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**COMMENTARY**

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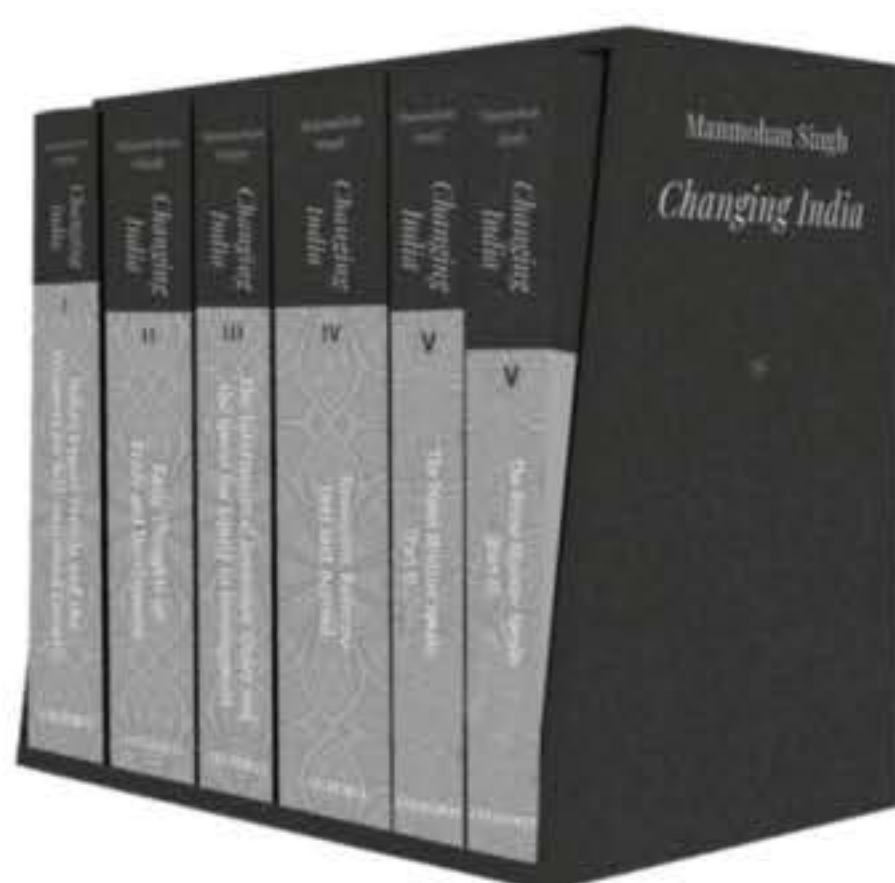
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## **Delivering Development Outcomes**

The article “Delivering a Global India: Capital Flows and Development Dilemmas in South Africa's Mining Zones” by Manjusha Nair (EPW, 24 November 2018) has built upon the ethnographic study of two Indian mining companies in exploring the nuances of the nature of capital and the delivery of developmental outcomes. It is interesting on two fronts: the role of capital, especially foreign direct investments, in bringing in development; and the extent of capital utility in delivering the outcomes of development to local communities. The author has, by and large, succeeded in achieving the first intended goal, that is, highlighting how the Indian mining companies are operating capital and their role in the expansion of South–South cooperation. In the fulfilment of the promises of capital in generating employment through the transfer of skills, both Indian companies have achieved an optimum level of progress.

To quote, in spite of the “state pressure, Indian firms were able to firmly implement some of the projects on ownership and were trying to incorporate diversity and some skill transfer.” However, what is not adequately clear from the findings is the behaviour of firms in rejecting the role of trade unions in workers' welfare. Had the author elaborated this point, at least in the section on work cultures, it would have given the reader a holistic picture of the firms' behaviour towards workers' well-being. It is also necessary to locate the firms' conduct in explaining the dialectical relationship of capital and labour.

Another aspect that has not been given adequate focus by the author is the development dilemmas, especially the provision of basic civic amenities to the local mining communities by the firms. As mentioned by the author, both the firms “had mining communities with absolutely no development of facilities.” To what extent are the firms committed to the development of mining and local communities? When the firms fail to facilitate even basic services, can this

qualify as “development?” The obvious question that emerges is, whose development, and at what cost? Setting aside these concerns, the study is a worthy addition to the existing knowledge, in particular, to the field of development studies and development economics.

**Nayakara Veerasha**

BENGALURU

## **The Failure of MSP**

In the article “Is MSP a Viable Proposition in Marine Fisheries?” (EPW, 3 November 2018), the authors, Shinoj Parappurathu and C Ramachandran, have rightly pointed out that the minimum support price (MSP) is not a good option for ensuring the fisherfolk's legitimate claim for fair/remunerative prices. Practically, we have learnt similar lessons from the case of agricultural commodities. The steady ratcheting up of the MSP of agricultural commodities has, in fact, distorted relative prices of agricultural inputs, such as land, by distorting both the pattern of use and the level consumption.

Moreover, while MSPs have gone up substantially, farmers' awareness about these support prices remains abysmal. Data from the Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 70th round, revealed that only one-fifth of our farmers knew about the MSP, and even a tenth of those who knew about it had no idea from whom and where the procurement at MSP took place. Incidences of middlemen purchasing foodgrains from the poor and marginal farmers residing in far-flung villages at a price much lower than the MSP and then selling the grains to the procuring centres at the MSP, are not unusual in this country.

While MSP is being sold as a silver bullet for India's agrarian distress, data

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indicate that the rise in MSP has neither widened the access of the poor to food, nor alleviated the suffering of poor and smallholder farmers. Market intervention through an instrument like MSP is not the ideal strategy. Rather, fixing of prices on a daily basis, as proposed in the article, could be a better option, only if effective supervision, to ensure the implementation of the prices fixed by the relevant authority, is in place.

Jaydev Jana

KOLKATA

## Tribal Undertrials

In the first quarter of the 19th century, the prison was a place for the detention of the undertrials. Unfortunately, even today, Indian prisons are almost filled with undertrial prisoners. Prison data reveals that undertrial prisoners constitute 65% of the total prisoners in India, with a significant increase in this percentage over the years. Irfan Ahmad and Md Zakaria Siddiqui, in an article in this journal (*EPW*, 4 November 2017) highlighted the over-representation of minorities in prison. More explicitly, Adivasis, Dalits, Christians, Muslims all are over-represented in prisons when compared to their total population. The tribal population in India is 8.63% of the total population, but comprises 11.33% of the total prison population. Both Dalits and tribals are over-represented in undertrial populations.

Vijay Raghavan opines that governments use prisons as an instrument of social control, and emphasises the need for quality legal aid service to undertrials (*EPW*, 23 January 2016). There is much literature elaborating the inability of certain sections of society to negotiate within the criminal justice system, especially in terms of seeking bail. When the court grants bail to an accused, the issue of security in terms of property arises. Thus, persons who do not possess property face difficulty in securing bail. The court supposes that only fear of forfeiting property ensures the availability of the accused in the court. However, compulsory surety for bail sends the explicit message that justice is more favourable to people who possess property.

Further, why should property be the only criterion of securing liberty? This is despite an abundance of academic writing explaining the exclusion of certain sections from securing justice, particularly bail, because of the absence of property. However, the tribal experiences of undertrial imprisonment deserves careful and immediate attention, because tribals live in forestlands which are not considered immovable property.

Extending this discourse to Kerala, although the Kerala development model has enabled high social development, it has been criticised for exclusion of certain sections of society, especially the tribal population. Furthermore, a significant share of the tribal population dwell in forests and do not own property. The struggle for land has been kindled long ago and continues still. It was in 2006 that the government enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. This act ascribes rights to forest-dwelling tribes, entitling them to hold a piece of forestland either for self-cultivation or for any other common occupation or habitation so as to ensure their livelihood. The important question here is whether the title deed, issued as per individual forestland, is considered as immovable property. It is in this context that the absence of land and title over immovable property is to be analysed.

From data on undertrial tribal prisoners collected from the prison department of Kerala through a right to information inquiry, it is learnt that there are 150 undertrial tribal prisoners in different prisons in Kerala. One of the important concerns of the inquiry was whether these prisoners are being denied bail due to the absence of a title deed for immovable property. However, there exists a serious limitation of data on the number of tribal prisoners who have been denied bail due to this particular reason. A majority of the prison heads replied that the prison department does not maintain any such

records and asserted that it falls under the purview of magistrate court.

However, very few prison heads replied that there are tribal persons, who are denied the bail because of the absence of title deed over immovable property. More clearly, data from the district jail in Manathavadi, Wayanadu reveals that there are four tribal persons who are denied bail because they failed to submit the surety. Data from the central prison in Thrissur also uncovers six more such cases. This does not mean the remaining tribal prisoners receive bail. My impression from the prison remand files is that very few do get bail, while a majority of them continue as undertrial prisoners until their verdict. A careful and detailed analysis reveals that the tribal category is almost excluded from the justice system, or they are not in a position to negotiate with the criminal justice system. I also want to add that a majority of these undertrial prisoners are charged under a simple provision of the Abkari Act.

The remand files also reveal that non-tribal prisoners facing similar charges get bail relatively easily. It is in this context that the demand to change property as criteria for securing liberty has been raised.

Shahdab Perumal

KOZHIKODE

## Corrigenda

(1) In the article "IL&FS Was an Avoidable Crisis" by T T Ram Mohan (*EPW*, 17 November 2018), on page 12, column 2, the sentence should have read as "Following the problems faced in infrastructure sector in recent years, banks chose to reduce their exposure to it."

On page 13, in the sentence "This has caused the stock to fall in recent weeks," the word stock should have been "stock market."

(2) In the article "Army's Robustness in Aid of Civil Authority: Lessons from the Gujarat Carnage" by Ali Ahmed (*EPW*, 24 November 2018), on page 13, column 2, "26 February" should have been "28 February."

The errors have been corrected on the website.

## EPW Engage

The following articles have been published in the past week in the *EPW Engage* section ([www.epw.in/engage](http://www.epw.in/engage)).

- (1) Are Linguistic Nationalisms Killing South Indian Federalism? — Pranav Kuttaiah
- (2) Photo Essay: A Different Kind of 'Mourning' — EPW Engage



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## Death Is Getting Cheaper

*The moral value in life lies in questioning the government for its colossal failure on the employment front.*

The suicide pact, in which three youth from Alwar district in Rajasthan ended their lives by jumping in front of a speeding train on 20 November, forms a tragic part of the series of deaths that India has been witnessing. On the parameters of moral common sense, Indians seek to evaluate the idea of death either in terms of living longer or living a short life but for a noble cause. In any case, the latter is considered to be morally more valuable. One's life acquires meaning only through the investment of labour power in the creative sphere of activity. Such an investment also presupposes the availability of opportune conditions which would help one to use one's mental and physical powers, and which are so crucial for developing a sense of self-worth. The sense of self-worth withers away when one finds oneself encircled by inopportune conditions. In fact, structural conditions that apparently look promising turn out to be quite frustrating eventually, particularly for the aspiring youth. Ironically, it is education that sets limits on the realisation of aspiration. Growing enrolment in higher education and the corresponding emphasis on the competitive examination system as the only route for a secured future serve as crucial indications of the continuation of this predicament.

The crisis of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led government has become much more serious, with the competitive examination as a concept having reached its limits in practicality.

The three youth who ended their lives form a part of this predicament as they had also pinned their aspirations on entering the civil services. Considering their educational qualifications and the sincere efforts that they were making to realise their legitimate aspirations, these youth ought to have got some stable job, preferably in the government sector. Instead, in their own self-assessment, they had become unemployable without any hope of getting employment in the future. According to the statements of their friends, the three believed that they had become a burden on their parents and the entire society. The loss of self-worth or a sense of meaninglessness is produced by the incongruence between the question about what one ought to have become and what one actually becomes. Arguably, a majority of the youth in the country are caught up in such incongruence between the "ought" and "is" dilemma. The tragic deaths of several youth over the years point to this enduring paradox.

However, politicians, through the nationalist construction of youth, often tend to symbolically elevate the moral value of youth.

Thus, in such language, youth is made to appear as the country's developmental asset, the nation's pride or India's future. Politicians and most in the present government seem to celebrate the role of "yuva shakti" in what they call the "Make in India" campaign. But, an observed side of such rhetorical construction suggests that the dying youth are a dispensable lot. This attitude of the governing class is evident in its leader's failure even to genuinely show some degree of remorse at the series of deaths of the youth who are ending their lives. But, the market and the government do not provide the required conditions and decent opportunities for its articulation. The lack of decent employment opportunities often leads first to social death, and ultimately to biological death.

In the Indian context, social death becomes social in the cold response of caste-based civil society, which does not distinguish between dangerous sewerage in manholes and the human being who is forced to enter such a death trap. In fact, a corporeal death is the tragic culmination of social death. Biological death is an unfortunate route that the farmers and unemployed youth adopt in order to escape social death that gets defined around the devastating experience of indignity and humiliating loss of self-worth. It is not the creative life of the youth, but their death that provides the evidence that they exist. The existence of youth is recognised only in their deaths through police inquiry, forensic examination, and compensation.

The irony is that even if the state tricks some of these youth on a regular basis by using symbolic issues ranging from cultural nationalism to raising religious structures, the youth seem to participate in the project. Ruling parties and their leaders in the government lack the moral capacity to tell the truth that their government is incapable of providing the youth with employment. Their politics does not allow them to tell the truth that skill development and job "melas" are nothing but a mirage, an exercise in futility. Such gimmicks of the government only provide the illusion that there are plenty of jobs and that the youth only have to acquire the skills for them. In such a situation, Indian youth have the moral determination to tell the ruling party the truth that the government lacks capacity in solving the fundamental problem of unemployment. But, the medium to speak truth to power must not be tragic. It must be transformative. Political parties have an agenda in misleading the youth on religious grounds, but is it not the responsibility of the youth to take the lead and ask questions about a more decent and secured life?



## Rendering the Perennial Lifeless

*To hear the call of the Ganga, both political will and ethical responsibility are required.*

To be a river, is to flow. It is the flow of a river that has been then put to "use," to rationalise that it is thus, prevented from going "waste." However, now this use has increased to such an extent that we are unable to decide if a river is "living." In fact, it is difficult to find a living river, as its flow is diverted into tunnels to produce electricity; or it consists of only filth and toxic wastes; or it is assumed that it can be cut and twisted like a water pipe for purposes of interlinking. And all of this can be done in the name of worshipping a river, "rejuvenating" it when the "development" instead is scuttling its flow. It is difficult to decide if a being is living, if it is entirely on the mercy of life support. It is difficult to call a river living if its flow is manipulated to such an extent that its naturalness itself is in doubt, and when it is not allowed to carry out the geological and ecological functions inherent to its being. It is difficult to call a river living, if it is living only in fragments, violated in parts in a way that denies it an ecological integrity, and an ability to self-rejuvenate.

While other rivers are equally in danger and are no doubt equally significant, the Ganga has been in a precarious condition despite and because of the government's added attention towards it. A "call from the Ganga" drew Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contest from Varanasi. However, on the lines of Hindutva, *Gangatva* has been used to promote crass emotions, when the real association with the Ganga's well-being is missing. Environmental-engineer-turned-sadhu G D Agarwal passed away unheard, continuing a fast for 112 days in the belief that the Ganga's call continues to be audible to the Prime Minister. Agarwal's demand, as indeed has been a consistent demand in Uttarakhand, was to address seriously the phenomena of sand mining and hydropower development in the Ganga that has reduced its flow to a trickle at most places. The source of the Ganga's perenniality, the Himalayas, are increasingly becoming dry, hollowed out, and made fragile.

How can an *aviral* (unhindered) and thus a *nirmal* (free from impurities) flow be maintained, as was the promise of the ₹20,000 crore Namami Gange programme, when the entire flow has been diverted away from the riverbeds? Namami Gange envisaged the restoration of the "wholesomeness" of the river, and thus, seemed to have an understanding of the essence of *aviralta* and *nirmalta*. However, in reality, a bare minimum condition of maintaining an ecological flow (minimum flow that allows the river mimic being a river) is not abided by the project owners, and its compliance not made mandatory; while its stipulated magnitude keeps shifting.

Instead of addressing the ground realities and taking concrete steps, the Prime Minister goes in a reverse direction, either trivialising the matter by engaging in mere symbolism or announcing tall projects to alter and tamper with the flows further, staying true to his commitment to corporate interests. Instead of freeing the flow of the river, maintaining its flow regime, monitoring sewage disposal, checking the excess withdrawal of water, saving and increasing the forest cover, and revitalising the waterbodies feeding into the rivers, river rejuvenation in most cases has been equated with riverfront development. Thus, it involves concretisation and encroachment of riverbanks and floodplains for commercial activities, and water diverted from other sources to create an impression that the river is still alive.

While in its upper reaches the flow of the Ganga has been killed, in the 1,600 kilometres of the Haldia-Varanasi stretch, the ₹5,369 crore Jal Marg Vikas Project is underway, involving significant investment from the World Bank. Prime Minister Modi recently stood welcoming a PepsiCo consignment in Varanasi, ignoring the damages borne by and in store for the river. Since the Ganga does not have the carrying capacity for the navigation of 1,500 tonne vessels, the project involves channelising the braided river, massive dredging, frequent desilting, and barraging to increase its depth artificially. There are commercial interests feeding into each other; for instance, the silt recovered is expected to be used in the construction sector. Dredging contracts have been handed over to multinationals, including the Adani Group. Significant pollution risks are being ignored. Also ignored is the destruction of the habitats of the aquatic life and livelihoods of the fisherfolk and boatmen. The turtle sanctuary in Varanasi is planned to be denotified. Endangered species like the Ganges river dolphins are being pushed towards extinction.

The health and aliveness of a river is no longer seen in its ability to support the beings living in harmony with it, but it has come to mean how much it can be used for commercial purposes, as a waterway, as energy, as sludge flush, and for religious tourism. As long as the river continues to be seen merely as an entity for extraction, its further concretisation and pollution will continue unabated. Making these violations cognisable offences and bringing in an armed Ganga Protection Corps under the National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, to be tabled soon, will not be able to put a stop to offences that the government itself is exemplifying on a much larger scale.

## Maintaining a 'Respectful' Distance

*Any intrusion in the local politics of J&K will erode mainstream political space and boost separatist politics.*

*Rekha Chowdhary writes:*

The decision of the governor of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to dissolve the assembly, five months after the fall of the Peoples Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party (PDP-BJP) government forms another important "political

moment" in the history of Kashmir's politics. This is so, not only for the immediate fallout that it has for various political actors in the state, but also for the already precarious democratic space and the popular perceptions about the central government.



The decision became controversial as it came soon after PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti staked a claim to form the government with the support of the J&K National Conference (JKNC) and Congress. Meanwhile, a counterclaim was also, made by Sajjad Gani Lone, leader of J&K People's Conference (JKPC) with the support of the BJP.

Paradoxically, the JKNC and PDP had been vociferously demanding the dissolution of the assembly, which had been kept in "suspended animation" after the fall of the PDP-BJP government. This demand was raised amidst speculations that the BJP was making efforts to form a government with the support of the JKPC and a few defectors mainly from the PDP, but also other parties, including the JKNC and Congress. When the idea of a third front was floated by Lone, a few prominent members of the PDP openly expressed their desire to join it.

The idea of a grand alliance between the JKNC, PDP, and Congress, therefore, was aimed at outmanoeuvring the BJP and stalling the possibility of a third front-BJP government. That is why, though the PDP and JKNC have criticised the decision of the governor, accusing him of partisanship, the dissolution of the assembly is to their satisfaction. These parties have succeeded in warding off the danger of destabilisation that was looming large over them. The danger was particularly real for the barely two-decade-old PDP, as it faced decimation in the face of a split. Though not as bad, the situation was not congenial even for the JKNC. Having lost its dominant position in the state's politics with the emergence of the PDP and failing even in maintaining its position as the largest party in the Valley after the 2014 assembly elections, it faced the new danger of being further pushed to the margins with the possibility of the emergence of a third force led by the JKPC.

Seen from the short-term perspective, one can say that with the dissolution of the assembly the crisis faced by the PDP has been averted and the JKNC has gained some brownie points by not only coming to the rescue of its arch-rival, the PDP, but also by serving the "Kashmiri interest" by keeping the BJP at bay. However, in the final analysis this whole episode has made a big dent in the democratic politics of Kashmir. This politics it needs to be emphasised had gained sufficient credibility and depth in the last one-and-a-half decades. Despite the fact that separatism

continued to prevail, the popular faith in democratic politics also increased. This was not a small feat considering the fact that mainstream politics had completely collapsed in the wake of militancy and separatism in 1989. It was the excessively intrusive role of the Congress as the ruling party at the centre and its manipulations vis-à-vis the power politics of the state that had pushed J&K to this situation. In its ambitions to control the power politics of the state, the Congress, after engineering defections in the JKNC in 1984, had removed the Farooq Abdullah government and replaced it with the unpopular government of defectors under the leadership of G M Shah. The unpopular JKNC-Congress alliance of 1986 that followed and the debacle of the 1987 assembly elections, perceived to be highly manipulated, had completely disillusioned the Kashmiris regarding a democratic politics. It, therefore, took a lot of effort and political investment on the part of Atal Bihari Vajpayee to restore the faith of Kashmiris in power politics. In 2002, he not only made a commitment for a "free and fair election," but also ensured a respectful distance of the centre from the power politics of the state. This had its long-term implications in grounding the electoral politics in local logic, and invigorating and expanding the democratic space in the process.

Seen from that perspective, the present episode does not bode well for the future of democracy in Kashmir. The BJP's efforts to form a government by breaking the local parties has not only regenerated the discourse of "manipulations," but has also made political analysts draw parallels with the manipulative role of the Congress during 1984-87. This is not good news, especially at a time when Kashmir is witnessing an upsurge in militancy and separatism. With the political situation being so precarious, any intrusion in the local politics would not only further erode the mainstream political space, but also give a push to separatist politics. For the situation as it stands, democratic politics needs to be strengthened and not be subjected to political manoeuvrings to serve the political interests of a particular party.

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# Minimum Support Price and Inflation in India

S MOHANAKUMAR, PREMKUMAR

The Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India revised the policy rates upward consecutively for the second time in 2018. While revising the repo rates to 6.5%, the MPC placed the onus on the recently announced minimum support price for agricultural commodities, alleging that it might firm up rural demand and drive up the price level in the economy. But is this threat of price spiral due to MSP hike real?

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) hiked the policy rate by 25 basis points from 6.25% to 6.5% in August 2018 (RBI 2018a). Two such consecutive policy rate hikes have happened for the first time since 2013. The reverse repo rate, marginal standing facility rate and the bank rate have also been hiked along with the increase in policy rates. The MPC has justified the hike in repo rate by stating that an inflationary spiral had been on the anvil, and therefore, it was essential to contain the retail inflation rate within the desired range of  $4\pm 2\%$ . Although the MPC deliberated on a handful of domestic and international factors likely to trigger inflation, in its press conference held immediately after the announcement of the repo rate hike on 1 August 2018, the committee, however, overemphasised the impending impact of the recently announced minimum support price (MSP) for kharif crops as the primary driver for the price spiral. This article examines the role of MSP in pushing up inflation in the economy.

The MPC meeting in August 2018 divulged that the performance of the domestic economy had been conditioned by a handful of factors in the domestic as well as the global economy. The factors identified in the domestic economy were: increase in input price for the industrial sector; implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission and subsequent uptick in house rent allowance (HRA) in various states; and revised MSP and its consequential effect on rural demand and the price spiral. Alongside, the MPC also noted that inflationary pressure and growth factors in the global economy such as monetary tightening in advanced as well as emerging market economies (EMEs); the growth performance of the world economy; uncertainties emerging out of

the trade war spearheaded by the United States; and volatility in crude oil prices add onto inflationary pressures and influence macro fundamentals in India. Conversely, the MPC and the mainstream media focused more on the notified revision in MSP for kharif crops in July 2018 as the primary source and determinant of the anticipated spike in inflation in the economy, indicating that the RBI was left with little alternative, but to squeeze the liquidity by increasing the cost of borrowing through the repo rate and other policy instruments. Further, the MPC has argued that the hike in MSP would firm up the demand in rural India, driving up inflation beyond the comfortable band of 6%. However, it has also been emphasised that the RBI would stick to its declared neutral monetary stance (NMS), implying its adherence to the pursuance of the liberal economic framework.

Although the government notifies MSP for 23 crops in India covering 14 kharif crops, seven rabi crops and two calendar year season crops, in addition to fair price for sugar cane and jute, by and large, monopoly procurement has been limited to paddy and wheat in India for a fairly long time. Gulati (2018) estimated that 6% of the total produce of agricultural commodities was procured under the monopoly procurement system.

Table 1 (p 11) shows the trend in procurement of four major crops, namely paddy, wheat, mustard and cotton during 1996–97 to 2017–18. Paddy procured as percentage of its production varied between 16% and 36% with an average procurement of 28% during the last 22 years. The average quantity of wheat procured was 25.8% of its production and further, quantity procured as percentage of production of wheat widely fluctuated between 13% and 40% during 1996–97 to 2017–18. Cotton farmers were one of the worst hit in the crop production sector. The average quantity of cotton procured as percentage of its production was only 5%, barring two exceptional years, 2009 and 2015. There had been attempts to procure mustard in the early 2000s, but this was almost discontinued for a long time until 2015–16. On

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an average, only 4% of the total produce of mustard was procured during the period under reference. It is worth mentioning that mustard has been an important rabi crop in states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The government stopped its procurement, notwithstanding the fact that the price volatility had driven the farmers into a deep crisis in major producing states, since the second half of 2000s.

**Table 1: Procurement as a Percentage of Production, 1996–97 to 2017–18**

Year	Paddy Procured as % of Production	Wheat Procured as % of Production**	Cotton Procured as % of Production	Mustard Procured as % of Production**
1996–97	15.8	13.4	7.9	0.0
2001–02	23.8	26.5	9.6	9.2
2005–06	30.1	13.3	7.3	27.1
2006–07	26.9	14.7	6.4	0.3
2007–08	29.7	28.9	3.8	0.0
2008–09	34.4	31.5	57.0	0.0
2009–10	36.0	27.9	2.4	0.0
2010–11	35.6	32.6	0.0	0.0
2011–12	33.3	40.2	0.02	0.0
2012–13	32.3	26.8	7.6	0.0
2013–14	29.9	29.2	0.1	0.02
2014–15	30.4	32.5	25.0	0.0
2015–16	32.8	24.8	2.8	0.0
2016–17	34.7	31.3	NA	NA
2017–18	32.3	35.6	NA	NA
Average	28.0	25.8	9.1*	4.1*

NA- not available.

\* For cotton and mustard, average procurement is calculated till 2015 only due to non-availability of data.

\*\* Wheat and mustard production of the previous year is procured in the current year because wheat and mustard are harvested in the middle of April. Hence, the adjustment in the data on procurement and production for wheat.

Source: Derived from *Agricultural Statistics at a Glance*, Government of India, various years.

Rajasthan accounts for more than 45% of area and production of mustard in India. A recent field visit to elicit the views of farmers on the monopoly procurement of mustard in Nahariya gram panchayat in Jaipur district in Rajasthan revealed that very few farmers sold their produce under the monopoly procurement system under MSP, even though the MSP was higher than the market price. According to a farmer from Nahariya ka Baas in Shivdaspura gram panchayat in Jaipur district in Rajasthan,

I cultivated wheat in the last rabi season in 40 bigha (*kaccha land*) and I sold 30 quintals of mustard in the market for ₹3,800 per quintal albeit the MSP was ₹4,000 per quintal. Farmers in our village opt to sell in the *mandi* (market) because of spot payment, whereas cash is credited in our account after

three to four months under the monopoly procurement system. Another issue is the complicated procedures involved under MSP. I have to obtain *jamabandi* (landownership record) on area sown from the *patwari* (village revenue officer) and then, register online with the Rajasthan State Cooperative Marketing Federation. For a small farmer like me, the procedure is time consuming, cumbersome and not worth pursuing. Therefore, farmers in our village seldom sell mustard under MSP and wheat is not procured from our area. (Nandkishore Sharma, Nahariya ka Baas, Jaipur)

There has been widespread criticism that MSP announcements and effective interventions in the market for agricultural commodities remained mostly in government notifications and were seldom implemented. As is well known, MSP is a floor price to mitigate the price volatility-driven risk in farming and it provides an alternative avenue to the farmer to sell at the open market rate, if the market price rules above the MSP rates. The Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income has estimated that the 14 major kharif crops have a profit margin (under MSP) less than 50% over the paid out cost plus imputed family labour cost (A2+FL). On the effectiveness of MSP, the NITI Aayog study is an eye-opener, as it reveals that only 10% of the farmers in India are aware of MSP before the sowing period. It has also been observed that in certain states, farmers are not even aware of the existence of MSP for their produce and further, 90% of the wheat procured under MSP is confined to three states, namely Punjab, Haryana and part of Uttar Pradesh. For other crops, to a great extent, the monopoly procurement system has not yet been put in place or does not exist at all. Despite such limitations, MSP notifications and monopoly procurement limits, due to the free play of market forces for agricultural commodities, particularly during peak seasons, farmers are forced to be price takers with little bargaining power in the absence of state intervention in the market.

Traditional approaches to the supply response of agricultural commodities show the relationship between quantity supplied and price, while other determinants of supply of agricultural commodities are held constant. For long-run forecasting of agricultural commodities, often the

duality relationship between production function and variable profit/cost function is employed to generate the supply response and input-demand functions. However, for the estimation of the supply response function for a subset of production in the short run, a simple one-stage estimation of Nerlovian models is adequate (Kumar et al 2010).

### Price Elasticity of Supply

Price elasticity of supply of the four major crops covered under monopoly procurement is computed to measure the supply response in production to MSP. For computing price (MSP) elasticity of supply of paddy, wheat, cotton and mustard for the period 1997–98 to 2017–18 (up to 2015–16 for cotton and mustard), a variant of the Nerlovian double log model was used and the results are reported in Table 2. It was found that cotton had the highest supply elasticity with respect to MSP, followed by mustard. In the case of wheat and paddy, the response of production to MSP is 0.21 and 0.32 respectively, and the computed price elasticities of supply are in conformity with the findings of an earlier study (Kumar et al 2010). The price elasticity of supply shows that MSP plays an important role in the production of agricultural commodities and that its influence could be indirect as the MSP provides an alternative source for farmers to sell their produce.

**Table 2: Price Elasticity of Supply of Paddy, Wheat, Cotton and Mustard**

Crop	R <sup>2</sup>	β	t-statistic
Paddy	0.68	0.21	6.35*
Wheat	0.87	0.32	11.33*
Cotton	0.72	1.25	6.61*
Mustard	0.39	0.36	3.34*

\* Significant at 1% level.

The argument of the MPC that MSP would drive up the retail inflation rate in the economy can be statistically tested by estimating the correlation between MSP and retail inflation rate during 2005–06 to 2017–18. For kharif crops, the notified MSP in the current year would be effective from 1 October of the same year, and therefore, it is logical to presume that the effect of increased income with the farmers from sales proceeds through MSP and monopoly procurement would be reflected on the rural demand and



inflation with a minimum lag of four months. The MSP of paddy and cotton in the current year is correlated with the quarterly inflation rate from 1 January in the next year. As paddy procurement is more decentralised as compared to wheat and other major crops, the impact of MSP on the rural demand and inflation would be more visible.

### MSP and Inflation

The correlation between MSP and rate of inflation in the first quarter of the year (from 1 January to 31 March) was -0.207 for paddy and -0.128 for cotton. For wheat and mustard, the MSP is announced in October every year and procurement commences from 1 April as these crops are grown in the rabi season. Therefore, the MSP of wheat is correlated with the quarterly inflation rate commencing from 1 July (retail inflation rate in the third quarter) and the correlation coefficient for wheat was -0.340 for the period 2005–06 to 2016–17. In the case of mustard, the procurement is highly irregular and the quantity procured is insignificant to deduce anything from correlation coefficient for the period between

2005–06 and 2016–17. The correlation between MSP for the three major crops (excluding mustard) was considered in the analysis and the retail inflation rate was found to be statistically insignificant, and the observed trend broadly confirmed that there was no valid reason (statistically) to argue that the MSP for agricultural commodities had driven up inflation in India.

If increments in MSP were the primary driver of inflation, the rate hike could have been halted until the next scheduled meeting of the MPC in October 2018 as argued by one of its members, who did not agree to the hike in policy rate in August 2018. The logic for delaying the hike in policy rates is based on grounds that farmers often receive the proceeds from the monopoly procurement three to four months after sale. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure for procurement with the agencies of the governments prevents farmers from selling their produce immediately after the harvest, and this further delays the receipt of sale proceeds under MSP. The Indian experience suggests that the monetary policy would have an impact on output

with a lag of 2–3 quarters and on inflation, a lag of 3–4 quarters (Acharya 2017). Dholakia was right in his argument that even if the anticipated spurt in rural demand triggered by the hike in MSP had occurred, as speculated by the MPC, the potential output could have been effectively managed by levelling it up to the spike in demand with a policy rate hike in October 2018 (RBI 2018b). Gulati had observed that unpaid Food Corporation of India (FCI) food subsidy bills had accumulated to a whopping sum of ₹1.34 lakh crore over the years as on 31 March 2018 (Gulati 2018). The unpaid bills were eight times higher than the estimated additional burden of ₹15,000 crore for procuring agricultural produce under the revised MSP in 2018. Is there any possibility of immediate payment this time? If there is no immediate payment, the revised MSP rate would not push up the price level as anticipated by the MPC. It is rather strange to note that policy rate hike became inevitable on account of the spike in MSP because the MPC had already started its deliberations on policy rate hike almost a month before the announcement of MSP. There were

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several factors that placed a higher upside risk on inflation in the economy, as core CPI inflation had reached 6.4% in June 2018 under the influence of global factors and volatility in crude oil prices. The policy rate hike can be qualified as a Pavlovian response in the light of such hard facts and figures.

The repo rate is connected to other rates in the financial markets and a hike in the former amounts to tightening liquidity in the money market. The hike in repo rate could be consequential as it would push up the cost of borrowing in formal as well as informal money markets. Farmers and petty commodity producers depend more on the informal credit market (non-institutional sources), particularly in rural India, for reasons sufficiently documented in the literature. Incidence of indebtedness of rural households showed that borrowing from non-institutional sources is significantly higher in the lowest deciles of the population defined in terms of asset holdings. It is found that 72% of indebted rural households in the lowest four deciles resort to non-institutional sources for credit. The Spearman rank correlation showed a positive and significant (0.0988\*\*) relationship between size of asset holdings and incidence of indebtedness from institutional sources of rural households in India (NSSO 2014). It is worth mentioning here that 89% of institutional credit is disbursed for a rate of interest of less than or equal to 15%, whereas 74% of the credit doled out from non-institutional sources attracts an annual rate of interest of more than 15% (NSSO 2014). Two consecutive hikes in policy rates indicated that the RBI had indirectly pushed the cost of credit, and thereby, the supply price of agricultural commodities in India. The total effect of such a spike in policy rate would be the pushing up of the supply price of farm produce, which has already been thrown into the state-managed crisis for the last two decades. Further, spike in cost of borrowing could neutralise the likely monetary gains from the announced hike in MSP.

