sisters spoke to them, they would grow quiet and listen respectfully. They just annoyed my mother.
The village was not educated in general, neither many men nor women had been to school. Zarine’s own mother had some schooling. She sometimes fought back against these older women, but didn’t care enough to take their snide remarks seriously. Neither did Zarine. Her bitterness was reserved for her second cousins and an uncle. Even in 2014, when Zarine’s work had come to be appreciated among activist circles in Srinagar, and she was taking on the military’s human rights abuses, these relatives kept bothering her.

When I return home in the evening, my cousins say “aye’kha” (Oh, you have finally returned!), or “How many areas have you graced with your presence today?” They are such losers. They want a petty government job, get married, and eat large plates of rice. I was with my brother on a bus back home and my cousin gets on. He tells me, “Zarine, I saw you outside… (a coffee shop).” He was basically trying to rile my brother by saying that I was hanging out at a place where lots of unmarried couples visit. I said I was hungry and had gone for a snack. My brother looked at me and said “Don’t listen to this idiot. You don’t need to explain anything to anyone.” My brother has been like a father to me. Tehreek is close to his heart. He knows how important our work is.

Zarine’s struggle had been structured by social pressures of a traditionally male oriented culture, but she didn’t share a uniform condemnation of men. She knew men were “not all the same.” Her own brother had stood by her all along. Further, Kashmiri men remained in a position of being dominated by Indian state forces. Ather Zia has described gender relations in Kashmir as forming part of a “non-hegemonic patriarchy that is subjugated by militarization and an oppressive administration” (2016, 173). That men had been the primary object of state violence had shaped Zarine’s own understanding of the women’s position within Tehreek. Kashmiri women activists were in a “double-bind,” she felt. On one side, they remained sensitive to the situation of their fellow male activists, who were more likely to be affected by direct
violence. On the other side, they pushed back against patriarchy that infused some Tehreek leaders’ perspectives on Kashmiri women. In their work, Zarine and her fellow activists were especially attuned to cases which could destabilize the patriarchal norms in society.

This was illustrated by Zarine’s views on the cases of women whose husbands had been forcibly disappeared by government forces. Speaking about what were described by some human rights groups as “half-widows,” she felt questions which had previously not been raised could be brought into the public debate. “Half-widows” were women whose husbands had been forcibly disappeared but whose status as alive or dead could not be firmly established, primarily because the military refused to accept that the disappeared had been in their custody. As Zarine explained:

These women keep the cases of their disappeared husbands alive and it takes immense strength. But it also leads to a situation where they are forced to think they cannot remarry. Socially, it would be seen as a “betrayal” of the disappeared husband. Her husband’s relatives would lay claim on her husband’s share of property. The courts also do not consider a remarried widow of a disappeared person as the “immediate beneficiary” for any temporary relief [or which the state describes as “compensation”]. The courts would consider other relatives of the disappeared husband, unless the couple had children, as the beneficiary, who are solely interested in “compensation” and not a search for justice. Remarriage could mean exclusion for a half-widow and lasting turmoil for her children.

Several half-widows had taken to organizing themselves and a deploy an “affective politics of mourning” to forge their own activist identities (Zia 2016). While male Tehreek activists saw these women as “courageous,” “strong” and as “willing to sacrifice,” Zarine took issue with this panegyric perspective, which tended to efface the everyday struggles of these women. She frequently argued with Tehreek activists about the need to support women who had
been “left behind to struggle alone,” and to take women’s perspectives on political strategy within the movement seriously.

Yet, Zarine saw Tehreek both as a “struggle for independence” as well as an agent of “social transformation,” and both as interlinked processes. In her meetings with Kashmiri women she recognized that though they had suffered, Tehreek had also produced a space of fluid social relations in which women could negotiate new positions for themselves. From active combatants and militant couriers to street agitators and demonstrators, Kashmiri women had, since the early 1990s, assumed for themselves previously unknown roles. Tehreek had, in a way, become a key site for, what Judith Butler (1988) has called, the constitutive performances of gender and identity. As opposed to the state discourse, which simultaneously suppresses women and presents them as victims of Tehreek, the movement had become a dynamic social force in which new gender relations could be forged.

This is evident, for instance, in how Zarine talks about pushing back against male attitudes in her organization. While her work with the victim families of state violence is tough and has been meaningful to her, Zarine believes certain kinds of the human rights work get automatically assigned to her and her female colleagues, because men feel that women alone can handle such cases, mostly those involving sexual violence. “Yes, of course, we are better prepared to document such cases,” she says, “but making this ‘our job’ also excludes us from other work which is then seen as ‘not our work.’” She wants women to develop effective strategies to become members of the executive bodies of Tehreek organizations. She is frustrated with female Tehreek leaders, like AB, who ask women to join Tehreek but then take a

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15 On Kashmiri women combatants, for instance, see Shekhawat (2015).
16 See also Habib (2011) on women’s efforts to become part of decision making bodies within Tehreek.
secondary role behind men. She wanted to “talk to the senior leaders and tell them not to take women’s involvement for-granted.”

In Srinagar, Zarine’s efforts to meet a senior Hurriyat leader had been thwarted, mainly because he had been in jail most of the time. But several years ago, when Burhan Wani was alive and still relatively unknown, Zarine had taken a grave risk to go and meet with him. Burhan was still a teenager but Zarine was curious to know his views. After a trek, arranged by Burhan’s friends, he had appeared with a mask, but had left his weapon behind.

“I told him, ‘You can take that thing off,’ and he obeyed.”

This is how she describes the conversation:

He did not know how to react to my presence. He was worried I had put my life in jeopardy, but also proud a Kashmiri sister from a village had taken so much trouble to meet with him. Burhan said, he and his colleagues were “independent of the Hurriyat” [key Tehreek groups]. They didn’t get support either from the Hurriyat in Srinagar or from Pakistan. He thinks people from the countryside suffered a lot but didn’t get recognition. “Even rural martyrs feel discrimination.”

Tehreek, he felt, was too Srinagar-centric. He was thoughtful about the need to not fall for the easy accusations. He knew mukhbirs and police face pressure to act against mujahids. He said some of his colleagues wanted to take revenge against policemen who were attacking youths after the 2010 protests. But Burhan had told them not to do so. Instead, he asked them to send messages to the police asking them to use any excuse they could to not come out during protests. He said, “If we kill policemen, their families will suffer.” He was worried that Kashmiri youth were entering the armed movement in a random manner. He does not want too many youths taking up arms, just a dedicated few who could last. When I asked him about women activists, he said elderly Tehreek leaders were mistaken. Women must make decisions. He believed azadi includes full equality for women. “You must take your public role through struggle,” he told me, “We are with you, sister.”
When Zarine left, she had felt pained at the thought that this “bright young boy” may not live long. She never saw him again, except in videos where he seemed to be relishing playing cricket with his fellow guerillas and singing mournful Kashmiri songs. But she appeared hopeful that younger Tehreek leaders no longer held stifling patriarchal attitudes toward women’s involvement.

During my research, I had met several other young female activists, who had increasingly begun to nibble away at the male-dominated public sphere. Most of these activists were from urban areas. Zarine was from a village. She shared several aspects of her life with these fellow women, but she had been trying to overcome challenges that are unique to life in the countryside. In some ways, though, gender relations in the Kashmiri countryside are not quite as rigid as in urban lower-middle income classes. Zarine feels in rural communities, women are actually less reverential toward men and their norms. She relishes telling me about an incident in her village:

When an imam from Srinagar once came to preach in the mosque, women made fun of his long beard and mocked his advice to men to take away mobile phones from women. Men told him that if they did that they will be chased out of the village by women, that he didn’t know how vicious women in villages can be [laughs].

While Zarine wore a hijab in the city, she didn’t do so in her village. Knowing Zarine’s work, her criticism of Tehreek leaders, and her broader struggles being an activist in a space that has long been occupied by men alone, suggests Tehreek had become a vehicle for multiple social projects within the Kashmiri public sphere. All these projects converged under the sign of azadi.

**Dreams of azadi**

If the concept of precarity gives an impression of a lack of agency, that is not the case, as the examples of Irfan, Zarine, or Burhan suggest. Anthropological studies of violence often tend
to see practices of subjects in terms of “adaptation to violence” (Strathern, Stewart & Whitehead, 2006), “resistance” (Scott 1990), or “resilience” (Scheper-Hughes 2008; Das & Kleinman 2001). Indeed, Kashmiri youth—both men and women—resist state violence. They use different genres of critique, including their writings, art work or poetry, or, as we will see in the next chapter, historical commentaries. They might mock official statements and discourses in their everyday conversations, or consciously or unconsciously deploy practices of defiance or civil disobedience in public spaces, including their refusal to follow orders from government forces (even if it might lead to beatings). And, of course, a few—armed mujahids and sangbāz youth—use or keep open the possibility of violence against state institutions and forces.

Yet, one way or the other, the notion of adaptation or resistance assumes subjects that are fully caught up in the logics of state power, and merely reacting to it. What has been interesting to me in my work with youth activists in Kashmir is the question of political projects that escape the state logics, and the modes through which these counter projects of youth activists might have the capability to transform the hegemonic terms of their subjection. Based on the synoptic accounts of the activist biographies above, I take a view of agency that posits an activism which is not simply reactive but one that constitutes Kashmiri youth as political subjects in their own right, even though they are objects of violence and invisibilized in interstate politics.

Irfan’s path to non-violence is based on a thoughtful understanding of the consequences of accepting the cyclical logic of violence, part of which he comes to recognize with his work in an Islamic charity. Zarine’s attempt to open conversations about women’s position in Tehreek by drawing on the emancipatory discourse of azadi goes against the prevailing view that Tehreek politics forecloses such a possibility. Again, her critique of patriarchy involves her human rights

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17 For more on the limits of the notion of “resistance,” see Kaplan and Kelly (1994).
activism. Both Irfan and Zarine effectively deployed their experiences, their work, and their proximity to Tehreek to advance goals important to them. While their overall life worlds are structured by the dyad of occupation and resistance, their projects are independent of the state itself. They remain committed to Tehreek politics, even though they want to transform it from within.

Even Burhan had defied the state’s attempt to consign him to obscurity. His path to armed activism was occasioned by his (and his brother’s) experience of violence at the hands of state forces. But in shaping a new, visible image for himself as an armed revolutionary, Burhan had not only succeeded in interrupting the state’s usual narrative about militants as marginalized “wild” figures, but also in bringing a new recognition for the rural youth activists who tend to remain invisible in Tehreek’s Srinagar centered politics of commemoration. Of course, it is hard to see the work of a guerilla who died in his youth as “successful.” Aamir’s untimely death again reminds one of the tragic pitfalls in the broader ethics of resistance. Is “normal” itself, after all, one possible, urgent goal Kashmiris must reach in their relation to the occupation? The summer of 2016 showed that even within an overall framework of the absurdity of the occupation, there are protracted intense periods when even that absurd begins to look desirable.

For six months, the government’s crackdown on people was relentless. A friend from Anantnag would later tell me that the children in his house had fallen sick from being confined. “Kashmir is a large prison,” he said:

Violence is casual and boring. There is really nothing to do, but wait. Some government bureaucrat will decide one cheerful day that curfew may be lifted, and it will be. Then he will decide against it, if his mood is kharab (bad), and Kashmiris will be locked in.
Throughout this time, news of deaths and injuries continued to come, even though the government had blocked phones and the Internet. Between the utter need of people to have an everyday “normalcy” and the Indian state’s relentless production of abnormality, Tehreek leaders often fall short of an adequate form of politics that might ameliorate the public life. In response to Burhan’s killing, Hurriyat leaders announced a program of protest called the “Protest Calendar.” People were supposed to march on the streets, pray for defeat of the evil occupation in the mosques or observe hartal or general strike, according to the Calendar. Women were to come out one day, transporters the next day, and then the shopkeepers. But as an activist explained:

Sometimes, the Calendar itself grates on public life. While the state imposes violent crackdowns and curfew, Hurriyat gives calls for general strike. Both reinforce people’s pain, but then people have been left with no choice but to continue.

There were small stories of resilience in the face of the repression, which itself suggest the logic of state violence, however drastic, is not fully internalized by communities. People collected grains, pulses, and vegetables to be sent to Anantnag’s main hospital where local youth activists had organized a community kitchen. “These are desperate times,” said Suhail, a volunteer. His mother was letting neighbors take vegetables from her small kitchen garden. Others gave extra rice to those who didn’t have it. I knew of a person who owns a drug store. He collected prescriptions from the sick or older people in the neighborhood and brought back whatever he could, for free.

Some of these are old Kashmiri instincts, I knew. People are “used to” long periods of curfews and military sieges, as I was often reminded. In the 1990s, months would pass before markets would be allowed to reopen. Then there is an even older foe: the winter. Kashmiris
usually stock their homes well in the fall with pulses, dried vegetables, and fuel, which last late into the spring. When snow avalanches close the highways, this traditional autumnal planning comes handy. This year was different, however; curfews began in the middle of summer, and stored food was not yet replenished.

By the end of the summer, I had left Kashmir. I was told that a few phones, which mostly the government officials used, were working. I arranged to speak with Suhail again, who had managed to find a working phone. Things hadn’t changed, he said:

Protests have become more disciplined. They are following the Protest Calendar. Tehreek leaders have requested people to protest peacefully, despite the provocations from the Indian soldiers.
There was a bike rally, then women took out a rally, then people were writing slogans on walls.
People are trying their best not to respond to paramilitary violence with stone throwing. Everyone says we have to do it this time, throw out India from Kashmir. It is now or never.

I have heard that before, “Now or never.” Yet each time the state tightens the noose, more tightly than people—any people—can endure. People need freedom, but they also need food and medicine, and to be able to move about. In 1990, Kashmiris bore two and a half months of curfews, and many long years of India’s suppression of the armed rebellion that followed. In 2010, they held out for five months, and several years of vindictive state violence against the youths who had led the protest movement that year. Could India force people to return to “normalcy” soon again? Is there ever a return?

Each successive wave of state violence produces new subjects who take lines of flight; they become something other than what the state attempts to make of them. In the lives, deaths, and the work of youth activists—of Burhan, Irfan and Zarine (and even the poetically minded Aamir)—the commitment to azadi remains unwavering. But what does azadi mean? It surely
means liberation from India, but it also carries more meanings than a limited notion of “liberation from India” can capture. In its polysemic, azadi means “political freedom,” as well as a “desire for liberation in an existentialist sense” or a “life of dignity in this world and beyond”—these were sentiments I regularly heard from youth activists. The coercive apparatus of the occupation cannot grasp these meanings, nor is the polysemic of azadi understandable through the interstate territorial prism. These meanings only appear in the diversity of Kashmiri voices and the local struggles to claim political subjectivity, as I have tried to show.
CHAPTER 2
TEHREEK HISTORY-WRITERS: HISTORY AND TRAUMA

Indeed, what produces statements in each of us is not ego as subject, it’s something entirely different: multiplicities, masses and mobs, peoples and tribes, collective arrangements; they cross through us, they are within us, and they seem unfamiliar because they are part of our unconscious. The challenge for real psychoanalysis, an anti-psychoanalytical analysis, is to discover these collective arrangements of expression, these collective networks, these peoples who are in us and who make us speak, and who are the source of our statement.


Tehreek, Tae’reekh, and the entangled histories of the past and the present

Historical timelines and messy histories

On a balmy afternoon in 2014, along the banks of River Jhelum in Srinagar, I sat among a dozen Kashmiri writers, university students, social activists, and journalists, who I had brought together to talk about the Kashmiri self-determination movement, or Tehreek. While all those present took the right to self-determination as an “indisputable” and “universally acknowledged” fact, they sought to return to history to explain its validity in Kashmir. Often, in such conversations, the way history of Kashmir is invoked appears like a historical timeline:

In 1586, the Mughal emperor Akbar, having failed to conquer Kashmir through force, tricked the Chak king, Yusuf Shah, out of his capital in Srinagar on the pretext of negotiations, and then arrested and permanently exiled him. The Mughals then took Kashmir easily. This was the first instance of the establishment of foreign rule and the loss of Kashmiri independence. Then in 1753, a general in the Afghan King Nadir Shah’s army defeated the Mughal governor of Kashmir, and established Afghan rule for the next sixty-seven years. The Afghans, in turn, were defeated by the Sikhs of Punjab in 1819, but the Sikh rule in Kashmir proved short-lived and lasted only twenty-seven years. In 1846, the British East India Company, by then the main power on the Indian subcontinent, defeated the Sikhs, took Kashmir from the latter’s possession and sold it as a reward to Gulab Singh, a vassal of the Sikhs who had changed sides to the British at a
crucial moment in the war. Gulab Singh established the Dogra dynasty, which ruled for a hundred years, lasting till 1947.

In this “timeline,” the transitions in ruling dynasties in Kashmir are not interpreted uniformly, as was evident during the conversation near the river. The participants described the Mughal rule as “overall benign,” even though Mughal benevolence is only remembered through the architectural icons they had left behind—especially the geometrically symmetrical flower gardens, also known as the Mughal Gardens. But several participants joked and invoked popular Kashmiri taunts against their Mughal rulers, words like “shikas-mogul” or “pogeh-mogul,” to suggest that the Mughals were nevertheless resented as “foreign rulers.”¹ In contrast, the Afghans, and what followed them, were described as “cruel” and “exploitative.” An enduring memory of the Afghan era, which a history student narrated, is that of soldiers bundling Kashmiri tax offenders in sacks lined with nettle grass and lowering them into Dal Lake with a heavy stone tied to the sack to drown them. Significantly, however, the period of Afghan rule is remembered as rather “evenly cruel” toward the majority Muslim and the minority Hindu populations of Kashmir. But the time of Sikh rule, everyone agreed, represented the beginning of a systematic and exceptional “oppression” toward Kashmiri Muslims, an oppression which only intensified during the long Dogra century.

In this account of Kashmir’s history, neither the timeline nor the oppression is seen to have ended in 1947. In that year, Hari Singh, the last Dogra ruler, “signed off” Kashmir to India, thus inaugurating a new era of “foreign domination.” As the participants in the meeting described it, the Dogra ruler acceded the state to India “without regard for the opinions or the interests of his Kashmiri subjects.” Thus, unlike the dominant Indian representations of the year

¹ Shikas-Mogul means “broke-Mughals” and was probably used because upon taking over Kashmir, the lore is that they emptied Kashmir’s treasury. Pogeh-Mogul translates to “miserable-Mughals.”
1947 as marking the “birth of freedom,” in the Kashmiri historical consciousness, the year is part of a transition to yet another period of foreign rule, as well as the source of a continuing dispute over the political status of the region. Instead of freedom, 1947 marks the birth of a “new Tehreek” in Kashmir. This new movement, which remained as a repressed sentiment and an underground movement for the next forty years, became a mass movement in the winter of 1989-90, when Kashmiris first rose to protest Indian control and then took up arms to liberate Kashmir. As a writer in our meeting put it: “Tehreek is the expression of the demand as well as the result of the long-denied political rights of Kashmiris as a people, especially our right to become independent, rights which the Indian state refuses to acknowledge.”

Behind this linear timeline—interspersed as it is by a broad sense of “deceit,” “betrayal,” and a “denial” of political agency—lies a messy *history*, which is both a field of contestation and a source of collective trauma. I use the term “history” here to signify a discursive space constituted by the contesting narratives of Kashmir’s past and present. These narratives include the official Indian account of Kashmir, Tehreek historical narratives, as well as histories of Kashmir produced by academic scholars or non-specialist writers.

The officially authorized historical account is the one that aligns with the dominant nationalist historiography in India. This historiography is typically marked by erasures of regional histories of South Asia, including that of Kashmir. Its master code is “India” as the dominant national signifier, as well as a timeless and pre-given national-territorial space. On one side, the official account often remains unconscious of the historicity of “India” both as a nation and as a territory; on the other, India’s sovereignty over Kashmir is treated as natural, *a priori* resolved, and even celebrated as a sign of India’s “secularism”—in opposition to the anti-national forces of “communalism” or “separatism” (i.e. Pakistani leaders, and Kashmir’s Tehreek
activists, respectively). Even in “liberal” Indian accounts, Kashmir is seen a “problem” of modern India, and is analyzed as an inter-dynastic relation between the Nehrus of India and the Abdullahs of Kashmir.  

The notion of India as a historical political space is, however, underwritten by the idea of Hindu nationalism, which in turn shapes the contours of Indian nationalist historiography. There is little doubt about this fact among Kashmiris, especially those who are curious about the roots of the official account of Kashmir. Indeed, Hindu nationalism alone could provide the geographical and cultural signifier “India”—as an organic geo-political body—around which the state history could be written. Despite these contentious roots, the official historical narrative is enforced in school curriculums especially though textbooks (including in Kashmiri schools), and is reproduced via popular culture (primarily in the popular Hindi cinema), in the nationalist iconography, and by India’s national news media.

Tehreek narratives contest the Indian official accounts. They posit the year 1947 as the beginning of a “new imperialism” in Kashmir, even seeing it as a betrayal of the promise of South Asia’s anti-colonial struggle. Tehreek intellectuals argue that 1947 represents the defeat of the movement for popular sovereignty among the overwhelmingly Muslim subaltern classes in Kashmir. That movement, in their view, had begun in 1931. Initially, the 1931 movement had

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2 The most prominent of such an account is Ramachandra Guha’s (2007) India After Gandhi. Guha’s account includes several sections on Kashmir. He prioritizes the perspectives of Nehru, the principal actor in his narrative, who saw Kashmir through the prism of its “strategic importance” as a border state, its symbolic value in keeping India “secular,” as well as his own personal “ethnic” connection (Guha 2007, 75-78). While Guha describes himself as a “liberal,” historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who approves of Guha’s work, describes him rather as “an Indian nationalist, albeit a moderate and self-critical one” (2013, 36).

3 Hindu nationalism itself had partly acquired its geographical and cultural imagination through the work of colonial historiographers and later orientalists, despite the fragmented expanse of the British Indian empire. That India was an “ancient civilization” is a view presented alike by orientalists such as Basham (1959), secular nationalists like Nehru (1985), and Hindu nationalists like Majumdar (1977). See also Subrahmanyam (2013, 1-10) on how this conception has shaped Indian historiography.
started as a spontaneous revolt against the discriminatory policies of the Dogra monarchy, but had, eventually, turned into a popular struggle to end the monarchy itself and to establish a “popular” and “free self-government.” Instead of leading to freedom, however, the national movement in Kashmir (also called the “first freedom struggle”) was subverted.

My Kashmiri interlocutors, sympathetic to Tehreek, claim that three main reasons lay behind the subversion: the “partition” of the subcontinent under the British; “authoritarian tendencies” among the political elite of the newly created states of India and Pakistan; and, most painfully, the “opportunism” and “lack of foresight” among Kashmir’s own political leaders. This subversion of Kashmir’s first freedom struggle is often narrated in detail in Tehreek accounts, which also contest the official version, episode by episode, on how the events of 1947 led to Kashmir being split into two parts, one coming under the control of India and the other under Pakistan. Accordingly, Tehreek intellectuals see the events of 1989-90 as vindicating their stand. When the movement erupted from being a largely repressed sentiment and underground activism to becoming a popular armed resistance for independence, it was enough to demonstrate that the question of sovereignty in the region had remained unresolved.

As I will show, there are significant internal variations within Tehreek historical narratives in terms of themes, periods of interest, and modes of writing, which suggests that Tehreek’s historical consciousness is not based on a systematic body of knowledge or a singular ideology. As historical writings produced outside the institutions of the state, the narratives remain fragmentary, even though as a body of historical literature they remain entangled with each other. However, a broad scheme can be established in these narratives for the purposes of illuminating their key elements. There are those that focus on the events of 1947, especially centered on the legitimacy of the accession treaty. Others retell Kashmir’s history as the history
of Islam unfolding in the region. A few, but only a few, venture into sketching a long arc of a people’s history of Kashmir, from the ancient era to the present, based on revisiting “origin stories.” And some are content simply chronicling the present. I will lay out central aspects of these four historical narratives toward the end of this chapter based on interviews with main figures, reading of key texts, as well as through the perspective of the audiences of these narratives.

It is important to note that two key elements unify the main proponents of Tehreek historical narratives, and justify my use of the term “Tehreek history-writers” for them. First, all four narratives that I delineate have emerged in contestation with the official Indian nationalist account of Kashmir. Second, Tehreek history-writers’ perspectives are deeply shaped by their experience of living under the occupation. Let me elaborate on this description further by locating Tehreek history-writers within the region’s longstanding tradition of history writing.

The figure of the “Tehreek history-writer”

There has been a long, interconnected tradition of history writing in Kashmir, mostly in the form of kāvyās and tāreekhs. Kāvyās were long poems written in Sanskrit between 11th and 15th century in Kashmir. They drew upon mythical sources as well as historical events centered on the life and reigns of kings and queens of Kashmir. Tāreekhs were Persian chronicles written after 16th century and which incorporated some elements from the kāvyās. These writings, especially the vibrant Persian tāreekhs, significantly shaped the narrative tradition in Kashmir. But, much of this tradition was centered on the lives of Hindu kings and Muslim sultans, or of sages and sufis, written in court languages which the common people did not speak. There was, however, a rich oral tradition of narrating the past in Kashmir and its adjoining smaller valleys, passed down in spoken languages in the form of folklore, lyrical poetry, epic poems, sayings (or
vakhs), and fables—a veritable archive for a potential social history of Kashmir. Aside from these, there have since the 19th century been several works that form the historical writing tradition in Kashmir. One can broadly categorize them as: pre-1947 British writings; pre-1947 Kashmiri writings; post-1947 Indian writings; post-1947 Kashmiri writings; and, political autobiographies and biographies.4

Tehreek history-writers engage with some of the themes that arise from practices and narrative traditions centered on kāvyās and tāreekhs. Many of them deal intensively with accounts that emerged since the 19th century.5 Tehreek history-writers are not, therefore, writing within a narrative void. Their writings are, however, attempting to produce a space for Tehreek by questioning India’s legitimacy in Kashmir. In this chapter, my focus is on this latter aspect. I examine how Tehreek history-writing has emerged as a direct response to contemporary political conditions in Kashmir, especially in the aftermath of the 1990 uprising.

To be clear, there are Kashmiri intellectuals who may “softly” align with the official historical account, even though they may not fully accept the premise that Kashmir’s “integration” into India is natural or justified. Situated in institutional spaces, like universities,

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4 Pre-1947 British writings often take either a pro-Dogra stance, or explicitly criticize the Dogra rule in Kashmir. These include: Arthur Brinckman’s *The Wrongs of Cashmere* (1967); Robert Thorp’s *Kashmir Misgovernment* (1968); William Digby *Condemned Unheard* (1890); Arthur Wingate’s ‘Preliminary Report’ (1890); William Wakefield’s *Happy Valley* (1879); and, Walter Lawrence’s *The Vale of Kashmir* (1895). Pre-1947 Kashmiri writings include Sanskrit texts like Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini* (12th C, Sanskrit) and several of its subsequent additions (including by Jonaraja and Srivara) under the Muslim Sultans. This period also includes several Persian Tareekhs, which continued under the Mughals, as well as the Dogras. This last includes Hasan Shah Koihami’s *Tareekh-e-Hasan* (3 vols., 1880s). The Dogra era also included Kashmiri writings such as Maqbool Shah Kralwari’s *Grees-Nām* and *Pīre-Nām*. Post-1947 Indian writings mostly take a stance which try to justify Indian sovereignty in Kashmir, but some of them call for autonomy of Kashmir within the Indian union. These include writings published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Indian government, like M. C. Chagla’s *Kashmir 1947-1965*, UN speeches (1965), as well as M.J. Akbar’s *Kashmir: Behind the Vale* (2002). Post-1947 Kashmiri writings include those by Prem Nath Bazz’s *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir* (1976), which can easily be categorized as a Tehreek history; Ishaq Khan’s scholarly work *A History of Srinagar* (2013); and R. K. Parmu’s *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir* (1969). Political autobiographies include Sheikh Abdullah’s *The Fire of Chinar* (orig. in Urdu, *Atish-e-Chinar*, 1985), Mir Qasim’s *My Life and Times* (1992), Syed Ali Shah Geelani’s *Secrets of Prison* (orig. in Urdu, *Roodad-e-Qafas*, 5th ed. 1995). Biographies include, Dewan Kripa Ram’s *Gulab Nama* (2nd ed., 1977); Bilkis Taseer’s *The Kashmir of Sheikh Abdullah* (1986). This is by no means an exhaustive list.

5 I discuss this engagement with the 19th and early 20th century writing tradition in Chapter 6.
where their jobs might come under threat, they tend to remain publicly silent on the question of
Indian claims on Kashmir. Since one of my key interests in this dissertation is to examine the
formation of political subjectivity among youth activists through an engagement with history, my
focus is the historical writings of those intellectuals who are either part of Tehreek-related
organizations, express support for Tehreek, or, at least, endorse the stated Tehreek goal of the
Kashmiri right to self-determination. I am also interested in their work because they write and
popularize narratives of Kashmir’s past that counter official accounts, often with the express
intent of destabilizing those aspects of the Indian nationalist historiography that see Indian
sovereignty over Kashmir as unproblematic.

For the intellectuals in whose work I am interested, I use the term “history-writers”
instead of “historians” simply because they are not “professional historians.” History-writers are
neither based in academic institutions nor do they claim authority based on training in historical
methods. Like professional historians, though, they devote considerable intellectual effort and
passion to their work. As history-writers, they are autodidacts, often, as they themselves admit,
“thrown into writing” or “forced to write” to present the “true picture.” They “feel the need” to
publicly counter official accounts, chronicle ongoing events, and, in general, preserve their
writings for the sake of “posterity.”

Some of the early Tehreek history-writings in Kashmir emerged in the period
immediately after 1947, but were published in Pakistan. But Tehreek history-writers have

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6 In other contexts, such practitioners have been called “homespun historians.” I avoid using “homespun historians” because of its crude and patronizing connotations, even while recognizing the good intentions of the scholars who used it to question the intellectual mining of homespun histories by “guild historians” as an unalloyed source of customary knowledge and even native psyche (Peterson and Macola 2009).
7 Among these, Saraf’s two-volume Kashmiris Fight for Freedom (1979) remains a key text. Saraf was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Azad Kashmir. Another important work is Bazaz’s The History of the Struggle (1976). Bazaz was a Kashmiri Pandit, leader of the Kisan Mazdoor Party in Kashmir, who strongly opposed Kashmir’s accession with India.
written primarily in the aftermath of the 1989-90 uprising. They tend to write in a conversational style; mostly in English and Urdu, and sometimes in Kashmiri—a language that was until recently was not taught in schools. Their works appear in the form of books, pamphlets, and newspaper columns. While the actual number of Tehreek history-writers is small, their writings have gained broad popularity in Kashmir. Prominent newspapers, like Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Reader, or Uzma feature their revisionist historical accounts on their opinion pages almost daily. Published by local publishers, their books sometimes run into several reprints. During my work with youth activists, I had noted that they frequently circulated the writings of Tehreek history-writers, or cited their work when pushing a point during discussions over history. Even a cursory look at the shelves of major bookstores in Srinagar will show more books written about Kashmir’s history than writings in other genres. This growth in the audience for history writing has taken place alongside a dramatic growth in newspaper readership in Kashmir in general.

Tehreek history-writers do not form a “school” or a “group,” and are largely independent of each other. Some are local literary figures, journalists, lawyers, or even retired government

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9 The number of newspapers and periodicals has grown enormously in the years after 1989-90, especially during the first decade of the new millennium. Each year dozens of new titles have emerged, but admittedly only a few of them have been independent initiatives, the rest are either profit ventures seeking to generate advertisement revenue, and are seen to be supported by the Government of India’s Ministry of Information, Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as the military (Gulati 2015). Kashmiri journalists often express concern that the government funds some newspapers at the cost of others, putting pressure on genuine newspapers to tow the government line. (Remarkably, in a place where English is neither a native language (Kashmiri, Pahari, Gojri, Dogri, etc. being native tongues in the region) nor the state language (which is Urdu), almost forty percent of the publications are in English (Ramesh Pandita 2013)). Some of this growth of newspapers and their readership has corresponded with a change in the content as well. The mostly state propaganda of the pre-1989-90 newspapers has been replaced by a more “balanced” coverage of news stories, which often leads the state to clamp down on publications, stop their distribution, and even block the Internet. Part of the reason for this shift in content is that many of the reporters and journalists who write are now Kashmiris who spend a considerable time among the people they write about.
employees, while others have been full-time Tehreek activists. They regularly encounter each other, read each other’s writings, but only in very few cases have I noted any sustained mutual engagement. This lack of cohesiveness, I was told, has had partly to do with adopting “guerrilla tactics in writing,” amid a system which appears determined to deprive all “intellectual support to the movement.” While it may sound implausible that such tactics are a systematic response to state repression, numerous Kashmiri intellectuals have been murdered over the years. As a result, Tehreek history-writers find themselves, as individuals, in precarious positions, worried their writings might invite the wrath of the state.

In the following pages, I examine the contested narratives of Kashmir’s past, especially the way this past is apprehended in the work of Tehreek history-writers. My own anthropological attempt in relation to these Tehreek history-writers is to trace a genealogy of Kashmir’s political present by—to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz—looking over the shoulders of those already doing so. I try to understand the following: Why do Tehreek history-writers read the dilemmas of the present as traumatic remnants from the past? What events are accorded importance in their writings? How do their accounts diverge from the official history? And, in general, how does the past intervene in their understanding of the present in Kashmir? Taken together, I describe their engagement and the intervention of the past in the present political struggles in Kashmir as an entanglement with history. I argue that, while the post-1989-90 Tehreek represents a potential for, and a gradual consolidation of, a new political subjectivity in Kashmir, the movement has been deeply shaped by an intense entanglement with history.

This entanglement is already evoked by the similitude of the terms Tehreek and tae’reekh, the latter being the Kashmiri term for “history.” However, I describe the self-
determination movement as an entanglement with history in three different senses. First, I underscore popular attempts to change the political fate of Kashmir through mass mobilization, protests, and armed struggle. Second, I highlight a simultaneous experience of a lack of control over the actual unfolding of the region’s history, and a feeling of being caught or trapped in history. And, finally, I emphasize Tehreek history-writers’ anxious and agonistic engagement with history, as well as their struggle to reconfigure and rewrite Kashmir’s past. I argue that Tehreek history-writers not only contest the dominant official accounts, but also suture fragments of collective memory into a coherent alternative history.

To account for the formation of Kashmiri political subjectivity in its entanglement with history, I follow Giles Deleuze’s words: “One should…start with the real individual statements, give people conditions, including the material conditions, for the production of their individual statements, in order to discover the real collective arrangements that produce them” (2002: 276). Drawing from interviews (conducted in 2014-15) with two Tehreek history-writers, Zahir-ud-Din and Shakil Bakshi, I will analyze their work and modes of writing history as points of entry into certain specific aspects of Kashmir’s political past, especially contests over the meaning of historical events and the legitimacy of Indian control over Kashmir. Analysis of a public lecture “J&K History” by Ghulam Qadir Lone will show how history writings intervene in the broader debate over identity within Tehreek, often to shape Kashmiris as primarily Muslim. In contrast, reading Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din’s short historical text A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir will reveal a way out of the identity trap as a well as a politics of indigeneity. All in all, the four figures and their works illuminate why Tehreek and its intellectuals remain invested in, and invested by, history. While the life experiences of all these writers is crucial to their work, I will provide a more descriptive biography of Zahir-ud-Din to illustrate how the desire for
an alternative history of the past is complicated by the anxieties of the actual work of writing history from the ground up, including having to contend with an occupation that has appropriated the sources of collective memory and delegitimized any alternative accounts.

To reiterate, this chapter is neither an historical account of Kashmir’s past nor a sociological study of Tehreek history-writers as a group. I focus mostly on what is common in their statements and writings and what makes them significant to Kashmiri political subjectivity. I look at the commonalities to trace their differences with the official accounts. And, while I acknowledge that their internal differences are significant, these differences have not become part of the public debate on Kashmir’s history. I focus especially on Zahir-u-Din because his work remains paradigmatic of Tehreek history-writing. His work is also sustained, accessible, and probably the most popular in this genre. In line with this, the chapter delineates those elements of Kashmir’s political history that have acquired significance in the present through the emergence of the Tehreek movement. Here, instead of laying out a linear sequence of events, or narrating this history from the vantage point of the predominant inter-state prism—which sees Kashmir as a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan or as a story of conflicting national sovereignties—I juxtapose events from the past and the present to underscore how history in Kashmir is remembered in terms of an unsettled past continuing to haunt the present, and how Tehreek history-writers emphasize these continuities in their work.

**History-writing and subjectivity**

*Chronicler of the present*

Returning to Kashmir for research in 2014, I knew the weight of history was going to hang heavy on my work. It was July 13 and Tehreek activists were out on the streets clashing
with soldiers. July 13 represented two dates from the past that had continued to resonate through these years. On July 13, 1989, Kashmiri militants fired gunshots at Indian soldiers who were charging at a group of people on a bridge over the River Jhelum in Srinagar. On that day, people had assembled to observe Martyrs Day, which commemorates the victims of a massacre on July 13, 1931 when Kashmir was under the Dogra monarchy. The symbolism of choosing Martyrs Day for the militant action was evident only to a few people in Kashmir in 1989, but as was clear in the tense clashes of 2014, the date’s symbolic force in the years following had enormously grown.

To Shakil Bakshi, who saw the region’s history as a series of alam-nakh baab (“grievous chapters”), the event of shooting back in 1989 was radically new. The “baegi (rebel) action,” as Bakshi (b. 1963) describes it in retrospect, was the moment of transformation for Kashmir. A leader of a Srinagar-based youth group Islamic Students League (ISL), Bakshi had found himself at the center of the unfolding events. ISL, formed in 1986, had been mobilizing people for a “pure freedom movement” by organizing protests on issues ranging from “discrimination against Muslim students” in exams for medical and engineering colleges to defying the government ban on Muslim religious processions. Bakshi, who had spent two years in jail for organizing protests, had felt that Tehreek had become “confused” by the “pseudo-secessionism” of the National Conference leaders. They had, in his view, used the “plebiscite demand” from India simply to gain power in Kashmir. Describing the background to the shooting incident of 1989, Bakshi says:

By 1977, Tehreek had been all but repressed. Tehreek parties like Jama’at Islami joined elections hoping to defeat Sheikh Abdullah, who had walked back on the Plebiscite question in 1975. But Abdullah won. Then he turned the opposition to Indian rule into an opposition toward the Congress party in India. Tehreek in response became fully focused on anti-National activism,
thereby falling into a Congress trap. Abdullah also started planting his own children for future positions of power, and harshly suppressed any kind of criticism, attacking the press and harassing editors. After his death in 1982, India used the internal fractures within the Abdullah family to strengthen its own position in Kashmir. Sheikh’s son, Farooq, would eventually accept further entrenchment of Indian control in exchange for his chief ministership. In 1984, JKLF leader Maqbool Bhat was hanged in an Indian prison. We were shocked. On the fortieth day of mourning, I was arrested along with other students. In the meantime, older anti-government voices, including Mirwaiz Farooq (the chief priest in Srinagar) and the Islamist Jama’at Islami, had literally given up on Tehreek.

According to Bakshi, this build up had become quite stifling, especially among young Kashmiris who found themselves limited both by loss of leadership as well means to carry on the movement.

Kashmiri youth had separated from this older leadership. Our ISL membership was increasing in strength. Jama’at’s youth wing Jami’at Tulba was quite active. In fact, Jama’at even renounced Tulba, forcing several of its members to escape abroad. Several youths formed underground groups, like Holy War Fighters, Al-Jihad, Al-Maqbool and what not. They exploded a few small bombs near government buildings. But Tehreek had lost so much ground that people felt the bombs were just Indian intelligence agencies creating chaos to force the National Conference out of the government. Soon these youths were arrested. Our dear leader Ishfaq Majeed Wani then went to Pakistan, where he met General Zia [Pakistani military ruler] and sought help. Zia promised help. Ishfaq returned with weapons and a strategy. He wanted ISL to be a banner for his armed struggle, but we said we didn’t have enough of a political base yet, and that the armed movement could not function without a popular base. He agreed and joined JKLF instead. Then General Zia died in a plane crash in August 1988, and Pakistan closed off all help. Ishfaq and his close associates had really no political patronage. In Kashmir, Jama’at explicitly opposed the
armed movement. India became quite repressive. For every form of protest, even if it was about lack of electricity, government forces would shoot straight at people and kill. A year later, on Martyrs Day, a few JKLF cadres opened fire on the bridge. Everything exploded. Suddenly, there was only Tehreek everywhere. Pakistan saw this and offered help. But Ishfaq told them, “No we need more commitment, not like last time; you come under slight pressure and you buckle.” He said, “This business of twenty-eight rounds and fifteen-day training won’t work. Our nation is plunging into a fight with a huge country. We need more.” He was also looking for alternative bases for the movement: China, Libya, etc. Pakistan then turned this into a red versus green war. It was not a religious war.

In his account, Bakshi describes the opening moments of the guerilla war that was going to last more than a decade. As the news of the July 13, 1989 attack on the bridge spread, large crowds of people had come out onto the streets of Srinagar to directly confront the Indian paramilitary forces. “When they saw that it was our own people who had taken on the Indian soldiers, they lost all fear, and openly mocked the soldiers,” says Bakshi, “People smeared earth on their faces, and were ready to die,” using a local phrase to emphasize the collective demonstration of courage. The incident on the bridge had become the opening act in a series that would set off, a few months later, a tumultuous armed uprising for azadi, or liberation of Kashmir from India. With the uprising growing in strength and crowds surging into the streets in response to the call of young militants.

Bakshi began addressing political meetings, but soon he found himself and the ISL without political space as armed Tehreek took center-stage. Out of the events of 1989-90, a fractious but more or less coherent set of political groups took shape. The key difference was their positions regarding Kashmir’s “independence” or “merger with Pakistan,” as well as the degree to which they emphasized “Islam” or “secularism” in their discourse. JKLF, the most
popular organization, and to which ISL was close, stood for a secular, independent Kashmir. Pro-
Pakistan groups were backed by the Pakistani military and came to be patronized in Kashmir by
Jama’at Islami. Jama’at branded JKLF as “communists,” which had gotten a bad name among
many Muslims after the Soviet war in Afghanistan. This is what Bakshi means when he says
“red versus green”—communists versus Islamists. By March 1990, Ishfaq was killed in an
ambush, and Bakshi was arrested. When he was released from prison, the red versus green
conflict had intensified. He took to writing.

Bakshi started maintaining elaborate diaries in which he began chronicling everyday
political events under the title “Today in History.” He publishes elements from it on Facebook
and includes lists of events, like massacres, martyrdoms, arson by Indian soldiers, public
statements, visits of dignitaries, etc., that have occurred on a particular day. When I ask him
about the significance of his diaries; he replies: “You will be able to see its significance in the
future.” Although he does not see his work as that of a historian, he is content for people to see
his diaries as an archive of Tehreek. He elaborates:

Young rebels hardly care for history; they see it as the job of old historians to write history.
Rebels just act. That is why I felt our Tehreek might not even be remembered by our future
generations. Historians will still write the history of modern Kashmir as a family history of the
Abdullahs or whoever sides with India. Who will remember Ishfaq Majeed Wani, a twenty-three-
year-old who sparked a revolution among us? It is not about who he was, but about what he and
his fellow rebels did. That is why every event, big and small, is in my diaries.

Bakshi’s mode of history writing creates a “shadow archive” of state violence, for the
official archives erase the state’s involvement in the violence, or makes any violence appear as a
rational necessity, a response to the armed movement. Bakshi’s chronicle is an archive of the fractured or dis-membered present, which might be discovered later, but of which no official record would have existed. Although he clearly has a “historical plot” in mind when he speaks about the uprising, his written material is organized as dates/year with minimal description, eschewing even a cursory judgment that could be evident in the use of language. An example would be:

#9Feb #Anniversary

1990: 17 killed, hartal on Juma.

1991: Eight die in fresh violence in Kashmir [Provides news link]

   First Death in #Batamaloo Baber Khan. In #Sumbal 4 killed


1994: Tariq Ahmed Malik… [Long list of dead and anniversaries]

1995: In #Zainakote 5 shopkeepers were killed. DoK of Idrees Amin Saker of #Shopian [DoK: Date of killing]

2013: #Afzal Guru [Provides a web link. Hanging of Afzal Guru in an Indian Jail].

This writing takes on the form of a “chronicle,” which Hayden White has defined as an overtly narrative-less recording of calendrical events (1990, 42). Bakshi, for instance, doesn’t give details of Afzal Guru’s hanging, which among Kashmiris was an important event in 2013.

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10 I draw the phrase “shadow archive” from Alan Sekula (1986), who writes in the context of photography and racism in the US South during segregation.

11 White argues chronicles and annals are facts, which become material for history. As opposed to chronicles, “history” involves modes of emplotment, modes of explanation, and modes of ideology (White 1990).
“They will be able to find material on Guru, but perhaps not so much on shopkeepers or the seventeen who were killed on February 9, 1990,” contends Bakshi, “Now if they want, our new generations will look at the date and then search the archives and locate other materials.”

Linking dates through a memory of loss and death is a powerful way of creating political subjectivity. Every day becomes a day of loss and remembrance. Each date carries the force of history behind it, impelling remembrance. Beyond its ideological work, there is, however, a logistical imperative to Bakshi’s style. As he explains: “Events in Kashmir happened at such a great pace—so many were dying, so many statements were being made—that I had to just accept the fate of writing them down in the simplest form possible.” Indeed, there is a broader narrative arc in his simple diary entries. That arc traces the fundamental belief in the assumptions of Tehreek and the significance of the 1990 uprising in Kashmir.

_Tehreek as historical event_

Looking back, Tehreek history-writers claim that for the self-determination movement, which had been subdued since 1947, the incidents of 1989-90 represented a historical break—or, truly an *event*. Over the meaning of “the event,” however, they remain divided. For some, it was radically new as it gave birth to a “new form of politics and struggle,” especially the popular armed movement—never before had Kashmiris taken up arms against the state. For others, the incidents of 1989-90 represented an event because it had “condensed” the modern history of Kashmir, and the questions over its political status, into a “singular moment,” bringing its deepest contradictions to the surface. For others still, 1989-90 constituted an event because it evoked the “continuity” of the past in the present—especially, as they saw it, the political moment of 1989-90 was the “culmination of mass politics” for the establishment of a “responsible government” and “popular sovereignty” that had originally begun in 1931. A young
Tehreek activist, who had told me that resistance runs in his “family’s blood” (his grandfather had been imprisoned during the Dogra era, while his father later spent time in Indian prisons), captured this sense of the past’s resonance in the present rather evocatively: “There was much euphoria around; people thought azadi was near, but Tehreek brought back all the painful memories.”

For Kashmiris in general, the event marked a transition into, what they describe as, kharaab haalaat or “bad conditions”—a protracted period marked by social mistrust, circulation of poisonous rumors, existential precarity, and an uncertainty about the time ahead. During the autumn and winter of 1989-90, Indian troops committed a series of massacres of Kashmiri civilians, outlawed anti-government protests, and arrested thousands. Kashmiri militants, in turn, carried out several killings and kidnappings of government figures, including those from the minority Hindu community. This led to a migration of Hindus from the Kashmir valley to the Jammu province of the state in the south. Simultaneously, many Muslim families from the northern border districts of Kashmir fled their homes for the Pakistani-controlled Azad Kashmir. Meanwhile, thousands of young Kashmiris crossed the Line of Control into Azad Kashmir to join militant groups. The Indian government imposed draconian new laws in the region, giving the military extraordinary powers under the overall authority of a New Delhi-appointed governor to suppress the movement. The state described the movement as a “proxy war” launched by Pakistan. Characterizing Tehreek in this way allowed the government to extensively use military force on a people whom it legally claimed to be its own.

What these developments really represent is a moment when the relationship between the people and the state transformed into one of direct confrontation. As Tehreek history-writers’ work presents it, through continuous mass demonstrations and protests, Kashmiris openly
challenged the legitimacy of the Indian state in Kashmir. And the state, by deploying the military and legislating emergency, sought to impose its dominance primarily through coercion. The breakdown of the state’s assumed hegemony pushed Kashmiri intellectuals to seek sources of understanding the present through the past. Not only did the audience for a new politics of memory grow, it also created space for the figure of “Tehreek history-writer,” who became instrumental in shaping Kashmiri political subjectivity.

Citing Francois Furet's definition of the term, Veena Das has described a “critical event” as an “event *par excellence* because it institutes a new modality of historical action, which (is) not inscribed in the inventory of that situation” (1995, 5). While this conception of event captures formally the rupture from the past, it does not account for how the event becomes historical. Alain Badiou’s conceptualization of event, which in his philosophical register is termed *political event*, seems more appropriate. He formulates event as something that “brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable…An event (which) is not by itself the creation of a reality; it is the creation of a possibility.” A political event, according to Badiou, does not necessarily have to have a world-historic magnitude (as in Furet’s understanding, who was writing about the French Revolution), “whatever its scale, (it) is a local opening up of political possibilities.” But more crucially, as Badiou adds, “Everything will depend on the way in which the possibility proposed by the event is grasped, elaborated, incorporated, and set out in the world” (2010, 9-10). In this formulation, it is the way the event as a possibility is understood and sought to be fulfilled, and which requires actual critical and creative work, that can make an event truly *historical*. An event brings forth the possibility for a new political subjectivity; but it
requires actual work to “name” and sustain such a subjectivity.¹² Have Tehreek history-writers been performing precisely this kind of role within the movement? To Shakil Bakshi, the 1989-90 uprising was an opportunity to give some degree of order to the otherwise inchoate “painful memories” of Tehreek and confused pre-1989 “sentiments.” This could be done through an orderly, chronological arrangement of everyday events.

**History-writer as witness**

A few weeks after my arrival in Srinagar for research, I met Zahir-ud-Din. At that time, he was an editor of a local English daily *Kashmir Reader.* Zahir-ud-Din is also a history-writer and has authored several books. Initially, his role as a history-writer had not been clear to me. He had written an article in his newspaper about the historical significance of July 13, 2014. But, I anticipated our conversation was going to be centered on problems he was facing editing a newspaper that took a stance against the occupation, how he managed to get the newspaper published and distributed during extended periods of curfew, and how he was dealing with the paper’s financial difficulties, which, I had been told, were a direct consequence of its stance.

Zahir-ud-Din, however, was more interested in talking about history. The newspaper was to him a “vehicle for telling our history.” Disappointed with a “lack of accurate accounts” of Kashmir’s pasts, Zahir-ud-Din told me that he hoped to write a “people’s history” of Kashmir. He wanted to “bring to light the stories of those who had expressed dissent with the political order established in 1947,” and discover “our heroes” who could inspire people into action. At the same time, he sought to “expose those who had collaborated with (the political order).” I had

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¹² Simon Critchley has argued, following Antonio Gramsci, that “Politics is always about nomination. It is about naming a political subjectivity and organizing politically around that name” (2012, 103). Further, Critchley points out that naming a political subjectivity is effective if it captures a contradiction within the claims of the state.
been reading his articles in the newspapers and had been recommended his books by several Tehreek activists. His articles—and his books—seemed to be part of a longer series. One had to, therefore, fully read his collected work to make better sense of it.

Several of Zahir-ud-Din’s pieces began with a pop quiz about Kashmir’s history, which he then went on to answer himself for his readers. For instance, before boarding an auto-rickshaw to his office in Batehmalūn on the day I first met him, I had picked up that day’s edition of the Kashmir Reader to read his long-running column “Unsung Heroes.” In that column, Zahir-ud-Din had taken issue with, what he had described as, a “false notion” prevalent as “common sense” among the “self-assured educated classes” about the lack of opposition to Sheikh Abdullah in the Constituent Assembly in the early 1950s. Zahir-ud-Din then went on to debunk the notion using evidence gathered from an interview with an old Constituent Assembly member, who had been witness to several speeches opposing Abdullah’s endorsement of the 1947 accession treaty. Zahir-ud-Din had managed, despite great difficulty, to trace down and interview the member.

Zahir-ud-Din’s writing strategy involves locating ignored, even minor, but counter-intuitive historical details and voices, to destabilize his readers’ understanding. His readers, “once awakened would then seek their own truth.” Zahir-ud-Din says his writings are not meant to be “academic expositions.” Not that he derides the ability of academic historians to question the official discourse, but he is “not sure if real historical scholarship would be allowed in Kashmiri universities, which are tightly controlled by the state.” Zahir-ud-Din presents his work as “educational material” for a specific readership: “basically students and researchers like yourself,” he tells me. This material consists of historical facts, which, according to him,
historians of Kashmir had “concealed.” Zahir-ud-Din argues that these facts shed light on how the “official history exists only to legitimate India’s sovereignty claims.”

Zahir-ud-Din’s office is just a few hundred meters from where he grew up in Batehmalūn, a Srinagar neighborhood deeply connected to his own politicization. From outside, Batehmalūn looks like a bewildering urban sprawl. It is full of old residential colonies, government offices, mosques, rows upon rows of tiny retail stores, schools, and the headquarters of a major Islamist party. All of these are squeezed around a noisy bus depot and an enormous Indian military base, whose expanse remains mostly invisible from the outside. In 1965, during the second India-Pakistan war over Kashmir, the soldiers from the base burnt down Batehmalūn, apparently in retaliation against the residents who were raising slogans in support of armed militias that had crossed into Kashmir from Azad Kashmir. Zahir-ud-Din was a young boy then, but he remembers the incident as the first spark of his politicization. By the time of the 1990 uprising, he was already a student activist in Kashmir University, studying law but also interested in early Islamic history.

The event that fully transformed Zahir-ud-Din into a political activist, and then into a writer, was a massacre in Srinagar on January 21, 1990. A procession of Kashmiris protesting police atrocities was—yet again—crossing a city bridge, this time the Gaw Kadal (the Bridge of the Cow), which is close to the main city square, Lal Chowk, when Indian paramilitary forces shot at them. Zahir-ud-Din was present in the crowd. He recounts the incident:

I was part of the procession. They just sprayed bullets. Unprovoked firing. Totally unprovoked. This was a peaceful procession. Its slogan (was) “Allah u Akbar” [Allah is Great]. No slogans against Pandits. No slogans against India even. We were marching to express solidarity with the people of Chota Bazaar, where a woman had been molested during a search operation…It changed Kashmir. That was the turning point.
While Shakil Bakshi, as a key political activist at the time, had presented the earlier incident on July 13, 1989 as the critical event, most Kashmiris would agree that the Gaw Kadal incident was what finally pushed youths to join Tehreek en masse. The incident, which came to be known among Kashmiris as the “Gaw Kadal Massacre,” was one among several such massacres during the early days of the uprising, and was the first indication for Zahir-ud-Din that the official account of events varied drastically from people’s experiences of them. The official account had described the procession as “communal,” one threatening to provoke violence against Hindus and the state. This account had also concealed the actual number of protestors killed by the Indian paramilitary. Says Zahir-ud-Din:

I am an eyewitness to it. I was in the procession. Fifty-two persons died on the spot. The hospital said fifty-two had been brought in. In the evening news, the government announced only eleven people were killed. But in our neighborhood graveyard alone they buried fifteen people.

In the years ahead, Zahir-ud-Din became involved in Tehreek, and spent several months underground to evade arrest and assassination. But as the movement turned into a full-blown armed resistance, Zahir-ud-Din turned to writing. He worked with the newly-established English newspaper *Greater Kashmir*, and spent years reporting on the political conflict. He later joined a local human rights group called the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, and documented cases of human rights abuses. It was during this time, he says, that he started collecting material he would need to write an alternative history of Kashmir. He had brought some of this material with him to our meeting in a large, unwieldy folder. The folder, he told me, included personal diaries, records, and transcripts of interviews with old Kashmiri activists, especially those who had taken part in the events of 1931 or opposed the accession treaty of 1947. The decision to
compile this material came from an exchange he had with a few visitors from abroad who had “provoked” him:

They told us, “Kashmiris always ride upon the shoulders of outsiders. They have not produced a hero of their own. There is no indigenous hero.” I was pained. That day we [him and his colleagues at the human rights group] took a decision that we will come out with a compilation of our heroes. It was entrusted to me, and I went to work. (laughs)

In his search, as he stumbled from one piece of historical information to another, his interest in Kashmir’s history grew into an “intense desire” to write it. He soon began serializing his notes in his regular newspaper columns, which became popular. Too eager, however, to bring them out as a collection, a local publisher printed an unedited version titled Bouquet: Unsung Heroes of Kashmir. While the book sold out, Zahir-ud-Din wasn’t happy, even though he understood the “urgency” of its publication. He continued to publish his serialized columns, which went into a similar but more polished text Flashback: Kashmir Story (2013).

During this time, Zahir-ud-Din told me, he became “painfully aware that Kashmir’s past was not so much silenced because of a lack of writing, but silenced actually through writings.” Most of these writings had come from Indian journalists and academics, whose “sole aim was to justify Indian claims over Kashmir.” Nevertheless, he says he was “pleasantly surprised to see a few nuanced writings” on the circumstances surrounding the Dogra monarch’s signing of accession with India in 1947, and the “political opportunism” of Kashmiri leaders like Sheikh Abdullah. Among these, he specifically mentions works by Joseph Korbel, a US diplomat, and Alistair Lamb, a British historian, both of whom had parted ways with the “standard Indian narrative.” To Zahir-ud-Din, the two authors, “possibly because they came from outside,” had remained “objective.” In contrast, he dismisses Sheikh Abdullah’s own autobiographical Atish-e-Chinar (“The Fire of Chinar”), in which Abdullah, during his Indian prison years (1953-1974),
had sought to justify his support for the accession, as a “bundle of lies.” He also laments that the few Kashmiris who wrote before 1990 had chosen to write “partial accounts,” mostly based on the perspectives of pro-accession National Conference leaders. These writers, he claims, had “distorted the truth” to gain patronage from the India-loyalist government in Kashmir. A truthful history of Kashmir, the “one written from the perspective of the people’s struggle,” would, in his view, naturally be opposed to Indian control over Kashmir.

What is the “distortion” that Tehreek history-writers seek to correct? In whose name can a “true” history of Kashmir be written? To contextualize the work of Tehreek history-writers, it is important to delineate how they sense the importance of history itself. The next section examines how political events from Kashmir’s past become visible within the circumstances of the present; how these events carry contested meanings for the state and Tehreek history-writers; and, how these writers grapple with aporias of subjecthood, like the issue of defining the proper subject of political claims in Kashmir.

Interpreting 1931 and 1990

On that July 13 in 2014 when I arrived in Srinagar, I had heard slogans reverberate in the streets. Amid loud bangs of the tear gas shells exploding in the streets, I heard: “Back off, traitors! We are the true heirs of the martyrs.” Defying a curfew, a group of youths threw stones toward armored government cars. The armored cars were transporting government ministers and senior bureaucrats to one of the city’s old shrines. The shrine houses a Sufi saint’s grave as well as the graves of dozens of Kashmiris killed by Dogra troops in 1931. Indian soldiers had closed the main roads, blocked all the city bridges, and severely limited the movement of people and vehicles. On this day only those Kashmiri Muslim politicians who express loyalty to the Indian
government in Kashmir are allowed movement. The loyalists go to visit, what Kashmiris call, the “1931 Martyrs Graveyard” and lay flower wreaths at the graves there. The graveyard is in a dense neighborhood of downtown Srinagar, where Tehreek activists regularly challenge government restrictions through stone throwing and sloganeering. The slogans were directed against the loyalists, who also claim to be the heirs to the martyrs of 1931. Yet, despite their differences over who the “true heir” to the martyrs should be, among Kashmiri Muslims there is largely consensus about the 1931 event itself.

On July 13, 1931, a group of Kashmiris assembled outside the Central Jail in Srinagar with the demand that they be allowed to witness the trial of Abdul Qadir, who the Dogra government had arrested and charged with sedition. Qadir had given a speech, in which, according to police reports, he had tried to provoke Kashmiri Muslims to attack Hindus. Tehreek history-writers deny this charge, but agree that he had urged people to protest the Dogra monarch’s discriminatory policies toward Kashmiri Muslims. The trial was set for July 13, 1931. Not used to insubordination from Kashmiri Muslims, the Dogra troops shot dead twenty-two people, precipitating a crisis.