The MPC observed that the NMS of the RBI would be adhered to and it meant that the future policy rate hike could be paused or reversed, if global financial

uncertainties were cleared. It has also been acknowledged that leakages of global inflation to the domestic economy facilitated by monetary reforms have weakened the link between monetary aggregates and inflation in India. The RBI has estimated that a 10% depreciation of the domestic currency would drive inflation up by 0.5%. Ghosh et al (2017) argued that "there is a significant impact of global uncertainty on the monetary policy of India." Leakages of global inflation to the Indian economy would sound a better reason for expected inflation because of eruption of global financial uncertainties in the backdrop of the Fed rate hike, trade wars and expected currency war. Unfortunately, none of the factors in the changing global macroeconomic scenario and its linkages with domestic money market outcomes were highlighted in the press conference of the MPC or the mainstream media in India.

Overemphasis on MSP amounts to cascading the monetary management system into a narrow groove of the market liberalism, ignoring the hardships and reproduction crisis that farmer and agricultural labourers, who account for about half of the workforce in India, have been undergoing for the last quarter of a century. Ever since the introduction of the neo-liberal regime in India in 1991, the protagonists of market reforms have also argued for doing away with MSP as it distorts the market for agricultural commodities. The neo-liberal market framework objects to the use of MSP because liberalism demands the state's absolute non-intervention in the market for small producers and the MPC also shared the same anti-farmer stance.

### Conclusions

The MPC of the RBI revised upward the policy rates consecutively for the second time in 2018, but the policy rate hikes were not in conformity with the ground macroeconomic realities in India. Moreover, the role and functions of the RBI have been narrowed down to a single-point agenda of regulating inflation within the desired range as warranted by the NMS embedded in the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) regime. The FIT monetary regime is known for its plutocratic bias.

While revising the repo rates to 6.5%, the MPC placed the onus on the recently announced MSP for agricultural commodities, alleging that it might firm up rural demand and drives up the price level in the economy. Although the government announces MSP every year, farmers are often dissuaded from availing monopoly procurement system primarily on account of its inbuilt labyrinth-like structure and procedures. In effect, the standpoint of the MPC on MSP is in conformity with the neo-liberal arguments for withdrawing state support system to the petty commodity producer in India. The present monetary regime and the hike in repo rates amounted to tightening liquidity and it may push up the cost of production, eventually driving out small producers, including farmers from their traditional occupation. It would not only neutralise the effect of the revision in MSP, but aggravate the crisis of agricultural and allied sectors and small producers in the non-agricultural segments.

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# Are Loan Waivers a Panacea for Rural Distress?

NILANJAN BANIK

Small and marginal farmers are not the real beneficiaries of loan waivers. In the year following loan waivers, small farmers lose out on three counts: lower access to formal loans, falling agricultural revenue because of higher informal loan costs, and falling agricultural productivity. Instead, supply-side interventions could make a real difference in farmers' lives as a long-term alternative to loan waivers.

On the eve of Karnataka elections, farm loan waivers were one of the major election promises. Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy eventually fulfilled his pre-poll assurance and announced farm loan waivers of up to ₹34,000 crore (with a cap of ₹2 lakh per family). Starting in 2017 Karnataka is the fifth state (after Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh) to have implemented farm loan waiver programmes. Another poll-bound state, Rajasthan announced farm loan waivers, and the main opposition party, Indian National Congress, has promised farm loan waivers in Chhattisgarh if voted to power. As a result of farm loan waivers, there is a likelihood that during fiscal year 2018–19, India's fiscal deficit may widen to ₹1,07,700 crore. During 2016–17, the total amount of debt relief programmes announced by the governments of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab amounted to ₹77,000 crore or 0.5% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016–17 (Kundu 2017). If all the states in India were to waive 50% of their farm debt, it would cost 1% of India's GDP in 2016–17 price.

## Small Farmers and Waivers

Unfortunately, the real benefit to small and marginal farmers (with less than 2 hectares (ha) of landholding size) will not come from loan waiver programmes. This is because only 15% of small farmers have access to institutional credit (formal credit), and loan waiver schemes typically cater to farmers who have availed formal loans (Figure 1, p 15).

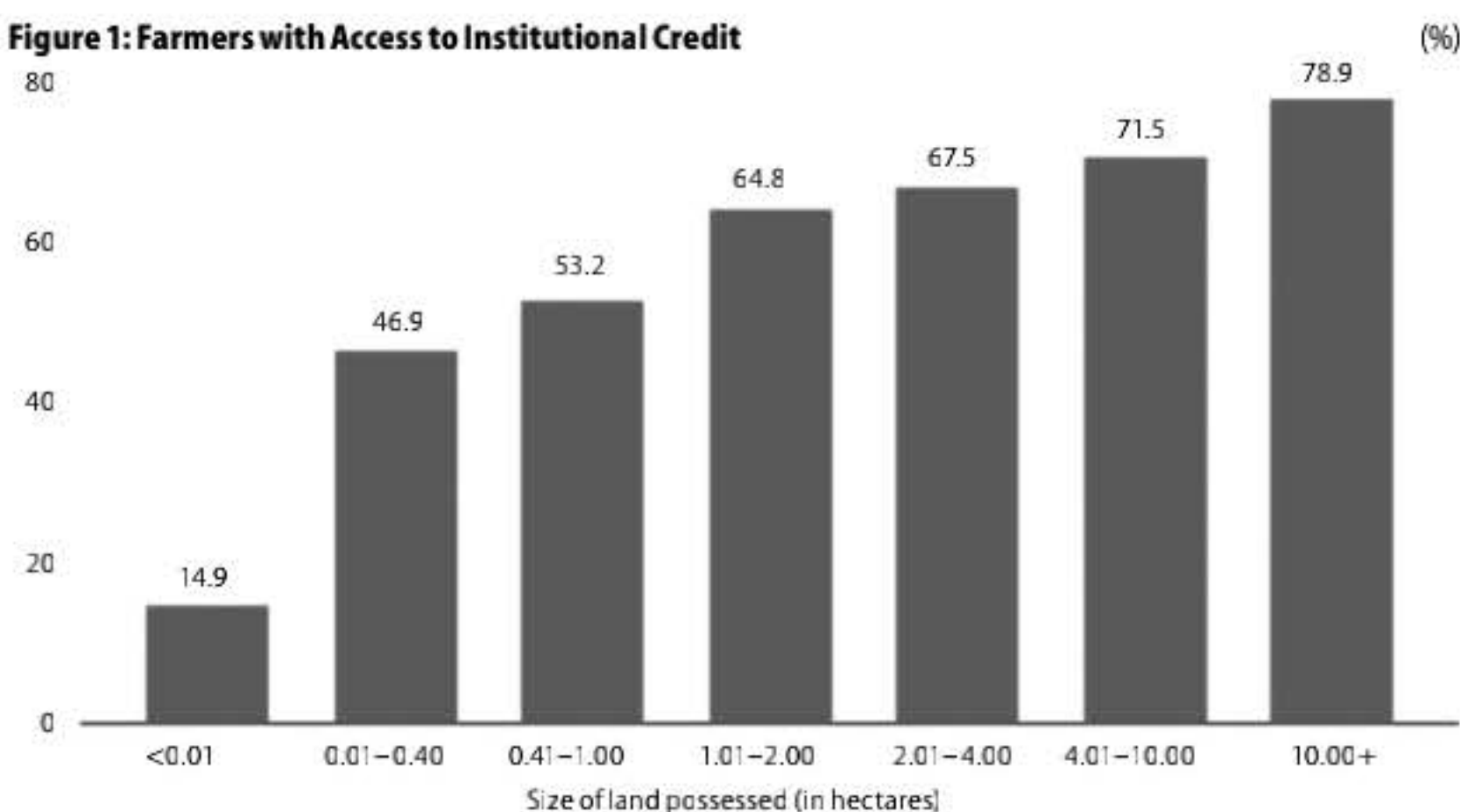
Once a loan waiver is announced, banks usually stop giving loans to farmers qualifying for loan waivers during the next loan cycles (Kanz 2016; Giné and Kanz 2018).<sup>1</sup> The banks lose on the interest payment, and at times it is not clear within what time frame any state government is going to repay the principal

amount, leading to credit rationing. Then there are issues related to moral hazard whereby more productive farmers who can pay off their loan, deliberately default. Rath (2008) points out that those farmers, who had already repaid their loans before the announcement of loan waivers, feel cheated and therefore are reluctant to pay fresh loans. Some farmers believe that such write-offs will occur from time to time, and therefore are unenthusiastic about the repayment. Kanz (2016) shows that beneficiary farmers appear less concerned about the reputational effects of defaulting on their loans.

Evidence suggests that quite often small farmers use the money saved from loan waivers for consumption purposes instead of using it as an investment to augment farm productivity. Analysing the loan waiver programme announced by the Uttar Pradesh government in 2011, Chakraborti and Gupta (2017) find that as compared to the non-eligible households, eligible households in districts that received loan waivers had higher consumption expenditure by approximately ₹8,000 per year. Furthermore, the eligible households also tend to spend significantly more on social events such as weddings and family occasions. This study points out that within the same district, households that received loan waivers had no significant productivity difference when compared with the households which are not eligible. Households expect governments to intervene so that the credit institutions do not seize their collateral in the case of default. The expectation that they can avoid any penalty for non-repayment of a loan is likely to affect household decisions regarding the utilisation of loans. At a time when it is costly for banks to operationalise bank branches in remote rural areas, such a problem associated with moral hazard is the reason why state-owned as well as private commercial banks are reluctant to extend credit to a large number of small farmers. The bottom line is that small farmers lose out both in terms of access to formal loan and a lower agricultural output as debt forgiveness is likely to disincentivise farmers from using loans for productive investments.

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**Figure 1: Farmers with Access to Institutional Credit**

Source: National Sample Survey Office's 2013 situation assessment survey of farm households, Government of India.

Yet, political parties use farm loan waivers as a strategy for winning elections. As has been seen time and time again, "farmers first" provides political mileage. With more than 55% of Indians earning their livelihood through the agricultural sector, it comes as no surprise that political parties like to place their bets on the farmers' cause.

### Real Gainers

The big and mid-size farmers (with more than 2 ha of landholding size) are the ones who gain the most from farm loan waivers. Giné and Kanz (2018) show that the loan waivers during the current loan cycle prompt banks to reduce credit outlay for small and marginal farmers during the next loan cycle. Post bailout, farmers below the 2 ha cut-off experience an 8% point reduction in formal lending. The implication of this finding is that the farmers with more than 2 ha receive more credit after the bailout that is made available to them at the cost of small farmers who qualified for loan waivers. The benefit to larger farmers is simply the total formal credit increase multiplied by the interest rate differential between formal and informal sectors. This amounts to ₹535 crore per year.

A K Tripathi (2017) shows that the average rate of interest on formal credit is 11.6%, while for informal credit it is 25.20%. Both these interest rates represent the weighted average of diverse sources of credit, including banks and government (formal) as well as moneylenders, shopkeepers, friends, family, and landlords (informal). Kanz (2016) indicates

that farmers are able to substitute 75% of the formal credit gap with informal sources of debt. If this were to come from costly moneylenders, then the extra interest expense would be significant. He also suggests that the credit gap is mostly filled with loans from friends and relatives. However, the fact remains that in the advent of credit rationing, the small farmers increasingly rely on costly informal credit. For the farmers relying on costly informal loans, they invest 15% less on agricultural inputs in comparison to the farmers who do not face credit rationing (Kanz 2016). Costly informal loans reduce their purchasing power and to an extent reduce farm productivity, thereby cutting revenue for the most vulnerable farmers by 13.5%. Loan waivers mostly help richer and bigger farmers, leaving smaller farmers worse off in the future.

We studied responses to farmer distress in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (Banik 2018 a,b). Of the two states, farmer distress appears more pronounced in Andhra Pradesh, which has one of the highest national rates of farmer suicides, at 47 per 1,000 population between 2010 and 2012. Nationally, between 2012 and 2015, over 10,000 farmers committed suicide.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, Andhra Pradesh announced a loan waiver costing the state exchequer ₹24,000 crore. In terms of generating a benefit-cost ratio, our work for Andhra Pradesh shows that waiving formal loans for landholders with less than 2 ha would cost ₹24,860 crore. The benefits will be slightly lower at ₹24,629 crore. Giving out a rupee to achieve just

99 paise of benefit is a poor deal (Banik 2018a). For Rajasthan, our analysis shows that waiving formal loans for landholders with less than 2 ha would cost ₹11,731 crore. The benefits will be slightly lower at ₹9,537 crore. Like in the case with Andhra Pradesh, for Rajasthan giving out a rupee to achieve just 80 paise of benefit is also a poor deal (Banik 2018b). Furthermore, spending thousands of crores on less effective policies leaves less for much more effective ones.

Loan waivers are not the solution to the farming crisis. In the year following loan waivers, small farmers lose out on three counts: lower access to formal loans, falling agricultural revenue because of higher informal loan cost, and falling agricultural productivity. This has a wider implication on income distribution. Eighty-three percent of the farmers in India who qualify for loan waivers are marginal and small farmers. The median annual wage of these farmers is around \$290, which is barely two months' minimum wage in Mumbai, the commercial capital of India. A low farm income not only exacerbates the rising income inequality, but also has been a reason for farmer suicides in India.

### Supply-side Interventions

What interventions, then, could be more helpful? One answer is reducing waste of perishable fruits, vegetables and milk that command a higher market price than staple crops. Most small farmers do not risk growing perishable crops. Nearly 20% of India's fresh produce is wasted because of storage problems. Because of lack of storage facilities small and marginal farmers seldom venture to grow high-value crop. Only 22.2% of marginal farmers (with less than 1 ha of landholding size) and 23.6% of small farmers (between 1 and 2 ha of landholding size) grow any high-value crops. Small and marginal farmers are likely to gain from shifting to high-value crops, after which the likelihood of a farmer being poor will be 3%–7% lower (Banik 2018a).

The National Centre for Cold-chain Development (NCCD) (2016) has estimated Rajasthan's total requirement for storing milk, fruits and vegetables at 74,889 metric tonnes (mt). Providing pack houses and



trucks would cost ₹5,985 crore. The benefits in terms of the reduced wastage in milk, fruits and vegetables, are worth more than 15 times this amount. Similarly, for Andhra Pradesh, the current total storage requirement for storing milk, fruits and vegetables stands at 7,44,650 mt. The total number of pack houses required is 4,382, ripening chambers required is 5,708 and the total number of specialised trucks required for transporting fruits, vegetables and milk is 1,312. About 90% of the storage requirement already exists within the state, but the remaining infrastructure needs are non-existent. To fill this gap, a one-off investment of ₹2,686 crore is required. In sum, the benefits in terms of the reduced wastage in milk, fruits and vegetables for Andhra Pradesh are worth more than nine times that figure. It is worthwhile to build more storage and warehouse facilities.

Other supply-side interventions such as village electrification and canals will help. With irrigation coverage on small landholdings being less than 40%, a bad rainfall year means crop failure. Likewise, a reform in the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act is required. In a supply chain examination study involving trade in potatoes, it was found that the middlemen can charge a commission of up to a staggering 70% (Singh 2017). For instance, during June 2017 in the Azadpur and Ghazipur markets of Delhi, the middlemen were selling common variety of potatoes at ₹5–₹7 per kilogram (kg). If these rates were being offered to farmers they should have realised between ₹250 and ₹350 for a 50 kg sack. However, in reality, the maximum price the farmers were offered was ₹100 for a 50 kg sack. Hence, most often farmers do not know the actual market prices of the commodities and it is the middlemen who siphon off most of the profits. The lack of reforms in the APMC Act prevents small farmers to sell directly to supermarkets, exporters, and agro-processors (thereby, enhancing their income).

Financial literacy is also important. Lack of financial awareness has affected the growth and deepening of agriculture finance markets.<sup>3</sup> The National Centre for

Financial Education (NCFE) conducted India's first-ever national benchmark survey of Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion in 2015 which captured a broad array of information from 76,762 respondents. The survey highlighted that the farmers are not aware of basic financial products. For example, less than 1.67% of the farmers are aware of crop insurance products. The corresponding numbers for cattle/livestock insurance and agricultural futures are 0.66% and 0.38%, respectively. Even the introduction of e-mandis—online market where farmers can sell directly to the retailers bypassing the middlemen—are helping them a little. Evidence from Rajasthan suggests that the introduction of an e-market resulted in farmers witnessing a price premium of 13%. However, at present, e-mandis are catering to only 7% of the Indian farmers and handles only around 2% of the total value of agricultural output of the country.

Waivers of farm loans may help any political party win an election once. For them to win an election twice, however, it is important to undertake policy measures that will make a real difference to the life of poor farmers.

## NOTES

- 1 Through the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008, the United Progressive Alliance government announced a ₹600 billion loan waiver package for 30 million small and marginal farmers. Both these papers examined the effects of the 2008 loan waiver scheme. The amount of loans waived was equivalent to 1% of India's GDP in 2016–17.
- 2 In addition to loans taken for agriculture, there may be other factors contributing to farm suicides. Citing reference from a report by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Rath (2008) argues the reasons for farmers' indebtedness may arise because of

the loans taken for weddings and drinking habits. Some farmers are mentally imbalanced, while others are committing suicide due to family or unknown reasons.

- 3 Agricultural finance refers to financial services ranging from short-, medium-, and long-term loans, to leasing, to crop and livestock insurance, covering the entire agricultural value chain—input supply, production and distribution, wholesaling, processing and marketing.

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# The Citizen Finds a Home

## Identity Politics in Karbi Anglong

GAURAV RAJKHOWA, ANKUR TAMULIPHUKAN, BIDYUT SAGAR BORUAH

On a fact-finding trip to the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, the authors find that the “crisis of citizenship” is a structural phenomenon rooted in the history of capitalist development and community dynamics in the state. The current political dispensation of establishing the “Hindu” Bengali as the “citizen” is not only a breach of the universal principles of “citizenship,” but also has deeper implications for the unresolved ethnic conflicts in the state.

The “citizen,” it seems, is once again in crisis. In keeping with its long-held position on the matter of providing asylum to Hindu refugees fleeing religious persecution in the Asian neighbourhood, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government introduced the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, in the last Parliament session. The bill explicitly promises Indian citizenship to all Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists and Christians living in India, who are refugees from religious persecution in “Muslim” countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan—and reduces the stipulated period of residency to six years. Its real import, however, lies in its exclusions of the Muslims from this amendment. As critics have pointed out, the bill attempts to attach to the universal principles of “citizenship” a specific religious identity. Their prescriptions, likewise, look to restore “citizenship” in transcendence over specific identities (Garg 2016; Suryanarayan and Ramaseshan 2016).

The effects of this proposed amendment, however, are not restricted to mere legalities. In Assam, for example, the issue of “illegal immigrant” has had a long and tenuous history. Even though the proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Bill promises to have a significant effect on politics in Assam, there has been a renewed effort to evict encroachers from reserved forests and national park areas (*Assam Tribune* 2016). The government as well as the media have liberally played upon the slippage between “illegal encroacher” and “illegal immigrant” in its representation of the Bengali-speaking Muslims in the main. They are presently bearing the brunt of the eviction drives. Although the new-found enthusiasm in these initiatives seems to have emerged from the changed political dispensation in the state since the 2016 Legislative Assembly elections, but their unfolding

is embedded in the longer history of migration and ethnic conflict in Assam.

The observations from a fact-finding visit by the authors to Diphu in the Karbi Anglong district between 25 and 27 August 2016, provide a nuanced understanding of the ongoing “crisis of citizenship” (Tamuliphukan et al 2016; Boruah et al 2016). The authors begin by acknowledging the fact that historically the notion of citizenship in Assam has had a precarious existence. Caught amidst the chronic failure of the state’s welfare apparatus, an inherent suspicion towards mass political participation, and persistent challenges to state sovereignty, the “crisis of citizenship” is potentially a structural feature of the nation state in Assam.

### ‘Hindu Bengali’ as the ‘Citizen’

The fact-finding visit to Diphu was held in the context of the “surrender” of 51 cadres of an organisation called “Banga Sena,”<sup>1</sup> during 11–17 August 2016, before the district collector of Karbi Anglong. Alleged to be involved in acts of sabotage in Bangladesh in 2003, the Bangladesh Rifles handed over a list of 29 camps of the Banga Sena and the Bir Banga Sena situated along the India–Bangladesh border; while another list of 39 camps was provided in 2004 (Bhattacharya 2004). Earlier, in 2003, some 400 activists were arrested in a protest at a border outpost in North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. In Assam’s Karbi Anglong district, they held their first meeting in Borbil in 2007, but were later denied permission for subsequent meetings. They, however, conducted a slew of meetings elsewhere in the state over the past year-and-a-half. In the summer of 2015, a meeting was held in Amsoi (Nagaon district), then in Coochbehar, and finally in Guwahati in January 2016 on the occasion of Subhash Chandra Bose’s 119th birth anniversary.

In the course of their visits and meetings, the authors observed that the organisation had adapted to the specificities of the political situation in Karbi Anglong. In a distinctive pattern of “recruitment,” the organisation was trying to draw members from local communities. The group that surrendered in August, for instance, comprised 48 Karbi and three

The authors acknowledge the invaluable help and comments from Sanjay Barbora and Surjyasikha Pathak over the course of writing this article.

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Nepali youths. Additionally, conversations with the surrendered revealed that the above-mentioned meetings in 2015–16, too, were attended by many Assamese, Bodo, Karbi, and Nepali cadres. More than the groups' alleged involvement in armed activities in Bangladesh, what formed the focal point of the fact-finding group's enquiry was their positioning within the imagined nation called Bangabhumii and its discourse.

With many of the ethnic "recruits"/cadres complaining about the meetings being conducted entirely in Bengali, which is incomprehensible to most of them, it appeared that these groups are excluded from the national discourse. While the tokens they held as evidence of their membership of the organisation, such as the identity cards issued in the name of the Bangabhumii National Army, and badges imprinted with the "Sri" that was emblazoned with the Bangabhumii flag, which they were instructed to wear in public, indicated that they were to be identified within the nation.

It was not about enlisting their loyalty to the nation state of Bangabhumii. Rather, these practices were attempts to establish

the "Bengali Hindu" identity of a citizen, by relegating his/her ethnic particularities.

Alongside the grandiose reiteration of the Hindu Bengali identity through these various tokens/display of citizenship, there were also attempts to suggest to the "recruits" the proximity of their leadership to the state. These ranged from the narratives about an arrested leader/hero who was let off in the course of the night of the arrest itself, to providing railway fare exemption coupons to the cadres/recruits for their trips to Guwahati to attend party meetings. While nothing was known about the reason for the leader's arrest and subsequent release, the respondents did acknowledge that the coupons were duly recognised by the railway ticketing authorities. However, this is a common occurrence in the country in general, with large groups travelling to political or religious meetings being treated with leniency by the authorities habitually. The point, however, is not the exact circumstances in which these may have happened. What is significant is that they are drawn into an overarching narrative of a privileged relationship between the organisation

and the state, and with it the promise of proximity to the sites of political power which in the commoners' perception is analogous to "citizen." The "Hindu Bengali" thus comes to be represented with all the paraphernalia of a "citizen," ranging from appearances to access to privileges and the vicinity of power. Thus legitimised, this citizen may then establish skewed and unequal relations with other "ethnic" interests who do not enjoy a similar access and substantive participation in the processes of citizenship.

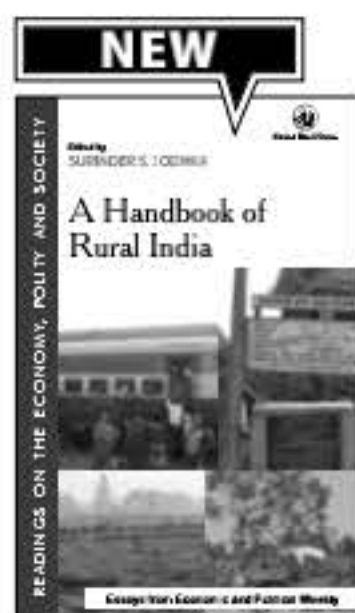
### 'Refugee' as the 'Citizen'

In Assam's current context, the "citizen" is realised in the slippage from "refugee" to "illegal immigrant" by elevating one ethnic identification above and/or against others. The legitimacy of the "refugee" is underwritten by the authority of the state: theirs is a demand that "must" be accommodated, as opposed to other ethnic demands. Concurrently, there has been a shift in the discourse on Hindu Bengali immigrants in recent months. An important aspect of their assertion is about being recognised as "refugees from religious persecution" rather than infiltrators/illegal

## A Handbook of Rural India

Edited by

**SURINDER S JODHKA**



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'Rural' and 'urban' are the foremost categories through which social life has been visualised and engaged with in modern and contemporary times. The idea of the 'rural' or the 'village' has been of particular significance in India.

Gandhi advocated 'a return to the village' as the only genuine way to gaining swaraj, or self-rule. Nehru and Ambedkar too saw the village as the site of India's traditional life; however, to them it was also a signifier of India's economic backwardness and social ills. These notions have shaped social science scholarship, popular politics and public policy.

This volume provides a historical perspective on the subject of the 'rural' and covers a wide range of topics that have been critical to the imaginings and empirics of village life in contemporary India. This comprehensive collection will be an invaluable source for students and scholars of sociology, social anthropology, economics, development studies and public policy.

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foreign nationals in contrast to the Muslim evacuees.

This attempt to cast all Hindu migrants from Bangladesh as victims of religious persecution received much play in the 2016 Assam Assembly elections. The BJP in its campaign endorsed two positions on the immigrant's question. While the chief ministerial candidate Sarbananda Sonowal endorsed the 1971 cut-off established through the Assam Accord, the former Congressman and now BJP minister Himanta Biswa Sarma endorsed the deportation of all immigrants arriving after 1951, and the simultaneous granting of refugee status to all Hindu migrants, albeit without full voting rights (Bhattacharjee 2016). At a meeting of the Karbi Anglong Bangali Samaj (KABS) held in Lanhing on 22 August, the BJP member of the Legislative Assembly from Hojai, Shiladitya Deb, argued for the case of Tripura, where the influx of Bangladeshi Muslims could be thwarted primarily by the "deshpremik" (patriotic) Hindu Bengalis, notwithstanding the alleged marginalisation and continued exploitation of the indigenous communities of Tripura at the hands of these selfsame deshpremiks.

While the claim to a refugee identity has always figured prominently in the political discourse of the Hindu Bengali community in Karbi Anglong, their demands have shifted significantly over the years. The KABS, for instance, was set up in 1999 as a democratic organisation to resist arbitrary harassment of the community members in the guise of being "D voters," and to protest targeted violence by contemporary insurgent groups operating in the area. In 2005, the organisation actively demanded changes to the landownership policy to accommodate Hindu Bengalis, and further in recent times, the reservation of five Bengali-dominated constituencies in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

In a discussion with the authors, four-time member of Parliament Jayanta Rongpi noted that starting with 200 families in the 1960s, the Hindu Bengali community has now grown to become the second-largest community in the district. The idea that the community should now claim landownership and electoral reservations in a Sixth Schedule area is

quite unsettling. While KABS adviser Kishore Choudhury punctuated his claims for the legitimacy of the organisation's demands with lamentations about the worsening of situations for the Hindu Bengali community ever since the beginning of the movement for a Karbi Anglong Autonomous State.

### Differentiated Citizenship

Capitalist development in Assam is historically characterised by a high mobility of mercantile communities and labour. Similarly, clearing of wastelands and forested areas for agriculture has been by conscious policy decisions, and/or due to displacement by riverine erosion, ethnic conflicts or developmental projects. As a result, class relations have historically been articulated through a peculiarly communitarian logic. The post-colonial state sought to administer this mobility through the fixity of spatially ordered ethnic categories, leading to demands for political and administrative autonomy based on the agendas of citizenship and ethnicity, through the 1980s and 1990s.

The movement for an autonomous state of Karbi Anglong gained strength in the 1980s with the attempt to make a case for differentiated citizenship for the Karbi community to preserve their cultural distinctiveness and ameliorate their marginalisation in bureaucratic/political representation by the Assamese majoritarianism, and economic exploitation by the Bengali and Marwari merchants and moneylenders. At the same time, the leadership of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) also attempted to articulate Karbi as a nationality rather than an ethnic identity. In doing so, the movement engaged with the complexities of multi-community political representation in the subsequently formed the Autonomous Council.

Against this, the state has defended the citizen, and by extension, the community of those who perform this citizenship by categorising all such articulations of the nationality question as either second-order, "ethnic" identifications, or as threats to the normal exercise of the rights of citizenship. This apparatus responds by selectively transforming political demands

into formalised procedures of administering communities, resources, or security threats.

In the last two decades, the migrant question has become extremely complex, owing to fundamental changes in the agrarian landscape resulting in new patterns of migration from and to the state; colossal population displacement; and vacillating autonomy movements in the face of the gradual dereliction of the welfare state, and the renewed attacks on the idea of differentiated privileges for differentially situated citizens. In recent years, these transformations have led to heightened ethnic tensions, with conflicts breaking out frequently in different parts of the state.

In this light, Rongpi's apprehensions and Choudhury's legitimisation of the recent turn of events represent the fissure in the current discourse of illegal immigrants/refugees. In this context, re-signifying the Hindu Bengali as a "secular" category (refugee) masks the community's ongoing social proximity with the bureaucracy and dominant economic interests. The claim to the term "refugee" enables an already economically dominant community to demand political representation as well. Moreover, with "refugee" being a potentially countable category of population, there is room for a minimal justification for political representation, be it directly as reserved constituencies or indirectly as political negotiation.

### Citizens' Insecurities

In recent years, the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) is perceived as a redefined measure for identifying the illegal Bangladeshi migrant and thereby resolve the "problem" once and for all. But, Anupama Roy points out that,

The NRC marks continuity with a notion of citizenship that can be traced to the Assam Accord, the contestations around the amendment of the Citizenship Act in 1986, and subsequently the Supreme Court judgment in the Sarbananda Sonowal case 2005. (Roy 2016: 50)

The Assam Accord of 1985 referred by her played out between two opposing tendencies of establishing a principle of "graded citizenship" (Roy 2010: 105) versus the



protection of the cultural identity of the Assamese. On the other hand, the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) (IMDT) Act invoked an exception to the Foreigners Act, 1946 in delineating procedures for detection of foreign nationals that were relatively more cumbersome for the juridical and administrative authorities to implement. Most importantly, both these measures ultimately emerged as reinforcers of the central government's sole authority in arbitrating on questions of citizenship (Roy 2010: 100). The festering antagonism over the IMDT Act was resolved when the Supreme Court in 2005 declared it to be an unconstitutional measure. This, however, inaugurated a new regime of the security state that aims to, first, identify aliens on the basis of religious, ethnic and linguistic markers; and then, treats them as dangerous or "infiltrators" to national sovereignty and not just illegal migrants.

Offering the promise of accuracy and reliability of a technocratic regime of surveillance (Roy 2016: 50), the NRC seemed to separate the politics from the legalities of the illegal immigrant question. But, the optimism has been somewhat premature. For those expecting that the conclusion of the NRC process and the subsequent identification of illegal immigrants would "return" Assam's authentic citizens to it, are disillusioned. The proposed amendment to the Citizenship Bill threatens to effectively grant citizenship to a significant section that is supposed to be left out of the NRC, thereby compromising the NRC's foolproof mechanism. Organisations protesting this "conspiracy" to disenfranchise the legitimate indigenous citizens of Assam, have affirmed their faith in the NRC process (Sentinel 2016). However, the argument has not quite found traction in public discourse. This presents a curious situation—on the one hand, people have been quite proactive in getting themselves registered in the NRC; but on the other, there seems to be relatively little concern about the possible subversion of its ends. It would seem as if "the wide-spread acceptance of the NRC among the Assamese people is indicative of a consensus among the Assamese people on the resolution of the question of citizenship" (Roy 2016: 50).

But the instance of Karbi Anglong makes it evident that the issue is not so straightforward. It might be more productive to read this apparent lack of enthusiasm by asking, instead: "why does this idea of a bureaucratically ratified citizenship presumably hold so little promise?" Despite of the immense technological and bureaucratic resources mobilised, initiatives such as the NRC are unable to "resolve" the problem of the genuine citizen. Rather, its procedures of identifying and classifying illegal immigrants from genuine citizens only provide the new coordinates for the field of ethnic conflict in which the struggle for the privileges of citizenship will play out.

### Conclusions

The state's attempt to resolve the crisis of citizenship seems unable to transform the social antagonisms set off as effects of contemporary patterns of capitalist development. Paradoxically, it is in its failure that the new figure of the citizen is most productive. In this frontier of the Indian state, the figure of citizen cannot claim transcendence above the field of ethnic identities, rather it is one more identity within it. At the same time, this citizen is able to establish unequal relations of political representation with other "ethnic" identities.

It is not because of the teeming migrants that citizenship is in "crisis" in Assam today—citizenship has always been precarious in its authority and whimsical in its guarantees here. Complicit in the

exclusion of vast sections of the population from the substantive processes of politics, one fears the citizen becomes a figure of political dependency rather than emancipation. At this juncture, the efficacy of the figure of the "citizen" brought about by these changes needs to be scrutinised, particularly in light of the unresolved ethnic conflict in Assam for the last few decades.

### NOTE

- 1 Banga Sena was set up on 26 March 1982 by Kalidas Baidya as part of the movement for an independent Bangabhum, to be comprised of the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Barisal and Patuakhali in Bangladesh. The organisation finds support primarily among Hindu Bengalis who fled to West Bengal, Assam and Tripura in the wake of the Bangladesh war in 1971.

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# Remembering K Raghavendra Rao

RAJARAM TOLPADI

K Raghavendra Rao's death is a loss to the academic community. But the legacy he has left behind of reconstructing the domain of political ideas in the complex cultural milieu of India will be continued meaningfully by his successors.

**K** Raghavendra Rao, an eminent political theorist from Karnataka and a fascinating teacher of political science, passed away on 11 October 2018, at the age of 90, at his residence in Dharwad. Rao belonged to that singular generation of scholar-cum-educationists who considered teaching to be more a calling, than a profession. He relished the aesthetics of reading, reflecting and writing and had carved a niche for himself in the fields of political theory and literature. This piece of writing is a modest attempt at delineating some distinct and distinguished aspects of his vibrant intellectual life.

## Education and Professional Life

Rao hailed from a Brahmin family of Karnataka, settled in Hospet, a town bordering the adjacent state of Andhra Pradesh. Though raised in a bilingual environment, he was more acclimatised to Telugu than Kannada. He completed intermediate-level education from Guntur, with distinction; graduated from Madras Christian College with honours in English, and then obtained master's degrees in both English literature and political science. Such interdisciplinary education had enabled him to navigate the breadth and depth of the discipline of humanities.

On the other hand, serving in different institutions across the country gave him a platform for continual learning and teaching in uniquely varied contexts. He taught at his alma mater, Madras Christian College for a short duration and then joined the department of political science of the Gauhati University, Assam. Later, he joined the political science department in Karnataka University, Dharwad as reader and spent most of his teaching career there. During this period, Rao also obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Toronto, Canada. He wrote a dissertation on the "Unification of Karnataka." Towards the end of his teaching career, Rao was appointed professor and head of the

political science department at the Mangalore University and eventually retired from there.

Superannuation was just another phase in the academic horizon of such an unstoppable multifarious intellectual. That he continued teaching political science and pursued meaningful research even after official retirement is a testimony to his relentless pursuit of knowledge. Rao was the University Grants Commission (UGC) emeritus professor at the Mangalore University; a fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla; and held the Zakir Hussain Chair at the Mysore University. These were acknowledgements of his academic brilliance.

Rao was a representative of that vibrant community of Indian political theorists who saw the necessity and desirability of embedded political theory. His perpetual endeavour comprised the reconstruction and re-conceptualisation of Western political theories against the cultural milieu in which he was situated.

## Nuanced Marxism

As an expert on Marxism, Rao never considered this concept as a doctrine or a fixed immutable ideology. Marxism to him was a constantly evolving and developing theoretical perspective, a constant becoming, as it were. It is precisely this openness to knowledge that enabled him to apply not only multiple but even divergent intellectual resources for conducting an exciting journey in the realm of philosophical explorations. To Rao, there were no limiting barriers, ideology or otherwise, to tether his vision. One could easily slip into labelling him a "philosophical anarchist" or a futuristic traveller on a planet full of exciting and undiscovered location.

Rao's major publication *Contradictions: Political Theory, Sociology, and Ideology* stands testimony to the theoretical open-endedness that he always wished to represent. This book tries to reconstruct the domain of political ideas by traversing through a broad spectrum of thinkers and their ideas. It provides a rereading of Aristotle, Augustine, Hegel and Marx of the Western world as it offers new perspectives on Kautilya, Gandhi, Mao and Fanon of the non-European world.

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What is striking is the ease and comfort with which Rao has been able to handle abstract and complex political concepts and categories.

This theoretical open-endedness which is fundamental to Rao's intellectual enquiry made him keenly aware of the doctrinal tendencies within Marxism and also maintain a distance from such tendencies. He always remained conversant with the contemporary debates both within and outside Marxism in order to avoid possibilities of imitative political theory. In fact, Rao's nuanced Marxism also enabled him to re-envision Marx in the light of Indian thinkers like Gandhi, Ambedkar or Lohia. This amazing ability for convergence of vision through an uninhibited tracing of the legacy of thought makes him a distinct as well as distinguished academician of political theory.

Unfortunately, he had not been able to crystallise this refreshing idea into a formidable argument through a published volume. In this regard, Rao's arguments have remained fragmentary—still to be cultivated as a full-fledged theory. We receive these ideas in the form of some stray writings on Marx, Gandhi and Ambedkar.

It is precisely this open-ended and embedded approach to political theory that compelled Rao to pay a lot of intellectual attention to issues of coloniality and modernity. His highly complex but nuanced approach to Marxism also helped him recognise Eurocentrism and develop an autonomous but highly specialised way of doing political theory. It is this "method in the madness" or the "madness in the method" that assisted him in engaging with complex issues concerning ways of comprehending political theories and reconstructing political thoughts in such a complex civilisational and modern construct called India.

Closely linked to Rao's pursuit of embedded political theory has been his engagement with the mapping or remapping of political theory and reconstruction of political thought in Karnataka. His work *Imagining the Unimagined Communities* which takes the pride of place of being the first ever English publication by the Kannada University, Hampi, provides a critical account of how four distinct

thinkers of Karnataka, namely Alur Venkat Rao, Hardeker Manjappa, Pandit Taranath and D V Gundappa from four different locations in Karnataka, offer four different cultural perspectives of the state. This work opens up a new tradition of doing political theory in Karnataka in order to reconstruct its intellectual history differently. Similarly, Rao's work on S Nijalingappa is also pioneering in recasting the historical character and cultural content of political leadership in Karnataka.

### The Littérateur

The multifaceted personality that he was, Rao also represented a fine blend of literature and political theory. His literary sensibility was largely shaped by training in English literature, his involvement in the Writers' Workshop of Kolkata and the cultural milieu of Dharwad. This confluence epitomises the essence of Rao as an Indian poet in English and demonstrates that culture studies is really and truly integral to the study of literature. A contributor to *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, close associate of the Writers' Workshop of Kolkata, an involved participant of the compilation of Modern Indian Literature (supported by Central Sahitya Akademi), he stands tall as an authentic navigator of the sociopolitical fabric of India. Rao was in close touch with literary giants and cultural icons of Karnataka like D R Bendre, Keerthinath Kurthkoti, Chennaveera Kanavi, Shanthinath Desai, Shankar Mokashi Punekar, G S Amur, and Heremallur Ishwaran among others. His interactions with these people motivated Rao to do the kind of work that he successfully undertook and completed.

Added to this, he was also one of our best translators. He translated several classical Kannada texts into English. His translations of two of Bendre's collections of poetry into English have been widely acknowledged. He also translated S L Byrappa's highly acclaimed novels *Vamshavraksha* and *Parva* into English. Byrappa was highly appreciative of the quality of his translations. Very recently, Rao, with his wife Prabha Rao had translated some of the selected *keerthanas* of the Saint poet Kanakadasa

of 16th century Karnataka as well. To Rao, translation was recreation and transformation, but not imitation. Translation also served Rao a political purpose. It helped him introduce Karnataka and Kannada culture to the rest of India and the world. Hence, Rao cannot be considered only as a crucial academic, but also as a builder of bridges by providing the portal for cross-cultural communication, both within India and beyond.

### Continual Learner

Apart from these significant works of translation, Rao has also contributed a good deal in creative literature. He has published a collection of poems in English, written a novel and also ventured writing a play. All these different kinds of writings reflect the profoundness of his thoughts and diversity of interests.

Being a fountainhead of creativity, music did not escape this sensitive aesthete, either. A lover of music, both classical and semi-classical, he spent a lot of time listening to music and discussing it with his friends. He had cultivated a large circle of friends in Dharwad, and in other parts of Karnataka and India. There are quite a few interesting anecdotes regarding the quality time that he spent on animated discussions with total disregard to time and place. This establishes the fact that he had ingrained the sterling qualities of a true teacher as a continual learner, open to diverse opinions and ideas. A B Shah, the philosopher, was one of his close friends with whom he had a long and enduring intellectual companionship. Poet Channaveera Kanavi was Rao's family friend with whom he had forged a very close relationship.

All in all, Rao's death is a great loss to the academic community of Karnataka and India. He was one of those rare scholars who was deeply concerned about the autonomy and dignity of Kannada culture. His political theory was global, no doubt. But it was, at the same time, deeply rooted in the cultural universe of modern Karnataka. Rao leaves behind a rich, critical and self-reflexive mode of intellectual enquiry waiting to be continued meaningfully by subsequent generations.



# Evaluating Post-Sachar Interventions and the Status of Muslims in India

SAUMYA UMA

**I**n the context of the threat to the Constitution and its core values, and a gradual exclusion of marginalised and minority communities from social justice interventions, both through patent and latent means, Abusaleh Shariff's book—which evaluates the impact of initiatives taken in the post-Sachar Committee context—is like a whiff of fresh air. For long, we have had a common knowledge that most pro-minority programmes and interventions by central and state governments have only served the purpose of a “feel-good” effect on paper. This book discusses why, how and to what extent the implementation has failed, and what can be done to address and redress the issue, so that constitutional rights of religious minorities can be institutionalised.

The Sachar Committee report, released in 2006, was significant in its study of the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims—the largest religious minority community in India. The report was followed by immense public discourse and some efforts by the central government to address and redress aspects of Muslim deprivation, particularly through the Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities, in 2009. By 2012, there were calls for revision of the programme and increased accountability around expenditures and incomes. As the book points out, under the new 15 Point Programme, a unique provision was made for scholarships to minority students at the elementary and higher levels of education across all parts of the country. It was subsequently found that this scheme did not operate in West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gujarat, that is, the states that have a sizeable presence of Muslims. This is an illustrative example of the dire need for evaluation of the implementation and

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Institutionalizing Constitutional Rights: Post-Sachar Committee Scenario** by Abusaleh Shariff, *New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016; pp xxix + 485, ₹1,195.*

impact of all such beneficial schemes, to ensure that they bring a positive difference to the lives of the stakeholders who are intended to benefit from the same.

The Sachar Committee report recommended the creation of an autonomous assessment and monitoring authority. This body was intended to engage in continuous monitoring and evaluation of the extent to which the benefits reached the intended beneficiaries under the myriad policies, programmes and schemes launched by the central and state governments in pursuance of the report recommendations. A failed attempt at establishing a committee to conduct the evaluation in 2013 by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, coupled with the disinterest of the subsequent government in undertaking such an evaluation, left a looming gap in documenting, analysing and evaluating the implementation and impact of post-Sachar policies by the central and state governments. This is the gap in the pool of information available in the public domain at present that the book attempts to address. And it does so with immense conviction, amply substantiated by factual data. In the author's own words, the book is the result of “the author's response to the government's refusal to document, analyse and publicise the impact of post-Sachar policies and their associated national and state-government programmes” (pp 3–4). That it has managed to do so without the benefit of highly skilled human resources and privileged access to data

that had been provided by the Indian government for the Sachar Committee report, is a feather in its cap.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the demographics of education, economy, employment, social structure, diversity and the significance of the Human Development Index (HDI) as a tool for monitoring equal opportunity. The second part of the book critically analyses inclusive policies and programmes initiated by the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MMA), development credit and financial inclusion, special purpose programmes and public institutions favouring minorities, a case study of inclusive development of Gujarat, and finally, recommendations for equitable social and economic development in India.

## Minority Programmes

Of immense importance is a chapter that critically analyses the programmes launched by the MMA. The chapter argues that since the Sachar Committee recommendations were broad and all-encompassing, an effective implementation would have warranted its incorporation into the programmes of various line ministries such as human resource development, labour, finance, social welfare, industries and panchayati raj. Instead the UPA-II government established the MMA, and implementation took place through this single ministry. Whether it was lack of imagination, zeal, commitment, or all of these, which restricted the implementation to a single ministry, is anybody's guess. The relevant line ministries manage large amounts of budgetary allocations in relation to their functional areas, and are mandated to ensure equity and equal access to all. Then, the author rightly asks, is it not logical that the implementation would have been more effective and impactful if the line ministries were involved?

The chapter discusses the Prime Minister's revamped 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities, which includes a focus on enhancing opportunities for education, employment, improving living conditions, and prevention and control of communal riots. It analyses elaborately



on the first two aspects. Substantiated by ample data and analysis, the chapter has several findings, including that the availability of formal credit to Muslims is meagre; scholarship schemes sanctioned are much lower than the total applicants, the amount offered to students from religious minorities are not on par with the amount disbursed to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a considerable delay in disbursements exists, and shockingly, that the scholarship money is being siphoned off.

The chapter on critical analysis of the programmes of the MMA makes only a cursory reference to prevention and control of communal riots, an important aspect of the new 15 Point Programme. However, this aspect is discussed further in the final chapter of the book, where it gives recommendations for institution-building. While it is true that there have been no major instances of communal violence in recent times other than in Muzaffarnagar in 2013, states such as Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have faced low-level targeted violence, often involving acts of commission or omission by state authorities. The Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, initially drafted in 2005, underwent several modifications subsequently. The UPA-II government, through the National Advisory Council (NAC), established a working group on communal violence, comprising members from the bureaucracy and civil society, culminating in the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2011, which too, had serious concerns. As a member of the Advisory Committee of NAC's working group, I recall that a bone of contention in both the drafts was in making public servants accountable and dispensing with prior sanction from the government for prosecution of errant government officials. Reflecting this key concern, the author observes as follows:

Although it is clear that a specific bill to address communal violence is the need of the hour, whether (the) current draft will see the light of the day and get translated into reality is debatable. Any new bill or progressive piece of legislation will have to be executed by the same government, institutions and

bureaucratic machinery, including the police, who resist penalties and try to remain above the law. (p 361)

The author points to the essential nature of the proposed law for reinstating the trust of the minorities in the government, and to empower the community for justice and reparation. Given the fact that effective prosecutions of perpetrators could act as a deterrent and prevent communal violence in future on one hand, and restore the faith of the minorities in the system of justice on the other, the discussion on the topic is pertinent and timely.

### Public Institutions

A chapter that would be of interest to many is that which reviews the functioning of important public institutions favouring minorities, namely the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). Substantiated by credible data, the author, in his critical review of the NMDFC, points out that it has extremely low allocations, turnover and coverage, and that the total flow of credits from the NMDFC is negligible. This is compounded by functional and administrative constraints such as lack of accessibility to the public, absence of functional autonomy and the non-existence of an outreach programme. The author concludes that in their present form, neither the national nor state corporations have the potential to address these issues, and recommends that they be closed down, and as a viable alternative, their programmes be transferred to public sector banks.

On the NCM, the author highlights that the annual reports that have been regularly submitted by it to Parliament never get discussed; an indication of the lacklustre concern for and commitment to minority rights by the highest lawmaking body. The NCM has an explicit mandate of evaluating the development of minorities, yet senior officials of the NCM are unwilling to undertake the monitoring and evaluation of government programmes for minorities, as they are convinced it is not within their mandate. The author rightly questions how the NCM's mandate can truly be fulfilled without such an

evaluation. The NCM lacks funding as well as political autonomy, which is expected for it to function as an independent statutory body, the author opines.

Some recommendations to increase the efficiency of the NCM are made as temporary measures, including conferment of constitutional status to the NCM and vesting of powers of inquiry on par with other national commissions. In the long run, the author favours the establishment of an independent Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), which would be open to access to all communities of India, due to the non-efficient functioning of special purpose institutions such as the NMDFC and the NCM. However, a question that remains in creating a new institution such as the EOC, particularly in the present political context, is whether the institution would be allowed to have political commitment to minorities, functional autonomy and financial independence.

### 'Inclusive Development'

This book review would be incomplete if it does not make a mention of the chapter that analyses Gujarat as a case study for inclusive development. Given the hype created by the Gujarat model of development, and its promotion as a benchmark for good governance, a rational analysis of the same through the lens of the Muslim minority community, substantiated by facts and figures, is an imperative. In terms of per capita net state domestic product (PCNSDP), which is used to measure economic prosperity among communities at the state level, Gujarat has remained one of the top 10 states for a long time. However, the chapter delves into investigating the state performance through qualitative indicators such as poverty, hunger, human development and social equity, and finds deep-rooted poverty and stark income inequality among Gujarat's lower castes and Muslims in comparison to other communities. The chapter concludes that Muslims in Gujarat fare poorly on the parameters of poverty, hunger, education and vulnerability on security issues, and are facing high levels of discrimination and deprivation.

There are three limitations of the study, as highlighted by the author: the rural-urban differentials and the



gender differentials are sharp, and are imperative to understand the depth of deprivation and exclusion of communities, yet, these differentials could not be analysed due to want of time and resources. Additionally, the intra- and inter-community differentials among Muslims also warrants analysis, but could not be undertaken due to compulsions of empirical and technical standards.

While all three differentials are of immense importance, there is a particular need to analyse the impact of post-Sachar policies, programmes and schemes from the perspective of Muslim women's empowerment. Gender issues among the Muslim community are often confined to discourse around the practices of triple talaq, polygamy and *halala*. Scarce attention has been paid to evaluating the impact of post-Sachar initiatives on Muslim women's status vis-à-vis education, employment, health and

nutrition, housing and sanitation, political participation, and a general enjoyment of citizenship rights over and above issues pertaining to Muslim family law. It is hoped that the present study will pave the way for future research in this arena.

### Conclusions

Twelve years after the release of the Sachar Committee report, there are yet no indications of improvement in the socio-economic status of the Muslim community. If anything, there has been increased deprivation, discrimination and exclusion of the community from mainstream development. The Muslim community in India today faces threat to life and liberty, and extreme insecurity, going by a high incidence of targeted lynchings of members of the community in the name of cow protection. This is in addition to the vulnerability to false or

trumped-up criminal charges of terrorism leading to prolonged incarceration without bail. Those affected are mostly impoverished members of the community. Civil and political rights go hand in hand with social, economic and cultural rights, and mutually reinforce each other. An effective implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations could have resulted in socio-economic empowerment of Muslims, and reduced their vulnerability to such attacks. Shariff's book, through its various recommendations, indicates the path towards institutionalising their constitutional rights. As a counter to the current majoritarian assertion of secondary citizenship to religious minorities, the importance of this book cannot be overstated.

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## Neo-liberal Transformations and the Challenges of Governing India

MITHILESH KUMAR JHA

The book *Neo-liberal Strategies of Governing India* is a timely intervention by Ranabir Samaddar to understand governing practices in India in its most recent neo-liberal phase. This book is a companion volume to an earlier work, *Ideas and Frameworks of Governing India*, by the same author (Jha 2017). Together, these two volumes critically explore the politics and practices of governance in a postcolonial society. Samaddar's analysis of these practices combines "political and ideological aspects" of governance with "technological characteristics" and examines it "in a historical framework." While critically analysing ideas, frameworks and strategies of governing India, its inner tensions and challenges, Samaddar is equally interested in examining the evolutions of newer categories and subjecthoods as a result of such governing practices.

### Neo-liberal Strategies of Governing India

by Ranabir Samaddar, Delhi: Routledge India, 2016; pp xviii + 334, ₹1,095.

This makes his analysis of the "contemporary history of Indian democracy" unique and also very interesting. This volume deals with some of the most dramatic decades of Indian democracy that have witnessed the weakening of democratic institutions as well as domination of the market and capital over state and society. There are a series of ideological and political churnings underway in contemporary India. Social and political movements of various kinds often challenge the "official" narrative of politics and governing practices that make the business of democracy and governance a messy affair. However, contrary to many pessimistic arguments about the possibilities of social transformations in terms

of empowerment of the marginalised or excluded, Samaddar continues to believe in and highlights the "hope for a politics of radical democracy."

He has two major premises for his analysis of neo-liberal governance in India: first, "mutually constitutive relationship between the rulers and the ruled, based on norms, rules, rights and popular claims;" and second, "governance as a strategy of creating conditions of" and providing the "institutional matrix" (p viii) for accumulation. This book is divided into three parts. In Part I, there are four chapters which are not necessarily interconnected, discussing diverse issues. Examining these issues, he discusses the questions of rights and development, and assesses how they have become the sites of neo-liberal governance. Part II consists of four fascinating chapters on how various modes of governing practices strengthen the hand of the market through the state that ensures the accumulation of wealth and natural resources. He also examines how this has an impact on the society and the state at large, and the status of labour in particular. In Part III, he revisits some of the theoretical questions and conceptual frameworks on



governance in India, like the notions of crisis, its interrelationships with neo-liberal governance, passive revolution and so on.

### Development and Rights

In this neo-liberal era, development as a faster rate of economic growth lies at the very core of nationalist imagination. Achieving this faster rate of economic growth within the parliamentary framework of democracy is a serious task before the policymakers. Developmental discourse and governance continue to set the agenda of politics and governments both at the central and state levels. It allows the governments to classify the population into different target groups and to subject them to various policies and techniques of neo-liberal governance. These new tools and techniques of governance monitor and control all spheres of individual and community lives. It has created a new dynamics of power relationships.

Samaddar, using the Foucauldian perspectives on governmentality and subjectivities, invites us to examine how “these life controlling aids emerging out of the combination of development and democracy have produced in terms of new forms of power and new forms of subjugation?” (p 79) He begins by analysing how “a recalcitrant minority population” poses governing challenges to the colonial and postcolonial governments in India. He offers an interesting analysis of the politics and prospects of various commissions with regard to minority issues. He observes, perhaps rightly that “the minority issue in India since its birth hangs between two markers: identity and development.” He traces the challenges of governing the minority in the colonial era and in his estimation, the governing of minority in India oscillates between “coercion and hegemony.” However, many readers may have strong objection to a few of his observations and terminologies like “a recalcitrant minority,” “rebellious minority” (p 5), and finally, his assertion that “exactly as the minority groups face the problem of the power of the sovereign, the sovereign also faces the power of the minority groups, given the attraction of the latter

towards the ideas of autonomy and self-government” (p 4). It is hard to agree on what basis one can equate such an enormous asymmetry of power between these two groups.

Chapters 2 and 3 are a fascinating read about how basic rightlessness and vulnerabilities of a large section of the society go hand in hand with laws and administration in the country. He cites the example of how selling a child is illegal but how at the same time, starvation deaths cannot be deemed to be illegal. This study helps to understand how access to food campaign is intertwined with the language of rights on the one hand and notions like “entitlements,” “claims” and “social security” on the other. He also examines the ways in which indigenous, subaltern and other deprived groups have reacted or responded to such developmental narratives. Samaddar rightly asserts that illegalities and semi-legalities in the conditions of absolute rightlessness of the masses and the dominating nature of the administration characterise the neo-liberal strategies of governing India. Famines or near famine-like situations in various parts of the country, farmer suicides and starvation deaths, food riots, and forcible land acquisitions, such as in Singur and Nandigram, pose serious challenges for governance. Interestingly, Samaddar is of the opinion that political parties in this neo-liberal era have failed to include these concerns and grievances in their policies and programmes, and have become merely an apparatus through which one acquires and yields power. In his terminology, this shift in the approach of political parties is “governmentalization of parties” (Chapter 4).

### Extraction and Accumulation

Perhaps, one of the worst consequences of neo-liberal strategies of governance has been the coming together of the market and state which intervenes and aims to govern all spheres of the social life of individuals and communities. Labour has been the worst victim of this schema of governance, which has clearly shifted its focus from empowering the masses/citizens to produce the conditions for accumulation of wealth and natural

resources. In this new era, Samaddar argues, cities have “become new sites of extraction, accumulation and governance.” Neo-liberal strategies of governance lead to are large-scale disposessions and displacements of rural and marginalised communities and their migration to the cities. Any urban space in India is testimony to these ironies in the Indian society and the unrepresentativeness of neo-liberal governing structures.

Chapter 5 dwells upon the government's approach (combined with the logic of market and capital), to social governance and peace-building measures in India's North East. Here conflict becomes the framework of both social and political governance. Draconian and repressive measures continue to characterise the governance of the region even when the focus is on pacification and expansion of government and electoral democracy. Chapters 5 and 6 engage with the questions of political economy within the overall framework of neo-liberal governmentality. Here two things appear to move simultaneously: increasing dispossession and as a result, large-scale internal migration mostly rural to urban, and accumulation of wealth and ever widening economic disparities. Samaddar characterises this large-scale accumulation of wealth and resources as “the process of primitive accumulation” (p 228), which signifies the inner tensions of democratic politics, where the focus is now on facilitating this process rather than empowering or strengthening citizenship and representation. Here, extraction becomes the hallmark of the liberal economy. Informal work conditions of labour, guarded by “labour reforms” result in the multiplication of labour forms, that is, from one site to

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another and one form to another. The cases of mining, in Bellary in Karnataka or “rat-hole mines of Meghalaya” are examples of utter disregard for labour laws or environmental consequences. These activities operate through a nexus between illegal miners, traders, politicians and the administrative departments. In some states, they have acquired enough power to shape the electoral fates of various political parties. The existence of special economic zones (SEZs), public-private partnership (PPP) models and economic corridors further aggravate this situation. The condition of labour in such a situation is correctly expressed through the notion of “transit labour,” which is by and large migrant labour kept in the invisible informal sectors, in subhuman working conditions. In other words, transit labour operates by and large beyond the purview of law.

Samaddar has examined the various dimensions of transit labour and how it leads to the creation of ungoverned and ungovernable subjects and spaces that coexist with perfectly managed and supervised spaces and zones. Urban neighbourhoods in contemporary India are a stark reflection of such governing systems, which Samaddar calls “logistical governance” (Chapter 8). It governs not just the big infrastructural projects and plans but also the urban space. Working within the language of freedom and risk in the name of security, this form of governance ensures parallel strategies wherein fenced and walled modes of supervision coexist with the space that reminds one of the spectre of chaos, narchy and illegality.

### Neo-liberal Governance

Urban politics, protests and agitations have become the sites of neo-liberal governance that also poses serious challenges to it. In order to ensure “reckless financialization and extraction of all conceivable resources,” it is the urban masses, who according to Samaddar, are “deployed as foot soldiers in the governmental programmes of mobilisation, assembly and attacks on the unyielding sections of population to throttle” their protests or agitations (p 306). Here, the whole apparatus of governance attempt

“to posit the ideology of the market before the society as natural” and legitimises monopolies, corporates, corruption and cronyism. Further, organisation, planning and management of the city embody the principal contradictions of our time and this creates new class divisions. In such a formulation, space becomes the marker of identity and in governing such spaces, the question of the subaltern or what Samaddar also calls “multitudes,” becomes absolutely critical to our understanding. In this connection, he rightly draws our attention to not only the populist response, but also populist resistance as well as demands for reforms in the neo-liberal era of governance. Populism which symbolises the “politics of the multitude” can also present itself as the “contradictory other of the neo-liberal capitalism.” It can, according to Samaddar, very well upset the existing structure of dominations and subordinations and may also lead to mobilisations of ungovernable subjects that may open up the possibilities of radical democracy in the country, even in this neo-liberal phase of governmentality.

### Summing Up

Samaddar examines the transformative impacts of neo-liberal strategies of governance on various sections of the Indian society. This volume is a fascinating study of the contemporary history of Indian democracy and its various challenges. However, the book is also surprisingly silent about many burning issues in contemporary Indian politics. For example, he talks about minority politics and the challenges it poses to governance, but is conspicuously silent about the rise of Hindutva politics. In fact, the spectacular rise of Hindutva politics is one of the major characteristics of Indian politics in this neo-liberal era, but the author has maintained an absolute silence on this issue. Similarly, while he focuses on the urban politics and challenges of transit labour, he hardly engages with the challenges of rural distress and large-scale farmer suicides. Many readers, especially those with a keen knowledge of the specific usage and contexts of some of the terms like

governing, governance, government and governmentality may find his liberal use of these concepts not only problematic, but at times confusing too. He claims that despite knowing “the specific intonation of each word and the need to keep them distinct,” he has liberally used these terms and at times interchangeably too (p xiv). However, in the very next page, he asserts that “this book is on governing India and not on governance” (p xv) and, thus, makes a clear distinction between the two. Thirdly, like the previous volume, this one too is replete with long quotations running into several pages (pp 22–26; 33–37; 39–42; 117–20; 214–17). These quotations overshadow his arguments and many of these citations could have been briefly summarised. And, if these were considered as necessary for the arguments, it could have been placed in appendices. Similarly, summarising the previous chapters in each subsequent chapter works as a constant reminder, presumably to an inattentive reader, which could have been avoided. However, through this work, Samaddar raises some very pressing questions of democratic politics in contemporary India, the explanation of which requires revisiting some of the conventional vocabularies and notions of explaining Indian politics.

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# Making Cyclone Forecasts Useful to Emergency Managers

UPASNA SHARMA

A relatively neglected area in hazard warnings research is the usefulness of hazard warnings in decision-making by emergency managers. Based on the interactions and interviews with various emergency managers at the state and district levels, the experience of emergency managers in using cyclone warnings for various kinds of decisions they need to make during emergency situations is analysed. The findings reveal that there are several areas—such as the content of the message, associated uncertainty, language, frequency, and timeliness—where improvements are required.

The author is thankful to all the district collectors and revenue officials in Machilipatnam, Prakasam, and Guntur districts in Andhra Pradesh, Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts in Tamil Nadu, and the joint commissioner (Revenue) in Chennai for providing valuable insights and sharing their precious time for interviews. The author is indebted to her supervisors Anand Patwardhan and D Parthasarathy for their unstinting support and guidance. She is grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and comments.

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Much of the emphasis of the empirical literature on “warning response” has been on “public” response to hazard early warning, that is, the response of the people at risk due to the hazard (see bibliography prepared by Mileti et al [2006] for numerous research articles published on this issue). The process of decision-making by the emergency managers and their response to warnings during a natural hazard have received relatively lesser attention and have undergone minimal objective assessment (Gladwin et al 2007). Studies on the management side of disasters have focused on organisational and coordination issues (for example, Dynes 2000; Lindell et al 2007). To the author’s knowledge, there is not even a single study that systematically examines the extent to which the warning messages are useful for emergency managers, and the limitations of the warning messages in aiding their decision-making.

This is an important issue to study as many decisions and actions that emergency managers<sup>1</sup> take for the area under their jurisdiction are usually triggered on receiving hazard warnings. The quality of the decisions made and actions taken by the emergency managers, for example, disseminating the warning to people at risk, evacuating people from danger zones, etc, are likely to be affected by the quality of the warning they receive and the manner in which they interpret the warning.

Based on the author’s interactions and interviews with 23 emergency officers at the state, district, and sub-district levels, which included the joint commissioner (relief), collectors, district revenue officers (DROs), and block- and mandal-level officers, during fieldwork for her PhD (2005 to 2008) in Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam districts of Andhra Pradesh,

and Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts of Tamil Nadu, this article seeks to provide an evaluation of hazard warnings, their various attributes, and the extent to which they meet the information needs of emergency managers. These warnings are evaluated in the context of cyclone warning systems in India. Tropical cyclones are a dominant natural hazard for Indian coastlines, and the entire east coast of India and adjoining Bangladesh is subject to tropical cyclones during the monsoon and the post-monsoon periods. Every year, the Indian coastline experiences cyclones of differing severities, varying from depressions to severe storms. An analysis of all the cyclones that arose in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea from 1877 to 1990 (Patwardhan et al 2003) shows that, on an average, eight cyclones crossed the Indian coastline per year with the majority making landfall on the east coast of India, which runs along four states: West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

## Content of Warning Messages

A typical warning message from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to state and district disaster management authorities has been illustrated below. It is an example of an actual warning from the Cyclone Warning Centre, Visakhapatnam, to the state relief commissioners, collectors, DROs, and mandal revenue officers (MROs).

Two stage warning (.) Cyclone Warning Bulletin No. 3 issued by CWC Vishakhapatnam at xx:xx hrs IST of date xx-xx-xxxx (.) Cyclone warning for the districts of Prakasam, Guntur, Krishna, East Godavari & West Godavari and Vishakhapatnam districts (.)

The cyclonic storm “Ogni” over west central Bay of Bengal moved northwards and lay centred at xx:xx hrs IST of y/day the xx-xx-xxxx near latitude 15.5 degrees north and longitude 80.5 degrees east about 50 kms east of Ongole (.) It is likely to move in a northerly direction and cross Andhra coast between Ongole and Machilipatnam by morning of today the xx (.)

Under its influence rainfall at most places with heavy to very heavy falls likely at a few places and extreme heavy falls at one or two places likely over coastal AP during the next 24 hrs (.) Gale winds speed reaching 70 to 80 kmph likely along and off coastal areas of



above districts, breaking off tree branches and causing some damages to kutchha houses (.) Tidal waves one to one decimal five mts above normal tide likely inundate coastal areas of above districts during the same period (.) State of sea will be high to very high (.) Fishermen advised not to venture into the sea (.) Danger Signal No. 7 hoisted at Vadarevu and Nizampatnam ports (.) Danger Signal No. 6 hoisted at Machilipatnam and Kakinada ports (.) Local Cautionary Signal No. 3 kept hoisted at Krishnapatnam, Vishakhapatnam, Bheemunipatnam and Kalingapatnam ports (.) The above warning is for Prakasam, Guntur, Krishna, East Godavari and West Godavari and Vishakhapatnam districts (.) All CIS only (.) Convey this message through V.H.F. sets to pass all the concerned P.S.S. (.)<sup>2</sup>

The warning message reveals that the contents describe who the message is intended for, the current location and the movement of the cyclonic system, and the likely location as well as the time when the cyclone is expected to cross land. It also provides an estimation of the likely weather (in terms of wind speed, rainfall, and tidal surge), the likely impacts due to the cyclone, and some cautionary advice like “fishermen advised not to go into the sea.”

While most district authorities responsible for managing the situation in their district during a cyclone acknowledged that the information received from the IMD is useful to them in taking decisions, many of them felt that the level of detail about the cyclone movement and intensity in the warning message was not enough. For example, one of the district collectors said that terms like “cyclonic storm” and “severe cyclonic storm” do give some indication of the severity of the cyclone, but these terms are not sufficient to understand how severe a cyclone really is and in what span of area it would cause damage. While the current position of the cyclone and the likely direction of its movement are mentioned, how quickly the cyclone is likely to move—crucial information if the emergency is to be handled in time—is not mentioned. In general, there is an expectation of greater detail in the warning message about the features that describe the movement and intensity, landfall time, and landfall location of the cyclone because it affects decisions related to many activities on evacuation and relief.

Also, the same message had been sent to all six districts (Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam) irrespective of the fact that the range of the location (Ongole in Prakasam district to Machilipatnam in Krishna district) where the cyclone was expected to cross land, as given in the warning message, spans only three districts (Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam). The IMD justifies this action by saying that the models used for predicting the movement of the cyclone and its landfall point can produce an error range of 100 kilometers (km) to 150 km. While a few of the district collectors felt that the IMD with its present technology could not do better than this, the others expected that the IMD should be able to provide more district-specific information in the various warnings they send. With the current information, there is a problem of the district administration being over-prepared (which causes problems for belief and confidence in cyclone warnings at the local village level) or under-prepared (which could be disastrous) for the event.

### Timeliness of Messages

Timeliness of the warning message is an important issue over which there is a clear mismatch in delivery by the IMD and the expectations of the practice domain. There are usually four different instances of time mentioned in the warning message. One is the “time” for which the location, intensity, and movement of the cyclone is described. The second is the time at which the cyclone is expected to cross land. The third (which is usually at the bottom of the message) is the time at which the warning message was drafted before delivery to the practice domain. And, the fourth is the time (noted down in ink by the person who received the fax or the telegram) when the message was received by the practice domain.

The gap between the time at which the actual location and other characteristics of the cyclone are described and the time when the warning message is drafted is usually between four and five hours. This happens because all the observations from the field observatories and Area Cyclone Warning Centres (ACWC) on the

coast are first sent to the IMD headquarters in New Delhi, where these observations are used for formal models for analysis and prediction. While the Cyclone Warning Centres (CWCs) and ACWCs also do their own analysis and share those results with the IMD, they are not authorised to issue any formal warnings on their own until they get the go-ahead from the headquarters in Delhi. The IMD in New Delhi finalises the severity and other characteristics of the cyclone. Once these have been finalised, the necessary warning bulletins are issued by the corresponding ACWCs or CWCs.

The gap between the time at which the warning message was drafted by the IMD, and the time at which it was received by the district and state authorities is usually between 45 minutes and two hours. Hence, the total time lag between the actual position time of the cyclone and the time at which the warning is received becomes about six to eight hours, which is a serious issue for managing the situation at the district level as one of the collectors mentioned, “there is almost 6 to 8 hours delay and that to a great extent hampers the preparedness because 6 to 8 hours means a lot in cyclone preparedness.” Another example was given by the joint collector of Krishna district,

In Dec 2003, cyclone warning centre, Visakhapatnam, gave the warning bulletin that the cyclone was 180 km south east [SE] of Ongole (which is about 130 km south of Machilipatnam in Krishna district). But I basically depended on the radar station (located at Machilipatnam) information where we could see that the entire system was only within 100 km of Machilipatnam whereas we received a message a little while earlier that it was 180 kms SE of Ongole. Based on the radar station information, we immediately alerted the people and it was a miraculous escape for us.

### Language Used in Messages

Language is another attribute of the message where what the IMD delivers and what the district disaster management authorities expect do not match. According to many district officials, the language used in the warnings is often too technical. For example, one of the collectors said that the likely direction of the cyclone mentioned in the warnings, say, north westerly, seems rather vague in terms of



understanding the specific movement of the cyclone.

Another collector explained the point through an example from the context of floods, where they received a warning that 4 lakh cusecs of water would be released from the dam into the river and that could cause inundation of some river-line habitations. The collector said that,

it is difficult for me to understand 4 lakh cusecs of water unless I see how much 4 lakh cusecs is. One knows that cusecs indicate the volume of water. But one does not know what will be the spread and the height of the water. One cannot imagine 4 lakh cusecs of water, how it would be in a low-lying area and how it would be in a normal area.