As news of the massacre spread, it further exacerbated the already deep resentment Kashmiris held against the despotic Dogra monarchy. While the cavalry charged, shooting and beating protestors in the major towns of the state, they faced mutinous crowds throwing stones at them and jeering the rulers. Along the way, the protestors destroyed debt records, looted granaries, and thrashed some Hindu moneylenders. In the hilly regions of the country, the state revenue department’s mostly Hindu officials faced Muslim crowds refusing to pay taxes, setting off a “rural revolt” that lasted three years (Rai 2004, 264). Kashmiri Muslims subsequently saw

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13 The initial tension, which became the context of Qadir’s speech, had begun in 1930 when word spread that a Dogra soldier had torn pages of the Quran.
the event as a moment of “resistance,” “sacrifice,” and the “start of the freedom struggle.” The Dogra officials (and Hindu groups), however, saw the event as a “communal riot,” with officials even pretending shock that their hitherto “docile” Muslim subjects should be so quickly roused by “conspirators” like Qadir. Whatever the state officials may have said about him, and despite no one knowing what eventually befell the man who had become the center of a political maelstrom, Qadir’s stand against the powerful Dogra state became legendary. In the Kashmiri imagination, he was a hero.

Incidentally, Qadir’s origin has, even to the present, remained a source of a contention that is quite telling of historical debates on Kashmir. Historian Mridu Rai suggests that Qadir was a Pathan butler in the British Army, but it is uncertain, she writes, if he was from Kashmir or had come with a British officer vacationing in Kashmir (2004, 259).14 Chitralekha Zutshi adopts the view taken by the Dogra state, which claimed Qadir to be a Punjabi from outside (2004, 212).15 Tehreek history-writers, however, insist that Qadir was a Kashmiri Pathan, whose family continued to live in Kashmir after 1931. During the 1931 uprising, the Dogra effort to denounce Qadir as gair-mulki, or foreigner, helped the Dogra state to propagate the uprising as an outside conspiracy to destabilize the state—a typical and enduring line, later also taken by India, first in 1947 and then during the Kashmiri uprising of 1989-90. Curiously, Zutshi also accepts the official view that Qadir was Ahmediya, a small heterodox sect of Muslims that arose in early 20th century Punjab and faced opposition from orthodox Muslim groups. Labeling Qadir as Ahmediya would have discredited him among several sections of Kashmir’s Muslims. Among Tehreek history-writers, Qadir is believed to have been influenced by the Ahrars, the more

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14 Pathans are a people native to the regions close to the present-day border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. But many Pathan tribes have lived in Kashmir since the late 18th century.
15 Punjabis are resident mostly of Punjab, now divided between Pakistan and India, but several Punjabi families have also lived in Kashmir at least since the early 19th century.
orthodox and anti-establishment Muslim group also based in Punjab that was opposed to the Ahmediya. To Zahir-ud-Din, Qadir is simply a hero because he stood up to the Dogras. Regardless of Qadir’s identity, this dispute about a seemingly minor historical detail illustrates how the contesting narratives of the state and its subjects continue to rupture the understanding of Kashmir’s past, and, more importantly, how historical events from the past have resurfaced to acquire new meaning in the present.

Echoes of the past, especially the events of 1931, were, however, more directly felt within the 1990 uprising. When crowds erupted on the scene in Srinagar and other Kashmiri towns after the “rebel action” of 13 July 1989, and then magnified into an almost unending cycle of mass rallies by the winter of 1990, taking the Indian government (as well as the youthful protest leaders like Shakil Bakshi) by surprise, many in Kashmir saw it as the beginning of a new stage in Tehreek. As Zahir-ud-Din states:

A suppressed history of resistance was running through and finding expression in those demonstrations. People felt they were part of something historic and for the first time, after the 1930s and 1940s, they felt they were again writing their own tae’reekh (history) and shaping their fate. For the first time, everyone felt history was important.

I will return to this understanding of the importance of history in Tehreek narratives later, but first discuss an issue that has simultaneously become a matter of anguished reflection within Tehreek as well as one of its key points of contention with the official Indian discourse.

*Internal schisms*

Within Tehreek accounts, the events of 1989-90 are not represented without their own internal complications. The military repression exclusively targeted Muslims, scattering
numerous families internally and across the Line of Control. Amid this, the tiny, but “historically privileged” Hindu Pandit community (Duschinksli 2008, 41), feeling threatened by the popular upsurge, fled Kashmir. Many Pandits left Kashmir between January 19 and 20, 1990, a day before the Gaw Kadal massacre. In the prelude to this “exodus” event, armed activists had assassinated several senior government officials and loyalist politicians, some of whom were prominent Pandits. Affluent Pandits found it easier to settle in Indian cities, but the poorer families were stranded in squalid refugee camps in Jammu. Some Pandit activists claim their departure was a result of a Kashmiri Muslim conspiracy to carry out “ethnic cleansing” against Pandits (Rahul Pandita 2013), while Kashmiri Muslims generally tend to believe that Pandit migration was a deliberate, temporary plan to give a “freehand” to Indian military to subdue Tehreek (Matoo 2010). Independent observers concur with neither of these positions. As Alexander Evans suggests:

The [Kashmiri Pandit] tragedy has not taken place in isolation in Kashmir, nor was it the result of a nefarious Muslim campaign directed against them. Kashmiri Muslim civilians remain by far the largest group among those killed in political violence since 1988 and, even at the height of selective militant killings in 1989–1990, relatively few KPs were killed (2002, 33).

Zahir-ud-Din, who is sympathetic to the plight of Pandits in Jammu, laments that in government reports only the migration of Pandits is taken account of, and not the displacement of Muslims. He argues that a much larger number of Muslims had been forced to migrate out of Kashmir since 1947.16 Most Tehreek history-writers would argue that militants had targeted both Muslim and Pandit government officials and loyalist politicians, and that it was Indian officials who had amplified threats to Pandit officials as a threat to all Pandits. Tehreek history-writers

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16 For migration of Muslim families across the border into the Pakistani-controlled side of Kashmir, see Robinson (2013) and von Tunzelmann (2007).
primarily hold Kashmir’s Indian governor Jagmohan (see Introduction, p. 24) responsible for urging and aiding Pandits to migrate, yet they do not dismiss the arguments that the uprising might have made Pandits feel unsafe.\textsuperscript{17} Zahir-ud-Din insists that Tehreek was not directed against Pandits, and points to the “well-being” of those Pandits who stayed back.\textsuperscript{18} He emphasizes that interreligious relations had remained strong in the Kashmir Valley even in 1947 when the Dogra state was perpetrating an ethnic cleansing of Muslims in adjoining Jammu.\textsuperscript{19} The displacement of Pandits is often used by India to denounce Tehreek as an “Islamic fundamentalist” movement, but for Tehreek the question, which is still unresolved, is important to defining its vision of a future Kashmir.

Was there an immediate political animus between Muslims and Pandits? Political scientist Sumantra Bose has argued that:

The small Hindu minority indigenous to the Kashmir Valley, known as Kashmiri Pandits, share a history, a locality, and a culture with the Muslim majority of the Valley, but are resolutely loyal to India and hostile to the dominant pro-independence sentiment (2003, 12).

While it is understandable that the Pandits would have preferred to live under a state with whose majority they shared their religion, Bose’s speculation underestimates the complex political contestations among Pandits on the question. Tehreek history-writers point to the political prominence in the Muslim imagination of Pandits, like Prem Nath Bazaz, Raghu Nath Vaishnavi and others, who stood for Kashmir’s independence, as well as of human rights

\textsuperscript{17} Jagmohan wanted a “free hand” to deal with the uprising in 1990 with an “iron hand,” and saw Pandits as a “hindrance” to his mission (Matoo 2010).

\textsuperscript{18} Tehreek parties often publicly plead for a return of all Pandits to their original homes, but insist that it should not be tied to any condition that demands an end to the movement for Kashmiri self-determination, as some Hindu groups have done.

\textsuperscript{19} See Chapter 6 more Muslim-Hindu dynamic in Kashmir. I argue that a long history of state patronage of the Pandits, connected structurally with the oppression of Kashmiri Muslims, had already frayed inter-religious relations.
activists and trade unionists, like Hriday Nath Wanchoo, whose killing in 1992 was widely believed to be the work of Indian agencies. It is probable that the Pandit view against Tehreek hardened in the aftermath of their migration. Indian government officials, who facilitated the Pandit migration, had promised that the migration was to be temporary. But, tragically, as the state’s war on Kashmiris intensified, the promised return never took place.

“Sense of déjà vu”

To Shakil Bakshi and Zahir-ud-Din, the events of 1989-90 had evoked a “sense of déjà vu.” They were experiencing a moment like the events of 1931, about which they had come to know from “earlier generations.” Some conditions that had preceded the 1931 events had changed, but many had remained the same leading up to the events of 1989-90. Further, both saw parallels between 1846 and 1947 as symbolically marking the “lack of agency” many Kashmiris had over their political fate. In 1947, the last Dogra maharaja, Hari Singh, had passed sovereignty over Kashmir into the hands of the newly established Indian state. Hari Singh’s act of signing the “Instrument of Accession” with India had, in an echo from yet another era, resembled the way the British East India Company had granted Kashmir to the Dogras in 1846. “Yitshiy haetshikh titshiy kienikh” (They sold it, the way it was sold to them), Zahir-ud-Din remarked about the 1947 treaty of accession. The description of the treaty through the metaphor of an economic transaction was meant to emphasize the imperial disregard for Kashmiri rights.

Based on such parallels between the past and the present, Tehreek history-writers speak about feeling bitter, but they also challenge state accounts of these transactions of sovereignty.
most vigorously, especially the 1947 treaty of accession. It is important to dwell here on the way
the events of 1947 are contested, as they form important elements of the larger Tehreek
narratives. Below, I will take up a few points of contestation regarding 1947 that illustrate the
importance of revisiting history for Tehreek history-writers, as well as the dilemmas this
contestation has led to.

**History as trauma**

*Accession, Jammu Massacre, and foreign interventions*

In official Indian accounts, the Dogra maharaja’s signing of the treaty of accession with
India in 1947 was a straightforward affair. The monarch had decided to join a “secular India”
over a “communal (Muslim) Pakistan.” According to these accounts, this decision was supported
by his Kashmiri subjects, most of whom followed the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah who had
endorsed the monarch’s decision. The signing of the treaty took place in haste, the official story
proceeds, because of the “invasion” of the state by tribal militias or *kabayli laskhars*, trained and
sent by the Pakistan Army to forcibly wrest the state from the Dogras. The treaty allowed Indian
troops to legally enter Kashmir and push out the *kabaylis*. By then, the narrative goes, the
Pakistan officially joined the war over Kashmir, and India had to take the matter to the United
Nations Security Council (UNSC). It is mostly at this point that the Indian narrative ends,
principally because the UNSC not only called for an immediate ceasefire, but also a withdrawal
of both the militaries from Kashmir as well as the holding of a plebiscite in the region.21

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21 From 1948 onwards, the United Nations Security Council passed several resolutions on Kashmir, most
prominently UNSC Resolution 47, dated 12 April 1948, which called for withdrawal of militaries and conduct of a
plebiscite.
For India, the signing of the treaty of accession had settled the question of sovereignty—but in reality, the treaty had mandated only a partial sovereignty, explicitly including only three areas to be under the ambit of the Indian control: defense, external affairs, and communication. India, however, saw the idea of a “plebiscite” as an unexpected outcome of the UN resolutions, and a discourse that needed to be silenced in Kashmir. Initially, India’s prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had publicly made promises of a plebiscite to Abdullah’s followers in Srinagar. These promises, according to Tehreek history-writers, had bought India time to alter the political situation in its favor, which involved violent suppression of the opposition, and in 1953 culminated in Abdullah’s arrest.

In Tehreek history-writing, the circumstances surrounding the Treaty of Accession are seen as far more complex. The signing had indeed taken place hastily and amid violence, but this violence had primarily been of the monarchy’s own making, and preceded the kabayalis raids. First and foremost, the Dogra ruler had signed the treaty while abetting brazen acts of ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Jammu. The 1947 genocide in Jammu is remarkable, not only for its magnitude, but for the way it has been erased from the official as well as Indian nationalist accounts. In his history of post-1947 India, Indian historian Ramachandra Guha calls this genocide as “panicky migrations” of Muslims from Jammu (2007, 74).

For Tehreek history-writers, the “Jammu Massacre” is a critical event—the foundational act of violence coterminous with the establishment of Indian rule. New scholarship on the event, outside of Tehreek history-writing, has suggested that Dogra troops, Hindu militias armed by the maharaja’s relatives, and Indian Hindu nationalist jathas pouring in from the south, killed between 200,000 to 250,000 Muslim in Jammu, while forcing half-a-million to migrate to Pakistan or settle in the western regions of Kashmir that came to be under Pakistan. Alex Von
Tunzelmann (2007) and Christopher Snedden (2007) both note, for instance, that news reports that appeared in London in 1948 and accounts of survivors, as well as the sudden fall in Muslim demography in Jammu between 1947 and 1949, indicate that close to half a million Muslims were evicted from the state, while more than two-hundred thousand Muslims just disappeared, most probably killed. Mostly, the violence was carried out by the Dogra troops, Jammu Hindu militias armed by the monarch’s relatives, as well as by Indian Hindu nationalist jathas pouring in from the south. Snedden points out that Hindus and Sikhs also suffered in many cases, primarily because of having to leave their homes from what became Azad Kashmir. But it was the Muslims of Jammu who bore the worst of it. Till 1947, Muslims had constituted a two-thirds majority in the Jammu province—unlike Hindus and Sikhs who were a small minority in the hilly areas of Azad Kashmir. After the violence, Muslims became a minority in Jammu.

For Tehreek history-writers, the official silencing of the “Massacre” in Jammu is neither surprising nor incidental. In their view, the silencing represents a constitutive absence within Indian narratives that depict the last Dogra ruler not only as “benevolent” but also “legitimate,” and hence his accession to India as a valid sovereign act. In Tehreek accounts, the trauma of the event is heightened by the fact that even in the midst of the greatest violence, the Dogra ruler’s actions had evoked no international censure at that time, or subsequently. Instead, what became the predominant view was the “state propaganda” that the Indian forces were in Jammu and Kashmir to protect Kashmiris from the kabayalis.

This view, according to Tehreek history-writers, had ignored several facts. First, that there was an ongoing popular anti-monarchical Tehreek in Kashmir, which had since 1944 demanded the end of monarchy. In the face of ethnic cleansing in Jammu which started right

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22 On the forced migrations of Muslims from Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan and parts of the state now under Pakistan’s control see also Robinson (2013).
after August 15, 1947, this Tehreek had morphed into an active rebellion in the border areas of Poonch. Second, the Dogra ruler had effectively lost power over vast territories to these spontaneous uprisings. When he signed the accession treaty, he had escaped from his subjects in Kashmir and abandoned his capital Srinagar. And, third, the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Jammu was evidence that, as a monarch, Hari Singh represented only the interests of the minority Hindus and not those of most of his subjects. All this had preceded the arrival of the so-called kabayalis toward the last days of October in 1947.

The question over the “legality” of Indian presence in the region, and the larger question of “foreign interventions” in Kashmir, is another point of contestation for Tehreek history-writers. Did the troops from India enter Kashmir in 1947 even before the treaty was signed? If so, did their presence in Kashmir effectively constitute an “invasion,” as Tehreek history-writers, parties, and activists claim? (see figures 5 and 6). Historians and legal scholars have long argued over the date Hari Singh signed the treaty. Those who claim that Indian forces entered Kashmir legally insist that the king had signed the treaty on October 26, 1947, the same day that the Indian troops landed in Srinagar.

Others, like Alistair Lamb (1994), claim the treaty was signed on October 27, suggesting the troops had landed illegally a day before the signing. Lamb has also argued that troops from the Indian state of Patiala had already entered Kashmir to defend the Dogra rule, much before the signing (1994, 130-32). According to Indian accounts, the first “foreign intervention” in Kashmir in 1947 took place from the Pakistani side when kabayali lashkars (“tribal militias”) arrived from the Pakistani region of the North-West Frontier Province in late October. Tehreek history-writers counter argue that the first foreign intervention in the state during this time occurred when
*jathas* or Hindu militias, who were part of rightwing Indian Hindu nationalist organizations, joined Dogra troops to evict Muslims from Jammu in August 1947.\(^{23}\)

![27 October, 1947: A day of invasion & occupation of Jammu Kashmir](image)

27th October continues to be a dark day for Kashmir, when military might trampled over civilian rights. A symbol of political treachery sold by India as military help, not to secure the commoners in Kashmir, but to secure a despotic king. Hari Singh, who in the following years was to be replaced by proxy rulers in democratic packing. Who landed the first Dakota with Indian soldiers in Kashmir is immaterial, what is important that India used the Srinagar airstrip on 27th October to force a silent invasion into Kashmir, that continues to hold a grip only by military force.

It all started with the unending Dogra oppression and arduous taxation forced primarily on the majority Muslim population. The revolt against Hari Singh began in early 1947 in Poonch. Fearing rebellion by the Muslims in Poonch who owned firearms because many of them served under the British army, Maharaja Hari Singh in June 1947 ordered the surrender of firearms most of whom were confiscated by force and were later handed over to the minority Hindus of the region. What followed was more gruesome. The Times [London] in its report *Elimination of Muslims from Jammu* (Part II, 10th August 1948, p. 5) wrote "2,37,000 Muslims were systematically exterminated by all the forces of the Dogra State, headed by the Maharaja in person and aided by Hindus and Sikhs." Other sources put the massacre toll to be more than 5 lakh, subsequently changing the entire demography of Jammu region.

The Poonch rebels angered by the massacres started organizing an armed mutiny against the Dogra Maharaja of which India took an advantage and declared the landing of its troops who were already at the Srinagar airfield from 17th October, camouflaged in civilian trucks and taken control of the Airport there. (Alastair Lamb, Kashmir, a Disputed Legacy 1846-1990).

Forgetting is a luxury, oppressed can’t afford. We as students of KU must be conscious about the fact that this event of invasion and militarization brought all the sufferings we are facing till this day. And we pledge that we will always stand against this military might & never bow down till the last Indian invader leaves Jammu Kashmir. FREEEEEEDOM...

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\(^{23}\) See Introduction for more on this.
Figure 6. A Tehreek organization issues an Urdu poster for circulation calling for a shutdown to mark October 27 as a “Manhoos Tareen Din” (Gloomiest Day) in Kashmir’s history.
Lessons of history

What these contentions over “foreign intervention” (that go even farther back, and include questions over the origins of Qadir) really point to is that the state’s legitimacy remains deeply contested. Tehreek history-writers revisit these historical events in detail because, in their view, illuminating the “imperial nature” of the Indian state’s relationship with Kashmir, as well as its basis in the originary violence of 1947, is central to their right to self-determination claim. The contestations over the events of 1947 also underline how the historical experience in Kashmir is felt as traumatic. This trauma is exacerbated by the way this experience is silenced or misrepresented within official accounts. As my conversations with Shakil Bakshi, Zahir-ud-Din and other Tehreek history-writers suggest, writing history takes on a therapeutic role.

For Tehreek history-writers, 1846 and 1947 as critical events evoke a sense of helplessness in the face of history. The years 1931 and 1989-90, by contrast, represent Kashmiri attempts to make their history. As Zahir-ud-Din put it: “The 1990 uprising was about reclaiming and fulfilling the promise of freedom that the 1931 uprising had originally unleashed.” The 1931 uprising had provided a sense of belief in collective resistance and an ability to envision a future of emancipation. The legacy of 1931, however, is complicated by the events of 1947, which went against Kashmiri aspirations of freedom. As such, despite its memory becoming a source of hope within the longer history of oppression, the 1931 movement’s own interrupted trajectory is interpreted as “instructive” and “sobering.” Here, for instance, the role of Sheikh Abdullah has become a cause of much expressed agony.

External forces beyond Kashmiri control led to the 1947 debacle, but Tehreek history-writers see Kashmir’s own political leadership of the era, including those who had led the 1931 movement, as no less responsible. If the events of 1931 had resulted in an “unfinished
liberation,” it was because Kashmiri leaders, especially from the dominant National Conference party, which had emerged out of the 1931 movement, were both “opportunistic” and “incapable of apprehending the historical transformations” taking place in the subcontinent. Tehreek history-writers concede that the monarchy had ended in 1947 due to the National Conference’s efforts, but it was a “pyrrhic victory.” Dogra rulers had abdicated the throne on their own terms and transferred power to India, thus disallowing “popular sovereignty” in Kashmir.

But an independent Kashmir was possible in 1947, Tehreek history-writers claim. The uncertain, intervening era between the British withdrawal from the subcontinent in August 1947 and the Indian takeover of Kashmir in October 1947, had allowed the possibility, and even brief experiments, with precisely such an idea. For instance, several Tehreek organizations in 1947 (Muslim Conference, Socialist Party, Kisan and Mazdoor Conference) had announced Tehreek’s eventual goal to be popular sovereignty and full citizenship rights in an independent Kashmir state. Sheikh Abdullah’s National Conference had adopted manifesto Naya Kashmir (“New Kashmir”) in 1944, which laid out this vision of independence in some detail. But then he not only went back on his party’s own popular stance on the question of sovereignty, he had, even more tragically, done so during the ethnic cleansing happening in Jammu. Indeed, as Tehreek history-writers like to point out, Abdullah’s decision faced opposition, not only from other parties in Kashmir but also from members within his own party.24 But those who opposed him were excluded, exiled, and gradually silenced.

24 The original party to come out of the 1931 movement was called Muslim Conference, from which National Conference split off in 1939. National Conference claimed support of significant sections of Kashmiri peasantry. Yet, another party called Kisan Mazdoor (Peasant and Worker) Conference also claimed support of the peasantry. Kisan Mazdoor Party first supported independence and later the idea of accession to Pakistan over accession to India. Those who had remained as part of the Muslim Conference supported an independent state, even if under a constitutional monarchy. Kashmir’s Socialist Party, a small group of people sensing Dogra intentions, chose to support accession to Pakistan. In short none of the parties supported accession to India in Kashmir. There was just one party in Jammu, Praja Parishad, which represented the interests of small group of upper-caste Hindu landlords in Jammu, which vehemently supported accession to India.
Around the same time, the idea of an independent Kashmir had found a brief, but a more concrete manifestation. In the south-western regions of the Kashmir state, where Muslim Conference was dominant, a provisional independent state called “Azad Kashmir” (Free Kashmir) had been declared. Yet, Azad Kashmir, as a truly free state, lasted only a few weeks before it was formally taken over by Pakistan. This nominally free state remained under Pakistani control after the India-Pakistan war of 1947-49, which ended after the UNSC resolutions led to a ceasefire but not the withdrawal of the two militaries from the areas under their control at that time.

“Nation” and the ghost of Sheikh Abdullah

Given the checkered legacy of the “first freedom struggle,” the key question that Tehreek history-writers ask themselves, in the context of the 1990 uprising, has been how to “safeguard the struggle from within” and take it to its mantaqi anjaam (logical conclusion), without “failing” yet again. While it is critical for them to contest the Indian accounts as well as revisit the role of Kashmiri leaders in the 1947 debacle, they understand the question of safeguarding the struggle from within as “creating a people conscious of the past,” who can “hold their leaders accountable.” Accordingly, their work raises historical consciousness among Kashmiris. The words of a youth activist from Anantnag, discussing Zahir-ud-Din’s essays, suggests what this might mean:

India controls our minds by trying to make their occupation of Kashmir look like a natural historical fact, as if this is how our life was supposed to be, as if this is the only possibility there was. The government tells us to forget the past and azadi, instead work towards “development” [his air quotes]. They tell us there is no other way. But these essays want to tell people azadi is
possible; we were once very close to achieving it. To achieve azadi, we need to become a _ba-sha’oor qaum_ [“dignified national community”].

On one side, Tehreek history-writers expose the violence embedded within official accounts of Kashmiri history and disrupt its normalization in everyday discourse. On the other, they also attempt to reconstruct a _ba-sha’oor qaum—a new_ people—as Shakil Bakshi put it. This latter idea is often vaguely defined as a “people capable of learning from the past,” but without any usual linguistic or religious undertones. I will try to explain ahead why the idea of a “dignified nation” may not have found a more concrete definition in Tehreek narratives.

Several commentators have argued that the dramatic scenes witnessed in Kashmir in 1990 expressed an emergent- or proto-nationalism (Varshney 1991; Bose 2003). Some of these assertions presume that the ideas of nationalism had either been absent previously, or, more problematically, these ideas had all by themselves acquired a historical momentum resulting in the uprising. In Bose’s (2003) more nuanced view, the manipulation of elections in Kashmir is seen to have finally driven people to challenge India. It is widely accepted that the Indian establishment had reduced “democracy” in Kashmir to an exercise of hand-selecting loyalist Kashmiri politicians in farcical elections,25 but these accounts fail to explain why it was only the rigged elections of 1987, and not those held over the previous forty years, that had led to the mass mobilization and armed movement.

Kashmiri _qaum_ or nation, as an idea, had existed long before its proclaimed emergence in 1990. For Tehreek history-writers, “nationalism” as a language of belonging represents an earlier, though besmirched stage within Tehreek. This stage is the era of 1940s and 1950s, the only time when an effort was made in Kashmir to turn “nation-building” into an actual, state-

25 See Chapter 4 for an ethnographic account of elections in Kashmir. Also see Kak (2014) for another good account on Kashmiri elections.
oriented project. This nationalism, represented by the figure of Sheikh Abdullah, had failed to take the project toward popular sovereignty. In 1939, Sheikh Abdullah had forged the National Conference, out of the Muslim Conference, as a nationalist party. The National Conference claimed to represent all the subjects of the Dogra state, and not just Muslims. But in the aftermath of his endorsement of the accession treaty, Abdullah found himself vacillating between the idea of a Kashmiri national identity and an Indian one. Since Indian leaders sought to centralize the state, the contradiction between the Kashmiri and the Indian national identities became accentuated. (Perhaps, if Indian leaders had pursued a confederal postcolonial order—which Abdullah had been led to believe—things might have turned out differently).

As Tehreek history-writers see it, by endorsing the accession, Abdullah had “betrayed people’s love.” Yet, people appear not to have protested Abdullah (at least not en masse), nor did he face rebellion within his own ranks. Tehreek history-writers, like Zahir-ud-Din, give two reasons for this. First, Abdullah had kept a critical part of his “promise”: carrying out comprehensive land reforms, which provided immediate relief to the Kashmiri peasantry. Second, Abdullah’s emergent frictions with India, which came to a head in 1953, were interpreted in Kashmir as a hope that Abdullah would eventually lead them to freedom from India too, just as he had led them in the struggle against the Dogra state.

In 1953, India removed Abdullah as the Prime Minister of Kashmir and arrested him. While Abdullah spent years in prison, his former deputies denounced him, and jockeyed for power and Indian patronage. Under them, the suppression of dissent, which had already started under Abdullah, became more intense. This jockeying for power and suppression of dissent allowed the Indian state to become more intrusive in the public affairs of Kashmir, eroding even the “autonomy” that was part of the accession treaty. When Abdullah was finally allowed to
return to Kashmir in 1975, the conditions for his rehabilitation included that he drop the idea of Plebiscite, which some of his loyalists had adopted as a slogan after 1953 for their new party, Plebiscite Front. In return, his family was assured a slice of power and patronage in Kashmir, but it earned him no goodwill from the Kashmiri masses. Yet, why people had accepted Abdullah for so long, could not be explained simply based on his land reforms or his frictions with India.

Given this background, Tehreek history-writers are wary of turning the idea of “nation,” as it had come to be associated with the politics of National Conference, into a “romantic ideal.” Nationalism associated with the failure of post-1947 Kashmiri politics is seen neither as a consistent nor desirable idea. If anything, by acceding to the overall dominance of Indian nationalism, nationalists like Abdullah had, in the eyes of Tehreek history-writers, only paid “lip service to Kashmiri nationalism.” Abdullah’s brand of nationalism had ended up initiating a “gradual dissolution of Kashmiris as a people.” As the logic of Indian nationalism demanded, the Kashmiri nation would have to gradually assimilate into the “Indian national mainstream.”

Nevertheless, most Tehreek history-writers resent that the figure of Abdullah and his National Conference had been allowed to appropriate the entire idea of the nation. JKLF, which led the 1990 uprising, had attempted to reinstate the question of “nation.” In some respects, JKLF had even succeeded in separating it from National Conference and reorient it toward its original intent: establishing popular sovereignty in Kashmir. Yet, the idea had faltered again within a few years, this time under the onslaught of the Pakistani-backed Islamist groups in Kashmir. The Islamist groups, like Jama’at Islami and Hizbul Mujahideen, contended that “nationalism” as an ideological form needed to be overcome (that nationalism was “unIslamic”), even though “Kashmiris-as-a-nation” remained their strategic refrain based on which they alone could make political claims, like the demand for self-determination. For Tehreek history-writers,
the pro-Pakistani Islamist position on nationalism is “hypocritical,” because these groups want to replace Kashmiri nationalism with Pakistani nationalism.

Caught between the “lip service nationalism” of the National Conference and the “hypocritical nationalism” of the pro-Pakistan parties, Tehreek history-writers saw the task of Tehreek as a critical imperative: to create a “new people.” “Not a nation of cattle,” as Shakil Bakshi put it, “But a people conscious of their past, who cannot be betrayed again.” The solution to the always interrupted, always insufficient becoming of the people was seen to lie in the retelling of Kashmir’s history—both its “grievous” chapters (1846 and 1947) as well as the moments that represented “resistance” (1931 and 1989-90). Attesting to this political imperative, a Tehreek history-writer at an event marking the “Indian invasion of October 26, 1947” told his audience:

So much has been hidden from the people, they must know the truth, even if that truth is bitter and it might lead us to dislike ourselves.

History as identity?

Artifice and the ideological construction of “Kashmiriyat”

From the beginning, the Indian establishment’s response to Tehreek had been a tough, multi-faceted effort to discredit the movement. Apart from the military crackdown and the emergency laws, government functionaries would often remind Kashmiris that “the clock could not be turned back” and that “Azadi had already come in 1947.” In 1994, India’s parliament pronounced Kashmir to be an “integral part of India,” and declared that “attempts to separate it
from the rest of the country will be resisted by all necessary means.”  

This pronouncement closed the possibility of carrying out the UNSC resolutions, especially the plebiscite, which had become the legal basis for the “Kashmir Dispute.”  

The state media declared Tehreek to be a “Pakistani conspiracy.” Kashmiris who had joined the movement were regularly described as *gumrah naujawan* (misled youngsters), Tehreek activists as “Islamic fundamentalists,” and Tehreek itself as a symptom of “Muslim communalism.”

If the “tough” face of the state saw Kashmiris as extremists liable to punitive containment, there was a “soft” face of the state too. This face proceeded to ideologically justify India’s control over Kashmir based on a contradictory discourse. A shared “secular culture” of a harmonious coexistence of Muslims and Hindus linked Kashmiris with India, instead of with Pakistan, to the extent that Kashmir represented India’s “secular crown” (Engineer 1991). Some commentators saw Kashmir as a syncretic, civilizational “melting pot” of Islamic and Hindu mysticisms, unsuited to a confessional Pakistan, but occupying a position as vital within India as that of “ancient Greece in European Civilization” (Puri 1995, 60). This “culture” was given a rather unimaginative, and a hastily invented name: “Kashmiriyat.”

On one side, therefore, Kashmiris were depicted as “communal separatists” for demanding independence, on the other, they also possessed a “secular, syncretic culture”—of course, only if they accepted Indian authority. As part of this ideological construction of Kashmiriyat, the Indian state could not completely deny the existence of Kashmiris as a people,

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26 Indian leaders had in fact taken this stance since early 1950s, but its clearest expression was the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) Resolution of February 22, 1994, which was passed unanimously. See more in Chapter 5 on the consequences of this resolution.

27 “Kashmir Dispute” is the term used to describe the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the basis of which are the UNSC resolutions. But Tehreek parties, principally JKL, claim the main dispute is between the people of Kashmir and the two states of India and Pakistan.
but their peoplehood was mandated only in terms of a transient regional (linguistic) identity that would eventually meld into or be subsumed under the singular Indian national identity.\textsuperscript{28}

For Tehreek history-writers, in contrast, Kashmiriyat was to be opposed, in the way the Indian state used the idea. As Zahir-ud-Din put it, “The state uses the concept to whitewash the actual historical experiences of Kashmiri Muslims who had been exclusively oppressed under the Dogras and the Indian state.” The notion of “harmonious coexistence” between, what they describe as, the “dominant Hindu minority” and the “dominated Muslim majority,” had glossed over the historically “antagonistic political and economic positions” within the state structures that the two had occupied. Not to mention the term had limited “Kashmiri culture” to a single relation, “Hindu-Muslim,” to the exclusion of other complex relations that intersected daily life in Kashmir.

It was no surprise, then, when one history-writer bitterly called Kashmiriyat a “histortion,” a portmanteau expression consisting of history and distortion (probably his own invention). Using a Kashmiri expression, he claimed the term to be a noon phol (a lump of salt), which, when forced into the mouths, makes people to lose their tongue. To him, the Indian discourse of Kashmiriyat had left Kashmiris unable to articulate their politics coherently, until the 1990 uprising ruptured that “hegemony.” Because of the rupture, the limited notion of Kashmiriyat, deployed as a legitimating idea behind the occupation, was called into question. This was also the time when the Hindu majoritarian impulses behind “Indian secularism” were coming to the surface,\textsuperscript{29} leaving Kashmiriyat with no parallel ideal in India. In the eyes of

\textsuperscript{28} Within the Indian context, “secularism” is not primarily defined as the separation of religion and the state, but as the state’s “equidistance” from different, recognized religions. The equidistance is hardly achievable given that majoritarianism is expressly the defining aspect of the political landscape, vividly exhibited in the way Hindu nationalist parties in India secure power by appealing to the religious identity of the majority.

\textsuperscript{29} Around the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Hindu right-wing had grown into a full-blown movement in India. Numerous Hindu nationalist parties were coordinating to occupy the center-stage of Indian political and cultural life.
Tehreek history-writers, the transition of India’s political culture toward Hindu majoritarianism made the official discourse of secularism, especially in relation to Kashmir, anachronistic, and even disingenuous.

Tehreek history-writers, however, do not dismiss the idea of secularity as such. They rather see it as a deeply pluralist “ethos,” a feature they believe Kashmiris share with Indians, but also with Pakistanis and other peoples of the subcontinent. As ethos, secularity stays beneath the realm of state secularism. It is not a state project, but an interpersonal ethic. It is embedded and interwoven within the everyday life in Kashmiri villages or urban neighborhoods. According to Tehreek history-writers, then, this ethos needs to be historically reclaimed for its intrinsic meaning. Tehreek history-writers point out, for instance, that while the Dogra monarchy and the Indian state had “fostered differences” between Muslims and Hindus as a state policy, Kashmiris must not trap themselves within a “communalist perspective,” nor allow state propaganda to define Kashmiri Muslim identity in “sectarian” terms. It was the depth of this pluralist ethos that had bound Kashmiris together, despite the uneasy political differences that often ran along identitarian lines.

Given this understanding, Tehreek history-writers see the Indian claim that “Kashmir is an integral part of India” as one based on the territorial impulse behind Hindu nationalism instead of a “shared secular culture.” The Indian claim posits a conception of the state’s “national space” that conveniently overlaps with the Hindu nationalist conception of India as the sacred geo-body of the deity Bharat Mata (or, goddess Mother India). Tehreek history-writers suggest that Kashmir as “secular crown” is the crown of Bharat Mata. As a territorial deity, Bharat Mata, is often depicted in Hindu nationalist iconography as standing in front of the map of India,

This had culminated in the destruction of a medieval Muslim mosque in Ayodhya, a north Indian town which was followed by widespread attacks on Muslims in India (Jaffrelot 1996 and 2007).
astride a tiger or lion, and bedecked with weapons and ornate jewelry (Ramaswamy 2010). In these depictions, the goddess’s crown sits exactly where Kashmir is located on the map.

For Tehreek history-writers, peeling away the multiple layers of state discourse on Kashmir or challenging Indian secularism is only one part of the problem. The other part is to replace this discourse with an alternative, coherent account that can become the ground for a new Kashmiri political subjectivity. As already stated, Tehreek history-writers frame the events of 1989-90 as “historic.” In my view, doing so expresses a desire to narrate the Tehreek uprising as “revolutionary,” and to plot an alternative history of Kashmir in terms of “resistance” and “struggle”—expressions I often heard Tehreek history-writers use. In this alternative history, the main actors will no longer be the states (India or Pakistan) or the statesmen (Nehru, Jinnah, Gandhi). Neither will its driving logic be territorial expansionism masked as nationalist fictions (Kashmir neither as India’s “secular crown” nor as Pakistan’s “jugular vein”). “The new history,” as Zahir-ud-Din says, “would be centered on the Kashmiri people and their sentiments.”

In some ways, the contours and elements of such an endeavor are not hard to locate. Kashmir has had a rather continuous, dialogic tradition of Sanskrit-Persian writings that can be broadly seen as mytho-historical in content. Drawn from kāvyās and tāreekhs, this tradition locates Kashmir as a cultural-political realm of its own. In these accounts, as historian Chitralekha Zutshi points out, Kashmir is imagined as a “specific mulk” or country (2013, 215). Yet, these accounts are written from the perspectives of the ruling dynasties, validating their rule, and composed in languages of power. So, while these works can become cultural reservoirs for the kinds of pluralist accounts Tehreek history-writers want to write, they hardly aid in the task

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30 Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Mohandas Gandhi, are the key figures whose actions and words have been a constant subject of the historical accounts of 1947, the Partition of the subcontinent, and the occupation of Kashmir.
of writing a “people’s history.” Even this pluralist tradition faces challenge from communalist paradigms that grew first under the Dogras and then under Indian rule. These paradigms also present internal challenges to Tehreek history-writing in Kashmir, as the example below will illustrate.

Communalist histories

Before I had watched Ghulam Qadir Lone’s talk “J&K History” [Lone 2014], I was acquainted with the “communalist” problem in Kashmiri history writing. The communalist view involved taking the difference in “Hindu” and “Muslim” historical experiences in Kashmir as a given. The communalist mode of history writing in the subcontinent had initially developed under British historians of India. Emphasizing the religion followed by the ruling dynasties, British historians divided the subcontinental history into the Hindu, the Muslim, and the colonial periods. In many such accounts, the “Muslim period” was presented as a long history of oppression of Hindus, who had finally been liberated by the enlightened British rule. This mode of history writing was then selectively appropriated by Hindu nationalist historians in India, and later by Pakistani historians. Hindu nationalist historians saw ancient India as a “golden age” under Hindu monarchs, which was interrupted first by “foreign Muslim invaders” and then by the British colonizers. Pakistani historians, on the other hand, took as their primary interest the era beginning with the first time a Muslim Arab army arrived in the subcontinent.

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31 James Mill’s six volume The History of British India (first published 1818) was a key text that created such a periodization.
32 For problems with this communal periodization in India, see Torri (2014).
33 In this tradition, R. C. Majumdar’s History and Culture of the Indian People (first volume issued 1951) is the most sophisticated, if deeply flawed work.
(712 CE) and ending with the birth of Pakistan. Both Hindu and Muslim communal historiography sees history as a long process of separate “national” struggles culminating in the formation of India and Pakistan respectively.

In Kashmir, a similar communalist mode of history writing had developed, first under the Dogra patronage and then supported by the Indian government. It had adopted key elements of Hindu nationalist historiography. There had been a “Hindu golden age” before the 13th century in Kashmir. But the Hindu kingdom had frayed toward the end, due to its “effeminate” kings, “selfish” queens, and its “visionless” gurus. Into the chaos had walked “foreigners”—who became the first Muslim rulers of Kashmir (Parmu 1969, 77-86). Then, an Islamic preacher Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani (1314-1384 CE) arrived from Iran and converted Hindus to Islam. For the next several hundred years, primarily under the Muslim sultans of Kashmir, Hindus were oppressed (except under Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin). This had largely continued through the Mughal and the Afghan eras until 1819. As Kashmir became predominantly Muslim, the small minority of Brahmins had finally found reprieve under the Dogras after 1846. Kashmir’s “integration” into a Hindu India was, thus, a natural culmination of this history. The Hindu communalist history writing presents Islam as “foreign” to Kashmir, and Pandits as its “indigenous” victims. The obvious question this mode of history writing did not address was what to do with the experiences of most Kashmiris who practiced Islam but were not part of the tiny ruling Muslim

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34 Prominent in this tradition is A Short History of Pakistan (Volumes I—IV), edited by Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi. However, the first volume by Ahmad Hassan Dani, an archaeologist, includes a detailed account of the pre-Islamic societies of the region.

35 Parmu’s account is one of the more sophisticated versions of this communal mode of history production, even though he would describe his own work as part of the Indian nationalist tradition. Parmu laments the 14th century loss of Hindu sovereignty in Kashmir and sees the “establishment of Islam” in Kashmir as part of the “Reign of terror.” His account of five hundred years of Muslim Sultans, Mughals and Pathans (Afghans) is mostly based on their treatment of Kashmiri Hindus. Only Zain-ul-Abedin (1420-70) is lauded for giving exalted status to Hindus and allowing reconversion to Hinduism, while his predecessor and successors are demonized as “the age of gangsters.”
dynasties. Were their experiences to be considered “foreign?” In any case, could the complex, seven-hundred-year-long story of Islamic faith in Kashmir be excised from history?

That is why when I watched Ghulam Qadir Lone’s talk [Lone 2014], I saw his narrative possessing a form similar to the communalist accounts, but from the other side:

Elements of the Rishi (a local mystic) movement had existed prior to the arrival of Islam in Kashmiri society. On the urging of Mir Hamdani, who visited Kashmir thrice [1372-1383 CE], a section of Rishis became Muslim. Sheikh Noorudin [b. 1377 CE], whose poetry has pre-Islamic and post-Islamic parts, took bayat [oath] with Hamdani’s Sufi teachings. Islamic principles became central to Rishiyat, which had previously not included emphasis on religious practices as such. Yet, several elements of Rishiyat even now remain unIslamic, and are qabil-e-tardeed [deserve rejection]. Hamdani’s Tehreek had involved a dawat [missionary preaching] of Islam, but this peaceful spread of religion had led to a cultural toleration of pre-Islamic traditions.

After Hamdani, dawat-e-Islam [inviting the unconverted to Islam] stopped, and it just became isha’at-e-Islam [preaching Islam to the converted]. Unfortunately, Hamdani, who was almost a contemporary of Ibn-Taymiyya,36 had not mentioned Ibn-Taymiyya at all—so there was not enough push to Islamize society. Yet, Hamdani’s work stood in contrast to Islamic political thinkers who had emphasized the conversion of non-Muslim rulers who would then islah’a [correct, purify] the society. Kashmir had had Muslim rulers since the 1320s, but it was not until Hamdani that Islam truly became embedded.37

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36 Taqi-a-Din Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE) born near Harran, close to the present day Syrian-Turkish border, was an iconoclastic Sunni theologian and logician who decried the accumulation of non-Islamic practices among Muslim societies. He had defined “un-Islamic” as anything that did not conform with the teachings of the Quran and the practices of Prophet Muhammad.

37 The first Muslim ruler had been a Ladakhi convert from Buddhism, Rinchan, who had waded into Kashmir’s chaos when the ruling Hindu Lohara dynasty came under threat of a Mongol attack in 1320 CE. He had converted after meeting with a Muslim sufi, Bulbul Shah. Rinchan married a Hindu noble woman to gain acceptance among Kashmiris but was attacked and died of his wounds in 1323 CE. For a few years, the old Loharas returned. Then in 1338, Rinchan’s Hindu widow, who had married a Lohara, became the queen. In 1339, a Muslim general in her army, Shah Mir, married her, took over the throne, and established the Shahmiri Sultanate that lasted until 1561 CE.
Central to our history has been a desire for knowledge. Sultan Zainul Abidin had *alm-i-zauq* [passion for knowledge]; he brought scholars of Sanskrit and Persian together. But the Mughals, who overtook Kashmir through deceit, humiliated the Kashmiri Chak rulers and changed our social nature. We were fiercely independent-minded, but they turned us into being slavish. A tragic fact of history is that it was a few sectarian Sunni *alims* [scholars] who invited Mughals to Kashmir. Mughals were Muslims, but their character had a stain: they never kept their word. When Afghans came, they treated us like beasts of burden. Dogra rule arrived as a *qayamat* [catastrophe]. They imposed the death penalty for cow slaughter. For a murder, a Muslim would receive the death penalty, but a Hindu could just pay 12 rupees, out of which 2 would go to the victim’s family, and 10 into the royal treasury.

The arrival of Islam in Kashmir had brought great progress: our handicrafts, our art, and our culture saw a renaissance. We became *Iran-e-saghir* [Little Iran]. By the time the Dogras were finished with us, we didn’t even have trousers left in our culture anymore.38 Now India tells us don’t eat beef. We accept it. We don’t even ask why.

Ghulam Qadir Lone is an Arabic scholar from Rafiabad in North Kashmir. Author of several books, which include an exegetical composition on Sufi thought and a comparative work on philosophers Muhammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche, he speaks regularly to his devoted followers in Fallah-u-Darien, an Islamic charity group in North Kashmir.39 A few months before his talk had been video-recorded by members of Falluh-u-Darein, the government had arrested

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38 One of the stories about Dogra rule goes that they had barred Kashmiris from wearing trousers—but maybe this was more a result of the general penury the Dogras had caused. Even in pre-Dogra eras, men and women wore long tunics with no trousers.

39 Dr. Lone’s works are in Urdu: *Mutala e Tasawuf: Quran wa sunnat ki roshini mein* (“Meaning of Mysticism: In the light of Quran and Sunnat”), *Iqbal aur Nietzsche* [“Iqbal and Nietzsche”], *Qurun e wusta mein Musalmaan sciencedaamon ke kaarname* [“Achievements of Muslim Scientists influenced by the Quran”], *Hazrat Khizer: tehkeek ki roshni mein* [“Hazrat Khizer: in light of research” (2012)], and, *Iqbal ka Jahan e aadam wa Iblees* [“Adam and Satan in the Iqbalian World”].
him, charging him, as is common under the occupation, with supporting the boycott of state elections.

Lone’s historical narrative depicts Kashmir’s history as a series of trials and tribulations of Islam. His recurring trope is the strengths and weaknesses of Islamic fundamentals in society. Whatever does not fit into the logic of his view of Islam is an extraneous influence that needs to be removed. In naming Hamdani’s mission of spreading Islam as “Tehreek,” Lone draws a much longer view of the movement than is popular among Tehreek activists. Yet, for several contemporary groups, especially those supporting a merger with Pakistan, “freedom” will come when Islamic principles are firmly established.

Clearly, Lone’s historical narrative of Kashmir excludes the history of both pre-Islamic pasts as well as that of non-Muslim peoples who have inhabited Kashmir. One can, however, detect an anti-sectarian streak in his narrative. Lone is himself sunni, yet excoriates medieval sunni alims for inviting a foreign power (Mughals) to conquer Kashmir out of spite for Kashmir’s indigenous Chak dynasty which followed shi’a Islam. Additionally, the geographic reference for his perspective is Kashmir and not the larger, geographically fluid Islamic world that the Islamist ideologues often invoke. Lone’s narrative is firmly emplaced in Kashmir. Yet, his view of the history of Kashmir remains closed in on itself. Could a historical narrative that covered a broad swath of Kashmir’s past truly have an inclusive pivot? Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din’s account provides a speculative beginning to an answer.

“Origin stor(ies)”

Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din (1928-2001) was a Kashmiri short-story writer, who had developed an abiding interest in the region’s ancient past. According to his son, Azhar Hilal, while building
a house in Srinagar, Mohi-ud-Din noticed workers come across small Neolithic artifacts. He cleaned and preserve them for archaeological analysis. With growing excitement about archaeological finds at the nearby site of Burzahom (3000-1000 BCE), Mohi-ud-Din began to take a critical look at the myths about Kashmir’s past that had passed for historical facts. The Dogra state had enthusiastically authorized historical accounts centered on Hindu mythology, and British colonial officials, who dabbled in history and Sanskrit philology on the side, had lent credibility to such pursuits. Post-1947, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), an old colonial-era institution, gave these originary myths a scientific veneer by supporting projects that would conduct “empirical research” in light of Hindu epics and myths. In survey after survey, for instance, the ASI focused on locating pre-Islamic Hindu artifacts in Kashmir, taking as its guide such literary texts as the epic *Mahabharata.*

In response to this lack of institutional openness toward any alternative narrative of Kashmir’s past, Mohi-ud-Din decided to write his *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir* (1998). A small monograph, it sought to reinterpret and revise Kashmir’s past by marshalling evidence from new advances in the study of Kashmiri language and archeology. Determined to upset the traditional gatekeepers of Kashmiri historiography, Mohi-ud-Din raised playful doubts about the predominant “origin story” of Kashmir (see below). For him, origin stories were tales that the dominant told the dominated. Taken to their extremes, however, these stories could become exclusionary and violent. Nevertheless, the seriousness of his purpose aside, Mohi-ud-Din sought to open a conversation about possible “other histories” rather than to assert

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40 Conversation recorded with Azhar Hilal in August 2014.
41 The prehistoric settlement of Burzahom was first excavated in 1939 by a joint Yale-Cambridge expedition, and during the 1960s further excavation was done by the Archaeological Survey of India. Most of the finds have been ground stone axes, bone tools, gray burnished pottery, and pit-like features.
“objectivity” against the mythic, dominant account. The dominant origin story of Kashmir went something like this:42

First, there was a lake called Satisar. Sanghraha, the chief of daityas (opponents of Aryan gods), saw the Aryan god Indra cavort with his wife Sachi on the banks of the lake. In a fit of passion for Sachi, Sanghraha released his semen into the lake. From this semen was born an evil demon Jalodbhava (literally, “the water-born”), who the snake-worshipping community of Nagas raised. Jalodbhava did penance and earned immortality from an Aryan god, but soon began to devour humans (the Aryan children of Manu inhabiting its four varnas). A conference of the Aryan gods, which the itinerant sage Kashyapa had called, decided to kill the demon. The Naga chief Nila was taken into confidence. Afraid of the Aryan gods, but confident of his immortality, Jalodbhava jumped into the lake and remained hidden beneath water. Kashyapa ordered the Himalayas around the lake to be broken with a plough. As the water poured out, and Jalodbhava came into view, the Aryan god Hari fought Jalodbhava and cut off his head. As a penalty for raising Jalodbhava, Kashyapa ordered Nila’s Nagas to live among the Pisćasas (the cruel, lowly race of meat eating half-humans) for a four-fold epoch (or chaturyuga), after which they could live among the Aryans. Kashyapa assured everyone that Pisćasas would always remain weak and dominated. The dried lakebed became Kashmir, after Kashyap-Mira.

To Mohi-ud-Din, the classic justifications for the caste order, its associated notions of purity and impurity, and the sexual anxieties of the Brahmin overlords was obvious. But this was no ordinary story of good versus evil. It set forth a complex narrative matrix upon which contemporary politics in and on Kashmir had remained bitterly divided. Before Mohi-ud-Din, the tale had never been challenged. A few medieval Muslim chroniclers had incorporated elements

42 This is an abridged account based on a reading of the origin story in Kalhana’s Rajatarangini, (12th CE, Aurel Stein ed.).
of this myth in their Persian accounts. Since, the origin story had been propagated mostly in Sanskrit and Persian texts, with strong references to Vedic culture, it was not part of the oral tradition among Kashmiris (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 30).

In my own repeated attempts to get a sense of how popular this story was, I hardly found anyone, even among older people, who could narrate it in full or even in part. Instead, I often heard people refer to the story of Sheikh Nooruddin (“Nund-reosh,” 1377-1440 CE) and Lalla (“Lal Ded,” 1320-1392 CE). Nund-reosh and Lal Ded, popular among both Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir, are the patron spiritual saints of Kashmiris. They are the first ones who elevated the Kashmiri language (or “Koshur”) to a literary-poetic status. Nund wrote his verse as shroks, Lal had written hers as vatsun. Both shroks and vatsun are inflected by Shaivite and Sufi thought. Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus claim both as their own. Muslims see Lal, a Brahmin renouncer, as the founder of the Rishis as well as a spiritual mother to Nund. Hindus see Nund, a Muslim, as a yogi in his own right. Neither denies the impress of others’ faith in their poetry and spirituality. Only in recent years, have some Muslim and Hindu intellectuals in Kashmir begun to emphasize Nund’s Muslimness and Lal’s Hinduness (Hoskote 2011, xxviii-xxx). Despite their efforts, however, the Nund-Lal story, a delicate, composite tradition—like a Kashmiri shawl—remains inextricably interwoven into popular memory.

Indian nationalist historians have, nevertheless, maintained the Kashyapa story as the key origin story. Even those who claim to be “secular” remain beholden to it, and read any attempt to

43 Shaivism, a monist metaphysical tradition involving yogic practice to attain moksha, emerged in Kashmir around 850 CE. Sufism goes back to the early years of Islam in the 8th CE. Formalized as doctrines centuries later, it established spiritual practices to pass through four stages of purification (suf) to arrive at haq. Sufism arrived in Kashmir around the time Lal was reaching her poetic maturity and Nund was a young boy.
44 Despite his dispassionate discussion of this narrow politics of appropriation, Hoskote is himself keen to place Lal within a Sanskrit cultural world and thought, instead of the Kashmiri one in which Lal wrote, and for which she remains popular. Hoskote, questionably, suggests that contemplating poetic, spiritual thought in Kashmiri must have been improbable for Lal, and provides no evidence in support of this assertion.
question the myth as a sign of “Muslim communalism,” or even, strangely, a fall into the evils of “objectivism.” For Mohi-ud-Din, there was no logical, aesthetic, or ethical reason to believe that the Kashyapa story was a “historical truth,” and, especially, *no reason not to speculate about other possible stories*, which if nothing else could at least pluralize the Kashmiri narrative tradition.

Instead of challenging Brahmins for sacralizing myths, which he rightly thought was no crime, Mohi-ud-Din took on British colonial historians who had overly relied on Sanskrit texts and presented myths as history (1998, 40). Prominent among these was Aurel Stein, a Hungarian-British archaeologist, a “Great Game” strategist, and a translator of *Rajatarangini*.45 *Rajatarangini*, or River of Kings, a 12th CE kavya (long Sanskrit poem) written by Kalhana, presented a chronology of kingly events in Kashmir and an imaginative account of Kashmiri geography. Parts of the poem, most importantly the origin story, were probably drawn from an eighth century Sanskrit text called *Nilamata Purana*, which falls into the genre of the Brahmin oral and textual tradition that records the legends of gods and goddesses, among other things.

Aurel Stein hadn’t been interested in simply translating the classic text, as Mohi-ud-Din realized. He had set out to unearth the cultural world to which Kalhana had belonged, and which, Stein thought, had become subsequently “polluted.” To do this, Stein took the twelfth-century place-names from *Rajatarangini* to locate their correlates in twentieth-century Kashmir. In doing this, Stein almost pre-figured to a letter the ASI’s program in Kashmir half a century later, only this time ASI’s archeo-nationalists would be armed with a different poem, the *Mahabharata*.

What surprised Mohi-ud-Din was that Stein had always been able to definitively locate the place-

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45 Stein was a student of a prominent Indologist Georg Buhler who, under the patronage of the Dogras, had begun work on Kashmiri Sanskrit texts in 1870 in collaboration with the Pandits of Kashmir. Stein also worked with Pandit collaborators when he arrived in Kashmir in 1888.
names found in *Rajatarangini*, although in a “corrupted” form. It was as if Kashmir’s history in the aftermath of “classical Sanskrit” times had just been a long period of stasis or cultural degeneration; as if nothing had moved fundamentally, everything had just collected dust and grass. For Stein, scholarly work meant separating what was “pure,” Sanskrit or *deva bhaśa* (language of the gods), from what was “corrupted,” Kashmiri or *loka bhaśa* (language of the commoners). Kashmiri Muslims, in Stein’s scheme, were sitting atop a vast Sanskrit culture, which had to be recovered and its primacy reestablished. *Rajatarangini* was to be the guiding map. This was sweet music to the Dogra maharaja’s ears, who was keen to consolidate his reputation as a Hindu king ruling over a sacred Hindu domain—even though more than three-quarters of his subjects were Muslim.

While Mohi-ud-Din saw Stein’s entire approach as flawed, he took issues with Stein’s “shoddy” methods. Stein had, according to Mohi-ud-Din, been quite casual in his research, going to Kashmiri villagers and asking questions to which the latter would have no way of providing valid answers. With generous help from his Pandit informants, Stein mostly asked about place-names and then “twisted” his findings enough to make what he had heard sound like names he had read in the *Rajatarangini* (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 42-62). Here is what Mohi-ud-Din had to say:

> We Kashmiris are generally intelligent conversationalists…But when it comes to spinning yarn, God bless us! …I wonder how it happened that Sir Aurel Stein always got the right answers to his queries, or was it that his subordinates prompted the interviewees to say exactly what was palatable to their Bod Sahib (the big colonial boss)? (1998, 77).

The Pandits had found in their Bod Sahib not only a sympathetic listener, but one who went beyond their interest in maintaining a myth, to being a zealous defender of the mythic origin story as the historical truth. In Mohi-ud-Din’s view, Stein had done a service to Kashmir
by making the *Rajatarangini* available to a much larger audience, but at the same time he had done a disservice to Kashmir by contributing to turning a mythical story, which was part of Kashmir’s cultural repertoire, into an ideological project. Interestingly, Romila Thapar, who sees *Rajatarangini* as a historical *kaavya* rather than a fictional *kaavya*, claims that Aurel Stein had wrongly argued that the text was intended to be for “didactic religion and not history.” According to Thapar, while Kalhana had called his writing *kaavya*, this should not be treated to be a disclaimer for his writing to be seen as history. She even approves of the view that *Rajatarangini*’s historical nature could be attributed to a “demarcation of Kashmir, suggesting a sense of nationalism at the time” (Thapar 2013, 598-599). It is, however, a mistake to treat all parts of *Rajatarangini* as historical in nature—except the part where Kalhana was writing about his own era. It is an even bigger mistake to talk about a “sense of nationalism” in 12th century Kashmir, even though one can clearly state that a sense of Kashmir as an autonomous geographic realm may very well have existed. Kalhana himself did not associate his work with the masses, whose language he saw as a “vulgur speech fit for drunkards” (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 30).

To present an alternative “origin story,” Mohi-ud-Din sought inspiration from two major sources. First, he read George Abraham Grierson’s *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Language* (1898). Upturning conventional wisdom that Sanskrit was the mother language of all others, Grierson had argued that Kashmiri had more likely emerged from an older group of subcontinental languages closely related to Dardic. Second, Mohi-ud-Din had closely followed the latest archaeological discoveries at sites such as Burzahom in Srinagar as well as the analysis of artefacts found in Indus Valley Civilization sites. These new findings indicated that the Indus Valley Civilization, which preceded the Aryan arrival/invasions into the subcontinent in 1500 BCE by about two millennia, had probably extended into Kashmir. Mohi-ud-Din himself went
around archeological sites in Srinagar to collect terracotta figurines and pottery shards, and interpreted his findings with remarkable sophistication to support his new arguments (1998, 63-82). All of this was enough grist for Mohi-ud-Din to speculate on an alternative origin story.

To begin with, Mohi-ud-Din argued that there was a deeper culture that lay buried underneath the so-called “Sanskritic culture” Stein had been searching for, and the remnants of this deep culture had survived in Kashmiri cultural unconscious. There may have been a vast lake, he wrote, but the demon story was just a latter-day myth woven around what was essentially an invasion of Kashmir and the domination of its natives. Mohi-ud-Din also pointed out that Nagas (“snake-worshippers”) and Pisćasas (“meat-eaters”), described in Sanskrit texts as two distinct groups, were in fact one people. “Nagas” and “Pisćasas” described only their religious and cultural (their meat eating) practices, respectively. Drawing from Grierson, Mohi-ud-Din wrote, these people spoke a language close to Dardic, which itself may have been part of a language from which Dravidian languages emerged (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 10).

Mohi-ud-Din was confident that the people of the ancient urban civilization of the Indus Valley spoke something close to Dravidian. The nomadic Aryans, who arrived/invaded from the northwest around 1500 BC and may have destroyed the remnants of the Indus Valley civilization’s urban centers, took a few centuries before crossing the mountains into Kashmir. By this time, Mohi-ud-Din argues, the Aryans had lost some of their early aggression, even though it had not prevented them from relegating the natives of Kashmir to the position of sub-humans, who could not speak a “proper” language and were fit only for annihilation. Yet, much of this pre-Aryan population remained, and was absorbed into caste hierarchy as “low castes.”

After an early period of domination, Mohi-ud-Din wrote, the popular turn to Buddhism in Kashmir around 300 BCE took place because Buddhist preachers used a “novel method of
preaching through beautiful stories, parables, and fables, in their (common man’s) own tongue” (1998, 26). Buddhism in Kashmir appears thus to be a subaltern rebellion against the Brahminical caste order. The subaltern cause was helped by the conversion of the Mauryas, the dynasty that ruled Kashmir around that time, and of which Ashoka was the most powerful proponent, to Buddhism. According to Mohi-ud-Din, fragments of Buddhist stories and parables narrated in non-Sanskrit languages are still in cultural use in Kashmir, even though their origins have been forgotten. He gives the example of *svod bror* and *bodh bror*, two cats who appear in Kashmiri folk tales as wise sages, often sitting under a tree (Kashmiri: *kulis tal*), and who resolve crucial ethical dilemmas that arise in these tales. The two cats, in Mohi-ud-Din’s view, are one: *svod* is Siddhartha and *bodh* is Buddha, two names of Lord Buddha, who is often pictorially represented as meditating under a tree (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 84).

Brahminism returned in full force around 600 CE when Brahmins from South India, who arrived in Kashmir from the Konkan region, made common cause with the ossified Buddhist clergy in Kashmir. But even then, the pre-Aryan cultural practices and beliefs continued to exist, Mohi-ud-Din argues. The common Kashmiri beliefs that serpents guard springs (springs are called “Nag” in Kashmiri language) and are not malevolent, folktales in which “the snake can assume human form on Earth (snakes live in *talpatal*, or the ‘nether world’), and even fall in love with human females,” and Kashmiri practice of putting cups of milk in front of snakes, all indicate the continuity of a distant past in the present (Mohi-ud-Din 1998, 11-12). He even argues that the 8th century Kashmiri philosophical traditions and spiritual wisdom, including *shaivism* and *tantra*, had their origins in pre-Aryan systems of belief comingling with Sanskrit traditions.

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*There is a famous folktale, called “Heemal-Nagiray,” that professional Kashmiri singers still sing on occasion. The folktale is about the Snake King of the nether world falling in love with an earthly princess Heemal.*
In Mohi-ud-Din’s view, the revival of Brahminism, which lasted six centuries, produced great cultural achievements, but the return of the oppressive caste system created the perfect opportunity for a new faith to make its way into Kashmir. Like Buddhism had earlier, Islam answered this need in the 14th century. Unlike Lone, however, Mohi-ud-Din’s central thread was the common people’s struggle against the oppressive social order, not an establishment of Islamic fundamentals. In Mohi-ud-Din’s alternative account, then, the driving force of Kashmiri history has always been the lengthy interplay of forces between the subaltern reactions to the structuring hierarchies of Brahminism and its revival.47 This history could be traced back all the way to the entry of the “Aryans” into Kashmir.

Mohi-ud-Din’s *Fresh Approach* may just be another story, but it is a more plausible one than the Brahmin-Stein origin story. His narrative begins to explain how Kashmir may have swung from one religion to another. More importantly, Mohi-ud-Din also emphasizes locating historical resources that Kashmiris might employ to build a plural, accommodative cultural foundation for their politics of liberation. It came as no surprise to me that Mohi-ud-Din was quite sympathetic to Tehreek. In the early 1990s, he returned a major literary award given to him by the Indian government. He even joined the Hurriyat for some time.

Could Mohi-ud-Din’s account become the grammar for a new historical narrative? Could the fractured Kashmiri past be sutured coherently enough to create the ground for a new Kashmiri political subjectivity that will assert both its right to be and demand rights? Communalist accounts, both Hindu and Muslim, have been *subtractive* in orientation. Hindu historiography sees Hinduism as the underlying cultural matrix of Kashmiri history. It ignores

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47 Huma Dar, a Kashmiri scholar, has told me that the Persian term “azadi” derives from a combined root “a-zadi” where “zadi” is a variant of an Indic term *jati* or caste-community. Azadi is then “without-jati” or a struggle to become without caste. (Personal communication).
the pre-Brahmanic pasts in Kashmir and sees Islam as an interruption. History, in this view, has been thrown off course and can get back on track when Kashmiris cast off “foreign” Islam. Islamic historiography sees Kashmiri history as the gradual establishment of Islamic fundamentals, which, in this view, could only happen at the cost of Kashmir’s pre-Islamic culture.

Despite Mohi-ud-Din’s renouncing of Brahmanic hierarchies, one can see his notion of Kashmiri identity more as accumulative than subtractive. All the previous pasts and their contradictions continue to be present; none has been totally replaced. Brahmanism may have subjugated indigenous communities in Kashmir, but it could not eliminate them, their languages, or their practices. Buddhism may have become the dominant faith around 300 BCE, but it could not remove the power of Brahmanism. Nor could Brahmanism later, with its revival in the 8th century, remove the influence of eight hundred years of Buddhism in Kashmir. Islam may have become the religion of the court and the masses in medieval times, but it could not subdue the Brahmanical and Buddhist cultural sensibilities or practices. In the present, neither Hindu historiography nor the Islamic one appear close to the cherished purist visions they propound.

Yet, an accumulative notion of identity that could provide Tehreek a pluralist foundation is tragically upended by the subtractive logics of interstate politics in South Asia. Mohi-ud-Din’s account is essentially a historiography that presumes Kashmir as a unified, independent realm. The cultural or religious dialogues, even with their occasional frictions, happen between the indigenous peoples and Brahmins, between Buddhists and Brahmins, between Brahmins and Muslims, and between Muslims and newer communities of Sikhs, Christians and others (including new schools of Islamic thought), within Kashmir. This is not an isolated Kashmir. It is in dynamic relation to the regions beyond it. But once new peoples
become part of Kashmir, their mutual interchanges are internal to Kashmir. Mohi-ud-Din’s Kashmir is, thus, a place where contradictions exist, but they are not resolved through the removal of one or the other. A balance is reached through accommodation. Yet, this balance comes under distress when Kashmir is longer a realm of its own.

To imagine such a Kashmir under the present circumstances is a tough intellectual task. Writing an alternative history of the present would involve different symbolic and practical economies than the ones mandated by the state. How is one to enunciate the alternative, often interrupted, history of “resistance” without subsuming the amorphous category of “people” into the logics of the state and power? What does it look like to write about the past from a perspective that has been historically suppressed? These questions, which Tehreek history-writers ask of themselves, turn their acts of writing into an agonistic struggle: To excavate elements of political subjectivity from the past and rearrange them for the purposes of the present. In Zahir-ud-Din’s work, some of the contours (the beginnings, the themes, the sources, and the voices) of their alternative histories have become increasingly visible, as I show below. Zahir-ud-Din’s work also reveals the challenges the labor of writing under occupation has involved.

**Writing history under occupation**

History does not forgive anyone; we must take people to the witness box.

—Zahir-ud-Din

*The people and the “resistance”*

Zahir-ud-Din’s writing has an exhortatory and inspirational function. “To make people believe in the possibility of azadi,” he says, “the fundamental political struggle will have to be an
intellectual one. We need to present a perspective on the past that is different from what the state has imposed on us.” Drawing, thus, a seamless relationship between history and struggle, Zahir-ud-Din feels that a “truthful history,” would necessarily move his readers into political action. To me, this view about the function of history-writing didn’t seem far from how Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, sees “historicization” as neutralizing the effects of “naturalization” and giving people a “critical political experience”—which Bourdieu defines as “suspend(ing) the suspension of doubt as to the possibility that the social world could be other than what is implied in the experience of the world taken for granted” (2000, 173-182).

Yet, a commitment to re-writing history and the actual task of doing so have not proven to be the same. There are both practical and conceptual difficulties involved in Zahir-ud-Din’s work. At the practical level, for instance, Zahir-ud-Din’s human rights activism puts severe limits on his access to the state archives—of which, in any case, hardly anything of substance remains in Kashmir. Most of the government archival material has gradually been moved outside of Kashmir (to Jammu and New Delhi). The miniscule part left behind remains in a dilapidated condition. But more worrisome to him is the gradual loss of the men and women who had participated in political events since 1931. “An entire generation is dying without having told their stories,” he says. At another level, as already indicated, he feels his work is delimited by the space of discourse established by the official historical narrative. Zahir-ud-Din, and other Tehreek history-writers, feel forced to spend much of their time challenging intricate details that form part of the dominant official narrative, instead of being able to work on their more ambitious, “people’s history” projects.

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48 The Jammu and Kashmir State Archives in Srinagar is housed in an old wooden building. Very few official documents are present in the premises. During the floods of September 2014, the first floor of the building was partially flooded, and the building in general remains under threat of fire.
Conceptual difficulties for his project, says Zahir-ud-Din, are presented by the fact that he finds no models of history-writing on modern Kashmir worthy of emulation, nor a distinct, non-statist account around which a new history could be written. Several times during our interviews he sighed, and remarked, “We have just begun to write,” suggesting that any Tehreek history-writing on Kashmir would have to begin with a clean state. Such an endeavor—writing a people’s history from a clean slate—presents an obvious dilemma. If the “people” are the only legitimate subject of history then one must construct the people as one writes. And, if the events of 1989-90 are the scene in which Kashmiris had arrived as a people (as both Bakshi and Zahir-ud-Din believe), then these people would have to be plotted both as new as well as historic subjects. Since there isn’t a previous model of a people’s history in Kashmir, Tehreek history-writers would need to make the decision to deploy memories in a specific way; indeed, differently from the way the state accounts do so, but no less strategically.

In this regard, the choice of key tropes in Tehreek history-writing resonates with the people’s experiences in the present. Zahir-ud-Din considers “suffering” and “resistance” as continuous themes of Kashmir’s political history. In his view, “suffering” expresses the Kashmiri experience under the different powers that have ruled them (the Dogra state, the Indian government), and “resistance,” the disposition people have had toward these powers. As such, in his writings, the main actors, whom Zahir-ud-Din either calls “heroes” or “collaborators,” are individuals who had, respectively, stood against the state or with it. He writes especially about people who were “tortured,” “exiled,” or “killed” because of their political stance. He has been able to personally meet a few of the survivors. He calls them his “greatest archive:”
I have seen old men with iron marks on their backs; some are still alive. It is from the mouths of these people that Kashmiris must know the truth. These are people who suffered, who were exiled, who were imprisoned, who were tortured, and who participated in this struggle.

According to Zahir-ud-Din, the history of suffering and resistance, however, goes farther back, and demands recognition. “Kashmiris have always offered resistance,” Zahir-ud-Din says,

We fought the Mughals, and when they prevailed, we poured sarcasm over them; we fought the Sikh onslaught, and later our shawl-bafs (loom weavers) were the first to organize the worker’s meet on April 29, 1865; it is sad our trade union leaders would rather celebrate May 1 as the Workers’ Day and not April 29.

While this may accord well with Mohi-ud-Din’s key insight, in emphasizing resistance as an “essential part of Kashmiri history,” Zahir-ud-Din is also responding to the traditional view that Kashmiris, except on a few occasions, had been incapable of fighting their oppressive rulers. The notion that Kashmiris are “docile” or zulm parast (worshippers of cruelty) is common, and I have heard it several times from those who comment on the so-called “Kashmiri psyche.” At times Kashmiris jokingly say as much about themselves. The Dogra rulers had thought so too, which is why they seemed surprised when Kashmiris revolted in 1931. Indians believed it, enough to be caught a bit complacent in 1989-90. Even the Pakistani establishment, which some Tehreek activists consider a “friend” of Kashmiris, expressed the same view when in 1965 Kashmiris failed to rise in revolt on Pakistan’s call (in contrast to Afghans who did rise against the Soviets later), even though, according to some Islamist groups, Pakistan was “ready to go to war with India for Kashmir.”49 The new persistence of the narrative of “resistance,” therefore,

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49 Pakistan had sent guerrillas in 1965 to help launch an insurgency, but according to the Indian government there was little response in Kashmir. But as stated earlier, the burning of Batehmalyūn indicates there might have been some support. Eventually Pakistan did go to an inconclusive war with India, which if anything, weakened the Kashmiri position even more.
hides a more complex story in which resistance hasn’t always figured so prominently, but it has not been absent either.

While this genre of historical writing is still in the process of taking shape, it is in writings like those of Zahir-ud-Din’s that a wide section of Kashmiri youth first heard a panoply of names, events, and places that had remained silenced. For instance, figures like Akbar Khan who was a leader of the worker’s strike in the Government Silk Factory in 1924, or Subhan Naed, a local barber, who protested the state’s legalized practice of trafficking of young girls for prostitution in 1934, or Ghulam Nabi Gilkar, who had declared the short-lived state of Azad Kashmir in 1947. These names entered the public sphere and were celebrated.

The case of an unlikely figure named Robert Thorp is also illuminating. Thorp was a young British military officer who, having written a critical report, Cashmere Misgovernment, about the Dogra state in the late 19th century, had died soon after, probably from poisoning. Zahir-ud-Din writes that Thorp was poisoned at the maharaja’s behest, and celebrates him as a “hero.” In fact, not only did his book on the heroes of Kashmiri history, Flashback, begin with Thorp’s story, Zahir-ud-Din also declared Thorp to be the “first martyr” in Kashmir.50 While the fact of Europeans writing about Kashmir in the 19th and early 20th centuries is well known, the mention of Thorp as a “martyr” was intriguing, and had piqued my curiosity. As Thorp’s own writing became available and was increasingly circulated (Thorp 2011), Tehreek history-writers located his grave in Srinagar, and started to visit it annually to honor Thorp’s memory on his death anniversary. One local human rights organization even instituted a “Robert Thorp Award,”

50 Some Tehreek history-writers were more limited in their claims, calling Thorp a “forgotten” instead of the “first” martyr.
which was annually given until its funds were exhausted. Nevertheless, as we will see in Chapter 6, the importance of Thorp and his writing emerged from an era in Kashmir to which he had become a quintessential witness, the era that led to the events of 1931 and thus remains critical to understanding the formative elements of Kashmiri political subjectivity.

*The empire continues*

Among those in Kashmir who look to the past to find the sources of Kashmiri selfhood, Zahir-ud-Din is a paradigmatic case. His work attempts to respond, like the writings of several others who I have called Tehreek history-writers, to the sudden rupture the 1989-90 uprising produced in Kashmiri political culture. Primarily, these events destabilized the postcolonial consensus in India that claimed 1947 as the moment of freedom from colonialism. Indeed, for people in India, the year 1947 symbolizes, in however limited a sense, the moment of independence. For Kashmiris, like Zahir-ud-Din, however, it represents the opposite: the “year of colonization.” These feelings extend beyond Tehreek history-writing circles. In Kashmir, India’s Independence Day on August 15 has always failed to evoke any positive enthusiasm, unlike in India where the day is publicly celebrated. Especially since 1989-90, the day has been observed as a day of protest in Kashmir. And while Kashmir shuts down in protest on August 15 every year, the Indian authorities, as if to affirm the troubled legacy of the date, impose a curfew.

Beyond the symbolism of the year, the dissonance around 1947 extends to the way approaches to history writing have diverged in India and Kashmir. For many Indian intellectuals,

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51 The organization called Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society continues to commemorate Thorp’s death anniversary each year.

52 In Pakistan and India intellectuals and poets have asked if 1947 truly did bring “freedom,” or if it was merely a “transfer of power” to a new elite. Even during the early days of national independence, poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, had felt that freedom from colonialism had either been incomplete or distorted. The bloodshed of Partition had besmirched the idea of freedom for many, like Saadat Hasan Manto, another subcontinental poet, who like Faiz moved to Pakistan.
on the left as well as the right, 1947 represents, with the achievement of the nation-state, a sort of historical closure. Marking an end to the project of national liberation, the year gives a vantage point to Indian historians to write teleological accounts of India’s nationalist struggle. From this perspective, no major events on the scale of 1947 shall take place, nor are such events necessary any longer. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, had inaugurated this feeling clearly when he declared on August 15, 1947: “A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.” Tehreek history-writers of Kashmir, by contrast, neither see history to have ended, nor do they believe the passing of sovereignty from the Dogras to the Indian state represents stepping from “the old to the new.” If anything, 1947 marks a moment of imperial continuity rather than one of a radical rupture with the past. “Power had simply passed from one set of illegitimate rulers (the Dogra state) to the next (the Indian state),” says Zahir-ud-Din.

For Tehreek history-writers, rewriting the past is essentially about exposing this continuity and to remember its originary violence. In their view, the meaning of azadi for Kashmiris was not limited to freedom from the Dogras, but was in being able to determine the future of Kashmir. Problematically, despite the popularly articulated view in Kashmir that 1947 is not the moment of “independence” for Kashmiris, academic historiographical traditions that begin from precisely such a presumption remain.53 Such presumptions have led to simplifications, misinterpretations, or uncritical acceptance of state accounts of political events in Kashmir. For instance, Zutshi reduces the 1931 movement into a communalist mobilization

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53 In recent years, for instance, the work of Chitralekha Zutshi (2004) & (2014) on Kashmir—despite the title of her recent book Kashmir’s Contested Pasts which indicates she intends to question such historiographical presumptions—has remained wedded to the idea of 1947 as the year of Kashmir’s independence.
(2014, 211). This view feeds into a false understanding of the contemporary Tehreek as “Islamic fundamentalism,” or even “terrorism,” as if the movement has no political content. Popular in India, such narrow perspectives emphasize religious false consciousness, manipulation by religious conservatives, as well as the notion of an inherent extremism within Islam, as explanations behind the rise of Tehreek (Singh 2000). As I have tried to show, however, the central argumentative structure that materializes from Tehreek history-writings is not religious or communalist, but lends political support to the claim of the right to self-determination. At the same time, the year 1947 does not represent the event of freedom, but a violent interruption of the people’s aspiration for popular sovereignty and rights within a free Kashmir state.

Koshur Mussalman

Clearly, the pitfalls of essentializing or reifying identity are obvious (cf. Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Scott 2001). Several Tehreek intellectuals invoke Koshur Mussalman (“Kashmiri Muslim”) as the identity that primarily defines them. “Kashmiri Muslim” is both a historic construction, and a name around which several Tehreek groups have organized their politics, even though they demand self-determination for all the peoples of the historic (pre-1947) state of Kashmir. Tehreek history-writers see Kashmiri Muslim as an identity that has arisen historically from the experience of “living under one foreign rule or another,” and through “state practices of discrimination” against Kashmiri Muslim subjects/citizens. In their writings, there is neither an imagined “glorious past” nor a concept of “pure blood.” Tehreek history-writers do not invoke the idea of “collective memory” as some seamless or uncontested ground that could give fixity to an essential or coherent identity in Kashmir. If anything, Kashmiri Muslim as an identity is often deployed in strategic, yet self-consciously ironic ways to destabilize the dominant Indian nationalist ideology which not only centralizes the subcontinental history as a teleological
account of Indian nationalism, but asserts “Indian” to be the predominant and solely valid national identity. In this sense, Tehreek history-writings do not mirror Indian nationalist historiography, either in form or purpose. They remain as alternative histories, which, as one Tehreek history-writer put it, reveal what has been “concealed within the official accounts.”

In another sense, by *re*-membering the past, Tehreek history-writers account for the collective trauma in the present. While repeated transitions from “one foreign domination to the next” have turned Kashmir into a space of disorder, both in a political as well as a psychological sense, history itself takes the form of trauma. Here “trauma” is a form of experience felt as an obsessive and repetitive wound inflicted from the outside, or as Cathy Caruth has defined the term, “an event experienced (each time) too soon to be fully known” (1996, 3-4). Within this context, the work of Tehreek history-writers assumes a rather therapeutic value, one that reconstructs the events from Kashmir’s past to make sense of the dis-membered present.

**Conclusion**

*Entanglement with history*

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which Tehreek history-writers understand what they see as major events in the modern political history of Kashmir, and the importance they place on re-interpreting these events in terms of “resistance” and “struggle” for Tehreek. Through their writings, Tehreek history-writers decenter what are officially authorized accounts of the region’s political status (accounts which axiomatically see Kashmir as an “integral part” of India or view Kashmir primarily as a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan) as well as popularize alternative histories of Kashmir’s modern politics. They emphasize Kashmiri people as “political actors” and Tehreek as an “expression of their struggle.”
I have focused primarily on the perspectives of Tehreek history-writers because their writings have, since the historic events of 1989-90, acquired a wide and receptive audience in Kashmir, despite persistent state attempts to marginalize their voices within a repressively controlled space. Through an analysis of their viewpoints, I have sought to show that contemporary intellectual engagements with the past in Kashmir reflect a distinct new political subjectivity in Kashmir. I have argued that this subjectivity can be understood in terms of an “entanglement with history” in its multiple senses.

In the first sense, the 1990 uprising produced a sudden rupture in Kashmiri political culture, throwing the order established in 1947 into disarray. This rupture allows Tehreek history-writers to open new narrative possibilities and build alternative histories. All four history-writers I discuss—Shakil Bakshi, Zahir-ud-Din, Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din and Ghulam Qadir Lone—wrote in the aftermath of 1990. I have also argued that if the 1990 uprising opened historical-narrative possibilities, it is through the tedious work of re-writing history—or as Zahir-ud-Din called it “stitching together the fragments”—that these Tehreek history-writers attempt to consolidate political subjectivity, or, in other words, form a “new people,” an idea they believe is necessary to keep the movement going.

In the second sense, the “entanglement with history” resonates in Tehreek history-writings in a contradictory way; it relates to a concern with the loss of agency. These writers regularly invoke a sense of “betrayal” and “denial of voice” in their narratives. This is, for instance, evident in Zahir-ud-Din’s description of the events of 1947, or in Tehreek accounts of the politics surrounding the last Dogra monarch and Kashmiri nationalist leaders, like Sheikh Abdullah. This “denial of voice” is also historically invoked in Tehreek history-writers’
contestations with the Indian National Congress’s politics of “unitary India” and the Muslim League’s claim of being “representative of all South Asian Muslims.”

In the third sense, “entanglement with history” must be understood in the way writing a “people’s history” has shaped not only the historiographical imagination but also the political culture of Tehreek history-writers and activists. Despite their emphasis on the notion of persistent struggle, Tehreek history writers sense Kashmir’s history as tragically cyclical and repetitive, instead of one which is linearly moving forward. Events from one era resonate with events from a different era; the past gets continuously folded onto the present.

Yet, if history is a traumatic trap, these writers see their task as reconfiguring the historical narrative in a way as to simultaneously connect and untangle the present from the past. For them, Tehreek represents the desire to escape the cycle of history, and move toward a future of azadi (freedom). From this perspective, azadi is an event-to-come, an event that will break the recurrence of their ongoing ghola‘mi (servitude). This is what Tehreek activists mean when they demand the resolution of the masla-e-Kashmir (“Kashmir question”), a resolution of this entangled history.

The work of Tehreek history-writers, often silenced in the din of Indian nationalist narratives on Kashmir, illuminates the implicit assumptions and the structure of the officially authorized accounts. They do not systematize or make coherent the past (despite the desire to do so, as is evident from the now-widely remembered “historical timeline”), but they do disturb the official coherence. Their work illustrates how a contested understanding of historical events has shaped the political subjectivity in the region. It suggests that Kashmiri historical consciousness

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54 This is explored further in Chapter 6.
has not emerged out of the “need” to have “a history”\textsuperscript{55}—as the region has long had a history writing tradition—but rather as a \textit{contestation} with that prescribed and authorized by the occupier state. Nevertheless, this mode of engagement with history reflects a shared desire to represent the self, not to “launch the struggle for power” (cf. Chatterjee 1993, 76). That struggle has been ongoing in Kashmir since 1931; Tehreek history-writers are trying to make sense of it.

\textsuperscript{55} Partha Chatterjee reports a late 19\textsuperscript{th} c Bengali nationalist writer (“incorrectly”) exclaiming, “We don’t have a history! We must have a history” (1993, 76).
CHAPTER 3
VISIBLE/INVISIBLE: FLOOD, MILITARY HUMANITARIANISM, AND THE “POLITICS OF IMAGES”

Disasters can make the invisible visible. Carefully managed facades fall apart, revealing the desires, mechanisms, and structures underneath, even if momentarily. It happened in 2014 in Kashmir, when the flooded Jhelum river swept away the physical as well as the ideological screens that had hidden from public view critical aspects of the military occupation. The flood devastated civilian settlements along the river and its tributaries, leaving tens of thousands homeless and desperate. It also laid bare the innards of major military bases and defenses, as well as the militarized infrastructure overlaying the civilian spaces. If the flood brought to the surface the spatiality of the occupation, it, almost magically, made the “state” disappear. There were no ministers, legislators, bureaucrats, soldiers, police, judges, or even low-level clerks to be seen for days. The government had, it was believed, lost all contact with its agencies, including with the officials of the State Disaster Management Authority, which is mandated to respond to and minimize the impact of hazards such as floods. Government offices were under water, the courts lost case records, the information ministry’s decades-old newspaper collections were washed away, and the revenue department discovered later that it could not find its land records. Kashmir’s chief minister, speaking to a news-channel, a week after the flood hit Srinagar, said: “I had no government… I had no cellphone and no connectivity. I am now starting to track down ministers and officers” (NDTV 2014).

From the start, the flood became a center of what many Kashmiris called, a “politics of images.” However, there was just one privileged participant in this “politics”—the news media from New Delhi—taking pictures and defining the terms under which the flood was to be understood. Shocking images of the Kashmir valley under water, taken from helicopters flying
above, often appeared juxtaposed next to images of Indian soldiers wearing orange safety-vests paddling boats and distributing relief. Television experts in New Delhi framed this “flood relief” as an exemplary case of “military humanitarianism” (Khalid 2016). Struggling to cope with the losses, with all telecommunications disrupted, Kashmiris had no comparable means to visually represent their experiences of the flood nor their own efforts at relief and rehabilitation.

For the most part, the occupation in Kashmir has remained concealed from global publics, in comparison to other similar spaces. Kamala Visweswaran has described sites such as Kashmir as “hidden or masked occupations,” and their visibility or invisibility as an index of the “power of mediatization and its skewed operation” (2013, 7). Historically, the Indian state has allowed international media very limited general access to Kashmir, and even less to its security infrastructure and counterinsurgency operations in the region. In early 1990s, just before a series of public massacres of Kashmiris at the hands of government forces started taking place, foreign press—especially photojournalists—was barred from entering Kashmir (Crossette 1990). Until the earthquake of 2005, which killed thousands of Kashmiris along the highly-militarized Line of Control, the border regions were essentially out of bounds for non-resident non-military personnel. That year, however, Kashmiri journalists and human rights activists followed in the tracks of humanitarian aid groups from India and abroad, and discovered thousands of unmarked mass graves strewn across these regions (Burke 2009; IPTK 2009). As the news of the graves began trickling into the international press, the Indian government sealed access to the border once again.

So, when the flood came in 2014, the Indian government appeared ready to ward off any unwanted attention it might bring. Not only was the media based in New Delhi rapidly mobilized, but extensive resources were made available to it—including putting helicopters,
which could have been used for rescue efforts, at the service of Delhi-based TV channels—to make sure the reports presented the Indian military in a “favorable” light (Khalid 2016, 9).

However, this attempt to turn the “disaster” in Kashmir into a political victory for Indian military’s “humanitarianism” was not instantly manufactured. Since the end of the last major war between India and Pakistan, which was fought in the mountainous heights of Kashmir in 2001, much effort has been made to change the image of Indian military presence in the region from primarily being a “security” force to being a force for “civilian development.” As Ravina Aggarwal and Mona Bhan show in their analysis of Indian military’s Operation Sadhbhavna (“Goodwill”) in Kargil district (Kashmir), adoption of this “development paradigm” is intended to “legitimize Indian military’s role in the region’s governance and civil society” (2009, 519).

But beyond this logic of military governance, which Indian military euphemistically calls “civic actions,” there is the less challenged rationale of “military humanitarianism.” Historically military humanitarianism has been a key component of the counterinsurgency doctrine according to which counterinsurgency is as much about “winning hearts and minds” as about war against insurgents (Dixon 2012). Natural hazards represented as “disasters” become key occasions to put this component into practice. During the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, Indian military and humanitarian agencies came together in a reciprocal relationship of dependency, with Indian military providing security and access to the latter and humanitarian agencies duly acknowledging the positive role of the Indian military.1 As Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi argue, “disasters and conflicts” have become “embedded in the same global

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1 The earthquake and its effect was more centered on the Pakistani-controlled side of the LoC, where the Pakistan military developed a similar relationship with aid agencies. While media and humanitarian agencies eventually saw the disaster relief on both sides as a “failure” because of the prevalence of the “military turn of mind” in India and Pakistan, the humanitarian agencies were forthcoming in using the infrastructure of occupation created by the two militaries (Economist 2005).
logic of intervention,” where “humanitarianization of intervention implies” a “form of
naturalization—or depoliticization—of war” (2010, 9-15). Essentially, military humanitarianism
continues the war by other means. For the military to claim a humanitarian role in a region,
however, it either represents the region as bereft of societal structures of sustenance, or enters the
picture as a “humanitarian force” after it has bereaved the place of such structures (Dawson
2011). In Kashmir, the flood, having swept away the civilian government (which is, nevertheless,
subservient to the logics of the occupation), presented the military opportunities to showcase its
effectiveness as a humanitarian force, even while it threatened to expose its repressive apparatus.
This opportunity was amplified by the images of Kashmir under water.

I argue that, to understand the dynamics of the politics of images, it is crucial to
recognize how Kashmiris understood the flood as an event. What was this moment that had
suddenly torn through the screen in Kashmir? How did those caught in the flood come to
understand the nature of the state? While the politics of images succeeded in reaffirming the
overwhelming support Indian publics lend to the military control in Kashmir, in Kashmir it
appeared to have little impact on the public perception toward the military, and even accentuated
the fear and suspicion of the military. Kashmiris, who come face to face with the physical
architecture of military control in their neighborhoods, continued to see Indian military as an
“army of occupation.” To Tehreek activists, the politics of images, if anything, was the Indian
government’s race against time to make the military occupation invisible again, even as it sought
to hypervisibilize its military’s humanitarianism.

This chapter is primarily based on the experiences of a group of people trapped in the
flood for several days in September 2014. My fieldwork, during this time, was restricted to the
third story of a house from which I could only observe, speak to others stranded with me, and
wait. Yet, our collective predicament brought to the fore the political underpinnings of the occupation, and how human life becomes hierarchically valuated during difficult conditions, especially under regimes of undemocratic control. The house itself was in a neighborhood that became a key prism to understand the image politics centered on the disaster and military humanitarianism. Days later, when I could move out, especially to the countryside, and take note of the devastation the flood had caused, the larger import of how the flood had reshaped the Kashmiri understanding of the state became obvious.

As will become apparent, the politics of images was not simply about how the flood was represented or image-harvested for state propaganda, but how a contested space of understanding was opened and closed by a dramatic event, heightening the rift between the state and the people. Beyond the politics of images, there were acts of solidarity, with individuals, communities, and religious organizations self-organizing for relief and rehabilitation work, pooling resources to rebuild life in the aftermath of the flood. Towards the end, I will briefly look at the work of a local religious charity in a southern Kashmiri town to examine how acts of solidarity eventually came to undercut the politics of images, at least among Kashmiris. These acts of solidarity sought to overcome fault lines that have emerged in Kashmir over the years, especially between the downtown youth sympathetic to Tehreek and the suburban upper middle-class closer to the establishment. But in other places, some hierarchies remained, throwing light on multiple forms of invisibilizing within Kashmiri society itself.

**Premonitions**

Early on Sunday, September 7, 2014, Jhelum’s waters gushed into Rajbagh. The river, it looked like, had changed its course, and there was no escape for the thousands of people who lived in the neighborhood. Over the previous few days, we had expected the flood, hurtling down
from the south of Kashmir, to pass by Rajbagh—like the floods always had, at least for as many years as anyone could remember. Looking back, it was a disaster waiting to happen, a flood the coming of which had been frequently *foretold*.

For long, I had heard Kashmiris speak about an impending catastrophe. They often did so within the grammar of eschatology. “There are too many *gunah* (sins) now,” I would hear people remark, “The suffering shall follow.” The prediction, while drawing from the Quranic/Biblical story of the Great Deluge, was based on what would be obvious to anyone who cared to look around. Over the years, forests had disappeared, flood plains were encroached, and a two-story high railroad was built through the heart of the valley that would block floodwater from flowing out. Meanwhile, the Jhelum itself had been allowed to shrink. Hydrologists and engineers at the Irrigation and Flood Control department had regularly warned that Jhelum’s “carrying capacity” had decreased to a critical level (*Kashmir Life* 2011). The government paid no heed. Even dire reports on an imminent flood, as Kashmiris would come to know later, had been stashed away.

Prone to extreme flooding, the only major government intervention to reduce the river’s intense overflow had been the construction of the Flood Spill Channel under the British Residency in 1903. Next steps were taken after 1959, when a newly-established Flood Mechanical Division began systematic dredging in the lower Jhelum basin in the northwest to hasten the flow of water out of the Kashmir valley. Then, the Indian government banned dredging in 1984 and all the equipment either drowned or was lost to rust. Under the orders of Governor Jagmohan in mid-1980s, one was dismantled and taken away to “beautify” the Dal Lake. “There is just one large dredger now,” one official had told me, and then added, stolidly, “For the last twenty-four years, it has been dredging Kashmiri bodies out of the Jhelum.”

People spoke about other *gunah* too. I had heard ordinary Kashmiris say that in their
pursuit of *ma’ashiyat* (materialism) people had forgotten the sacrifices of the thousands who had died during Tehreek—in the resistance against the Indian control—and that was “the biggest *gunah* of them all.” And sometimes, they would pause to reflect, and lament *asi mah chu paanas taam* (but it is not our hands, is it?). “If we controlled our lives and our affairs, we would care for Kashmir.” Whatever the causes, the flood made little distinction between the pious and the sinners. Entire villages, which the Indian government had suppressed brutally over the years, were washed away. On the other hand, Rajbagh, with “practically no role in Tehreek,” as a young relief worker stated disdainfully—except, perhaps, in housing the offices of a few “moderate” Tehreek parties—also drowned.

If the premonition of a divine vengeance/justice expressed a shared political stance on the “sinful” present, deeper cultural memories and conflicts over them resonated in the way some Kashmiris spoke about the impending event. “This country came from water, and to water it will return,” an ageing houseboat owner on the Dal Lake in Srinagar had once told me in frustration with the government forbidding him from renovating his boat. Renovations of houseboats were banned under a plan to clean up the lake. The plan was really pushed by moneyed hoteliers on the lake’s shore who did not like the Hænz-owned houseboats. Houseboats, often grandiosely named after European royals and cities, were great attractions for tourists, giving competition to their hotels. The Hænz had resisted a government offer of relocation to the dry ground away from the lake. Without renovations, the government hoped, the wooden boats would just rot away, destroy the Hænz’s livelihoods, and compel them to leave. “These ministers don’t know we are the progeny of Jalodbhav,” he had said to me, jokingly, “If they drive us out of this lake,

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2 Kashmiri houseboats are elongated floating homes and hotels made entirely of cedar wood. While primarily meant for tourists to stay, they are owned by lake-dwelling members of the Hænz community whose families live alongside the houseboats.
the lake will come into their homes.”

The man was referring to one of Kashmir’s originary myths, surprising me not only with his knowledge of a story that is hardly ever told or remembered outside of specialist circles, but also with his Sanskrit rendering of Jaladev as “Jalodbhava.” (Indeed, the old man had heard it from an Indian student of Kashmiri history who had once stayed on his boat). There are multiple versions of the myth, but the one written down by Sanskritists and Indologists is connected to a legend of a Brahmin named Kashyap. In this version, Kashmir was one big lake. Along its shores lived the indigenous Nagas and the troublesome, half-human Piśaćas. Kashyap, a member of the newly arrived Aryan tribe, fought and killed a lake-dwelling Piśaça demon Jalodbhava, who had been protected by the Nagas. (Jalodbhava literally means “the water born”). The Brahmin then miraculously opened the mountains in the northwest to let the lake’s water out and Kashmir emerged from underneath. The Piśaćas were killed, the Nagas punished, and Kashmir became the land of pious Brahmins. In the less well-known versions, Nagas and Piśaćas are the same people, who were subjugated by the incoming Aryans. Many of them survived as lower castes within the new social stratification that Aryans imposed on the land. Jalodbhava was their local king or deity, or, as a student activist accompanying me to the Dal Lake that day had quipped: “Jaladev was probably a youth activist of the primeval era.”

**Political geography in my field of vision**

Many consider Rajbagh an upscale neighborhood in Kashmir’s capital Srinagar, but it presents nothing remarkable. A maze of narrow and wavy lanes course through its breadth, some of which grow even narrower until they reach dead ends. Perhaps Rajbagh’s fame came from its

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3 See chapter 2 for more on this. “Aryans” probably arrived in Kashmir between 1000 BC to 500 BC. As Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din suggests Nagas and Piśaćas were the remnants of the broader Indus Valley Civilization that once flourished near Kashmir.
large mansions that belong to high-ranking bureaucrats and large business families. There is a host of guesthouses as well, and, because of its proximity to the touristry areas of the city, some house owners lease portions of their houses to vacationers at slightly exorbitant rates. In July 2014, I decided to rent the top floor of a three-story house there. It was close to several neighborhoods where the offices and homes of Tehreek parties and activists are located, and with whom I needed to meet regularly for my research work. Yet, Rajbagh also provided (in my mind) a distance from Tehreek’s internal rivalries, and a space where I could remain (again, in my mind) under the threshold of surveillance of the Indian agencies. Never had I imagined that this neighborhood was soon going to become one of the most unlivable in the city, and prove to be a critical window on the politics of occupation in Kashmir.

Rajbagh looks like a peninsula. As the Jhelum meanders, south to north through Srinagar, it curves around Rajbagh’s three sides: the south, the east, and the north. In the south, before the river touches Rajbagh, the Flood Spill Channel breaks off, rather abruptly, that then envelops the neighborhood on the west. The channel reconnects with the Jhelum much further downstream. For all practical purposes, therefore, one could call Rajbagh, along with its adjoining neighborhoods to the west, an inland island. On a normal day, when the water of the Jhelum is low and calm, a flood is the last thing on the minds of the residents of this island. But as it turned out, a flood should have always been the first.

Rajbagh is built on a reclaimed floodplain, much like most newly inhabited marshes and dried up lakebeds around this medieval urban agglomeration that is now Srinagar. Till about the middle of the last century, vegetable gardens and apple orchards dotted the land, and the area was considered an outlying wilderness, where, as the local baker—who had heard from his father—told me, “jackals would roam in daylight.” Then, as the city expanded and the land
prices rose, many rich-folk left the congested downtown districts and built their mansions in Rajbagh. But the investments of the rich were based more on a desire to keep a distance from the coarse, hardworking downtown culture than on soil testing. By the time the rulers and governments of different eras finished building the Bund, the parallel-running high embankments of the Jhelum and the Flood Spill Channel, Rajbagh had become a bowl-shaped depression. And since then, Rajbagh’s fate had depended on the number of days it rained in the river’s catchment area in southern Kashmir. More days of rain than normal during the summer months—when glaciers melt faster and the grassy slopes of the mountains retain very little water—and the river rose dangerously high all around Rajbagh. Yet, it had never really occurred to its inhabitants that the river could one day spill right into their upscale bowl.

Beyond the river, to the northeast of Rajbagh, is the Zabarwan mountain range. Its jagged peaks rise to form a carapace around the Dal, the shimmering lake about which many tales of Srinagar’s legendary natural beauty have been told. Just south on this far bank of the Jhelum is a verdant stretch between the river and the mountain, pockmarked by a series of official residences, military barracks, and “secret” facilities. Known as Gupkar Road and Badamibagh Cantonment, these highly fortified zones are the nerve centers of Indian control in Kashmir. They lie huddled in a tight embrace.

Gupkar Road, a narrow pass between the Zabarwan range and a hill called Takht-e-Sulaiman, is home to the India-loyalist Kashmiri political establishment. The Abdullahs and the Muftis live there. They are the two main political families that today act as “Kashmiri sheaths on the Indian bayonet,” as one Tehreek activist remarked on their role. Papa 2, which was a prince’s palace before 1947, when the Dogra dynasty ruled Kashmiris with a zealous cruelty, and then was turned into a Joint Interrogation (torture) Center for the Indian intelligence agencies, is now
home to the Muftis. This changing of hands for the property, many say, has been smooth and natural. It is said that before the Muftis moved in, the walls were painted several times over to hide the blood stains on them, and a mound of severed fingers and toes was cleared from the backyard to make it level for a badminton court. In the adjoining Abdullah residence, murderous intrigue is woven into the daily life of its politics quite as smoothly. A couple of years back, an old man, a party worker of the Abdullahs, went in to meet the latest scion of the family and was brought out bloodied and dead. The incident had threatened to destabilize the government run by the Abdullahs, but, as the deathly conditions in Kashmir go, an old man’s death is a threat to no one. The Abdullahs, running the National Conference, and the Muftis, running the People’s Democratic Party, are ostensibly fiercely opposed to each other. When not speaking to the press, however, they live rather amicably on the Gupkar Road, under the protective watch of the Indian military.

Badamibagh, which once used to bloom into endless acres of almond orchards, is the headquarters of the Indian Army’s 15 Corp, a quarter-million strong military formation that tightly controls the nooks and crannies of the Kashmir Valley. It also directs the political “puppet show” on the Gupkar. The Gupkar and much of Badamibagh are safely perched on the slope of the Takht-e-Sulaiman hill and the Zabarwan Range respectively. On a clear day, one can see long, garish green and white buildings of Badamibagh stretched along the foot of the Zabarwan. On top of these mountains, above the headquarters, is a string of pickets and surveillance installations, which become visible at night when the lights glow on the ridges. Atop one of the ridges, which faces Srinagar, this city of more than a million Kashmiris, the army has hoisted a huge Indian flag, “a triumphalist gesture toward a subject population that will not concede defeat to the Indian nationalism,” as a Kashmiri activist, equally triumphantly, retorted.
The only other structure visible above the line of my vision from the terrace of my rented place in Rajbagh is the Shankaracharya Temple, which was built on top of the Takhte Sulaiman hill in the ninth century CE. When the flood came, my first thoughts unwittingly traced this complex political geography of my surroundings. Only the Indian military, their main Kashmiri clientele, and a Hindu temple, popular among Indian tourists, looked safe in the deluge.

**A missing government**

On Saturday evening, the day before the flood washed into the city, my friend Parvaiz, who had rented the ground floor of the same house, decided to drive his car up to the Bund for safekeeping. Our friend Aijaz, who lives in the adjoining Jawahar Nagar locality, and I accompanied Parvaiz. The water was quite high. Houseboats on the Jhelum normally float much lower than the level of the road atop the Bund, but that evening they were standing eerily aligned with the road.

Near Zero Bridge, one of the major bridges crossing the river in the city, people had assembled to monitor a weaker embankment that was beginning to give way. This narrow strip of the embankment, made mostly of mud, was not part of the main Bund. It connected the bridge and the main Bund at a point where the Bund curved backward from the river, and on sunny days offered walkers a chance to avoid the busy Bund Road. The threat to Rajbagh was real but not immediate. The Bund, which is a much sturdier stone and gravel embankment, whose cross section would look like a giant trapezoid, would act as a buffer, it was believed, in case the narrow embankment strip breached. In the end, this weak part remained stable; the main Bund breached, and precisely where it was not expected to.

The flood arrived first in southern Kashmir, where my parents live on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Jhelum in Anantnag, an hour’s drive from Srinagar. The last I had heard
from them before their phones went dead, was that the water had climbed into the lawn and the backyard of their house. That was Thursday evening. After desperate attempts to connect all the Anantnag contacts in my phone book on Friday, and failing, I was finally able to reach someone who had climbed to the fifth story of his house and managed to catch a signal. The water had not climbed “much further” than where it was on Thursday evening, he said, as he quickly cut his phone to preserve its dying battery. This was hardly a consolation, for never had the waters crept up so high in Anantnag, not even in 1988 when a flood was close to wiping out the town. I was seven then and remembered that event as terrifying. Our family had to move out of the house. And with the water even higher, I thought, it was sure to lay waste to everything that lay in its path.

To reach Srinagar from Anantnag, the swell of water should have taken around eight hours. The real surge in the water was, however, expected to come on Saturday evening, as a radio presenter announced. Parvaiz’s brother, an engineer who understood the seriousness of the flood well, called us several times to warn us. He asked us to pack the essentials and drive to his home, which was in a part of the city that was relatively safer. We did pack a few things and left, but returned midway, unsure of what was “essential” and what could be replaced. There was too much that we would be leaving behind, we thought.

We stayed. But as a precaution, I asked Parvaiz, Aijaz, and their assistant, Mughal, to relocate to my rented apartment on the second floor. On the first floor of the house lived the Hakims, the house-owners. They were an old couple and kept mostly to themselves. Their daughter-in-law and grandson lived with them, but I rarely saw them around. Their housekeeper Omais, a boy from Jharkhand in India, lived in a room on the terrace of the second floor. The second floor was the topmost and had been constructed from the attic of the house, almost as an
afterthought. I shared the open terrace with the Hakims. During the day, I had seen the Hakims drive their cars away, and thought they were planning to leave. Omais, too, had been busy bicycling back and forth from the Bund.

Before relocating, we rearranged Parvaiz’s books from the floor level bookcase to the top of a cupboard. If the flood came, we reasoned, the books would be spared. Half-heartedly, we rolled a large hand-made rug from the living room and put it on top of the dining table. We left the rest untouched. Mughal, not so romantic about books, carried some bedding, blankets, and a few items of clothing upstairs. We finally moved up, opened the windows, and, huddled around an old radio set, waited for the flood.

The night fell; the flood had still not come. Friends called to say that the water was rising, but it was still contained within the cusp of Jhelum’s banks. We were past midnight at that point, and instead of thinking about the flood, we chatted about how the Indian media, instead of providing any useful news, had turned the disaster in South Kashmir, where many villages had been submerged, into a public relations campaign for the Indian army. Indian army had rescued a few trapped Kashmiri villagers, and, on NDTV, a New Delhi-based English language news channel, the host of a popular show asked, not without a hint of disdain, if Kashmiris would, after what the Indian army had done for them, show some gratitude. “Sure, why don’t we just forget the eighty thousand the Indian army has killed since 1990!” someone tweeted in response.

Sometime later, we heard a muffled siren in the distance. A vehicle passing quickly along the main road made an inaudible announcement, which we came to know later was the government asking people to leave. But where could people go in the dead of the night with their children and elderly folk? The government didn’t say. Which area was safe? Did the government have an emergency plan? Had they put the disaster and emergency teams in place in the event of
a flooded Srinagar? Had any one in the government even thought about these questions?

Despite clear flood warnings, the city was unprepared. There were no boats kept at the ready, no ambulances parked strategically, no disaster control personnel positioned in vulnerable areas. The one picture that had exemplified the nature of Kashmiri politicians’ priorities was that of the chief minister, the head of the civil government in the state, a descendent of the Abdullah dynasty, walking down the tarmac at Srinagar’s airport holding an umbrella to protect the visiting dhoti-clad Indian home minister from rain. This was on a day when South Kashmir was reeling under the worst floods in the region’s history. In the picture, the Indian home minister is holding up his loincloth, taking giant leaps, with the chief minister gormlessly trying to catch up. On social media, where the image was circulating, people were angry. “Even though no one expects any better from the Kashmiri civil government, some indignities pinch more than others,” Aijaz had said, looking at the picture. The picture represented, as Parvaiz put it, a “craven Kashmiri elite shielding their Indian masters from their Kashmiri subjects.” People were feeling they had been left to fend for themselves.

After midnight, we heard occasional slogan-shouting coming from the east and the south. It was unclear what it was, but it sounded like a protest. One of Aijaz’s contacts had called earlier to tell us that the water had begun to climb into parts of Badamibagh, and the army was out on boats trying to breach “our side of the Bund” to protect their own installations. “Could they do it?” we asked each other. A breach would submerge a huge portion of the city. It could have just been a rumor, but since it existed as a real possibility—especially in a situation where, as Parvaiz said, “India’s long war on Kashmiris has been veiled from the world, and from which the world itself looks away”—we feared the worst.

Thoroughly exhausted, we finally decided to go to sleep at around 4 am, Sunday
morning. “I will stay up for a while and keep watch,” Aijaz said. I could barely sleep, though. The noises from the outside increased, and then there were yelps of desperation. I could hear “Khudayo, reham kar” (God, show some mercy), and “Allah u Akbar” (God is great). Amid these frightening cris de cœur, I fell asleep, only to be woken moments later by Aijaz’s loud bangs on the door.

“Junaid, wake up, wake up! There is no flood, after all!” I heard Aijaz announce. “You can sleep now. The Jhelum has stabilized.” He sounded suspiciously nonchalant, like a boy in the middle of a mischief.

“Why, I was sleeping already!” I muttered, a bit aghast at being robbed of a few winks of badly needed sleep.

No way out

Rubbing my eyes, I went to the living room and looked out from the window. The dawn had just broken. What I saw shook me out of my half-daze. The water was gushing almost waist high through the front lane. Its speed was unnerving, and it carried deadly debris: broken logs of wood, large paper boxes filled with god-knows-what, plastic bins and water tanks, mangled sheets of tin, and upturned furniture. A couple of cars floated by, carried by the current. They crashed clangorously into walls and electricity poles in their stubborn movement forward.

Ten minutes or so later, the water broke open the main gate and flooded our compound. As if under a spell, we looked on at the rising water in total silence. The delicately manicured lawn in front of the house, in which I had often seen Mr. and Mrs. Hakim direct Omais to pick up dead hyacinth leaves or bright yellow marigolds and languid narcissus, was submerged under the turbid waters.

Now fully awake, I ran down to confirm if Mr. Hakim’s family had left, but saw them
standing on top of their first floor-porch, anxiously watching the flood. Mr. Hakim asked me how high the water was going to climb. “Can’t say, sir, if there is a breach in the Bund, then the water will climb high.” Having listened to Aijaz and Parvaiz the whole night, I felt confident to state my own opinion on the subject, even though I had absolutely no basis to back up my claim, and even regretted depressing old Mr. Hakim. Since there was no way out of Rajbagh by then, I suggested they move their belongings upstairs. Fortunately, the Hakims didn’t ask any more questions. The urgency in my tone caused them to jump back inside to salvage their belongings, and, as soon as they did, Parvaiz and Mughal turned their attention toward their own belongings on the ground floor. Since the front door from the driveway was flooded by that time, they went through an internal kitchen door that connected the ground floor with the first floor. Watching this sudden flurry of activity, which was turning the order in the house upside down, I worried that if the flood didn’t climb high everyone was going to blame me. Sadly, however, the prediction turned out to be correct.

Around that moment, Aijaz and I saw a calf float through the broken gate into the driveway. Only its snout and eyes were above water, and it was gasping for breath. The calf was at the mercy of the turbulent waters, and it circled in the whirlpool that the water was creating. “Are we going to risk our lives to save a dying calf?” Before we could even debate the point, Aijaz jumped chest high into the water to catch hold of the calf, and I pulled it up onto the staircase. Aijaz was surprised by how cold the water was. The calf was in death throes, with its eyes rolled upward. Its body was rigid with hypothermia, and the belly was bloated with water. Aijaz patted the calf to revive its heartbeat, as I dashed upstairs to heat up water. It must have been just about three months old. We poured warm water on its body, and it seemed to work. The calf jerked its body uncontrollably. Just as we were getting hold of the calf's body to help it
stand up, the wall behind us collapsed. It narrowly missed us, but a torrent of water poured into the compound. We pulled the calf further up on to the porch, trembling with the sudden realization how weak the walls of the compound were.

I went upstairs to heat some more water, and then saw Parvaiz and Aijaz carry the calf up to the second-floor terrace. Seeing them there, I came down to join Mughal who was retrieving food items from the ground floor kitchen. When I looked down from the staircase, the water was already chest-high inside the ground floor. Utensils and gas cylinders were floating in the water. As soon as I waded into the flooded kitchen, hard objects under water hit my shins. Even though benumbed by the frigid water, my legs felt excruciating pain from these impacts.

Parvaiz’s place looked like a horror house. The refrigerator, which Mughal had earlier piled on to a bed, was floating and banging against the window, trying to find an escape. Inanimate objects, as if having acquired the first stirrings of life, were moving about aimlessly. Nothing was in its right place. Utensils were floating in the office, and books were floating in the bathroom. Mughal and I managed to reach the living room, and I don’t know why but all we could think of saving was the handmade rug that we had kept on the dining table earlier, and had now gotten soggy. We walked out of the water, the heavy rug held above us, onto the inner staircase. As I closed the door behind me, Mughal’s eyes welled up. His kitchen, where he used to cook his delicacies, and which Parvaiz, in appreciation of Mughal’s culinary skills, would call “Mughal’s Sultanate,” was gone.

When we reached the second floor, we saw the Hakims were already bringing their belongings up to the terrace. We went down to help. The water was rising sharply and beginning to trickle into the first floor. I had lived upstairs from Mrs. and Mr. Hakim for only about two months, and I had never been inside their house. Now that I went in, I marveled at how long their
The Hakims’ house

The phones were down. There was no electricity. The local radio station, the only government institution which had proved of great help over the previous few hours, sharing information about the situation in Srinagar, stopped their broadcasts about 8 am. Stating rather dramatically that the “time has come to save our own nears and dears,” the presenters bid an emotional adieu. Listening to their end-of-the-world somber tone, Mughal, who was already crest-fallen, became desolate. I patted his back, “We will be fine.” Aijaz and Taham had salvaged a solar light and some wires from the first floor, which came handy in the coming days.

Outside, Rajbagh looked like a lake, and the houses in it stood barely above water. Since most of the houses are two or three stories, several disappeared under water, while others only had their roofs visible. What were colorful corrugated roofs of large houses would appear, to someone watching from above, like splotches of red, green, and silver grey on a vast muddy brown surface. But for the surrounding mountains, Srinagar was now a two-dimensional
waterscape. Dark clouds, which had poured rain for the previous six days, were still hanging low, hiding the Indian flag on the ridge.

Water was still rising, and if it continued to rise at that rate, we figured, it would only take a few more hours to enter the second floor. The first option was to climb onto the roof, but that would mean leaving all our supplies behind. How long could we sustain ourselves there? Our immediate neighbors, the Jamwals, who were standing on their second-floor balcony, looked strangely calm. Mr. Jamwal, a staid figure, said he was sure the Indian army was going to begin rescue operations soon. He looked out toward the Gupkar, and then turned toward me, forlorn and bitter, to say that, before 1947, his father, a close aide to Kashmir’s Hindu Maharaja, had a house there, until the “shikaslad (pauper) Abdullah” forced the Jamwals to vacate the land so the Abdullahs could build their own house there. He was referring to Sheikh Abdullah, the grandfather of the current chief minister, who M. K. Gandhi had bestowed with the sobriquet “Lion of Kashmir” and who, as Parvaiz sniggered, “in return endorsed the accession with India.” Abdullah had in the pre-1947 era led a successful anti-monarchical campaign and, subsequently, implemented an influential program of land reforms. But Mr. Jamwal believes the reforms were as much about improving the lives of landless Kashmiri peasants as about helping the Lion himself to a prime piece of Srinagar real estate.

No rescue was in sight, however. Rajbagh was eerily quiet, except for the deathly hum of the flood, which was occasionally interrupted by a loud thud of a collapsing house. “How sturdy was our house?” We didn’t want to ask Mr. Hakim and panic him even more. Parvaiz said the house was probably built about fifty years ago. But the “original house,” he said, had been smaller. As Rajbagh became commercialized over the years, the Hakims began adding extensions to the house. They rented out three portions of the house (two on the ground floor and
one on the second) and kept the middle floor for themselves. Extensions meant the house had “variable structural strength” at different points. That was not reassuring knowledge. Aijaz, however, pointed toward the main walls and said they were quite thick, and would likely sustain the pressure. Taham, the grandson, said the walls were all cement and brick, except on the second floor where the Hakims had used clay. If the water reached the second floor, he said matter-of-factly, those walls would turn into mud.

We looked out into the large backyard of the house, where the Hakims had a small orchard. The top branches of the trees bearing ripe pears and apples still stuck out from the water. The tin roofs of the garages and storage sheds had separated from their stilts and were floating in the water. Electricity poles had prevented these potential rafts from floating away. “It would be hard, but we could jump onto these if need be,” Aijaz said. If the house collapsed under us, however, it would create a strong inward pull, from which only those might reemerge who could hold their breath long enough and swim out toward the rafts.

In the distance, a few street dogs had managed to climb on top of floating roofs, and were squealing in terror. A dog in our sights kept running from edge to edge looking for a way out of the water. Even though dogs are good swimmers, there was nowhere to swim to. Between the dog and us there was a strong current, and the icy water would have washed him away.

As we anxiously monitored the water through the day, we noted that it was still rising but at a much slower rate. By late Sunday evening, the water finally stabilized at around twenty-two feet (our collective estimate). It looked like the swollen Jhelum had filled to the brim all the spaces that lay in its path. It was likely that the river had leveled with the Dal Lake, Parvaiz said, and now the only way left for the water was to leave town. It was quite plausible. I wondered how the scene looked to the Indian soldiers from their bunkers atop the Zabarwan. What did the
utter silence of this flooded, rebellious city mean to them? Did they finally turn off their surveillance equipment, and take a break from their constant watch of every move in the city?

As soon as we announced that the water had stopped rising, the Hakims and the Jamwals heaved a sigh of relief. Any good news was better than what we had been witnessing since early morning. Our attention shifted to planning for the night. We had not eaten much since the previous evening. The normally quiet second floor began buzzing with activity. I made room in my rented apartment for nine people. The calf—Aijaz named him Sultan—was given some old rugs to sleep on. I jokingly called those gathered on the terrace “Internally Displaced Persons,” as I announced who was sleeping where, and then pinched myself. It was too soon for humor.

Mughal got busy cooking in my kitchen. It seemed to calm his nerves. Omais helped Mrs.
Hakim rearranged her stuff. Rearranging her stuff seemed to calm Mrs. Hakim’s nerves. At times, it looked like Mrs. Hakim’s movements, picking things up and putting them in different places, emerged from her muscle memory, from years of organizing a home. Mr. Hakim kept taking nervous strolls on the terrace, while oddly, I thought, taking time off in-between for his naps. Reminding us that we were suddenly not all one family, their daughter-in-law quickly created a kitchen of her own on the terrace. Her makeshift kitchen looked better organized than mine. While Mughal and I looked enviously at her kitchen, it also unnerved me a bit. During such crises as floods or wars, makeshift should look like makeshift. Her kitchen, however, looked like she was preparing for a long haul.

The night was calm. The clouds withdrew, and the moon came out. The submerged Rajbagh began to shimmer in its glow. The squeals of the dog on the floating roof were subdued by then. How long could it have lasted, we thought. Over the years, the open urban spaces for street dogs in Kashmir had shrunk as people built high walls around their compounds—both a psychic and a practical imperative for a people pegged under a violent military occupation. Older cultural practices of leaving the first portion of the meal at the door for the dogs had become scarce. As a result, the rummaging habits of dogs, whose population had exploded due to absence of any sterilization program, became precarious. They returned human aggression with their own aggression. I doubted if people were going to go out of their way to help a marooned dog.

The first and the last sign of the government

The next morning, the water had reduced, but only by a few inches. At this rate, we thought, it would take several weeks to completely drain. We also knew that—because Rajbagh was a “stupid bowl-shaped depression”—the only way to drain the water was to pump it out.
Even that could take weeks. We assessed our supplies. We had sufficient drinking water to last several days. The food could also last. We had brought up some rice, flour, and pulses. We also had enough gas to cook. But there were nine mouths to feed, and Sultan was consuming our fruit liberally.

Later that morning, a boat carrying policemen came. It remained at a distance. Four cops rowed it quietly, and when Mr. Jamwal asked if any help was coming, they replied that a “rescue plan was under consideration.” The officialese didn’t sound convincing, at least not to us. They were still considering a plan! The boat came to a house, and a man, a woman, and their little son, got on through the second story window. Then the boat went away. That was the last sign of the government we would see for the next four weeks. Parvaiz said the man they evacuated was a “senior police officer.”

Another boat came, but it was a “private” one. It went straight to a guesthouse across the lane from our house, evacuated tourists, including a Western couple, and then never showed up again. Later in the afternoon a few flimsy rowboats came. They carried no water or food. Young men rowing them plucked fruit from the treetops and distributed them to different houses. They looked at us with a morbid pity, as if they knew something about our precarious existence that we didn’t. One of them threw a few pears toward us. We managed to catch some, while others crashed into the roof and turned into mush. We fed the mushy pears to Sultan, who had by that morning gained enough strength to stand up on all fours and grunt some moos. He happily gobbled them down.