There is an expectation in the practice domain that the terminology used in the warning message be more amenable to their understanding.

### Insufficient Frequency

The warning from the IMD is sent to the practice domain in four stages. First is the “pre-cyclone watch,” which is sent to the maritime states when a low pressure system develops in the sea—but is far away from the Indian coast—so it is under watch. Once the system in the sea starts moving from the depression stage to the

cyclone stage, then the second-stage warning, that is, the “cyclone alert” is issued by the IMD. The respective CWCs of the maritime states, likely to be affected by the cyclone, issue the cyclone alert to the state and coastal district authorities. The cyclone alert is usually issued 48 hours in advance of the commencement of adverse weather. The third-stage warning is the “cyclone warning” which is issued 24 hours in advance. The fourth-stage warning is the “post-landfall outlook,” which describes what happens after the system crosses land.

When the low pressure system is at the depression or deep depression stage, the IMD issues bulletins about the depression/deep depression twice a day based on the 8:30 observations (the bulletin is issued around noon as it takes about three hours to collate and analyse the data) and the 17:30 observations. Once the depression or deep depression enters the cyclone stage, the frequency of the issuing and sending of bulletins is increased from twice a day to every five to six hours. The IMD sends in a warning only once after every new analysis of the data on the position of the cyclone, and movement and intensity of the cyclone,

which happens in about every four to six hours. They do not repeat or resend the same message. Receiving an update on the position, movement, and intensity of the cyclone about four to five times a day, while it is useful, is not sufficient for the district administration for taking decisions on the evacuation and management of the cyclone situation at the ground level. They expect to receive these updates at a greater frequency because even a few hours can make a huge difference in cyclone preparedness.

### Channels of Communication

There are several channels—wireless, phone, fax, and telegram—through which the IMD cyclone warning messages are received by the practice domain from the state relief commissioner’s office and the CWC. A few years ago, the main channels of communication between the science and practice domain for the dissemination of warning was the telegram and the landline telephone (which could be problematic due to communication failures and outdated lists of telephone numbers). The use of mobile telephones in the last few years has ameliorated this problem to some extent. Additional

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channels of information are the All India Radio, and the television news networks and newspapers. Although, generally, the warning message received from the state relief commissioner's office and the cwc in that particular state is considered the formal warning, if the news about the cyclone is heard from one of the media channels—sometimes before receiving this formal warning—the district-level disaster management authority may start gearing up for action.

Several district collectors spoke of the necessity of having a satellite phone in every district; a real necessity for them because the communication and the transportation infrastructure are among the first to be hit by a cyclone. While some districts like Krishna have procured satellite phones, every district on the coast does not have them. Also, the collectors emphasised the improvement of the wireless network at all levels in the practice domain. The wireless helps in internal communication, whereas the satellite phone helps them to get in touch with the state headquarters in case total communication breakdown happens.

### Uncertainty in Warning Messages

The three most important elements of a warning message for decision-making in the practice domain are the likely landfall intensity, likely landfall location, and likely landfall time of the cyclone. However, there is uncertainty associated with all these three elements of the warning because the cyclone movement and intensity are not absolutely predictable with the present level of scientific and technological knowledge. Lipshitz and Strauss (1997) point to three basic strategies of coping with uncertainty in a naturalistic decision-making framework—"reducing" uncertainty, "acknowledging" uncertainty, and "suppressing" uncertainty—each of which consists of more specific tactics of coping with uncertainty. The strategies emergency managers employ for dealing with the uncertainty associated with the elements of the cyclone warning message are discussed below.

**Reducing uncertainty:** The obvious strategy to cope with uncertainty is to reduce it (Lipshitz and Strauss 1997),

though removing it altogether is rarely possible. The following tactics are usually employed for reducing uncertainty associated with cyclone warning message.

(i) *Collecting factual information in addition to that given in the warning:* This is the chief tactic employed by the decision-makers to reduce uncertainty before making a decision. For example, the collector of Guntur said that, "I talk to the Vizag people (cwc, Visakhapatnam) to ask them how likely it (cyclone) is, when and where it is likely to be to get the additional information." The collector of Cuddalore also said that he "keep(s) in direct touch with director of meteorology, Mr Ramanan, based in Chennai. Also if there is anything urgent, the director of meteorology immediately rings me up and tells me." The collector and joint collector of Krishna district spoke of being in direct touch with the Doppler Radar station which is located at the Krishna district headquarters in Machilipatnam and get immediate online information about the movement, intensity, and location of the cyclone. The Guntur collector said, "We just orally call them (cwc, Visakhapatnam), once they withdraw the cyclone warning we just confirm whether it's really withdrawn and we say thanks for the entire period for whatever the support they gave during the entire period, I make it a point to thank them, because we keep calling them at all odd hours, 12.30 am or even 1 am during the cyclone period." The common feature in all the above interactions between the science and practice domain is that these are informal interactions for collecting information in addition to that given in the formal cyclone warning for taking decisions.

(ii) *Seeking advice and opinions of others and relying on doctrines:* In addition to informally collecting information from the meteorologists, the collectors also seek the advice and opinion of the people at the local level. For example, the joint collector of Krishna district said, "We also ask the old people in the villages and the government officials, who have been in this area for many years, whether the intensity of this cyclone seemed similar

to or less than the 1977 cyclone (landmark cyclone in Andhra Pradesh in terms of severity and impacts) before taking a decision on evacuation." The collectors of Guntur, Krishna, and Prakasam also mentioned the existence of a manual of cyclone preparedness that is updated during the cyclone preparedness meetings that are held every six months before the start of the cyclone season.

**Acknowledging uncertainty:** Lipshitz and Strauss (1997) find that this strategy for coping with uncertainty can be applied when reducing uncertainty is either unfeasible or too costly. They also identify the two broad ways the decision-makers can use for acknowledging uncertainty in their decisions. The first way is by taking uncertainty into account in selecting a course of action. For example, in the "rational choice models," decision-makers choose among different alternatives by assessing the utility of the outcomes of these alternatives (in terms of costs versus benefits) and the associated probability of that outcome materialising. The second way of acknowledging uncertainty is to prepare to avoid or confront potential risks by using various "forestalling" tactics such as "pre-empting," that is, to generate specific responses to possible negative outcomes, or "improve readiness," that is, to develop a general capability to respond to unanticipated negative events (for example, put forces on alert).

The rational choice models are usually not used explicitly in the decision-making in the practice domain discussed in this case study because the decision-makers find it difficult to estimate probabilities associated with the outcomes. The decision-makers in the practice domain do use various forestalling tactics to acknowledge uncertainty associated with the cyclone warning message while making their decisions, for example, taking all the preparedness measures even when it is not certain that the cyclone would cross your district or one of the neighbouring districts. Many of the decision-makers do apply this strategy and it is well illustrated by the Guntur collector:

We had seen last year, it was said that it [cyclone] was going to hit at Ongole [which is in the neighboring Prakasam district] and



then suddenly around 12.30 in the morning they [warning message] had said that it [cyclone] was going to cross at Bapatla [which is in Guntur itself]. So at 12.30 and you are giving just 1 and half to two hours. It would take 1 hour and 15 minutes itself for our people to reach Bapatla. So since we had gotten warning earlier that there is likelihood of continuous rain and cyclone, we were getting prepared for it. Our people were already stationed there. It is advantageous for us to send some officers there, keep them and start doing some ground work. Whether or not it is going to hit, I always think in terms of calamity even if you overdo a little, it is OK. It is pardoned after some point of time. People will only shout that unnecessarily you disturbed us but it won't cause any damage except feeling inconvenienced. So I always take more caution so that things don't go [awry].

**Suppressing uncertainty:** The major tactic for suppressing uncertainty is the tactic of denial, that is, ignoring or distorting undesirable information. While there is some anecdotal evidence of suppression of uncertainty by the decision-making unit (individual or household) at the community or village level through denial or disbelief about the intensity of the cyclone mentioned in the warning, there is a lesser frequency of occurrence of such suppression of uncertainty by the decision-makers in the practice domain, especially in recent decades (after the landmark super cyclone of 1977 in Andhra Pradesh and 1999 in Odisha). None of the people interviewed reported suppression of uncertainty associated with the warning message through denial or disbelief. Rather, the tendency was to treat the uncertain warning information as certain and disseminate it further downstream as certain information. Therefore, in one sense, uncertainty associated with warning information was suppressed in this case too, which has its own problems as it leads to greater disbelief among the local people about the accuracy of cyclone warnings that would come in the future.

### In Conclusion

The cyclone warning information sent from the IMD to state and district administrations does provide the emergency managers a window of 48 to 72 hours before the occurrence of the cyclone. But, uncertainties in forecasts about the land-fall location, time, and intensity create

dilemmas for those taking operational decisions at the ground level. Clearly, the severity of the cyclone is a crucial factor in determining a number of operational decisions, for example, dissemination of warning further downstream, timing of evacuation, areas to be evacuated, mobilisation of relief stocks, etc. Currently, the IMD provides information on the severity of a cyclone through three parameters: central pressure and wind speed, expected rainfall, and tidal surge. As is evident from the specimen warning message presented above, while the information on wind speed is relatively specific, information on rainfall and tidal surge is less specific, and can create ambiguity for the emergency managers as to how to interpret this information for taking action.

As has been discussed in this article, the emergency managers take a number of measures (for example, reducing, acknowledging, or suppressing) to manage this uncertainty. Timing, frequency, and language are other attributes of warning messages where there is a mismatch between what is delivered by the science domain and the expectations of the emergency managers regarding these attributes. Addressing the various concerns surrounding cyclone warning messages discussed in this article will be instrumental in improving the usefulness

of the cyclone warning messages for emergency managers in India.

### NOTES

- 1 Emergency managers are the public authorities responsible for managing disasters, that is, officials and staff at the state, district, and sub-district levels who are involved in the warning, evacuation, rescue, and relief processes during natural hazards.
- 2 The information on time and date has been suppressed to avoid reference to any particular event.

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# Knowing in Our Own Ways

## Women and Kashmir

NITASHA KAUL, ATHER ZIA

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

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

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

At the outset, we reflect on some of the issues of grouping the themes and the challenges we faced in putting together this review issue. As co-editors, being Kashmiris ourselves, our motive for this review issue was to include the "herstories"

of Kashmir. We have, deliberately and with intent included only work by Kashmiri women. We do not claim to be representative of or speaking for all Kashmiri women, but our motivation is to bring a heightened visibility to at least some Kashmiri scholars who are actively thinking about the intersection of gender and the political dispute. The Kashmiri women writing in these pages are scholars, professionals, and activists who present their analysis in light of history, anthropology, law, and feminist studies. No doubt, there will be other endeavours where we can include a more diverse array of Kashmiri scholars and scholars of Kashmir across genders. We consider this review issue as part of an ongoing endeavour that will prioritise Kashmiri voices that have been usually sidelined. We are aware that in this review issue there is relative absence of gender concerns as they relate to Kashmiri Pandits and other Kashmiri minorities, the Kashmiri and Indian economy, as well as the disputed parts of Kashmir administered by Pakistan and China. It is not that we did not try to find some such voices, but it was not possible always to find or to retain them. In that context, much more work needs to be done, and this is only the beginning.

Each paper in this review issue refers to the conflict, and relies on a wide range of narratives and sources. The aim here is not to provide a definitive account of what Kashmiri women think, or say, or want, or experience. Indeed, for us, as editors, selecting and finalising the papers was a tough balancing act. On the one hand, it is not always possible to request a citation for the experience of being marginalised or of witnessing marginalisation, and, on the other hand, scholarly work cannot rely entirely on assertions. We have tried, wherever possible, to walk this line between acknowledging the theoretical feminist insights and making sense of the empirical realities faced in the colonial periphery of the postcolonial nation.

In a protracted conflict as the one in Kashmir, the life of people remains suspended often, in the time between the next encounter, killing, arrest or curfew. When men become direct victims of state violence, it falls to the women to hold the last vestiges of the community together. Samreen Mushtaq's (p 54) paper

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engages with the ways in which Kashmiri women are part of a more overt and wider political struggle, but also part of the everyday resistance where the binaries of home and outside do not hold, and where the home is not an indicator of safety. She looks at the ways in which everyday resistance can be understood through visibility, resilience, and dignity in the reproduction of the daily existence of Kashmiri life. Ordinary life also features in Mona Bhan's (p 67) paper, but in an extraordinary manner. Bhan shows us how the daily life of ordinary Kashmiris is threatened as Indian policies increasingly weaponise nature. Bhan specifically locates her paper in the aftermath of the floods of 2014, when Kashmiris en masse challenged the notion that the flood was natural, and thus apolitical. Kashmiris linked the questions of nature, and ecological and resource sovereignties to their struggle for self-determination against Indian hegemony. Bhan's paper situates Kashmiri women's narratives of dispossession and the proliferation of Indian investments in mega hydroelectric dams on Kashmir's rivers within this context. Uzma Falak's (p 76) paper is a lyrical analysis of affective female alliances—*vyestoan*—and their liberatory potential. She theorises women's mobilisation in friendships that emerge during protests, demonstrations, and funeral processions of militants and civilians alike who are killed by the government forces. She analyses these linkages not just as a form of support, but also as the creation of a gendered resistance. In Inshah Malik's (p 63) paper, we see how funerals have become spectacular sites of feminist resistance. She challenges the myth of the grieving mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism, and

meaningfully theorises Kashmiri women's agency in the public sphere.

Mir Fatimah Kanth (p 42) excavates the history of gendered resistance, illustrating a continuity when it comes to women. She looks at women, politics, and subjectivity in relation to the state and its arbitrary exercise of power, and in relation to society and its gendered expectations of women. Kanth's tracing of this history makes it clear that resistance to Indian authority is not a post-1989 phenomenon and certainly has not been bereft of women's participation. In the context of the empowerment of Kashmiri women, Hafsa Kanjwal's (p 36) paper takes us back in time, alerting us to how state-sponsored women empowerment programmes in the early years of post-partition Kashmir resulted in feminist projects that were affiliated with the state, and, in time, became deeply contested and politicised. In this context, women's mobility and education were more geared in the service of consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state, rather than allowing indigenous movements—political or social—to grow and flourish. Essar Batool's (p 60) paper tackles the issue head-on by focusing on sexual violence under intense militarisation and patriarchal norms. Batool, who is also a co-author of an important volume titled *Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?*, analyses the sexual violence against women, men, and transgender persons in Kashmir at the hands of the government's troops, who are emboldened by the legal immunity provided by laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. While militarisation-related violence works differently on men and women, issues of "shame," "honour," and reprisals mean that fear results in under-reporting of such

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violence for both men and women. Batool also makes the important point of how the structure of patriarchy can act as an ally of state violence and oppression. Alliya Anjum's (p 47) paper makes sense of how militarism and militarisation is linked to a denial and loss of rights, investigating the gendered effects of this in terms of how violence is experienced and why it is perpetrated. She thinks through the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm in the context of Kashmir, calls into question the government response towards human rights abuses in Kashmir, and urges the need for ending impunity, especially in the context of international legal policy, which is stringent and clear with regard to sexual violence in conflicts.

### Understanding Experiences of Women in Kashmir

While the structure of a military occupation cracks down equally on all genders, feminist scholarship has shown us that the interlocking nature of militarism and masculinity means that competing patriarchies of oppression and resistance become mutually constitutive, and women are at the sharp end of both. Understanding and analysing the life experiences and agential potential of women in disputed zones like Kashmir becomes difficult as well as crucial. In addition to the complications of the globally ubiquitous patriarchy, there is the question of how war and occupation is an exercise in gendered hyper masculine power in the context of a conflict zone. Against this backdrop, Kashmiri women deserve to be recognised for their tremendous role in challenging the narratives and impacts of occupation; these are generational struggles, at once poignant and powerful. We think of inspirational women like Parveena Ahangar who is the co-founder and chairperson of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), an organisation that brings together those searching for Kashmiri men who have disappeared in the custody of the Indian armed forces. We think of the 55 Kashmiri women who came together in 2013 under the banner of the Support Group for Kunan Poshpora, and have been key to the annual commemoration of 23 February as Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day. We think of the Kashmiri women of the past, the present, and the future who have spoken truth to power, stood up for their rights, braved all odds and persevered, disrupted both patriarchy and occupation, and have lived to tell their stories, to laugh, sing, and love.

Yet, so many Kashmiris have had their lives brutally cut short by conflict and violence that has been orchestrated to humiliate them and render them bereft of relatives, homes, and hopes. Do you know how Kashmiris remember? Kashmiris, of any and all kinds, map their timelines not merely by running through the years chronologically, but by recalling the years through what they brought: the summers of massacres, months of mass blindings, humiliations of human shields, ceaseless curfews and bans, repeated uprisings, political upheavals, impositions of governor's rule, India-Pakistan border hostilities, rigged elections, mass exodus, and mass rape. Srinagar has flowers that grow on mass graves, lanes that are littered with ruined houses and torture centres that have been turned into official residences. There are soldiers and guns everywhere.

In 2018, the United Nations produced a "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan." The reception of this report in the Indian media was overwhelmingly one of rejection and ridicule. The illegitimacy of the Indian state's actions in Kashmir is aided by a common-sense public opinion of the Indian majority, which only allows for seeing the Kashmiri struggle through the lens of paternalism or jingoism.

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

We urge the readers of this review issue to move beyond the comfort zone of merely acknowledging the vulnerabilities of the marginalised Kashmiris, by equalising the illicitness of the military and the militants, by thinking past the self-serving machinations of the Indian power brokers at the centre and Kashmiri mainstream politicians at the periphery, and by asking the difficult question: How long must ordinary Kashmiris suffer their traumatic history as endless memory before their calls for freedom and justice are taken seriously enough to warrant a political resolution?

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

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

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### EPW Index

An author-title index for *EPW* has been prepared for the years from 1968 to 2012. The PDFs of the Index have been uploaded, year-wise, on the *EPW* website. Visitors can download the Index for all the years from the site. (The Index for a few years is yet to be prepared and will be uploaded when ready.)

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# The New Kashmiri Woman

## State-led Feminism in 'Naya Kashmir'

HAFSA KANJWAL

Influenced by the leftist ideals of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, the post-partition state governments in Kashmir sought to empower its women. Scholarly work on this period covers how it was a particularly liberating moment for Kashmir's women. Using an autobiography and oral history, the existing scholarship on the meanings of the "Naya Kashmir" moment for Kashmir's women is critiqued. Even while Kashmiri women were able to benefit from a number of economic and educational opportunities, we must be cognizant of the ways in which the state became the purveyor of patriarchy. One of the shortcomings of this period of state-sponsored feminism was that no indigenous, grass-roots women's movement emerged in Kashmir, given that those working on women's issues in Kashmir were exclusively dependent on the state, which was becoming deeply contested and politicised.

In the last decade of the 20th century, as Kashmir Valley was in the midst of an armed uprising against the Indian state, Shamla Mufti (1928–2008), one of the first female Muslim educationists in Kashmir, published her autobiography, *Chilman se Chaman* (From Darkness to Light) (1994). Mufti was the former principal of the premier Women's College in Srinagar, and was also one of the first Muslim women to receive her master's degree from Aligarh in the 1950s. In the beginning of the autobiography, Mufti states that her target audience is the new generation of girls in Kashmir, a generation whose experience of Kashmir has been refracted primarily through the prism of armed conflict. She desires that this generation learn about their recent history and is afraid that they are being raised without an understanding of the sacrifices and struggles of their predecessors.

Mufti's autobiography is structured alongside three important moments in the history of modern Kashmir. The first, which encompasses the final two decades of the repressive monarchical rule of the Dogras in the state, describes her family background, childhood, and early marital and home life, and speaks to the multiple ways in which she, as a young Muslim female, was restricted both in relation to the Dogras as well as the prevailing conservative norms of the emerging urban, middle-class Kashmiri Muslim society at the time. Mufti was married at an early age, before she completed her schooling, and much of her narrative revolves around how she continued her education and gained employment, despite criticism from her family and her in-laws. The second moment, which arises in the immediate aftermath of partition and Kashmir's disputed accession to India, as well as the rise of the Kashmiri-led National Conference (NC) government, narrates her experiences of obtaining higher education and working in a number of schools and colleges. It traces an "opening" that existed for a number of Kashmiri women, who were able to leave the confines of their homes under the new policies of the state government. Finally, the third moment, which is not covered as much in depth as the other two, provides a brief overview of increasing political instability in the state and its implications for everyday life, including the closures that it enforced on the period of "opening."

While I will briefly address the first and the third moment, it is the second moment—the construction of the new NC state government and its policies for female empowerment—that will be the focus of this article. In doing so, it is argued that state-sponsored feminism—while providing an upwardly socially mobile group of Kashmiri women opportunities for

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education, employment, and mobility—was paternalistic and ideologically motivated in its vision. As a result, no indigenous, independent women's movement emerged in the state, and women's issues became contested and linked to what was increasingly seen by them as an illegitimate rule.

### Building a 'Naya Kashmir'

The NC was an anti-monarchical, left-leaning, secular, nationalist Kashmiri political party that, with the support of the Government of India, came to power in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, in the aftermath of partition and the accession of Kashmir to India. While the leadership of the NC had links to the Indian National Congress, the party retained a distinct political identity that emerged in the late Dogra period, and was instrumental in formulating a unique brand of Kashmiri nationalism. In 1944, the NC had published *Naya Kashmir*, a Soviet-styled manifesto that sought to pave the way for an independent, modernising, socialist welfare state that would reduce the monarch to a titular figurehead. Addressing the dire social conditions that were prevalent under the Dogras, it incorporated important interventions, including free education, the abolition of landlordism, and land to the tiller.<sup>1</sup>

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

While Kashmir's political context shifted after 1947, the NC state government, which had approved of the accession to India, still attempted to implement various sections of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, and also struggled to maintain political autonomy for Kashmir. Women's education and later, employment, became a primary target for intervention by the state government as it was committed to creating a citizenry that would be able to take part in the development of the region. One of the important legacies of Sheikh Abdullah's government is the founding of the Women's College in 1950, which was the first institution of higher education for women in the state.<sup>2</sup> In 1953, Abdullah was deposed from power and his successor, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, became the second Prime Minister of the state. He continued to implement the ideals of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto in his project of state building and reform. Thus, using the manifesto as a frame of reference, I refer to the period of state building post 1947 as "Naya Kashmir."

Mufti's autobiography provides an important lens with which to view Naya Kashmir. This is primarily because Mufti's autobiography goes beyond the realm of the political intrigues of Kashmir, and speaks directly to issues of social and cultural transformation within families, homes, schools, colleges and workspaces. Her account, therefore, gives us a

unique perspective of Naya Kashmir that is not found in the existing narratives of the Kashmiri male political and religious leadership of the time.<sup>3</sup> Through her personal observations of the changes in Kashmiri society at this time, we are able to envision the impact of Naya Kashmir on Kashmiri women in particular.

### Historiographical Limitations

The limited historiography on Naya Kashmir covers how it was a particularly liberating moment for Kashmiri women. Shahzada Akhter (2015) writes how the NC upheld women's equality, and involved all sections of society, especially the lower classes, through free education, land reforms, modernisation, and development programmes. Andrew Whitehead (2017) mentions the Women's Self Defense Corps of the NC in 1947 that received training against the invading tribal army from Pakistan, describing the military-style drilling as "a moment of political empowerment just at the eruption of the still unresolved Kashmir conflict." Farida Abdullah Khan (2005: 136) compares the situation in Kashmir with those of other states in India, and says that in contrast with the colonial context of the 19th century, education for women in Kashmir began "under a socialist program rather than by elite groups of philanthropic organisations with their own agenda for women's education ... the goal was ... to produce ... partners in the development and progress of the region and its people and the emergence of a 'new' Kashmir."

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

While portraying the NC government as being particularly empowering for Kashmiri women, most of these scholars situate the blame for the decline in women's empowerment on the armed militancy in Kashmir. For example, Khan (2010: 115) attributes this to the militancy, given that women's activism in Kashmir was reduced to "their identities as grieving mother, martyr's mother or rape victim." She also mourns this period as one in which civil society voices were relegated to the background and dissenting voices were clamped down on, giving



the impression that such a clampdown did not exist earlier when Abdullah was in power.

Both Krishna Misri and Rita Manchanda, who have also written on the relationship between gender and the Kashmir conflict, concur with this assessment. For example, Manchanda (2001) argues that in the recent past, the pro-freedom groups have instrumentalised Kashmiri women, using them for their propaganda purposes. Misri (2002: 25) suggests that the "post-independence era opened new vistas for the emancipation and empowerment of women," that the "new political and institutional milieu encouraged women to look forward to the future as equal partners in the reconstruction of the socio-economic matrix," and that Kashmiri women became partners in the struggle to create a greater political consciousness as well as better economic and educational opportunities for all. As a result, they were able to step out of their usual familial caste and religious identities. The "changing landscape saw them making their own small choices and this was reflected in their dress, demeanor and deportment. Breaking free from purdah, many donned sari which did not symbolize a particular identity then" (Misri 2010: 311). Misri (2010: 311) affirms that "women had come into their own ... Reconstituting themselves, they exhibited confidence to break the shells of stereotype images and projected new images of modern and professional women." Once more, the "secular" and "democratic" state government is seen as breaking women away from the cultural and religious shackles that bind them, and propelling them towards modernity.

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

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

Given that women's empowerment was intrinsic to the development of a socialist, modernising state, the vision for the "new woman" in Kashmir was linked to, but also separate from the "new woman" that emerged in social reform projects in India and Pakistan, which were centred more on grounding

woman's spiritual/religious difference from that of her Western counterpart (Chatterjee 1989). As Reza Pirbhai (2014) argues for the case of Pakistan, the non-clerical male leadership affiliated with the Muslim League promoted an ideal for the "new woman" that was grounded in Islamic principles, promising the rights of inheritance, divorce, and property, while also challenging customs like purdah and polygyny.

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

### Life under the Dogras

As many scholars have noted, the Dogra period served as an immediate counterpoint to the Naya Kashmir era (Rai 2004; Zutshi 2004). It is, thus, important to recall that the changes engendered by the Naya Kashmir project were occurring in the context of significant illiteracy in the state, especially amongst Kashmiri Muslim women. Under the Dogras, while a small number of Kashmir Pandit women began to get educated, education for Muslim women was lagging. Even by 1941, the literacy rates for Muslims overall were staggering, with only 1.6% of Kashmiri Muslims being able to read and write (Sikand 2002). The statistics for Muslim female literacy were even lower.

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



education for girls was still perceived negatively in Kashmir. Khandani women were primarily restricted to the domestic space.

Mufti describes that from her window she could see the activities of the Hanjis, lower-class families, who lived in boats along the river. Unlike the women of Mufti's family, the Kanji women would be seen walking outside, attending to menial labour. She writes of the intimate social relations that developed amongst the women in the neighbourhood, describing the proximity between the houses and how women would sit at the windows and talk for hours amongst themselves. This closeness enabled women to develop familiar social relations with each other. Yet, Mufti is ambivalent about this closeness, as it also created unwanted interference, gossip, and idle chatter. Mufti attributes this to the constriction of mobility. "Women would remain in their own four walls," she describes, "they were not aware that their land is like heaven" (Mufti 1994: 16–17). She also bemoans the fact that women were largely unaware of what was going on in Kashmir outside of their homes. With restricted mobility, khandani women were only able to go from their in-laws' home, where they lived with their husband and his extended family, to their parent's home, usually with a guardian. On special occasions, they would visit the gardens with their families. Some of the elderly women would also visit the shrines of local Sufi saints or attend sermons held by religious leaders (Mufti 1994: 16). Yet, on the whole, women remained enclosed in their domestic spaces and their activities in the public sphere were limited.

### Women's Educational and Economic Empowerment

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

After working as a teacher for some years, Mufti went on to receive her bachelor's degree from the Women's College at Maulana Azad Road, much to the initial dismay of her in-laws and family. Because of the lack of higher educational institutes for women until the establishment of the Women's College, there were very few Kashmiri women who had obtained adequate education to teach in schools and colleges. Mufti writes that most of the female teachers were from outside Kashmir. The NC government, acknowledging this deficit, began to send Kashmiri women outside the state to receive higher education, promising them teaching positions once they returned (Mufti 1994: 116).

In 1953, Mufti, along with a select few other Kashmiri women, left Kashmir for Aligarh Muslim University. In an act almost unheard of at the time, she left her 10-year-old son, Altaf, with his father and her in-laws in Srinagar. In Aligarh, she completed her master's degree in Farsi within two years and returned to Srinagar.

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

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

The college was an awesome building, beautiful gardens, magnificent Chinar ... I saw many girls walking, running here and there. They were all dressed in clean and smart uniforms. Some girls had a hockey stick in their hands ... some were talking about badminton matches. Some went towards the field to play netball. Some girls were coming from the classroom. Some were in a hurry to go to the library. Some had to go to a drama practice and they were running around for that reason. (Mufti 1994: 119)

Mufti's description highlights the variety of options available to female students. Not only were they exhorted to focus on their studies, they were also involved in a variety of sports and in theatre. These activities were meant to increase the students' confidence. The students at the Women's College would also go with their professors to nearby villages or downtown Srinagar for various social service projects.

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

These extracurricular activities played an important role in the government's cultivation of the modern Kashmiri woman. They propagated the emphasis on discipline, service, and a well-rounded personality. All of these qualities were to help women play a critical role in the construction of a Naya Kashmir. By transforming the mentality of the female students, the government envisioned that they would be able to make their inroads into the broader Kashmiri society, as the students would be able to influence their families, relatives, and neighbours. The shift in just a few years, in societal perceptions of women's education and role in society was notable. At home too, Mufti (1994: 129) realised that over time her in-laws also became more accepting of her career endeavours.

The young women were enthusiastic and disciplined, and it appeared that the environment was always bustling with



activity. According to Neerja Mattoo, a Kashmiri Pandit who went on to serve as a Professor of English in the college:

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

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

Through her description of the college atmosphere, we see Mufti ascribing a form of cosmopolitanism to the educational space. Indian dignitaries, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, would come to the Women's College on their visits to Kashmir. Regular cultural programmes in multiple languages would be held for these important guests. And, yet, it was not just the space of the college that gave the female students more exposure to the outside world. The young women, for the first time, were able to travel to places within and even outside Kashmir. The college would take the girls on field trips and camps. Mufti describes these visits in great detail, including the initial hesitation from families to permit their daughters to travel, the various modes of transportation, and the scheduled activities. The novelty of mobility, especially for girls in that time period, is particularly salient. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these trips were curtailed, and families were less willing to allow their daughters to venture afar given the prevalence of sexual violence in the region by the Indian armed forces, including the mass rape that occurred in the villages of Kunan and Poshpora (Batoool et al 2016).

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

The state was able to utilise women's emancipation as a way to empower the Muslim middle class, in particular. As a number of scholars have noted, gender is intrinsically linked to class as particular class-based formations have defined ways of being male and female (Sarkar and Sarkar 2008; Banerjee 2004;

Fernandes 1997). Oftentimes, in elite or middle-class formations, the construction of womanhood is relegated to the private and domestic spheres, while manhood is defined in the public sphere. In the post-1947 Kashmir, however, these formations were linked to the socialist ideological underpinning of the state, and demanded a particular political inclination. For the state, the new Kashmiri woman, much like the new Kashmiri man, was educated, progressive, and a secular nationalist. In many ways, the space of the Women's College reflected this gendered construction. The government was in charge of appointing its professors, lecturers and principals; ideally, those it saw as being politically loyal. The individuals involved with the Women's College, as well as a number of other institutions set up by the NC, exhibited a form of Kashmiri nationalism that was not opposed to increasing identification with the Indian state, and suppressed those who argued otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

### State-led Feminism

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

We see a subtle example of this in Mufti's autobiography in her description of her time at the Nawa Kadal College. This college was established for girls in the Old City in Srinagar, so that the Naya Kashmir ideology may also reach them. The politics surrounding the locality of the college, however, was different from the brand of Kashmiri nationalism found at the Women's College. Since a majority of the families that would send their daughters to this college were not members of the bureaucratic class, the students at the college were significantly more critical of India and vocally sympathetic of pro-plebiscite groups such as the Awami Action Committee and the Plebiscite Front.

Mufti narrated an incident in which the female students protested against official Indian presence in the college. In an effort to quash the tension, the Department of Education appointed Mufti to serve as the principal of the Nawa Kadal College. As a Kashmiri Muslim who was originally from that part of town, she was seen as a safe candidate for the position. Nonetheless, Mufti admits that the government had used her; while they appointed her as a principal, they still paid her as a lecturer. Her appointment was purely a political one. Here, we see the paternalistic attitude of the state. Had women's empowerment



been the primary motivation, Mufti would have at least received the salary that was due to her.<sup>5</sup>

This paternalistic attitude was experienced in the Women's College as well. Asmat Ashai and Nighat Shafi Pandit, both sisters who attended the Women's College at the time, spoke of how they resented having to perform during cultural functions in front of Indian delegations, but they had no choice. Pandit recalled how Mehmooda Shah, the principal of the Women's College, would make sure that the female students would attend college on the day that important figures were visiting, including Indira Gandhi, who visited the college a number of times during these years.<sup>6</sup> She remembered having no interest in meeting her, but the punishment for not attending was severe. Neerja Mattoo also mentioned how pro-Pakistan sentiments were suppressed. She recalls an incident when the students were knitting sweaters for Indian soldiers. One girl "raised the slogan for Pakistan ... and Miss Mehmooda slapped her."<sup>7</sup> In addition, the students were not allowed to express any critical views in the school magazines or newspapers on the subject of Kashmir's ties with India, or the NC government. From these examples, we can see the coercive nature of the state, and how women's empowerment was inextricably linked to ascribing to a form of secular modernity and pro-Indian sentiment.

This tension came to the fore in 1973, when the government proposed that the name of the Women's College be changed to Kamala Nehru College, after the mother of Indira Gandhi and the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru. Students from the Women's College, in addition to other students from the nearby Sri Pratap

and Amar Singh colleges, protested the plan to change the name.<sup>8</sup> The female students "smashed the sign board that was installed on the main building of the college," and also pelted stones at Sheikh Abdullah's vehicle as he was arriving at the college to preside over the official function (ud-Din 2017). The protest at the Women's College was important as it revitalised the movement for plebiscite. This incident, however, is remarkably absent from the scholarly accounts that have focused largely on women's unequivocal acceptance of the state government's agenda and subsequent "empowerment."

I suggest here that women's empowerment, though an important aim of Naya Kashmir, became embroiled in the political compulsions of the state. State-sponsored feminism had other goals in mind, including consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state as an integral part of India. Thus, even while Mufti described the many openings that these women benefited from, we must understand them as being reflective, and not independent, of the broader political developments under the NC-led state government. One of the shortcomings of this period of state-sponsored feminism is that no indigenous, grass-roots women's movement emerged in Kashmir, given that those working on women's issues in Kashmir were exclusively dependent on the state. As a result, the mass mobilisation of women's rights groups that arose in a number of other postcolonial societies was relatively absent in the Kashmiri scene. This was to have important ramifications for women's movements in Kashmir in later periods too, as state-led women's empowerment initiatives remain contested given the groundswell of resistance to the state.