During the day, we busied ourselves with pulling stuff out of the water with a long hook that Taham and Aijaz built. Although it was only the second day of being marooned in the flood, nerves were beginning to fray. During the initial moments of water rushing in, on Sunday
morning, no one had thought so much about the things they had lost, perhaps except the elderly Hakims, who lost the most. But as the water stopped rising further, Parvaiz and Aijaz (who knew that his own ground-floor apartment in Jawahar Nagar was by then fully under water) reminisced about lost books, documents, diaries, computer hard drives, and photo albums, things that were irreplaceable. There was a three hundred-year-old handwritten Quran, medical records of children, and memorabilia of dear ones who were no more. There were passports, which are difficult to get in Kashmir, and usually take months to replace.

Moments of activity were interspersed by longer periods of silence. But there were also times when our old “argumentative selves” took hold of us. Aijaz kept up the spirits with his wry comments on how India was going to respond to the flood. “Was it an opportunity for India to wipe out the freedom movement?” “Had the flood resolved the Kashmir question in ways that would become visible in the coming years?” At one point, Mrs. Hakim almost sneered as the men blathered about international politics around ISIS, Iran, and Israel. But she did make cups of salty nun chai for all. Amid the passionate arguments, we often sneaked momentary glances at the water all around us, the water whose immense weight could at any moment crush the floor under our feet. I caught myself wondering what kind of sound the collapse would produce.

As darkness fell on Monday, we started untying Sultan from his daytime spot on the edge of the terrace to his nighttime home under the canopy which protected the water tanks, when suddenly a bearded man drenched from the chest down arrived on the terrace. “Where had he come from?” The man, who turned out to be Mrs. Hakim’s relative, was in a hurry and in no mood to answer. He spoke agitatedly to the Hakims, asking them to get out of the house with him. He had brought a boat with a boatman, he said, and it was waiting next to the living room. Mr. Hakim, a sense of male pride (which torments many Kashmiri men in their relations with
their in-laws) hitting him at the wrong moment, announced he was going nowhere, and that he would prefer to live or die in his own house. But the drenched man thundered that he had “no time for such bluster.” The houses are collapsing all over, he said. They had to leave. This was not good news for the rest of us for whom no boat had come. Finally, the daughter-in-law put her resolute foot down, announcing she, her son, and her mother-in-law were leaving with the man. Amid all this, the man’s eyes fell on Sultan. He paused, scowled in surprise, and then silently dragged the Hakims to the window, from where they were lowered, a tad roughly, onto the tiny rowboat.

With Omais, along with more luggage than suited the dire situation, we felt there were one too many people on that little boat. A jerky movement could send them all down into the frigid, roily waters. It was dark, but the full moon provided some visibility. The electric and telephone cables that lurked underneath and above the water were going to make the boat ride harder. Mr. Hakim kept looking back at the four of us—Parvaiz, Aijaz, Mughal and I—remorsefully, as we watched them leave. We were worried for him and his family, and he was sad he was leaving us behind. Yet, despite the rickety boat they were all perilously piled on, we knew they had a decent chance of reaching dry ground. Soon the Hakims were out of our sight, and the man who had brought the boat for them shouted from a distance that he was going to bring back the boat for us in the morning. We closed the window behind us, and went back to the terrace to eat dinner.

The Hakims had left behind some food for us. I missed the little community that had begun to form on the terrace. In an impulsive moment on that lazy Monday afternoon, my anthropological training had led me to briefly wonder how a community of two strange groups, brought uncomfortably together by collective distress and with limited resources and space to
share, might negotiate everyday norms of Kashmiri social life. Aijaz missed Taham’s company. They had struck a chord. Taham had appeared skilled in the “practical issues of basic survival,” qualities Aijaz admired in men.

My thoughts returned to my family. I wondered if my parents in Anantnag were safe, and if they knew about my situation. Did my wife and little daughter in New York, who had had no contact with me for the previous three days, know that I was trapped in the flood? The last time we spoke, on Saturday, I had only told them that my parents’ house in Anantnag, which stood on the banks of Arapat stream, was under threat from the flood.

**A differential value of life**

Tuesday was spent in bitterness. We cursed India, and distributed drinking water to our neighbors. The water had receded by a couple of feet, but almost half of the second story was still submerged.

Early that morning, giant military helicopters flying low over our neighborhood awoke me. The rug Mughal and I had saved from Parvaiz’s house, and had left to dry on the rooftop, flew off from the tornado that one helicopter’s rotors generated and landed on the railing of the terrace. Mughal managed to catch a hold of it just in time, and pulled it back. The house shook violently. We ran out on the terrace, and tried to shoo the helicopter away.

The helicopter had not come to evacuate us or drop any supplies. It just made several rounds and went southward. It stopped over a military camp near the Flood Channel, and began airlifting soldiers. Several more helicopters arrived on that spot until all the soldiers were taken. Then the helicopters stopped at a paramilitary camp to the west of us, and began another airlift. By early afternoon the military had airlifted its own men.

With all the repression Kashmiris had been subject to for the previous twenty-five years,
they had very little expectations from an army they considered as an “army of occupation.” Yet, at some level, there was also a belief that during a calamity, like the one that had just befallen Kashmir, humanistic considerations might override nationalistic antipathies. But it quickly became obvious that in the minds of the authorities there was a clear hierarchy of the value of life in Kashmir. They appeared to know who needed to be rescued and who to be left to the elements. After the military camps, the helicopters stood above hotels and guesthouses, and began airlifting Indian tourists. Once the tourists were taken away, the helicopters didn’t return until the next day, even though it was quite possible to airlift many stranded Kashmiris that evening. Some neighbors made flags and kept waving at the helicopters. Mughal made one as well. The Sikh “domestic help” of the Jamwals made a large red one; its irony as a symbol of communist insurrection atop the house of erstwhile feudal lords was not lost on us. He waved it vigorously long after the skies had become silent.

No boats came on Tuesday, except a little one that came late in the afternoon and was rowed by four young Kashmiri men. They had come from the old downtown area. Downtown, according to them, had not been submerged. “Our ancestors were wiser,” said one of them, “they built on higher ground, and let the river have its way.” The men told us that there were thousands of evacuees stranded and cold under the open sky at the foot of the Takht-e-Sulaiman hill, and there was no more space or food left. The locals from the neighborhood there, who had been feeding these evacuees, had run out of supplies. Were we better off where we were, in this house that still had some drinking water and a bit of food left? Perhaps, but how long could the house stand? We worried that the water was slowly loosening the foundations of the house, and it could just take a small jolt of seismic activity in this earthquake-prone region to turn it into a pile of rubble.
The young men had no supplies with them, but they were helpful in carrying water from one house to another. We sent drinking water to a few neighbors, who had gestured from a distance that they were running short. We requested the young men to cut off a few leafy branches for Sultan from the tops of the weeping willows and the mulberry trees still visible above water. Sultan, who had recovered well, cocked his neck above the terrace railing, crooned out a moo, and self-pityingly lowered his long kohl-colored eyelashes in several rapid movements. The young men couldn’t help but fall into Sultan’s trap, and despite one neighbor angrily shouting that they ought to be helping “human children” instead of animals, the men fetched enough branches to last till the next morning. Sultan had a feast that night. He was picky even, choosing the mulberry leaves over the willow.

Sultan was generally quiet, but his searing gaze appeared to beseech conversation, and let it be said, in full disclosure, that we all spoke to the calf. During their conversation, Parvaiz watched Sultan animatedly as the calf pushed its long, greyish pink tongue into its nostrils to clean them. Sultan had endeared himself to us, so much so that when Mughal patted the calf’s back harshly to make him move, Aijaz frowned at Mughal. In his defense, Mughal explained to us newly minted cowherds that that is how it is done in the village.

“Sirji, leave! Leave,”

By Wednesday morning, we all had clear physical signs of fatigue. We wanted to leave the place as soon as possible. The water had receded further, but again just by a couple of feet. With the vacuous government unable to even register its presence anywhere during the crisis the possibility of removing the water mechanically looked remote.

The previous night, we had decided that two among us should get on the first boat that agrees to take us to the Bund, which, we heard from people shouting from their rooftops, had
begun to emerge from under the water. Then a boat could be arranged and all of us could leave. By Wednesday, when the rush of evacuations would have calmed, we reasoned, it would be less daunting to find a boat willing to take four men ashore. But we didn’t want to leave Sultan behind. While we had devised all different strategies for making an enclosure full of food for him, neither would his instinct allow rationing the food, nor would the food remain edible for more than a few days. It would be impossible to regularly check on him. And then there was always the looming terror of the house collapsing.

At 9 am a boat came and after some negotiations its occupants were willing to carry Aijaz and Parvaiz to the Bund. Phones were still out so there was no way to communicate. I told the two of them that if they were unable to manage a boat, Mughal and I would wait for another two days and then we would attempt to leave by early morning on Friday. In the meantime, we would store as much food for Sultan as possible.

When they left, the house seemed all the more threatening. To keep busy, Mughal and I made some rotis. Mughal said if only we could get Sultan out on the Bund, he would take him to his home in Kupwara, where Sultan could have a decent life in the hills. He promised he wasn’t going to sell Sultan off to a butcher.

In the afternoon, the helicopters returned and flew low above the neighborhood. Again, they didn’t evacuate any residents, nor drop food or water. By then only a few neighbors were waving flags. It seemed the rest had resigned to the fact that they would have to wait for help from fellow Kashmiris. From one helicopter, a TV crew was taking photographs. It circled above the houses several times. Angry, a few men from a neighboring house, who, we came to know later, were Kashmiri policemen, gestured lewdly at the TV crew. Several other neighbors joined these men, and soon furious expletives started flying toward the helicopter. One police
officer turned to me and said, “Kashmiri lives mean nothing to India.” Not a bad wake-up call, I thought, for a cop who serves the same repressive apparatus that the Indian government uses to control and render Kashmiri lives expendable.

Mr. Jamwal came out on his balcony in the afternoon, and said they had found some kerosene for their little electric generator, and they were planning to start it to see if their TV worked. We had had no news of the world beyond the Bund. He wanted to know, for one last time, if we should be waiting for an evacuation at all. Their Sikh helper had found a place on the same boat as Aijaz and Parvaiz in the morning, and was out inquiring on the Bund. He returned in the afternoon panicked. He told us he had gotten separated from Aijaz and Parvaiz, and had managed to return with great difficulty on top of a small raft.

“Sirji, leave! Leave,” he hollered from the balcony, and then ran indoors. Hearing this, Mughal grew even more miserable. “We should leave sooner than Friday,” he said. I agreed.

There were things we needed to take care of before we could hop on a boat willing to take us. On Tuesday, several men on one boat had said they were chasing thieves with boats. People had been caught breaking into abandoned houses, they said. Several neighbors had decided to stay even if rescue came because they feared they would be robbed as soon as they left. Mughal had nothing to lose. He had managed to save nothing of his own from the ground floor. I packed some of my stuff, mostly my fieldnotes, recorders, and books, in a bag, and Mughal and I pulled it up into the dusty, low attic through a trap door. Any intelligent thief would first hit the attic, I knew, but every thief would have to pass through my second-floor apartment to reach the attic. Why not make it a bit harder for the thief, I thought.

As evening fell, the neighborhood buzzed with the whir of Mr. Jamwal’s generator. They shut their doors and windows to watch news on their TV. News was gold, not to be flagrantly
shared with neighbors. I had untied Sultan and was bringing him under the canopy when Mughal came running from the living room hysterically announcing that Parvaiz had brought a boat. I ran to the living room window and looked out. Indeed, there Parvaiz was, on an inflatable boat, larger than I had expected, waving at us! There were five more men on the boat. Parvaiz shouted from a distance that we had “two minutes” to get out. It was clear that a lot of negotiation had gone into convincing the volunteers with the boat, and Parvaiz wanted to appear like he meant business. Looking at the boat, I asked if we could take Sultan. Parvaiz had, perhaps, not mentioned Sultan to the men. Rightly, I thought. But he asked the men finally, and to our surprise all they wanted was to see how big Sultan was, and if he could fit. Sultan was brought down to the first-floor porch where the water was low, and the men, seeing Sultan was just a baby, said he could come along. We could barely suppress our delight.

Shortly thereafter, we were out on the boat. For the first time, I saw the house surrounded by water from the outside, and the neighborhood beyond what the view from the living room window and the terrace had allowed. Rajbagh looked ghostly. Putrid smells wafted from the water. Sides of some houses had fallen off. The destruction underneath the water was yet not visible. There were dead dogs on top of floating roofs. But the dog we had heard howl was not there. Had he finally jumped into the water and swum to safety? I hoped he did.

There was very little light, and even the moon was blanketed in clouds. Beneath, poking through the water, were tips of electricity poles, barbed wires, and sharp-edged corrugated tin roofs. It took quite a bit of maneuvering to move the boat forward. As we were nearing the Bund, our inflatable boat suddenly got stuck on top of a pole, threatening to poke a hole in the middle. Everyone was told not to make any rapid movement. Thankfully, Sultan sat motionless. We had to tenderly nudge the boat over to one side, and after, what seemed like an eternity, it was free to
move.

**Distraught city**

As the Bund became visible, I saw it was full of people. A few men, managing the rescue efforts, saw us coming, and guided us to a makeshift landing pad. One man gave me his hand, and I stepped off the boat. Parvaiz, Mughal, and Sultan disembarked after me. The mood was glum all around. There were noises of desperation, pleading, and mutual comforting. The famed Rajbagh was ruined.

Sultan trotted on the Bund, as the rest of us began looking for Aijaz. We were told he was waiting at a distance. People stopped us to ask about Sultan, some even rudely joking that he would make tasty kebabs. A few little boys took pictures with their cell phones. We had no idea where Sultan had come from, but here he was, days after he had been pulled out half-dead from frigid floodwaters, soaking up all the attention.

We finally found Aijaz, and saw several other friends were waiting on the Bund. Nawaz had been coming to the Bund over the previous few days to see if he could arrange a boat, but he wasn’t sure if we were in Rajbagh at all. To get rescuers to agree to help and row a boat for hours, and then not find us, would have been a great act of “insensitivity.” Parvaiz’s brothers had been coming to the Bund too, to see if there was any news of him. The Indian military had announced on their “flood relief webpage” that they had evacuated Parvaiz on Monday. Did the Hakims on their way out tell the army that we were still trapped in the house, and they just included Parvaiz’s name in the evacuee list without confirming if he had been evacuated at all? Parvaiz’s brothers, however, had heard nothing from him. Quite rightly, they didn’t believe the army.

Four days after the flood marooned us, we were finally walking on dry ground. There
were still travails ahead, and as soon as we learnt about the extent of devastation the flood had caused all over the city, our hearts sank. The coming days were going to be the toughest ones, I would soon learn. We walked past the submerged working class district of Maisuma where the houses are old and wobbly. Several of my research informants lived in these houses. Entire families waited on the Bund praying so their houses could remain standing. Tehreek activists had organized rescue operations there, as they consoled those who still had relatives stranded in the area. One senior Tehreek leader had sent relief boats into a Hindu dharma, and rescued the priests from there. His own house in Maisuma was under water, and he looked a bit desolate. “I know in the end my poor neighborhood will be left alone to rebuild, for now it is important that we all stand together,” he said to his JKLF volunteers. In the distance, Hænz men were rowing tourists in their boats from the half-submerged hotels on the Dal Lake to the dry road toward the airport. Hotel owners who had often resented Hænz and their houseboats were looking quite grateful for the critical help Hænz men were providing.

Further ahead, a dozen pregnant women, due anytime, held their bellies up in their arms and walked in file. Distraught and silent, they had been evacuated by Kashmiri volunteers from the submerged Lal Ded Hospital, Kashmir’s largest child and maternity facility. We had also seen many women with their newborns camping on the Bund outside the hospital. A few, I was told, had been born out in the open. We learnt about deaths from capsizing boats and collapsing houses. Several families remained buried under the debris of their homes for days to come. A young photojournalist, trying to save a trapped family, had been washed away.

There was desperation, and there was anger. On Budshah Bridge, young men were running from end to end, sending tractors to areas where people needed to be saved. They were hurling abuse at those taking pictures. The youths were already agitated by TV crews in
helicopters pointing their cameras at desperate people. Those on the bridge taking pictures had
their phones snatched and flung down into the water. They felt helpless, and didn’t find taking
pictures to be sensitive, or urgent. Local photojournalists huddled by the curbside respectfu1ly
agreeing not to take pictures. Youths were also yelling at helicopters for throwing “expired
biscuits” at the bridge. Several young men and women had been injured from falling biscuit
packs.

On Thursday, wading through a three-mile stretch of waist-high water from Qamarwari
to Rawalpora, Parvaiz, his brothers and I found hundreds of bloated dead cows strung to the
fence of a dairy farm that supplied the Indian army. Contorting his face at the smell, one of
Parvaiz’s brothers quipped that if the Indian army didn’t even save these cows, which are “holy
and practical,” how could we have stood a chance? Alongside us walked disconsolate mothers
and fathers, carrying their children on their shoulders, going in both directions, searching for a
safe place.

**Images of solidarity, images of control**

But if we saw immense destruction all over, those areas where water had not entered also
provided glimpses of selfless acts of solidarity and support. There were community kitchens all
over the downtown for people fleeing the waters. On the Bund along Maisuma alone, I counted
fourteen langars. While the flood had washed away the government, local communities in
Srinagar and people from villages, who had trudged dozens of miles loaded with gunny bags full
of rice and vegetables, demonstrated that Kashmir was not going to drown.

Amid the leveling and immersion that the city experienced, many paramilitary pickets
and bunkers had also been washed away. The “fortified” walls had given way and the guts of the
tightly knit military control over the city had spilled out for everyone to see. In some
paramilitary camps, embedded deep in the densely built and populated parts of the city, where aerial evacuation was not possible, the soldiers had shed their pants, and, even while continuing to hold fast on to their machine guns, were pouring water out with buckets and tin pots. At other places, Indian military quickly erected perimeter posts where walls had stood and draped cloth screens on them to prevent curious Kashmiris crowds from peering inside the camps.

In downtown’s narrow lanes, people listening to Indian radio shook their heads in anger. I found a group of people assembled outside a tea-stall watching news on TV. The TV was broadcasting aerial shots of Srinagar with a Hindi caption, Wo Jo Kashmir Tha (“The Kashmir That Was”). I asked one of them how many people had died according to the government. There was no government, he replied, adding that the Indian newscasters were reading obituaries for Kashmir. “The helicopters are helping only their own people, and throwing expired biscuits at us,” another man said. In another part of the downtown, a man stood up facing the square and cursed India. A couple of Kashmiri police officers on duty were within earshot, but gauging the mood, they just nodding in agreement.

That evening, we arrived at one of Parvaiz’s brother’s place, and watched news on an Indian TV channel. The newscaster berated Kashmiris for their “ingratitude” toward the Indian army. Apparently, at a couple of places people had thrown stones at the helicopters flying overhead. According to yet another newscaster, Indian army had saved countless Kashmiri lives. “How could Kashmiris pay the Indian army back like that!” he bellowed. Kashmiris could no longer justify their “separatism” when their very lives depended on the Indian army, a panelist on his talk show grumbled.

Indian news reporters had been flown into the Srinagar airport, and were reporting from inside the relief tents that the army had set up there. The reporters were also being flown around
in the helicopters, and from high and far they had captured irresistible videos of a city under water. These videos were edited and beamed back to the TV studios in New Delhi, where the Indian political pundits endlessly speculated whether this was the “decisive victory” for India in Kashmir. It was clear that “this” referred not to the help they believed the Indian army had provided to the Kashmiris, but the flood itself. The flood was a godsend weapon of war, which the TV pundits believed, was going to win the Kashmir war for India.

Many in Kashmir complained that the “communication blackout” in Kashmir during the flood was deliberate and was meant to prevent Kashmiris from telling their story of the flood. They thought the prolonged outage of telephone lines and the Internet was a deliberate move to give the flood a spin in favor of the military, and to prevent international scrutiny of their actual role. Reminding the world that Kashmir was India’s “internal matter,” the government in New Delhi had declined offers of help from several countries, and barred the flow of international aid. The Indian government argued that it could handle the crisis on its own. All it showed it was capable of, however, was to watch Kashmir drown while unleashing a public relations campaign to resurrect the image of its military, a military that had been regularly criticized by international agencies for human rights violations in Kashmir.

The much-touted “financial aid package” for disaster relief, announced by the new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, turned out to be spectacularly measly (even by the estimates of the loyalist local government, which sends taxes collected from Kashmiris to the Union government that are then distributed back to the States). Not surprisingly, even from that sum it was reported that the India’s Defense Ministry had helped itself to a clean one-third cut of about $90 million, as the bill for “air dropping and rescue operation” called “Operation Megh Rahat” (The Rain of Feel Good). A few months later, some of the families in Srinagar who had lost their
houses in the flood said they had received bank drafts from the government for 3000 rupees (= $50) each.

**Solidarity, fault lines, and military humanism in the villages**

A week after the flood hit Srinagar, I found a way to reach my home in Anantnag. Much of the town had come under water, but because of its higher altitude, the water had flowed out as soon as it arrived. Some of the lower parts of the town had seen damage, but the worst was suffered by villages along Jhelum and its tributaries. I saw volunteers from Syed-us-Sadaat Foundation (SSF) distributing rice, pulses and blankets in the town, and decided to help them assess the damage to help run their relief work efficiently. Along with a couple of their volunteers, I travelled widely in the region to understand the full impact of the flood and if the government had been able to reach the affected areas. As Bari, the SSF general secretary described it, the foundation was a local “religious charity” run on non-sectarian lines. SSF had started off as young men from a neighborhood in Anantnag donating money and volunteering time to help “widows and orphans” through monthly allowances. It ran a sewing workshop for young women and included religious teaching for children. On the side, SSF also had an active mountaineering club.

Bari said the flood had expanded SSF’s work and they had been stretched thin for resources. The government had blockaded material sent by expat Kashmiris working in the Gulf states. Even materials collected by Kashmiri students in New Delhi was lying at the airport, with government unwilling to allow it to pass through. SSF had jumped into flood relief the moment the banks of Arapat nallah breached, flooding parts of town. Their volunteers had saved lives, and brought people to safety. By the time, I joined their meetings and efforts, their work had already expanded to areas beyond the town.
By mid-September, flood had left behind not only ruins but also severe danger of disease outbreak. Several local chemists in Anantnag opened supplies in their stores to help with chlorination. A water bottling company gave their stocks to SSF to bring clean water to the villages. People donated their clothes, beddings, and grains. Some pooled milk powder from their homes for hungry babies. Doctors banded together to set up medical camps, where medicine was freely distributed. Imtiyaz and Nazim, two SSF volunteers, set up round-the-clock ration distribution center in the town, where affected people could come get food grains, oil, and pulses. It was all in all a remarkable collective societal effort in a place shattered by years of splintering occupation and violence. Anantnag, a town that had been at the heart of the armed rebellion of 1990 and then turned by the state into the center of violent Ikhwani counterinsurgency, where thousands had died and disappeared over the years, was resilient at precisely the moment when it needed it the most.

I visited villages, there was still no trace of the government. In HP Tavela, more than two hundred homes had been washed away. Sara, a middle aged woman, was in the grieving period. In a recent road accident, she had lost her three sons, her only sources of support. Sara and her daughters had been woken by the rushing water in the middle of the night. She tried to save her only cow, but lost her belongings and grains in the process. Spending the next few days drinking salty water on the top floor of a nearby mosque, she said she had been left with just tshod zu (“bare life”). No one from the government had visited Sara and her daughters, even a month after the flood.

In Beighpora, straddling the thirty feet high railway track that had been built a few years earlier, Raja’s two-story house had collapsed. The villagers blamed the railway track for
blocking the flood water from flowing out. An old lady, Raja’s sons had saved a boatful of army soldiers from the water. But when the flood water finally receded, the soldiers came back with dredgers to dig up the village road to find the weapons they said had fallen into the water, increasing the difficulties for the villagers already dealing with fallen structures all around. Raja’s sons came under suspicion and were harshly interrogated.

If the government and the military had been absent or insensitive in HP Tavela and Beighpora, in other places, the army and the police competed for media attention. In Lelhar, a

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4 See also (JKCCS 2015), on the role of militarized infrastructure during the flood.
flooded village along the Jhelum further downstream, villagers were desperate for clean drinking water. This desperation had resulted in old fault lines between the village’s cultivators (zamindars)\(^5\) and the fishing community (haenz) to accentuate. The dominant zamindars took most of the drinking water that non-Kashmiri aid groups brought into the village. The fishing community were forced to drink turbid Jhelum water. When I visited Lelhar, I noticed an army water-tanker pulling in. A local pro-India politician and a TV crew from an Indian news channel were closely following the tanker. Villagers lined up to get water, as the politician gave a speech in self-praise. A TV cameraman took videos of men and women carrying copper vessels full of water with Indian soldiers bending and moving at just the right moments to be seen helping. Later, when SSF conducted a turbidity test on the water army had brought, it turned out to be more turbid than the Jhelum waters. Mughali, an old woman from the fishing community, who had been living with her three little grandchildren on a small boat on the Jhelum since the flood receded, was sad she had lost her small mud and brick shack on top of the bank, and bitter at the cultivators for not letting her grandchildren take water. When an SSF volunteer told her about the turbidity of the water the cultivators were drinking, she laughed. We laughed too.

I witnessed similar societal fault lines becoming accentuated in Dehrun, a quaint village on the roaring Brengi tributary, where flash floods destroyed the lower inhabitations of people mostly from Mochi community—traditionally associated with removing hides from dead cows for the leather industry. Hanifa and her daughter Ruby said that a truck had arrived from the Indian state of Rajasthan carrying grains and blankets. I had seen the truck parked on the higher side of the village with banners from the Indian National Congress party. The upper-caste Pirs

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\(^5\) These were small landholders, beneficiaries of the Land Reforms of the early 1950s, and not big landowners, which the name zamindar might suggest. Yet, zamindars had more control over village affairs generally than the haenz.
had taken over distribution and were selectively giving relief to cultivators and denying it to the Mochis, who had been the ones most hit by the flood. Waiting in their makeshift shed, Hanifa, Ruby and Ruby’s three small children had gone hungry for days, until villagers from the cultivator community took pity. Local Tehreek activists had also intervened on behalf of the Mochis to resolve the situation.

In Aadi Gatun, a village leveled by the flood, Sayeeda had lost everything except the “rags on her old back” as she described it. Volunteers from Jama’at-i-Islami, a religious-political organization, had helped her build a temporary shelter. When I arrived, trudging along miles of washed away roads and bridges, Jama’at volunteers were distributing food and blankets. Jama’at had for years been part of Tehreek, even though since late 1990s they had kept a low-profile. A police party arrived and urged villagers to come to their “relief camp” instead, which they said they were just about to set up. Jama’at volunteers wrapped up and left, promising to return the next day.

Soon an army contingent arrived in Aadi Gatun, and took over a distribution center, where a few school teachers had volunteered to distribute rice collected from adjoining villages. The officer told his men to “clear the area.” The soldiers asked the people to form a line outside, and the distribution resumed, except now it was the soldiers distributing. A photojournalist from India was encouraged to take pictures, which he happily did. A mini-military coup. The original volunteers stood by at a distance, waiting for the photojournalist to finish and leave.

Wherever I visited, alone or with the SSF team, women, the traditional center of socio-economic activity in Kashmiri homes, were sharpest in their criticism of the government, and most forthcoming in describing the difficulties they had faced after the flood. Unlike the young men on the overpass in Srinagar, who had prevented onlookers from taking pictures, these
women urged me to take pictures of their damaged homes, soiled grains, dead cattle, and even include them in the pictures. (Since I didn’t carry a camera with me, it was easier to recuse myself from such requests). It was clear, Kashmiri women, despite their anger at the government, wanted to get back to rebuilding their lives and families, instead of protesting against the state. Yet, as Sara from HP Tavela said, “rebuilding our homes without government help will be a slap on their faces.”

Threshold of the visible

A couple of months after the flood, the state officials suddenly became active. Patwaris (land record officials) began visiting villages assessing flood damage, and district administrative
offices opened their gates. Villagers, who had lost *pukka* (red brick) houses, were given checks for 75,000 rupees (USD 1100) each, and those who had lost *kuccha* (raw clay brick) homes received 40,000 rupees (USD 600) each. The break-up hardly made any logical sense—or difference in the lives of the people affected—but the government could claim it had “done something.” For weeks before these checks arrived, prime-time experts on Indian news-channels had been calling Kashmiris “free-loaders.” These experts were tapping into a common discourse in India that Kashmiris were dependent on Indian dole. This discourse is also internalized and promoted by Kashmiri parties that take part in elections. Kashmiri intellectuals and activists, however, held a differing view on the subject, as was evident in a public meeting on “Kashmiri Economy” held a few months before the flood. Indian state not only collects taxes from Kashmiris, but, as several participants claimed, the state acts like “a monopoly colonial corporation.” For instance, while disbarring foreign investment in Kashmir’s “energy sector,” Indian government generates hydroelectricity in Kashmir at “very cheap prices.” And then it sells the same electricity back to Kashmir at multiple times the cost of production (Umar 2016; Ganai 2016). Clearly, Kashmiris were not the ones profiting from this relationship, or at least that was the perception common among sections of Kashmiris intelligentsia.

In many respects, the flood was part of an overall “regime-made disaster.” Ariella Azoulay, writing in the context of Israeli occupation in Palestine, defines regime-made disaster as when one population (citizens, privileged) imposes a disaster (which could include “expulsion, dispossession, and destruction,” or in case of Kashmir persistent state violence as well) on “others,” but is unable to see it for what it is or to think themselves responsible for the outcomes of the disaster (2013, 550). Occupation in Kashmir has become invisible to most Indian citizens. They believe India to be a benign, progressive, democratic patron of Kashmiris.
Refusing to listen to the perspectives of Kashmiris, Indian media confirms these beliefs incessantly. But to Kashmiris, the impact of the occupation on their life-worlds is palpably destructive and dramatic, especially during grave events like the 2014 flood. Not only had the militarized infrastructure, especially the high railroad in places like Beighpora as well as military occupation of *karewas* (high grounds) in Kashmir, directly led to drowning of dozens of villages and urban neighborhoods, but the absence of the government during the critical initial weeks had also turned a natural hazard into a catastrophe (JKCCS 2015). Given this context, the politics of images that I had been witness to was not just about who controlled the images, but about “differential visual rights”\(^6\)—who decides what is to be made visible or invisible, and who gets to see from which position within the hierarchies of power.

![Cartoon illustration: Indian media overinflates the role of the Indian military in the post-flood relief.](image)

\(^6\) Gil Hochberg (2015), writing in the Israel-Palestine contexts, shows how Israeli concealment, surveillance, and even acts of visual witnessing produce mechanisms for denying Palestinian political subjecthood.
Over the years, the camera had been systematically used by Indian news media to obscure the occupation, and keep its violence under the threshold of visible (and outrage). During the previous twenty-five years of military occupation, it had hyper-visibilized Kashmiri Muslim “extremism” and Indian military’s humanism, while invisibilizing the occupation and the state of violent emergency under which it had put Kashmir. Human rights activists in the region, for instance, had long been denouncing Indian media’s blackout of stories of enforced disappearances, mass graves, and torture. And even though news from Kashmir was staple on Indian TV, the focus was intensively fixated on the “disorder” that the Tehreek demand of right to self-determination had supposedly caused. The flood was, therefore, not only an opportunity to accentuate that focus, but the disaster could also be image-harvested to frame Kashmir as an Indian dependency without a viable independent future of its own.

Yet, on the ground, the flood had also made a “non-governmental viewing” possible. The physical and the ideological structure of the occupation became visible. The military’s tightly-knit infrastructure of control was momentarily exposed, and the discrepancy between the circulating images on the TV and the actual realities on the ground became too glaring. The acts of solidarity, the individual and collective efforts in localities and beyond them, stood in sharp contrast to the background of circulating images. If there were differential visual rights that marked the politics of images, the non-governmental viewing also exposed the hierarchy of the body politic: whose lives were worth saving, and whose were not. In the larger schema of the occupational order, things may have remained the same as before—the military and the state did bounce back from the disruption—but its hegemony had come unhinged. For Tehreek volunteers, the flood also exposed the internal societal fault lines in the towns and the
countryside like never before. In many cases, youth activists and volunteers began taking renewed interest in history of these fault lines—between the cultivators and the fishing community, the landed villagers and the landless Mochis, the city and the countryside. The flood had exposed another differential body politic that stood alongside the body politic created by the occupation.

**Back to the business of normalcy**

It took several weeks for the communications to be restored, but as soon as Kashmiris caught their breath and began telling their story of the flood, the Indian TV had moved on. It was time to switch to something else, something that has become a way to undercut the popular demand for the right to self-determination: elections. Not a month after the flood devastated Kashmir, and displaced tens of thousands, the Indian government decided that it was time to ask Kashmiris to vote. A supposed tool of democracy, in Kashmir elections are used as a weapon against Tehreek parties, who ask people to boycott elections and are unable to contest because that would require them to endorse India’s sovereignty over Kashmir, a position with which they don’t agree. More than choosing representatives, therefore, it is the “voter turnout” in elections that matters. India exhibits a higher voter turnout in front of the international press as proof that Kashmiris have chosen to live under “Indian democracy.” If the turnout is low, India ignores it, and no political or moral lessons are learnt. Based on media-generated “goodwill” (*sadbhavna*) for the military’s relief work—earning goodwill is part of military’s more elaborate “Operation *Sadbhavna*”—India’s Kashmir experts hoped to rev up the turnout. (Some Kashmiris, I noticed were using the word *goodil* instead of “goodwill,” which in Kashmiri means “fraud”).

Brought to their knees, I wondered if Kashmiris will be able to see through the flood of images and misrepresentation that followed the September flood. It was likely that desperation
would bring them to voting booths. But, then, gut feelings, cultivated through a history of protest and resistance, are impervious to even neatly packaged propaganda. In a town square in Anantnag, I saw a large hoarding put up, with an oversized picture of an aspiring pro-India politician. Wearing a spotless white \textit{salwar kameez}, the man was standing ankle deep in muddy flood waters, handing out money. Out of sync with the tragedy all around him, the politician sported a big smile into the camera, and the caption read “Vote for Change.”

A grandma, waiting for bus, looked at the hoarding, sighed, and then laughed.

“Photoshop,” I said, absentmindedly.

“\textit{Awah photooshap}.” She knew.
CHAPTER 4
STATE OF EMERGENCY, STATE OF ELECTIONS: THE SOCIAL MEANINGS OF “DEMOCRACY” IN KASHMIR

It is November 2014, the beginning of winter in Kashmir. The Indian government has announced that the elections for Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly will be held in December. Hardly two months have passed since the catastrophic flood destroyed dozens of villages, submerged towns, and left the local economy in ruin. Thousands have been displaced and are without shelter for the typically harsh Himalayan winter. Electricity has been disrupted and water is contaminated in many places. With long stretches of roads missing and bridges swept away, post-flood Kashmir is a broken landscape. There is a pervasive sense of helplessness. In September, when the flood hit, the state government—then in its last months of power—had found itself utterly unprepared, and has since failed to provide relief to flood victims. Its civilian officials claim that the Indian government, on which the local authorities depend for disaster funds, has not released an “emergency package.” But now, some of these officials are taken aback that the Indian government is ready to spend valuable resources on conducting elections, instead of reconstruction. “True, elections were due,” one local official, conducting damage survey in Srinagar, says, “But things need to be restored to some degree of order before people can even think about elections. Isn’t it?” But Tehreek activists argue that elections in Kashmir are intimately tied to the “state of emergency”—and “disorder”—and have very little to do with “democracy.”

To understand this intertwining of elections and emergency in Kashmir, let us briefly return to the early 1990s, when Kashmir erupted into a mass uprising and an armed movement, known as Tehreek. The first response of the Indian federal government had been to dismiss
Kashmir’s civilian government, suspend the constitutional rights of the people, and appoint a new governor, Jagmohan, who would be responsible directly to the Indian government in New Delhi. The appointment of Jagmohan was central to the imposition of an emergency order.¹ With all the executive authority now vested in his office, Jagmohan represented not only the administrative face of the emergency, but also articulated its ideological underpinnings (Brass 1994, 225). A career bureaucrat, he had previously served under Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s emergency regime (1975-77), and was in-charge of a “beautification” program in old city Delhi. Under Jagmohan, the program had led to forcible mass sterilization of men, large scale demolition of poor neighborhoods and evictions of urban poor, and, at least, one public massacre—all of these affecting the city’s Muslims disproportionately (Tarlo 2003, 39).² Given full authority to deal with the Tehreek uprising, when Jagmohan arrived in Srinagar in January 1990, he saw Kashmir as a “valley of scorpions,” where, he said, “the bullet is the only solution” (Anderson 2012, 175).³ Drawn to using medical metaphors during his televised utterances, he once dramatically claimed: “Kashmir is sick, and I am its nursing orderly. My job is to administer medicine when it is needed.” Jagmohan intended to instill in Kashmiris, what he euphemistically called, the “rationality of fate” and the “resignation to order” (Newstrack n.d.).

For the next four years, first under Jagmohan, and then his successor, Girish Saxena, militarization became the dominant paradigm of state control.⁴ Jagmohan instituted punitive

¹ While Jagmohan’s full name is Jagmohan Malhotra, in public life and in his writings, he only uses his first name.
² The massacre known as Turkman Gate massacre took place on 19 April 1976, when Jagmohan, as the Vice Chairman of Delhi Development Corporation, accompanied by the prime minister’s son, let loose police against Muslims protesting forcible sterilization and demolition of homes. His Kashmir stint was his second one.
³ At one point, to justify his wider crackdown, Jagmohan had gone on to say: “Every Muslim in Kashmir is a militant today.” See also Schofield (1996).
⁴ I describe this process of militarization in Chapter 5. Drawing on Michael Geyer (1989), Catherine Lutz sees “militarization” as “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.” Lutz argues that militarization involves “intensification of labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals.” She points out that militarization involves both “discursive process” (shift in societal beliefs etc) and “organization” (of armies and
measures against public expressions of Tehreek, which led to extensive restrictions on civilian life, killings (including several public massacres), enforced disappearances, incarcerations, and torture (Human Rights Watch 1993). But instead of subduing Tehreek, militarization served to increase the number of Kashmiri youth joining the rebel ranks. The movement not only became further entrenched but also spread to a larger geographic region beyond the Kashmir valley (Bose 1997; Kazi 2010). Within a few months, as international criticism over public massacres in Kashmir rose, Jagmohan was recalled, and replaced by Saxena. However, the change was superficial. Saxena had also been an advocate of “tough military action.” Under his administration, violence under policies like “Catch and Kill” intensified, creating widespread fear, especially in the countryside.

By late 1993, however, the Indian government decided that the answer to the armed revolt in Kashmir was not to be a purely military one. A “political process” was to be restarted as well, as Rajesh Pilot, the federal minister in charge of Kashmir affairs in New Delhi, prominently announced to the press. Governor Saxena was replaced by General K.V. Krishna Rao, who was to start “secret talks” with Tehreek militant leaders. Prominent elements of the old civilian government, which had been dismissed in 1990, were to be brought back from their self-imposed exile. Bureaucracy was to be “revived” in a way that could “respond to people’s grievances.” There was talk of reviving “the economy,” which would mean, as openly admitted by government’s advisors, pumping cash into the region to purchase loyalty. All of this was to culminate in the conduct of elections for the state assembly, which would give Kashmir a “semblance of normalcy” (Baweja 1993a, 1993b, 1993c).

leadership)—all in all militarization glorifies and legitimizes “military action” (2004, 320; Geyer 1989, 70). While Lutz analyses this process in the US at the societal level, in Kashmir the process was specifically carried out at the level of the state, primarily through militarization of public spaces and introduction of emergency laws. See also Kazi (2010) and Junaid (2013).
In the first indication of this shift, the Indian government’s discourse changed markedly from describing Kashmiri armed militants as the “enemies of the state” to describing them as the “enemies of peace.” Unlike previously, when all Kashmiris were considered potentially subversive, which to the state officials justified militarization and the suspension of civil rights, now Tehreek activists were to be differentiated from the larger Kashmiri population. Accordingly, a new purchase was put on the idea of “return to peace” instead of simply “law and order,” and peace was symbolically connected with the conduct of elections.

In truth, however, elections were not so much about democracy as about the image of democracy. None of the emergency laws were withdrawn, nor was the military pulled from civilian spaces. Conducting elections in Kashmir had a three-fold purpose. First, elections were expected to wean away a section of Kashmiris from Tehreek and cause fissures in it. Second, they would create a local face of the government to execute the will of the Indian state, instead of having a New Delhi-appointed (unelected) governor do so. And, finally, elections would present a “soft” image of Indian rule in Kashmir to the international community (that is, to the Western governments critical of human rights abuses in Kashmir), demonstrate that Tehreek was not popular, and that Kashmiri participation in elections was a sign of their trust in the Indian government.

This “new thinking,” as it was called in government circles, raised an obvious question among state strategists: how to make Kashmiris participate in the elections? In 1989 and 1991, there had been enough hints of potential wide-spread boycott that no scheduled elections were held in those years. But by 1994, Ikhwan, a counter-insurgent militia funded and armed by the state, had arrived on the scene to solve the issue of “participation.” I will tell the story of Ikhwan and Ikhwanism in Chapter 5. Here, let me just say that the Ikhwanis were instrumental in the
elections that eventually took place in 1996, and they left a mark on all subsequent elections as well, long after the armed dimensions within Tehreek had declined.

Given this background, I will explore below the contemporary social meanings of “democracy” in Kashmir, especially among youth activists. Elections broadly evoke varied responses in the region that range from a limited excitement and resigned neglect to public scorn and strenuous opposition. This is in marked contrast to most of South Asia, where elections have become a spectacular mode of participation in politics, especially in India’s public life in which elections occupy a “sacrosanct place” (Banerjee 2007, 1556-1562). Elections split Kashmiri youth activism, if in a limited way, between those few who veer toward “electoral politics” and the rest who emphasize “resistance politics.” Based on ethnographic engagement with the work of activists involved in election campaigning and those involved in election-boycott campaigning in 2014, I analyze the modes through which the idea of elections itself comes to be contested.

As stated above, Tehreek activists tend to see elections as intimately tied to counterinsurgency. Indeed, not only have elections and emergency worked in tandem in the region, but the state’s instrumental use of elections and the popular mistrust in the process perpetuates the crisis of representation that has been left open by the historically unresolved demand for self-determination, the key principle that undergirds the Tehreek movement. Especially, since 1994, elections were used to create new social relations of power in Kashmir, mediated by what I call an uncivil society. However, the normative contradictions that elections under emergency bring forth, also shed light on the incongruities that are present in Tehreek’s own claims of representation of Kashmiri aspirations. While I focus on the elections that took place in the winter of 2014, I also draw from my previous observations and experiences, especially with the elections of 2008.
An election is announced, and no one is happy

“This announcement is a cruel joke,” Hussain, a Kashmiri relief and rehabilitation worker, tells me in Srinagar, the city worst hit by the flood. “They will spend crores of rupees on the *tamāsh’ē* (drama, spectacle), but have nothing for people in distress.” The Indian government, tight-lipped about “emergency package” that its local functionaries (the National Conference government in Kashmir) have been promising, insists “democracy” will “heal the wounds” of Kashmir. For a while now, the Indian government’s position on Kashmir has been that people need *bijli, sadak, paani* (electricity, road, water) and not *azadi* (freedom or independence). This has been its argument at least since 1994, when a return to elections and civilian rule was proposed to defeat Tehreek, then in its fifth year.

Several Kashmiri politicians and groups had emerged or were revived in response to the possibility that elections would be their way to acquire power over the administration of civilian affairs in Kashmir. Those elections took three years to materialize, and finally happened in 1996—nine years after the last time such elections had been held, in 1987. “All civil governments in Kashmir come with promises of change,” says Hussain. He lists these promises: reduction of military violence, demilitarization of public places, AFSPA removal, development, and jobs for youth. “But they all forget when the election is over,” he says:

The flood was the final test. Not only for the civil government in Srinagar, but for the government of India too. Now when people need *bijli, sadak, paani* most urgently, the Indian government has shown no sense of urgency.

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5 AFSPA stands for Armed Forces Special Power Act, which was an emergency legislation imposed in Kashmir in 1990, under which military personnel were granted extra-ordinary powers in the region. There has long been a demand for repealing the AFSPA, but the military and the government in New Delhi has refused to debate the question. See Chapter 6 for more. See also Duschinksi (2009) and McDuie-Ra (2009).
Hussain is not so much outraged as baffled. “How will people vote, when they have no documents left or are displaced from their homes?” Incorporating the discourse of counterinsurgency into his own speech, he says, “They talk of ‘winning hearts and minds’ in Kashmir, and this was their opportunity.” When I ask him why the government didn’t help, Hussain starts by putting the blame on khalkh, the people. “It is part of the absurdity of politics in Kashmir,” he says. “People don’t see themselves as shehri [citizens], even though the Indian constitution has declared Kashmiris as citizens.” Before the flood hit, Hussain had been a “civil society worker,” who had volunteered with a New Delhi-based non-governmental organization to “educate Kashmiris about their civic rights.” He laments:

People often don’t make demands on the government, not even those basic ones that citizenship minimally grants. Even though the government collects taxes from them, people are inclined to see what the government occasionally does for them more like a favor done to the ri’ayaa [the subjects].

After a brief pause, however, Hussain suddenly backtracks and his tone becomes plaintive:

We are living under an occupation. We don’t have rights, despite what their constitution says. You are a subject. Sometimes Kashmiris protest lack of basic services, but the government treats these protests as violations of law and order, not as legitimate demands. The people protesting power-cuts or shortage of drinking water are met with police and paramilitary actions, even though the government keeps hiking the prices for these services. Asking for water or a road is a crime against the state here. They will arrest you, and say you were waging war against the state. The protestors sometimes turn to azadi [pro-independence] slogans, but often because soldiers beat them up or shoot at them. Then, people don’t even express their basic demands publicly.
In his remarks, interspersed with content from emergency laws in force in Kashmir, Hussain had diagnosed his dilemma well. The schizo-politics of elections under the military occupation is marked by the split in Kashmiri polity along the citizenship-subjecthood difference. Hussain’s use of the terms khalkh (people), shehri (citizen), and ri’ayaa (subjects) also hints at this split. What could electoral democracy mean in a place where the state privileges elections but denies the popular demand for the right to self-determination, and where, therefore, democracy is made to adjust to the imperatives of the military occupation? The Indian government insists that the real Kashmiri aspirations are centered on “issues of everyday life,” which the elections alone could resolve. Yet, as Hussain insists, the government violently circumscribes the arena in which the issues of everyday life could be expressed, fearing that opening this space of politics will take it out of its control.

The obverse of this position is to be found in the Tehreek argument, which insists that only an evental politics of “plebiscite” and “azadi” will address Kashmiri aspirations; and that “suffering” is a natural consequence of the occupation. While Tehreek activists call for sabr, or patience, they realize that the movement cannot run on a promised “future” alone. To its clear disadvantage, however, Tehreek cannot match the state’s ability to address everyday needs of society, which partly explains its insistence on “resistance” and “struggle” over elections. So, while state authorities see conducting elections as a test of its power and authority, Tehreek parties frame the success of the election boycott calls as a test of their popularity.

Hussain tells me that before the flood he had often argued with the residents of the city: “The election might help if everyone voted for morally upright representatives.” His audiences had laughed, wondering how much he had been paid to preach the values of democracy. But after the flood, and the lack of government help in its wake, he feels uncertain if even “morally
"morally upright" representatives could achieve much. Hussain had minimally expected the elections to be deferred, so that “for a moment, everyone could move beyond politics to help in relief and rehabilitation.” The election announcement suggested to him that the dissonance between what is “morally upright” and the “reality of the occupation” will haunt even a major disaster, like the flood. Standing on the teetering foundation of a washed away house, he remarks, “It is as if the flood didn’t even take place. What was the hurry in calling for the election?”

To be clear, the “wounds” the Indian government invokes in the context of the election announcement are not the wounds inflicted by the flood. The wounds are those that several liberal Indian commentators call “alienation” of Kashmiris from the Indian state. Indian state does not see its presence in Kashmir as a military occupation. If there is alienation, the state officials claim, it has been deliberately fostered by Tehreek organizations. But Kashmiris view Indian control as jābri qabzeh, or “forced occupation,” a word which seems to have appeared in political discourse as soon as Indian military arrived in the region in 1947. Nevertheless, as Tehreek activists describe it, “wounds inflicted by the occupation” remain invisible to the state.

In 1994, the government was subduing an armed movement, and the election discourse then had concentrated on returning Kashmir to “normalcy”—which apparently meant a return to the pre-1990 position. By 2014, however, the armed movement has largely faded into the background. Yet, while the government is suddenly abuzz with preparations for the election, there is no talk either of demilitarization or the withdrawal of the draconian AFSPA, which have caused immense misery. There is also no talk of a return to normalcy. The occupation itself has become normalized.

The elections must go without any major snag, insist state officials to the media. Since the Indian government presents elections as a clinching proof of its good intentions in Kashmir
and the Kashmiri desire to stay with India, the picture must be perfect. The “voter turnout” is a key statistic the government uses to measure the success of elections: the higher the turnout, the better the picture. Photographs of Kashmiris lining up to vote rounds up the success. At the end of the 2008 elections, then Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh had underscored this overall meaning the state attaches to the elections in Kashmir, when he said: “Large turnout is a vote for democracy, a vote for national integration” (Kak 2014, 40). To manage the event, or the *tamāsh'e* —the “drama” of election—as the dejected Hussain describes it, therefore, hundreds of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) paramilitary companies have been dispatched from mainland India to bolster the already bloated security infrastructure in Kashmir. Many of them have been housed in schools and other public buildings in Srinagar and across Kashmir. This is again a well-established pattern. The same story was repeated in 2014 Parliamentary elections. As Sanjay Kak, who witnessed those elections, writes:

> Every part of the Kashmir valley was flooded with troops. To supplement over half a million soldiers deployed as part of the permanent security grid, additional paramilitary forces were flown in from all over India—452 companies of a hundred men each…In Gurez [a smaller region in Kashmir] …each voter could literally have been assigned four armed minders” (2014, 46).

The 2014 Assembly elections will take place in five stages, and a “curfew plan” has been drawn up to go with it. The “stages” indicate which districts in Kashmir will be “open” during the elections and which ones will be under military lockdown. Curfew-plan means you can move about only if there are elections in your district (and only if you are going to vote), and you will be under curfew if there are no elections where you live. The curfew will remain in effect on election days, which are spread over a month. The rationale of this process appears obscure, and baffles many, yet people, at least on the surface, seem to have become reconciled to it. A
common complaint I hear, however, is that children will have to miss long stretches of school days, because school teachers have been given marching orders to assist the military in the “smooth conduct of the polling process,” and would be relocated from one district to another. The real reason behind the curfew-plan, a government official tells the press, is to “prevent (Tehreek parties) from mobilizing people on a large scale and disrupt the elections.” He adds: “We take extreme precaution.”

Hussain laughs, when I show him the clip on my phone, but is unable to hide his scorn: “They have seven and a half lakh soldiers (three-quarters of a million) in Kashmir, in a valley of sixty lakh people (six million), and they can’t conduct an election within a day!” He tells me to notice the difference between the pre-election and post-election government discourse. Before the elections, Hussain says, the local electoral parties vehemently claim the election has “nothing to do with the larger questions of self-determination,” and the Indian government remains quiet. But after the election, the India government asserts, like Prime Minister Singh’s statement above, that election participation represents “a desire for integration with India.”

“Extreme precaution,” I realized, is not an offhand remark; it precisely means what it suggests. For instance, as Hussain had also noted, the government has a “deliberate strategy” in planning to start elections in the far-flung areas of the countryside, where people can be made to vote more easily, and where the focus of the pro-government media can be concentrated. By the time the elections reach urban areas, where people largely heed the Tehreek parties’ call to boycott, the government would have already framed the elections as “successful.” The “strategy” was repeated in 2014, when elections first took place in a placid Bandipora, where elections can be minutely managed, and only in the end in Srinagar, where such control is harder.
Meanwhile, Tehreek activists and “other miscreants” have been arrested in daily raids and put in prison— to remain there until the end of the elections in January 2015. In Baramulla, Kulgam and Pulwama districts alone, more than three hundred youths are arrested to “ensure peaceful polling” (Greater Kashmir 2014). News media personnel from New Delhi have arrived alongside the CRPF to cover the elections. “If it would help their military objectives in Kashmir to help people affected by the flood, they would have helped,” Husain tells me, “Elections help the Indian story in Kashmir—that ‘India is democratic’—and their media is here to tell it to the world.” He adds, “In the end, elections in Kashmir are a counterinsurgency tactic.”

Hussain’s remarks turned my attention to 1994, when the government in New Delhi first announced that elections would be held in Kashmir that year, and the civil government would be reinstated. The announcement had appeared quite odd to many Kashmiris then. It was the peak of the armed movement, and thousands of people were dying each year. How could an election be held in a political vacuum? Who was going to contest? Who was going to vote? But the elections were held, in 1996, with the aid of the counterinsurgent Ikhwanis, who not only suppressed the Tehreek armed groups in the countryside, but also fielded their own candidates in the election.

**History of elections and the politics of “plebiscite”**

The idea of elections in Kashmir was complicated from the beginning. India took Pakistan to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1947 over what Indian leaders had described as Pakistan-backed “tribal invasion” into Kashmir. After lengthy debates, the UNSC passed Resolution 47(1948), which called for a ceasefire, and a step-by-step demilitarization of Kashmir by both India and Pakistan. The resolution also recommended a “free and impartial plebiscite” in the region to be held under the auspices of the UN “to determine the final
disposition of the State of Jammu and Kashmir” according to the “will of the people.” While this resolution was not to Indian liking, its recommendations were not enforceable by the Security Council, which allowed India enough elbow-room to gradually freeze the “dispute.” When India announced that it was going to hold elections in Kashmir in early 1950s, which would determine the future of Kashmir, Pakistan protested this at the UN. The UN passed Resolution 91(1951), which stated that elections in Kashmir were no substitute for the Plebiscite. This idea of “plebiscite,” then, would become one of the central political planks for Kashmiri politics in the years to come. *Haq hamara, Rai-shumari* (“Our right, Plebiscite!”) became the quintessential Kashmiri *cri de cœur*.

Ironically, “plebiscite” was first taken up by the National Conference, a Kashmiri party which had supported Kashmir’s accession to India. The party used the *rai-shumari* slogan as a political expedient, though, primarily to negotiate the return to power of its leader Sheikh Abdullah who had been arrested in 1953. Once India rehabilitated Abdullah to power (in 1975), the National Conference dropped the slogan. Tehreek voices grew louder around the plebiscite slogan later, but replaced it with a less ambiguous, if equally daunting, idea of *haq-e-khud-iradiyat*, or the “right to self-determination.” The claim that there could be “no real democracy without self-determination” became a strict political principle for Tehreek. This principle, however, limited Tehreek’s own political choices. For instance, to show their representative character, Tehreek politics had to devolve into street agitations, demonstrations, strikes (*hartals*), and election boycott campaigns.

But long before Tehreek parties decided to boycott, elections had already become a discredited phenomenon. Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din (1928-2001), one of the most popular writers in Kashmir, had seen elections as part of the politics of patronage and an economy of lucrative
contracts for publicly funded projects. In his short story, “Election: The Kashmir Kind,” written in early 1960s, Mohi-ud-Din tells the story of two rival Srinagar-based political families rousing a crowd of people against each other. The Dars, who hope for the Green Flag party to win in the elections, incite the crowd to throw stones at the house of the Kacchroos, who hope for the Red Flag party to win. When the Red Flag party wins, the Kacchroos rouse the same crowd of people to throw stones at the Dars’ house. In the end, Kacchroos win major contracts from the government, and the Dars are reduced to doing “illicit” trades. But more important than the mutual squabbling between the two families is the “hidden hand” in the entire game. Writes Mohi-ud-Din, barely concealing his contempt for the National Conference (the Red Flags) and their main Islamist opponents (the Green Flags) in Kashmir, “Who will win and who will lose had already been decided. But, then, it was important to make a big show.” Fearing government reprisal, a common enough threat to Kashmiri intellectuals in the post-1947 era, Mohi-ud-Din leaves unsaid who has already decided the election. For his Kashmiri readers, however the hint is conveyed unambiguously (Mohi-ud-Din 2009).

Given the widespread resentment against Indian control, especially over the question of the plebiscite, the state made sure that those who came to power in Kashmir remained loyal to India. The history of democracy in Kashmir, accordingly, became one marked by election riggings, rejection of the candidacies of those suspected of “pro-azadi” (pro-freedom) proclivities, appointments of India-loyalist Kashmiri politicians to positions of power, and persecution, arm-twisting, and arbitrary dismissals of those seen critical of the Indian policies (Kak 2014, 33-51; Bose 1997; Lyngdoh 2002). The “hidden hand,” which Mohi-ud-Din writes about, was, of course, this systematic manipulation of politics in Kashmir.

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6 The Kashmiri title of the story is “Election: Koshur Tarz.”
For India, despite the UN resolutions, elections (and their manipulation) were the perfect political formula to evade the question of plebiscite. Indeed, the military had always remained as the back-up, even during peacetime—at least until 1990, when in response to the Tehreek movement, the military came out of their barracks and took direct control. In the aftermath of the events of 1947, when war between India and Pakistan bifurcated the erstwhile semi-independent state of Kashmir, and the two countries occupied its two resulting parts, the Indian government had publicly accepted the idea of plebiscite. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had himself made public promises to crowds of National Conference supporters in Srinagar that the plebiscite would be held upon cessation of hostilities with Pakistan (Noorani 2014). But references to plebiscite dropped as soon as elections were announced. The National Conference won the election “unopposed” in almost all places, giving India confidence that there was no further need to talk about the plebiscite.

By 1953, three years after the end of the India-Pakistan war, India had completely backtracked. This frustrated Sheikh Abdullah, who was then the Prime Minister of Kashmir. Abdullah had lent India support in the uncertain post-1947 period with the hope that, once the military conflict with Pakistan had ended, a plebiscite would be held to give an international as well as a popular legitimacy to the political order, and to his own authority. He had promised as much to his supporters in Kashmir. Instead, in 1953, Nehru’s government arrested Abdullah on charges of hatching “conspiracies” with the help of “foreign” powers (Bose 2003, 66). Abdullah was until then considered a key ally of India, not to mention a personal “friend” of Nehru’s (Guha 2007, 76). Abdullah had already felt unnerved by the right-wing Hindu agitations in India, which demanded “full integration” of Kashmir with India, as well as by India’s creeping
infringement of Kashmir’s “autonomy” as enshrined in the 1947 Instrument of Accession.\(^7\)

Nehru replaced Abdullah with Ghulam Muhammad Bakshi, a minister in the deposed Abdullah’s Kashmir cabinet. Bakshi happily agreed to bury the plebiscite question and denounced Abdullah as an agent of “imperial powers.”

Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest led to a crisis of representation in Kashmir. India’s Congress party leaders, especially Nehru, with whom the National Conference had tethered its fate, had without batting an eyelid “betrayed” the National Conference. The National Conference had till then carried the mantle of Kashmiri nationalism, and believed India would respect Kashmir’s autonomy, but its greatest bet had backfired. The 1953 events also set the precedent for a series of Indian interventions to dismiss dissenters and install favorites as administrators in Kashmir. As an old, former legislator, a Kashmiri who had been part of the civilian government in the pre-1990 era, told me in an interview, “Many in Kashmiri politics soon learnt that the key to entry into the state assembly was to represent Indian interests in Kashmir, instead of Kashmiri interests to India.”

Principally, this meant, as the former legislator clarified, “silence over the question of the plebiscite.” And those who did not agree with the silence? “They were debarred from contesting elections, or their candidacy was rejected on flimsy grounds.” Election rigging became a common practice. However, he was quick to point out: “But the idea of the plebiscite did not die.” He explained how during the two decades of Abdullah’s “political arrest and exile,” the slogan was taken up by “his loyalists.” These loyalists formed the Plebiscite Front, which was

\(^7\) The Instrument of Accession was the document signed by the erstwhile monarch of Kashmir, and which India claims to be the “legal” basis for its legitimacy in Kashmir. It was signed in October 1947 between Kashmir’s Dogra autocrat, Hari Singh, and the Indian government, to allow Indian troops to enter Kashmir, ostensibly to defend against the “tribal invasion” from Pakistan. The accession was meant to give India legal cover for, what many Kashmiris consider, was in fact an invasion to pacify the anti-Dogra revolt by the subjects of the state. Nevertheless, the document had envisaged that India would control only three areas of Kashmir’s public life: defense, external affairs, communication. Kashmir was to have its own “Prime Minister” and President (Sadr-e Riyasat).
immediately proscribed, while their main party, the National Conference, remained “hijacked” by a small section of “pro-India” Kashmiri politicians. Years later, in 1975 after Abdullah made “compromises” on both the plebiscite and the autonomy, and signed an “accord” with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India to accept a much-weakened position of chief ministership, elements from the Plebiscite Front would combine with the older opponents of the National Conference and religious parties to form the Muslim United Front (MUF). MUF contested elections in 1987. The elections that year were again rigged, but instead of business-as-usual, the idea of “self-determination” emerged as the lightning rod of the 1989-90 uprising that followed.

The “election formula” had worked until 1987—at least no sustained or organized movement had emerged in Kashmir with the ability to challenge the political order established in 1947. Even the Plebiscite Front had chosen a less confrontational path of parleys, negotiations, and court battles. But when elections were conducted in 1987, and the MUF alliance found it had been defeated despite its “considerable public support,” its activists took to streets, intensifying the general discontent with elections. Incidentally, many Kashmiris remember people coming out to vote enthusiastically in 1987. Wherever MUF had fielded candidates, the “turn-out” had been a historic high. However, an alliance of the National Conference and the Indian Congress was declared winner with an overwhelming majority. As the former legislator said, “Even some within the winning alliance were embarrassed by the size of their victories!”

As it turned out, the rigged 1987 elections became the prominent background to the Tehreek movement for independence. The leaders of Tehreek had either contested as MUF candidates or been its polling agents. Even before the election results were announced, many of

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8 The designation Prime Minister had already been changed to Chief Minister in the 1960s. While the former had symbolically and nominally acknowledged Kashmir’s separate status (or what some call “special status”) vis-à-vis India, the latter designation placed Kashmir on the same level as the other states of India.
these MUF workers were arrested. After their release, several crossed into Pakistani-controlled western areas of Kashmir, received training in guerrilla warfare, and came back to lead the armed Tehreek. Among these, the name of Yusuf Shah, an MUF candidate in a Srinagar constituency, is prominent. Shah was likely to win, but before the election results were announced, he was arrested. After his release, he escaped Kashmir to become the head of the Hizb-ul Mujahideen (Group of the Mujahids), the largest of the armed organizations. Another prominent name is that of Yasin Malik, who was an MUF polling agent. He was also arrested (and, some of his associates say, “tortured”) on the eve of the elections. Malik would later become the chief of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), the most popular armed group.9

Some have argued that the armed movement was a “response” to India’s “mismanagement of elections” and the “institutional decay of democratic institutions” (Ganguly 1996). While this contention, as I have also suggested above, is not entirely amiss, the question of democracy in Kashmir goes deeper than the elections. Tehreek, according to its ideologues, had been a result of the larger “crisis of representation” in Kashmir. The movement’s aspirations were undergirded by a popular vision of Kashmiri independence, the vision to which none of the electoral parties had shown fidelity, including the National Conference.10 The MUF had been, in the words of one of its surviving activists, the “last ditch effort to create an alternative to the National Conference.” The alliance had brought together secular as well as religious formations in Kashmir, all seeking Kashmir’s right to self-determination, or even outright independence. “The rigging of the 1987 elections was,” the activist says, “the proverbial last straw.” It was not

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9 The two groups eventually became fierce rivals, setting the stage for the 1996 elections. I explore these rivalries further in the next chapter.
10 National Conference, the most prominent of these parties, had started off before 1947 as a party representing the popular goal of establishing an independent, republican state. While National Conference had supported 1947 limited accession to India, it had demanded that India conduct a plebiscite in Kashmir to allow Kashmiris to determine the political status of their country and to give legitimacy to the question of accession.
the last straw because the MUF’s hopes for a fairly elected civilian administration had been
dashed, but because it convinced many of its constituents that the politics of independence could
no longer be carried out through electoral or “democratic” means.

By January 1990, when the armed rebels acquired mass momentum, even those five
MUF candidates who had won (or had been “allowed to win” in the words of the MUF activist),
resigned from the state assembly, and organized the political front for the movement. The Indian
authorities, finding the state government unable to take “tough action” against the almost-daily
processions and protests, dismissed it. It was the same local government that had come to power
in the aftermath of the “rigged” elections of 1987. During the next four years, as the military got
busy suppressing Tehreek, there was no talk of elections. The pro-India politicians mostly fled,
and Kashmir was under direct rule from New Delhi. Yet by late 1993 election talk would be
revived, but this time—since the militarization and Tehreek resistance had fundamentally altered
the situation in Kashmir—the elections would be assembled from completely new elements. The
Indian government deployed radical new tactics to achieve this objective. The election itself, as I
argue, was neither meant simply to produce a civil government per se, nor even to maintain the
traditional form of control over Kashmir (through electoral manipulation), but was instead
geared toward a restructuring of Kashmiri society itself.

In 1994, however, India’s counterinsurgency war in Kashmir was still going badly, and
restarting the “political process,” as Minister Rajesh Pilot had announced, became less of a noble
ideal it was purported to be, than a liability. The Indian government had set forth a parameter of
“success” in Kashmir—the early conduct of elections—which its military was having a difficult
time achieving on the ground. It was in this context that the government started investing in
creating elements from among Kashmiris (principally the Ikhwanis) who would constitute a new
ground of the political process, one that could bypass the much larger but recalcitrant subject population altogether, yet claim to represent the whole. The “image of democracy” in Kashmir that the government wanted to project required a constituency that would, just by existing, diminish the politics of the plebiscite and the right to self-determination. At least this is how Tehreek activists perceived it. According to a former member of the MUF who had actively campaigned for his party in 1987, and then become a fervent opponent of the elections in Kashmir, “India wanted a sort of ‘democracy’ in Kashmir that could live comfortably under the state of emergency.” The election, in his view, would produce a civilian government, but one which would not govern in the “interest of the people.” This government would itself be governed by the “Indian state’s agenda.” To him, the “agenda” involved the “destruction of Tehreek” and the “permanent integration of Kashmir into India.”

When elections were finally held in 1996, the government presented it as a “game changer.” The election did not transform people’s sentiments toward the state. It, however, set a new tone for the government’s discourse on Kashmir. Despite an abysmally low voter participation in urban Kashmir, the government declared the election a “victory” for its position on Kashmir.\(^1\) Since the 1996 election, the militarized process of conducting elections became a routine. Its components included heavy paramilitary deployment, mass arrests of Tehreek activists, multi-stage polling, starting polling from far-away places and moving into more populous areas toward the end, tactical use of curfews, and using intense but selective media.

\(^1\) According to the government’s own records, in all of Srinagar’s assembly constituencies (the most populous and significant region in Kashmir), for instance, between 10-20 percent of all the registered electorate voted. In most of these constituencies only around 12 percent voted. In the Kashmiri countryside, which is easier to control, between 30-54 percent were declared to have voted. In the 2008 election, the polling rose only marginally higher, but in 2002, which some of my interviewees see as less militarized, as Ikhwan had just begun to be officially dismantled, the polling dropped to single digits in almost a dozen constituencies, some reporting as low as 4 percent, including in some areas of the countryside (Statistical Report on General Election, 1996, 2002, and 2008).
reportage to declare every local election as Signifying “Kashmiri desire for integration with India.”

A more profound impact of the 1996 elections was felt in Kashmir in the time to come. Not only had Ikhwanis, between 1994 and 1996, pacified the political ground on which elections could be conducted, Ikhwanis themselves became the center of an amalgamation of political and social actors who together constituted a new polity in Kashmir, an “uncivil society.” This term was, in fact, used by an ex-Ikhwan operator during an interview with me. He used “uncivil society” as a bitter pun on the idea of “civil society,” which he had often heard his military handlers using to describe him and his fellow Ikhwanis. He sounded bitter because he and his fellow Ikhwanis had been abandoned by the government as the elections in the next decade became less dependent on Ikhwani violence. But I also have a logical explanation of why I use the term, which I will explain toward the end. Suffice it to say here that this “uncivil society” circumvented the larger subject population of Kashmiris altogether. It could be tactically mobilized by the government to provide an appearance of legitimacy to the elections, despite the “alienation” of the broader Kashmiri population from the “electoral process.”

But what about the Tehreek boycott campaigns? In some respects, staying away from elections has given the movement an aura of respectability. Not participating in elections in the aftermath of the 1990 uprising has led many Kashmiris to see Tehreek leaders as somehow “incorruptible” and committed to the “Kashmir cause,” even though the occasional rumors fly about their “hidden properties” and “black money.” On the question of Tehreek’s relationship with the elections, one activist told me in Srinagar on the eve of the election in 2014:

Perhaps India would prefer us to fight elections and hope that we lose. We will lose because people would see our participation as a betrayal of the bunyeadi maqsad [fundamental objective,
that is self-determination]. But if we were winning, India would do an Eighty-Seven [1987] all over again, and make us lose.

Having debated the question with his fellow activists several times at their party headquarters, the activist found the dilemma to be unresolvable. “India would only allow us to participate if we lose. They would allow us to win if we commit to their sovereignty,” he says, and adds, “But why should we, if all our politics is fundamentally opposed to the occupation?”

On the other hand, the former legislator’s words about the “silence over plebiscite” as a “key to power,” produces its own dilemmas for those who participate in the elections. The popular memory of elections as a “big show,” to use Mohi-ud-Din’s phrase, has led the local pro-state politicians and parties to occupy a nebulous zone between the Indian state and the Kashmiri people, the khalkh. Several Kashmiris, whom I interviewed during the election period, tended to see these pro-state formations as “representatives of the Indian state” rather than as “representatives of the Kashmiri people.” I came across statements like, “They don’t possess our pain,” “They only listen to their aaqās (masters) in Delhi,” and “We only have God with us.”

Were these statements just made in the context of the lack of flood relief, as Hussain, the relief worker in Srinagar, had told me? It was hard to determine, but at some places where I attended election related activities in the winter of 2014, I also heard views that did not fit the larger Tehreek narrative on elections. Below I will present one such instance from a village in southern Kashmir, where a significant election contestant spoke in a market place. Later, I will also describe another instance, at a university, where student activists gathered to talk about elections, and called for a “boycott.”
Dilemmas of party work: election campaign in the countryside

I met Shafi and Ashraf in their village, Poore, almost by accident. It is early December, and I am visiting Gām and Poore with a local youth group that is assessing the flood damage for a local charity. The election is two weeks away, but there is hardly any visible campaigning. There are no rallies, no public speeches, no local TV debates. Hardly any contesting party has come out with a “manifesto” or an “agenda.” On a different song altogether, the Indian media has dedicated “special coverage” for the elections. The first three phases of the elections have been held, and the Indian media has been repeatedly claiming that the “election turnout is a defeat for Tehreek separatists.” There has been no mention of the curfews in this media coverage. Because the district, under which Gām and Poore fall, is going to polls next, there will be no curfew. The entire district, however, is full of paramilitary soldiers, who have set up camps and mobile patrols. As I explain to a few soldiers at the entrance of the village that I am not a “trouble maker” (that is, a poll boycott campaigner), Shafi and Ashraf come to my rescue. They seem to have an in with the soldiers. That is how I meet Shafi and Ashraf for the first time.

Poore is a smaller settlement adjoining a larger village, Gām. Shafi and Ashraf are part of a large family that has lived in Poore for at least nine generations. Their oldest remembered ancestor had received a tract of land during the late 19th century land reforms, which were led by a British survey commissioner. The land had belonged to a Hindu landlord, who, as Poore’s elders claim, did not protest the loss of the flood-prone part of his much larger estate. When the National Conference government initiated land redistribution reforms in 1947-53, the family, having grown, was given no new land. Over the years, land holdings became even smaller, and the family developed anti-National Conference sentiments. The family had also supported the smaller *Kisan Mazdoor Party* (Peasant and Worker Party) around 1947, which opposed
Kashmir’s accession to India and competed with the National Conference for support in the countryside.

The elders believe the National Conference, with considerable influence in Gām, didn’t forgive Poore for its defiance. After Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest in 1953, Poore took an about-turn, and instead of opposing Kashmir’s accession to India, started supporting the anti-Abdullah Bakshi government and then India’s Congress party. A small “pro-India” enclave amid National Conference’s larger “pro-plebiscite” region, Poore should have received many favors from the Indian establishment. But, as Shafī and Ashraf believe, the family had been ignored. The National Conference, by giving up the plebiscite slogan in the 1970s, would make families like the one in Poore irrelevant in the larger game. Yet, the family continued to remain loyal to the Congress, and when the 1990 events happened (which, among other things, also led to a violent reaction against the National Conference), Poore refused to participate in Tehreek.

For Poore’s residents, as I came to understand, these party loyalties had not been based on an acceptance of party ideologies, but on personal connections with the party representatives. While saying “We should just settle for India,” they would also say, “India will never let us be azad (independent),” or “We can’t fight them, India is too big.” It is hard to read this resigned tone as an endorsement of the “Indian position,” however, many people in Gām and beyond, had come to see Poore as “pro-India.”

Shafī and Ashraf, now in their late-thirties, belong to a generation that came of age during the 1990s. But both would become an oddity among youths in the larger Gām, where they went to high school. Instead of joining Tehreek politics or rallies, like youths in Gām often did, they remained aloof, and later started going to small events organized by a new party called the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Kashmiri politicians, who had once been part of the Indian
Congress party, formed the PDP in the early 2000s. The PDP also included others who sought an electoral alternative to the National Conference and would, therefore, contest elections, unlike Tehreek parties. To create a base, the PDP appropriated several prominent Tehreek symbols and slogans, including using an “inkpot” as the party symbol on the ballot paper (a similar inkpot had been used by the MUF in 1987 as its election symbol), displaying rock salt at rallies to woo “pro-Pakistan” crowds (rock salt is also called “Pakistani salt” in Kashmir, and is contrasted with the sea-salt that comes from India), and raising demands like “self-rule.”

If Ikhwanis had helped the National Conference in 1996, some in Kashmir believe the remnants of the Hizbul Mujahideen helped the PDP in 2002 (Kak 2014). PDP came to power in alliance with the Congress party that year, replacing the National Conference government that had won in 1996. In 2008, the PDP found itself stuck with a limited number of seats again. While Shafi and Ashraf believe the “hung verdicts” in 2002 and 2008 indicate “lesser interference from India in elections,” others told me “Indian intelligence” supported the PDP with the intent to fracture even the limited electorate that voted in Kashmir, and to force Kashmir-based parties to ally with Indian national parties. The latter would keep both the National Conference (which occasionally still called for the “pre-1953 autonomy”) and the PDP (which raised the slogan of “self-rule”) from taking a line that went against the larger purpose of “national integration.”

Shafi and Ashraf are second cousins and have no college education, even though several members in their families, even older ones, boast at least an undergraduate education, enabling them to find government jobs. Tehreek supporters in Gām claim these jobs are a favor for not joining Tehreek. Indeed, as many Poore elders happily concede, their asar rawoos (“connections,” “influence,” “approach”) with ministers had been the reason they found
government jobs. Poore residents are regularly branded as *gadhaar* (“traitors”) and *ken’mut* (“sell-outs”). Shafi and Ashraf have no jobs, and they believe if they work for the PDP with “dedication” they will get jobs.

For decades, government jobs have been the only source of regular income in Kashmir, especially in the countryside, where farm work is seasonal and unrewarding. These rare jobs, even if not always well-paying, provide a degree of economic and social uplift. Many of these jobs can pay as low as USD 25 a month, but the average monthly salaries are around USD 300, which provide for a middle class living. Those who get government jobs often find it easier to find a woman from a “good family” to marry; and, if a woman has a job, to find a man with a well-paid job or one from an even better family than her own. After marriage, a salaried man can build a house. A house and a “good wife” are two signs of social standing in the Kashmiri countryside. Shafi is not married, and Ashraf, who had recently married, had to settle for a woman several years older to him, which often invites sharp taunts from his friends and family.

The flood had washed away a small wooden bridge in Poore, and Shafi and Ashraf claim that when their party forms the new government, the village will get a “cement culvert” and a “macadam road.” They tell me election campaigning has been going on quietly. “People are upset,” says Shafi, “It is risky for politicians to run into crowds of resentful people.” They tell me their party’s “higher-ups” have informed them that a prominent party leader will make a quick stop in Gām, and that they “must bring as many people from Poore as possible” to the Gām market square. No one else is supposed to know. The leader will reach the venue, give a quick speech to the assembled crowd from Poore, and by the time larger Gām will come to know, he would have already left. I am not told when, but am simply asked to be ready and that I would receive a phone call from either Shafi or Ashraf.
A couple of days later when I receive the call, the party’s plan has worked almost to the letter. In Gām’s central market place, several Poore residents have been milling around, pretending to be innocuous. Then, suddenly, a flurry of military and police vehicles arrive, securing all the entry points, and positioning snipers on rooftops. Another flurry of vehicles with black tinted windows quickly follows. The leader has squeezed his upper body through a roof opening in one of the vehicles. Poore residents gather around his vehicle, surrounded by soldiers, and cheer and raise party slogans. Others in the market, a bit dazed by this sudden shift of mood, look on. The leader gives a short speech, laced with promises of “development,” “jobs,” “keeping the BJP out of Kashmir” (Bharatiya Janata Party, the Indian Hindu rightwing party that is contesting in Kashmir), and “removing the military from civilian areas.” Surrounded by a sea of soldiers, the irony of the last “promise” is not lost on anyone. It sounds bizarre, but the soldiers don’t understand Kashmiri, or they already know too well. And, then, everything that is going on is bizarre. At one moment, some people start running, causing a brief commotion. The leader slumps back into his vehicle, and the vehicles speed away. I hear Tehreek slogans from the back of a building and look for Shafi and Ashraf, but they have slipped away too.

Later, I meet Shafi and Ashraf back in Poore, who describe the event as a “success.” While both think their presence at the event had been noted by the party seniors, which will help them develop *asar rawoos* in the party, Ashraf feels less sanguine about the leader’s speech. “He should have mentioned the flood.” Soon, however, both forget the speech, as they shift conversation to occasions when they had used their party connections to help their acquaintances get out of police cases. In police cases, above all else, the party connections come in handy. While it appears to delight them that the police, which is a source of fear among others, is friendly to them, Ashraf resents that the party work has not provided them a government job so
far. They tell me about other youths from Poore, who had grown “tired” of party work and had chosen to move to Srinagar to find odd jobs. Shafi is more critical of the Indian parties contesting. He tells me these parties had brought “truckloads of expired biscuits and dirty blankets from India” and were giving them to poor people in flood-affected areas to garner votes. Ashraf interrupts Shafi to ask if that was worse than their own party, which he says, “has done nothing.” Shafi replies by blaming the National Conference, which was in the government when the flood took place. At one point, both Shafi and Ashraf agree that “it [electoral politics] benefits those families most who are also involved with other things, and not ordinary people like them.” These “other things” include big government contracts, supplying provisions to the army (an extensive business by itself), and the land and the forest mafia.

Figure 11. In Gām, a contestant addresses his audience, as some get distracted by the commotion in the back. Photo: Mohamad Junaid, 2014.
Some of this is usual staple discourse on democracy in South Asia. Yet, in conversations like these, I see a fracture both within the Tehreek discourse as well as the Indian state discourse. Considerations of livelihood, and individual aspirations of “a government job, house, and marriage,” tend to push youths in a place like Poore to work for electoral politics, even at the cost of drawing resentment from the larger population. But this work often fills them with self-doubt. Ashraf and Shafi indicate that “boycotting elections is not helpful” because “daily issues cannot wait for azadi,” but they say they often have “khadshaat (doubts)” about what they are involved in, and they increasingly question the wisdom of their elders for having permanently marked Poore as “pro-India.” Their involvement is driven by a combination of that older legacy, their individual aspirations, and their engagement with everyday problems in Poore. Nevertheless, their involvement of Shafi and Ashraf remains limited, and cannot be see as “participation”, far less an “endorsement for integration.”

What the “campaign event” of the day (which was the typical form such events took in the 2014 elections) and my interviews with Shafi and Ashraf, and with several others from Poore, indicate is that under the state of militarized emergency in Kashmir, “elections” have acquired a quality that is more (in Hussain’s words in Srinagar) “counterinsurgent” than “democratic.” As an instrument of counterinsurgency, elections become just a way to delegitimize Tehreek politics, without allowing people an alternative space for political expression. The elections, then, produce a fractious space within the larger politics of independence, which splits youth political subjectivity in Kashmir. They give rise to accusations of “betrayal” against people who vote or support electoral parties, and among those who do vote they become a source of self-doubt. So how, then, do the boycott campaigners frame the elections?
Invoking the dead against the elections: students organize a boycott event

If the event in Gām was highly planned and structured, the event I witness on the campus of a university in Srinagar, where students gathered to give a boycott call, is by comparison almost spontaneous, if equally tense. The university’s Students Union is banned, and several years back its office building was bulldozed by the university proctor’s officials in the dead of night. Only months previously, Students Union had been allowed to hold elections. The last election had taken place before 1990. Despite the ban, and bereft of an office space, the office bearers of the Union have continued to work clandestinely. Most students still consider the Union a legitimate student representative body. In place of the elected Students Union, the university authorities have encouraged Indian and Kashmiri electoral parties to run their “student chapters.” Yet, even though high profile Indian and Kashmiri politicians visit the campus to recruit new members, these student chapters have found almost no support. By contrast, the Students Union, which unofficially aligns itself with Tehreek, draws a strong following.

I receive an invitation to a Students Union event over Facebook. It is a “closed invite,” which means the event is not public. But one can’t be sure if “closed” means the event page is not under state surveillance. While there are options to indicate, by clicking, if one is “going,” “interested” or “not going,” the text accompanying the event page on Facebook advises invitees to not click on any option. If invitees do click, especially “going” or “interested” they would be doing so at their “own peril.” The organizers, whose names have not been announced, also argue that in case the event attracts too many “going” clicks, the authorities might prevent the event from taking place. The event is titled “Student Talk: Elections.” There is no further description, apart from the location. I don’t click anything, but decide to go. I received the invitation because I know two students, Arif and Zarqa, who were part of several focus group meetings on environment (in the aftermath of the flood) that I had attended.
Paramilitary vehicles are parked outside the main gate of the university, which I come to know is a permanent presence. I arrive a little past time, but see no sign of any activity related to the event, which is to take place in front of the library. Slowly female students gather under a tree in the front lawn, from five or six to a few dozens. Then male students, many coming out of the library, gather. Some students pull out banners from inside their jackets and hold them on the periphery. Soon, more students arrive, and the crowd grows to a few hundred. Students are passing piles of pamphlets from one to another. I am handed one pamphlet. A young masked man gets up, comes to the front, and starts giving a speech. He begins by asking his audience to remember “our martyrs,” “the resistance,” and “the sacrifices of lakhs of Kashmiris.” His gestures are animated, as he urges students to tell their parents and neighbors not to vote in the elections. His speech is short and is followed by a young woman, who has a naqab on her face, through which she is barely audible. A few seconds later, she lowers the naqab. There are smiles, followed by loud cheer. She talks about her brother who she says has been “forcibly disappeared.” The mood grows melancholic. She also finishes her talk by urging an election boycott. Several more students follow, and almost all of them invoke the “blood of martyrs” and “sacrifices.”

Amid these emotive appeals, the university police have surrounded the gathering. The police are armed. Their chief, the Proctor, asks students to wind up the meeting and clear the area. The students have no choice, but as they leave they raise rhythmic Tehreek slogans for azadi, clapping and moving their bodies in harmony. Zarqa has found me. She leads me to Arif, and we return to a canteen. I read the pamphlet in my hand. It is titled: “Student Talk: Discourses Beyond Elections in Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.” It calls the elections a “farce” and a “sham.” It describes electoral parties as “puppet regimes” and “collaborators” who “perpetuate the
military rule and act as emissaries of Indian military occupation,” who want to “kill…our movement of (sic) Right to Self Determination, nourished by the blood of lakhs of martyrs since last 7 decades.” But the pamphlet sees voting as “provid[ing] consent for military occupation,” if not an “endorsement for integration with India,” which is how the government frames voting.

This points to the dilemma of the election boycott campaign: to keep people away from the election, they attach too much value to the act of voting. In my interactions in Poore and
elsewhere, voting had appeared to have little to do with “integration” or “providing consent” to the military occupation.

Zarqa and Arif are from Srinagar. They attend Tehreek-related events when they can. They tell me events on campus connected to Tehreek are furtively organized, and the student response is always spontaneous. They want to separate the “ideal” of democracy from the “reality” of elections. Says Arif, “if they use so many resources to conduct elections for the assembly, why can’t they allow students to conduct elections on the campus?” “They know students will always elect a pro-Tehreek body,” answers Zarqa, “which they don’t want.” Years ago, when the rebellion broke out many students had joined the armed Tehreek groups, which gave the government an alibi to shut down student unions.

The Gām event and the university event were similar in some respects, yet had key differences. The Gām event was almost surreptitiously organized in fear that people might harm the politician, which is why soldiers were deployed. The event was meant to give an appearance of an electoral campaign, but it prevented people from participating, thus undermining the rationale behind campaigning. The university event had to be discreetly organized in fear of the authorities disrupting it. Nevertheless, it ended up leading to a large, spontaneous participation. Soldiers had to be deployed in Gām to protect the politician, but at the university, armed police mobilized to disrupt the meeting. For Zarqa and Arif, these differences point to an antagonistic relationship between “the state” and “the people,” and which is why they believe the elections to be “absurd.” Shafi and Ashraf in Poore are forced to question their own place within this dynamic, but they realize that in their under-developed countryside, the state and the politicians can exert more power through a politics of patronage. Despite these differences, Shafi, Ashraf,
Zarqa and Arif all similarly feel trapped in the present situation. “If Kashmir was free, I would contest elections,” says Zarqa. Arif laughs, “We can live without a government too!”

The December 2014 elections take place, and follow the script perfected over the years. In the countryside, people vote. In the urban centers, more people boycott. The results produce a “hung verdict,” giving Shafi’s and Ashraf’s PDP fewer seats yet again than are required to form the government. In a stark contradiction to the pre-election promises, the party forms a coalition with the Hindu nationalist BJP. The party leader who had claimed his party was fighting against the BJP making “inroads into Kashmir” justifies his volte-face by claiming “flood-affected Kashmir needs to have good relations with the party in power in New Delhi.” This seems to
vindicate the words of the former legislator, the one who had been part of an electoral party before 1990, about the “key to power in Kashmir.” For Shafi and Ashraf, the about-turn doesn’t mean anything in terms of “ideology.” Hesitantly, they insist it is “good for development.” For Zarqa and Arif, it is “frustrating” to see that “people who vote can’t see what these politicians represent.”

**Elections under occupation: theatre of the absurd**

The last time assembly elections were held in Kashmir, in 2008, I was in Anantnag. Elections had been announced in the aftermath of a long Tehreek agitation against a controversial “transfer of public land” to a quasi-governmental body that intended to create “permanent facilities” for Hindu pilgrims. For Tehreek activists, the land transfer had come as a blow, because they had already been demanding the removal of the military and release of the land. The land was also located in an ecologically fragile zone. After the summer 2008 protests and the five-month long harsh clampdowns, many were surprised that the government wanted to hold elections. The long months of curfew had exacted a heavy toll, not only in terms of lives lost and people injured in paramilitary shootings, but also the suffering of those whose livelihoods depend on an uninterrupted daily activity: the hawkers, shopkeepers, daily wage earners, laborers, etc. Hindu activists had imposed an economic blockade on Kashmir, which caused a severe shortage of supplies for around a month.

Within this context, the election announcement had sounded like a “cruel joke,” just as Hussain in Srinagar would describe the 2014 election announcement. But by late November and December, the months in which the elections were to be held that year, an unusually large

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12 As Sanjay Kak points out, “One recent estimate suggests that the more than 650 security-force installations in the valley occupy a staggering 125,000 acres. The formal acquisition of yet another piece of public land was incendiary” (2014: 40).
number of people decided, or were mobilized, to contest. Remarkably, there was even a distinct buzz of election campaigning in the air. I took some notes on the polling day’s events, which I reproduce below in full, to give a sense of what election day had felt like:13

It is nine in the morning. Overnight drizzle has darkened the winter bare trees. The hill, around which the town is wrapped, has disappeared in the mist. I look out onto the road in the distance to see if anyone is moving. There was an explosion a couple of hours ago. It must have been somewhere close. A few police jeeps can be seen moving fast every few minutes. I am curious to see if people are going out to vote. My parents advise me to stay indoors. We have been without electricity since last evening. I use this fact as a pretext, and announce that I am going to go out to get it fixed. I see large boot prints in our mud-spattered kucha. Soldiers must have been moving about in the night. It is the day of election in Anantnag, and the bandobast is tight.14

A few meters ahead, after a bend in the kucha, two people from the neighborhood, father and son, are looking dejectedly at the electric transformer that supplies our neighborhood. The father turns to me and says: “Every soldier in this cinema has a heater and a boiler of his own. They get two phases. And the rest of us get one. It can’t take this load.” He is talking about the cinema hall in our neighborhood, which was taken over by the paramilitary almost eighteen years ago, and turned into a camp. It houses more than three hundred soldiers. The neighborhood has around thirty houses. The electricity transformer was installed way back in the 1980s for these thirty houses and the cinema. Each night of the winter the fuse blows.

An elderly man has come out of his house with pieces of aluminum wire in his hand. “To hell with them, and if it wasn’t, why would they be here!” he blurts out in Kashmiri. We laugh.

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13 I have used this note elsewhere, see Junaid (2013).
14 Kucha: lane; bandobast is an official Hindi/Urdu term to describe “security arrangements.”
military helicopter comes out of nowhere. It flies low overhead. Our laughter is drowned in the sound. Both the laughter and the helicopter disappear quickly.

We can see the main road from where we are standing. Soldiers deployed on the road stop a car. They make gestures for the driver to come out. He is apparently showing some papers. One soldier flings his door open. As soon as the driver steps out, another soldier lands his heavy muddy boot on the driver’s belly. “Oh, no, they have just destroyed his perfectly clean pheran. How will he wash it now in this cold winter with no electricity?” quips the man standing next to me, and then giggles at his own dark sense of humor. One of his own relatives was beaten blue and black two months back. Soldiers had dug a hole in his arm with a screwdriver, which took a surgery to fill. The driver receives a rain of blows, and soon passes out. The soldiers drag him to the side. The man standing next to me “bets” the driver is pretending to be unconscious. He is right. One soldier kicks him hard in the belly, and the driver is up. He limps back to his car and drives away.

Two trucks packed tightly with sullen and frozen Kashmiri men move down the main road. A young man, who has joined us, says wryly: “They are bringing people from outside to vote. They don’t need our vote.” A cab is moving toward us slowly. We are alert, and ready to dart back into our homes. It is a Kashmiri driver, therefore safe. He stops near us. A thin vein of blood is issuing from the corner of his mouth.

“These berrahgodhs pulled me out of my home in the night, and asked me to ferry troops to Kadipora. They gave me a paper telling me no one would ask me questions on my way back. But at every checkpoint they stop me and hit me, even after I show them this blasted paper.”

“Hatta haz, they have no sympathy, no humanity,” says the elderly man, consoling him.

I return home to write.

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15 **Pheran**: Kashmiri loose gown worn in winter
16 **Berrahgodh** is a typical vulgarism some Kashmiri men use. The term is almost untranslatable, and its sound does not lend itself easily in English.
For the last two months, the elections have been taking place. Kashmir’s assembly elections are happening in six phases. Anantnag is the fifth one. Srinagar will be last. Today, like in all other phases, the rest of Kashmir is under curfew. It reminds me of Dr. Aziz in *Midnight’s Children* examining the body parts of his future wife through a perforated sheet, one by one.\(^{17}\)

Beyond the regular election-day restrictions, people have been barred from going out on Fridays as well. No prayers have been offered in Jamia Masjid, the largest mosque in Srinagar, for the last six Fridays. People are not allowed to assemble. The main preacher at Jamia Masjid, and head of the Hurriyat Conference (a Tehreek coalition), Mirwaiz Umar, is under house arrest. Thousands of Tehreek activists have been bundled into jails. The Indian government has slapped many of them with the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA), which means they will be put in prison for the next six months to two years without trial. Once you have one PSA against you, it is tough not to have several more.

In Anantnag, last month, a hundred parents were picked up randomly by the police and the paramilitary, and were told to warn their sons not to get involved in the pro-independence campaign. Many young men have already been beaten up, and warned to stay indoors. A friend who works with a local newspaper was threatened, and his younger brother beaten, for reporting on police atrocities. He was told to do “favorable stories” about the election. He is following the orders to the word, he tells me. He doesn’t want to give up his job, for they don’t come easily. Pro-government Ikhwani militias, which are funded and armed by the Indian state, and who wreaked havoc on Anantnag for a full decade, have been reactivated. Many of the militiamen, who were integrated into the army, wander about the town in civvies and harass people.

A lot of people it seems want to vote, if not in Anantnag town, then in the villages. They need MLAs [Members of Legislative Assembly] to relieve them from the tremendous pressure the Indian state puts on them. During the past few months, thousands were arrested. They had no

\(^{17}\) *Midnight’s Children* by Salman Rushdie. This episode in the novel takes place in Kashmir.
one to go to for redress. Governor’s rule meant one inaccessible Indian bureaucrat controlled everyone’s life in Kashmir. A legislative assembly would mean, at least, that they could go to people who might have some say. That is what the contestants are promising. People in jails shall be released. The level of military oppression will be brought down. Government militias will be reined in. Major parties, like the People’s Democratic Party and the National Conference, are saying, “this vote is not a vote for India.” And thrown in between are several others who have one or the other motivation to contest, and none of which is loyalty toward India. One contestant, who I’ve known since childhood, told me privately that he is contesting to get special papers and a residence in Jammu so that he can take his ailing mother away from Kashmir.

In New Delhi, however, pundits are claiming elections to be a victory over “Kashmiri separatists.” Indian newspapers and TV channels are gloatting over the turnouts: sixty-eight percent, fifty-one percent, and fifty-seven percent. The numbers encouraged even India’s prime minister Manmohan Singh to come to a village in Anantnag a few days back to support his party’s candidate from there. The village he visited is surrounded by hills full of bombs. The Indian military has built one of its largest ammunition depots in those hills. Last year the hills in Khundru exploded into a huge ball of fire and consumed dozens of Kashmiri lives. The military asked villagers in fifteen villages surrounding the depot to vacate so that the depot could be expanded. No word was spoken about that. To the Kashmiris that he addressed, Prime Minister Singh said, “India would defeat terrorism soon.” He was talking about Mumbai.

Across the stream that runs behind the house I am staying, young men from the neighborhood who led stone-pelting battles and the protests against Indian soldiers over the summer and the autumn are playing cricket. The stream almost dries up in winter, leaving a little plain island behind. Soldiers can’t see it.

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18 In the most densely populated places like Srinagar city, Anantnag, Sopore, Baramulla, and other towns, there was a single-digit turnout.
It is almost three in the afternoon, and I haven’t seen anyone go to vote, yet. But there are
two more hours to go, and who knows.

What these notes from almost nine years back reaffirm is an interwoven pattern of
elections and violence. They suggest that while elections may appear to give people a choice of
carrying on everyday social life over falling for the evental narrative of azadi, everyday life itself
remains deeply enmeshed with a state of emergency. Could elections lead to demilitarization, as
residents of Poore thought it might? Or do elections only reinforce the military occupation in
Kashmir and give abnormal a semblance of normalcy, as the students at the university claimed?
As it is, the violence of the occupation and the dynamics of everyday life remain inseparable.
Elections, instead of alleviating the effects of militarization, have become its key constitutive
component.

**Conclusion: uncivil society**

In Jose Saramago’s novel *Seeing* (2007), polling officials find out that most voters in the
municipal elections in the capital city have returned blank votes. After the voters do the same the
second time in a week, the government calls the electorate unpatriotic and views their actions as
a threat to the legitimate authority. As a result, an emergency is imposed. When the residents
remain defiant, the government shifts the capital, leaving the residents to fend for themselves
(which the latter do handsomely). In contrast to Saramago’s unnamed city, where a certain kind
of elections, one that does not yield “desired results,” leads to an emergency, in Kashmir, the
emergency is itself turned into a condition of possibility for the elections to be held. If voting a
certain way leads to a suspension of civil rights in the former, in Kashmir, suspension of civil
rights becomes the precondition under which one can vote. In both cases, however, the
underlying fact remains the same: elections and emergency go hand in hand.
In this chapter, I have explored the social and historical meanings of elections in Kashmir, and through these meanings hinted at the interrelations that emerge between the state and the people. But there is the in-between space occupied by elements that together constitute what I have above called “a new ground of the political process.” Unlike the residents of Poore, who have been voting since before 1990, but remain in the minority, this “new ground,” emerging in Kashmir since 1994, constitutes an unfamiliar phenomenon for Kashmiris in general, and for Tehreek in particular. Let me preface this rather amorphous notion of “new ground”—which I hope will become clearer in the next chapter—by drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of “civil society.”

In its ordinary sense, “civil society” is an amalgamation of individuals and private associations (“the ensemble of organisms”), which occupies the nebulous space between the state and its subjects (Gramsci 1971, 12). It keeps in check the arbitrary use of coercive power by the state, and demands rights for the state’s subjects in the name of law and the constitution. It demands that the institutions of the state honor their legal mandate. And, under democratic regimes—where alone a civil society might even properly emerge—the institution expected, and valued, above all to honor its mandate is the institution of Elections. Unlike political parties or revolutionary organizations, civil society claims “neutrality,” which gives it an aura of legitimacy outside the structures of the state, even though it works strictly within the same legal limits it seeks to uphold. So, even if civil society “operates without sanctions or compulsory obligations,” as Gramsci noted, it gathers enough legitimacy to “exert a collective pressure and obtain objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morality, etc” (1971, 242, 246). Gramsci showed that, historically, civil society (in Italy) arose
alongside the emergence of the modern state (which he designated as “political society”), and functioned to maintain the overall “hegemony” of the state.

Theoretically, civil society crumbles under a “state of emergency,” which might well be defined as the disappearance of civil society altogether. The state of emergency is marked by a legal suspension of the legal order, leaving neither the space, nor the raison d’être for civil society. But a state of emergency is not to be confused with anarchy or disorder, one that exists prior to the establishment of the order or political society. There is still order, as Giorgio Agamben (2002) has argued, but one which emerges because of the suspension of the legal order. I am tempted to call it an “ordered disorder,” and to argue that, in Kashmir, elections have become a key instrument in its maintenance.

Conceptually, the space between the Indian state and Kashmiri people should be designated as the “civil society,” if only in the sense that this society seeks to build the hegemony of the state. Yet since this phenomenon has emerged in Kashmir around the Ikhwanis, a violent militia, and paradoxically with the suspension of the legal order itself, rather than with its establishment (contra Agamben), I use the term, uncivil society. I describe “uncivil society” in Kashmir as those socio-political groups and forces whose origins, as well as mode of functioning, lay in illegality itself, acting as violent intermediaries between the state and its subjects. This “uncivil society” came to be hinged principally around a group of counterinsurgents, called Ikhwanis, and their instrumentalization by the state. The rise of this

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19 Carl Schmidt points out: “The state of emergency is always distinguished from anarchy and chaos and, in the legal sense, there is still order in it, even though it is not a legal order.” Schmidt cited in Agamben (2002).
20 As Agamben’s analysis of Schmidt’s concept of “state of emergency” shows, “The state of exception is not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension” (1998, 18). Given this split between order and legal order, Agamben (2002) suggests that Schmitt’s theoretical challenge was to “show that the suspension of law still derives from the legal domain, and not from simple anarchy.” A civil society may still emerge, but it will appeal to international law, international norms etc., (which is what eventually happened in Kashmir).
uncivil society was a result of the state declaring a punitive emergency, even though, as I will argue in the next chapter, its conditions of possibility were created by the larger crisis of representation in Kashmir.

The story of electoral democracy in Kashmir in the post-Tehreek era is intimately entwined with the story of Ikhwan violence. But while many from Tehreek still tend to see the elections as a part of the counterinsurgency campaign, there is a difference too conspicuous to be ignored. The difference between the 1996 elections and the 2014 elections was the absence of the Ikhwanis. They had been instrumental in earlier elections. It is this absence that brought me to the Ikhwanis—at least to those who have survived—not only to tell through their accounts the story of how an “electoral democracy” under occupation was manufactured, but to tell the story of how violence and the question of representational crisis remain entangled.
CHAPTER 5
THE IKHWANIS: COUNTERINSURGENCY, TEHREEK, AND THE SPLIT KASHMIRI SUBJECTIVITY

Th(e) desire for simplification is justified, but the same does not always apply to simplification...the network of human relations inside the Lager was not simple: it could not be reduced to the two blocs of victims and persecutors.

Primo Levi (1989, 37)

The Gray Zone

The elections of 1996 in Kashmir were held in a context of generalized violence. The number of Tehreek armed groups had at one point grown into an alphabet soup of around a hundred, though by the end of 1994 only a few remained in the fight, including most predominantly the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (also known as the Hizb). Yet, in the early years of Tehreek, the government, even with its ruthless military campaigns and harsh legislations, including the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA),¹ had failed to break the movement. By early 1994, the government began contracting violence out to fringe Kashmiri groups and individuals who either volunteered or were coerced into becoming part of the counterinsurgency. These included village defense committees (especially in districts under Jammu province in the south), special operations group, special police officers, and, most devastatingly, the “Ikhwonis,” who broke ranks with Tehreek and turned their guns against the Hizb and its patron party, Jama’at-i-Islami. These formations acted semi-autonomously, and, even though they were not legally covered by AFSPA, they secured immunity for their illicit acts within the larger counterinsurgency apparatus by demonstrating their effectiveness in spawning a culture of fear.

¹ In 1990, the Indian Parliament had passed colonial-era emergency laws, like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), that gave wide-ranging powers and immunity to the military to eradicate the movement (Duschinski 2009). AFSPA was accompanied by several other draconian legal instruments, including Public Safety Act (PSA), which has caused immense misery among Kashmiris (Amnesty International 2011).
and draconian reprisals. On modest state payroll, these groups more than made up for their meager salaries with income through extortion, illegal land grabs and constructions, and forcible takeover of people’s personal belongings and properties. Occasionally, they also received monetary rewards for killing or arresting Tehreek activists, which incentivized their overall state-permitted criminality.

In the coming years, the thoroughly subjectivized and unaccountable exercise of violence facilitated under the AFSPA regime seeped into everyday life of Kashmiris, which, combined with the civilian contracting of violence, created a monstrous new reality. Under this new reality, what Walter Benjamin calls the “spectral mixture” of “valid” violence—both its paradigmatic, “law-making” military violence, and its “law-preserving” threat of violence (1986, 286-287)—was no longer limited to the state, or its central institution, the police, but had spilled into the intermediate space between the state and its subjects, creating a zone of quasi-sovereign power within the state. It appeared as if the state was not interested in the “monopoly of violence,” which is a critical feature of the modern state. State officials had in fact worried that the police (which consisted mostly of Kashmiri officers) was holding the “law-preserving” threat of violence against the state itself. In 1993, for instance, more than two thousand police officers revolted and laid a protracted siege to their own headquarters in Srinagar. They were demanding

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2 Many ex-Ikhwanis have told me that they were paid 1500 rupees per month (USD 30/month). While this salary figure seems arbitrary, it is in line with the later governmental policy of employing many people in government positions on a meagre and temporary salary. There is no publicly accessible record whether Ikhwanis were paid directly from state payroll or from the operational funds of the counter-insurgency campaign.

3 Writing on violence, Benjamin says “All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity” (1986, 287). The “lawmaking” aspect of violence takes the form of military violence, which is paradigmatic as it seeks to achieve an end, for instance, to establish a “new” order. The law-preserving aspect of violence is exercised as the “threat of violence” to assert legal claims. Both these aspects are present as a “spectral mixture” in the institution of the modern state—the police, which not only asserts legal claims but also determines what the legal ends should be (Benjamin 1986, 286-287).

4 As Benjamin writes: “Law sees violence in the hands of individuals as a danger undermining the legal system. Law’s interest in monopoly of violence vis-a-vis individuals is explained by the intention in preserving law (not legal ends), for when not in hands of law, law is threatened not by the ends violence may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law” (1986, 281).
a return to “lawfulness and accountability” (Baweja 1993b). The revolt had started off in reaction to the death of a police officer in military custody. The Indian government responded by sending troops to quell the police, a bizarre situation, which brought even Tehreek groups to express sympathy with the police. Yet it was not so bizarre, if we consider that at several places Indian soldiers had killed local police officers and armed militants almost without discrimination.

What the state authorities seemed interested in creating—in place of the regular police—was a nebulous sphere of action, a non-state acting like a state, to which it could outsource violence. This non-state sphere would obviously bolster state’s own coercive power in Kashmir but also provide it with plausible deniability. The state of emergency imposed in 1990 was thus muddled by a “civil war” by mid-1990s, in which violence became amorphous. Giorgio Agamben’s argument about the mutual coalescing of the “civil war” and the “state of emergency” fits this situation well. He writes:

One of the elements that make the state of exception so difficult to define is certainly its close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance. Because civil war is the opposite of normal conditions, it lies in a zone of undecidability with respect to the state of exception, which is state power’s immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts. Thus, over the course of the twentieth century, we have been able to witness a paradoxical phenomenon that has been effectively defined as a “legal civil war” (Agamben 2005, 2).

The expansion of this zone of quasi-state power, waging a “legal civil war”—which I call the “gray zone”5—was linked to the state’s shift in policy in 1993 under which the government sought to hold elections in Kashmir. As examined in Chapter 4, the question of “elections,”

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5 I use this term from Primo Levi’s essay “The Gray Zone,” in which Levi calls for a less passionate, yet critical understanding of the phenomenon of the so-called “privileged-prisoners” at Auschwitz. He writes: “It is a gray zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and slaves both diverge and converge…The harsher the oppression, the more widespread among the oppressed is the willingness…to collaborate” (Levi 1989, 42).
which was claimed to be part of the government’s “new thinking,” posed some obvious questions for the authorities: Will Kashmiris participate in elections? Will militants allow it? Who would be allowed to contest? To these questions, there was a singular answer: “Ikhwan”—a force that the state had always hoped to create but had never truly succeeded. Ikhwan was unleashed on the Kashmiri society to create “conditions” for the election by neutralizing the power of the Hizb, disrupt the over ground Tehreek workers, and, if nothing, themselves jump in the fray and contest.

Propping up elements from within the insurgent movements to break them is a classic counterinsurgency tactic. In standard COIN manuals, this goes alongside tough military pacification as well as creating a local face of the government through a “political process” (Nagl 2005; Kilcullen 2011; Hussain 2011). The process is, for the most part, about managing perceptions. While the end objective of the political process in zones of occupation remains military in nature (the strategic defeat of the insurgency), its success ultimately hinges on the state’s ability to turn the “native on native” (Lee 2010) and to use the “co-ethnicity advantage” against the counterinsurgents (Lyall 2010). Both the decision to hold elections and the emergence of Ikhwan were conjoined parts of precisely these logics that came to define the gray zone in Kashmir.

The Indian government had already had a long history of counterinsurgency, and had deployed the “native on native” tactic elsewhere. For instance, during Punjab’s Sikh Khalistani

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6 For instance, US Army’s Counterinsurgency Field Manual, which has become a standard, states, “Managing expectations also involves demonstrating economic and political progress to show the populace how life is improving. Increasing the number of people who feel they have a stake in the success of the state and its government is a key to successful COIN operations.” This apparent good intention is a “psychological operation,” as the manual states, “In other cultures, exorbitant promises are normal and people do not expect them to be kept” (US Department of the Army 2006, 1-25).

7 Lyall (2010) argues that using locals as counterinsurgents is more effective than regular armed forces.

8 In fact, the first time AFPSA was invoked in post-1947 India was in the early 1950s in the country’s northeastern states, where indigenous communities were fighting for independence from India.
militancy in the 1980s, Joyce Pettigrew writes, “Several militants became informers…(several) indulging in rape and extortion, creating confusion, disorder, and discreditation of the militant cause” (2000, 216). While the counterinsurgency did appear to deliver what it envisioned—a split Tehreek in Kashmir—it is simplistic to assume that a few turned insurgents could have fatally divided a popular movement such as Tehreek. Often such assumptions smooth over differences within the insurgent movements themselves, and treat the state as an all-pervasive actor.

In his theorization of “pro-state paramilitaries,” which is based on a case study of the Ikhwan phenomenon in Kashmir, Paul Staniland (2012) argues that “ethnic defection” in insurgencies—some co-ethnics flipping to side with the enemy state—results from insurgent fratricide, or when one insurgent group tries to dominate others. Ikhwanis, according to Staniland, joined the Indian forces because the Hizb tried to dominate them through fratricidal fighting. Ikhwanis had, however, retained enough organizational cohesion to neither crumble away nor merge with the Hizb. Instead, they joined the Indian side to take on the Hizb. Staniland is right in emphasizing Hizb’s campaign for dominance as a reason for fratricide among Tehreek groups, yet, the fratricide was not in itself a reason behind Ikhwani “defection.” Staniland’s dismissal of ideological differences and state policy as “secondary factors” in the Ikhwani defection is a vital shortcoming in his account. He considers ideological differences as absent because “political debates were rare” and sees the state as having only provided “protection of defectors” rather than triggering defection (Staniland 2012: 21).

In Algeria, for instance, the COIN doctrine was a success “tactically” but a failure “strategically” (Heggoy 1972; Trinquier 2006, orig. 1964).
Having laid out above some of the state policy context (especially the start of the "political process") in which Ikhwan arose, I will describe in the pages ahead how Ikhwanis, who individually came from diverse factions of Tehreek or from outside the movement, clearly

Figure 14. In the aftermath of militarization, public massacres at the hands of Indian soldiers took place at several places. On October 22, 2014 Tehreek activists commemorated one such event that took place in 1993 in a town called Bijbehara. Photo: Mohamad Junaid, 2014.
understood their ideological differences with the Hizb. These differences were often expressed in the language of sectarianism as well as of distrust of the foreign (Pakistani) control over the movement. As the accounts of former Ikhwanis show, fratricidal conflict played a part in their decision to defect, but “fratricide” was neither a “given,” one-way system of killing (as Staniland assumes) nor was it as intense before the defection as it became afterwards. There had indeed been skirmishes between the Hizb and the Ikhwan before Ikhwan “turned” in 1994. These were, however, insignificant compared to Hizb’s dramatic one-way assault on another organization, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), a large secular pro-Independence group. Yet, JKLF with a much more coherent organization, political vision, and popular support did not turn.

It is commonly understood in Kashmir that turning insurgents—or as the government officials would describe it, “Bringing the gumrah nawjawan (misled youths) into the national mainstream”—was often achieved “through money as well as abduction and torture” (Lalwani 2011, 7). This perspective also fits well into Tehreek discourse of seeing Ikhwanis as “collaborators.” There is, however, a more complex story behind the rise of Ikhwan, which involves intricate questions of identity, differences over political goals, and contestation over the control of the movement. This chapter argues that the conditions for the rise of the Ikhwan and Ikhwanism were created within Tehreek itself. The state exploited the ideological differences and the resultant fratricidal violence to its advantage at a moment when the state policy was shifting from an outright military pacification to adopting “political process” as a counterinsurgency strategy.

Staniland suggests JKLF did not have a “cohesive” organization, which he gives as a reason behind its inability to effectively deflect. This is inaccurate and looks at JKLF’s state of organization only in 1994. Hizb’s assault on JKLF had begun in 1991 already. JKLF had continued to be strong organizationally even until late 1993. By comparison Ikhwan and Muslim Mujahideen, two groups that defected, were very small, dispersed, and without much “cohesion,” whatever that means.

When Kashmiris speak about those among them who joined the counterinsurgency, they use the term phearan, which means “to turn” but it also can mean to “turn bad” as in milk or cooked food turning bad.
Ikhwanis were an all-pervasive presence in Kashmir from 1994 until about 2002-03, but their real influence was centered on a few towns and a few dozen villages in North and South Kashmir. In the capital, Srinagar, and most other major towns as well as the countryside more generally, Ikhwanis could only operate as “embedded” within Indian forces. Nevertheless, many in Tehreek acknowledge that Ikhwanis almost single-handedly destroyed the armed movement, if not Tehreek itself. Yet, now, Ikhwanis have been cast out of public consciousness, almost like a bad memory. To tell their story is to illuminate a crucial aspect of the recent Kashmiri past that has remained concealed. Ikhwanis are the “intimate other” within Kashmiri society about whom people don’t like to talk or invoke without a tinge of pain. Even for loyalist politicians in Kashmir, who spoke to me, Ikhwanis were an “embarrassment,” something they hoped would become a “forgotten chapter of history.” Ikhwanis, however, are not just a story of the state manipulating a section of people to turn against their own. Feared for their violent tactics and locally despised for switching sides to the Indian military, Ikhwani trajectory and quick rise were co-terminus with Tehreek’s ideological crisis and a pre-existing internal conflict.

My account will not sit well with either the state’s official story or with Tehreek’s counter-narratives. For the state, counterinsurgency has been about “re-establishing democracy and normalcy.” In this account, the military is lionized, Ikhwanis are omitted, and, predictably, Tehreek is the disruptive force. In Tehreek accounts, in contrast, it is Ikhwan which is depicted as the violent disruptive element: they are seen to have interrupted the forthright “struggle between domination and resistance,” between the “Indian military occupation” and the “Kashmiri peoples’ movement for self-determination.” The account I tell is indeed laced with Ikhwani violence, carried out under the overall regime of military occupation, but Tehreek ideological crisis—especially around the question of identity and differences in political goals—
is the constitutive element in this account. I move away from the prism of “collaboration” which has so far underpinned the popular understanding of the Ikhwan phenomenon in Kashmir, but I also don’t take their defection as conscientious "ethical acts." For many Ikhwanis the decision to defect (or to join the defected Ikhwan) was made based on a complex mix of state threats and torture, Hizb’s dominance agenda, ideological differences with pro-Pakistan elements, personal circumstances, or even a desire to acquire social power.

What follows, then, is the story of Kashmir in the mid-1990s, when years of armed insurrection against the Indian state, beginning 1989-90, had left very little buffer between the coercive state apparatus and its Kashmiri subjects, and violence had become the primary relation between the two. I will first trace the rise of the Ikhwan in this period. It will become clear that the key dynamic of Tehreek was not limited to the question of Kashmir’s relation with India, but with Pakistan too. The Pakistan question, as it emerges from the accounts of former Ikhwanis, had already split the movement from within, which allowed the Indian state to widen the fractures within Tehreek and turn some of its elements. These accounts suggest that the dilemmas of the movement (in its relationship with Pakistan) had seeped into debates about Kashmiri identity, bringing violence to the old questions of the “religious” (Muslim) and the “regional” (Kashmiri), the aetiqad (heterodox belief in shrines) and the shari‘at (orthodox interpretation of the Islamic texts), and azadi (independence) and the “merger with Pakistan.”

The accounts also reveal how accusations of “betrayal” or “treason” are contested and re-contextualized amid articulations of identity and political projects. Drawing from interviews with former Ikhwanis, accounts of victims of their violence (those who claim to have suffered either

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12 On the theme of “collaboration” and the complexities which underlie acts of collaboration, see for instance the essays in Thiranagama and Kelly (2009). While Thiranagama and Kelly emphasize collaboration or treason as “ethical acts” within the contexts about which they write, it is hard to establish Ikhwani defection as ethical acts, given the violence that they inflicted on Kashmiri society. See also Kennedy (2009).
directly or indirectly), and my own memories of living in a town which the Ikhwanis had
dominated for years, Ikhwanism emerges as a “split” in the Kashmiri political subjectivity.
However, I argue that this split cannot simply be described in terms of contesting narratives of
identity. It must be diagnosed in the way these narratives came to shape the perspectives of those
involved, their understanding of their actions and personal transformations, and how interactions
and interrelations between people were restructured. Here violence is both a result of a
disjunction in discourse as well as generative of its own justificatory mechanisms.

The rise and fall of the Ikhwan

Often, when I ask Kashmiris about their memories of the early Tehreek years (1989-93),
most can vividly recount the major and even mundane events, their own circumstances, and the
public discourse of the time. It is a much-storied and memorialized period. But, for the same
people, the period between 1994 and 2003 is rather blurred, as if it has been excised from public
memory. I often hear words like an ’gaet alam (“blind-dark condition”) or toofan (“tempest”) that
are used to describe the time. “Some got rich,” is a constant refrain; so is, “A few were minting
money, while people were dying.” This is meant literally. Many remember neighbors or relatives
printing money at home. Indeed, it was believed that much fake currency was circulating in this
period. The rise of the nouveau riche—those who jumped class from poor or lower middle to
upper middle class—becomes a way of signifying the moral corruption of the period.

For many, “unspeakable events” took place. At the center of this “blind-dark condition”
was the Ikhwan, whose collusion with the official counterinsurgency became part of a Kashmiri
“public secret.” Michael Taussig describes “public secret” as that which is widely known but
cannot be publicly stated. Writing about the dealings between the paramilitary death squads and
the military’s counterinsurgency campaign in Columbia, he says: “We all ‘knew’ this, and they
'knew’ we ‘knew’, but there was no way it could be easily articulated, certainly not on the ground, face-to-face” (Taussig 1999, 6). Yet, Kashmiris openly referred to Ikhwanis as “renegades” or “sarkari (government) militants,” and in certain places in central Kashmir as “naabid” (because many Ikhwanis active in that area came from the village of Naabidpora, but naabid also has a pejorative ring to it).

Ikhwanis rose as a counterinsurgent group in 1994 in parts of North and South Kashmir. Allying themselves with the Indian military, Ikhwanis turned violently against Tehreek, of which they had previously been a part. Ikhwan’s emergence coincided with a drastic new posture of the Indian state vis-à-vis the Kashmir question. In February 1994, India’s Parliament unanimously passed a resolution on Kashmir, which declared, “The State of Jammu & Kashmir has been, is and shall be an integral part of India and any attempts to separate it from the rest of the country will be resisted by all necessary means.” The resolution was prompted by statements by U.S. government officials calling into question India’s standpoint on Kashmir as well increased Pakistani diplomatic activity at the United Nations to condemn India on human rights violations in Kashmir and pass resolutions in favor of Kashmiri self-determination (Indian Express 1994a, 1994b). Not only did the 1994 Parliamentary resolution violate the UN Security Council’s resolutions on Kashmir, which deemed the political status of Kashmir as “disputed,” it also contravened inter-governmental agreements between India and Pakistan, which had envisioned a resolution of the Kashmir issue through bilateral negotiations. On the ground in Kashmir, it had two immediate and interrelated effects, which directly contributed to the rise of the Ikhwan.

13 The lead editorial in a major Indian newspaper stated that the “historic show of unanimity in Parliament over Kashmir (as) a clear demonstration of national resolve” would reassure the troops that “some cynical politician will not barter away their sacrifices” (Indian Express 1994a). Another article in the same newspaper (Indian Express 1994b) expresses frustration with the India’s “listless efforts” of stemming international condemnation of its human rights violations in Kashmir at the UNHRC (Indian Express 1994b).

14 One such agreement was signed between India and Pakistan in the Indian city of Shimla in 1972, at the end of the India-Pakistan war over Bangladesh, which had ended in defeat for Pakistan. Kashmiris tend to emphasize UN
The first had to do with the Indian government’s new policy of starting a “political process,” which was to culminate in the state assembly and federal parliamentary elections, as well as reviving the bureaucracy and a “civil society.” In the face of an entrenched armed movement, the government had been unsuccessful from 1990 to 1993 in limiting the influence of the militants, and the bureaucracy had become disorganized and fragmented. Even as the architecture of military occupation had tightened, Tehreek armed groups had continued to enjoy widespread support. By 1993, the Indian government replaced its top official in Kashmir, Governor G. S. Saxena, the face of the “law and order approach,” with General K. V. Krishna Rao. Rao was presented as the face of a new “humane approach.” Under this new approach, elements of pro-India politics in Kashmir, like the former chief minister Farooq Abdullah (whose coalition government, a result of the “rigged” elections of 1987, had been summarily dismissed in early 1990), were to be gradually recycled back into the public sphere. Briefly, the military paused its punitive pacification campaign, which had been marked by an extensive use of urban arson and civilian massacres, indicating that it was willing to allow government’s talks with leaders of the armed groups. But the “humane approach” sputtered and stopped soon thereafter. This did not surprise the leaders of Tehreek, who had seen the government “feelers” about talks simply as an attempt to widen mistrust among different factions within the movement.