## NOTES

- 1 There are debates over the reasons why the National Conference government issued the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, with some suggesting that it wanted to regain its popularity, which it was losing to its rival, the Muslim Conference.
- 2 Sheikh Abdullah led the Kashmiri nationalist opposition to the Dogra monarchy. He was the first Prime Minister of the state after accession.
- 3 These include the writings of Sheikh Abdullah (Prime Minister) and Syed Mir Qasim (Chief Minister), as well as the writings of Munshi Ishaq, the former head of the Plebiscite Front, and Qari Saifuddin, the former head of the Jamaat-i-Islam.
- 4 The autobiography is largely silent on these contestations, except in the section where Shamla Mufti discusses how her appointment was a political one, to quell the level of distrust that existed in the community. Here, I also draw upon my conversations and oral interviews and an understanding of the broader aims of the state project.
- 5 While Mufti does not use the term "paternalistic" in her autobiography, she does describe her disappointment with what happened. She did feel that she was just a political appointee, as the neighbourhood would be more amenable to having a Kashmiri Muslim as the principal.
- 6 Interview with Nighat Shafi Pandit, Srinagar, 5 May 2014.
- 7 Interview with Neerja Mattoo, Srinagar, 24 May 2014.
- 8 This incident is mentioned in detail in Mir Fatimah Kanth's article "Women in Resistance: Narratives of Kashmiri Women's Protests" in this issue of the Review of Women's Studies.

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# Women in Resistance

## Narratives of Kashmiri Women's Protests

MIR FATIMAH KANTH

Media framings of street protests by young women in April 2017 projected them as “poster girls” of women’s resistance to the Indian administration in the region, thereby invisibilising the largely undocumented past of women’s resistance as well as daily acts of survival and dissent. Comparing women’s street protests across two time periods in Kashmir—1964 to 1974, and April 2017—women’s role in the narratives of nationalist and anti-colonial struggles is analysed. The struggle for “self-determination” in Kashmir provides women with a space for active political participation. However, as seen in the creation of women’s protests as “spectacle,” it denies women the opportunity to participate as genuine political actors and decide the terms of their participation.

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

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

This paper traces the histories of Kashmiri women’s participation in student-led street protests in two different time periods—1964 to 1974 and April 2017—and reveals the selective amnesia regarding women’s role in the resistance movement within the terrain of social memory in Kashmir. In contrast, I locate the recent protests in April 2017 as a part of the continuum of a largely undocumented and inter-generational history of Kashmiri women’s participation in the struggle against the Indian state, spread over the last six decades. I use media analysis to describe gendered representations of the contemporary student protests, and oral history narratives to recover and contextualise them against the backdrop of the wider history of Kashmiri women’s political agency.

In the final section, I draw on debates and theories of gender and nationalism, to explore why women’s narratives of resistance are rendered insignificant in the social narratives of the Kashmiri freedom struggle. These theoretical debates also help in understanding how gendered relations shape the popular mobilisations and imagination of the struggle. While women of all age groups have played an active role in the movement in the 20th as well as 21st centuries (Gazi 2017; Qayum 1989), the period between 1964 and 1974, defined by large-scale mobilisations

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of students across Kashmir, is a particularly striking historical moment to analyse women's participation.

### Women's Protests as 'Spectacle'

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

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

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

Indian media's portrayals of these protests by young women were almost exclusively in terms of the "emergence" of a "new phenomenon." News channels like AajTak expressed outrage that even young women were now "radicalised" enough to pelt stones during demonstrations (AajTak 2017). In the local media, these protests were framed in terms of the new generation of Kashmiri women "redefining" political agency, having arrived at a level playing field with men within the resistance movement (Kanwal 2017). The media hype and commentary around the way these young women pelted stones at the police, kicked armoured vehicles, or got into altercations with the armed forces construct them as "poster girls;" exceptional and representative symbols of women's participation in the movement.

One such particularly widely circulated image was that of a group of girls pelting stones at the police, with one of the girls in the foreground holding a basketball in one hand while aiming a stone at the police with the other (Hussain and Saha 2017). The contrast in this image between a student's everyday

life (the basketball) and the exceptional figure of a young woman pelting stones created what Guy Debord analyses as "a spectacle:" "a social relation among people, mediated by images" (1967: thesis 4). This mediated spectacle of young women taking over the streets—a singular moment in history—obfuscated other histories and realities of women's long-standing protests as well as other means of women's resistance to the Indian state (Debord 1967: theses 11, 143). Commenting about the dearth of visual documentation of past protests by Kashmiri women, Khurram Parvez, a human rights defender at the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) stated:

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

The power of images to shape emotive responses became clear in the manner in which iconic photographs of young women became popular symbols of the "new" spirit of resistance in the Kashmiri imagination, and threat of "Islamic radicalisation" in the Indian media. However, the circulation and deployment of these images as representative symbols call for a deeper analysis of women's agency as political actors.

### Everyday Resistance and Survival

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

van der Molen and Bal (2011: 94) analyse dissent practices among Kashmiri youth, particularly young women against the military occupation, and draw attention to the threat of militarised gendered violence that constrains and shapes these small practices of dissent. For instance, on a regular school day, a walk to the high school basketball court across the militarised urban space of Srinagar, for a young Kashmiri woman, can encompass a range of such public and private dissent practices: from markedly and deliberately crossing the street to avoid walking below a nearby checkpoint they may have to pass, to continuing to play basketball despite the gaze of the Indian soldier from a watchtower close by, or refusing to take off the widely worn headscarf while playing, to evade such a military gaze. These are only some of the many other possible and unstated ways that women in Kashmir adopt to survive and resist.

The beginning of an armed uprising in 1989 ushered in a decade of widespread violence and human rights violations by the Indian state in Kashmir. This is often referred to as the darkest period of contemporary Kashmir's political history. During this period, Kashmiri women's bodies became sites of



both intense militarised violence and also resistance (Batoool et al 2016). As the “picking up” (illegal and arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances) of Kashmiri men and boys by the Indian armed forces became a daily occurrence, women of the neighbourhood would gather in spontaneous protests outside the army camps, demanding the release of their loved ones (Sikander 2011). Announcements from local mosques, specifically requesting the women in the locality to come outside their homes to protest against particular human rights violations and atrocities, were also common (Zia 2017).

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

In fact, despite the ways in which intense militarisation of the region has constrained Kashmiri women’s lives (Kazi 2009), women have engaged with the popular resistance in creative and passionate ways. Women’s resistance to the Indian state in the region has been shaped by circumstances of time and political context. Street protests by young female students may not have been a constant feature in the last three decades, but, given the varying levels of the intensity of the conflict, which has a direct bearing on women and children, women have hardly been absent from the public space in Kashmir.

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

### Hidden Stories of Women’s College, Srinagar

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

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

Over the course of several conversations, spanning three weeks, I interacted with Shagufta Qayoom,<sup>1</sup> a 69-year-old retired educationist and former student of the Government Women’s College at Maulana Azad Road (M A Road) about the students’ movement of the 1960s. It was a period of intense cross-border hostilities between India and Pakistan (Operation Gibraltar), which ultimately led to the Indo–Pakistan War of 1965. I have edited and translated our conversation, for the sake of brevity:

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

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

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

She continued:

At around the same time, we had heard news that *mujahids* (fighters) have come from across the border to fight for Kashmir. Huge demonstrations were being organised near the Jamia Masjid, in support of the *mujahids*. We felt that we should also participate in these protests. A group of us marched to the Jamia Masjid, to a friend’s house to borrow *burqas*, so that we couldn’t be recognised in public. At the site of the protest, I remember a tall man asked us to chant slogans that would pierce the skies. We used all our strength to chant slogans and express our support. One of the slogans that I remember clearly was “Azad Kashmir Zindabad.” (Long live Azad Kashmir [a part of Kashmir administered by Pakistan])

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

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

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



many other young Kashmiri women continued to organise themselves through the 1960s and well into the 1970s.

A longer view of women's political mobilisations in Srinagar's Women's College resonates with coincidences and continuities that point to the flows of intergenerational social memory and political consciousness. In early November 1973, an event was to be held at Women's College at M A Road, to change the name of the college to "Nehru Memorial College," in honour of Jawahar Lal Nehru (Qayum 1989: 337). Sheikh Abdullah, a key political figure of the time, was to preside over the function. However, upon his arrival at the venue, Abdullah's entourage was attacked by the protesting students—both male as well as female—and was forced to retreat (ud-Din 2017). The protesting students chanted anti-Abdullah slogans, burnt his effigies, and smeared mud on his pictures (Qayum 1989: 337–38). Young women destroyed the signboard that had been fixed on the main building, and the remnants continued to be there until as recently as 2009 (ud-Din 2017).

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

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

### Gender, Nation, and Memory

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

Simona Sharoni (1995: 31) argues, "gender, like other such structures of social identity as culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality" affects the way we engage with "the social and political world." Gender, as an analytical lens, brings to light the "often taken-for-granted distinctions between what it means to be a man or a woman" and the power relations that are constitutive of these distinctions (Sharoni 1995: 31). These power relations shape the "dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena"

(Cockburn 1999: 3). Within nationalist and anti-colonial struggles, gender ideologies play out by ascribing different roles to men and women. However, the centrality of these ideologies to women's experiences and histories are neglected in the collective imaginations of nationhood (Cockburn 1999; Enloe 2014; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989: 7) locate five major ways in which women are seen as participating in national processes, chief among them being "as biological reproducers" of nations, "as transmitters of its culture" and "as signifiers of national differences." These roles are constructed differently across historical contexts, according to the specific circumstances of these struggles. As biological reproducers, women are burdened with the task of producing boundaries for ethnic or imagined national communities, and an attack on their bodies is, thus, seen as harm to the nation.

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

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

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

Women have, across contexts of different political mobilisation, been active participants in "national, economic, political and



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

Young women's participation in the street protests of April 2017 involving acts such as stone-pelting—acts viewed as being generally undertaken by angry young men rebelling against state forces—were framed in terms of an extraordinary display of aggressive, non-normative resistance by women, or as transgression into a public, non-familial space constructed as masculine and out of bounds for women. In both these framings, women were viewed as the angry or agitated symbols of the nation, and became representational of a particular historical

moment and social reality as these images proliferated and were circulated on social media.

The protests of the 1960s and 1970s, which unfolded in a remarkably similar fashion, however, reveal older political histories and the political space that women have occupied in the struggle for self-determination. The interpretation of women's political acts as unique spectacles denies them the position of genuine political actors having their own creative and subversive engagements with the resistance movement. In doing so, it conforms to gendered power dynamics and ideologies of nationhood.

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

#### NOTE

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

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# Moving from Impunity to Accountability

## Women's Bodies, Identity, and Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Kashmir

ALLIYA ANJUM

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan genocide, international legal policy on sexual violence in conflicts saw a major shift towards stronger international accountability mechanisms. The establishment of criminal tribunals and the development of the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm were some of the institutional and policy changes that occurred as a result, with both acknowledging that women are targeted in conflicts not only because of their gender, but also due to their ethnic identity. The applicability of the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm to the Kashmir case is explored, thereby underscoring the bigger questions regarding the state's responsiveness towards such human rights abuse, and its commitment towards ending impunity for sexual violence in conflicts.

Kashmir is one of the most militarised conflict sites in the world, with more than half a million troops populating its streets and borders (*Kashmir Times* 2013). The heavy presence of troops and a legal apparatus that provides them immunity signifies that "militarisation" and "militarism" pervade the state's response to conflict in the region. Militarisation in its plain sense can mean "expansion of the relative size of some integral part, scope or mission of the armed forces"—visible either in military spending, or through the number of soldiers on the streets (Bowman 2002: 19).<sup>1</sup> Militarism, on the other hand, is a system of thinking where military "institutions and ways" are valued more than "civilian life"—where life includes its inextricable signifiers, like dignity, freedom, and health (Lutz 2002: 723). This hierarchical valuation in Kashmir's case, for instance, is most visible in the operation of immunity laws and the resultant impunity accorded to the armed forces for the smooth functioning of ostensible counter-insurgency operations and the maintenance of law and order (Rediff 2011). Though war is the ultimate manifestation of militarism, militarisation is a wider process that permeates "institutions, values and practices" of the state (Sjoberg 2013: 96). The deeply penetrating and far-reaching effects of militarisation and militarism, on even the everyday lives of civilians, include processes by which "military practices extend into the civilian arena" (Peterson and Runyan 1999: 258), for example, military-sponsored civilian activities like educational tours.<sup>2</sup> A conceptual extension of this analysis of militarism helps locate its pervasiveness in militarised societies such as Kashmir, where the distinctions between combatant and non-combatant, and war and peace, soon begin to dissolve into each other, making rights a natural casualty.<sup>3</sup>

The association between militarisation and denial of rights, thus, has remained an enduring feature of conflicts across time. As Richard Falk (1977: 231) points out, where state power is maintained through military control, a regime insensitive to human rights compliance is a natural outcome. The processes of militarisation and conflict at the same time are not gender-neutral phenomena, in that they inherently rely on heteronormative ideas of masculinity and femininity. The conventional, culturally constructed view of this position is that men, the "just warriors," make war, and women, as "beautiful souls," provide "succor and compassion" (Elshtain 1987: 4) and promote peace. This, however, is challenged by studies which

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indicate that be it peace, political conflict, or war-making, these cannot run without women's participation and support (Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001). Relatedly, the memory archives of 20th-century conflicts also make it amply clear that the experiences of men and women in conflicts are gendered in nature. In other words, women experience conflicts differently as compared to men. Sexual violence against women, for instance, has been a common, if not unavoidable feature of conflicts (Chinkin 1994), including in Kashmir. Even though men too are subject to sexual violence in conflicts, the rationale for men being the targets of such violence may differ from that used for women. Cynthia Cockburn (2013: 434) explains this difference in the following words:

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

In Kashmir's case, survivor testimonies have indicated that "interrogation techniques" by the Indian armed forces have included electric shocks to their genitals, forcible performance of sexual acts on others, and rape, thus confirming that men too have been the targets of sexual violence (Hoenig and Singh 2014).<sup>4</sup> These instances of male sexual violence in Kashmir, however, are not as well-documented as those of violence against women, owing to heightened stigma and shame. At the same time, there is comparatively significant reportage available on instances of sexual violence, including rapes, against women largely committed by the Indian armed forces, since the beginning of the armed insurgency in Kashmir in the late 1980s. Apart from gendered experiences, the wars of the 20th century—for example, in the Balkans and Rwanda—have provided us with historical knowledge that men and women become targets of sexual violence because of their ethnic or national identity too. This is why, systematic rape in the context of war was categorised as a "war weapon" (Kohn 1994: 199)—a tactical tool that is used not only to harm and dominate individuals, but also their communities.

Against the background of these preceding conceptual frameworks, this article aims to analyse sexual violence against women in Kashmir in light of the law and policy developments of the 20th century, particularly those that have occurred in the post-Balkan Wars period. The first part of the article aims to examine how sexual violence in Kashmir is significant, particularly in view of the changed and strengthened human rights policy on sexual violence in conflicts after the Balkan Wars. The second part, while referring to instances of sexual violence against women in Kashmir in general, engages with the drivers of conflict-related sexual violence against women and their application in the Kashmir context. The third part highlights, how, because of a distinct import of sexual violence in conflict zones, the state's international human rights obligations are implicated.

### From Regrettable Excess to Crime against Humanity

Sexual violence in conflict zones is a long-existing phenomenon. An all too well-known, yet partial list that is still fresh in popular memory includes the close to 60,000 rapes of

Bosnian women in the former Yugoslavia (1992–95), 40,000 in Liberia (1989–2003), 2,00,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (since 1998), and a staggering 1,00,000–2,50,000 rapes committed just within three months of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (UN Outreach Programme on the Rwandan Genocide 2018). Rape, however, has often been used as a euphemism for sexual violence in conflict. At the same time, historical evidence from victim accounts illuminates how women suffer such violence in forms including and other than rape, for example, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and sexual humiliation among others (Leiby 2009). This enhanced understanding of the nature of conflict violence that women are subject to, has led to gradual law and policy developments. For instance, the United Nations (UN) acknowledges this broader strain and context of violence as "Conflict-related Sexual Violence," (CRSV) rather than confining it to the commonly used, "wartime rape."<sup>5</sup> The term "wartime rape" refers to the context of an "armed conflict," which is a legal term for war—whether declared and acknowledged or not. This may involve fighting between states, or between states and armed groups (Non-International Armed Conflicts [NIACs]). Jurisprudential tests and legal thresholds are used in order to ascertain that the latter variety of conflicts are NIACs and, thus, will involve application of international laws of war (read expanded protections and accountability for violations of rights of civilians including women) (*Prosecutor v Dusko Tadic* 1999; Vite 2009).<sup>6</sup>

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

Hence, the protective ambit of the concept of CRSV seeks to include prevention and prohibition of "incidents or patterns" of sexual violence, including "rape," or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity against women, men or children, occurring in "conflict or post-conflict settings or situations of political strife" (UN Secretary General 2010). This highlights that human rights policy does not mandate legal and or strategic interventions by the state until such violence escalates to a certain (grave) magnitude; and an incidence–conflict nexus is what sets this strain of violence apart, say, from sexual violence



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

Before the conflicts of the 1990s—like the Balkan Wars—sexual violence, unlike other forms of conflict violence, such as murder or torture, was often dismissed as a by-product of wartime activity, as "collateral damage" (Brownmiller 1975: 31). It was frequently downplayed as a private (sexual) act of soldiers (the boys-will-be-boys argument), or was being outrightly denied (this never happened). For example, Peruvian army commanders in their counter-insurgency operations against the Shining Path called it a "necessary excess" (Brownmiller 1975: 31). Radovan Karadzic—now convicted, among other crimes, for the Srebrenica massacre by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia—is quoted to have dismissingly stated that of the few cases of rapes by Serb soldiers that he knows of, they were "*not organised*, but [were] done by psychopaths" (Iacobelli 2009: 270). With reference to an incident in Kashmir, an Indian army officer was quoted as stating in a similar, flippant vein: "A soldier conducting an operation at the dead of the night is unlikely to think of rape when he is not even certain if he will return alive" (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993: 17). It was soon realised that it is this acceptance, dismissal, or condoning of rape as an inevitable aspect of conflicts that lends itself to be utilised as a "weapon of war" in an armed conflict context, and as a political tool no less in conflict situations other than that of the armed variety (Cockburn 2013: 441). Therefore, this dismissiveness and resultant lack of accountability for violation of rights had to be addressed by gender and ethnic identity sensitive policy changes.

The events of the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s, therefore, in particular, redefined the way sexual violence against women in conflicts has come to be understood. The carefully garnered evidence in the former Yugoslavia, for example, revealed that Bosnian women were raped as a project of ethnic cleansing and humiliation, and as a "weapon of war" (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). Among other motivations, women were raped so that they become impregnated with Serb babies in furtherance of the Serb national project of creating a Greater Serbia (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). The rapes of Tutsi women in Rwanda were systematically carried out as an act of genocide to breed out the Tutsi people in the country (Alvarez 1998–99: 359).<sup>7</sup> Due to media attention received by the horrors of this violence, coupled with feminist lobbying, conflict rape, when committed systematically in the

course of armed conflicts, came to be recognised as a crime against humanity, war crime, and also as an act of genocide before international courts (Park 2007: 13).<sup>8</sup> These developments changed the way sexualised violence and rape in conflicts is perceived worldwide. Given this heightened understanding that ethnic and national identity is often central to the violence suffered by women in conflicts to now refer to this violence as a regrettable by-product of wartime, or conflicts, or as an isolated event of aggressive male sexuality is to speak of it cursorily. Understanding sexual violence against women in Kashmir has to be placed within this broader continuum of historical, legal, and policy transformations.

### Kashmir in the CRSV Framework

A brief sketch of the incidence, nature and extent of sexual violence in Kashmir will help place things in perspective in relation to the preceding discussion. Since the outbreak of the conflict in the late 1980s, such violence has regularly been reported. Of the conflict-related rapes reported from Kashmir, an overwhelming number indict the Indian armed forces.<sup>9</sup> Rapes by militants, although rare, have also been reported; however, as has been noted elsewhere, the armed forces as the representatives of the state violate human rights, while militants violate law (Varadarajan 1993: 5). Unsurprisingly, an accurate estimation of the number of rapes in Kashmir is difficult to obtain. But, the information available indicates that the practice is regular. A 2006 Médecins Sans Frontières study on rapes in Kashmir found that the number of people witnessing or hearing of a rape between 1989 and 1990 was far higher than that in high-intensity conflicts like in Sierra Leone or Sri Lanka (Médecins Sans Frontières 2006). Eighteen documented cases of rapes by Indian armed forces ranging from the Jamir-Qadeem, Sopore case in 1990, to the Gujjardora-Manzgam case of 2011 have been recorded (Kazi 2014: 14).<sup>10</sup> The most frequently cited examples, however, remain the mass rape of Kunan Poshpora, the Handwara and the Mubeena Gani rape cases. In the Kunan Poshpora village, during a cordon and search operation, about 800 soldiers of the Indian army gang-raped between 20 and 60 women. Ages of survivors ranged from 13 to 60, including a young pregnant woman, who later delivered a baby with a fractured arm (Batool et al 2016: 82; Jha 2013). In 2004, in a village in Handwara, a mother and her 10-year-old daughter were raped by a major of the Rashtriya Rifles (Peer 2016: 200–02). Mubeena Gani, a young bride, was raped by a group of Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on 16 May 1990, the evening of her wedding, when she was on her way to her husband's house with the groom's entourage (Varadarajan and Joshi 2002).

These instances provide an indication of the prevalence, nature and scale of the rapes in Kashmir. However, these parameters, too, have to be placed within the CRSV paradigm mentioned above to understand their salience in a particular context. It has been argued that prevalence and scale (quantitative information) of rapes and sexual violence may no longer be the sole compelling methodological driver for provoking human rights interventions at the state or international levels.



It is now thought that even isolated incidents of sexual violence (quantitative information) when complemented with contextual factors (qualitative information), such as conflict history, politics, and motivation of perpetrators, will warrant legal action and protection, even at the international level (Boesten 2017: 506). Scale assumes significance when sexual violence occurs in mass numbers during armed conflicts, as part of a systematic policy, and can be prosecuted as crimes against humanity or war crimes (Meron 1993: 424). Otherwise, even sporadic, regular incidents of sexual violence necessitate stricter enforcement of human rights guarantees, better preventative measures, and stringent accountability mechanisms and outcomes, if the victim and perpetrator profiles remain unchanged within a charged political context, and the incidence–conflict nexus is established, as described above (Boesten 2017).

### Women's Bodies as Symbols of the Nation

Even though sexual violence is a gendered violation committed against women qua women, the evidence from the conflicts since the 1990s brought to cognisance that *certain* women suffer sexual violence by *certain* men for particular purposes (MacKinnon 1993: 64–65). In the case of Bosnia and Rwanda, this kind of violence was inflicted for annihilation of the group to which the women belonged, forced impregnation and genocidal rape being the *modus operandi* for achieving this end. In other conflicts, where mass, systematic rape as a weapon of war may be absent, sexual violence becomes a tool of achieving political goals, namely control and repression.

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

The detailed impact of this in Kashmir's context can be garnered by some of these examples. A report by the Centre for Policy Analysis (CPA) on the Kunan Poshpora case highlights the general and long-term social and psychological implications of sexual violence for women in Kashmir (*Kashmir Times* 2018). The report highlights that women from Kunan Poshpora have faced strained relations in their martial homes and ostracisation from a deeply patriarchal society,

which treats women as an embodiment of family “honour,” and violation thereof amounts to the loss of such honour. In a context where loss of virginity and consensual or forced sex outside of marriage is stigmatised, expectedly, unmarried women from these villages, who have, or are presumed to have suffered sexual violence, cannot find suitors after the incident of a mass rape. The report also details that these women suffer from trauma, physical ailments and many have had to undergo hysterectomies as a consequence of the violence (*Kashmir Times* 2018). By losing their capability to provide reproductive labour, which is one of their primary functions in a patriarchal imaginary, an additional variety of isolation from the community is foisted upon them. In another instance, in the case of Mubeena Gani mentioned above, even though her husband, resisting social pressures, did not abandon her after the rape, the couple were ostracised by their relatives and villagers who were ostensibly influenced by ideas of purity and pollution before and after rape (Peer 2010: 149).<sup>11</sup> Often, thus, the isolation of the survivor or her family begins within close kinship and community ties, where “honor takes precedence over victimhood” (Bhasin Jamwal 2017). The social, psychological, and physical consequences of this violence, therefore, result in the “shattering” of its victims and “driving a wedge through the community” (MacKinnon 1993: 66), thereby fulfilling the militaristic goals of control and domination of a community by weakening its constituents.

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

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



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

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

### Immunity, Impunity, and Elusive Justice in Kashmir

The juridical backdrop against which sexual violence takes place in Kashmir has been referred to as a “legal civil war”—a situation where the operation of immunity laws, like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1990, enforces an indefinite “state of exception” or emergency, and has an impact on everyday lives and processes of justice (Duschinski 2009: 692). This means that due to the legal immunities afforded to the armed forces, any reporting and redress of sexual abuse is stonewalled. One of the key contributory factors behind this lack of access to justice is that any prosecution of armed forces by civilian courts involves seeking executive sanctions, which are never granted (Amnesty International 2015: 27). Usually, in situations of extreme public pressure, court martial proceedings may be initiated, as was done in the Handwara rape case, for instance. However, these have been severely criticised for falling short of international standards of fair trial and natural justice. Additionally, the process is inaccessible and opaque for victims, and has been condemned for treating perpetrators too leniently (Gazala Peer 2016). Pertinently, in the Handwara case, the Supreme Court had ruled that court martials could not be subject to the superintendence of the high court, hence reinforcing their nature as impervious and inscrutable forms of justice (*Union of India and Others v Major A Hussain*: 1998).

Within such a constraining legal apparatus and a judicial process that is unresponsive to restoration of rights and accountability, a survey of the state's response to prominent cases of sexual violence in Kashmir becomes important. These will help illustrate the applicability of the CRSV paradigm in the

Kashmir context. In the case of the Kunan Poshpora rapes, the state's initial response was to deny that the incident had ever occurred. The inquiry by the Press Council of India, a non-judicial body, three months after the rapes, exonerated the army, by discrediting victim testimonies, finding contradictions in their statements, or downplaying what had happened to them, by stating that these “abrasions are common among Kashmiris” (Press Council of India 1991: 146). They termed their narratives as “tutored” and “coerced,” while calling the incident a “massive hoax” (Press Council of India 1991: 146). Independent judicial enquiries observed that normal investigative procedures were ignored in this case, indicating the state's active attempt to brush the incident under the rug (Noorani 1991). After reinvigorated efforts by Kashmiri women to revive the case, in 2011, the State Human Rights Commission ordered the reopening and investigation of the case, followed by a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) High Court asking for compensation to survivors and monitoring of the investigation (Masood 2014). Even though, in an unprecedented move, the high court ordered compensation, the Supreme Court has stayed further proceedings in the case as on date (Masood 2015). Similarly, because of the state's efforts to thwart a fair investigative procedure in the rapes of Asia and Neelofer in Shopian, it has been termed as a cover-up (Fazili 2014). A Yale Law School (2009) report has also noted that despite litigants approaching courts against armed forces in cases including rape, not a single conviction has been achieved, spawning a culture of impunity for such and other forms of human rights abuse.

Given this impunity and the vulnerabilities of Kashmiri women to sexual violence in a charged political context in the ways described above, a redefinition of the concepts of “accountability” and “redress” needs to happen within a CRSV paradigm. This would involve a feminist redefinition of the concept of “security,” which requires the bringing about of an absence of military, economic, and sexual violence particular to women (Tickner 1992: 66). This position accommodates the broader concept of “human security” that emphasises guaranteeing freedoms, dignities, and “absence of fear” to individuals such that they can develop their potential fully (UN General Assembly 2012). A critical feminist understanding of “human security” also acknowledges intersectional identities of women involving their gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc—identities that underlie conflict violence against women (Hudson 2005). Considering these, it was thought important that women in conflict situations need special human rights protections, so that state behaviour and structures do not make it impossible for them to achieve the end of “developing their potential fully.” This is why Security Council Resolution 1325 was passed, which recognised the specific effects of war and conflict on women and called on states to take measures to prevent sexual violence, apply international human rights law, and end impunity in cases of sexual violence (UN Security Council 2000). These cannot happen unless structures of immunity, impunity, and denial continue to thrive. The CRSV paradigm also mandates that the rights of women to equal protection under laws and access to



justice be ensured in a conflict setting. This is currently elusive in the absence of a comprehensive approach to ending impunity for CRSV (UN Security Council 2008). Besides, international legal policy acknowledges that when sexual violence in conflict is used against civilians, it impedes just resolutions to conflicts in the first place (UN Security Council 2010).

Furthermore, the institutional response to sexual violence in Kashmir also needs to be seen within the larger framework of the tripartite human rights obligations of the state: the responsibilities to "respect, protect and fulfil" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). The obligation to "respect" means that states must refrain from interfering with or curtailing human rights. The obligation to "protect" requires states to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses, committed either by its own representatives or by private actors. The obligation to "fulfil" means that states are mandated to take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights, including existence of robust institutions, and accountability mechanisms to ensure access to justice. When CRSV occurs in Kashmir and is followed by the lack of meaningful redressal mechanisms, these fundamental tripartite human rights obligations of the state towards the survivors remain unfulfilled. This is exacerbated by the fact that official apathy and even acquiescence is evident through certain recorded instances, for example, military authorities terming sexual violence by armed forces in Kashmir as a "regrettable excess," or soldiers recorded to have acknowledged that they

were ordered to rape (Kazi 2014: 29). This scenario seriously calls into question the current mechanisms of redress, as well as underscores the need for placing sexual violence in Kashmir within the perspective of global debates and transformations on human rights policy on CRSV, which treats both gender and national identity-based targeting of women as a matter of international concern.

## Conclusions

Despite sexual violence being pervasive in conflicts, it had often been underplayed as an atrocity. At the most, it would be described as a personal act of soldiers. The law and policy transformations of the 20th century, however, have changed that. This portrayal is now not only considered narrow and depoliticised, but it is seen as ignoring how sexual violence can be and is deployed in conflict situations to fulfilling political goals. The learning from past conflicts has given rise to the CRSV paradigm, which encompasses this understanding and helps adequately evaluate institutional responses to such violence once it occurs. In the Kashmir case, hence, we need to call this violence by its rightful name, and gauge institutional responses within the paradigm. The fact that the state responds to such violence with de facto and de jure immunity, therefore, would go directly against the intent and directive of its mandate. As Brownmiller (1975: 31) has argued, men do not rape because they can, but because they are explicitly or implicitly encouraged to do so.

## NOTES

- 1 A more complex analysis of militarisation, however, understands it through its involvement of, and impact on, society and institutions. In that sense, it entails discursive and material processes through which societies prepare for war, including the "shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals." See Lutz (2002).
- 2 For details of the military's engagement in civilian life as an avowed policy of counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir, see Anant (2011).
- 3 For an understanding of how the lines between these concepts can blur, see the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990, Section 4(a), and how its operation facilitates this. Any commissioned or non-commissioned officer: "if he is of the opinion that it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area." Also see Human Rights Watch (2011).
- 4 In the Kashmiri lexicon, "interrogation" is often used as a euphemism for torture, due to its prevalence in questioning by the armed forces. For details, see Mathur (2016: 16–20).
- 5 "Conflict-related sexual violence" and "Sexual violence" will be used interchangeably hereinafter.
- 6 Sylvian Vite (2009) finds that one of the tests for declaring a conflict as an NIAC is the "collective nature of fighting" or the state being forced to use its army as the police is being unable to deal with the situation "on their own."
- 7 See particularly the judgment in the Akayesu case where rape was adjudged as a weapon of

- war and an act of genocide when carried out systematically against a community in an armed conflict. For details, see Alvarez (1998–99).
- 8 For these and other related changes brought about by international tribunals established after the Bosnia and Rwanda conflicts, see Park (2007).
  - 9 In reply to a question in the legislative assembly, the then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Omar Abdullah, placed the registered number of rapes in J&K between 1989 and 2013 at 5,125. The number of rapes by state forces far outnumbered rapes by insurgents. Besides, abuse by armed forces as representatives of a state invites international legal obligations, like enforcement of human rights, which are not enforceable against insurgents, who violate law, not human rights (Abbas 2013).
  - 10 For the whole list of cases, see Kazi (2014).
  - 11 Basharat Peer provides comprehensive details of Mubeena Gani's rape, as well as her life afterwards.

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# Home as the Frontier

## Gendered Constructs of Militarised Violence in Kashmir

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In conflict zones, the home–outside binary is often erased in practice as violence enters people's lives and personal spaces, diluting any distinction between combatants and non-combatants, even as the international humanitarian law and Geneva Conventions highlight the distinction. In Kashmir, a popular armed rebellion against the state, since 1989, has been met with brutal force. Making use of militarised masculinity to inflict violence on bodies and psyches of the people considered to be the "other" has been a norm. In extending the understanding of the front line from the border to homes, actions, bodies, and the everyday trauma that women face, the victimhood narrative is problematised by placing women as frontliners as they witness, survive, and resist.

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

This paper highlights how the home–outside binary is rendered indistinct in conflict, as homes become frontiers where people's lives and spaces are subjected to militarised control that makes gendered constructs of identity especially prominent. The paper builds on the existing research that brings to the fore the linkages between gendered identity and violence in the context of armed conflicts, using the intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (1989), so as to understand how Kashmiri women become the "other" in terms of the varied strands of identity they inhabit, and how the everyday forms of violence play out, with their bodies, psyches, and spaces becoming sites of conflict. The paper includes interviews of women survivors of violence, presenting the testimonies in a single narrative without identifying the survivors.<sup>1</sup> Taking from Scott's (1985) understanding of "everyday forms of resistance" among Malayan peasants, the paper also brings to the fore the subtle ways in which Kashmiri women are reclaiming their spaces and how these attempts construct them as frontliners resisting the brutal onslaught of a militarised state. In bringing forth narratives of Kashmiri women about violence, struggles, and survival, the paper attempts to highlight the multiple experiences of women living in a conflict zone, beyond the binaries of victim and agent, and how they negotiate their days under a militarised code of conduct.

### Gendered Constructs and Armed Conflicts

In areas of militarised conflict, gender relations are put to use to "incite, exacerbate, and fuel violence" (Giles and Hyndman 2004: 4). The body becomes a site of violence, which is marked by relations of gender, religion, class, race, ethnicity and so on. The idea of the nation posits masculinity and femininity in certain ways. As Enloe (2014: 93) argues, the construction of

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nationalism springs from "masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope." In such a project, women are symbolically seen as carrying the notion of honour and identity of the nation on their backs for the men to protect.

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

However, it would be wrong to assume "male" and "female" to be homogeneous categories and to ignore the wide variety of meanings that social categorisations assume, when they are looked at in relation to the various other identities one is seen to represent. Thus, gender, class, caste and race do not simply have to be looked at in terms of the additive effect; there is a need to understand the complex, complicated, and intersectional effect of these categorisations as they form a part of the "intersectional wheel" (Anthias 2001). Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) helps to bring to the fore the varied strands of identities to explain how various forms of oppression take place as a result of specific experiences and contexts. It focuses on the ways in which one experiences, reproduces, and resists social divisions in everyday life and how they go on to reinforce inclusions and exclusions (Taylor et al 2010).