By 1994, the objectives of the “humane approach” became clear when its key policy components began to fall into place. The “civil society,” which was to be constituted, was not a civil society per se, but rather a lawless local auxiliary force meant to destroy Tehreek from within. This involved “co-optation and transformation of insurgents into local assets,” who were resolutions, which give primacy to Kashmiris as the primary party whose will needs to be determined in a plebiscite. The Shimla Agreement denies Kashmiris this right, giving India and Pakistan the right to determine Kashmir’s future.
to be recruited from surrendered militants, militants in prisons, or those disgruntled elements within Tehreek who had personal scores to settle (Lalwani 2011, 5-9). A report by Human Rights Watch indicted India for using tactics like “forcibly recruiting former militants into Ikhwan by detaining members of their families as hostages until (they) agreed to work with the security forces” (1996). The report also claimed an extensive use of torture to make jailed or surrendered militants comply.

The second and more disastrous effect of the Parliament’s 1994 resolution was the exacerbation of already existing tensions within Tehreek. Most prominently, there had been ongoing internecine fighting between the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen (Hizb) and groups like Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which supported the independence of Kashmir from both India and Pakistan. This fighting had split Tehreek in the middle, even though JKLF, the more popular of the two, had been trying hard to present a united face. In the post-1993 “humane approach” phase, the Indian government had attempted to discredit JKLF several times by leaking to the press that it was engaged in “secret talks” with the group’s leaders to end the conflict and to aid JKLF to take on the Hizb (Baweja 1993a, 1993b, 1993c). While public denials by JKLF commanders, like Javed Mir, staved off suspicions of treachery on the street, Hizb used these press reports to push for a violent campaign to decimate the JKLF and to emerge as the singular representative of Tehreek. Hizb achieved this goal almost completely in the countryside, where it was backed by the strong network of Jama’at-i-Islami, an Islamist party modelled on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, Jama’at provided an ideological backdrop which had fattally split Tehreek politics long before the Indian Parliament resolution.

Jama’at-i-Islami was cadre-based and strictly disciplinarian, and its primary base was the petit bourgeoisie in the countryside. Yoginder Sikand has argued that the rise of the Jama’at in
Kashmir must be traced to the “changing social contexts” of the period 1948—90, in which “a more assertive and activist expression of Islam came to be increasingly articulated by sections of a newly-emerging Muslim Kashmiri middle-class” (2002, 706). Jama’at arose amidst the declinist narratives of Islam that had grown in South Asia since the 1857 revolt against the British and then with the end of the Ottomon Empire in early 1920s. Jama’at’s intellectual founder was an Indian Muslim scholar Maulana Abu Ala Maududi, who believed that Muslim political revival was closely connected to the reform of Islamic practices toward a firm establishment of the Islamic code, or sharia, as well as the creation of an Islamic state (or states). While Jama’at was established in Kashmir in 1942, it separated from its parent body in India in 1952.\footnote{The original Jama’at Islami was formed in 1926 by Abu Ala Maududi. The party split in 1947 into Jama’at-e-Islami Hind (India) and Jama’at-e-Islami Pakistan. Other Jama’at parties, all based on Maududi’s thought also emerged in Afghanistan and Bangladesh.}

Jama’at reform in Kashmir centered on education and a turn against Sufi shrine-centered Islamic devotional practices, even though it took care not to dismiss Sufis as such, attempting through an intense production of revisionary literature to find its orthodox message within the Sufi teachings. Jama’at, nevertheless, took a stance against what it called kashf (illumination) and karamat (miracles), which had traditionally been popular in Kashmir as part of the Sufi lore (or tazkirat).\footnote{Though critical of shrine-related practices, Jama’at had remained firmly non-sectarian, when it came Shia-Sunni relations, and as such drew support from Shia scholars as well.} However, as Jama’at influence grew, its youth formation, Islami Jamiat-ul-Tulba (Islamic Students Union, established in 1977) took an increasingly divergent stance. Instead of rooting itself in the specificities of Kashmir’s social history (as Jama’at had tried to do), Jamiat sought its roots in an imagined community of the global Muslim ummah. It was inspired by the
Iranian revolution of 1979 as well as the US-Saudi-Pakistan facilitated Afghan jihad against the Soviet Red Army.

Jama’at had maintained a distinct identity from its larger Pakistani and Indian fraternal chapters. Nevertheless, it had always sought to cultivate a fervent Pakistani nationalism in Kashmir, even while ideologically dismissing “nationalism” (especially Kashmiri nationalism) as an “unIslamic” idea. This political viewpoint tied well with its “shari’ah-based” reformist agenda, which was critical of the place-based Islamic devotionalism. While, visibly, its institutional power in Kashmir lay in its network of schools and charities, from its inception, Jama’at had remained ideologically interested in the capture of state power. Over the years, however, its repeated attempts to gain power through elections had resulted in failure, and in many cases, were thwarted by rigged elections. By then, however, Jamiat was a force all by itself and frustrated with Jama’at’s quietist politics.

When the Kashmiri armed Tehreek began in 1989-90, Jama’at initially sought to distance itself from the movement led by the JKLF. But when the movement suddenly gained mass popularity, Jama’at attempted to become Tehreek’s sole political face. Its first act was to appropriate the fledgling Hizb as its “military wing,” with many Jamiat youth taking the leadership positions. With a strong backing from the Pakistani state in the coming years, Jama’at took a prominent role in shaping Hizb’s campaign to dominate other Kashmiri armed groups. These groups included JKLF, the largest one, whose secularized Kashmiri nationalism presented the main challenge to the pro-Pakistan ideology in Kashmir—as well as to India’s secular nationalist ideology.

17 Some have argued that Maududi’s inspiration to create his Jama’at was the Leninist communist party. But Jama’at had a visceral dislike of the communists (Nasr 1994).
Pressure from the Indian military’s years of the “Catch and Kill” policy\(^{18}\) (which had continued even through the “humane approach” phase), as well as from Hizb’s domination campaign, which included a violent disarming of the JKLF cadre, eventually forced the JKLF to announce a “unilateral ceasefire” with India in 1994. JKLF’s chief, Yasin Malik, now released from jail, vowed to persist in the struggle for independence through non-violent means, even though his cadre continued to face backlash at the hands of both the Hizb and Indian military. In an interview in 2014, Malik told me that more than six hundred of his fellow fighters had been “murdered after the ceasefire.” With JKLF out of the way and its idea of independence in abeyance, Hizb had no serious material or ideological rivals left within Tehreek. Flush with weapons and armed fighters from Pakistan and Afghanistan, however, Hizb’s leaders continued their campaign of domination, turning their attention now to smaller groups that had existed alongside the JKLF, including ones sharing their pro-Pakistan ideology. Among these groups were the *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* (IuM)\(^{19}\) and *Al-Jihad*.

Given these internal splits, the 1994 resolution of the Indian Parliament represented a big setback to Tehreek, whose main constituents had expected the Indian government, after four years of war in Kashmir, to come to the negotiating table. The setback especially threw into disarray the calculations of the Jama’at-i-Islami and the Hizb, both hoping to be the last ones standing among the alphabet soup of armed groups, and to negotiate the future of Kashmir exclusively—of course, with Pakistan at its back. But their campaign of domination proved

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\(^{18}\) The policy had included laying extensive sieges to villages and towns, “crackdowns,” and summary killings of Tehreek suspects or sympathizers.

\(^{19}\) Ironically, the name *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* was the taken from the Arabic name for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian party on which Jama’at-i-Islami was both ideologically and organizationally modeled. Perhaps Egyptian Brotherhood activists would have been shocked to hear that in Kashmir two groups, one, having taken its name, and, another, its ideology, were at each other’s throats.
costly, especially with the emerging new skirmishes with the IuM. It is important to remember that amid this troubled era, Jama’at and Hizb had continued to push *sharia-

IuM had its roots in armed student factions that arose in the late 1980s, and which had once hesitantly worked alongside the JKLF. By the early 1990s, it resented JKLF for their pro-independence stance, yet the relations between the two had remained non-violent. With a few hundred fighters, IuM was prominent in the southern Kashmiri town of Anantnag. Its leader then was Sajad Kanue, a resident of the town, and who many within Tehreek recall as an “educated” and “pious” commander. Until 1993, he had been leading IuM from his jail cell, but his control over the group had slipped gradually, and second-rung leaders consolidated their own power within the organization. Then in June 1994, Qazi Nisar, a prominent preacher and a pro-independence politician in the town, was abducted and assassinated. While the Hizb didn’t take any responsibility, it was widely believed that the group was behind the killing. Nisar had been central to the formation of Muslim United Front, an alliance of pro-independence and pro-Pakistan parties (including Jama’at-i-Islami) that stood in opposition to the governing National Conference—Congress coalition in the 1987 elections. Nisar’s assassination consolidated the already growing anti-Jama’at and anti-Hizb sentiments in Kashmir, especially in Anantnag, where the Hizb were rumored to have circulated “hit lists” of prominent pro-independence activists.\(^\text{20}\) The second-rung IuM leaders found a perfect opportunity to change sides and join the Indian counterinsurgency campaign, to which they had been lured for a while. Apparently disturbed by the reports of defection, IuM leader Kanue escaped from prison in 1994 and formed a new group. He was unsuccessful and was killed by his ex-colleagues in 1996.

\(^\text{20}\) The “hit lists” were both real and imaginary. Often, they would appear outside mosques warning named individuals with “severe consequences” for their “anti-Tehreek activities.” These activities could include “collaboration” with the government or taking a pro-independence stance. In many cases, however, “hit lists” didn’t have names on them, leaving a wide scope for people to circulate names on their own.
Even before IuM’s emergence as “the Ikhwan,” Hizb’s campaign to dominate Tehreek had faced an intra-organizational opposition. In north Kashmir, several senior Kashmiri commanders had split from the Hizb to form Muslim Mujahideen (MM). Among these commanders was Nabi Mir, who was originally from a small village in south Kashmir but had operated for several years in the north. A former police officer, he had joined the Hizb in the early 1990s and risen through the ranks. According to his former colleagues in the MM, Nabi Mir formed the new group because he did not agree with Hizb’s domination campaign or with Jama’at’s influence on the Hizb. Furthermore, MM had gradually moved to a pro-independence position. As an “internal traitor” of the Hizb, Nabi Mir topped their “hit list,” while his family came under attack as well. Four of his brothers were killed, one after the other, but he survived. For help, Nabi Mir turned to his former enemy, the government, which readily offered it. When he returned to his village with a few dozen MM cadre to establish the village as his new base, the villagers hesitantly welcomed him. Within a year of his return, Nabi Mir and his fighters became the nucleus of the Indian state’s counterinsurgency campaign, which had till then floundered. Nabi Mir’s village became the Jama’at’s and the Hizb’s worst nightmare, where dozens (and probably hundreds) of their activists were tortured and killed.

Meanwhile, Ikhwan had also come under Nabi Mir’s influence, but it was mutually decided that the Ikhwan would control Anantnag town, while the MM would fight the Hizb in the countryside. Learning a lesson or two from the fate of the much larger JKLF, both Ikhwan and MM “took the fight back” to the Hizb and the Jama’at, as one ex-Ikhwani militiaman described to me. In the aftermath of Qazi Nisar’s assassination, Ikhwan found some support among Anantnag’s residents. Even this support gradually thinned, however, as Ikhwan openly embraced the Indian military. Ikhwan ranks swelled in the coming months as imprisoned
militants were released on condition that they would join the Ikhwan. Many were regularly harassed by the Indian forces until they joined. But as we will see, in several cases, the pressure on released militants or ordinary youth to join Ikhwan ironically came from the Hizb itself.

Between 1994 and 1996, the Ikhwan (which eventually became the common designation for IuM and MM) and the Hizb fought a devastating civil war, which left both sides weak and exhausted. If there was one victor, as Tehreek activists like to say, it was India. Ikhwan entrenched itself in towns and villages, as it killed Hizb’s top commanders. The most devastating blow was dealt to the Jama’at, whose activists were abducted, tortured and killed, leading to a mass migration of Jama’at families to the relative safety of Srinagar.

By 1997, Jama’at publicly severed its ties with the Hizb and claimed a halt in all its political activities. While this decision seems to have been made to protect its leadership and cadre from further Ikhwani attacks, it had an unintended positive consequence for the Hizb. As soon as Jama’at separated from the Hizb, Hizb’s support among Kashmiris began to grow, as if people had solely suspected Jama’at to be behind Hizb’s domination campaign. Hizb not only turned the tide against the Ikhwanis, but also visibly ended its policy of fighting with other Tehreek groups. By the early 2000s, Ikhwan was scattered, its tactics deeply despised across Kashmir, and its activists starting to feel “betrayed” by their patrons within the Indian establishment. Those among Ikhwanis who survived the Hizb’s counter-assault, either joined the Indian army and shifted out of Kashmir, or took on a quiet, low profile.

**Meeting the Ikhwanis: Shabbir and Riyaz**

In his short story titled “My Lips are Sealed” (2009) the Kashmiri writer Akhtar Mohiud-Din (1928-2001) describes a cunning milieu that had emerged in mid-1950s Kashmir.\(^{21}\) It was

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\(^{21}\) In Kashmiri, the title is “Wanun mah banem.”
a period, he writes, when the government was consolidating its control in the region with the help of its “local quislings.” The story is about Qadir, a rowdy city hustler, who works alongside Indian paramilitary forces, picks up fights and causes trouble. One day, Mohi-ud-Din, the eponymous narrator, witnesses Qadir pick a fight and beat up an innocent passerby in a crowded Srinagar street, and as soon as people assemble to intervene, Indian paramilitary forces dressed as Kashmiri policemen ruthlessly cane-charge the crowd. The next morning’s newspapers surprise Mohi-ud-Din. Uniformly, all newspapers report that a “savage mob of Kashmiris” had pounced upon and beaten Qadir, a “respectable citizen,” and it was only through the “timely intervention” of the Indian-trained police that “a ghastly lynching” was prevented. Mohi-ud-Din decides to make inquiries and find the hustler’s home. After much search, he locates it in a dingy part of the city. It turns out that Qadir is a broken man at home with no job and a huge family to feed. It is, in fact, some local pro-India politicians who had blackmailed Qadir to do their bidding, in lieu of keeping an accidental death that Qadir had caused under wraps. “My Lips Are Sealed” is an early account about “collaboration” in Kashmir, in which Mohi-ud-Din uncovers how “local quislings” remain key to Indian rule in the region. But it clearly distinguishes between those whose circumstances are exploited and are made to become enforcers of illegitimate state power on the streets and those who acquire political power on the backs of such enforcers. The story stresses that to rebuild trust within Kashmiri society one must understand how the gray zone works at the personal and micro-political levels.

“Nothing puts a pause on counterinsurgency in Kashmir, not even a khudayi-qahar [natural catastrophe],” Shabbir tells me, when during one of our last interviews I read him Mohi-ud-Din’s story. He was referring to the September Flood, but quickly grasped the historic import of Mohi-ud-Din’s story. Shabbir is an ex-militiaman, an Ikhwani. He gets his designation
“Ikhwani” (“Eckwaen” in local parlance, which twists the Arabic “Ikhwan” to give it a derisive tone) from having joined MM, when the MM was already involved in the counterinsurgency and come to be known as Ikhwan. He doesn’t like being called “Eckwaen,” or even “Ikhwani,” by the villagers, at least not anymore. Yet, he uses it when he meets government officials or politicians to ask for a government job or for a loan. On both counts, however, he has been unsuccessful. He and his fellow Ikhwaniis played an instrumental role in holding elections, especially in 1996. “I can tell you that because without us the elections in 1996, or the ones afterwards, could not have happened,” Shabbir declares. When I met Riyaz, another Ikhwani, he would repeat Shabbir’s assertion: “One hundred percent!” he claims, “Government could not have conducted elections without us.” Riyaz, however, was more active during the 2002 elections.

I met Shabbir and Riyaz in 2015, several years after their militia lives had ended.22 I was introduced to Shabbir over the phone by one of his former associates who knew me. Shabbir was part of the Ikhwan between early 1996 and late 2001, after which he joined the Kashmir Police’s semi-official Special Operations Group. Riyaz was introduced to me by an ex-Ikhwani who himself didn’t want to talk. Riyaz, initially associated with a pan-Islamist armed group, Harkat-ul-Ansar, joined Ikhwan in 1999, and remained a part of it until 2006. Shabbir and Riyaz gave up militia lives when they got married, in 2005 and 2006, respectively. At the time I met them, Shabbir was unemployed, staying home with his mother and his wife in his village, while Riyaz worked as a day laborer in Anantnag. Both were in their early forties, living troubled lives.

22 Not only have I changed their names, I have also removed the nature of the roles they played or positions they occupied within the Ikhwan to protect their identities. I met them separately, kept my meetings with each highly confidential.
While, over time, I met and interviewed several other ex-Ikhwanis, Shabbir and Riyaz became my main interlocutors.

Meeting ex-Ikhwanis is fraught with interpersonal risks for researchers, especially if the researcher happens to be a Kashmiri, like myself. Having lived much of their lives harassing and hurting people, Ikhwanis worry their victims will someday return to take revenge. When I contacted Shabbir and Riyaz, I did not have to establish my research credentials as much as my residential/family ones. Later, they would tell me separately that before agreeing to talk, they both had to make sure that no one in my family had suffered “takleef (pain)” at their hands. Even then, when I began visiting and interviewing them, I was initially met with a refusal to talk, except about their economic difficulties. At one level, I interpreted this reticence as a lack of desire and awkwardness about bringing up a time about which I might have already known several things; at another level, like everyone else, the Ikhwan era is also a difficult time for them to grapple with personally. As Shabbir would tell me later: “Everyone knows about us, it is not hidden from anyone. I try to forget, as if it was not me but somebody else who was doing these things. But memories come, and they hurt.” Perhaps, the fact that I was no longer based in Kashmir helped me to secure my first meetings.

In the beginning, I had to clarify that I was not a journalist. While ex-Ikhwanis are circumspect about revealing their former lives, they speak profusely if they sense talking might potentially lead to a government job. I had noticed that it was easier for Indian journalists to interview Ikhwanis, for Ikhwanis see the Indian media as an effective platform to voice their emotive appeals. For Indian TV reports, Ikhwanis often spoke about having been “used,” “betrayed” and “left behind” by the Indian establishment, and demand government jobs in return for their years of service in the counterinsurgency campaign. Even the Indian media seemed only
occasionally comfortable interviewing Ikhwanis as the news of the latter’s atrocities in Kashmir had become a subject of criticism from international human rights organizations (Human Rights Watch 1996). In a report telecast in 2002 on an English-language TV news channel in India, for instance, Ikhwanis were given credit for “breaking the back of the Kashmiri militancy” for “meager salaries,” but the report also suggested they might be involved in “extorting money” from the locals who lived under fear (NDTV 2002). Another news video shows the interviewer stating, “Ikhwanis created a secure environment for voters,” and even lamenting that the voters had not come to vote in 2002, because the Ikhwanis “had been restrained” (Video Volunteers n.d.).

I was not unaware of the history of the Ikhwan. I had known about them from almost the moment IJM joined India’s counterinsurgency campaign, and, instead of pretending that I knew nothing about them, I decided to make this knowledge available to Shabbir, Riyaz and other ex-Ikhwanis beforehand and as openly as possible. While the resultant tension between us formed the overall intersubjective context in which meaning was shared and contested,23 it helped make an incision upon the typical veils of secrecy drawn on shared memories of violence. Openness about what I remembered from my early years about Ikhwan eventually helped open a space in which ex-Ikhwanis could intervene with their own understanding of the events we recalled, and which helped to complicate popular notions of violence, commitment, and betrayal in Kashmir.

Finally, there was the fragile question of the difference between informants and informers.24 In anthropology, we are accustomed to treating native experts as anthropological

23 On how meaning is co-constructed in intersubjective contexts, see Crapanzano (1980).
24 Miles Richardson sees the difference between the “informer” and the “informant” as critical. Informer informs the authorities about illegal activities that might lead to legal proceedings, while an informant acts as a local collaborative expert for the anthropologist, which might help produce ethnographic accounts (Richardson 1990, 14-17).
informants. But the ex-Ikhwanis who became my “informants,” had once inhabited the space of “informers” as well. Even in the present, sometimes, they were unable to mark the difference between the “interview” and the “interrogation.” This problem emerged in a curious manner during our conversations. Questioning or interviewing was a form of address/inquiry to which ex-Ikhwanis had learnt to respond in a peculiar way. Riyaz, for instance, seemed eager, and without any prompting, to give extended details about how he had crossed the border and the mountains to reach the militant training camps in Azad Kashmir (the western part of the region under Pakistan), the routes he had taken, his guides, the locations of camps, and, especially, the role of the Pakistani intelligence officers in his arms and ideological training. While former Tehreek militants, who gave up arms but did not join Ikhwan, have also talked to me about their journeys to the training camps, their narratives are more often laced with claims of “courage amid hardship,” as well as a romantic nostalgia for “camaraderie in the camps,” but no more than that. In some interviews, it was typical for some ex-combatants, who had spent time in “interrogation centers” and jails, to remain discreet about their training and armed operations. But others would volunteer to give copious accounts, indicating a rehearsed pattern—which, I figured, they must have learnt well to escape torture from their interrogators. Riyaz appeared to be among the latter. Incidentally, the more I heard accounts which offered such “information,” the more I realized that by the mid-1990s torture must have become ineffective in terms of obtaining useful information as all captured militants appeared to possess the same knowledge. Nevertheless, the torture had continued.

It is not possible to give a full account of what drove Ikhwanis to “turn,” as few have survived and many refuse to speak, but one can trace the larger context in which they emerged, as I have done above. There is no archive to return to, and much of the official involvement
remains classified. In Kashmir, as in other unstable places, many rumors and conspiracy stories circulate, and theories abound. My own image of Ikhwanis was shaped by living a significant part of my life in Anantnag town, which they had dominated twenty years ago. I will give a brief account of my own memory of the Ikhwan, which will help give an overall context within which my conversations with Shabbir and Riyaz took place.

Memory in a time of counterinsurgency

For several years, Ikhwanis had come to closely inhabit my own daily life. I grew up in Anantnag. My high school was in the center of the town, where Ikhwan had their “headquarters.” Sometimes when coming out of my school, I would encounter armed activists of IuM. One of them, who was the older brother of my classmate, was later shot by Indian troops, just before IuM became the India-allied “Ikhwan.” His death caused my classmate trauma—yet some relief too. Before her brother’s death, soldiers would regularly come to harass her family. Till 1994, IuM had remained inconspicuous; it was just one among many guerrilla groups.

Then an incident around that time made me, and possibly some others, take note. I was walking back from school, when I saw two Kashmiri gunmen openly enter an Indian military post. I remember being startled, but also intrigued. I couldn’t believe Kashmiri militants could enter a military installation like that, for it would mean a certain death. I waited for the sputter of gunfire to begin, but nothing happened. I would come to know soon that the IuM had defected to the government side, which is why I heard no gunfire.

Tensions in Anantnag had been running high. Qazi Nisar, the town’s main preacher, had been assassinated in June that year. There were angry protests against the Hizb and the Jama’at, whose hand was seen in the killing. In mourning, Nisar’s followers kept the body for display in the open for several days, and processions were carried out. Although Hizb had never been a
strong force in the town, in the adjoining villages it was predominant. A week later, Hizb cadres, accompanied by Jama’at activists, marched through the town in a procession of their own. They were carrying bodies of their fallen colleagues, who had died in a gun fight with the Indian military. They raised slogans supporting Pakistan, and challenged Nisar’s followers. The procession, as much about mourning the dead, was also an assertion of Hizb’s power. To underline their message, they buried the bodies close to Nisar’s grave. I had witnessed both, the processions and the counter-procession. For the moment, it seemed as if the Indian military had somehow dissolved into the background, while an internal schism had replaced the hitherto clear distinction between the military and the resistance.

In the coming days, I would see Ikhwanis packed in army vehicles patrolling Anantnag’s streets. Reports of raids in surrounding villages were coming in. They rounded up, killed, and burnt the houses of Jama’at members. Public talk had been poisoned by mistrust and threats for long, yet within intimate circles people still spoke to each other. Tehreek politics, for instance, had from the beginning been everybody’s business, at least in the early years—in homes and storefronts, or around the bakers’ ovens, common people would regularly discuss resistance politics and tactics, which would annoy the government and irritate even some of its opponents. However, in the aftermath of the rise of the Ikhwan, a dark silence fell over the town. People in Anantnag would not mention attacks on the Jama’at and the Hizb. It was a stolid stance, if not an approval. But some would justify Ikhwani attacks by claiming that the Jama’atis had used the Hizb to settle personal scores in their localities, and that it was their own violence that had come back to haunt them. Senior Jama’at members, it was claimed, would hold shari’at courts where summary justice was issued to people. In this, it was claimed, the Hizb had acted as the executors of “Jama’ati insaf (justice).”
While the town was under Ikhwanis, the countryside came to be split between villages controlled by the Ikhwan and those under Hizb influence. Hundreds died from both sides during skirmishes along these unprecedented new “borders.” People from one village became suspects in another. These borders interrupted previous forms of interdependence and exchange in the countryside. Most precarious were those who had kinship relations in villages under opposing sides. In this fight, eventually, the Hizb lost its former power, as many Jama’at families, which had acted as the Hizb’s support base, escaped to Srinagar. As their primary targets thinned, Ikhwanis had little raison d’être left, so they turned against even those who had quiescently accepted their presence. Anyone who questioned their authority in the town became a target. While public discourse was muted, stories of women’s abductions, torture, and people being forced to pay money circulated quietly.

With power had come a transformation in the Ikhwani self-presentation, and it sharply diverged from their previous “mujahid (militant) looks” that had emphasized an ascetic appearance. Many had noticed the change in the way Ikhwanis had begun to dress and walk, and to the youths of my age it was especially hard to miss. The traditional militant outfits, consisting of the loose fitting shalwar-kameezs were replaced by jeans, lengthy beards were shaved off, or styled in the way the Indian military prescribes for some of its troops. It was a symbolic inversion of the militant ideals of “piety.” Not only did they suddenly begin to carry shiny new weapons, but they also acquired shiny new cars to carry them in. To spite the residents, the Ikhwanis had said they were going to rename Anantnag “Ramnagri” (a Hindu name, “City of Ram”). The town’s residents fondly called and remembered their town as “Islamabad,” after an 18th century governor of Kashmir under Afghan rule, Islam Khan, who had, as the legend goes, established it. In the early 1990s, Indian soldiers would beat up shopkeepers or tear down
billboards with “Islamabad” written on them, for they thought the name had a religious significance. If a soldier asked you, “Where are you from?” and you accidentally answered, “Islamabad” instead of “Anantnag,” it would result in a thrashing. People, who had gradually become used to “Anantnag,” a Sanskrit name the Dogra rulers in the late 19th century had given to the town, feared this second possible change of name.

The Ikhwanis established camps in three separate places in their “Ramnagri,” all three in large abandoned Hindu Pandit houses. The one in Kadipora was closest to my school, and would reek of blood and liquor. The school principal and teachers would often have a hard time keeping Ikhwanis out of the school premises. All three Ikhwani camps became fearful spaces, the vicinity of which was best avoided. Apart from the systematic torture and harassment, Ikhwani violence had taken on a berserk character. Mundane incidents would turn ugly. In one incident, an entire team of cricketers and the two umpires were roughed up in the town’s stadium, when a member of the opposing team, with connections to the Ikhwan, claimed that he was falsely given an out. It is the bloodiest cricket match I have ever watched.

With much cash available, Ikhwanis started building and occupying properties in the town. Many vacated Pandit properties were occupied and some were bought at “distress” prices. One prominent Ikhwani built “shopping complexes” on public land. First, he built an ugly structure in the middle of a bus stand. Then he built another in front of the district court, apparently as an open challenge to the judges inside who had dared issue a “stay order” on his previous illegal structure. Another top Ikhwani joined pro-India politics. He had a large house built for himself in a posh residential area generally reserved for senior government bureaucrats. He started his own political party to contest elections in 1996, and which until a few years back paid poor Kashmiris a hundred-rupee note (USD 1.5) each to join his election rallies.
For many, the trauma of Ikhwani violence became almost something one could not
mourn. As a crisis of the Kashmiri self-identity, there were no easy dichotomies left to process
the losses, no language of “sacrifice” or “martyrdom” to deal with death. Yet, as one
acquaintance from those times said, “Our own people,’ is nonsense! Once they defected, they
were no longer our own.” I thought about this phrase “Our own people.” Ikhwan in Arabic means
“brotherhood.” In Anantnag, the “brothers” wreaked havoc. The brutal irony of the brotherhood
is probably illustrated by the case of the three brothers from the town, which my old
acquaintance recalled, “The eldest one was a popular JKLF commander, released after sixteen
years in prison, and then shot dead by Ikhwanis a month later. His younger brother was burnt
alive by the army camping on the hill. And, the youngest brother, seeing all this, became a
vicious Ikhwani... ‘Our own people’ is nonsense!” It is fissures like these that made it hard to
maintain a coherent political or social position on critical issues in everyday conversations. The
result was silence and generalized violence.

When I met ex-Ikhwanis in 2015, this past hovered around my inquiries. It was hard to
firmly establish if I had suffered takleef from Ikhwanis. Not directly, I thought. Yet, in some
ways, everyone had, one way or the other—and from all the combatants, state and non-state.
Nevertheless, in stating my memories to Riyaz and Shabbir upfront, we moved to have a
dialogue over the nature of events and the meaning of actions, rather than reproduce a litany of
grievances, accusations, and counter-accusations.

Political projects, *maslaq*, and violence: Shabbir and his village

I drove slowly on the narrow, snow-covered road towards Shadepoor, remembering the
fear the name of this village used to evoke in the post-1994 era. Although it was only one among
several such villages across Kashmir that had once hosted the Ikhwan militia, Shadepoor was
significant because it had been the home as well as the “headquarters” of one of Ikhwan’s main commanders, a man who, when he was alive, was considered by the Indian security agencies as the “pillar” of their counterinsurgency campaign. Growing up in Anantnag, a large town only a few miles from the village, Shadepoor had loomed large in our imagination. For years, stories had circulated about locals, mostly Tehreek activists, being picked up and taken to the village, never to return. Passersby preferred long detours and circumventing Shadepoor rather than passing through it. Strangers who passed were harassed or physically assaulted, and often ended up paying a “toll tax,” which was part of a series of extortion mechanisms deployed by the Ikhwanis. There were also reports of Ikhwanis regularly raiding those villages that had a significant number of Jama’at families to “confiscate” cash and valuables that they believed could “aid the insurgents.” Not only did the Ikhwani discourse and practices mimic the state’s functions and the counterinsurgency discourse, but these practices also appeared to be overlooked by the state. I had also heard, during those early years, about Hizb militants launching counterattacks on villages like Shadepoor. Both sides lost cadres, producing a violent deadlock that ground them down.

That was almost twenty years ago. A lot has changed since then. In 2015, the Hizb had no more than a few dozen active combatants in small pockets across Kashmir, and the Ikhwan had disbanded after its leader Nabi Mir’s assassination in 2002. Not many Ikhwanis survived; those who did either joined the Indian military formally or found themselves jobless. Meanwhile, three years of sustained pro-independence popular protests swept across Kashmir, from 2008 to 2010, re-igniting Tehreek. These protests not only signaled the beginning of a new, non-armed phase

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25 These protests had started in 2008 over a land dispute, and quickly led to months of protests and curfew. The next year, two women were found dead, with signs of sexual assault, near a military camp, which again provoked a series of protests and clampdowns. Then in 2010, for months Kashmir witnessed massive protests and stone-pelting duels between Kashmiri youths and Indian soldiers (Junaid 2013; Bukhari 2010).
of the self-determination movement, but also emboldened a few of those subdued by the Ikhwan for years to question its surviving members, and socially mark them as “renegades.” In this new phase, Shadepoor again became synonymous with “betrayal” and with fraternal violence. Despite all this, however, much has remained the same. A canopy of bare branches of walnut and willow trees covered the road, its pot-holes barely hidden by the ice formed in them. While new metaled roads had come up in Kashmiri villages in recent years, as part of government schemes to build roads and generate “rural employment,” it seems Shadepoor had not received much attention—which surprised me, given the crucial role it had once played on the government side.

I parked near a community water pump at the entrance to the village. The women talking animatedly with each other while waiting in line to fill their copper vessels with water grew silent and closely watched my moves. A few older men in the distance glanced toward me, looks that lasted longer than usual. A young man came over and asked me who I had come to meet. He spoke in broken Urdu, probably gathering from my clothes that I was not a Kashmiri. I didn’t say who I had come to meet, but smiled and greeted him in Kashmiri, mostly to avoid answering his question. But he quickly replied that he had mistaken me for a journalist. I asked him if he was expecting a journalist to visit, to which he shook his head and said, “Many have come, so I thought you might be one too.” Asking such direct questions from strangers, like who one was meeting or where one was going, is not unusual in Kashmiri villages, where traditionally few secrets are kept and anyone’s business is everyone’s business. But I noticed that he had proceeded to pat my backpack, in an awkward mix of returning my greeting and feeling its contents.

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26 In 2014-15, during my fieldwork, I came across many villages where government schemes, like the road building scheme in villages called Prime Minister’s Grameen Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA), were being talked about, mostly in terms of a promise of “development,” and in a few some visible changes had even begun to appear on the ground.
Shabbir, the man I had come to meet, tells me that his neighbors were apprehensive that the village might still face reprisals. “Outsiders see the village as a mukhbir gaam (village of informers),” he says. Hizb’s attacks had in fact stopped in 2002, after the assassination of their bete noir Nabi Mir, who had led Ikhwan for eight years. When he died, Ikhwan melted away and the villagers felt a bit relieved, despite their “tainted image.” The Shadepoor villagers’ unsettling curiosity about my presence was a result of an instinctive scrutinizing of strangers coming into the village as either possible Hizb attackers or Indian journalists—and, like Hizb militants, the journalists had also lost their interest in the village after 2002. While this mode of scrutiny during my subsequent visits gradually came to a stop, I chose to meet Shabbir outside the village. Shabbir blames the reputation of Shadepoor on himself and his fellow Ikhwanis. As a result, he had been trying hard to earn his keep in the village. “They dislike me,” he says, “but they tolerate me because I go to the mosque five times a day, and try to help with odd jobs in the village.”

Shabbir had joined MM in 1995, because, as he describes it, local Hizb and Jamaat activists frequently harassed him and his friends. He says there was no particular reason why they did it, but agrees it may have been because they felt “offended by the way we moved around with masti (boyish nonchalance).” However, he also says he joined because “Picking up gun was a nashsheh (addiction).” This addiction does not have a negative connotation for Shabbir; it suggests the lure of weapons and the power it brought.27 He became a close associate of a top commander, who he thinks was “good initially” and was even “welcomed” by the villagers, but “then he started doing bad things.” Shabbir says the commander got Jama’atis of his own village killed, which most villagers did not like. Shabbir was often ordered to round up Jama’atis from the villages around Shadepoor. He followed the orders up until 1997, but then he “couldn’t bear

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27 Saiba Varma (2016) in her study of Drug De-addiction Center in Kashmir, which is run by Kashmir police, has given another interesting interpretation of the term nasha.
watching people being shot like that.” He switched to a different commander, and then, in 1999, formed a “Special Task Force” with the police, and relocated to a different village. Part of the reason Shabbir left Ikhwan was that he did not see any reason to continue the civil war with the Hizb. “We were tired,” he tells me, “We didn’t know how long we had to fear them and they had to fear us.” Had the violence become “banal” in the sense that carrying out violence had become normalized and no longer required an intention? Why was there such an ease with which violence was carried on, I ask him. Shabbir ponders over the question for a while, and then says: “The fight was really about maslaq, which is why we had to kill the Jama’atis.”

In Islam, maslaq is a school of jurisprudence. There are four well-known ones: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali, all named after prominent medieval Islamic jurists. Most Kashmiri Muslims are Hanafis, which certain Islamic preachers see as more tolerant toward heterodox practices. Jama’at-i-Islami, however, is not easy to categorize in any of these, as it is more of a political rather than a religious organization. Yet, Jama’at activists regard heterodox practices, like supplication in shrines, as bidah, or “religious innovations,” which must be discarded in favor of an orthodox interpretation based in shari’ah. Despite these injunctions, heterodox practices had remained common in Kashmir. More importantly, however, such religious ideas often translated into certain kinds of political projects. Shabbir sees an emphasis on orthodoxy as connected with Jama’at de-emphasizing a “Kashmiri identity” in favor of a “Pakistani one.” Shabbir tells me that MM had started off as an internal rebellion in the Hizb precisely over the question of “total azadi (independence)” versus “merger with Pakistan” as the political goal of Tehreek, yet maslaq was at the center of it. “People used to say that MM (and then Ikhwan) was

28 Discussing Hannah Arendt’s notion of “banality of evil” in Eichmann in Jerusalem, Judith Butler argues that Arendt did not see the crime committed as banal (in Eichmann’s case, it was “exceptional”), but committing crime no longer needed “intention” as such, and could be carried out without “thinking” (Butler 2011; Arendt 2006).
the ‘Army of the Dastgeer’ or the ‘Army of the Hazrat Sultan.’” Dastgeer and Hazrat Sultan are the titles given to an eleventh century Iraqi jurist and Sufi practitioner called Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, in whose name a popular shrine exists in the heart of Srinagar city. He was also the founder of a Sufi order called Qadriya, which has a large following in Kashmir. Abdul Qadir never visited Kashmir, but his two-hundred-year old shrine has been a center of religious and political activity among Kashmiri Muslims. Many Kashmiris see Sufi orders, like Qadariya, and the local Rishi traditions, like the one founded by Sheikh Nooruddin, as the “foundations of Kashmiri Muslim identity.”

Questions over maslaq and over religious practice, and subliminally the political projects assumed to go with these questions, had not remained confined to public debates, but in the context of the Hizb-Ikhwan (MM) civil war had acquired a tangible power of violence. According to Shabbir, Jama’atis were of two kinds: the “moderate ones” and the “kattar (deeply ideological) ones.” The latter, if caught, were not spared, but the “moderate ones” would be given a “choice:” If they could invoke the name of a Sufi shrine or sing a “Dastgeeri manqabat” (a devotional poem in praise of the Dastgeer), then they would be let go with just a beating or after they had paid a “bond.” The kattar ones met a terrible fate. He says people initially appreciated that the Ikhwan was “defending” this “Kashmiri tradition,” but “later they didn’t accept that so much violence was required for such a defense.”

In Shabbir’s accounts about identity and tradition, however, several memories emerged in which violence had not taken place, and which he often wanted to talk more about than incidences of violence. Shabbir was certain that Ikhwan’s aetiqād (belief in the power of Sufi shrines) was irreconcilable with Hizb’s and Jamaat’s puritanism, but the incidents he most
enthusiastically narrated were those that hinted at the lack of appetite for violence. Here is an incident he narrates about his aetiqad:

I was leading eight of my men in W village. It was winter, and we had been going each day house to house to get firewood from people. One day, an old woman engaged me in a conversation, and suddenly, behind my back, several Afghans appeared. They cocked their weapons ready to shoot. The woman pleaded with them not to kill me but give me a sound thrashing for stealing her firewood. As I looked around, my men had scampered off. I also made a desperate dash for my life. The Afghans were running after me and shooting wildly. I jumped into a pond, but it turned out to be a mud pond, and I got stuck in the freezing mud. They surrounded me and asked me if I was a commander. A few local Hizb men were also with them. I was scared, but I didn’t call for anyone, except Dastgeer—not Khuda (God), not family, not my men. I said, “My Dastgeer, if they slaughter me in this mud-pond, it will bring shame to your name.” [Dastgeer means “One who holds one’s hand in tough times”]. Then I lost consciousness momentarily and found myself out on dry ground, as if angels had lifted me out of the pond. Then I told the Afghans, “You and your Pakistan cannot kill me anymore.” I ran and commandeered a car passing on the road nearby. I returned to W village later with dozens of our men, but the Hizb people had departed.

Because he is an aetiqadi, Shabbir believes the hidden help from Dastgeer had saved his life. Did the Hizb activists let him go and he was ashamed to tell that to his colleagues? If he had been let go, it would also have made him suspicious among other Ikhwanis. He insists the Hizb militants did not let him go, and says it was all Dastgeer’s work. While he acknowledges that they should not have been stealing people’s firewood, he sees the incident as “Dastgeer’s āzmaeish (test)”: “Will I stand firm in my faith at my worst time?” Yet occasionally Shabbir would also talk about how he had let go a young woman, who was a Hizb “OGW” (over-ground worker), after he caught her carrying hand grenades inside her bag. At some places, Hizb men, who he remembers
fondly, had let his men go, he recounts. He also says one of his Ikhwani commanders had allowed a Jama’at activist who had fled from her village to return “if she gave up her activities.” Such incidents had increasingly taken place toward the time he was about to break from Ikhwan’s commanders. These narratives show constant calibrations of exchanges of violence, even while the fire of maslaq and political projects kept the parties fighting.

Shabbir and his colleagues were each paid fifteen hundred rupees a month (about USD 30 by late 1990s exchange rates). But for killing Hizb activists or capturing weapons, they would get bonuses of ten- or twenty thousand rupees (USD 200 or 400). “Army gave some supplies, like house provisions,” Shabbir says, “but that is all.” Often, then, his men were “forced to loot.”

Questions of economic difficulties, however hard to avoid, kept returning. But in them I detected Shabbir’s disappointment with the political choices he had made. “Our commanders were useful to the government,” he tells me, “because, unlike the army, they knew very well who fed the militants, who gave them shelter, who supported them.” These Ikhwan commanders had themselves at some point in the past been fed, sheltered and supported by those same people. To defeat the Hizb was to first defeat its support base, and with their intimate knowledge, the Ikhwanis had achieved what had eluded the large Indian counterinsurgency forces.

Yet, once the Hizb was weakened and the Jama’at pushed out from the countryside, Ikhwanis were no longer necessary. “All our surviving boys are dar-be-dar (jobless, idle, hopeless)” says Shabbir, “They all regret what they have done.” The government would call on them “only at the time of elections to threaten election boycott wallahs,” which also became an unpredictable source of money over the years for Shabbir. “I used to make some money around the election time,” says Shabbir, “but not anymore.” His niece sometimes shows him YouTube videos and he uses one to describe Ikhwan in its final years:
Have you seen those thin birds cleaning the crocodile’s teeth? They show it on the YouTube.

Think of us like that. Army was still killing in large numbers. We just picked up small pieces, but made them look clean.

That the government had discarded them had caused bitterness, but the real pain was caused by how Ikhwani lives had become permanently marked, even after they had left the militia. As Shabbir describes it, no one was willing to give their daughter in marriage to him. Then, after four years as an Ikhwani and six years working for the Special Task Force, Shabbir’s mother finally found him a girl to marry. The girl’s parents had put “dropping the gun” as a precondition for Shabbir. He did that in 2005. His problems, however, had not stopped, even though he had taken a great risk by giving up his unit’s protection. It took immense effort, and finally the military’s help, to leave his village and bring his bride home:

My wife’s village had to be fully cordoned. A military commander I knew agreed to deploy a company-strength force until the ceremony was over. None of the villagers came to the bride’s home for lunch, to which they had been invited. My in-laws were also upset that I had brought the army.

**Torture, madness and aetiqad: Riyaz’s turn**

I met Riyaz in Anantnag. He works intermittently as a day laborer and has a meager, irregular income. He had just sold off his auto-rickshaw, which he had bought from selling a piece of ancestral land around the time he stopped working with the Ikhwan. Among all the ex-Ikhwans I had met, Riyaz had been unusually eager to talk. While others often had a life trajectory similar to Shabbir’s, Riyaz had come to Ikhwan quite late and then through a curious path. What also intrigued me about Riyaz was his ability to tell stories that had apparently gotten him out of the life-threatening situations he often found himself in. Of course, much of what he
told me about himself over the series of our interviews and meetings may have been made-up. I had often heard ex-Ikhwanis personalize elements of the larger stories circulating among them, as if each of them had taken part in all the events connected with the Ikhwan. Yet, certain key elements of Riyaz’s account remained consistent. I was also as interested in the facts of his life as I was in how he made sense of his life with the Ikhwan.

Unlike Shabbir, Riyaz’s life began with Tehreek. At sixteen, in 1993, he crossed into Azad Kashmir to get arms training. He had been sent across by the Hizb, because of his “own shoakh (desire),” but once there he found another group more inviting. This group was called the Harkat-ul-Ansar, a pan-Islamist group, which had not been directly under the influence of the Pakistani government, unlike the Hizb. Riyaz tells me, “There was no respect in Pakistan for Kashmiris. Hizb was also disrespectful toward us. Pakistan had kept Kashmiri migrants in backward conditions in the camps.” “Harkat,” according to Riyaz, “supported independence and not Pakistan.” He returned to Kashmir in 1996, but after only a year he was arrested by the Indian military. Riyaz spent the next six months in a Joint Interrogation Center (JIC), after which he was given a light sentence of one year in jail. JICs are known among Kashmiris as “torture centers,” but Riyaz says he faced no torture. “A good officer, whose trust I had earned, saved me,” he says, and adds “They gave fabulous rice, special chai, four times chai, two big plates of rice!” The man who had spent four years in the wilderness of the militant training camps and as a guerilla fighter, had suddenly found himself a full year-and-a-half of eating and rethinking.

When Riyaz was released, he tells me, the bus carrying him met with an accident, which broke his arm. He finally reached home and waited for his former Harkat comrades to show up.

29 In fact, Harkat’s view of independence was quite different from that of the JKLF. Harkat had a pan-Islamic agenda, and did not believe in Pakistani nationalism (which the Hizb and the Jama’at did), but neither did they believe in Kashmiri nationalism, unlike the JKLF. Harkat’s idea of independence was the “liberation of all Islamic lands,” and had, accordingly, attracted many foreign fighters to its ranks.
They arrived a month later and asked him to return to “the field.” But Riyaz told them that his arm was broken and he needed a surgery. They gave him a month and some money. In between, Riyaz, who no longer wanted to be a militant, found support in his family. “Before I was arrested,” he says, “the military would come and take my three brothers for interrogation and spill all our stored grains.” His family feared the same would happen again, if he joined the Harkat. “My mother would cry and say, ‘Save yourself; Go with the Ikhwan; Don’t go with the Harkat.’ She was scared.” The good officer, the broken arm, and the mother’s words were all components of “the story” that Riyaz needed—or had constructed—to cross over into becoming an Ikhwani. It had also helped that Harkat was more lenient toward surrendered militants than the Hizb.

That was in 1999, almost at the end of the Ikhwan-Hizb civil war. Hizb had recouped some of its strength and was taking out major Ikhwani commanders. Riyaz first joined a rural MM commander named “Pinn Jinn,” but the latter didn’t last long. In 2002, Riyaz and his colleagues then turned to the urban Ikhwanis, who were only too glad to accept them. As Ikhwan was beginning to wind down across Kashmir, and not many were joining the militia anymore, Riyaz had entered the most violent phase of his life. His resentment toward the Hizb and the Jama’atis was more palpable than Shabbir’s, even though, unlike Shabbir, he had no personal reason for that resentment (except perhaps the “disrespect” he had felt in Azad Kashmir).

“Jama’atis,” according to Riyaz, “had poisoned everything.” He asks me rhetorically, “Before 1989, we were azad (free) to pray nimaz (Islamic prayer). Did anyone stop us? By fighting with India, haven’t we put an axe to our own feet?” Riyaz talks about several shrines that the military had given funds to renovate. It was probably true; I had also noted billboards of the Indian paramilitary near Srinagar boldly advertising the funds given to an important shrine.
To Riyaz, then, Jama’atis were the main culprits. “Just being Jama’ati was enough crime,” he asserts, and in a third person voice, adds, “As soon as they found a Jama’ati, he would be hung by the bridge in the evening.” While his initial disagreement had been over the question of independence versus a merger with Pakistan, under Ikhwan he had even started questioning the logic behind the need for independence. At a different point, Riyaz had also suggested that the “traitor” label for Ikhwan was unfair: “Jama’atis are the ones who betrayed Tehreek. We hurt the movement only later. And if we hurt the movement one rupee, they harmed it at least eight anna.” (One rupee is sixteen annas in old currency system).

Unlike Shabbir, Riyaz seemed keen to talk about “torture.” His casualness toward “torture” was apparent in the way he spoke about it. He tells me the story of a young woman, girlfriend of his former commander Jinn, who had informed the Hizb and gotten Jinn and his several Ikhwani associates killed. “After torture-worture, we came to know it was she who had tipped off the Hizb,” he says. He speaks about his “favorite techniques”— “Power-touch” (electric shocks passed through wet bodies), “Aab parade” (waterboarding with water mixed with chili powder) and “Awezaan” (hanging naked by the feet). He adds, however, that he had learnt these techniques in the Pakistani training camps, but got to use them working for India.

Riyaz’s experience with the Harkat had made him appreciate the Ikhwan life. “Militancy was jail, Ikhwan was freedom,” he says, “In Harkat, life was short and strict; everyone was just waiting to die, to become a shaheed (martyr). There was lots of money, but you neither spent it, nor felt like spending.” Additionally, there were no women. “You couldn’t even look at women,” he says, “If a woman complained against you, the Harkat commander would just shoot you right there.” Under Ikhwan, things became dramatically different. “You could spend money,” he says, “But you had to find it first.” And that was not hard. “Days were free, spent in driving around,
picking Jama’atis, confiscating their properties.” He mentions doing “drugs” and taking “sharaab (liquor),” but quickly adds, as if anticipating my next question, “The army never gave it to us. We just found it.”

Despite Riyaz’s appreciation for Ikhwan’s easy life, I noticed that he described his commanders in the Harkat with more reverence than his Ikhwan commanders, and had a more vivid memory of his Harkat associates than his Ikhwani ones. He described his Harkat commander Javaid Dabrin’s death in an explosion as guzreov (passing away) and as shahadat (martyrdom), but the death of Nabi Mir and Pinn Jinn as moodh (died or killed), which is considered a disrespectful way of describing someone’s death. He was also unable to hide his contempt for his Ikhwan commander “Uncle S,” who after torturing the woman involved in the Jinn case, offered her to marry him “to save her life.” He laughs, “With Pinn Jinn out of the way, Uncle S got the woman, and the game was over!” Riyaz is particularly bitter that the senior Ikhwan commanders who survived had joined Indian political parties, contested elections, and made big money, while those like him were cast out. In contrast, Riyaz fondly recalled his Harkat comrades who had been killed by the military. He spoke about their “courage” and “piety.” A Harkat comrade had even donated blood to Riyaz’s mother, who had needed blood infusion during a surgery when Riyaz was not available. Despite these memories of his earlier comrades, Riyaz had chosen to avoid them, as he says, to save his family.

Hizb, Riyaz tells me, had also fought with the Harkat, and which had pushed his commander Dabrin to come closer to Nabi Mir. “Although, we were on the opposite sides of the fight,” says Riyaz, “before my arrest I would often spend time in Nabi Mir’s village.”

30 It turns out Javaid Dabrin and Nabi Mir had been high school mates, and had continued their contacts even after Mir switched to India. Riyaz says that despite these contacts no information was shared between them.

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Ikhwan. Working with Ikhwan, Riyaz had rather quickly acquired a faith in shrines. This new development would become crucial as well as traumatic for him in the time to come. Harkat’s religious outlook had been even more puritan than the Hizb’s, but people would say Harkat was less interventionist than the Hizb in the society’s everyday life, including on the question of maslaq. In 2006, Riyaz found a woman to marry. He had applied for a job in the army, but returned disappointed. He sold his land to buy an autorickshaw that he drove around to make ends meet. He had distributed posters in the town’s mosques asking for forgiveness from the community. His maefi-nameh (apology letter), he says, was also published as a local advertisement. “I wrote: If you walk with a saint, you become a saint; if you walk with a bandit you become a bandit.” He had publicly hinted at his affirmation of faith in shrines, but also recognized that the Ikhwan had been a wrong company to keep.

To atone for his wrongs, Riyaz received a wazifa, a Muslim prayer practice performed with an intent to acquire Allah’s help in a personal worldly pursuit. “Wazifa,” Riyaz tells me, “is a vulnerable time. If anything goes wrong one can become possessed, or even grow mad.” And, this is precisely what happened to Riyaz. He couldn’t finish the wazifa and became possessed by “five jinns.” “I became mad, and would beat up my wife,” Riyaz says, “I broke up things at home, and even broke my mother’s arm.” Then his family made offerings at the Reshmoal Saeb shrine, and a Pir (a mystic, faith healer) gave him a ta’wiz (an amulet). Riyaz gradually grew better. “Now jinns run from me. Because I have dokh (spiritual backing).” Riyaz’s life had come full circle, and the transition from being a Harkat guerilla to an Ikhwani counterinsurgent, had been complemented by a transition from a puritan to an aetiqadi.

Both Shabbir and Riyaz see their “turn” a result of unavoidable circumstances (Shabbir’s harassment by the Hizb/Jama’at activists, and Riyaz’s concerns about his family’s safety), even
though they had made the choice of adopting militant/militia lives based on their own shoakh ("desire") or nasheh ("addiction"). Once they became Ikhwanis, however, they had accepted the dichotomy of tradition ("aetiqadi") and orthodoxy ("kattar"), which had then become the ideological justification for gruesome violence. They had not only come to construct themselves as the defenders of what they saw as “Kashmiri tradition,” but based on their experiences also as its personal bearers/agents.

Both Shabbir and Riyaz acknowledge the harm they have done, but they put the blame for the background circumstances and violence singularly on the Jama’at-i-Islami, even though Jama’at had really played significantly smaller roles in their personal lives. Yet, while the ideology of tradition/orthodoxy provides a justification in their eyes for their violence against the Jama’at, they are discomfited by the idea that they had joined the Indian government. If they could have taken on the Hizb on their own, ex-Ikhwanis assert, they would not have joined the government. (But then again, Riyaz had gradually come to accept the “pro-India position” on Kashmir). Were they “pawns” in the hands of the government, as Tehreek activists assert, or did they tactically use the government’s help for self-preservation? It is an unresolvable dilemma that for the surviving ex-Ikhwanis remains central to their present and about which they are constantly reminded by others around them. Shabbir’s and Riyaz’s lives have passed through phases of violent antagonisms, and their efforts at leaving their past behind have been painful and ultimately unsuccessful, for they continue to remain socially shunned.

**Conclusion: The split subjects of occupation**

In Mirza Waheed’s novel “The Collaborator” (2011), the narrator, an unnamed young Kashmiri man, is working for a foul-mouthed Indian military officer, Captain Kadian. Living in a border village, the man has been assigned the task of collecting identity papers and other
possessions from the bodies of dead militants or civilians, who find themselves in the crosshairs of the Indian military ambushes, and whose bodies lie strewn across the wooded mountains. The narrator, whose four village friends have suddenly disappeared, perhaps to join the militants, sees his job under the captain as an “accountant of the dead.” The novel is centered on edgy dialogues and agonizing meetings between the narrator and the captain, whom the narrator realizes is “twisted” with a penchant for piling up dead mangled bodies. The narrator is morally troubled, and contemplates killing Captain Kadian. He is a reluctant collaborator, who seeks redemption. While the novel explores in intimate detail the personal traumas of “collaboration,” it also captures a publicly shared concern in Kashmir about the dilemmas presented by Kashmiris working for the state. If the state sees Kashmiris as “seditious” for demanding the right to self-determination or “treasonous” for sheltering Tehreek activists, Tehreek discourse also sees Kashmiris working for the state as “collaborators.” Like other such situations, however, the internal complexities get easily papered over.

During my conversations with Tehreek activists, I had often heard the assertion that the Ikhwan was merely a “state creation,” or that Ikhwanis were simply instruments of the state. Shabbir’s and Riyaz’s accounts, however, suggest that such an assertion is only partly correct, and, I would argue, reveal the inability of Tehreek activists to account for ideological differences within the movement. The state certainly facilitated and provided logistical support for Ikhwan’s creation, but the internal split within Tehreek itself, especially on the questions of respect for local traditions and the goals of the movement, played a major role. Indeed, the state marshaled the potent symbols of identity (respect for shrines) to fuel less ideological, localized power battles into an effective counter-insurgency tool. It used narratives of identity, especially “Kashmiriyat,” which had long been held as a symbol of “Kashmiri syncretism” along with the
imagery of the “docile Kashmiri,” as a tool of violence and betrayal. But, on other hand, there were also groups like Jama’at-i-Islami trying to enforce an Islamic solidarity and an erasure of theological ambiguity, and who, as a result, found themselves faced with deadly fellow Muslims, and an irreconcilable contradiction within its conception of nationalism (Pakistani versus Kashmiri). It is important to remember that the debates over “identity” had been an ongoing phenomenon in Kashmir, but they turned violent in a space where the state’s hegemony was destabilized. This destabilization allowed the possibility for a consolidation of alternative sources of sociopolitical power. Violence (including state violence) went hand in hand in forcibly establishing narratives of identity – the state, the Ikhwanis and the Hizb (and Jama’at) all used violence to set the terms of the identitarian discourse. These identitarian discourses became lethal precisely because of their ideological inflection by the pro-Indian and the pro-Pakistani political projects.

Ikhwanis were not mere cogs in the counterinsurgency machine—at least, not initially—but were conscious of the choices they had made or were making. In recounting their militia lives, Shabbir and Riyaz uncover how their acts as Ikhwanis became charged with ideological conflicts. For some, the consciousness of these conflicts had been the key reason for “turning,” for others this consciousness developed gradually. Ikhwan had come to construct its enemies as “anti-tradition” and as “anti-Kashmir,” and itself as “a defender of Kashmir’s aetiqaad (belief in the power of shrines).” (Albeit with so much violence, this façade was hard to maintain). Yet, if initially the violence was inflicted as ideologically charged retribution, later it became increasingly banal and arbitrary. While it was clear Ikhwan had come to detest the idea of “merger with Pakistan” (a transformation from its pro-Pakistan JuM days), its new stance on Kashmiri independence had also begun to shake. At the same time, the “permanent accession
with India” as a political solution, which Ikhwan leaders came to support, remained limited to vague notions, like “Kashmiris have freedom to pray,” as Riyaz would describe it. Toward its end, Ikhwan really represented no traditional political stance in Kashmir (pro-Pakistan, pro-Azadi, or even pro-India). With its “enemies” subdued, it just devolved into becoming an auxiliary of the counterinsurgency machine, and as such it couldn’t even maintain its usefulness to the Indian state as a spoilsport in Tehreek discourse, except at the time of elections.

In a broader sense, the civil war that Ikhwan was a part of was not so much a clash of subjectivities—between traditional heterodoxy and puritan orthodoxy, or religious and regional—as much as a split within the Kashmiri political subjectivity itself. What was publicly believed in 1990 to be a “short journey to azadi,” had by mid-1990s become a stalemate, which began to cause public fatigue. Many had become weary of Hizb’s domination campaign. As several Kashmiris, who had witnessed that time in the mid-1990s described it: “People were feeling spent,” and that is why there was “less shock expressed at Ikhwan’s turn.” From the height of the revolutionary emotional upsurge in 1989-90, some had begun to question the efficacy of the armed movement, and others even felt azadi was ultimately unachievable. In many ways, the counterinsurgency, aided by the internal fighting among Tehreek groups, had succeeded in consolidating the seeds of political doubt. Kashmiris, who had seen the events of 1989-90 as emancipatory—as a return of the Kashmiri masses as historical-political subjects—were now unsure of future political possibilities.

On the phenomenon of late-colonial occupation, Mbembe writes, “Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood” (2003, 16). Kashmiris had precisely come to occupy this “third zone” between the violence of the Indian military occupation and the incoherence of certain Tehreek political
projects. In this, Riyaz and Shabbir were not only the agents of disruption, but had themselves become the quintessential split-subjects of occupation. Both appear broken between waiting for the promises of recompense for their labor of violence and their fall into madness and a sense of emptiness in the absence of a political project.