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

During times of conflict multiple binary constructions are formed; not only is "masculine" contrasted to "feminine" within a group and "us" contrasted to "them" between groups, but "our women" are contrasted to "their women" and "our men" to "their men." (Alison 2007: 80)

The masculinist and feminist constructs are such that violence becomes an act of proving one's masculinity, the reason why men are thought to be the protectors of the "nation," again thought of in terms of the image of a vulnerable woman needing protection from "other" men. Writing in the context of Palestine, Kassem (2011: 157) notes that the metaphor of the nation as a woman conflates "the political control of territory with the control of the female body and female sexuality." This use of the nation as a metaphor has also come to be increasingly used in the Kashmir conflict by the construction of identities of the "self" and the "other." This is done by evoking a sense of protection for the nation, spoken of in terms of

Bharat Mata—the image of a woman—threatened by the Kashmiri "other" that demands freedom, seen akin to attacking the very honour of the "motherland," and the male warriors who come to defend it. Slogans like "Bharat Mata ki Jai" and "Mera Bharat Mahaan" are seen inscribed outside military bunkers and roadside hoardings to glorify the nation. Others like "Ajeet hain, Abheet hain" (we are victorious, we are invincible) further bring forth the use of the protectionist discourse that the Indian soldiers in Kashmir, meant to protect the integrity of the nation, are invincible. One might ask: Who is the protection needed from and who are they victorious over? Since these slogans and military installations are integrated into the civilian spaces, the message goes out to the Kashmiri "other," who would be otherwise disciplined by violence.

### Women and Militarised Violence in Kashmir

Kashmir has been a matter of long-standing "dispute" between postcolonial India and Pakistan. There are varied accounts of what happened in Jammu and Kashmir during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, who the invaders were, what their motive was, and if the Pakistani government was officially involved. However, these questions are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> What needs to be emphasised in the territorial aspect of the dispute is the human cost of the conflict.

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

An important part of the state's militarisation process has been a concerted counter-insurgency mechanism where "winning hearts and minds" of people is sought to be achieved by providing them with incentives and welfare services through projects like Operation Sadhbhavana (meaning goodwill in Hindi). This military operation has been "the state's way of building legitimacy even as coercion continued" (Mushtaq and Bukhari 2018: 83; Bhan 2013). The aim here is to attain an even stronger presence in the everyday lives of people by having access to their social spheres, setting the standards of the services they receive, and, in certain cases, even restricting or directing their choices of employment (IPTK and APDP 2015: 16). This has



gone hand in hand with the violent manifestation of the militarised state and its institutions and processes.

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

Gender-based violence as a feature of the Kashmir conflict has led to gendered identities becoming the sites where power is inscribed in violent ways, both subtly and overtly in all its physical, sexual, psychological and socio-economic manifestations. Women have been subjected to violence not just because they are women, but because they are seen as the "other," in terms of being the women of the "other" who are a threat to "our" national security. Also, women are seen as the repositories of honour of the Kashmiri community that is at war with the Indian state, as having a political ideology where they are vocal about the right to self-determination, and are seen to have collaborated with India's historical enemy, Pakistan, to demand *azaadi* (freedom). The national interest, "heavily laden with the symbols of masculine power" (Horn 2010: 60), works to dehumanise an entire population, "emasculating" the "other" men by attacking "their" women, thus relying on a complex web of violence.

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

### Testimonies of Women

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

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

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

My husband and I were accused of giving shelter to militants in our house. We were taken, separately, to an army camp. I was tied with ropes; electric shocks were administered on my body. They

made me drink excessive water and would then torture me. (personal interview, 2014)

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

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

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

Girls and women, when they leave their homes, often have to hear the directive,

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

However, as I have stated previously, the mere cautious avoidance of the outside does not mean that the "home" is a safe space. This was evident in the 1990s and early 2000s with militancy at its peak in Kashmir. The government forces cordoned areas for crackdown, on suspicion that militants were present in the area.<sup>3</sup> They did this even to get the *mukhbireen* to point out the people they suspected of being militants or having militant links or sympathising with the militants.<sup>4</sup> The male members would be asked to assemble in a nearby playground, while the females would stay back home. The government forces would conduct house-to-house searches and, often, in these situations, they would resort to sexual harassment of the women. In a harrowing memoir, a Kashmiri woman recalls the events that took place during such cordons and what it meant for the women.

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



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

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

With a high military presence even in the civilian areas, the “masculinist military gaze” where women become the “objects” of the male gaze, is another form of violation. During the early 2000s, even when the militant presence was low, the harassment continued to happen. Saja (name changed), 65, recalls that period:

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

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

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

Although there is no evidence to suggest that sexual violence by Indian armed forces in Kashmir is a part of the state’s official policy, yet the way such acts have been carried out with the state providing absolute impunity to the perpetrators and dismissing the testimonies from the survivors as propaganda and “recorded rotten stereo sounds that play rape all over again” (Parvez 2014), points to a systemic and systematic way in which such acts occur with the silent complicity of the state.<sup>5</sup> Women in Kashmir have been subjected to sexual violence, including individual acts of rape by soldiers as well as mass rapes, both of which point out to the larger system of oppression and impunity that the state provides to its forces accused of such crimes. Such acts of violence have been committed to “feminise” the victim and, thereby, seek to dominate over the sexual as well as the religious, ethnic, and political identity to which the victim belongs, while at the same time seeking to empower and make more masculinised the perpetrator’s identity.

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

My husband was taken to the camp. We were accused of sheltering militants. It was just the two of us; we have no children. Then they

came on the pretext of searching the house and raped me inside my own home in the dark of the night. (personal interview, 2015)

Cases like Kunan Poshpora provide a telling example of the use of mass rape to terrorise an entire population, as Skjelsbaek and Smith (2001: 5) write,

Those who are ruthless enough to launch a war in which civilians themselves are the target are therefore likely to find that rape can be a convenient and effective weapon.

On the night of 23–24 February 1991, soldiers from the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the 68th Brigade barged into homes in this north Kashmir hamlet and raped around 53 women while the men were interrogated in the cold outside (Batool et al 2016: 80).

Our homes suddenly turned into centers of violence. Rooms remind us. Our bodies bear witness. Our wounds bleed and they will speak. (Falak 2013)

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

### Kashmiri Women as Frontliners

Despite facing violence on several fronts, the story of Kashmiri women needs to be heard beyond the victimhood discourse in order to understand how they have survived the violence over the decades. In this context, Manchanda (2001: 20) writes,

Women’s negotiations with violent conflicts create historically and situationally specific economic, social, cultural, ethnic and national realities that form a new knowledge base and resource.

While historically the front line has been looked at as a place where the “actual” fighting between the warring groups occurs and where most damage is done, feminist analysis over the years has challenged this notion of the “front line.” Both in the physical and symbolic sense, they have reinterpreted a “front line” as a “space where the traditional boundaries of public and private space are blurred” (Dowler 2002: 162), and as transformative spaces where “women’s voices challenge and enrich simultaneous struggles” (Waller and Rycenga 2002: xxii). Thus, as women’s bodies are marked violently in “safe spaces” and as they chalk out ways to resist militarisation, the front line becomes the home, which is militarised and also turns into a site of resistance. The front line becomes the body, psyche, and memories where the war is played out. What Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009: 34) explains for Palestine, fits the Kashmir scenario as well.

The frontliner can be a woman who is lining up or is humiliated at a checkpoint, a woman singing her children to sleep in the middle of night raids and incursions, one selling yogurt to make some additional money and buy food for her children, a woman giving birth at a



checkpoint because she has been prevented from reaching a hospital, or one screaming and crying in court while refusing to accept the law's failure to protect her rights.

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

As Aaliya Anjum (2011) notes, in the early years when the Kashmiri armed movement started, women took to facilitating the men in their fight by acting as couriers who took arms from one place to another. As they could pass checkpoints without being suspected, they could inform the militants of the position of the forces, and help them flee in case of sudden cordons. Women have participated in the protests with heightened participation in the 2008–10 and the 2016 uprisings, taken out all-women marches shouting slogans for freedom, and joined the stone-pelting men. This "gendered resistance," as Ather Zia (2017) notes, has been integral to Kashmir's social fabric. Kashmiri women have a long history of protesting atrocities and resisting in their own ways, right from the time of the Mughal rule in Kashmir (Gazi 2017).

The women also "brought the private act of mourning into the public space and politicizing it into a formidable tool of moral protest against state injustice" (Banerjee 2008: 150). This is epitomised by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, headed by Parveena Ahangar, which brings together families of the disappeared, who stage a sit-in on the 10th of every month, seeking the whereabouts of those subjected to enforced disappearances. During the funerals of militants,

women "break out into a *wanuwun*, the traditional Kashmiri song of celebration, intertwining couplets in praise of local *mujahids* (militants)" (Manchanda 2001: 51). Not only do the women use the "public space" to register their protest against the oppressive state structure, their resilience also shows in the everyday in terms of how the home, rather than being a private sphere in statist terms, becomes a site where they have to struggle on a daily basis. These struggles, visible or invisibilised, overt or covert, institutionalised or random, go on to indicate how the home–outside binary does not indicate safety, and neither are women simply to be placed in the binary categorisations of victim and agent.

Women have also used the law for memorialisation. A case in point is the public interest litigation filed by 50 women in 2013 at the Srinagar High Court seeking reinvestigation into the Kunan Poshpora mass rapes. Although the Supreme Court later stayed the proceedings of the case, what it was essentially aimed at was not to seek justice per se, but,

to expose the judiciary being part of state oppression, to make use of law in order to preserve memory which is a powerful weapon, for it is in our remembrance that our resistance lies.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusions

It is not the case that women suffering violence have no ability to act, neither does the recognition of women's agency mean that they have overcome the violence and it no longer affects them. Surviving the everyday troubles of militarisation and facing its multifaceted gender-based violent manifestations means that women have to cope with having their bodies treated as battlegrounds. They have to hold their families intact and "construct counter-spaces that allow them to survive and to envision that they might someday attain the justice they have so longed for" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009: 187). In this paper, I have argued that women cannot simply be placed between the binaries of "victims of violence" and "agents of peace," and even when seen as survivors, witnesses or frontliners resisting militarised violence in the everyday, the analysis must not fall prey to romanticising a notion of resistance that invisibilises the violence, despair, and resilience of women's lives in conflicts.

## NOTES

- 1 Interviewees' names are anonymous. Interviews were conducted by the author as part of her PhD fieldwork during 2014 and 2015.
- 2 The departure of the British colonisers from the Indian subcontinent in 1947 witnessed the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, ruled by a Dogra Maharaja, acceding to neither India nor Pakistan. However, a popular uprising in Poonch that had started prior to the partition gained increasing momentum following the division, resulting in the Maharaja's forces massacring 2,37,000 Muslims (Naqvi 2016) even as a provincial "Azad Kashmir" government was proclaimed to have been formed in Rawalpindi. This was followed by a "tribal invasion" (Lamb 1991; Snedden 2013) resulting in the Maharaja signing a temporary Instrument of Accession with India which brought the Indian army to Kashmir and later, India taking the matter to the United Nations to complain against Pakistan.

- 3 The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) gives security forces the right to enter or search any premise in order to make arrests (of anyone who has committed cognisable offences or is suspected of doing so), or to recover any person wrongfully restrained, or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it.
- 4 Plural for *mukhbir* which is used in the Kashmiri parlance for the informers, local people who provide Indian forces with the information about the whereabouts of militants or their supporters. Usually during crackdowns, men would be paraded in front of a masked mukhbir, who would then point out to the forces of any suspects who would then be bundled up in the vehicle and taken away for interrogation to undisclosed torture cells, in many cases to return dead, or severely tortured, or just disappear.
- 5 Not only has the state over the years rejected such allegations of sexual violence as baseless and an attempt by militant sympathisers to defame the Indian forces and bring international

attention to Kashmir, it has also ensured that the forces are not prosecuted. Even in cases where first information reports are filed, prior sanction is needed for prosecution. The whole system, from the laws to the courts to the institutions and process form "structures of violence" that provide absolute immunity to the forces.

- 6 For more on this, see Asia Watch (1993), reports by IPTK and APDP (2012, 2015).
- 7 Personal interview with one of the 50 women petitioners of the case, 12 August 2016.

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# Dimensions of Sexual Violence and Patriarchy in a Militarised State

ESSAR BATOOL

Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence have characterised Indian military operations in Kashmir. Of these, sexual violence has been used widely to “break” individuals and communities, and as a tool for punishing resistance against violence by the Indian state. The discourse around sexual violence, however, has always revolved around women with very little focus on men and transgender persons, given the patriarchal understanding of sexual violence and power relations. A critical part of this discussion is also looking at how the patriarchal structure of the society acts as a facilitator for the effective use of sexual violence as a tool against the people. The sexual violence that is propagated and implemented by a masculine patriarchal state can be resisted well with a deeper understanding of gender dynamics.

Kashmir's armed struggle has been a matter of serious concern for the Indian state that has been claiming Kashmir as its own “integral part” contrary to the political aspiration of many Kashmiris. The embarrassment caused to the world's “largest democracy” by the movement for self-determination and the resistance to military occupation by the people of Kashmir has been retaliated with extreme violence and gross human rights violations. In different cycles of both armed and civilian resistance, hundreds have been injured, killed and maimed as a result of direct physical violence perpetrated by the Indian state and there has been absolute impunity for these crimes (Human Rights Watch Report 1993a). People across divides of age, religion and gender have protested against the away occupation in Kashmir. While researching and writing about the human rights violations in this region that are widely believed to be the result of military occupation and army operations against armed rebellion, the wide use of sexual violence by the armed forces—that remain protected by the guarantee of legal immunity under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958—cannot be overlooked.

Sexual violence has effectively been used as a weapon to crush resistance and break the morale of people across the world in conflict zones. In Kashmir also sexual violence has been used as an important part of strategy for crushing support to the popular armed rebellion in Kashmir. The families of militants, mostly women, have been attacked but the families of non-combatants and civilians have been victims and survivors of this violence too. It is usually incorrectly assumed that sexual violence is used against only women. Men have equally been victims of a sexualised form of violence. However, the motive behind perpetrating sexual violence against men is distinct from sexual violence against women (Kazi 2008).

## Gendered Shades

Sexual violence against women by men is not about a male desire for sexual gratification, but is a proven assertion of sexual power to subjugate, given the unequal power dynamics between genders in the society. Many cases of sexual violence committed by civilian men against women end in the woman being killed or mutilated, proving that aggression and a display of masculinity forms the basis of motivation for such crimes. Coupled with the social structure where the blame and shame is directed towards the victim, sexual violence against women becomes an instant tool to break a woman's sense of self, forcing her into victimisation (Bhugra and Kalra 2013: 244–49).

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Sexual violence against women that manifests in the context of militarisation is immediately a fatal combination of unquestionable power and absolute impunity, as is the case in Kashmir. The institution of military has used sexual violence against women as a tool to punish them and the communities. It is an attack on "collective honour" and not just of individuals and their immediate families but on a collective identity (Human Rights Watch 1993b). In a state of militarisation, the idea of the "other" or the "enemy" is strongly, actively nurtured and thus sexual violence by this "other" is seen as an aggression against the entire community. Kashmir's history is replete with examples of how the Indian state through its armed forces attacked the entire Kashmiri community. In 1991, a unit of the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the Indian armed forces raped women inside their homes in the twin villages of Kunan Poshpora, while the men were being tortured during a cordon and search operation. This was meant as an attack not just on the "honour" of the people of these villages, but on the entire Kashmiri community, that has been supporting the armed struggle against the Indian state, as a representative action that could break a whole community (Batoool et al 2016).

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

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

### Of Impunity and Denial

Sexual violence follows the impunity that the Indian armed forces have in Kashmir under the protection of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). The AFSPA was passed in some states of India on 11 September 1958, but it was extended to Kashmir in July 1990. Under this act, army personnel can enter and search to make arrests without a warrant and fire to injure and even kill any individual "suspected" to be acting against law. Fake encounters, custodial killings, civilian killings, detentions and disappearances are a result of the impunity that this act provides to the Indian armed forces (Wani et al 2013: 62). In addition to the impunity that AFSPA grants, there is an extended cover of legal impunity as proven recently when the Supreme Court of India stayed investigations against Major Aditya Kumar, accused of firing on and killing three civilians in Shopian in January 2018 (Soni 2018).

There are only denials against accusations of rape and sexual violence. Till date no accused from the army has been tried in a civilian court, even when there are provisions for them to be tried in such courts for crimes such as rapes, murder and culpable homicide. Even in cases where there have been trials in military court, the accused has merely been suspended from service, as in

the case of Major Rahman, who raped a mother and daughter in Bader Payeen in Handwara in 2004 (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society report 2015). He was only suspended from service after a court martial and later reinstated (Jaleel 2018). It is abundantly clear that punishment for sexual violence is only an eyewash, intended to deceive people. The Indian armed forces have used sexual violence against women to create a sense of fear among the people, and to establish a norm of punishing people who might support resistance against the state. As in the case of the mass rape in Kunan Poshpora in 1991, the incident was a collective punishment against the villagers for "sheltering militants." Through violating the bodies of women a message was sent, and not just once, that the community would be broken in any way possible for any act of defiance. These offences have not been limited to just the Indian armed forces, but were used as a tactic by the government-sponsored militia known as *ikhwans* to consolidate their power and instil fear within Kashmiris. Their crimes went unchallenged and unquestioned (Human Rights Watch 1996).

While sexual violence against women in Kashmir has received attention, countless men in Kashmir are also victims of sexual assaults perpetrated by the various apparatuses of the Indian state. Sexual violence works on similar lines of power and subjugation among both men and women, especially in conflict zones, where it is a more explicit weapon against a certain population. Within the patriarchal structure, however, sexual violence against men tends to break an individual, keeping in mind the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Sexual violence against men, mostly boys, is also a reality in both conflict and non-conflict zones, but is mostly neglected as it is erroneously perceived to be a rarity (Kapur and Mudell 2016: 11–14). This fact further complicates the gender equations underlying the idea of why sexual violence is prevalent and perpetrated. Gender relations in sexual violence are seen mostly as men perpetrating violence against women, but the vulnerability of men to sexual assault in conflicts results in both men and women being victims. Sexual violence against men in conflict areas like Kashmir has been used mostly as a torture technique; being sexually violated has been reported as a routine by those who have been detained by the Indian armed forces. Common techniques include mutilation of genitals, forced sodomy or insertion of object into the anal canal (Qadri 2016). When used against men, sexual violence is a tool to break the man, to induce a sense of shame and to dent the "masculinity" of the man, so that he breaks into giving what is required of him, or as punishment for defying the state. The sexual abuse, torture, and mutilation of male detainees or prisoners are often carried out to attack and destroy their sense of masculinity or manhood (United Nations report 2002).

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



Kashmiris, faced sexual violence when he was stripped naked, as a punitive action for protesting (Rashid 2017).

### Patriarchy as an Ally

An understanding and critical research of how sexual violence has been used by states against people in armed conflicts worldwide clearly reflects that sexual violence is an effective tool to break people. Militarisation in Kashmir has led to a climate of impunity and lack of accountability, where people are unable to report or engage with institutions that would otherwise provide respite to them. The low percentage of reporting of cases against the Indian state can be attributed to the fact that a fear of reprisal against the people is common, and there are no precedents of punitive action against the perpetrators. There is no denying the fact that militarisation provides a cover of impunity to its apparatuses, however, a critical ally to the effectiveness of a weapon like sexual violence is the patriarchal structure of the society. The state and the military in itself is a patriarchal institution that covers up morally for its crimes of war by citing patriarchal excuses, especially when it comes to sexual violence. Apologists for the Indian armed forces have used the notion of armed men being jawans, young men who are bound to commit sexual misdemeanour that has nothing to do with the state, but is a commonly accepted aberration of male behaviour. It is an exoneration of perpetrators using what is a universal system of oppression and justifying male dominance and excesses.

The deeper problem is that men seem to use sexual violence when deployed not only in times of war as the "enemy," but also when their role is perceived to be that of protectors. An example of the widespread unchecked sexual abuse by UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, Cambodia, Congo, etc, against women and minors, proves that combined with a military/armed forces background, sexual violence is bound to be used to terrorise and abuse those who are vulnerable (Anderlini 2017). The state understands the patriarchal nature of Kashmiri society which makes sexual violence effective. An example of this is considering the bodies of women as repositories of "honour," "chastity" and "chivalry" of

men, which, when violated by the enemy, psychologically breaks the men of the community in their failure to "protect their women," a role that patriarchy assigns them (Coomaraswamy 2002).

Similarly, when sexual violence against men is used to break their "masculinity," and to "feminise" them, it is in accordance with the patriarchal notion that a man will not be fit to be a protector and is now "feminised," as in a helpless individual overpowered through infliction of sexual violence. The refusal of men to report or document cases of sexual violence against them for the fear of loss of reputation in the society and a stigma of being mocked as "effeminate" is strong evidence of patriarchy helping the larger occupation. "Men also may be loath to talk about being victimised, considering this incompatible with their masculinity, particularly in societies in which men are discouraged from talking about their emotions" (Sivakumaram 2007: 255). This is similar to the women who are victims of sexual violence, and who would rather not report sexual violence against them from fear of reprisal, given the social stigma attached to rapes and sexual violence. A glaring example of this has been the Kunan Poshpora mass rape in which a lot of unmarried survivors preferred not to be named in legal documents out of fear for their future. The whole scenario of the experiences of transgender persons missing from the broader narrative of occupation is also an example of how as a society we are yet to open up beyond patriarchal gender binary.

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

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# Gendered Politics of Funerary Processions

## Contesting Indian Sovereignty in Kashmir

INSHAH MALIK

On 8 July 2016, Kashmiri militant Burhan Wani was killed by the Indian army, setting in motion unprecedented funerary processional grieving. Using accounts of funerals of militants and civilians, gendered funerary processions and the transformation of gendered cultures of grieving in Kashmir have been analysed. It is argued that women's participation in the militant and civilian funerary processions is a feminist political formulation in the Kashmiri context. This is understood through a review of the politics of funeral attendance and two specific actions that women undertake: publicising grief by bringing the private out into the contested public realm, thus outdoing religious law, and resisting the state's sovereignty by grieving for lives that the state deems "non-grievable."

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

The answers that were offered by the Indian government were mostly inadequate. The national media kept circulating the state's official stance of holding Pakistan responsible for a mourning that was essentially indigenous. The Indian media repeatedly informed us that Pakistan was implanting ideologies of terrorism, which created troubled and dangerous people like Wani and those who were grieving his death (Hindu 2016). The mourners were dubbed as misguided juveniles or deemed to be under the influence of foreign propaganda. However, these assertions were insufficient, because they offered no understanding of how such political figures were fashioned and why those grieving for them encountered fatal violence at the hands of Indian troops? Moreover, the complexity of the situation was visible when women too, in large numbers, attended these prohibited funerals. All this immediately pointed to the inadequacy of the official narratives.

The moment of Wani's funeral brought to the fore the question of the Indian state's sovereignty and a challenge levied against it by the Kashmiri people to the centre stage, yet again challenging the state narratives about Kashmir politics. Since then, Kashmir has witnessed a drastic increase in the young men taking to arms. The renewed politics of disagreement is shaping another armed resistance and funerals are increasingly becoming contested spaces of power, grief, and mourning. Earlier, in January 2016, when the then Chief Minister and the People's Democratic Party patron, Mufti Saeed, passed away, his funeral attendance became a subject of a rigorous debate. The low turnout of mourners was seen as a symptom of waning political support for pro-India parties in Kashmir.

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On the other hand, huge funerary processions for both militants and civilians killed in police action have become a worrying point for the security establishment. Therefore, when mourning for Wani soared, the state declared it as a sign of rising support for "terrorists" among the masses. The government's response to the funeral demonstrations was lethal and resulted in the killings and blinding of mourners. Ever since, targeted violence has become a normalised response to public grieving at such sites. The continued normalisation of the violent response to these funerary demonstrations points to a striking identitarian polarisation of public discourse through which the support of ordinary Indian citizenry is garnered by the Indian state. The question that arises is: How do the majority of people in India simply lap up these assertions about grieving Kashmiri people made by the state? What rationalisations are offered by the government about the nature of this grief and what were its justifications about civilian deaths and blinding of children?

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

Thus, in the broader Indian political culture, a Kashmiri has come to signify one who is in a complicated relationship with the state's sovereignty, to whom the rule of law does not apply and whose political action is labelled as misguided or constituting terrorism (Noorani 2011). Simultaneously, a Kashmiri can be killed but cannot be sacrificed (Zia 2018). A Kashmiri signifies something primitive; a body sans capacities to think and reflect on her political condition. Someone full of vengeance but not patriotic, a body that can be corrupted but not trusted. In the case of Kashmiri militant bodies, the state is taking decisions about who can live and what the political meanings of a liveable life are. When the state makes such a decision about the dispensability of people for strengthening its political claims, it assigns "grievability" to such bodies (Butler 2010). Thus, the media and political class in defence of the state create the distinction between who is to be grieved (soldiers) and who we must not grieve for (in this case, Wani).

The Indian state through regimens and technologies of power creates acceptable forms of citizenship and the Kashmiri bodies—militant or not—are consistently struggling to reject these imposed political frames. The public mourning envisages grief

as a political possibility to register a protest against the order of sovereignty in its current form. Thus, the politics of mourning is a reclamation that signifies a contest for political power, where people who attempt to ascertain their rights demand to share or overtake that sovereignty. The public mourning at funeral sites brings us to acknowledge the deep aspiration for Kashmiri sovereignty and rejection of the Indian state.

### Funerals as Affective Sites of Feminist Politics

At the traditional funeral sites, the gendered division of labour is visible. Women perform obituaries and eulogise the dead in the inner familial circles. They testify if the deceased performed their gendered role to the satisfaction of their kith or kin. This is a political dimension of gendered roles of grief, and it operates in the constituencies of establishing and producing cohesive social bonds or animosities, while keeping ranks and files of a social community in place. The final pronouncement of application of "grievability" is in the hands of women and comes in direct conflict with the state's claim of sovereignty.

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

When an event like Wani's death happened, it brought into the open the crises of traditional mourning culture, and people responded by improvising the culture itself. At Wani's funeral, a widespread redistribution of grief occurred and people, irrespective of their gender, felt overburdened by sorrow. We saw women in large numbers transform the traditional grieving culture into a potent funerary processional grieving for slain militants and civilians. The improvisation of the traditional cultures of mourning involved bringing women's grief into the public sphere (that was prohibited by the tradition) and then by women grieving bodies (that the state prohibits grieving for). In doing so, they provided a new political cohesion to



their Kashmiri political community, while creating a more progressive role for themselves.

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

### Culture of Mourning and the Grieving Mother

The realignment of the culture of mourning has seen a transformation in traditional symbolic icons of Kashmir's Muslim nationalist movement. The mourning mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism has long been a contentious subject in feminist theory. Rita Manchanda has noted how the figures of grieving mother and the martyr's mother have become iconic in the Kashmiri nationalist imagination, the public grief of mothers becoming a powerful aesthetic resource of the nationalist conception of *azaadi* (freedom) (Misri 2014). However, in the transformative culture of mourning in Kashmir, mothers make private this very public grief. This was very much visible in the subsequent funeral of Sabzar Bhat, another militant affiliated with Wani's outfit, Hizbul Mujahideen. Sabzar was popular in his village, Rathsun, for his bravery and will to fight against injustice (Naqash 2017). He was killed in an encounter in a nearby village along with 16-year-old Faizan Bhat, a young boy who had dropped out of school in May 2017 and who became part of the group after having successfully snatched a rifle from a Central Reserve Police Force personnel in Tral. In an account, "A Militant's Mother" published in a local newspaper, *Kashmir Life*, Shams Irfan recounts the scene when Sabzar's body arrived at his home, noting about his

mother, "She didn't react at all" amidst thousands of mourners who had gathered in her house. Furthermore, she took away her son's body into her private quarters and grieved by his side, away from the public gaze and in the morning she plainly informed her husband that the time to bury their son had come (Irfan 2017). This account challenges what is taken for granted about mother's grief amidst self-determination movements. Through emphasising the different modes of a mother-son relationship, women's connections to their political community under these political conditions offer them spaces for self-articulation and a chance to demand more freedoms. The account of Sabzar's mother is not a secluded case; there is a pattern visible in many mothers' response to their militant sons' death. The image of a grieving mother is further complicated by the disturbing silence about women as casualties. In 2017, two women, 22-year-old Mysra Bano from Kopwour and 24-year-old Beauty Jan from Shopian both died from gunshot wounds leaving behind their toddler daughters. The iconic images of toddlers left behind engendered the normative ways in which the ethnonationalism of military occupation is understood (Muhammad 2017).

In a compelling interview with Wani's mother, Maimoona, we see a woman who does not publicly display her pain (Amin 2017). She uses discretion, talking intermittently about the recognisable humanity of her two sons, both killed by the Indian army. Similarly, the mother of Faizan Bhat hides her trauma. She tells the journalists that they took a collective decision to donate her son's books and school uniform much before his death, since she was convinced that her son would not return (Ahmad 2017). In the media accounts, militant mothers move away from their traditional victim image to depictions as more robust petitioners. They ask tougher questions about the political conditions prevailing in Kashmir and link their children's lives to the political issues in myriad ways (Nabi 2017). With the shift in the gendered practices of political mourning, between privatising public grief and publicising what tradition asks to keep private, Kashmiri women are piecing together a radical framework that makes possible an even bolder entry for younger women. The contemporary gendered politics of mourning is nestled within a long history of women's resistance in Kashmir.

In April 2017, women from prominent Srinagar colleges came out to break the hegemonic dominance of men in the pro-freedom protests. The violent protests against the Indian state in Kashmir that remained largely a monopoly of young boys, found a rejoinder. Girls donning their school uniforms, headscarves and sometimes long robes thronged Srinagar city roads, armed with stones, taking aim at Indian soldier bunkers and armoured vehicles. They were undeterred by the tear gas canisters and PAVA [Pelargonic Acid Vanillyl Amide] shells that are routinely used to disperse public protests in Kashmir (Ashiq 2017). One of the young militants from Hizbul Mujahideen, Zakir Musa, admonished them for retorting to violence saying "abandon stone pelting; your brothers are alive" (*Kashmir Watch* 2017). These girls made it clear that they were representing their own selves when, despite these warnings,



they continued unafraid, fighting Indian forces at various nooks and corners of Srinagar city (Krishnan 2017). In a photo that surfaced over the internet on 5 March 2018, two women were seen alongside men offering funeral prayers for a young militant. It was a scene that further confirmed a silent feminist revolution that is enabling women to fight both the cultural patriarchy and the military occupation of Kashmir. The photo was not an anomalous event, but the product of a long history of women's political action in Kashmir (Outlook 2018).

## Conclusions

The case of women's participation in the militant and civilian funerary processions is a feminist political formulation in the Kashmiri context. This can be easily understood when we review the politics of funeral attendance in two actions that women carry out. They publicise grief by bringing out the private into the contested public realm, outdo the religious law, and

simultaneously resist the state's sovereignty through grieving for lives that the state has designated as "non-grievable."

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

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# Jinn, Floods, and Resistant Ecological Imaginaries in Kashmir

MONA BHAN

How Kashmiri women experience and narrate questions of resource sovereignty and dispossession within the context of Kashmir's long-drawn-out military occupation, and India's investments in mega hydroelectric dams on Kashmir's rivers have been discussed. The devastating floods in 2014 led Kashmiris to increasingly challenge perceptions of nature or natural disasters as apolitical. Dams are an integral part of border-making processes, and gender, space, and borders are continually co-produced through militarised infrastructures. Women's resistant imaginaries, which combine political and ecological metaphors, and rely on conceptions of jinn and other non-human agency, offer a way to rethink Kashmir beyond its securitised geographies.

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

The NHPC is India's premier hydropower generation corporation, which, Kashmiris assert, has been "stealing" Kashmiri resources to power the Indian economy for the past several decades (Bhan 2014). In April 2013, Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) National Conference (NC)-led state government asked New Delhi to pay Kashmir for its water resources and stop depriving Kashmiris of their most valuable resource and their prized economic asset (Parvaiz 2013). This was not the first time that Kashmiris had demanded ownership over their waterbodies, or recognised that the control of economic resources was key for India to maintain its political control over Kashmir (Hakeem 2014). In 2011, Taj Mohi-ud-din, a senior politician from the Congress party, had accused the NHPC of acting like an imperial power and thwarting local industry and entrepreneurship (Umar 2011). According to a Right to Information application filed in 2016, J&K was the "second largest buyer of electricity produced in its own territory" (Parvaiz 2016). Even as Kashmiris have frequently drawn meaningful connections between territorial and resource sovereignties, tropes of electricity theft, resource misuse, and hijacking of Kashmiri rivers gained even more traction after the floods of 2014, making questions of resource control and ownership critical components in the Kashmiri fight for *azaadi* (freedom) from the long-drawn out military occupation in Kashmir (Junaid 2013; Kaul 2013; Duschinski and Bhan 2017; Duschinski et al 2018; Suhail 2018).<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2012, I was in Gurez, the northernmost frontier tehsil in the Bandipora district, conducting the first segment of my ethnographic fieldwork on dam-related displacements in the villages of Badwan and Khopri.<sup>2</sup> By 2016, the villages were expected to be submerged by India's 330 megawatt (MW) dam on the Kishanganga river, a tributary of River Jhelum, which courses through Gurez, before it enters Pakistan, irrigating vast swathes of its prime agricultural land. Gurez, much like other border provinces in the state, got three hours of electricity daily through a diesel-powered generator, which was not connected to the northern grid that supplies electricity to nine Indian states, including India's capital city, Delhi. The irony was not lost on Gurezis, who saw their rivers being repurposed to power the Indian nation while

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their villages remained relegated to the “dark ages,” with no immediate government plans to electrify them. In addition to lamenting the loss of their rivers, with no tangible benefits in sight, Gurezis were also worried about losing access to critical resources such as sand, wood, glaciers, animals, and highland pastures, because the dam and its related infrastructure now populated the landscape. The situation was worse for Gurezi women who no longer felt “free” to pursue their livelihoods or venture into the forests in search of medicinal herbs, vegetables, and mushrooms. For them, the dam had not just “stolen” their resources, but also their freedom and ability to move freely in a space already scarred by years of military control.

### Gender, Space and Borders

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

I first map out how the devastating flooding of River Jhelum in 2014 made questions of resource sovereignty central to questions of azaadi. As mentioned earlier, misgivings about the NHPC's imperial control over Kashmir's rivers were widespread even in the 1990s, with a few strident voices cautioning against the central government's increasing control over hydropower projects as a means to erode Kashmir's “capacity for self-reliance” (DN 1991: 1959; Hakeem 2014). But, until 2014, questions of resource control and access featured sparingly in public conversations about Kashmir's economic future and its viability as an independent entity. The 2014 flood changed this

substantially. Several civil-society groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kashmir began asking if the Kishanganga river was another “disaster waiting to happen,” since the NHPC was diverting the waters from the Kishanganga river to the Wular Lake, raising its water level, and reducing its future capacity to soak surging waters from River Jhelum. Kashmiris increasingly situated “natural” disasters within their larger political fields, in order to extend Kashmiri resistance to environmental issues (and not just territorial ones) and, at the same time, dislocate perceptions of nature as apolitical. Dams were increasingly seen as critical instruments for maintaining the Indian state's control over Kashmir's water resources. They were, as Bonnemaïson and Macy (2003) claim, “state-ments” or “ideologies” in concrete, which revealed the intersections between gendered dislocations and India's masculine infrastructure (which included both men and equipment) in the context of Kashmir's military occupation.

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

### A Fight for Identity

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

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



in this destructive pattern of growth, what is rendered invisible in this map of land use is the pervasive military occupation of the city's hill sides and the Karewas," and its waterbodies, glaciers, and forests. At the same time, the Jhelum did not just carry copious amounts of silt and mud but also the tortured and mutilated bodies of Kashmiris (Mathur 2016: 61). A witness to the past three decades in which the Indian military has used brutal counter-insurgency tactics to squash widespread dissent, a flooded Jhelum was a grim reminder of the accumulated violence on Kashmir's body politic that had not spared the Jhelum either. Amidst Kashmir's violent turmoil, the complete mismanagement of the river by a series of puppet governments had wreaked environmental havoc. Layers and mounds of silt and mud, and massive constructions on critical wetlands in and around the river or on its critical tributaries had suffocated the river. The government, Kashmiris claimed, had purposefully choked the river. The fight for Kashmir's rivers, particularly for River Jhelum, considered to be Kashmir's lifeline, was a fight for Kashmir's identity (*vajud*). In the years following the flood, questions about Kashmir's rivers and their centrality for Kashmir's azaadi assumed centre stage. Kashmiris demanded that River Jhelum be properly dredged. They challenged the state of Kashmir's rivers and their ecological vulnerabilities in the context of intense militarisation of their land and rivers and the commodification of their water resources.

The flood of 2014 was, thus, a turning point in many ways, both in terms of how civil society groups envisioned the relationship between environmental and territorial sovereignty, and how Kashmir's struggle for azaadi became tied, even if loosely, to the reclamation of its rivers and waterbodies. Even before the flood, Kashmiris had repeatedly argued that the numerous hydroelectric dams in the region had contributed to the inundation of Kashmir's most fertile rice-growing regions. Kashmir's agricultural sector, they claimed, was deliberately being weakened so that regional food sovereignty could be undermined and Kashmir could once again be turned into a spectacle for tourism. Indeed, in a prescient commentary, only several months before the devastating flood, a senior engineer said to me while sitting on the banks of River Jhelum:

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

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

The Government of India does not allow us to grow on any front, economically. Be it power, tourism, or any other sector of the economy. If we need a rupee to survive, they will only give us 75 paisas. There

were times when we relied on our milk, eggs, and chicken. Everything that India does here is a conspiracy against Kashmiris. Why shouldn't I think like that? We were a haven for small industries. And, now we don't produce anything. Our water sources have been colonised and exploited.

### Politicising the Flood

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

In the next section, I present stories from my interviews with women from Srinagar, a year after the flood had destroyed their homes and added yet another layer of fear and anxiety to their already precarious lives. By no means were these stories limited to women, nor do I claim to offer a gendered perspective that is divorced from differences of class and location. Despite these differences, my conversations with women across Kashmir foregrounded the gendered nature of Kashmir's military occupation and the state's masculine infrastructure that has occupied its roads, alleyways, mountains, lakes, and buildings. India's military interventions in Kashmir have for the most part included defence installations such as roads, bridges, railway lines, and more quotidian forms of control and surveillance in the form of bunkers and checkpoints, which have implications for how men and women can go about their everyday routines or access certain spaces and places. Stringent forms of militarised control are also routinely imposed through legal provisions, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) and Public Safety Act (PSA), that grant the Indian military impunity against war crimes in Kashmir, which include enforced disappearances, extra juridical killings, rape, sexual violence, and torture (Duschinski and Hoffman 2011; Mathur 2012).

In a geography heavily structured by the logics of militarism, the flood, too, according to many Kashmiris, was an extension of a military state, a silent instrument of death and destruction that had weaponised nature. Kashmiris remained deeply wary of India's selective rescue missions and its rejection of international humanitarian help under the pretext that India was sufficiently equipped to rescue its citizens. Within this context, Kashmiri women volunteers came out on the flooded streets and alleyways, along with their male counterparts, to rescue their neighbours and take on the task of saving, rehabilitating, and rebuilding community in the post-flood period (Reshi 2014). Contrary to mainstream portrayals of Kashmiri women as victims, recent scholarship has documented their active role in the politics of Kashmiri resistance (Kaul 2013; Malik 2015; Ghosh 2016; Zia 2017). Kashmiri women have resisted the military



occupation in Kashmir as mothers and wives whose sons or husbands were killed or disappeared in the three-decade long brutal counter-insurgency war (Zia 2016). As human rights lawyers, activists, photographers, film-makers, and reporters, they have tirelessly documented military crimes, and fought to reopen cases of rape and sexual torture against the Indian military (Batoool et al 2016; Manecksha 2017). In certain instances, Kashmiri women have also assumed explicit political roles to demand the right of self-determination (Malik 2015). In their post-flood narratives, too, women offered a trenchant political commentary to establish the predatory nature of the Indian state in Kashmir and its intensification under India's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

### 'The Water Was a *Balai*, a Demon'

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

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

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

Sakina, another middle-aged woman who was visiting from a village in northern Kashmir, chimed in, "Mona ji, you won't believe it when I say this. But I saw how a giant man, whose

arms must have been at least a kilometre long, was directing the flow of water in my village."

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

The post-flood stories were poignant testimonials of a jolted world in which women's relationship with land and water had been profoundly altered, and in which women used their water-soaked walls and damaged material artefacts as repositories of a familial world that had now turned eerie and unfamiliar. Women's stories of Srinagar city populated with men on horses, or with water that "shrieked and yelled" stayed with me, shaping how I heard women's anxious tales of an imminent flood that the Kishanganga dam would unleash, submerging their villages and devouring their highly fertile land. Likewise, women's stories from another border region in Uri, where the consequences of the 2014 flood had worsened because of NHPC's hydroelectric dam on River Jhelum (commissioned more than a decade ago in the 1990s) established the long-term social and ecological consequences of mega-dams. Such stories also offered radical ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir was no longer barricaded with dams and military installations, but presented as vibrant and free, empowered by extraordinary forces that animated its land, forests, and rivers. These narratives confronted the "ecological dread and disenchantment" produced through years of violence and militarised confinement (Palmer 2017: 2). In the next two sections, I rely on ethnographic narratives from Kashmir's border regions—Gurez, where the Kishanganga dam is currently in its final stages of completion, and Uri, situated on the banks of River Jhelum, where a 480 MW dam was commissioned in the 1990s—to analyse how mega-dams shape women's anxieties about flooding, resource alienation, and social and economic freedom.

### The Kishanganga Dam

In Gurez, which is roughly 50 miles from Srinagar city, people were spared the wrath of a flooded Jhelum. Instead, Gurezis dreaded the man-made flood that would forever alter their worlds. The Kishanganga had flooded many times in the past, devouring large tracts of land or slicing it into fragments. People's accumulated wisdom had taught them to work with the ebb and flow of the Kishanganga river. But, nothing could prepare



them for the deluge that awaited them (Baruah 2012). Gurezis would often say "that the dam was their *sehlab* [flood]," which would drown their villages, and leave them at the mercy of government-sponsored rehabilitation packages. Gurezi women experienced a deeper sense of dislocation since they felt terribly disenfranchised in an already altered landscape, disrupted by men and materials that were both seen as "foreign" entities. Since 2009, Gurez was populated with officials of the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) and the NHPC, most of whom belonged to the plains of India. In addition to setting up make-shift camps and settlements on land that once belonged to the villagers, the HCC and the NHPC had also set up a stone-crushing plant in Badwan village. The incessant sounds from the crushing of rocks and the air they breathed, which contained specks of dust and smoke, I was told, felt "foreign." The outsiders, all of them men, dug the earth, crushed rocks, and bored their mountains to redirect their water to produce electricity in far-away places. Instead of horses, it was men who were doing it; and instead of using sticks and batons, there was heavy machinery and equipment that was stealing their water. Women worried about the deluge that would submerge their homes, land, trees, and orchards, and drew a close connection between the impending flood and the loss of their freedom and independence.

In the summer of 2015, as the date for the commissioning of the dam drew closer, Gurezis experienced increased fear and uncertainty, which sometimes turned into anger and bitterness within the community. No longer would I find women gathered outside their homes, soaking in the summer sun or taking intermittent breaks between household chores and working on their land. Many homes were already deserted and families were scattered between Gurez, Srinagar, and Bandipora. Men and women were engaged in heated discussions, most of them tied to the issue of insufficient compensation for their acquired land. Despite this uncertainty, women refused to abandon their land even though there were government sanctions against cultivation that year. "Women love the land more than men do," Nafeesa told me as she loosened the earth with her hands, flattening it a few seconds later after she had removed the weeds. "We work on it more than men do, and it takes care of us and our families." A few other women who were working alongside Nafeesa spoke about their uncertain futures, a routine conversation among women when they gathered together in their homes or fields to socialise or to share updates regarding matters of land acquisition and compensation. "When the HCC came, and offered money, our important leaders did not ask the right questions. They accepted the money thinking that the world was coming to them." I asked them if they had resented this decision, to which they promptly replied, "We were told that the dam was not women's matter and the men were enough to tackle this issue." Given their active participation in political rallies and speeches, the absence of women's voices in dam-related matters, at least in the early years, was a striking one. The women I spoke with attributed this to the "misconception most men carried regarding what the dam might bring in terms of

money and other benefits." But, a lot of these turned out to be illusory as people realised that "they were not just losing their land, water, trees, fruit, and vegetables," but also an "entire way of life." Now, people are *hushaar* (vigilant), especially women, who feel terribly anxious about raising their children in unfamiliar environments, without access to farmland or the forests. "What will we do without this air, this water, and this land?" chimed in Haseena, a young woman in her 30s. She went on to say,

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

### Conceptions of Freedom

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

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

And, this freedom was as social as it was economic. Women cringed at the thought of having to buy *rajma* (beans) or potatoes, part of their staple diet, and crops that Gurezis deem to be the "best and sweetest in the entire state," from the market.



"Here, we grow these ourselves, care for them. It is our wish if we want to eat or sell them, but in the towns we will have to buy these from the bazaar." Most women recognised that contrary to what the government officials were promising, a forced migration into the cities and towns would not automatically translate into "opportunities for upward mobility," especially for women who would not enjoy the bodily freedom or forms of economic self-sufficiency that living close to a river or a forest afforded.

### Dams as Military Apparatus

Gurezi women's care and labour translated into "love" for a vibrant landscape, which was now drenched in unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells. The muck and the concrete had diverted the water and contaminated their routes of travel. In addition to the concertina wires installed by the military—a ubiquitous presence in Gurez—there were now meshes and slabs of iron, rusted trucks and rotting jeeps in the vicinity of their apple orchards, and mountains reduced to rubble and dust. If anything, the dam was an assertion of masculinity and control over a vibrant landscape. Much like Nehru's writings in which the Himalayas figured predominantly in gendered narratives of self-realisation and nation-building, for the engineers and geologists of the HCC, too, dam building was deeply connected with conceptions of heroic masculinity in the face of difficult weather and harsh mountainscapes (Holden 2003). The "cool rationality of modernity" that the Himalayas represented for Nehru was only enhanced by the HCC's investments in "meticulous planning, precise execution" and cutting-edge technology that helped the engineers and geologists establish domination over mountain valleys (Holden 2003: 7; HCC 2014).<sup>4</sup> Scores of men donning their yellow helmets and fluorescent safety jackets, many of them from outside Gurez, considered themselves to be "pioneers" who were building India's prestige project in an inhospitable terrain, where it was often difficult to breathe, especially if they were trapped inside the long and cavernous water tunnels. And, yet, the work of engineering persisted despite the hardships. Embedded in the tropes of hardship and difficulty were celebrations of their hardiness, the enormity of their efforts, and proofs of "national greatness," which lay in transforming nature and bringing it in line with visions of national destiny.

The masculine nature of infrastructural work and the walls, tunnels, adits, and concrete in Gurez produced a new set of gendered immobilities, forcing women to alter their movements and restructure their sense of space and place.<sup>5</sup> In frontier zones of Kashmir, where movements are heavily surveilled by the Indian military, infrastructural interventions such as big dams also end up multiplying and extending borders that limit people's, especially women's, access to critical spaces and resources. In doing so, infrastructural forms shape social domains by imposing new geographies of movements and restrictions, and violating pre-existing rights and claims to particular spaces. And, in the process, what arise are borders within borders, and infrastructure that reproduces

the logics of border surveillance and enforcement (Weizman 2007; Lambert 2013).

Dams, thus, become extensions of a military–security apparatus, widening their reach into new social and ecological domains, and intensifying everyday levels of policing and surveilling, while ensuring that even less physical space remains for public use. For instance, concertina wires are no longer only confined to military installations, but are also used to enclose dam sites; there is posted signage in non-military sites prohibiting the use of cameras; there are no-entry signs, placed strategically near the dam site so civilians cannot access walled-off zones. Likewise, power stations built underground remain inaccessible to the general population, and worker camps installed on prime agricultural land make it difficult for women to walk across their fields after sunset.

### The Uri Dam

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

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



stunted vegetation, more cloud cover, and less sunshine (Bauer and Bhan 2016, 2018).

### The Flood and Its Jinn

For many women like Razia, the flood, while catastrophic, opened up alternative ecological imaginaries in which the gushing waters of the Jhelum river made explicit the connections between land and water, and human and non-human forms, reminding them of the lived landscape that existed before it was burdened with concrete and concertina wires. Here, I describe how Razia, a community leader and the daughter of the disappeared landlord, sutures a fragmented landscape through tales she recounts of the flood and her encounters with non-human figures, who remind her of Kashmir's *garam* (spiritually potent landscape), and the ways it has been mauled and desecrated by decades of violence.

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

After recounting her encounter with the jinn, Razia talked in detail about her relationship with the *sar*, a place she had visited often. As a community leader in her village and also the daughter of the local landlord, Razia visited many sites that once fell under her father's sphere of influence. Indeed, her interactions with the jinn and his directives to her must be understood within the context of the important position she occupied in the village as a well-known social and political worker.<sup>6</sup>

The first time I went to the *sar* was after a few Bakarwals [pastoralists] who live in *dhoks* [small mountain houses] complained about the military's continued harassment. Despite living in a tightly-surveilled territory in the higher reaches of the Himalayas, Bakarwal *dhoks* were raided often, sometimes in the middle of the night. Men were routinely asked to leave the *dhoks* and sit outside during cold nights while women were instructed to stay back. I took my mother along and a few other villagers to visit the site to figure out a way to help the community. I mobilised at least 25–30 Bakarwals and went to the camp commander. I told him you have such high surveillance during the day so why is it that people are harassed in the night time; their identity cards and other official documents demanded at arbitrary hours? Seeing the size of the crowd, the commander ensured us that he would look into the matter. The Bakarwals lived in peace for some time after that. After we left the military station, we went to the *sar* with Bakarwals and their horses, many of them used for military portering. When we arrived, a feast was ready for us. A Bakarwal family had cooked a meal

for us and sacrificed a goat for the feast. I can never forget the picturesque *sar*, with its blue waters dancing under gleaming sun rays. We could hear faint music coming from the other end of the *sar*. As I trained my ears, an older Bakarwal told me that the *sar* is home to jinn too, and these are old and pious jinn. The *sar* is deep and according to legend contains a mosque. He used to visit the *sar* with his grandfather and once a *barāg*—a winged steed used by the prophets to travel—appeared from under the water. The *barāg* instructed his grandfather to visit the site one more time but his grandfather pleaded that he was too old and might not be able to visit again. But the *barāg* insisted that he visit one more time, and carry with him a bag of rice. As instructed, the grandfather visited the *sar* and was told to dump all the rice in the *sar*. Later, he was asked to visit *Chasmashahi* and see the rice sprout there.

Razia continued to reflect on the "mysterious" and "magical" powers of the *sar*. "The *sar* is not always visible," she said. Even when the weather is clear, the *sar* refused to be seen often. There is too much *gunah* (sin) in Kashmir, but many land and waterbodies remain pious.

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

The rice grains that the Bakarwal's grandfather immersed in the *sar* sprouted far way in another waterbody, in *Chasmashahi*, located at least 60 km from Gulmarg, establishing the connectedness of a landscape that has been cut, sliced, split, mined, and fragmented—through walls, borders, dams, roads, landmines, and checkpoints—and rendered lifeless and inanimate. Such connections extend from the human to the non-human world, which include the jinn, who, dislocated by the floods, visited Razia's village to assess the damage. In her narratives, the jinn, disguised as a human, comes from the same *sar*, making it obvious to Razia that he was indeed a jinn since he possessed non-human capabilities to travel across flooded roads and bridges.

The jinn, bestowed in Islamic cosmology with a long life and the faculties to move fast and swiftly, while continually able to change form (Khan 2006: 238), says to Razia that the deluge is a *kheher* from *khuda* (wrath from god) and it will come again, but that she should try to stop it. Razia claims she is powerless in the face of such calamities, although the conversation inspires her to immediately begin post-flood recovery work in her village. Razia's constant invocations of the space as already heavily surveilled and guarded by the military, and their litany of atrocities against the Bakarwals, particularly their women and children, foregrounds a morally corrupt geography of militarism, in which the *sar*, standing here both as a metonym for



Kashmir and its sacredness, is contaminated with gunah. And, yet, despite being scarred with militarised violence and located amidst dense geographies of surveillance, the sar, which guards a sacred mosque and is also home to the jinn, dances with joy as fountains of water burst from its womb. In her post-flood recounting of Kashmir's morally laden geographies, in which jinn and humans are both victims of the deluge, Razia's story restores lost connections, human and non-human, natural and social, as well as spiritual and political.

In his extensive study of jinn in Delhi, Anand Taneja (2017: 10) argues that "jinns are linked to deep time, connecting human figures thousands of years apart." In doing so, they serve as "magical figures of memory," who, by virtue of the long lives they lead "[connect] human beings centuries and millennia apart in time" (Taneja 2017: 11, 25), while also challenging an amnesiac state's concerted attempts to efface Muslim artefacts and sacred sites in post-partition India. For Razia, too, the jinn reminded her of garam, spiritually potent spaces, or of the connectedness of spaces and waterbodies that militarised infrastructure—bunkers, camps, dams, and checkpoints—had fragmented. Such connections represented alternative social and material histories and spatial imaginaries that now lay buried under dense layers of a military occupation. In doing so, the jinn restore some form of mystique to Kashmir's land and water forms, for instance, through their abilities to not "reveal" themselves fully, despite the structures of surveillance that attempt to map every inch of the region's surface. At the same time, the jinn stand witness to the connections of the past; they speak to different modes of being and belonging in a space, where both are structured by the spatial logics of a military occupation. The jinn also prod Razia to "do something" and "stop the flood." Realising her charge, she assumes the task of rebuilding her community by setting up teams and equipment to clear her muck-damaged agricultural fields, and she reclaims what is left of her land and village.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have analysed how the intersections between dams and more quotidian forms of militarised infrastructure shape women's anxieties about their environments, and their abilities to seek opportunities for social, political, and economic freedoms. As exercises in border enforcement, the dams in Gurez and Uri intensified the structure and logics of a military state, by imposing new limitations on women's freedom of movement and by literally disappearing people who refused to conform to the NHPC's brutal land-grab policies. In a space where the military exercises various degrees and forms of spatial control, the flood of 2014 was both a stark reminder of how environmental and territorial freedoms were interlinked, and how Kashmir's river resources were being exploited to power the Indian economy, thus triggering a series of conversations on Kashmir's resource sovereignty and the fate of its rivers and waterbodies. The flood, it was clear, was a political event, which laid bare the state government's apathy and callousness toward Kashmir's water resources. For Gurezis, who had not experienced the 2014 flood, it stood as a reminder of what was to come: the dam, often called the sehlab, would inundate their villages, and also their way of life, and the consequences of this disenfranchisement were deeply gendered. In women's narratives across Srinagar, Uri, and Gurez, I heard a trenchant critique of a militarised state, which was abusing Kashmir's resources and using them against the local populations, revealing women's vulnerabilities, but also spurring resistant political and ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir's land and waterscapes were reimagined and re-spatialised through allusions to jinn, spirits, and Kashmir's mystical and enchanted geographies. Such alternative conceptions of Kashmir's geography, which presented it as unfragmented, undivided, and garam (spiritually potent) exceeded the militarised logics of border enforcement, and can be read as the political renditions of a landscape scarred by decades of violence and bloodshed.

## NOTES

- 1 The term "occupation" encompasses both the affective and legal dimensions of the existing Indian state in Kashmir. Kashmiris overwhelmingly resent and resist the presence of a hostile, largely Hindu, military force and their violent tactics to suppress popular demands for self-determination. Indian military presence can justifiably be called an occupation based on Article 42 of The Hague Convention, which states the presence of a "hostile" army and the exercise of its authority over the local population as a fundamental characteristic of an occupation (Ferraro 2012: 7). The ICRC report notes that, in recent years, the meanings of occupation and the laws governing occupation have undergone many shifts, mainly because "in addition to the persistence of traditional forms of occupation," extraterritorial military interventions "have given rise to new forms of foreign military presence on the territory of a state, sometimes consensual but very often imposed" (Ferraro 2012: 7; Bhan and Misri 2015).
- 2 Badwan and Khopri are two villages in the Gurez tehsil, which is approximately 85 km from Bandipora district. According to census

- data from 2011, there are around 479 families in Badwan-Wanpora and the total population is 3,327. Khopri-Mastan, a village considered to be the 7th least populous in Gurez has 97 households and a total population of 520 (Gol 2011). Despite these official statistics, the data on the total number of households in each village was contested by the villagers who felt that their *chula* or household was not represented in the data, which made them ineligible for dam-related compensation. Badwan, which means big forest, I was told was the "face of Gurez" since many of its residents have excelled in the bureaucracy, as well as in medicine, arts, and poetry. The villages once used to be at the heart of the Central Asian Silk route and memories abound from the times when Gurez was not a border, but an entrepôt, and a thriving cultural and trade centre. Likewise, villagers were also arbitrarily separated from their families and relatives in 1948, when the UN brokered the ceasefire line soon after India and Pakistan's first war over Kashmir.
- 3 Interview conducted by author, 5 June 2014.
- 4 HCC is the acronym for Hindustan Construction Company, a Mumbai-based contracting company, responsible for building the Kishanganga

dam. For more details, see HCC (2014). Also see Bhan (2014).

- 5 Unlike in other Himalayan regions, where women are an integral part of the workforce in mega-infrastructure projects, such as roads and dams, women in Gurez did not participate in similar forms of construction work.
- 6 By no means were jinn-related stories limited to women. In Gurez, for instance, both men and women spoke about them, worrying that the jinn were harder to spot now because human interventions had wreaked pre-existing moral and spiritual worlds. In writing about the world of jinn, some scholars express concern that a widespread belief in jinn among South Asian Muslim communities might be used to reinforce stereotypes about Muslim irrationality (in this case Muslim women's irrationality; see Naveeda Khan 2006: 239). Such stereotypes, they caution us, can miss out on the secular character of jinn, or their significance among non-Muslim communities in South Asia and beyond. In many instances, such as in the Feroz Shah Kotla ruins of Delhi, as Anand Vivek Taneja notes, non-Muslims, too, visit the *durgah*, petitioning the jinns to resolve their personal and professional



predicaments. Furthermore, such stereotypes erase how Jinn are dynamic entities, and the ways in which relationship between jinn and humanity is also constantly evolving. Jinn can be seen as political figures, offering a nostalgic view of the past, and a yearning and potential for inclusive and moral futures (Taneja 2017).

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# The Intimate World of *Vyestoan*

## Affective Female Alliances and Companionships of Resistance in Kashmir

UZMA FALAK

Through ethnographic vignettes and auto-ethnographic fragments of women's intimate worlds in Kashmir, women's congregations, female alliances, friendships, embodied practices, and everyday memory projects are examined, arguing that these constitute an alternate affect and episteme in Kashmir. The concept of *vyestoan* is introduced as a critical, affective female alliance and companionship of resistance hinged on the notion of witnessing, in life, death, and beyond. This critical female alliance, against several interlocked forms of domination, is proposed as a useful term, rather than the notion of "sisterhood" in feminist scholarship, to understand intersectionality and criticality particularly in the context of Kashmir.

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

Women filled Rukhsana's hands with henna in intricate patterns, as if inscribing secrets on her palm. Rukhsana's confidante, Parveena Ahanger, sat next to her and sang along. Rukhsana was a little girl when, accompanied by her grandfather Jamaal Dar, she would travel every month from their village Pahaldej in Handwor for the sit-ins and protests of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)—a collective of relatives of those subjugated to enforced and involuntary disappearances in Kashmir—in Srinagar's Pratap Park demanding the whereabouts of her father Fatah Muhammad, who was subjected to enforced disappearance in 2000. It was here that she met Parveena, Haleema and Sabia, who, along with other women from her village, were now singing at the *maenzraat* (night of the henna) of her wedding.

As the women sang, a strange haptic moment, a certain haunting bound us, creating a different time and a different space. It seemed like everyone's loss and mourning had survived a body search, crossed a certain checkpoint, a certain border, and were now in an assembly; each articulation was distinct yet coalesced into an ephemeral collective, manifesting itself into a longing and a cry. Several such cries echoed that night from the colourful tent. Suddenly, a woman in the gathering beat the *tumbakhnaer* in a discordant way, signalling a change of rhythm. The song of grief and mourning was punctuated by a swift change of rhythm and tune from a certain drum

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accompanied by an impromptu humorous verse, and thus the otherwise crying congregation suddenly burst into a song of laughter. Soon, women began dancing, bodies oscillated, arms and feet moved. These movements engendered an affectivity that one could, as it were, touch.

This women's gathering, which I was a part of, at Pahaldej village in 2013, brings us to the heart of my undertaking in this paper in which I reflect on women's congregations, female alliances, friendships and embodied practices, arguing that these constitute an alternate affect and episteme in Kashmir. Here, I attempt to bring these discussions to life through ethnographic vignettes and auto-ethnographic fragments of women's intimate worlds in Kashmir. One of my major undertakings will be working through a concept of critical female alliance of resistance, which I call *vyestoan*. In Koshur, Kashmir's native language, *vyes* refers to a female friend and *vyestoan* is a term for female friendships. I hope to delineate notions of in-betweenness and liminality which come closest to an indefinable and obscure, yet a powerful force that I have felt amid women gathered at weddings, funerals, protest marches, mosques and other myriad spaces and times, and beyond. Therefore, in some sense, this paper is a site of struggle with (and within) the confines of language to articulate the embodied, particularly this affectivity of a women's gathering that I first felt as a child when my grandmother took me to the mosque for women's congregational prayers and which continues to hold me in its tender and poignant grip.

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

A similar transformation takes place during the monthly protest meetings of the APDP in Srinagar. Those who were subjected to enforced disappearances "appear" through the bodies of their family members, who wear their images certifying both their presence and absence. As women assemble, greet, hug, laugh and talk, a space of protest, mourning and remembrance is transformed into a space of celebration; not only of persistence and struggle but of alliance, friendships and mobility as well.<sup>6</sup> The women, thus, enact memory and collective trauma, initiating intergenerational "acts of transfer" (Taylor 2003).<sup>7</sup>

The night of fellowship at Rukhsana's *maenzraat* ended amid laughter, chit-chats, and whimpers. Morning light filtered through the window and reflected on a mud wall contouring the window itself. In this window of light on the wall, I saw

Rukhsana's silhouette, disentangling her hair. Her bridal dress still neatly folded, coloured shiny bottles, hair clips, moth balls, and knick-knacks were scattered like her hair. This visible and invisible portrait, this silhouette sculpting the light, is how I was to remember Rukhsana years after: an intense portrait of presence and absence.

### Women's Assemblies as Political Enactment

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

Men were taken out during crackdowns. We were caged inside our homes. Troopers would lock us inside and shout swear words. They broke our doors, walls, windows, took our belongings, even pliers and screw drivers. They would frisk our trunks, rice and flour canisters, coal, sugar, clothes, water storage tanks, chicken coops. (personal interview, 2013)

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

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

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

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

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



During long spells of crackdown, women would spread mats and blankets on the streets and assemble, organise community kitchens, or distribute food among neighbourhoods under relentless curfews and crackdowns. They contributed money to buy bread and food for men who would be forcibly asked to assemble outside their homes during long hours of search and cordon operations.

In instances such as these where the boundary between the public and private crumbles, where people stand, sit, breathe, sing, sleep, mourn, cook, and eat on the street, Butler asserts that the demonstrators put their body on the line in its “insistence, obduracy and precarity, overcoming the distinction between public and the private,” challenging not only the legitimacy of the state, “but also maintaining themselves as persisting bodies with needs, desires, and requirements” (2015: 97–98).

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

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

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

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

Her sister Nayeema interjects:

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

### Songs of Resistance

Women's songs in Kashmir form an important repertoire of resistance. Enacting cultural agency and encoding resistance into cultural memory, women's intimate worlds of singing rendered (and continue to render) the political struggle into poetry. Songs which women sang in *Pahaldej* or those which Nayeema and Neelam referred to are songs of collective loss and longing, media of protest, mobilisation and solidarity, and significantly, an enactment of a collective articulation of freedom. Offering alternate ways of knowing, these songs challenge “established

practices of remembering and forgetting” and “insurrect the perspectives that culturally hegemonic practices have foreclosed” (Medina 2011). They emerge from, in the words of Ariel Dorfman (2007) in his epilogue to *Poems from Guantanamo*, a “simple, almost primeval, arithmetic of breathing in and out” which keeps us alive. What Butler, in her *Frames of War*, says about the “written” poems of the Guantanamo detainees, holds true of the songs in Kashmir:

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

Understanding these songs as challenging statist knowledge production and as offering alternate ways of knowing offers several critical possibilities. These songs, for example, not only enact embodied memory, but also may offer nuanced reflections on resistance and embodiment itself. For instance, “*Hum Kya Chahtey? Azaadi*” is a popular slogan enacting a collective longing for freedom in Kashmir, and in one of its renditions, freedom is inscribed on the mountains, rivers, soil, body, and soul (Ahmed 2012). A nuanced reading of the song, I argue, enables us to read it as a critical reflection on embodiment itself. The notion of embodiment moves beyond the understanding of the body as a physiological entity and explores the “phenomenal” body focusing on unified experiences and potentials, beyond rigid binaries and dualisms such as the Cartesian split of the body and mind. The song of *azaadi* inscribes “freedom” transcending various binaries—body/soul, material/spirit, reason/emotion, nature/culture, history/memory, life/death, individual/collective—and creates a porosity between these dualities and other evocations of landscapes, proximity, intimacy, desire, promise, voice, and movement in relation to occupation and resistance, offering, thus, a poetic thesis of embodied resistance.

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



In Kashmir, such assemblies are not understood within the democratic logic of the right to freedom of assembly; such gatherings enact a rejection of the Indian state as the guarantor of rights. As demonstrations turn into funerals and vice versa, every death in Kashmir indicates and enacts the death of the state.<sup>10</sup> It is an enactment understood beyond the language of the constitutional law and rights even though the region and its people's lives are complexly involved and interlaced within the structures of law. Moreover, though such assemblies are ephemeral, their "transience is linked to their critical function" (Butler 2015: 20).

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

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

No one could afford or bear to stay in isolation behind closed doors. We were alive and we had to communicate that. (personal interview, 2013)

### Dreams and Their 'Share in History'

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

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

After her son's disappearance, Parveena cried relentlessly and felt she was unable to carry on. She says she travelled to far off places, to every prison, every interrogation centre in search of her son and could not pay attention to her family and the household. Her neighbours attended to the household chores in her absence.

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

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

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

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

Like other members of the collective, Parveena and Saima, bound by a similar (not same) loss and struggle, forged a bond enriching not only their mother-daughter relationship but also extending beyond it, into a *vyestoon*, as confidantes in a common political struggle. The members of the collective forged enduring bonds, creating a new "social network of hands" towards the sustenance of the struggle (Butler 2015). It is this network of hands that Parveena perhaps hinted at when she, referring to the larger APDP family, expressed her hope and wish—*myaen aathe gasan palzin*—using the metaphor of hands she implied that she (her hands) wishes to be of assistance and help.

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

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



This song and its several versions are in circulation within women's oral traditions in Kashmir, and has multilayered references.<sup>11</sup> However, one of the two obvious references in popular circulation is the Kashmir's 16th-century poet Habba Khatoon's longing for her husband Yousuf Shah Chak, who, as the last king of Kashmir opposed Mughal expansion, was tricked into parley and was thereafter exiled to Bihar. The second reference is to the Quranic story of Prophet Yusuf, son of Prophet Yaqub. The Quran refers to the intense patience, faith, and waiting of Prophet Yaqub for his favourite son Yusuf, who is a master at interpreting dreams and whose envious half-brothers throw him into a well. The story is poignantly structured, starting with a dream and ending with an interpretation of the dream. Encapsulating several temporalities and spatialities, the song of Yusuf in Kashmir thus encodes hope and resistance into a multilayered cultural memory.

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

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

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

### Intimate Spheres and Subversive Solidarity

As the fierce Chenab flows in Kishtwar, a shrine stands in gossamer silence broken only by the mutterings of a woman sitting on its stairs near the threshold. Inside the shrine is a small door separated by a curtain. I try to peek in but cannot

see through the dense dark. I bend my head and step inside as my eyes negotiate the darkness in this small chamber which appears to be a private prayer room only for women, honouring a local woman saint buried there. I see a group of women sitting next to each other, whispering, reciting verses in sing-song voices, and moving their bodies in a rhythmic to and fro, like a pendulum. In the seclusion of this room, several coloured threads are tied in a close embrace, holding onto each other as if in a moment of emergency. Suddenly, a cry of one woman punctuates the antiphony of silence and lilt. The woman sitting next to her frees her lament too, joined by the other women in the circle, one by one, carefully crossing a barricade. The whimpers which began in an ascending tempo now become a sustained cry, as if all the women have transcended. I feel like an intruder and escape the dark room to watch the flowing Chenab, light gnawing at my eyes.

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

Several such everyday intimate spheres characterise women's lifeworlds in Kashmir. Trips to collect wood and wild herbs, assembling at the *yaarbal* (riverbanks), working in the fields, gathering to spin yarn, husking, winnowing, pounding chillies, or separating stamens from the saffron flower to extract the spice, going to the mosque or swimming in the village ponds, singing during weddings, or mourning rituals, protest rallies, sit-ins and marches—all binding women not only to each other, but forging a relationship of love and labour, bodies and landscape, liberation, and support.

One such intimate world, for instance, is the *yaarbal* (literally a place for friends), where women, young and old, would fix a time to meet other women. *Yaarbal* would buzz with activities and friendships. Women would wash clothes and utensils, collect water, bathe, and also use this as a meeting place for conversations and songs, stories of grief and endurance. Big stones and boulders lying around naturally became resting places and hours would pass quickly at the *yaarbal*. Together, women would collect wood and herbs like *hand*, *liss*, *nunar*, *gul*, *kretch*, *bhum*, mobilising women on an everyday basis, beyond the occasions of *khaer* and *sharr* [celebrations and difficult times]. While intimate spheres like *yaarbal* helped sustain older friendships, new companions were welcome into this subversive fold of support and solidarity. Similarly, during the thrashing and winnowing periods in the field, women came together and sang long narrative oral poems to carry on through the long working hours (personal interview with Mubeena/AG, 2018). The singing and dancing practices of



Roff, Wanwun, and Hikar also give way to intimate proximities; women hold each other's hands or wrap their hands around each other's bodies, or hold on to each other's shoulders, coordinating their body and feet movement, entrusting themselves to each other while gyrating and swirling, holding each other firmly, creating an intimate trellis of trust and support.