What I called the “monstrous new reality” in the beginning, was the result of the government’s effort to create an in-between space—a “gray zone” between Tehreek and the state—as a response to the crisis of Tehreek politics in Kashmir. Its ground was prepared by the occupation, whose core elements were the emergency laws and the extensive militarization of the region. This gray zone was to be inhabited by the Ikhwanis and other civilian contractors of violence, who together constituted what I have previously called an *uncivil society* (Chapter 5). This term was first used by an ex-Ikhwani operator during an interview with me as a bitter pun on the idea of “civil society,” which he had heard his military handlers using to describe him and his fellow Ikhwanis. For me, however, the idea of “uncivil society” has an analytic significance as well: it helps to understand the relationship between the occupation, elections, and the unaccountable, generalized violence. This understanding can be stated as follows: The organizing logic behind uncivil society, as it emerged in Kashmir, rested on creating a new “image of democracy” shaped by a new vocabulary of “pacification,” “identity,” and “political process” but was managed on the ground through the outsourcing of violence to quasi-state actors through a legalized civil war within a space of emergency.
CHAPTER 6
THE DOGRA STATE AND THE EMERGENCE OF KOSHUR MUSALMAN
IDENTITY

Thorp’s legacy

Early on November 22, 1868, a body was found in a wooded part around Sulaiman Hill, midway between the seat of the Dogra rule in Kashmir and the old districts of Srinagar city. It was a young male body with telltale signs of poisoning. In those days, the Dogra maharaja had barred the British from staying in Kashmir beyond the summer months, especially after the harvesting season, when the revenues were collected. The man had clearly overstayed his vacation. This man, however, was no ordinary vacationer; he was Robert Thorpe, a lieutenant in the British Army, who had been visiting Kashmir since 1865, and, more importantly, was writing scathing reports on the Dogra “misgovernment.” He had become too inquisitive for the Dogras to take lightly. Just a day before his body was found, Thorpe had been tied to a bed and carried away by Dogra soldiers on foot to be delivered to the British authorities at the southern border of the Kashmir state. The soldiers later reported that Thorpe had managed to give them a slip; but it is possible he was never even taken out of Srinagar. His body was buried in the city’s main Christian cemetery in Sheikh Bagh on the banks of the River Jhelum. The inscription on the grave read: “Robert Thorp, aged 30, who sacrificed his life for Kashmir on 22nd November 1868.”

Thorp remained buried for more than a century before Kashmiri Tehreek activists brought him back to life. In early 2000s, when Thorp’s book Cashmere Misgovernment was reprinted by a Srinagar-based press, it evoked the interest of Tehreek activists, so much that he
was instantly anointed a “martyr.”¹ Zahir-ud-Din, a Tehreek history-writer, declared Thorpe to
be the “first martyr” of Kashmir, while an anonymous columnist described him as “a chronicler of Kashmir’s pain.” Thorp’s work was “shining light into the darkness” and his voice was
“sympathetic” to Kashmiris when none were. Some Tehreek leaders started visiting Thorp’s
gave each year on November 22 to lay flower wreaths on it. A Srinagar-based human rights
advocacy group even instituted a Robert Thorp Award to be given annually to the defenders of
human rights.

Yet, there are others who believe Thorp was just an “imperial agent” who had been
dispatched to destabilize the Dogra government and make a case for the British annexation of the
princely state. According to the Dogra government, Thorp had not died of poisoning, but of a
ruptured heart. Intriguingly, the imperial agent’s death had provoked no reaction from the British colonial government. In any case, for an odd British critic of the Dogras, there were many other British, in much more powerful positions than Thorpe, who defended the Dogras. The mystery of his death will probably remain unresolved, but as Tehreek history-writers like to say, what matters is what he left behind: a detailed description of the nature of the Dogra state during the
time he was visiting.

In Chapter 2, I argued that in Kashmir, political subjectivity has emerged in contestation with the
official Indian accounts, and in the post-1990 Kashmir Tehreek history-writers have sought to consolidate this subjectivity through an engagement with history. I described Tehreek history-

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¹ *Cashmere Misgovernment* was first published in 1870 in Britain by Longmans, Green and Company. In 1973, the book was included in a volume called *Kashmir Papers*, which also included books on Kashmir by Arthur Brinckman and Sir William Digby. Then in 1980, Gulshan Publishers in Srinagar printed Thorp’s book under the title *Kashmir Misgovernment*, which was reprinted several times in early 2000s. In 2011, Gulshan Publishers reprinted the book as part of *Kashmir Papers*.
writers as non-professionalized autodidacts who engage with Kashmir’s past through writing practices and an argumentative disposition opposed to the official state positions. They produce accounts that counter the state’s official interpretation of historical events, and support the Kashmiri right to self-determination. What the chapter sought to show was that if there has been a history of dates, dynasties and domination in Kashmir, there is also a popular memory of sentiments, people, and resistance, all forming elements of a political subjectivity which Tehreek history-writers are invested in both revealing and giving shape. Yet, to fully understand the roots of Tehreek in Kashmir, it is crucial to understand the formation and nature of the pre-1947 Dogra state and its relationship with its subject population.

In this chapter, I will outline key aspects of the Dogra state to historicize the Kashmiri Muslim identity. I tentatively use the term “Kashmiri-Muslim,” and not simply Kashmiri, as the former captures the intertwining of “religious” and “class” difference that has marked this identity. Here, religious difference refers to the communal identities of different religious groups within the Kashmiri subject population. These communal identities are more political than religious; they are based on perceptions of political interests of communities rather than simply differences in beliefs or practice. Class difference refers to the differential relationships among Kashmiri communal groups, between communal groups and the state, as well as the differential economic position the communal groups occupied during the Dogra era. As will become clear, “Kashmiri Muslim” is the name around which politics in the region became historically organized. But this name has always remained an unstable referent in Tehreek politics, which

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2 Simon Critchley, citing Gramsci, has argued that the problem of political subjectivity is a question of naming: to be able to name a collective of people, and then organize around it. By this he means, that politics involves identifying a “determinate particularity in society and then hegemonically constructing that particularity into a generality that exerts a universal claim.” This could be “workers,” “the peasant,” “the immigrant,” or “indigenous people” (Critchley 2012, 91).
seeks self-determination for all the people who were subjects of the state before 1947. At the
same time, none of the “communal identities” is internally coherent, which implies a politics
based on such identities is fraught with contradictions, and possibly violence.

What follows then is a brief account of the formation of the Dogra state and its chequered
relationship with the Kashmiri Muslim subject population. I argue that the Dogra state, through
its extractive and repressive practices, created a differential body politic in Kashmir, producing
communal fault lines based on religious identity which have continued to underpin the politics
around and in the region. The history of Dogra state practices has remained embedded within
public memory. Tehreek history-writers invoke this memory to call into question the legitimacy
of the Dogra ruler’s signing of the Treaty of Accession with India in 1947. I will survey the
Kashmiri communal identities that may have older roots, but became politicized during the 19th
and the early 20th centuries. These identities were sharpened under a state which, as historian
Mridu Rai has argued, became a veritable “Hindu state.” Finally, I will briefly examine the
political mobilization that gave rise to the events of 1931 and drove Kashmir toward the tragic
events of 1947.

While I draw parts of my account from Thorp’s work and those of his contemporaries, it
is important to reiterate that some of the British writings on Kashmir from the 19th century which
are critical of the Dogras seem to be modelled on the trope of “oriental despotism.” Romila
Thapar, a prominent historian of early India, describes Oriental Despotism\(^3\) as a mistaken
“belief” among British historians of the colonial era that “there was no private property in land in
pre-British India,” and “extraction of a maximum percentage of surplus from village
communities enabled the despotic ruler to live in considerable luxury.” Accompanying this belief

\(^3\) Oriental Despotism as a trope had greatly influenced the G.W.F. Hegel’s dialectical philosophy of history as well
as Karl Marx’s writings on the “Asiatic Mode of Production.”
was the cultural evolutionist notion that such societies were “unchanging” and had nothing to contribute to the “rational development of civilization” (Thapar 1979, 4-9). Bernard Cohn explaining the trope also describes how the early British colonial officials viewed India as “lawless” and ruled “arbitrarily.” They believed that “during his (despot’s) life, his pleasure is the law” (Cohn 1996, 62-64). It is true, as Thapar says, that it was the “exigencies of (colonial) administration that had impinged on (colonial) historiography” (1979, 5), and it would be unwise to uncritically accept colonial writings as an impartial source for writing history. Additionally, as Mridu Rai, an important historian of the Dogra-era Kashmir, points out, some British critics of the Dogra rule “perpetuated the oppression attributed to (Dogras) by actually using to their benefit some of its consequences,” like forcible use of “cooler” labor from Kashmiris (2004, 65-66).

Yet, it is would also be a mistake to dismiss the writings of people like Thorpe, who seemed to have gone out of their way to write about the life of Kashmiri peasants and artisans under a state which clearly displayed elements of “despotism”—even by the standards of its own time. This is especially important concerning writings about a time (1846-90 CE) when hardly many detailed sources on the life of ordinary Kashmiris are available, and in most cases British had rather chosen to ignore the plight of Kashmiris under the Dogras. In the account below, I also draw from official Dogra reports, as well as from emerging new scholarship on the Dogra period, to give a broad picture of how the Dogra state must have appeared to its subjects. My objective is not give a full account of the Dogra state as such, but those of its aspects which later provoked a political mobilization against it as well as shaped the Kashmiri Muslim identity.

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4 As already mentioned, for a comprehensive account on nature of the Dogra state, see Mridu Rai’s *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, (2004).
The Dogra state

“Treaty of Amritsar” and the sale of sovereignty

At the time of the British withdrawal from the subcontinent in 1947, Kashmir was a princely state ruled by the Dogras, an upper caste Hindu clan from the hills of Jammu province south of Kashmir. Most the subject population, however, was Muslim (77 percent), even beyond the populous Kashmir valley, where more than half of the total population was concentrated.\(^5\)

The founder of the Dogra dynasty, Gulab Singh was a “raja” (feudatory) of the Sikh kingdom based in Lahore. The Sikhs had conquered Kashmir from its previous Afghan overlords in 1819. During the Anglo-Sikh Wars of the 1840s, Gulab Singh decided to switch sides at a critical moment in the war. When the Sikhs lost in 1846, the British East India Company,\(^6\) through the Treaty of Amritsar, allowed Gulab Singh to pay war indemnity on behalf of the defeated Sikhs, but in lieu of which he was given control over Kashmir. Some historians, missionaries, and poets later described the Treaty of Amritsar as a “sale deed.” Arthur Brinckman, a missionary in Kashmir in 1867, appalled by the actions of the British corporation described the Treaty of

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\(^5\) The Kashmir Constitutional Reform Conference, appointed under the presidency of B. J. Glancy after the events of 1931 in Kashmir, came with the demographic figures in its 1932 report which showed that across the State there were in all 24,02,000 Muslims (77 percent of the total), and 7,00,300 Hindus (22 percent), and a small number of Buddhists and Sikhs. In Kashmir province, the Muslims were more than 95 percent of the population, while Hindus (mostly Kashmiri Pandits) were about 4 percent. In Jammu region, Muslims were 54 percent, and Hindus were 46 percent. Here Muslims were much more numerous especially in Mirpur and Reasi, a considerably large minority in Jammu and Udhampur districts or wazarats, while Hindus were predominant in the Kathua wazarat. In mountainous Frontier Province, which included Ladakh and Gilgit, and was territorially the largest, there were more than 82 percent Muslims, 17 percent Buddhists, and practically no Hindus. The Buddhists were mostly concentrated in Ladakh area, where they constituted 20 percent of the population, while 79 percent were Muslim. Gilgit had 94 percent Muslim population (Report of the Kashmir Constitutional Reform Conference, 1931). This composition of population had remained unchanged till 1947, despite the population growth, and was altered only in Jammu province from where Muslims were evicted through ethnic cleansing during the fateful months of September and October 1947.

\(^6\) Till 1858, the East India Company was the sovereign power in the subcontinent. The British trading company had consolidated their empire in the subcontinent through a century of conquest and annexation, and which was taken over directly by the British Crown after the revolts of 1857.
Amritsar in these words: “We have been called a nation of shopkeepers, the most cruel bargain we ever made was selling the souls of men” (2011, 25).

As a reward for his role in the war, the indemnity demanded from Gulab Singh was halved than what was demanded from the Sikhs, which, reveals that the British had already decided that they wanted Gulab Singh to rule the hilly and the mountainous regions in the north (Rai 2004, 26). The East India Company, having been squarely defeated by the Afghans a few years earlier, had realized that while maintaining a permanent military presence on the British Indian Empire’s northern flanks was strategically important, especially in the wake of the perceived fear of the Russian Empire trying to expand south (“The Great Game”), the costs of doing so were too high. It was better to have a friendly military in Kashmir than pay to station one’s own, especially for a commercial-military regime like the East India Company whose primary goal was to establish “rising sources of profit” through exploitation of raw materials, opening access to markets for manufactured goods, and acquiring exclusive or favorable trading rights. Another strategic aspect of the Treaty was that the British wanted to create, what Rai describes as, “a Hindu buffer to prevent a uniting of Muslim interests, Kashmiri with Afghan, in the north-western ‘entrance into India’” (2004, 142).

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7 Poet Mohammad Iqbal wrote of the Treaty thus: Their fields, their crops, their streams / Even the peasants in the vale / They sold, they sold all, alas! / How cheap was the sale (cited in Rai 2004, 19).
8 Between 1839 and 1842, the British invaded Afghanistan to affect a regime change by replacing the ruler Dost Muhammad Khan. Khan was believed to have sought Russian help to reclaim Peshawar from the Sikhs. The British invasion turned out to be a terrible mistake for only person from the invading army of more than ten thousand returned—to tell the tale of the British defeat.
9 Bernard Cohn points to the debate in Britain about the precise status of the East India Company, if it was just a private company run solely for the profit of its stockholders, or did it have responsibility for the subjects in the territories it controlled. By 1785, Cohn states, a principle of “dual citizenship” had been established which allowed the Company to “administer its territories in its own name for the profit of its stockholders—but under regulations passed by the Parliament” (1996, 58).
Gulab Singh duly paid “seventy-five lakhs of rupees (Nanukshahee)” to the British. This was not hard to do, because toward the end of the Anglo-Sikh War he had carried away with him the Sikh treasury from Lahore. It was the treasury that, in a historical irony, was filled with the wealth extracted from Kashmiris during the previous twenty-seven years of the Sikh rule. Gulab Singh was given the title of “Maharaja” and even bestowed with a “Rajput” (kingly) lineage.

But, as was to become part of the resistance lore in Tehreek narratives later, when Gulab Singh sent his troops to takeover Kashmir, they faced resistance and defeat at the hands of Kashmir’s Muslim governor Sheikh Imam-ud-din, who had been appointed by the Sikhs. The anxious governor probably knew a few things about Gulab Singh, whose infamy as a cruel and opportunistic man had reached Kashmir even before his troops had arrived. This image of the new ruler had only become substantiated with his acts of treachery against the Sikhs. Gulab Singh appealed to the British for help in securing his reward, and the British did so by threatening Imam-ud-Din with an invasion. Imam-ud-Din gave up, paving way for a hundred years of Dogra rule, which, according to Zahir-ud-Din, “remains burnished in the Kashmiri collective memory as a catastrophic period of tyranny, exploitation, and repression.” Several reports and personal journals from the period, mostly written by Western travelers, clergymen, and wives of British officers vacationing in Kashmir, paint a picture of distress and decrepitude,

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10 Nanukshahee was the Sikh rupee. The amount Gulab paid was probably equivalent to £6.8 million of the time.
11 To rule a kingdom in the subcontinent was not anyone’s “divine right,” nor could fear alone command obedience. One had to have a kingly lineage to make such a claim, and to be accepted. While Gulab Singh, at the time he acquired Kashmir, sponsored histories that could invent his natural aristocracy from antiquity, the British seem to have simply bestowed on him a “Rajputness” or kingly lineage (Rai 2004, 66-67).
12 Writing about Gulab Singh (and the British), twenty years after the Treaty of Amritsar, Thorp had this to say: “For purposes entirely selfish, we deliberately sold millions of human beings into the absolute power of one of the meanest, most avaricious, cruel and unprincipled of men that ever sat upon a throne” (2011, 84).
whose traces, Kashmiri intellectuals believe, continue to infuse the everyday terms of Kashmiri
language and even the bodily practices of the people.

No provision for a responsible or a fair government, or for public welfare, was made in
the Treaty of Amritsar. The treaty had been signed with Gulab Singh (and “the heirs male of his
body”), and not with the rulers or the state of Kashmir—that is, the Sikhs of Lahore. Gulab Singh
had purchased sovereignty over the territory of Kashmir, and over its people from the East India
Company, which did not rule or own Kashmir. This effectively turned Kashmiris into a part of
the estate of their new ruler. From the way Gulab Singh and his descendants ran the state, they
had seen the terms of the treaty in exactly those terms. The only “limits” placed on Gulab Singh
included the following: he would refer to the British in dealing with his neighboring states; he
would not change the limits of his territories without the British government’s concurrence; and,
if required, he would be ready to militarily aid the British troops in the hilly areas nearby.

While Gulab Singh acquired almost full control over a territory as large as Britain itself,
as a token in “acknowledgement of the supremacy of the British Government,” he was required
to “present annually to the British Government one horse, twelve shawl goats of approved breed
(six male and six female) and three pairs of Cashmere shawls.” He didn’t mind this payment, for
into his hands had fallen Kashmir, which had been known, even to the rulers before the Dogras,
as a “workshop” and a “treasury” (Rai 2004, 61)—for the wealth it created through the industry
of its peasants and artisans, and the ease with which that wealth passed into the hands of those
who controlled Kashmir.

While the previous Afghan or Sikh rulers had not been any more “enlightened” than the
Dogras, the arrival of the Dogras in 1846 appears to have been registered as a critical event. By
the time it ended in 1947, it had done more than rule over a subject population. A Tehreek
intellectual, who had first heard stories about the Dogra period from his grandparents, had this to say:

The Dogra Raj left behind zehni zakhm ("psychic wound") among Kashmiris. It may appear like we have come a long way from that time, but the zakhm is still fresh. If you scratch the zae’hiri (deceptive surface), you will see the imprint of that time on all of us.

Does his assertion have substance? What was the nature of this “psychic wound?”

Apparatus of capture

As soon as Gulab Singh got hold of Kashmir Valley, he began a bloody campaign against small Muslim hill communities in the surrounding mountains. Under the benign gaze of the British, he invaded smaller autonomous principalities in the region and brought them under his control. Gulab Singh also terrorized Kashmiri tribes in the north, especially the Galwans, who resisted the Dogras, but whom he had presented as “plunderers” and “arsonists.” Most consequentially, though, he set about to establish a repressive revenue collection regime. As Thorp acknowledged, the regime of heavy taxation had, in fact, been created and imposed by the previous Sikh rulers. Finding this system already in place, Gulab Singh intensified its operations with swift measures. First, he introduced a new rupee, Chilkee, which was twenty percent higher in value compared to the previous Nanakshahee rupee (also called “Hari Singhis”) in use under the Sikhs (Thorp 2011, 65). Second, instead of reducing the taxes in view of this appreciation in the value of the rupee, he increased them to even higher levels. Third, he almost doubled the prices of grain, which was exclusively sold from government-run depots, with critical consequences for the urban working and artisanal classes.
These monetary and tax fiats were part of an elaborate apparatus of capture designed to extract maximum surplus, way beyond quickly recuperating the sum “he had paid the British.” Gulab Singh made Muslims the exclusive victims of his apparatus, while exempting the Kashmiri Hindus (or, the Pandits) from it or very lightly assessed.\textsuperscript{13} The Pandits were, in fact, inducted into the apparatus of capture itself as revenue collectors and other petty officialdom. In the eyes of ordinary subjects, this made the Pandits the “visible face of the Dogra state,” as some Tehreek history-writers claim. This differential treatment of two religious groups, whose everyday lives had previously been much more interdependent and culturally composite, opened a communal fault line which could not heal again. I will discuss this fault line ahead.

Distressed to see the condition of Kashmiris, Thorp, who was visiting Kashmir twenty years after the establishment of the Dogra state, wrote a stinging report about the Dogra rule. Unlike the critical writings of Christian missionaries who sometimes saw religious ideology as the reason behind the harsh policies of the Dogras, Thorp’s report does not indulge in cultural indictment. He also did not advocate dethroning the maharaja or calling for British military intervention, but sought “reform.” He sent letters to the government in Britain canvassing support to put pressure for reform on Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who had succeeded his father Gulab. In his report, Thorp highlighted the “villainy” of the nobles (\textit{diwans}), ministers (\textit{wazirs}) and the revenue officials, but not the maharaja himself.

In \textit{Cashmere Misgovernment}, Thorp draws a detailed picture of the Dogra tax administration and its functions. In the countryside, he wrote, the system consisted of revenue collectors (\textit{tehsildars}), crop-account keepers (\textit{kardars}), land-record keepers (\textit{patwaris}), grain

\textsuperscript{13} It seems among the Muslims the tiny minority of Pirs—those who claimed to be the descendants of 14\textsuperscript{th}-16th century Sufis who came to Kashmir from Central Asia and Iran, were also exempt from some taxes. It is not clear, however, if the beneficiaries were all the Pirs or just those in charge of different Khanqahs (Sufi hospices), ziarats (Sufi and Rishi shrines), dargahs and mosques (Rai 2004, 152).
Weighers (taroughdars), the police (thanedars, hurkuras) and their local networks of informers and enforcers (surgowls, mukadams, shugdars). Taxes were imposed on all kinds of produce, from paddy to livestock (including on the sale of livestock) and from forest products to dairy. These taxes were taken in kind (about two-thirds of total rice, maize, honey or wheat, and three-fourths of all the fruit) and a tax in cash was imposed on whatever was left with the peasant (Thorp 2011, 51-52; Rai 2004, 151). Additionally, the peasantry was required to directly support the entire tax and police apparatus by sending supplies (rassad), and paying an “additional portion” of the taxes to the officials. There were other taxes too, for instance, a “Hindu temple (mandir) tax” and a “Sanskrit tax” for maintaining temples, priests and Brahmins; and a “Maharaja’s guest tax,” which basically provided for the hospitality extended to His Majesty’s guests. These taxes didn’t include the separate, extra-legal exactions that the officials forced on a population with no realistic means of complaint redress, or hope for justice (Thorp 2011, 54-56).

While gradually some of these taxes came marginally down, any resultant benefit was offset by the introduction into the system of revenue speculating contractors (chakladars) in 1860 CE. These contractors would assess taxes based on average production of three years. This led to rural ruin during drought years. After Thorp’s death, another revenue extracting instrument izad-boli would be introduced. The practice, started in 1882, consisted of publicly auctioning villages for tax collection purposes. Izad-boli allowed and encouraged successful bidders to extract revenue maximally from the auctioned villages to increase their margin (Rai 2004, 151-52).

In Srinagar, and other bigger towns of Kashmir, the apparatus of capture was embodied in the “Dagshali.” Dagshali was an all-purpose government revenue collection, certification, and evaluation office, headed by a darogha with close to two hundred officials under him. All of
them were Pandits. To aid the Dagshali was the police system centered on kotwals, or district officers, whose primary purpose was to capture tax evaders, and make an example out of them. The entire Muslim population in the towns was taxed; the shopkeepers, the shawl merchants, the karkhandars or loom owners, the prostitutes, and the boatmen. But the worst fate fell on shawl-bafs, spinners, and sada-bafs. Shawl-bafs were weavers (all male) contracted by karkhandars and provided with threads of wool to weave shawls. Spinners (all women) spun raw pashm into pashmina threads. And sada-bafs (all male) were shawl weavers without contracts.

The loom owners, for instance, were required to pay the Dagshali heavy taxes on all individual weavers in their employ (from 36 to 47 rupees per shawl-baf), as well as on the shawl at different points of its production. The loom owner couldn’t sell the shawl without Dagshali’s final stamp, for which he was required pay a tax amounting to close to thirty percent of the total value of the shawl. After adjusting the taxes, he would be typically left with a meager couple of rupees to give to the contracted shawl-baf (Thorp 2011, 65). Given that weaving a shawl usually took a typical shawl-baf several months of hard labor, he was practically a slave even with his unique skills.

Thorp, appealing to the “British conscience,” in which he retained his belief despite his horror at the British being principally responsible for the Treaty of Amritsar, wrote about the condition of the shawl-baf:

A shawl-baf may become blind, as many of them do from the nature of the work; he may contract other diseases which the sedentary life and the foetid atmosphere of the low rooms engender and ripen; he may long to take up some other employment, which will permit him to breathe the fresh air, to recruit the unstrung nerves, the cramped sinews, and the weakened frame; and to prolong the boon of existence, which the fearful toil of the loom is hurrying to its close! Nothing but death
can release him from his bondage, since the discharge of a shawl-baf would reduce the Maharaja’s revenue by 36 Chilkkees a year (2011, 68).

The Kashmir “workshop”, which produced “cashmere” shawls famous in the West,\(^{14}\) had surely been built on the misery of Kashmiri artisans before 1846, but the Dogras turned it into, what Thorp calls, “looms of sickness and suffering” (2011, 68).

_Mechanisms of control_

The Dogras had realized that to maintain high levels of tax extraction it was important to keep the subject population under tight control and check any sign of resistance. The pivotal component of the Dogra state’s control mechanism was _grain control_. The government actively prohibited trade and barter between the towns and the countryside. The peasants couldn’t sell their produce in the city (of course, after taxes taken in kind there was hardly anything left to eat, far less to sell), and the urban dwellers were only allowed to purchase a very limited amount of grain, and that too from _kotas_, or the state-run depots (Thorp 2011, 57; Rai 2004, 152). The excessive taxation in the countryside and the unavailability of grain in the towns throughout the year kept the peasant poor and the artisan and worker on the brink of starvation (Thorp 2011, 57).

In 1885, under pressure from the British, who had finally begun to take note seventeen years after Thorp’s death, a “Durbar Proclamation” remitted some of the customs duties on the rice peasants might bring into Srinagar for sale. But in early1890s, the government, the principal grain dealer and fixer of grain prices, began selling rice at a reduced rate in the city _kotas_, taking away any possible benefits to the cultivators from the tax remission. Reduction in grain price was

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\(^{14}\) As one legend goes, Napoleon gave a “Cashmere shawl” as a present to Empress Josephine, who turned Cashmere shawl-wearing into a high fashion in Paris (Maskiell 2002, 39; Daly 2002, 237-256).
apparently done to sustain the shawl-bafs, who brought “bountiful profits” to the treasury. But, as Rai argues, the main beneficiaries of the system were the Pandits, who “having grown used to obtaining cheap rice… were among the few who did in fact obtain shali (rice) at the state rate, while most of the poorer classes in Srinagar often paid twice as much” (2004, 153).

The prohibition of trade between the countryside and the towns, in the long run, led to their economic, political, and social separation. As a result, towns and the countryside in Kashmir could not build organic connections with each other, leading to the lack of effective solidarity at critical junctures in the coming decades. In the short run, it produced the devastating famines of 1877-1879, which led people desperately to try and escape Kashmir.

The apparatus of capture, however, was also an open prison. The state had decided that no Kashmiri artisan or peasant must leave their occupation, or run away to the plains of Punjab. Shawl-bafs were prohibited by law from changing their occupation, while the tax levied on the sale of land by a peasant family wishing to run away was equal to the value of the land itself. No one paying taxes could escape, not even those sold to brothels. Since prostitution brought high revenues to the state, not only was the “sale of young girls in Cashmere to established houses of ill-fame… protected and encouraged by the Government,” but the victims of prostitution were also “prohibited from relinquishing their profession or marrying” (Khan 2013, 115; Preliminary Return of the Census in India 1891, 355). Thorp reports that “Some nautch girls pay 80-100 Chilkees a year,” (2011, 80-83).

By 1880, there seem to have been close to 18,750 registered sex workers in Kashmir, many of them living in Srinagar, an extraordinarily high number in a city of 125,000 residents. Mostly from the Watal community of Kashmiri Muslims, hundreds of them were young girls bought from their indebted parents for 100 Chilkee rupees each. Called a “gaaen,” a prostitute
was required to pay from 10 to 40 rupees annually as tax, dependent on which “class” she fell into: Ist, 2nd or 3rd. The state derived a large percentage of its annual revenue from the *gaaens*, but most lived and died in misery. Widespread contraction of venereal diseases was an unspoken aspect of the Srinagar life, especially among the higher social classes. A report of the Srinagar’s Mission Hospital states that during the period 1877-1879, the hospital had treated 12,977 new cases of venereal diseases (cited in Khan 2013, 92, 115).

Reflecting on this bondage, Thorp reminds his imagined reader “the English traveler,” on his pleasant journey to Kashmir from the Indian plains, who while crossing over the beautiful mountain passes might encounter “the pale, worn figure hastening past him,” to not mistake him as anyone but the industrious shawl-baf who “flies like a hunted felon” and whose “only crime is poverty.” At several places on the passes, the Dogra soldiers would carefully hang the dead, fleeced bodies of Kashmiri peasants and artisans as odious examples for others attempting to flee. Yet, hundreds of Kashmiris would escape each year early in spring, as soon as the snows melted on the mountains (Brinckman 2011, 15).

The only time Kashmiri peasants stopped working in their fields during the cultivation season was when Dogra officials rounded them up for *begar*, or forced labor. The military logic of the Great Game had required the Dogras to station troops across the northern mountains. Kardars were tasked to bring men from the countryside to the Bandipora depot in north Kashmir, from where these men were fully loaded with supplies and sent across the treacherous, icy passes beneath the Nanga Parbat to Astore and Gilgit, garrison towns deep in the Karakorum ranges. Of the system, which ensured Muslim peasants paying constant bribes and remaining submissive to the Pandit officials of the revenue department, Rai writes:
In a still vastly underpopulated territory where labour was scarce and valuable commodity, the Dogras had made an art of obtaining it for free. How to escape *begar* was a constant preoccupation for the Kashmiri cultivator… (2004, 154).

There was a payment for this labor, equivalent to next-to-nothing yet symbolic of the apparatus of capture. For a journey, from which it typically took a peasant almost fifty days to return, he was paid 4 to 7 Chilkees. If he ate from his load, which he invariably did—with the full load on his back there was no room for his own supplies—the value was deducted from his wage. To receive their meager Chilkee rupees, the peasants would have to present a receipt from the Governor of Astore. Few returned from these journeys.

Only those Muslim peasants were relieved from *begar* who worked on the fields of Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs, jagirdars (landlords), and the dharmarth department.¹⁵ Urban artisans, much too profitable for the exchequer working on the looms, and peasants working on prominent Muslim Pir lands were also exempt. This left a large majority of peasant households, which were already on the brink of collapse, losing able bodied men to either slavery on the fields of the ruling classes or slavery on the mountain passes.

Thorp, who had travelled on the mountainous paths peasants took, asks his “moral readers” in England to imagine the typical “scene of death” of a Kashmiri peasant under *begar*:

Picture to yourself, oh reader, those desolate scenes where the Cashmeree *zamindars* (cultivators) had to lay down their lives! None save those who have seen such can fully realise their horrors. No imagination is powerful enough to realise them; the waste, hopeless aspect of the unbounded stretch of snow, the intensely keen blast of the wind, which strikes you with the force of an eagle’s wing as it sweeps down upon you through the ravines; above and around you are snowy

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¹⁵ Dharmarth was a state-funded body which functioned like a ministry, and managed the construction and maintenance of Hindu religious establishments in the state (Rai 2004, 154).
peaks and summits, and precipitous slopes of rock, upon whose edge sits the avalanche waiting for his prey (2011, 76).

The combination of heavy taxation and the general wastage of humans on the looms, in paddy fields, and on begar, took a heavy toll on Kashmir’s population. At the same time, floods, epidemics, and fires became a regular occurrence in Kashmir. Lack of drainage in urban conglomerations, a constant concern of the residents, led to waterlogging, producing conditions for the spread of cholera. Late 19th century also saw a series of vast fires destroy several poorer neighborhoods in Srinagar, where people lived densely in their crumbling wooden houses. A willful lack of government support during famines, floods and fires that ravaged Kashmir, or during the regularly occurring cholera epidemics further exacerbated the dire situation.16

Also witness to some of this destruction, Arthur Wingate, a British civil servant deputed in 1887 as revenue settlement officer in Kashmir, claimed that during the seventy years of Sikh and Dogra rule half of Kashmir’s population had vanished from unnatural causes (cited in Digby 2011, 142). Wingate’s observation is cited by William Digby as an instance of unfair criticism of the Dogras. Digby (d. 1904) was a journalist, a supporter of Indian Congress, and generally critical of the British Indian government’s role in impoverishing the Indian peasants. For this, he gets mentioned as a “humanitarian” in some circles. In case of Kashmir, however, Digby had decided to lobby for the Dogras against Kashmiri peasants; he was a paid lobbyist for the Dogra maharaja in London.

In defense of the Dogras, Digby claimed that while Wingate’s assertions were true, the situation was not better in directly controlled British territories, and therefore it neither warranted

16 Eventually in 1902, a devastating flood kept a large part of Srinagar inundated for months. Many European vacationers were trapped. They forced the British Resident to intervene, and finally with the help of British engineers, the Flood Spill Channel project was started. See more in Chapter 3.
questioning the ability of the Dogras to administer Kashmir nor was it a sufficient case for intervention. (Wingate was not in favor of intervention). Digby’s assertion about the condition of peasants in British India was quite correct, especially in Bengal Province where the 1877 famine had wiped a large part of the native population. Yet, the specific claim of population reduction in India wasn’t true in general or as a pattern. The survey of 1891, for instance, had shown an increase of more than nine percent in population across British India since 1881.

The apparatus of capture continued to function deep into the new century. There were some instances of public protest, but all of them were quickly subdued. The most significant of these protests was the revolt of 1931, which not only had its roots in the extractive regime of the Dogras, but also in its religious discrimination.

**Plurality and division in Kashmir**

*Sects and ethnicities*

As already indicated, the Dogra state systematically discriminated against its Muslim subjects, who formed the clear majority of the population. Muslims of Kashmir region, from whose labor (as cultivators and artisans) the state derived most of its revenue, faced not only an exacting tax structure, forced labor, and grain control, but severe restrictions on their religious practices as well. The systemic nature of these restrictions was built into the way the Dogra monarchy, as Rai has argued, functioned ideologically, and sought to fashion itself, as a “Hindu state” (2004, 113). When Kashmiri towns erupted in revolt against the Dogra state in 1931, the authorities described the events as “communal riots,” that is, borne out of religious antipathy against the Hindus, even though the targets of the protests were almost exclusively the tax

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17 See more on 1931 events in Chapter 6.
18 In South Asian politics “communal” has come to strictly mean politics along religious identity.
administrators. Yet, if there was a “communal” element visible in the protests, it was the state itself which had produced the conditions in which religious identity had become politicized.

In 1931, the Muslim population stood at more than 77 percent in the entire state (and 95 percent in the Kashmir Valley), and it can be safely assumed that at no point during the entire Dogra rule (1846-1950) was this number lower. Muslims in the state had varied regionally in their language and cultural practices. Even Muslims of Kashmir Valley, who predominantly spoke Kashmiri, did not quite have a coherent or a politicized identity at the time of the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. It is possible, yet hard to establish, that the non-Muslim rule in the country since 1819 (when the Sikh kingdom of Punjab took Kashmir from the Afghans) may have begun to give the previously regionally expressed discontent against the imperial Mughal rule from Delhi (1586—1753) and the Afghan rule from Kabul (1753—1819), a fledgling religious turn among Kashmiri Muslims. Yet, the Muslim religious identity, if there was any, was not expressed as part of a public/oppositional discourse before 1846, or at least no significant evidence of it remains.

Among Kashmiri Muslims, there were the majority “Sunnis” and a small minority of Shi’as, who had historically seen periods of social tensions between them. Always confined to urban Srinagar, though, during the rule of the Chaks (the pre-Mughal 16th century Muslim rulers of Kashmir) these tensions resulted from different Sufi sects competing for royal patronage,

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19 See footnote 5 in this chapter.
20 Dogra rule didn’t end officially in 1947, but in 1950 when the crown prince abdicated.
21 In fact, there is every reason to believe the number was even higher. First, the Muslims in the state were dispersed far and wide into mountainous valleys hard to survey. Second, the growing Kashmiri Muslim diaspora of escapees in Punjab were not included when B. J. Glancy came out with his report (see footnote 5). Finally, as stated before, if Wingate’s argument that the population of Kashmir had decreased by half over the previous seventy years was even half way correct, then Muslim population in Kashmir had diminished substantially through adverse government intervention.
22 Although Shi’a Islam had a history in Kashmir dating back to 1450 AD, the number of Shi’a seems to have never risen more than five percent among the Muslims. The Shi’as were mostly residents of some old city localities in Srinagar and in Budgam in Central Kashmir.
control over *khanqahs* (Sufi hospices), and growth in their following (Zutshi 2014, 29), as well as from the instability of the Chak rule, which was marked by a civil war, internal feuds, and the imminent threat of Mughal invasion (Khan 2013).

In the latter half of the 19th century, the tension between the sects flared up again, when the decline in the shawl industry led to incidences of violence between the mostly Sunni weavers and their Shi’a karkhandars, or loom owners and traders (Rai 2004, 39). But, since the lot of the Sunni weavers and their Shi’a karkhandars was not markedly different under the Dagshali system, in the 19th century these sectarian identities remained mostly depoliticized. This is especially true among the more numerous Sunni Muslims, among whom the term “Sunni” (or any of its equivalents) was never explicitly used—and still isn’t—as a self-identifying term.

Yet, sectarian identities were not absent. Contests over the correct practice of religion—despite a consensus on Islam’s fundamental beliefs—had remained a source of rupture and division throughout. These claims and contests often centered on theological disputes between the orthodox Islamic scholars or *ulemas* (and the *moulvis* schooled in the seminaries) and the heterodox sufis preachers, among different orders or *silsilas* of Sufism (some of which were more orthodox than others), or, between reformists influenced by sufis from Iran and the Central Asia and those part of the indigenous Kashmiri *reshi* (mystic) tradition. Yet, such sectarian contests never consolidated into political identities the general populace. The disputes, as local legends go, even provided occasions for engagement with each other, and moments of acceptance of the others’ influence.  

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23 Of these occasions, for instance, Kashmiris often tell the story of the encounter between a Kashmiri *reosh* (practitioner of reshi tradition) offering a cup of tea filled to the brim to a sufi master from Iran who had come visiting. Taking the hint that the reosh by offering a full cup was suggesting that there was nothing the sufi could offer spiritually or intellectually to Kashmiris, he put a thread of saffron in the cup, pleasantly changing the flavor of the tea. Seeing this, the Kashmiri reosh smiled and invited the sufi into his home.
increasingly reformist schools of Islamic thought, led by new movements emerging in the Arabian Peninsula and India, actively sought to recruit followers, like the sufis had done before them.

Among those who fell into the category of “Sunni” at the beginning of the 20th century, there were the “Hanafis” and the “Ahl Hadees,” designating two self-conscious sectarian categories. The Hanafis, followers of a prominent school of Islamic jurisprudence, had incorporated some heterodox practices, especially the ones centered on shrines of the sufis and the reosh, into their religious observances. Ahl Hadees, inspired among others by the newly arrived teachings of 18th century Arab preacher Ibn Wahhab, were purist in orientation. They saw the shrine-related practices as bidat or “innovations” against Islam, and therefore fit for removal. They also sought to expunge South Asian cultural influences from among the Muslim societies, toward a more Arabic-cultural orientation. During the latter part of the 20th century, even among the more numerous Hanafi Kashmiri Muslims, two 19th century Indian schools of Islamic thought, Deobandism and Barelvism, had begun to sharpen the division on shrine-related practices. Barelvis expend considerable effort in defense of these practices, while the increasingly influential Deobandis tend toward “purification” and advocate missionizing work.

However, more potent than sect, as a source of social division among Muslims in the 19th century Dogra state, was “ethnicity” based on regional and linguistic variations. Ethnic differences had widened primarily because of the difficult mountainous terrain preventing mutual interactions between people of the Kashmir Valley and those in the surrounding mountainous areas, like Kishtwar, Neelam Valley, Poonch, Baderwah, Gilgit and Ladakh. Indeed, contact was neither absent nor slim, especially in the summer months, when the snow melted on the passes. The brisk traffic of traders and preachers across the mountains, petitioners
frequently visiting the capital Srinagar, and even a few intermarriages, before and after the Dogra consolidation of the state,\footnote{After 1846, the hilly southern regions of Jammu became part of Kashmir, while a Dogra general in the Sikh army had conquered Ladakh region in 1834.} had created a loosely connected cultural-political space, at the center of which was the populous Valley of Kashmir. Yet, this space was still held together through force by the Dogra apparatus of capture. People living in the surrounding regions probably resented being ruled from Srinagar, but the resentment was directed against the rulers, who had mostly been non-Kashmiri.\footnote{In the later part of the 20th century this resentment has turned against the Kashmiri Muslims themselves. Its causes mostly lie in Indian political parties whipping up a campaign against Kashmiri Muslims who are falsely seen as the predominant force in the government. In the recent assembly election (2014-15), BJP, the governing party in India, negatively campaigned in the hilly regions on the line that the party will diminish the “power” of Kashmiri Muslims in the State, especially that of the Sunnis.}

\textit{Caste}

Arguably, caste differences had a more significant impact on power relations in Kashmir.\footnote{While I use the terms “ethnicity” and “caste” here, I agree with Pierre Bourdieu’s caution that “a model of reality” should not be confused with “the reality of the model.” What he calls “classes on paper” or “theoretical classes”, if they are at all to be named, must be recognized for explanatory purposes, for they don’t exist as such. They often correspond to similarities in the material conditions of life, and bring together “agents” with “common dispositional properties (habitus).” Hence, they possess a certain propensity to come together in reality, to constitute themselves into real groups. For a real group to emerge requires political work of mobilization and organization (Bourdieu 1990, 117-118). For the social groups that I present here—additionally—using cross-cultural categories of classification (caste in particular) tend to produce and accentuate the differences that the categories try to explain. Aware of these problems, I use the terms sect, ethnicity, and caste quite broadly without claiming such categories to have actual or more meaning compared to others. For instance, “sect” in the anthropology of Muslim societies is often used to describe the “Sunni” and “Shia” difference, which had both political and theological origins. “Ethnicity” is also quite an elastic term that often tends to label equally elastic communities, which apart from attributes like language, sense of belonging to a place, may also share stories of origin, and even shared historical memories and experiences—but unlike “nations” these communities don’t make explicit claims of seeking a state or self-government (see Smith 2010). Caste in South Asia is often associated with Hinduism, yet within South Asian Muslim societies, certain occupational, hereditary hierarchies have clearly retained and produced relations as if part of a broader caste structure.} The notion of “caste” was not codified but based on differences in, and social valuations, of hereditary occupations, as well as on the divergent narratives of clan origin and belonging. In fact, the way social stratification in Kashmir was represented in official records and in colonial writings holds an important point about the nature of caste in Kashmir.
Much of what we know about Kashmiri social stratification comes from the writings of Walter R. Lawrence, a late 19th century land settlement commissioner in the employ of the British Residency in Kashmir. Lawrence, whose taxonomy of the Kashmiri society many scholars take for granted, classified Kashmiri Muslims into Shaikhs, Saiyads (or Pirs), Mughals, Pathans, Gujars, Bakarwals (Rai 2004, 38), and the socially marginalized Doombs and Wātals, with the largest majority of Kashmiri Muslims consisting of the Shaikhs. Some of these categories, like Pirs, Doombs, and Wātals, had actual meaning in the lives of the people it described. While Pirs saw themselves as bearers of the Prophetic tradition, and therefore, superior to other Muslim, the categories possessed actual “social meaning” for the Doomb and Wātal Muslim groups. The two groups were vital for the socio-cultural life of Kashmiri Pandits. They carried out “polluting” services for the Pandits, whose Brahmin creed proscribed them from carrying out such work on their own (Madan 1990). The Pirs, however, used the services of the Doombs and Wātals without even such creedal justification. Apart from these, however, there was no lived, symbolic or material content that the term “Shaikh” could designate for those classified as Shaikhs.

27 Walter Lawrence was a British civil servant tasked to survey and carry out land reforms in the last decade of the 19th century. He had succeeded Arthur Wingate, who also wrote a report on land and had called for radical changes in the tax regime. While in Kashmir, Lawrence wrote his famous book, The Vale of Kashmir (1895).

28 Lawrence believed Mughals (not the royal dynasty) and Pathans (remnants of the Afghans) to be the more recent immigrants into Kashmir. There were also Gujars (cow or buffalo herders) and Bakerwals (goat herders) who were mostly seasonally migrating, and sometimes even settled, endogenous communities (Lawrence 1895).

29 Problematically, as Mridu Rai points out, Madan sees extraction of such work as “mutual dependence” and provides an “idealized model of a society extricated from its quotidian functioning and emptied of history” (Rai 2004, 40). In Jammu, Dalits formed a considerable section among the Hindus, who occupied a structurally similar position as Wātals and Doombs in Kashmir.

30 The term itself is also quite confusing. Unlike “Shaykh” among Arabic speaking peoples, Sheikh in Kashmir is not a title, but a surname. Wātal communities use “Sheikh” as a last name, but those who distinguish themselves from the Wātals use the same term but as a prefix in their name—so that, “Sheikh Abdullah” would mean something different than “Abdullah Sheikh.” Notice Cartier-Bresson’s caption in the Introduction, where he uses “the Sheikh Abdullah” instead of Sheikh Abdullah. Clearly, Cartier-Bresson had mistaken Abdullah as a religious-political figure among Kashmiris which he was not.
Lawrence, who had no knowledge of Koshur (the language Kashmiris spoke), had chosen to classify Kashmiri Muslims in this manner because he had depended for his work on a select group of local informants. Dogras, it appears, had actively discouraged European missionaries or officials from seeking assistance in learning Koshur, forcing them to rely on the court languages of the subcontinent they understood: Urdu, Persian, and Sanskrit. Pandits spent considerable effort to learn the Dogra court language Urdu, which assured them government jobs. Some Pandits also learnt Sanskrit, the language Dogras had spent considerable sums to promote. Pirs, though not quite as favored as under pre-Sikh Muslim dynasties, could still speak Persian. It is likely that most of Lawrence’s local informants were the Pandits, and, in certain places, the Pirs. Therefore, the classification Lawrence arrived at was a distillate of how these two social groups viewed the Kashmiri society: divided between those who claimed pure ancestry and religious authority (Pandits and Pirs) and those who performed low-level occupational services.

Pandits and Pirs

Bernard Cohn has argued that the British invested some of their local informant groups with a “discourse of differentiation” to cultivate loyalty among them toward the empire and a stake in its preservation (1996, 21-22). In Kashmir, this discourse was in some respects already present, and cultivated by almost all rulers. Both the Pandits and the Pirs saw themselves as the quintessential representatives of their respective faiths (Hinduism and Islam) in Kashmir. The

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31 It was a practice among European officials in British India to employ a munshi to teach them local languages, and acquaint them with native cultural practices.
32 Lawrence’s goes into detail describing the “character” of various social groups in Kashmir, most of whom are presented in a very poor light. Some of these perspectives are still being ploughed into the public space by Indian journalists writing about Kashmir.
33 The British had employed natives (mostly Brahmins) into their service as local informants and interpreters, and then through a “discourse of differentiation” invested this new class of clerks and babus with an incentive to maintain British power in India. While Lawrence was attempting no such thing, he was following the established practice of using Brahmins as native informants.
two may have, on occasion, contested each other’s version of history, and their valuations of historical figures, but they essentially shared the same form of narrative of Kashmir’s pre-modern past. Their valuation of rulers and figures of different eras was centered on written or orally passed-down memories of how these rulers treated Pandits or Pirs respectively. For instance, Pirs saw the Sultanate period (1338-1526 CE) as a golden period of Islam, valorizing the zealous Sultan Sikandar and the sufi preacher Sayyid Ali Hamdani, who they consider as the most important cultural and religious figure in their tradition. The Pandits despised the sultan for his “fanaticism” and disapproved of Hamdani’s influence in Kashmir. The Pandits, on the other hand, were ardent defenders of the Dogra state, while the Pirs were critical of it—yet, afraid of losing the few meagly privileges the Dogras had granted them, their criticism was muted. These modes of evaluation seeped into forms of historical conscious as well.34

While there is no easy way to trace the roots of these social relations, one can only provide a provisional hypothesis. The ancestors of Kashmiri Muslims had been resident in Kashmir as a mixture of pre-Islamic communities or zaats. A Brahmin would have classified these zaats as lower- or untouchable caste communities. As the sufis from Iran and Central Asia (the supposed ancestors of the Pirs) started preaching Islam in the region at the end of the 14th century, these zaats gradually converted to Islam.35 Eventually, only the “upper caste” Kashmiri Brahmins, or the Pandits, didn’t convert. Pandits derived their social capital, in the sense Pierre Bourdieu has conceptualized the notion,36 in later years from having maintained their Hindu

34 See more in Chapter 2. Almost all historical accounts of the past are either written by Pandits or by Pirs.
35 Islam had a slightly older history in Kashmir though. Rinchen, a Buddhist from Ladakh, was likely one of the first convert to Islam. Rinchen had become king of Kashmir in 1320 CE amid the chaos and infighting of the previous Hindu Lohara rulers. Believed to have been denied permission to become a Shaivite by the Brahmins, Rinchen converted to Islam under the influence of a preacher Bulbul Shah.
36 Bourdieu defines “social capital” as the “aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, membership to a social group—which provides each of its members the backing of
faith. Pirs drew their social capital from being the harbingers of a new Islamic faith. As Bourdieu has argued, while most people belong to one or the other social group, with access to some form of social capital, a dominant social group is designated under the sign of a “great name.” For Kashmiri Hindus, the name “Pandit” or more commonly “Bhatta” functioned as a great name. Both terms signified a mastery of religion, knowledge of religious texts, and purity of lineage. In the same way, “Pir” or “Sayyid” was the great name that signified intimate association with religion and pure ancestry.

It was not hard to convert this social capital into societal power. The Pandits, as already mentioned, were the proximate face of the Dogra state in Kashmir. They occupied most of the high and middle-ranking positions in different government departments. Before the Dogras, other rulers—the Mughals, the Afghans, and the Sikhs—had also employed Pandits heavily. Receiving a government job was both a desired life-goal as well as a prominent part of the Pandit life-world—to the extent of centrally defining the identity of the “Karkun” Pandits.³⁷ Pandits jealously guarded the domain of government jobs for themselves, agitating for protection of their privilege when perceiving a threat.³⁸ Significantly, in the late 19th century, when the British Resident opened a new road connecting Kashmir with Rawalpindi, leading to an influx of Punjabi Hindus (mostly merchants, but ready to serve as government officials), Pandits perceived the move as a threat. It led Pandit leaders to famously petition the Dogra ruler to establish the principle of “Kashmir for Kashmiris” in jobs. While this demand was couched in

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³⁷ Although now seen as representing a uniform group, the Kashmiri Pandits are not homogenous. All of them were Brahmin, indeed, but there were the more influential and numerous Karkuns (those who vied for government service and were part of the revenue administration), the Gors (the priests), and Buhrs (mostly grocers and confectioners). These were all strictly endogamous sub-groups (Rai, 37-38).

³⁸ Rai has argued that most Pandit “religious” reform movements, starting late 19th century, were primarily focused on protecting the domain of government jobs for Kashmiri Pandits (2004, 252).
new claims of “indigeneity” (*mulki*), and in principle included Muslims, the fear of losing their
own privileged access to jobs was central. Kashmiri Muslims, denied formal education by the
state, had no such privileged domain to defend in the first place.39

If Pandits increasingly deployed the discourse of indigeneity to protect their interests, the
Pirs used the opposite discourse: tracing their roots in the purer, older heartlands of Islam—Iran
and Central Asia. Pirs claimed to be the guardians of Islam in Kashmir, as “their ancestors” had
had a longer association with the religion. They acquired exclusive control over religious
establishments, like *khanqahs*, *ziarats*, *dargahs*, and mosques. Along with the Pandits, a few
Pirs had received generous land grants, tax exemptions, and sustenance from different rulers.
These beneficences had led Pirs to imagine Kashmir as a *pir-waer*, the “garden of the Pirs.”40
While the position of the Pirs diminished significantly after 1846, it was still better than that of
the overwhelming majority of Kashmiri Muslims. Both the Pandits and the Pirs, therefore, had
reasons to be conscious of their identity, and probably explains their strict endogamy. On the
other hand, the so-called “Shaikhs,” the catchall category to which, according to Lawrence, most
Kashmiris—cultivators, artisans, boatmen, small traders, ironsmiths, or barbers and other service
providers—belonged, were least conscious of this identity.

If identity among Kashmiri Muslims, therefore, could be traced along the triple lines of
sect, caste, and ethnicity,41 there was hardly either a neat overlap or an explicit politicization of
this identity. As argued, the “Pandit” identity had begun to acquire a political content of its own,
especially with the late 19th century reform movements aimed at protecting the Karkun class interests in the state administration. For the heterogeneous Muslims of the state, “Kashmiri Muslim” or *Koshur Mussalaman*, only gradually coalesced as a political identity—mostly during the third decade of the 20th century. The name *Koshur Mussalman* expressed a convergence of the multiple interests of the Muslims of the state, and eventually included an aspiration for sovereignty. While the regional differences continued to persist between Muslims from different regions of the state, Kashmiri Muslim was a political identity precisely in the sense that it sought to project itself as representing the political identity of all of the state’s Muslims, and not of the Kashmiri-speaking Muslims alone. Similarly, caste differences among Muslims remained palpable at the societal level, but politically, as Kashmiris mobilized against the state, this difference began to lose its earlier power. Below, I argue that it was the advent of the Dogra state that created the external conditions for the emergence of Kashmiri Muslim as a political identity.

**The exercise of Hindu sovereignty**

*Cows, terror, archaeology*

In the subcontinent, intervention (or “non-intervention”) in religion had for the most part formed a vital element in the practice of sovereignty. Pre-colonial rulers had sometimes asserted the primacy of their own religion or creed over that of the subjects, but the pragmatism of sometimes administering a largely non-coreligionist population required not only keeping

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42 *Koshur Mussalmaan* is used in Koshur language, while *Kashmiri Mussalmaan*, as it came to be called in the Urdu press.

43 Kashmiri Muslim eventually could not bring together all the Muslims of the state, especially the Muslims from Jammu. These divisions became obvious during the violence of 1947, when Jammu’s Muslims found themselves unrepresented within Sheikh Abdullah’s National Conference.
religious hardliners within the government in check but also granting symbolic patronage to the religious establishments of the subjects. In the 19th century, the British colonial authorities proclaimed religious “tolerance” and “neutrality” as the main principles of their rule—offsetting, thereby, the need for a demonstrable, and often expensive, religious patronage of the natives.44 After Britain took direct control over the Indian Empire in 1857, Queen Victoria announced in her 1858 Proclamation that all her subjects, regardless of race and religion, were to be treated equally. While there was always, what Partha Chatterjee has called, “the rule of colonial difference” (1993, 16-18),45 the British appear to have taken this proclamation seriously in relation to the natives—of course, to preserve the stability of their empire. They saw infractions against religious tolerance as diminishing the “paramountcy” and the “impartiality” of the British Empire in the eyes of the natives. This image of a “moral empire” had, therefore, animated many Englishmen in the subcontinent.46

While Queen Victoria’s proclamation had not been extended to the princely states, the Dogra state’s mistreatment of Kashmiri Muslims was so revolting that it became a source of embarrassment for the colonial authorities, as is evident in the British writings on Kashmir of the era. The mistreatment of Kashmiri Muslims was also a source of concern for the British because the Dogra rule had begun to come under severe criticism from the Muslims of Punjab, whose quietude the British saw as important to the stability of their empire. The role of Maharaja

44 For instance, while the religion of the colonial authorities played a significant role in the imperial symbolism, the British East India Company had employed Brahmins and Moulvis (Muslims trained in religious seminaries) to code “Hindu” and “Muslim” personal law respectively, to “rule India with Indian laws.” This may have been driven more by the company’s need to better assess taxes in the 18th century that truly a genuine desire to preserve “local customs” (Cohn 1996, 62).
45 Chatterjee argues that the application of “universal” principles of British imperial governance were undercut by specific history and culture of Western societies as well as historical and cultural differences as they obtained in the colonies (especially India).
46 Indeed, the “moral” image sustained despite the famines and the poverty that the relentless British “drain of wealth” caused in the subcontinent and the ferocity with which Muslims and Hindus in India were dealt with long after the 1857 revolt.
Ranbir Singh (r. 1857-85) in intensifying the devastation caused by the Kashmir famines of 1877-79, particularly its almost exclusive impact on Kashmiri Muslims, had agitated the opinion in Punjab. Eventually, all of this would become the reason for the British to intervene, leading to the establishment of the British Residency in Kashmir and to sidelining of the third Dogra ruler Pratap Singh from the administration for almost two decades (Rai 2004, 134-35).

The sources of Dogra antipathy toward their Muslim subjects lay in the nature of the state itself. When the British handed Kashmir to Gulab Singh in 1846, not only was he devoted to his Hindu faith, but also “anxious to be seen a Hindu raja (king).” He based his sovereignty on his claim to rule as “a protector of the Hindu dharma” (Rai 2004, 96-98). He took this to mean, first, the repression of Muslim religious establishments and practices in Kashmir, and, second, creating a Hindu religious geo-space through extensive temple-building and expansive rituals. (In later years, his descendant continued this project through archaeology). Gulab Singh cut off all previous forms of patronage which had sustained major Muslim religious establishments. He also came down harshly upon public expressions of Muslim faith in Kashmir, especially the azan (the call to prayer), which was suppressed in the countryside. It was, however, the issue of “cow slaughter” that became the centerpiece of the Dogra practice of Hindu sovereignty (Rai 2004, 178-179).

Cows were—or, more accurately, had become—sacred to upper-caste Hindus in the nineteenth century, and killing cows for any purpose was deemed a religious offence equivalent to murder. The punishments meted out to Muslim peasants accused of being “cow-murderers,”

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47 The previous Sikh rulers had also been intolerant of Muslim public rituals, and had proscribed the azan. They had criminalized cow-slaughter, but had continued the patronage of Muslim religious establishments—which probably kept the Pir's happy at least.
48 The common expression used in Dogra law to describe cow killing was gau-hatya, or “cow-murder.” It is possible that banning “cow-slaughter” as a cause célèbre for the Dogras was transmitted via Hindu reform movements in India. Indian historian D. N. Jha (2002) has argued that upper-caste Hindus did not see beef as a taboo until early medieval times and there is evidence that cow was not considered “holy.” It was in the context of the nineteenth
or even merely suspected of harboring “intent to injure a cow,” were grossly cruel. These punishments included public floggings, chopping off noses, ears and tongues, using of hot iron rods on the body of the accused, torching the offender’s house, and long imprisonment, all of which could be carried out before the final execution. For good reason, then, the Kashmiri peasant lived in terror of being accused of harming, killing or eating a cow. In truth, terror itself was the main modality of exercising power over the Muslim subjects, and cow slaughter a charged occasion to display it.

Thorp, who had witnessed some of these punishments during the rule of the second maharaja Ranbir Singh, writes: “No one ever connected to cow slaughter has ever been released…Many just die in the prison of starvation and torture” (Thorp 2011, 77-78; see also Rai 2004, 181). He mentions, however, that by 1868 the state was considering commuting the punishment for cow killing from death sentence to life. Yet, decades later, the situation had barely changed. In 1889, for instance, Bhag Ram, a Hindu member of the Kashmir Council appointed by the British Resident, called the system of justice in the state as a “wretched specimen of barbarity and oppression.” Describing the highly-charged investigations into incidents (or suspicions) of cow slaughter in villages, Ram writes:

Cow is held in the highest veneration, and no punishment is spared, however faulty the evidence may be. When a person is shown to have put a cow to death, his lands and property are confiscated, houses are burnt, permanent exile is ordered, and whole families are ruined…A person is bound to be sent to jail if he happens to yoke a cow to the plough, or otherwise take...
excessive hard work from that animal. It is a penal offence to kill animals (any animal) for food or meat on certain days in each month (*Note* 1889; see also Rai 2004, 100).

Reading reports such as Bhag Ram’s, the British Resident brought the punishment for cow-slaughter down to an average of two to three-year imprisonment. Yet, after the reinstatement of Maharaja Pratap Singh to full power in 1905, many of the previous draconian measures were brought back, and the prison sentence was raised to ten years.

While cutting off patronage to Muslim shrines and mosques created resentment among the Pir guardians (or *mutawalis*) of these shrines, laws like criminalizing consumption of cow meat was a source of general misery in the countryside. Eating cow meat was not only an acceptable practice among Muslims but, given the regular shortages of food, especially in the countryside, it was a practical imperative as well. Cow meat was cheaper than other *halal* kinds. Additionally, the sacrifice of cows on the annual Muslim festival Eid-ul-Zuha was, in religious terms, more desirable than sacrificing sheep and goat. But, as Bhag Ram’s note indicates, beyond cow meat, even killing other animals for food on certain days of each month considered important to Hindus had been declared a penal offense. The proscriptions against cow-slaughter, meat consumption on certain days, and azans, were an infringement of Muslim religious and cultural practices, but they were also an assertion of the state’s claim to be the protector of Hindu cultural sensibilities.  

As Kashmiris found themselves ruled by a dynasty determined not to seek their consent or approval, the discrimination became even more stark given the way their Hindu neighbors were treated. As Rai (2004) has shown, the Dogra era saw an extraordinary number of Hindu

49 In recent times, the Indian government has again banned consumption of beef in Kashmir, provoking people to claim that the government was imposing a Hindu code of life on non-Hindus.  
50 The good treatment of the Pandits of Kashmir by the Hindu rulers from Jammu may have been political in nature, yet it came at the cost of most of the subjects of the Dogra state. Writes Rai, “The Dogra maharajas needed to
temples being constructed or renovated in the state. A large amount of money from the state treasury was spent on the maintenance of these temples, in carrying out expensive and a never-ending cycle of religious rituals, and on religious pilgrimages (tiraths) in the state. The network of temples in the state and the daily rituals performed in them were all connected through the Dharmarath department to the person of the Dogra maharaja, who was at the center of this religious universe.

Archaeology was another crucial element in consolidating the Hindu sovereignty. By late 19th century, European philologists and Indologists had became greatly interested in pre-Mughal Sanskrit texts in Kashmir, and the Dogra rulers saw this as an opportunity to reaffirm their image as the patrons of Hindu cultural tradition. On the invitation of the British authorities in India, the Dogras established the Archaeology and Research Department in 1904, but kept the “archaeology” separate from “research.” While archaeology, focused on conservation of monuments, was kept under British experts, research, focused on locating new sites or making authoritative claims over their provenance, was kept under Pandits (Rai 2009, 416). The Research department privileged “Hindu” archaeological artifacts over “Muslim” ones—a practice of communal labeling started by the British-established Archeological Survey of India—taking its primary responsibility as uncovering the Hindu antiquity in Kashmir. Its officials used Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini*, a 12th century Sanskrit *kaavya*, as the basis to locate sites, and

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substantiate their claim to legitimacy in Kashmir as Hindu rulers by associating with them its powerful Hindu minority, while the Kashmiri Pandit community was concerned to hold on to its privileged access to government employment” (2004, 124). While the Dogras were Vaishnavites (followed the Rama cult) and despised some of the practices of Kashmiri Pandits, who followed Tantric Shaivism, such differences didn’t come in the way of forming political bonds.

51 Alexander Cunningham, who founded ASI, had been a major influence on the direction archaeology took in British India. In Kashmir, Ram Chandra Kak, who later became the Prime Minister of Kashmir (under the last Dogra), was particularly interested in locating Hindu antiquity and ignoring sites that indicated Muslim cultural and political presence in Kashmir.
even change place-names from those in common Kashmiri use to their “original” Sanskrit ones.\textsuperscript{52} As Rai has argued, by 1920s ARD had become “sufficiently adjunct to the Dharmarth department, so that supporting archaeological principles could reinforce his status as the protector of Hindu worship” (2009, 416). These efforts inevitably provoked conflicts over sites that became “contested” (Rai 2004, 192-205). In any case, the consolidation of a Hindu religious domain in the state became coterminous with the territoriality of the state itself, leading to the creation of, what Rai calls, a “Hindu State” (2004, 125-127).

\textit{Separate but unequal}

For British travelers in Kashmir, for whom the Victorian Proclamation of 1858 represented the cornerstone of religious tolerance, the contrast between how religious communities were treated in Kashmir and in British India must have been glaringly obvious. Yet, only a few commented on it. The colonial governance was broadly based on the principle of separateness but equality of Hindus and Muslims. The British, at least partially, claimed their legitimacy from standing over and remaining neutral between the subcontinent’s Hindus and Muslims. While the coding of separate personal laws over the previous century had had the effect of bundling together diverse communities in the subcontinent under the dominant communal signs of “Hindu” and “Muslim,” some of the consequential stiffening of religious identities was sought to be ameliorated after the legal reforms of 1864, especially with a return to “customary laws” and recourse to colonial legislations, instead of using the Hindu and the Muslim “personal laws.”\textsuperscript{53} In the Dogra state, however, separate personal laws began to

\textsuperscript{52} See Chapter 2 for more on this.

\textsuperscript{53} These personal laws had been codified over the previous century, with the help of Hindu Brahmins and Muslim Moulvis, from religious texts, which the British thought regulated the everyday life of Hindu and Muslim communities in the subcontinent. The effect of this codification had been not only to strictly demarcate the two
supersede customary ones almost exactly around the same period. Erasing any ambiguous zones of overlap between Muslim and Hindu customs and practices, the state was intent on “diligently maintaining separate religiously-informed identities among the state’s subjects” (Rai 2004, 178).

Under the Dogra state, while separateness was carefully maintained, there was no legal equality between the Muslims and the Hindus in practice (Rai 2004, 174). This was, for instance, not only obvious in the way the Hindu subjects of the state were very lightly taxed, received preferences (to the level of exclusivity) in state employment, were gifted funds from the treasury or received immense land grants for their religious institutions and rituals, but also in such matters as how the state exclusively allowed the Hindus to get licenses for weapons. This inequality naturally extended into the domain of dispensing justice in the Dogra courts. Thorp, for instance, writes:

Offences against the Government or against Hindoos (sic) are punished with undue severity, while offenses perpetrated by Hindoos or Government officials are either passed over or adjudicated with partiality and injustice (2011, 78).

If the Dogra state was, therefore, assiduous in its quest to exercise power in the name of the “Hindu dharma” and maintaining religious difference as a difference of inequality among its subjects, the primary reason was clear: as an apparatus of capture, the state wanted to extract as much wealth as possible from the majority Muslim subjects with minimal corresponding obligations toward their welfare. Since, the legitimacy of the Dogra state was not based in

communities, but also to supersede the diverse customs that had regulated different communities and which were irreducible to singular religious identities. See also Cohn, who argues that in fact that by 1864 the British had transformed “Hindu law” into English case law (1996, 75).

While Rai reports the first serious attempt to apply the personal laws of Hindus and Muslims around 1872, these efforts were enacted as Sri Pratap Jammu and Kashmir Laws (Consolidation) Act of 1920 (Rai 2004, 176-77).
consent or approval of most of its subjects, terror and violence were the main modality of exercising state power.

As already mentioned, the British government was aware of the nature of the Dogra state, but having signed a treaty (in 1846) that put no obligation on the Dogra rulers to provide good or responsible government for the subjects, it had neither a legal justification for intervention nor did it want to be seen as intervening in the affairs of the princely states. The British were wary of losing confidence among the princes in India. Princes were important stilts on which British power in India rested. And they keenly watched and protested any British overreach in the internal affairs of the states. Or may be the British were simply not concerned about what the Dogras were doing so long as the northern frontier of the empire was stable. But stories of repression in Kashmir were beginning to leak out into the public domain. Thorp’s writing was among the first of these, and may have been the reason behind his untimely death. The growing Urdu press in Punjab was beginning to publish accounts of escapees from Kashmir. This concerned the British who sensed a brewing agitation among Punjabi Muslims would disrupt revenue from one of their richest provinces, and might provoke a “Wahhabi” revolt against the empire.55

Though pressure started to grow on the Dogras to show progress toward a more equitable system, the maharaja instead chose to prevent news of the state of affairs in the kingdom from leaking out.

55 In the aftermath of the 1857 “Indian Mutiny” against the British East India Company, a large-scale repression of Muslims was carried out in northern India. The British especially sought to hunt down disparate groups of Indian Muslims living in the interstices of the British, the Russian and the Ottoman empires. These men were interchangeably described in the British colonial imagination as “wahabi,” “fanatic,” “outlaw,” and “fugitive mullahs,” and many were hanged in summary executions (Alavi 2011, 1340).
Control over Dogra self-image

One must wear jeweled ice in dry plains
  to will the distant mountains to glass.
The city from where no news can come
  is now so visible in its curfewed night
  that the worst is precise:

—Ali (2009, 178)

Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001) wrote these lines about the traumatic years of early 1990s, when the Indian government imposed a military occupation in Kashmir and prevented foreign press from reporting from there. But this could very well be said of the Dogra state. Not only did the Dogras severely curb the migration of peasants and artisans, groveling in poverty, out of Kashmir, but they also carefully controlled the flow of Europeans visiting the state. There was even an official restriction in place that prevented European visitors from coming to Kashmir at the end of autumn—the time of revenue collection. To minimize interaction between Kashmiris and the Europeans—and thus to prevent news leaks—the state officials used threats, obstructions, and pure manipulation.

Arthur Brinckman, a British clergyman, who left a record of the “wretched conditions” in which Kashmiris lived, complained bitterly that the British, unlike other visitors, were not allowed to stay for more than six summer months (2011, 15). Brinckman lamented that the ruler of the state “didn’t allow Europeans to learn Cashmeree (Koshur)” and “humbugged” British officials about Kashmir being a “Happy Valley” (2011, 10, 17). State officials regularly questioned the motives of the British travelers who wrote against the Dogra policies, often accusing them of being interested in foreign-funded conversion missions. It was common for the

56 Thorp, however, bases the accuracy of his report on the precise fact that despite the official ban he had managed to stay and gather information during winter months (2011, 49). See also Rai (2004, 59).
Dogras to incite public opinion against missionary activities, complaining about it to the British government, and preventing missionaries from establishing schools and hospitals or even mixing with local people. As the Kashmiri historian Ishaq Khan writes, “The missionaries were often prevented from visiting the artisans’ quarters, and were forced to reside on the outskirts of the city” (2013, 139).

While Christian missionaries castigated the Dogra state for trying to manipulate people’s opinion, they often pointed to the “friendliness” of the people, even of the Muslim moulvis “who seem(ed) to have no objection to European Christians setting up schools and hospitals” (Khan 2013, 138-40). Kashmiri Muslims had shown no inclination toward converting to Christianity, but they saw the missionaries as valuable conduits for passing their distressful stories under the Dogra state to the British government and general publics in India. The missionaries, including Brinckman, didn’t hide their missionary role, yet the Dogras knew that complaining about their activities as acts of “religious interference” was enough to neutralize their criticism of the state in the eyes of the British government. The British as already mentioned, after the experiences of the 1957 revolt in north India, often reproved direct interference in the religious affairs of the natives, and especially saw the issue of conversion with alarm.

The Dogras presented their policies to be in the interest of their subjects. If they had prevented Europeans from coming in and settling down, it was to protect the praja from a “foreign culture” and the region from becoming a “British colony.” However, given the condition of the deliberately impoverished subject population whose religious practices had been severely curtailed, Kashmiris would have a hard time believing the maharajas. It is no surprise

57 Muslim and Hindu soldiers feeling insulted at finding pig or cow fat mixed in the grease for their cartridges had sparked the great revolt of 1857 against the East India Company across northern India.
that Kashmiris—at least the very few who had the means—were writing to the British authorities for relief from the Dogras.

Now, as I pointed out in the beginning, the early colonial modes of knowledge production were tied, one way or the other, to the exercise of imperial power in British India. The “oriental despotism” narrative had been used to buttress cases for colonial annexations and invasions, and then in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries the idea was revived to justify strong-handed measures to “administer justice” in the Indian provinces. When Brinckman wrote about the Dogra state in 1867, he was drawing upon elements of this mode of writing. Possibly, he felt bitter at the second Dogra maharaja Ranbir Singh issuing proclamations against missionary preaching in his ascendant Hindu State, though there are hardly any signs in his writings that suggest so. Brinckman, unlike Thorp, did appeal to the British to annex Kashmir “before Kashmir became a stain on the prestige of the British Empire.” To his credit, however, he was writing at a time when it was widely known that, having gifted Kashmir to the Dogras, the British government considered the stability of the Dogra state as a vital imperial interest.

In fact, when Brinckman and Thorp (or, even later, when Arthur Wingate and, to some extent, Walter Lawrence58) wrote their scathing criticisms of the Dogra state, they were going against the prevailing European view of Kashmir of the time being a “happy valley.”59 The dominant British perspective all along favored the Dogra rulers, and even when the British government eventually did try to intervene, the Dogras had powerful advocates of their own in the imperial government. These advocates, often senior British public servants or paid lobbyists, like William Digby, denounced anyone critical of the Dogra regime as “slanderers,” as “actively

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58 Lawrence was a British civil servant who had succeeded Arthur Wingate as the Settlement Commissioner.
59 Ten years after the publication of Brinckman’s and Thorp’s reports, William Wakefield decided to write his book on Kashmir under the title The Happy Valley (1879).
hostile” toward Dogra officials, and their writings as merely the “unchecked observations of stranger(s)” (Digby 2011, 145). Digby was especially prone to presenting Dogra rulers as really the ones “wronged.” Here is how he describes a meeting with Ranbir Singh in 1876:

I was one day sitting by the side of the late Maharaja of Kashmir talking over various matters… [And maharaja, having just returned from a royal visit to Calcutta, the capital of India, says]

“They [his advisors] said that it was an open secret that the British Government wanted to annex Kashmir, and it was only a question of time…” I told His Highness that he must be careful not to give any excuse for the British authorities to interfere with him, and that if they did unjustly interfere, he might always rely upon the English Press to defend his rights. After a pause, he said:

“Sahib, what do you call that little thing between the railway carriages? It is like a button stuck on a sort of gigantic needle that runs through the train, and when the carriages are pushed at one end or the other you hear a ‘houff, houff,’ and bang they go against the poor little button. I felt sorry for the poor little button, but it is doubtless useful in its way. What do you call it?” I replied that I believe it was called “a buffer.” “Buffer, buffer,” repeated the Maharaja in earnest tones. “Yes, buffer, that’s just what I am, and that shall henceforth be one of my titles;” and he directed Dewan Kirpa Ram to see that it was written down correctly (Digby 2011, 101-102).

The sly tone of this self-pitying account between His Highness and the Sahib was the predominant one in the British writings of Kashmir of the time. British saw the Dogra state as the buffer in the Great Game, and the Dogra played the game to their own advantage: “If you want the borders peaceful give us free license in Kashmir.” Digby’s account makes it sound like Ranbir was a truly humble person, “that little thing,” as he describes the maharaja. But note how Rai, drawing from multiple sources of the time, describes this man:

“(I)t would appear that Ranbir Singh, while still only heir apparent, was the greater “fanatic” and an extremely “cruel fellow” [than his father Gulab Singh]. Thus, it is said that “he slit a
woman’s tongue for beating a cow which had torn some clothes she had hung out to dry”

…Ranbir, unhappy with his father’s “liberality” [who had instituted only life sentence for cow slaughter], took his own measures to ensure that imprisonment would translate, in effect, into the death penalty. For instance, on one occasion, while inspecting a state prison, Ranbir Singh was appalled by the “goodness of fate” given to a “stout man” incarcerated for cow-slaughter. He ordered that salt be mixed in his food so that he died of dehydration (2004, 101).

I use this example to illustrate the nature of contest over the self-image of the Dogra regime during this time. Dogras were janus-faced. They were extremely careful in presenting themselves to the outside world as kind and generous; for instance, they spend considerable amount of tax money extracted from Kashmiris on charities in Punjab, and extended generous hospitality (of course, paid for by “Maharaja’s tax” and free Kashmiri labor) toward Europeans who wrote glorious reviews of the maharaja’s generosity. Toward their Kashmiri subjects, Dogras followed the principle of terror.

*British residency*

Yet, forty years after the Dogra rule began, accounts of fleeing Kashmiri shawl-bafs and peasants about the tyranny under the Dogras had finally begun to appear in the Muslim-owned press in Punjab. The British found these reports carrying the potential to ignite an unrest in Punjab, and were, thus, forced to intervene in 1889. The “intervention” was not an annexation, but a few administrative reforms. The British retained the full power of the ruling class, but temporarily recused the new (third) maharaja Pratap Singh from his executive powers. Announcing in the Parliament in London that the British government in India had no intention of annexing the state, Pratap Singh was asked “for a time at least to refrain from all interference in the state administration.” He was “allowed to retain his rank and dignity as Chief of the State,”
but the administration was handed over to a “State Council” consisting of the maharaja’s brothers and a few officials chosen by the British, under the overall “guidance” of the newly appointed British Resident.

The State Council had no Muslim representation. As such, the British Resident’s administration could hardly make much difference to the lives of the Kashmiri subjects, except doing away with a few minor taxes and some elements of the Dogra apparatus of capture, like the nazarana, to ameliorate the few Mussalman jagirdars. In any case, the Residency faced vociferous criticism from Dogra princes who begrudged their loss of independence, from the revenue officials (mostly Pandits) who faced an increased scrutiny of their role after Wingate’s and Lawrence’s land settlement and revenue-reform reports, and from the British advocates of the Dogras. Most of the criticism was centered on the propaganda that the “treasury was empty!”

Indeed, there was British profligacy on their own comforts in Kashmir; yet, they were also spending a considerable sum on infrastructural projects. They built two major roads that connected Kashmir with the rest of South Asia, as well as flood control and irrigation canal systems that helped reduce inundation and prevent drought. The British also linked the Dogra heartland Jammu with Sialkot through a railway in 1897; however, a similar proposal to connect Srinagar with Muzaffarabad in the west, which would have reduced the isolation of Kashmir Valley was met with fierce opposition from the Dogras. Expenses on the salaries of professional bureaucrats deputed from British India came under the severest attack. It must have sounded

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60 Most of the reforms, which included relief from military services, benefitted the people of Jammu, even if marginally. Remission of a part of customs duties on sale of rice in Srinagar had minimal impact as the government had already kept the price of rice much lower than the market rate.

61 Nazrana was a gift of gold coins a jagirdar (owner of a landed estate) made to the maharaja in return of the khilat (a loose gown), which the maharaja gave to the jagirdar to symbolize the act of “transmitting his authority” over the estate. Cohn has argued that passing the khilat had symbolic and political value in pre-colonial political relations in India (1996, 114). In Kashmir, however, nazrana/khilat seems not to have been quite symbolic, or universally so, as only the Muslim jagirdars were required to pay for it, while the Kashmiri Pandit and the Jammu Rajput jagirdars were exempt from it (Rai 2004, 45).
ironical to Kashmiri ears to hear that the Dogras, who spent the revenues wrenched out of
Kashmiri cultivators and artisans on their elaborate religious rituals and building temples,
subsidizing an idle class of urban Brahmins, not to mention a lavish palace life, were accusing
the Resident with spending excessively on his “costly hobbies.”

Eventually, the vocal advocates of the Dogra rule got the arrangement reversed and
Pratap Singh was restored in 1905 with full authority. Digby wrote much in defense of Pratap
Singh (r. 1885-1925). He claimed in his melodramatically titled report Condemned Unheard that
the British, in “deposing the Maharaja,” had committed a grave error. The ruler, he wrote, had
been “deposed against the wishes of his subjects” and that “the Kashmirians… had made no
complaint…(nor were they) aggrieved…on the contrary, if a plebiscite were taken, it is believed
nine-tenths or more of the people would call for the Maharaja’s speedy restoration” (Digby 2011,
107). Recalling Digby’s assertion, a Tehreek history-writer lamented to me that the history of
“plebiscite” in Kashmir had been a paradoxical one: it only involves assuming or speculating
what Kashmiris would want, and never actually going to them to ask “What do you want?”

Driven into silence, very few Kashmiris during the pre-1931 era left behind written accounts of
life under the Dogra state, except in poetry form.62 Even though across British India, newspaper
publications, including nationalist anti-colonial ones, had been thriving, in Kashmir no
newspapers had been allowed publication until 1932. As a result, for Tehreek history-writers
trying to understand the “history of resistance” in Kashmir, writings such as Thorp’s, Wingate’s,

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62 Even the multi-volume Tareekh-e-Hassan written by Hassan Shah Koihami in 1880s had a very little on the life of
peasants and artisans under the Dogras. From a prominent landed Pir family, Koihami, despite his deep insights into
the history of Kashmir, probably took the nature of Dogra rule as a “natural one.” Yet, the lacunae are particularly
telling because he was one of Walter Lawrence’s important informants, and Lawrence made extensive observations
about the life of peasants under the Dogras in his report. Even poems of such popular Kashmiri poets of the era as
Shamas Faqir and Wahab Khar took on a rather Sufi spiritual tone instead of becoming social commentaries.
and Brinckman’s have become highly valued. Writings of Kashmiris in the wake of the 1931 events resonate with the experiences the British writers had described sixty years earlier. Not much had changed in Kashmir in the intervening period. As the Great Game heated up once more, the Dogras became even more useful to the British empire.

By 1931, however, several major transformations had taken place across the world, including, in close vicinity, the gradual maturation of the Indian nationalist movement that began demanding political independence from Britain. In Kashmir, where the relations between the state and its Muslim subjects had remained essentially the same as Thorp had described, the moment of political shift came suddenly. “There had always been incidents of revolt here and there, but Kashmiris had essentially failed to organize,” says Zahir-ud-Din, a Tehreek history-writer. In 1931, an urban uprising in Kashmiri towns, involving attacks on grain depots and debt records, and a rural tax revolt, that followed the trial of Abdul Qadir,63 tore through an oppressive silence in Kashmir. Tehreek history-writers see the events of 1931 as “revolutionary,” precisely because 1931 produced the first major crack in the social and political order set up in 1846. These events were also the first to give expression to the “Kashmiri Muslim” identity. Tehreek history-writers see 1931 events as the birth of modern and mass-politics in Kashmir, leading to the emergence of new political subjects who demanded rights and sovereignty. Below, I will briefly explore the political implications of 1931 events for the Kashmiri Muslim mobilization and Tehreek in general.

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63 See more in Chapter 2.
From hope to crisis

Political Mobilization

The period of British Residency (1890-1905) had provided a window for a small section of Islamic reformers in Srinagar to start efforts toward raising questions about the condition of Muslims in Kashmir. While the British saw any effort of Islamic reform as “Wahhabi” (and hence a political threat), these reforms were actually influenced by the Indian school of Islamic reformism Darul-Uloom at Deoband. Deoband school had emerged in the aftermath of the 1857 revolt against the British East India Company in North India with the aim of reviving Islam in the subcontinent through reforms of Muslim practices, and not through political activism against the British (Metcalf 1982). Some stirrings from this reform movement, it seems had reached Srinagar in 1890s, but they became more visible in the early 20th century, especially through the work of the “Mirwaiz.”

The chief preacher of Srinagar was the one who led prayers at the medieval Jami’a Mosque. By 1901, his title came to be known as the Mirwaiz of Jami’a Mosque. The Dogras found the Mirwaiz of key importance for their stability. Pinched by years of British Residency, they were trying to create a loyal Muslim leader who could influence the Muslims of Srinagar from the pulpit and prevent them from revolting. Hence, the Mirwaiz position was assured by the Dogras as hereditary and came to be controlled by a Kashmiri Muslim family. The Mirwaiz family, in return, publicly prayed for the continuation of the Dogra rule (Rai 2004, 235-37). Yet, behind the overt political sphere, some reformist efforts were taking place.

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64 Wahhabis were followers of Ibn Wahhab, a late 18th century preacher in Arabia, who called for a turn to Quran and Prophetic practice as a direct and literal source of socio-political code of Muslim life. He had banded with the ruler of Nejd, and they together laid the ground for todays Saudi Arabia. Wahhab’s followers had influenced several insurgencies against the British in the Middle East; and the British were alarmed by any sign of Muslim activism in South Asia, which they quickly branded as Wahhabi and made liable for repression.
Mirwaiz Rasul Shah (d. 1909), influenced by the Deoband school, had set up the Anjuman Nusrat-ul-Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam) in 1899. Its aim was to eradicate “superstitions” and bida’at (“innovations”) that were seen to have crept into Muslim religious practices. The Anjuman, much like the Jama’at Islami in the 1950s, claimed its mission was to create haqiqi musalman (“true Muslims”), as followers of sharia, unencumbered by the burdensome practices of shrine-related devotionalism popular in Kashmir (Sikand 2002, 712-13).

The Anjuman set up a school in 1905, the first school in the state where Muslims could study. Both jadeed (“modern”) and Islamic education was to be imparted in the school. Later Rasul Shah’s brother, Ahmadullah, who succeeded Rasul in 1909, set up the Oriental College in Srinagar. These endeavors received small grants from the Dogra rulers, who made much of their desire to improve the condition of “all their subjects.” Mirwaiz Ahmadullah’s successor Yusuf Shah, who was trained at Deoband, returned in the 1920s to set up a printing press and two weeklies, which propagated news and views about the Khilafat Movement (Sikand 2002, 713). These efforts were remarkable, even though centered in only a few of Srinagar’s neighborhoods, and would gradually produce a new crop of Muslim leaders.

In 1931, when urban protestors set fire to revenue records and chased revenue officials on the streets of Srinagar, and peasants confronted Dogra soldiers in the province of Poonch, they had no arms or ammunition. The government had historically barred Kashmiri Muslims (including the rare few Muslim land grantees) from purchasing firearms, as well as from joining the military. In contrast, Jammu’s Rajputs (a Hindu upper caste to which the Dogras also belonged) and the Pandits in Kashmir could acquire weapons, and were the main components of

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65 The two weeklies were al-Islam and Rahnuma. Khilafat Movement was launched in India in the early twenties with the aim of preventing the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate at the hands of the British. The Caliphate eventually collapsed under the weight of Turkish nationalists. In India, Gandhi had enthusiastically supported the Khilafat Movement. The movement failed to have any impact among Kashmiri Muslims.
the Dogra army (Rai 2004, 141). Tehreek history-writers claim the denial of arms and military training, as well as severe forms of punishment meted over even mere signs of disobedience, as the primary reason behind the lack of widespread revolts against the Dogras in earlier years.\textsuperscript{66}

The elaborate network of spies (including the district-level zillahdars and the local hurkuras), which Brinckman narrates in detail, made organizing protests lethal.

Yet, in Srinagar and in the towns, Kashmiri youth would sometimes throw stones at the Dogra soldiers, and, in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there had even been incidences of minor revolts, especially against grain control and high taxes. Then, in 1924, workers at the government silk factory in Srinagar sustained a months-long agitation against their Hindu supervisors over low wages and maltreatment, which ended in Dogra soldiers shooting ten workers dead (Kaur 1996, 112-118). Against this background, the events of 1931 were quite dramatic. While the uprising was spontaneous, and there were many actors who played a part, the one who became the driving force behind the movement in the years to come was Sheikh Abdullah.

Sheikh Abdullah was an attendee at what was called the “Reading Room” in Srinagar. Among the first Kashmiris of his generation to get education outside of Kashmir,\textsuperscript{67} Abdullah was initiated into politics by the Srinagar city’s tiny class of Muslim khwajas (“moneyed”), who had been, until then, content with presenting petitions for Muslim welfare to the Dogra maharaja. Abdullah aligned with one of city’s two main Muslim preachers, the Mirwaiz Hamdani (based at Khanqa-e-Mualla shrine), who was a proponent of Sufi shrine-oriented intercessionary practices. He was an opponent of Mirwaiz of Jami’a Mosque, who was not only orthodox and reformist in

\textsuperscript{66} One Tehreek history-writer claimed that Kashmiris didn’t \textit{vigorously} challenge the new political order that was coming into being after 1947 because “across the board, Kashmiris felt greatly relieved at being delivered from the Dogra rule, even though they didn’t realize then that they were simultaneously being swallowed up by the Indian state.”

\textsuperscript{67} Abdullah went to Aligarh Muslim University, then the center of elite Muslim cultural and political activity in British India. Upon his return, he couldn’t get a job as a teacher, which, some of his biographers believe, was because of his socialist leanings and anti-Dogra stance.
outlook, but too close to the Dogra rulers. Where the Islamic reformists, including Mirwaiz Jami’a Mosque, saw shrine-oriented devotionalism as an obstruction to Muslim political awakening, Abdullah tapped precisely into its inspirational power among the peasants in the countryside and the urban working classes. In the coming decades, this would serve him handsomely, even in times when he made disastrous political decisions.

Abdullah’s rise threatened the delicate political balance in Srinagar, in which Jami’a Mosque Mirwaiz’s hereditary position had remained assured under the Dogras. While Abdullah increasingly took a strident stance against the Dogras, the Jami’a Mirwaiz opposed the Reading Room party, refusing, for instance, to support their early call of a general strike against the government in 1930 (Khan 2013, 132). The Jami’a Mirwaiz, as already stated, had been keen to seek Dogra patronage for his efforts in setting up Islamic education for Muslims. Fearing the loss of their own privileges, him and his clique had studiously kept away from making any radical demand for equality or the rights of the Muslim subjects in Kashmir.68

In the aftermath of the events of 1931, a large public gathering was convened in August 1932 near Pather Masjid (Stone Mosque), which would become Abdullah’s base in the years to come. A resolution was passed to establish Muslim Conference, the first political organization of Kashmiri Muslims. At the meeting, Abdullah, who had seen the nationalist movement gain momentum in British India, chose to take an openly confrontational path of mobilizing the Kashmiri masses for equal rights. This made him popular among the vast and immiserated Kashmiri Muslim peasantry in the countryside and the artisanal and working classes in the

68 Ian Copland, analyzing the events of 1931, states that “Clearly, religion lay at the heart of the Kashmir conflict” (1981: 231). He also traces the roots of the events in the “bitter rivalry” between the Ahmediya and Ahrar Muslim sects in Punjab. From my account, it is understandable as to why religious symbolism may have appealed to Kashmiris, but for a symbol to have efficacy there needed to obtain material conditions that these symbols brought to the surface.
towns. Since the Dogra regime had, despite a series of minor reforms since its early years, maintained its fundamentally appropriative character, Abdullah sensed that Kashmiris needed a more radical politics than the one based on petitions. His advocacy of popular Muslim practices reinforced his position, which also became one of the reasons for fissures, which appeared soon. Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, egged on by Dogra regime supporters, started openly calling Abdullah a “Qadiani.” Qadianis were Ahmediya, a heterodox sect that had emerged in Punjab in early twentieth century, and whose creed was denounced by orthodox Punjabi Muslim politicians as a British conspiracy against Islam. Abdullah’s supporters were furious and roughed up Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah’s supporters, thus starting the never-ending “Sher-Bakra” saga of split among Srinagar’s Muslims. Abdullah never truly gave up on using henchmen against his opponents.

In 1939, after a series of experiments with electoral politics (which had been granted in the aftermath of the 1931-34 agitation), Abdullah split the Muslim Conference to form National Conference. Some Tehreek history-writers believe Abdullah split the party at the behest of the Congress leaders in India. Mirwaiz’s supporters believed, he had done so on the advice of the Ahmediya. Over the years, Abdullah had indeed grown close to Jawaharlal Nehru. Apparently, Nehru’s secular, socialist rhetoric and his stance against princely powers had appealed to Abdullah. Nehru, along with Gandhi, had also reciprocated and announced Abdullah as “the sole leader of the Kashmiris,” and bestowed on him the title of Sher-i-Kashmir (Lion of Kashmir), further fueling Abdullah’s “authoritarian” tendencies (Bose 2003, 27). Others have claimed that, by replacing “Muslim” with “National” in the party’s name, Abdullah had hoped the members of

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69 Essentially, it was claimed that Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian, the founder of the sect, had asserted himself to be a prophet. This allegation brought his followers into confrontation with orthodox Muslims in Punjab (especially the Jamaat-u-Ahrar), who believed Prophet Muhammad to be the last prophet.

70 Abdullah’s supporters began calling him “Sher” (Lion), and his opponent Mirwaiz as “Bakra” (Goat), for his beard.
the influential Pandit community (as well as Sikhs) would join the party, and thereby increase his
party’s chances at securing more representation in the newly established legislative assembly
(Copland 1981, 252).

Very few Pandits joined his party however; probably only those, like Prem Nath Bazaz
and Raghunath Vaishnavi, who were socialists. (In Jammu, however, sections of non-Rajput
“lower-caste” Hindus did join). National Conference remained a Muslim party precisely because
the “Muslim question” was the “class question” in Kashmir. Further, the nationalism of the new
party came to be circumscribed by Koshur language. That is why, as National Conference grew
dominant in Kashmir Valley, Muslim Conference remained popular among Muslims in Jammu.

In contrast to his proximity to the Indian Congress, Abdullah was suspicious of
Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League. Muslim League was dominated by the Muslim
landed elite of British India. Their thwarted efforts to secure increased representation for
Muslims in the elected bodies of future India had driven the League to demand “Pakistan.” For
Abdullah, whose primary support came from the landless Muslim peasantry of Kashmir,
League’s economic program was reactionary and the demand for Pakistan unattractive.
Additionally, Jinnah was legally minded and believed in the right of the princes to determine the
future of their states, as had been negotiated under the Viceroy’s plan (1946). This was seen as a
betrayal by Abdullah who did not trust the Dogra monarch to make his decision in the best
interest of his Muslim subjects. Yet, unable to weigh these interests himself in the larger game
between the Congress and the League, Abdullah critically failed to appreciate the historical
moment that was going to come to pass with the withdrawal of the British patronage to the
Dogra monarchy.
After a period of “moderation” and “cooperation,” in mid-1940s, National Conference launched the “Quit Kashmir” movement against the Dogra monarchy, replicating a similar movement Gandhi had launched in British India. The movement was short-lived and didn’t meet any of its objectives; instead its consequences turned out to be disastrous. Abdullah and his associates were arrested and remained out of the political scene when major transformations were taking place in the subcontinent. Kashmiris were left leaderless during the key negotiations over the future of the region. One of the major factors behind the decision to launch the movement at the time was National Conference’s waning appeal in the face of the rise of alternative parties such as Kisan (Peasant) Conference in South Kashmir, which had a radical economic plan but supported merger with Pakistan, if Kashmiris were to make such a decision. Then there were the socialists, who also supported merger with Pakistan.

With mass politics in Kashmir gaining widespread ground (involving several Pandits intellectuals to ally with the Muslims), Abdullah also took a more programmatic stance in 1944. His party adopted the *Naya Kashmir* (New Kashmir) plan, which envisaged a constitutional monarchy with a democratic government, and civic citizenship to all the state-subjects. *Naya Kashmir* was remarkably progressive for its time, but, as it turned out, it was eventually only partially implemented. The key element of “popular sovereignty” in the plan was tied to Kashmir becoming an independent state (Bose 2003, 26-27). By 1947, Kashmir appeared on the cusp of becoming independent dominated by progressive forces committed to economic and political justice. Among most people in Kashmir, accession with India was furthest from mind. But history, as it turned out, had a mind of its own. What possibilities existed, is a question many Tehreek history-writers often ask themselves?

71 In subsequent years, National Conference kept tinkering with the original document, with Indian “Union” entering the document, while monarchy was replaced.
Partition

The British Empire in India till 1947 had been a patchwork of large tracts of directly ruled “Provinces,” and more than five hundred large and tiny “Princely States” whose rulers enjoyed different degrees of sovereignty. Kashmir was one such princely state, but a large one, and its Dogra rulers enjoyed almost full sovereignty. Around the time when the British government decided to roll back its empire in South Asia, a conflict over the structure of the post-Independence political order ensued between two major political parties in the subcontinent. On one side was the Congress, which claimed a non-religious character, but was led mostly by Hindu leaders, some of whom had clear majoritarian agendas; on the other was the Muslim League, which claimed to represent the interests of all of British India’s Muslims. The Congress wanted a unitary state with a strong center. The League felt such a set up would give Hindus more share in power across all regions, including in Muslim majority ones. Instead, the League wanted a confederation of states and provinces with a weak center, which in its view would ensure a proportionate share of power for Muslims in Muslim majority provinces and safety of their rights where they were a minority (Bose and Jalal 2004, 144-145). However, in case the conflict remained unresolved, the League had decided that the only way out was the creation of a separate state of Pakistan.

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72 This description is based largely on the work of Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (2004).
73 The Muslim League was concerned that in a unitary India, Muslims would become a minority with little influence over legislation.
74 Bose and Jalal (2004) have argued that the demand for Pakistan was merely a bargaining tool in the hands of the Muslim League. They point out that till even early 1940s, the Muslim League was not clear what possible shape such an entity would take. The idea of Pakistan was based on the “Two Nation” principle that Hindus and Muslims formed separate nations. The League argument was Muslims were not a “minority” in British Indian Empire, but a “nation,” while Congress claimed Hindus and Muslims formed one nation. The negotiations over the post-1947 order continued almost till June 1947, before the decision to split the British empire into two states was made.
Eventually, instead of committing to a guarantee that would ensure Muslim share of power at the all-India center, the Congress decided to have the Muslim majority provinces (Punjab and Bengal) be partitioned (Bose and Jalal 2004, 153). The British rulers, eager to leave the subcontinent in the aftermath of the Second World War, partitioned Punjab and Bengal, and divided them between what were going to be India and Pakistan. Pakistan, as a result, came into existence on the eastern and the western flanks of the new state of India. A massive transfer of population—in many cases forced—accompanied this partition. Many Hindus from the new state of Pakistan migrated to India, and almost an equally large number of Muslims from the new state of India moved to Pakistan.

As Tehreek history-writers would later argue, Partition was tragic but had at least resolved the question of sovereignty in the British Indian provinces—people had chosen their representatives (Hindus had overwhelmingly chosen leaders of the Congress, while most Muslims had chosen leaders of the Muslim League)\textsuperscript{75} to negotiate on their behalf. The violence of the event deeply affected the state of Kashmir as well (Jammu massacre, for instance),\textsuperscript{76} but instead of solving the question of Kashmir’s sovereignty, it had led to its parceling out between India and Pakistan.

In the princely states, including Kashmir, the British government left the “choice” of accession to India or Pakistan in the hands of the rulers of these states, with the caveat that such a choice be exercised keeping in mind the religious demographic composition of their subject populations and the geographical contiguity with the new states. Despite various degrees of hesitation on the part of the princes, these principles were largely followed, except in the case of

\textsuperscript{75} The elections to assemblies in British India had begun after the reforms of 1937, and in the last election (1945-6) before the Partition, Muslim League won a decisive majority of Muslim vote, while Hindus exclusively voted for the Congress (Bose and Jalal 2004, 148).

\textsuperscript{76} See Introduction on the genocide in Jammu.
three states: Hyderabad, Kashmir (both large) and Junagadh (a smaller one). In each of these cases, the decision of the rulers of these states went against the expected wishes of the subject populations. And in all three, the newly independent India intervened. The Muslim ruler (Nizam) of the large state of Hyderabad, most whose subjects were Hindus, initially decided to remain independent and then join Pakistan. But the Indian army invaded the State, an act that Indian leaders called “police action,” and dethroned the Nizam. In Junagadh, the same ruler (Muslim)-subject population (majority Hindu) situation existed, the lone difference being that the State was almost contiguous with Pakistan. India, however, insisted on a plebiscite, and the decision went in India’s favor. Expectedly, neither Hyderabad nor Junagadh became a dispute, as both had Hindu majority populations, who, it is likely, resented their Muslim rulers. Additionally, neither state was contiguous with Pakistan. In Kashmir, however, where the logic of Partition and the stipulations set out for princely rulers meant an imminent accession with Pakistan, the events took an unexpected turn.

Maharaja’s choice

Kashmir had a Hindu ruler but a majority Muslim subject population. Since 1931, there had been a mass movement directed against the century-old Dogra monarchy. The movement in Kashmir had initially demanded a responsible and unprejudiced government. But by early 1940’s, Kashmiris supported an end to the monarchy and the establishment of a republican form of government. This popular national movement was separate from the Congress and the League, both of whom had no presence in Kashmir. Tehreek history-writers see this as proof that the Kashmiri struggle could not be subsumed under the Congress-led nationalist movement in British India, nor could the Muslim League claim to speak on behalf of Kashmiri Muslims. The main components of the post-1931 national movement in Kashmir were the Muslim Conference,
the National Conference (which split from the former), and several other smaller formations, including the royalists and the socialists, none of whom were formally part of the subcontinental political formations. When the last Dogra monarch Hari Singh decided to sign the treaty of accession with India, he plunged Kashmiris into a political impasse that most Kashmiris had not anticipated.

Some historians have claimed that Hari Singh, when presented with the “choice” of accession between India and Pakistan, wanted to remain independent, and had even found support among his old opponents in the Muslim Conference, who would have consented to Hari Singh’s nominal rule along with substantial constitutional reforms. To this effect, he signed what was called a “Stand Still Agreement” with Pakistan, which meant he could get a few months after August 14, 1947 (the day Pakistan was born) to make his decision. While Pakistani leaders, confident that the ruler had really no choice but to accede to their new state, easily agreed to the Stand Still, the Indian government refused to sign a similar agreement.

Tehreek leaders see India’s non-acceptance of the Stand Still as the first indication that India had decided to take Kashmir with or without the state ruler’s consent. Indeed, Nehru had repeatedly dismissed the notion that princes had any right to decide. But then suddenly Hari Singh dismissed his Prime Minister, who had counselled joining Pakistan, armed Hindu militias, and instigated a genocidal violence against the Muslims of Jammu. At the behest of the Dogra royal family, Dogra troops as well as Hindu nationalist groups coming from India in September and October 1947, started massacring Muslims and forcing them out. Poonch province of the state had also erupted in revolt against the maharaja in the meantime. Most fatefully, India began

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77 As already stated, Pakistan also accepted the agreement because of Jinnah’s insistence on legality, which meant giving the Dogra ruler the right to decide.
78 See introduction for more on violence in Jammu.
destabilizing the Junagadh state with the help of armed volunteers towards the last week of October, and Pakistan responded by aiding armed militias from North Western Frontier Province who were pouring in to support Muslims in Kashmir.

These militias, however, caused wide-spread mayhem in Kashmir’s border districts. Hari Singh fled from Srinagar, leaving the capital defenseless. Like his ancestor Gulab Singh in 1846, who had stolen the state treasury from Lahore, Hari Singh carried away the treasury with him from Srinagar. On reaching Jammu, he signed the Treaty of Accession with India. Nehru, who had publicly said he didn’t believe in the rights of princes to decide the future of their states, suddenly decided to accept the validity of Hari Singh’s right to sign off Kashmir. India airlifted its troops into Srinagar, starting a two-year long war over Kashmir with Pakistan, which resulted in the bifurcation of the state and an enduring political conflict.

Despite the historical circumstances in which the treaty was signed, the Dogra elite had decided quite early that they would be better off with their co-religionists in India, who would rehabilitate them politically, instead of remaining as shaky nominal rulers of a restless Muslim subject population. Hari Singh, till then a trenchant defender of the borders of the state, had already allowed the Indian government to begin laying roads and telegraph lines connecting Punjab with Jammu. The systematic genocide of Jammu’s Muslims took place around the same time. The Dogra elite hoped at least to separate and “cleanse” Jammu, in case retaining Kashmir Valley and other Muslim majority provinces of the state became tough. Despite the

79 “Instrument of Accession” gave India a “legal” cover to militarily intervene in Kashmir, and take sovereign control over the state in matters of defense, communication, and currency. The date of signing the accession has remained in some quarters a matter of legal contestation, and was hotly debated at the time between Indian and Pakistani delegates in the United Nations Security Council. Although moot historically, some argue that if the Accession was signed on October 27, 1947, then Indian intervention which occurred a day before should be considered an “invasion.”

80 See Introduction and Chapter 2 on Jammu massacre. It is estimated at more than 200,000 Muslims disappeared or were killed, and close to half a million were forced to migrate to Azad Kashmir and Pakistan.
Dogra-abetted genocide in Jammu, the ongoing popular movement in Kashmir, and the armed revolts against Hari Singh’s authority in Poonch and elsewhere (regions to the north, Gilgit and Baltistan, had fully slipped from his rule), Indian leaders found it fit to see the maharaja as a legitimate authority who could decide the fate of his people.

For Tehreek history-writers, Hari Singh had no authority to sign the treaty on behalf of the subjects of the state, a treaty which they see as unjust and invalid. They also see the consequent arrival of Indian military into Kashmir as an act of “invasion.” The man who could have stood up to Hari Singh’s decision, the man who had been a bitter foe of the monarchy throughout, was Sheikh Abdullah. Toward the end of September 1947, he was released from jail, and quickly roped in by Nehru and Gandhi to marshal public support among Kashmiri Muslims for the accession with India. Endorsing the accession, however, would have been a reversal of his public pledges of a free Kashmir as well as against the spirit of the Naya Kashmir document. Yet, in a volte face, Abdullah went ahead and supported the treaty. Instead of taking the question of accession to the people of Kashmir, he treated his decision as the decision of all Kashmiris. Hardly anyone in Kashmir, except perhaps the tiny, but influential Pandit community, would have wanted Kashmir to be part of India. If anything, the Muslims of Kashmir would have preferred to remain independent. As the United Nations Security Council saw it, listening to extensive arguments from Indian and Pakistani representatives, the so-called “treaty of accession” had no legal validity. In 1948, UNSC Resolution 47 called for an impartial “plebiscite” to democratically determine the wishes of Kashmiri people. India saw the

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81 India had taken Kashmir case to the UN in November 1947 presenting Muslim tribals from NWFP attacking the Dogra state as an invasion of “Indian territory.” By early January, UNSC set up a commission to investigate. Later that year, it passed Resolution 47 calling for demilitarization of Kashmir by both Indian and Pakistan regular and irregular troops and conduct of plebiscite.
international consensus over the plebiscite as a setback for its Kashmir policy; Kashmiris saw the resolution as a recognition of their status as a “people” with a right to self-determination.

Sheikh Abdullah’s ambiguity

Because of his contradictory stances in 1947, Sheikh Abdullah became the single most divisive figure in modern Kashmiri history. His life has been subject of several biographies, and his role in shaping Kashmir’s history is doubted by none. Abdullah embodied (and, to many, destroyed) Kashmiri nationalism. So hefty was his shadow on the Kashmiri politics—his resistance against the Dogra regime, his position as the prime minister of Kashmir (1947-53), his long years in Indian prisons and under house arrest (1953-75), his return in the (constitutionally degraded) position of chief minister (1975-82), and even in his ghostly presence in public discourses years after his death in 1982—that some Tehreek history-writers claim the mass rebellion of 1989-90 was, among other things, a cathartic revolt against Abdullah’s legacy. “Despite all the good that happened in his earlier avatar, the weight of Sheikh Abdullah’s personal ambition broke the back of Kashmiri aspirations,” said a Tehreek activist, looking toward the mausoleum of the dead leader on the shores of the Dal Lake.

The “good” to which the activist was referring were the series of economic transformations, like “Land Reforms” and “Debt Cancellation,” which happened during Abdullah’s time as prime minister, immediately after the end of Dogra monarchy. Under the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act of 1950, agricultural land was redistributed from absentee landlords to cultivators, immediately lifting tens of thousands out of poverty. Further, the debts that urban artisans and peasants had accrued due to excessive taxations and usurious practices of moneylenders, and which had kept them in a state of permanent bondage, were reduced or
cancelled (Aslam 1977, 62-64). The true impact of these measures would take years to become evident, but its momentary effect was to neutralize to some extent the popular antagonism Abdullah had earned because of his endorsement of Hari Singh’s treaty.

Landlords—Dogras, Pandits, and a few Muslims—who lost their massive estates during land reforms, found themselves in a quandary: Abdullah was a bitter foe because of his reforms, but an ally due to his stance supporting India and opposing Pakistan. In the original treaty, India’s jurisdiction in Kashmir extended only to defense, communications, and external affairs. The Treaty of Accession had almost preserved the form of the Treaty of Amritsar that Dogras had signed with the British empire in 1846. In both cases, a curtailed form of sovereignty was agreed upon. Under India, Kashmir’s “autonomy” would include Kashmir having its own constitution, an independent judiciary, its own national symbols, its own tax system, and its own president and prime minister—all this was agreed upon, with some caveats, between the Indian government and Abdullah in Delhi in 1952. “Sovereignty in all matters other than those specified in the instrument of Accession continues to reside in the State”—this was the key point of the 1952 agreement. The agreement was already a significant betrayal of the promise of Tehreek, but soon Hindu nationalists in India started a country-wide agitation demanding Kashmir’s

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82 Around 4,50,000 acres of land (excluding orchards, fuel and fodder reserves and uncultivable wasteland) over the established limit of 22.75 acres of land per holding was taken without compensation from about 9,000 absentee landlords. Of this, 2,31,000 acres was distributed among cultivating peasants. In later years, an aborted attempt was made to remove some of the flaws in the previous reforms, under the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act, 1972. Similarly, “Debt Conciliation Boards” had been set up to either scale down accumulated debts or completely liquidate them (Aslam 1977, 62-64).

83 As Kashmiri economic historian Javed Bakshi argues, land reforms were marred by nepotism and favoritism. Many National Conference loyalists got a bigger share than others, while the landlords fragmented their holdings and homesteads to avoid having to submit land to the state. Nevertheless, the scale of the land reforms in Kashmir was, by South Asian standards, the most radical anywhere in the subcontinent. (Interviews with author, August 2014). Thorner (1953) also suggests that the primary beneficiaries of the land reforms were those who already had significant holdings at the village level, and not those who had been landless.
“complete integration” with India. “Ek Nishan, Ek, Vidhan, Ek Pradhan” they demanded—one symbol, one constitution, one leader.

By 1953, Abdullah had begun to sense that the general discontent in Kashmir with his decision to join India had spread fast. He asked Nehru to conduct the promised plebiscite. Having cultivated separate ties to a section of Abdullah’s close confidants, Nehru got Abdullah arrested, and replaced him with Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi. Bakshi went about giving away elements of the “autonomy” enshrined in the treaty of accession piece by piece. While in jail, Abdullah’s popularity grew in Kashmir; his loyalists had even set up a part named “Plebiscite Front.” But Abdullah was not interested in the national struggle. He spent more time explaining to Kashmiris why independence was not a good idea, than pushing Indian leaders to allow Kashmiris their right to self-determination. By the time he was reinstated to political office by India in 1975, he had again fallen from his status among Kashmiris. His fall had been occasioned by his agreement with Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1974-75. He had agreed to a severe delimitation of Kashmir’s autonomy and withdrawal of the plebiscite demand—in return for a “chief ministership.” Abdullah’s death in 1982 life a weight from the Kashmiri public sphere. By 1990, so much had the political climate changed that Indian soldiers were deployed to guard Abdullah’s mausoleum.

Among Tehreek activists and intellectuals, Abdullah had complicated the Kashmir question immensely. From a popular Kashmiri leader, he had become an authoritarian politician. Abdullah became an object of hatred for many; especially for those who witnessed the violent, post-1990 military occupation in Kashmir. Yet, even among Tehreek sympathizers, opinion on Abdullah is not unanimous. For those in Kashmir, who would prefer Kashmir became part of Pakistan (especially from Jama’at-i-Islami, an Islamist organization, and Mirwaiz’s supporters)
and those who hated him for land reforms (ex-ruling class Hindus, pro-India Pandits, and a few prominent Muslim Pir families), Abdullah was indubitably a loathsome figure. Pro-Pakistan formations retell the history of the events surrounding 1947 in a mode in which Abdullah and his associates from the National Conference are represented as conspirators. They accuse Abdullah of sabotaging Jinnah’s crucial visit to Kashmir in 1946, crushing his opponents from the rival Muslim Conference, and remaining silent over the Jammu ethnic cleansing. Pro-India formations, see Abdullah as a “communal” Muslim politician who had hurt the interests of the Hindus by taking their land. Kashmiris, who would prefer to see Kashmir independent, uncover a side of Abdullah in which he is seen in his early years to have desired to chart an independent course for Kashmir, and then lost his way.

Several Tehreek history-writers take a less ideological stance about Abdullah, and question if he represented the entirety of Kashmiri opinion in 1947. Among these is Zahir-ud-Din, who I have introduced in the Chapter 2. Zahir-ud-Din remains conflicted about Abdullah. From his book *Flashback*, and in interviews, I noted Zahir-ud-Din saw Abdullah as a “tall leader,” who had “stood up to the cruelty of the Dogra rulers” and “even up to Nehru to some extent.” But Abdullah was also as a “colossal failure of Kashmiri politics,” who “ditched his people.” On some occasions in his writings, Zahir-ud-Din even used “Sher-i-Kashmir” (Lion of Kashmir) in place of Abdullah’s name. Most significantly, Zahir-ud-Din doubts that Abdullah represented the sole or authentic voice of Kashmiris. For instance, in one of his daily column “Unsung Heroes” published in *Kashmir Reader*, Zahir-ud-Din wrote:

> Contrary to common belief, Sheikh Abdullah did not have a cakewalk in 1947. He faced stiff resistance not only from Muslim Conference workers, but also from a number of National Conference activists as well. A staunch worker of National Conference, Noor Muhammad Sofi registered protest in his unique style. He dressed like a *sadhu*… (2014).
The struggle with Abdullah’s complicated legacy is centered on his fateful endorsement of Hari Singh’s accession with India. Tehreek’s fundamental aim is to undo that accession.

*The aftermath and its aporias*

The events of 1947 and afterwards in Kashmir became a source of well-known conflict between Pakistan and India. The two fought several wars over it—in 1947-49, 1965, 1971, and 1998. The UN-mediated “ceasefire line” came into effect in 1949. The line was to act as a temporary demilitarized border, but it became the highly-militarized Line of Control. Indian policy since 1953 has involved a combination of an aggressive pacification, using elections to split Tehreek, and invisibalizing Kashmir as a “question” in international politics. Even seventy years after the UN Resolution 47 was passed, no plebiscite has taken place. India claims Kashmiris had accepted the accession to India because Sheikh Abdullah had endorsed the accession. Pakistan, on the other hand, sees plebiscite as the corner stone of their position on Kashmir.

The UN resolutions were not unproblematic, nor did they provide an easy solution, as Tehreek intellectuals themselves acknowledge. Despite the legal and political case that could be made against the Indian position, the UN framing of Kashmir as a “dispute” between India and Pakistan, centered principally on the premise of contestation over territory, erased Kashmiris out of the picture, even though it simultaneously held up their right to self-determination. For forty years after 1947, Kashmir question had essentially been reduced to an inter-state dispute between India and Pakistan. In challenging the official Indian discourse of an assumed, originary Kashmiri consent to the accession with India, the 1990 uprising created what can only be seen as a *historical* crisis within Kashmir. It had lifted, as one Kashmiri activist put it, “the scab off the festering wound.”
The “crisis” was that of the Kashmiri political subjectivity as much as that of political sovereignty. Kashmiris had arrived at the crisis in 1989-90 after passing through the moment of “nationalism” (1939-1953), which had not only failed to deliver the promised sovereignty to the people, but was now seen as having cynically led them, through the opportunistic collaboration of the Kashmir’s political elite with the powerful India state, into the hands of a crushing military occupation. From 1953 to 1988, Kashmir was in a state of political wilderness, being denied a space in within the inter-state dynamics between India and Pakistan. There was, therefore, hardly a stable ground for a Kashmiri “self-hood” around which a new politics of emancipation could be formulated; or, at least, the need for such a ground was felt more than ever. Tehreek, as the movement for self-determination, first needed to determine the self. At the time of its inception in 1990, aside from its fundamental premise, *haq hamaara rai-shumari!* (“Plebiscite, is our right”), as well as slogans like *hum kya chahte, azadi!* (“We want, freedom”), there was hardly any consensual narrative on identity that could sustain the movement. Was it just Kashmiri or Kashmiri-Muslim which named this “our” and “we”? Was Tehreek a revolution without an idea?

As explained in Chapter 2, Tehreek history-writers took it upon themselves to reconstitute a new Kashmiri self-hood, a task which could no longer be entrusted to the old guardians of “Kashmiri nationalism.” This new identity could not easily adjust to the ahistorical,

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84 Even this was a slogan borrowed from the “nationalist” days when the Indian state, after its initial scramble over Kashmir and then the stabilization of its control, began to readjust, to the consternation of its Kashmiri collaborator class, how much “autonomy” it was willing to offer Kashmir. After Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest in 1953, Plebiscite Front, a breakaway faction of National Conference, was formed, which called for an implementation of the UN mandated plebiscite in Kashmir. Ironically, only a few years before his arrest, Abdullah had vigorously defended the Indian position in the UN, and condemned the UN resolutions.

85 Even slogans *hum kya chahte, azadi!* and, later, *Pakistan se rishta kya, la illaha illal-lah* (what is the relation with Pakistan, is Islam) sounded more like questions without any substantive answers. What was the meaning of *azadi*—was it independence, liberation from India and then merger into Pakistan, or just end to the suffering, as some claimed, and was merger with Pakistan mandated by Islam, or the choice first offered by the British and then endorsed by the United Nations?
syncretistic inter-communal “harmony” (or “Kashmiriyat”) as the bedrock of Kashmiri political identity—for such a state-imposed view was premised on the notion that Kashmir was part of India. The work of retelling the past was riddled with aporias, because any retelling would have to address the fissures that marked people’s memories in Kashmir, the region’s geo-political predicaments, as well as the dualities that split the post-1990 Tehreek.

First, there was the question of “which history” and “whose history?” Pre-1990 Kashmir was already a site of historical contestation, mostly centered on the communalized memories. But the fissures ran not only between the memories of the disempowered Muslim majority and the influential Hindu minority, but also among rural peasantry and urban artisanal and trading classes, and between residents of the valley and smaller communities in the adjoining regions. Second, while Kashmir, as a place, had a continuous history, its geo-politics was nevertheless entwined, even before 1947, with the regions that surrounded it, and after 1947, with the two postcolonial states, India and Pakistan. Third, a set of conflicting dualities marked the post-Tehreek Kashmir: one, the mutually competing regional-religious duality embedded within the identity named as “Kashmiri-Muslim;” two, the territorial duality that had carved up Kashmir between India and Pakistan, and under which Kashmir was now practically two “occupied Kashmires;” and, finally, the seemingly insurmountable complexity represented by the end goal of Tehreek—complete independence of Kashmir or merger with Pakistan? These historical fissures, geo-political conundrums, and political dualities represent central concerns in the work of Tehreek history-writers, as well as key structuring elements of Kashmiri politics.

The work of reconstituting a self-hood has meant returning the gaze to the past to recover elements that can give shape to a new Kashmiri identity. It involves retelling the Kashmiri past

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86 See Chapter 2 for more on Kashmiriyat.
as one of “resistance,” and historicizing the Kashmiri self. What Tehreek history-writers animatedly ask in their writings is the following: Has Kashmir’s history finally found its appropriate subject, the “Kashmiri people,” just as Kashmiri people are discovering “their history?”

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, drawing principally from the account left behind by Robert Thorp, I have examined the nature of the Dogra era, a traumatic period in Kashmir’s history. Thorp’s long subdued writings have acquired a new lease of life in the post-Tehreek Kashmir as well as become an important resource for understanding the evolution of the Kashmiri Muslim identity. I have argued that examining the nature of the Dogra state is crucial to understanding the “Kashmiri-Muslim” identity. With tensions between its two constituent terms, “Kashmiri-Muslim” encapsulates the historical intertwining of religious, ethnic, and class differences in the region, yet it is also an identity that delimits the history of Tehreek in relation to many youths who don’t have access to the history of social relations of power in Kashmir before 1947, or even the pre-1990. While embracing the history of Tehreek and its roots in Kashmiri-Muslim mass politics of the 1930s, younger activists in Kashmir are, at the same time, trying to overcome the internal limitations that are presented by this double-helical identity.

This complex interweaving of the religious, class, and national in Kashmir puts constraints on forms of politics that locate Kashmiri struggle for azadi only in the unfolding of Islam in the region, which thereby is made into a justification for a “merger with Pakistan.” It also interrupts those who produce a seamless, but ahistorical narrative of “coexistence” (or “Kashmiriyat”) as the justification for “integration with India.”

Is it possible to shape a political identity that can overcome this fraught history, but
which continues to resonate deeply in the present? Of course, such a collective endeavor is not possible so long as India and Pakistan lay claims on Kashmir. In the emerging work of Tehreek history-writers, Kashmiris confront on one side a history of dates, dynasties and domination, and on the other a history of sentiments, people, and resistance, all forming elements of a political subjectivity that Tehreek history-writers have been invested in both revealing and giving shape.

If Kashmiri history appears like as a cyclical trap, youth activists believe plebiscite or a referendum will resolve the question—at least as a start. Is this belief a false hope, I don’t know? For now, at least, the right to self-determination, and azadi at its end, has become a placeholder for collective memories, aspirations, and sentiments.
Maps

Figure 15. Kashmir map. Courtesy of Perry-Castañeda Library, University of Texas at Austin.
Figure 16. Line of Control, Kashmir. Map no. 3953 Rev. 4. Courtesy of United Nations.
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