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

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

### A Companionship of Resistance

Women's embodied practices, everyday memory projects, and intimate worlds shape and are shaped by, give way to and are informed by, what I have called *vyestoan*—a critical and affective female alliance and friendship, a companionship of resistance. Significantly, this alliance is hinged upon, I propose, a notion of witnessing. *Vyestoan* is an alliance of witnesses, in life, death, and beyond.

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

This critical female alliance, I argue, is an alliance against several interlocked forms of domination. *Vyestoan*, I propose, is a useful term, rather than the notion of "sisterhood" in feminist scholarship, to understand intersectionality and criticality especially in the context of Kashmir. While the notion of sisterhood in feminist scholarship has been critiqued (hooks 1997; Mohanty 2003) that it overlooks the differences among women and does not employ a critical lens where race, class, colonialism and militarisation are considered and while sisterhood indicates a common source emphasising kinship, *vyestoan* on the other

hand extends beyond the claims of kinship, as I have shown. In Kashmir's context, if a mother and daughter, for example, share a good relationship, it is said that they are like friends (*vyes*). Therefore, the notion of *vyestoan* has radical possibilities extending beyond the notion of kinship and blood relations.

*Vyestoan* could be ephemeral and transient, constituting itself strategically in moments demanding such alliance, or it may be enduring and forged into lifelong friendships. It is potentially latent or active. The claims of *vyestoan* could extend beyond life too. For instance, the expression, *mei vaedze yele ba marai*, mourn for me when I die, is often a wish expressed by women to their close friends. *Vyestoan* creates and flourishes on the critical possibilities offered by liminality and in-betweenness, coalesced together into a hauntology of liberation. *Vyestoan* enacts myriad manifestations of agency and a resistance against the state's exoticisation, victimisation, and pathologisation vis-à-vis the resistance movement. It could be understood as a rejection of the statist notion of empowerment, interlaced within which is its ideological project of territorial integration.<sup>12</sup>

This critical alliance is not hinged merely on a common pain or a common victimhood, but plural shared-ness of strengths, struggles, and resistance against oppression and its myriad structures and manifestations.

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

Having separated from her husband, Mogal Maas was a single mother of her lone son Nazir Ahmed Teli. Nazir, a school teacher, was subjected to enforced disappearance in 1990 and since then she kept waiting for his return. She died in October 2009 and rests close to Kashmiri poet Abdul Ahad Zargar's grave. When waiting weighed her down, she would long for Parveena, her confidante, her companion. Mogal Maas often played little pranks by requesting her neighbour to phone Parveena and announce that she had died. At her behest, her neighbour would put on the phone loudspeaker. Mogal Maas would then lean her ear towards the phone and quietly wait for her friend's reply. Parveena knew this prank well and it would always end with the women bursting into laughter.

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

She wailed. She was inconsolable and told me she feels suffocated and her heart is heavy. I had never seen her like that. She beat her chest, pulled her hair in grief. (personal interview, 2013)



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

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

### Postscript

As a child, my grandmother would often take me to a neighbourhood mosque embraced in ivy. Before the prayers, a rhythm of its own would emanate from the mosque hall—women greeting each other, sharing everyday anecdotes, dream narrations, joys, maladies, fears, laughter, and grief. The hall would reverberate with women's supplications and recitation of the Quran in a sing-song manner. After adjusting

their scarves, hems, and sleeves, women would stand together and begin to pray in unison. While bowing down on the ground for *sajdeh*, I would steal chances and secretly lift my head up to see a spectacle I never got tired of watching—heads bowed down, in neat rows of coloured scarves. It appeared as if women shared secrets in whispers. This is my foremost memory of women's gatherings. It is my grandmother and her friends who, through their bond, introduced me to the magical world of female friendships and bonding, and intimate women's worlds.

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

Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,  
Aes che vedveneye te paan ven kuneye,  
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,  
Aes che asvenye, paan ven kuneye,  
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar  
[We are the flying birds,  
Together, we take flight,  
We are the flying birds  
We, the joyous, companions,  
We, the flying birds]

### NOTES

- 1 Tumbakhaer, a membranophone, is an earthen hand or goblet drum with animal skin as its base, notably played by women during celebratory occasions such as weddings. It is played with a rhythmic movement of hands and fingertips while it is held under the arm or it rests on the knee or in the lap. Beats of the tumbakhaer accompany collective singing in Kashmir and it is one of the main instruments to maintain rhythm in these songs.
- 2 Logs of wood arranged in a particular way for cooking elaborate meals for a large number of people.
- 3 Roughly translates as "the light of our eyes is snatched/here graveyards, vast, fill too quick."
- 4 Roughly translates as, "knows of loss, the daughter, who lost her father/here graveyards, vast, fill too quick."
- 5 Parveena Ahanger's son Javaid Ahmed Ahanger was subjected to enforced disappearance on 18 August 1990 and Haleema Begum's husband Abdul Rashid Ganaie was subjected to enforced disappearance on 5 January 1998.
- 6 For work on mourning, memory and resistance of women activists of APDP, see Zia (2014) and "Khoon Di Barav" (Blood leaves its Trail), a film by Iffat Fatima. Also see, "Till Then the Roads Carry Her"—a film on women's resistance in Kashmir—by Uzma Falak.
- 7 As opposed to pathological and clinical approaches to trauma, drawing from Taylor (2003), the focus here is on "non-pathological cause and canalisation of trauma."
- 8 A call to march towards Tchar-e-Sharief, the mausoleum of Kashmir's mystic poet Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali.
- 9 For an insight into the historical continuum of women's resistance in Kashmir, see Gazi (2017). Also see Malik (2015); Manekshaw (2017).
- 10 For similar argument on funerals and demonstrations, see Kaul (2016).
- 11 For example, 15th-century Persian poet Jami who uses the trope of Zulaykha's longing for the beautiful and moon-faced Yusuf, interpreted

mystically, or Kashmir's 18th century poet Mahmud Gami's Yusuf and Zulaykha.

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

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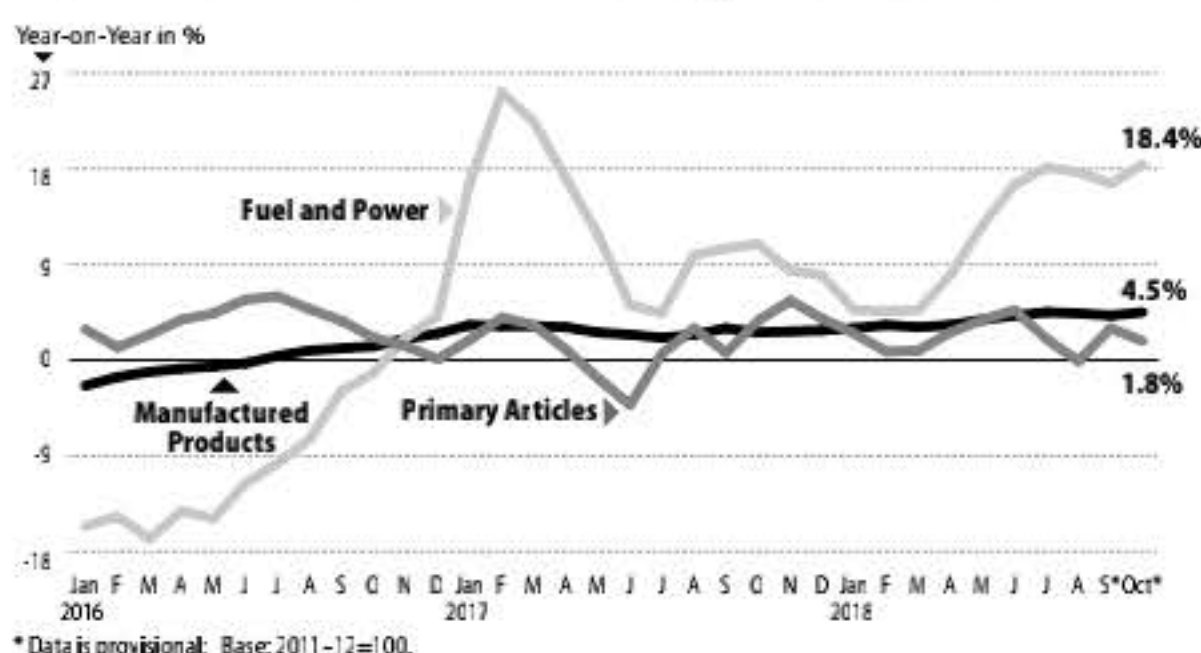


**Wholesale Price Index**

The year-on-year (y-o-y) WPI inflation rate increased to 5.3% in October 2018 from 3.7% registered a year ago and 5.1% a month ago. The index of primary articles decreased by 1.8% compared to 3.7% reported in October 2017 and 3.0% in September 2018. The index of food articles declined by (-) 1.5% against 4.3% recorded a year ago and (-) 0.2% a month ago. The index of fuel and power rose substantially by 18.4% compared to 10.9% in October 2017. The index of manufactured products, which has higher weight in WPI, increased by 4.5% compared to 2.6% reported a year ago.

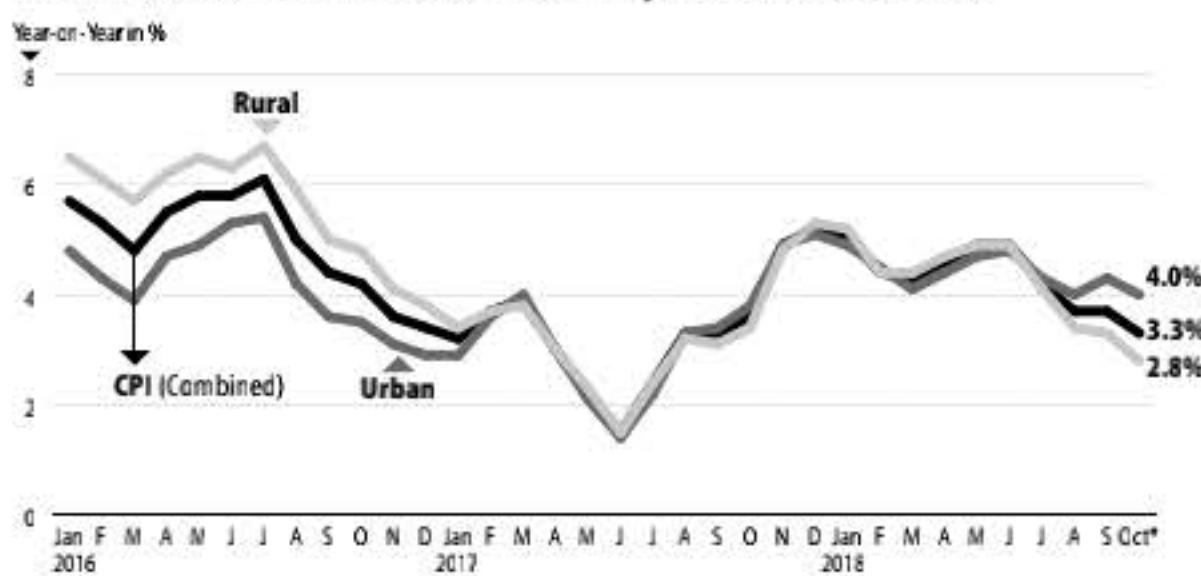
**Consumer Price Index**

The CPI-inflation rate eased to 3.3% in October 2018 from 3.6% registered a year ago and 3.7% a month ago. Consumer food price index declined by (-) 0.9% compared to 1.9% in October 2017 and 0.5% in September 2018. The CPI-rural inflation rate decreased to 2.8% while the urban inflation rate increased to 4.0% in October 2018 from 3.4% and 3.8%, respectively, a year ago. As per Labour Bureau data, the CPI inflation rate of agricultural labourers (CPI-AL) decreased to 1.3% in October 2018 from 2.9% in October 2017 and that of industrial workers (CPI-IW) increased to 5.6% in September 2018 from 2.9% a year ago.

**Movement of WPI Sub-indices January 2016–October 2018****Trends in WPI and Its Components October 2018\* (%)**

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Averages)		
				2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
All commodities	100	0.7	5.3	-3.7	1.7	2.9
Primary articles	22.6	0.7	1.8	-0.4	3.4	1.4
Food articles	15.3	0.9	-1.5	2.6	4.0	2.1
Fuel and power	13.2	3.6	18.4	-19.7	-0.3	8.2
Manufactured products	64.2	0.3	4.5	-1.8	1.3	2.7

\* Data is provisional; Base: 2011-12=100; Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

**Movement of CPI Inflation January 2016–October 2018****Inflation in CPI and Its Components October 2018\* (%)**

	Weights	Latest Month Index	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Aves)	
					2016-17	2017-18
CPI combined	100	140.6	0.3	3.3	4.5	3.6
Consumer food	39.1	138.2	-0.5	-0.9	4.2	1.8
Miscellaneous	28.3	136.3	1.2	6.7	4.5	3.8

**CPI: Occupation-wise**

Industrial workers (2001=100)#	301.0	0.0	5.6	4.1	3.1
Agricultural labourers (1986-87=100)	913.0	0.3	1.3	4.2	2.2

\* Provisional; # September 2018; Source: CSO (rural and urban); Labour Bureau (IW and AL).

**Foreign Trade**

The merchandise trade deficit in October 2018 widened to \$17.1 billion compared to \$14.6 billion registered a year ago. Exports increased by 17.9% to \$27 billion and imports by 17.6% to \$44.1 billion from \$22.9 billion and \$37.5 billion in October 2017. Oil imports stood higher by 52.6% at \$14.2 billion and non-oil imports by 6.0% at \$29.9 billion compared to \$9.3 billion and \$28.2 billion a year ago. Cumulative exports increased by 13.3% to \$191.0 billion and imports by 16.4% to \$302.5 billion during April–October 2018–19 compared to \$168.6 billion and \$259.9 billion, last year.

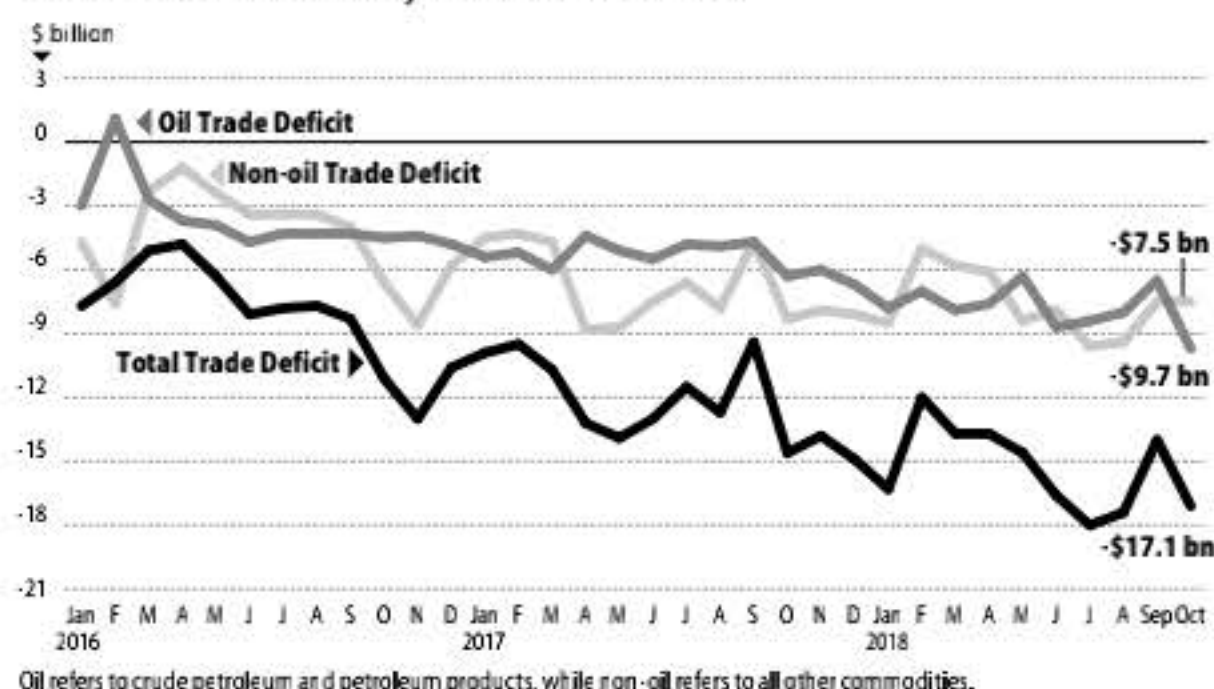
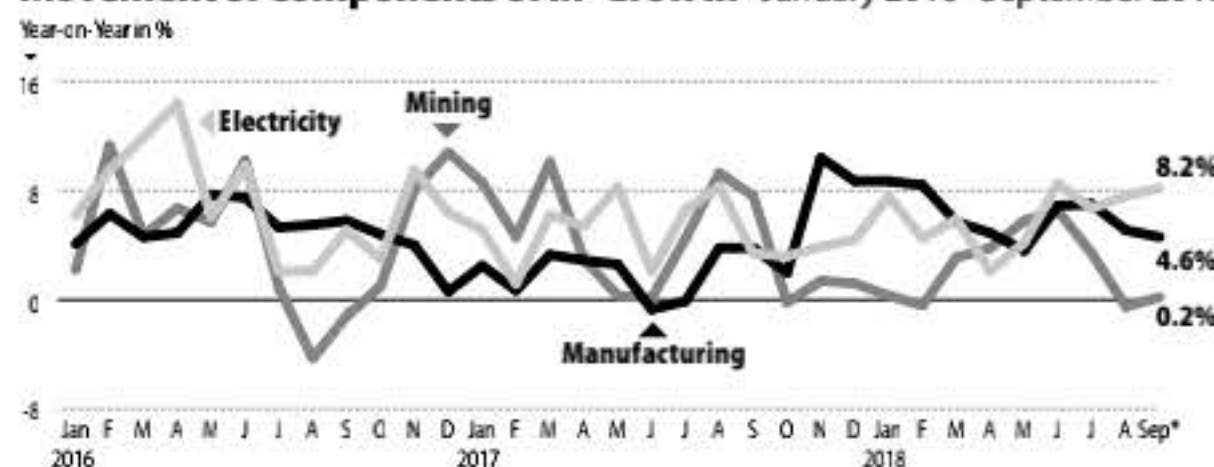
**Index of Industrial Production**

The y-o-y growth rate of IIP increased to 4.5% in September 2018 from 4.1% a year ago, but was lower than 4.7% a month ago. The index of eight core industries decelerated by 4.3% in September 2018 compared to 4.7% in September 2017. Production of crude oil declined by (-) 4.2% and natural gas by (-) 1.8% against 0.1% and 6.3%, a year ago. Growth in coal production decreased to 6.4%, refinery products to 2.5% and steel to 3.2% from 10.4%, 8.1%, and 3.7% in September 2017. Production of fertilisers increased by 2.5% and cement by 11.8% compared to -7.7% and 0.1% in 2017. Electricity generation rose by 8.2% against 3.4% in September 2017.

**Merchandise Trade October 2018**

	October 2018 (\$ bn)	Over Month (%)	Over Year (%)	April–October (2018-19 over 2017-18) (%)
Exports	27.0	-3.5	17.9	13.3
Imports	44.1	5.2	17.6	16.4
Trade deficit	17.1	22.5	17.2	22.1

Data is provisional. Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

**Trade Deficits January 2016–October 2018****Movement of Components of IIP Growth January 2016–September 2018****Growth in Eight Core Industries September 2018\* (%)**

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Aves)	
				2016-17	2017-18
General index	100	0.6	4.5	4.6	4.4
Infrastructure industries	40.27@	-1.2	4.3	4.8	4.3
Coal	10.3	5.8	6.4	3.2	2.6
Crude oil	9.0	-3.8	-4.2	-2.5	-0.9
Natural gas	6.9	-3.7	-1.8	-1.0	2.9
Petroleum refinery products	28.0	-1.5	2.5	4.9	4.6
Fertilisers	2.6	-1.2	2.5	0.2	0.0
Steel	17.9	-0.9	3.2	10.7	5.6
Cement	5.4	-0.4	11.8	-1.2	6.3
Electricity	19.9	-2.6	8.2	5.8	5.3

(Base: 2011-12=100); \*Data is provisional; @- The revised eight core industries have a combined weight of 40.27% in the IIP.

Source: Central Statistics Office and Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

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## ■ India's Quarterly Estimates of Final Expenditures on GDP

₹ crore   at 2011-12 Prices	2016-17				2017-18				2018-19
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Private final consumption expenditure	1595219 (8.3)	1619781 (7.5)	1817549 (9.3)	1779784 (3.4)	1705974 (6.9)	1730288 (6.8)	1923991 (5.9)	1898844 (6.7)	1852663 (8.6)
Government final consumption expenditure	313990 (8.3)	360466 (8.2)	304372 (12.3)	283296 (23.6)	369303 (17.6)	374216 (3.8)	325145 (6.8)	331031 (16.8)	397215 (7.6)
Gross fixed capital formation	960255 (15.9)	921132 (10.5)	938951 (8.7)	977537 (4.2)	968141 (0.8)	976881 (6.1)	1024006 (9.1)	1118528 (14.4)	1065217 (10.0)
Change in stocks	22498 (-60.5)	22367 (-61.2)	21389 (-61.1)	24002 (-67.7)	21840 (-2.9)	23672 (5.8)	22935 (7.2)	25873 (7.8)	23718 (8.6)
Valuables	37008 (-10.5)	39255 (-18.8)	37644 (-17.0)	45828 (-6.4)	82235 (122.2)	60550 (54.2)	51654 (37.2)	59186 (29.1)	75650 (-8.0)
Net Trade (Export-import)	-21906	-42207	-57671	-765	-102005	-65917	-90685	-48348	-113693
Exports	603715 (3.6)	612021 (2.4)	617872 (6.7)	655470 (6.6)	639145 (5.9)	653613 (6.8)	656006 (6.2)	679160 (3.6)	720410 (12.7)
Less imports	625621 (0.1)	654228 (-0.4)	675543 (10.1)	656235 (6.6)	741150 (18.5)	719530 (10.0)	746691 (10.5)	727508 (10.9)	834103 (12.5)
Discrepancies	46358	62743	-30143	117276	72929	72420	-13558	91713	73213
Gross domestic product (GDP)	2953421 (8.1)	2983537 (7.6)	3032091 (6.8)	3226958 (6.1)	3118417 (5.6)	3172110 (6.3)	3243489 (7.0)	3476827 (7.7)	3373983 (8.2)

## ■ India's Overall Balance of Payments (Net): Quarterly

	2016-17 (\$ mn)			2017-18 (\$ mn)			2018-19 (\$ mn)			2016-17 (₹ bn)			2017-18 (₹ bn)			2018-19 (₹ bn)
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Current account	-3467	-7976	-3452	-14979	-6956	-13716	-13066	-15829	-232	-0.6	-538	-1.4	-231	-0.6	-966	-2.5
Merchandise	-25612	-33273	-29722	-41936	-32455	-44022	-41623	-45748	-1715	-2243	-1992	-2703	-2086	-2086	-2850	-2678
Invisibles	22146	25297	26270	26957	25499	30306	28557	29920	1483	1706	1760	1738	1639	1962	1837	2004
Services	16295	17780	17636	18308	18377	20712	20164	18699	1091	1199	1182	1180	1181	1341	1297	1253
of which: Software services	17650	18002	16839	17457	17969	18199	18561	18414	1182	1214	1128	1125	1155	1178	1194	1234
Transfers	13902	13894	14186	14491	15672	16062	16213	17031	931	937	951	934	1008	1040	1043	1141
of which: Private	14048	13996	14368	14603	15776	16167	16402	17216	941	944	963	941	1014	1046	1055	1153
Income	-8051	-6377	-5552	-5842	-8550	-6468	-7820	-5811	-539	-430	-372	-377	-550	-419	-503	-389
Capital account	12835	6073	10392	26946	16890	22530	25024	5262	859	2.3	409	1.1	696	1.7	1737	4.5
of which: Foreign investment	23050	-1607	15796	19595	14477	9645	8683	1551	1543	-108	1059	1263	931	624	559	104
Overall balance	8512	-1242	7312	11405	9499	9434	13237	-11338	570	1.6	-84	-0.2	490	1.2	735	1.9

Figures in square brackets are percentage to GDP.

## ■ Foreign Exchange Reserves

	16 November 2018	17 November 2017	31 March 2018	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year So Far		Variation		Financial Year	
						2016-17	2017-18	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Excluding gold but including revaluation effects											
₹ crore	2656300	2441540	2607590	-62920	214760	187220	48710	251570	322660	218620	25300
\$ mn	369995	376594	400982	-547	-6599	28829	-30987	16769	40486	16297	53217

## ■ Monetary Aggregates

₹ crore	Outstanding 2018	Over Month		Over Year		Financial Year So Far		Variation		Financial Year	
		2017-18	2018-19	2017-18	2018-19	2015-16	2016-17	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17	2017-18
Money Supply (M <sub>3</sub> ) as on 9 November	14544750	103460 (0.7)	1361520 (10.3)	391290 (3.1)	582160 (4.2)	1067452 (10.1)	1174320 (10.1)	1170650 (9.2)			
Components											
Currency with public	1938830	62660 (3.3)	366300 (23.3)	308400 (24.4)	179110 (10.2)	211078 (15.2)	-333130 (-20.9)	495590 (39.2)			
Demand deposits	1330000	8090 (0.6)	102430 (8.3)	-169170 (-12.1)	-153710 (-10.4)	98198 (11.0)	406910 (41.1)	86970 (6.2)			
Time deposits	11251190	32210 (0.3)	890700 (8.6)	250510 (2.5)	555940 (5.2)	757306 (9.2)	1094910 (12.1)	585270 (5.8)			
Other deposits with RBI	24730	500 (2.1)	2080 (9.2)	1560 (7.4)	830 (3.5)	860 (5.9)	5640 (36.5)	2810 (13.3)			
Sources											
Net bank credit to government	4379610	-30110 (-0.7)	294000 (7.2)	229010 (5.9)	378210 (9.5)	231086 (7.7)	618120 (19.1)	144800 (3.8)			
Bank credit to commercial sector	9702990	120190 (1.3)	1201200 (14.1)	90290 (1.1)	489270 (5.3)	753346 (10.7)	608430 (7.8)	802220 (9.5)			
Net foreign exchange assets	2980930	-46990 (-1.6)	258970 (9.5)	163730 (6.4)	58640 (2.0)	283071 (12.6)	24510 (1.0)	364060 (14.2)			
Banking sector's net non-monetary liabilities	2544480	-60360 (-2.3)	392820 (18.3)	92190 (4.5)	344010 (15.6)	202541 (11.4)	79900 (4.0)	141000 (6.8)			
Reserve Money as on 16 November	2560620	24140 (1.0)	383220 (17.6)	276920 (14.6)	141840 (5.9)	252280 (13.1)	-280260 (-12.9)	518300 (27.3)			
Components											
Currency in circulation	2015380	46620 (2.4)	356560 (21.5)	323550 (24.2)	186040 (10.2)	215151 (14.9)	-328193 (-19.7)	494070 (37.0)			
Bankers' deposits with RBI	520240	-23300 (-4.3)	24360 (4.9)	-48250 (-8.9)	-45280 (-8.0)	36270 (7.8)	42300 (8.4)	21390 (3.9)			
Other deposits with RBI	24990	810 (3.3)	2290 (10.1)	1610 (7.6)	1080 (4.5)	860 (5.9)	5640 (36.5)	2820 (13.4)			
Sources											
Net RBI credit to Government	754970	89750 (13.5)	256780 (51.5)	-122620 (-19.8)	279010 (58.6)	60470 (16.6)	195820 (46.1)	-144850 (-23.3)			
of which: Centre	749280	91070 (13.8)	252170 (50.7)	-122480 (-19.8)	275000 (58.0)	63520 (17.6)	195030 (45.9)	-145310 (-23.5)			
RBI credit to banks & commercial sector	72400	-48570 (-40.2)	127390 (-231.7)	254290 (-82.2)	9030 (14.2)	102040 (50.4)	-613820 (0.0)	372650 (0.0)			
Net foreign exchange assets of RBI	2826240	-57750 (-2.0)	236770 (9.1)	192260 (8.0)	65460 (2.4)	256200 (12.0)	13730 (0.6)	363570 (15.2)			
Govt's currency liabilities to the public	25700	0 (0.0)	160 (0.6)	450 (1.8)	50 (0.2)	2480 (12.8)	3180 (14.5)	560 (2.2)			
Net non-monetary liabilities of RBI	1118690	-40710 (-3.5)	237880 (27.0)	47460 (5.7)	211700 (23.3)	168900 (21.5)	-120830 (-12.7)	73640 (8.8)			

## ■ Scheduled Commercial Banks' Indicators (₹ crore)

(As on 9 November)	Outstanding 2018	Over Month		Over Year		Financial Year So Far		Variation		Financial Year	
		2017-18	2018-19	2017-18	2018-19	2015-16	2016-17	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17	2017-18
Aggregate deposits	11825770	39790 (0.3)	990050 (9.1)	78070 (0.7)	399720 (3.5)	794000 (9.3)	1430360 (15.3)	668400 (6.2)			
Demand	1216770	7970 (0.7)	102230 (9.2)	-166900 (-13.0)	-153510 (-11.2)	94970 (12.0)	392440 (44.1)	88840 (6.9)			
Time	10608990	31810 (0.3)	887800 (9.1)	244970 (2.6)	553220 (5.5)	699050 (9.0)	1037920 (12.3)	579550 (6.1)			
Cash in hand	73450	2520 (3.6)	2270 (3.2)	9820 (16.0)	13390 (22.3)	4080 (7.6)	3920 (6.8)	-1300 (-2.1)			
Balance with RBI	480460	6570 (1.4)	43720 (10.0)	-72030 (-14.2)	-45230 (-8.6)	14380 (3.9)	121320 (31.3)	16920 (3.3)			
Investments	3443130	-51820 (-1.5)	64370 (1.9)	347800 (11.5)	124680 (3.8)	133690 (5.4)	405440 (15.4)	287490 (9.5)			
of which: Government securities	3441770	-52240 (-1.5)	64920 (1.9)	347110 (11.5)	124360 (3.7)	134180 (5.4)	405810 (15.5)	287670 (9.5)			
Bank credit	9111500	118350 (1.3)	1180420 (14.9)	89610 (1.1)	486080 (5.6)	713200 (10.9)	591850 (8.2)	783950 (10.0)			
of which: Non-food credit	9050950	103330 (1.2)	1188110 (15.1)	75310 (1.0)	467520 (5.4)	702360 (10.9)	643170 (9.0)	795900 (10.2)			

## ■ Capital Markets

	22 November 2018	Month Ago	Year Ago	Financial Year So Far		2017-18		End of Financial Year	
				Trough	Peak	Trough	Peak	2015-16	2016-17
S&P BSE SENSEX (Base: 1978-79=100)	34981 (4.2)	34134	33562 (29.3)	33019	38897	29319	36283	25342 (-9.4)	29621 (16.9)
S&P BSE-100 (Base: 1983-84=100)	10807 (0.1)	10481	10801 (31.4)	10266	12036	9439	11547	7835 (-9.0)	9494 (21.2)
S&P BSE-200 (1989-90=100)	4505 (-1.1)	4355	4556 (32.4)	4273	5043	3983	4881	3259 (-7.9)	3992 (22.5)
CNX Nifty-50 (Base: 3 Nov 1995=1000)	10527 (1.8)	10245	10342 (29.2)	10030	11739	9104	11130	7738 (-8.9)	9174 (18.5)
CNX Nifty-500	8879 (-3.4)	8577	9196 (34.5)	8417	9992	8003	9877	6452 (-7.5)	7995 (3.3)

Figures in brackets are percentage variations over the specified or over the comparable period of the previous year. | - = not relevant | - = not available | NS = new series | PE = provisional estimates

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# 'Hamara' Alyque

A theatre artiste and entrepreneur looks back at the influence Alyque Padamsee (1928–2018) has had on his life and career.

SUNIL VISHNU K

Back in 1995, I was studying in Class 12. I had been failing miserably at understanding integration–differentiation and barely had any interest in atomic values or chemical equations, but had taken up maths and science as my main subjects. Back then, I used to ask myself, “I may not be so great at science and maths, but I am good at singing, debating, and making plays; when will this *double life* end?”

Little did I know that much later in life I would ask myself the same question all through graduation and my marketing communications post-graduation, where I would end up having another kind of double life: juggling theatre and brand management. No wonder I relate so much to the “god of advertising” and theatre icon Alyque Padamsee (Alyque’s autobiography is titled *A Double Life*).

I grew up in the 1990s, when advertising was always exciting and enticing. We used to have a Weston tv, which my dad bought during the Asiad, and our favourite programmes were *Chitrahaar*, the Sunday film, and advertisements. In fact, the dialogues of “Lalitaji” and the jingle “Hamara Bajaj” (Lalitaji was the famous protagonist of the Surf advertisement created by him, and Hamara Bajaj was, of course, his most famous ad for the scooter) were my favourite “go-to” hacks for Mad Ads competitions, which I have won many a time spoofing these ads. Of course, I didn’t know then that the man behind my success was a certain Mr Padamsee, but that was soon to change.

I studied commerce during my graduation, but spent more time doing street theatre and wondering what my career would look like. As I thought about what I wanted to do next, I started doing research (which meant going through old magazines and books in library in the pre-Google days), and the two names that repeatedly popped up were “Jesus Christ Alyque” (Alyque most famously staged the play *Jesus Christ Superstar*) and “Hamara Bajaj Alyque.” Here was a man known for telling stories on stage and on screen with the same creativity and boldness. He had done it all. After that, whenever someone asked me about my career plans, I would say, “advertising, theatre, you know...”

When I joined the Mudra Institute of Communication, Ahmedabad in 1999, I started a theatre group with my classmate Karthik Kumar and started performing plays regularly. However, we had to find the time to do theatre while also attending classes on advertising, brand management,

consumer behaviour, and more. It was another case of leading a “double life,” but, unlike in school, this time I was in love with both.

In the summer of 2000, I wanted to do my internship at Lintas (the advertising agency that Alyque built), but I ended up doing one at Enterprise Nexus and got around to reading *A Double Life*. Among other things, that summer made me realise that I had to take up theatre full-time.

I spent the next two years in design and advertising at Elephant Design, Pune, where the Alyque connection returned as we planned the relaunch of “Hamara Bajaj.” How do you modernise an iconic brand with an iconic message that drove home the point that India was one? The logo was iconic, the jingle was almost like a national song for the Indian middle class and the brand was synonymous with nostalgia, finding

a place in pop culture and Bollywood as well (like in the film *Andaz Apna Apna*).

With Sudhir Sharma at Elephant Design, the hexagonal shape gave way to a sharp millennial “B,” the font became younger and the new imagery was of a Pulsar zipping across the screen. Lowe designed the tv commercial with a new techno version of the song “Hamara Bajaj” infusing young blood with traditional values. Bajaj 2.0 was born. And I was glad to be a small part of this continuing legacy that Alyque had created.

Two years later, in 2003, after living a double life in Pune doing theatre and advertising design, I decided to take the plunge into full-time theatre and started ‘evam’. In his book, Alyque writes about how people in theatre came to advertising to make ends meet and that thought remained with me so much that when Karthik and I decided to start this enterprise, we wanted to be theatre people who do theatre full-time and make money unapologetically. And, ironically, our confidence came from knowing advertising. I borrowed many learnings from Alyque unknowingly and knowingly as we set up ‘evam’: be it following an advertising-based business model in the initial years to focus on people, or balancing rehearsals and work, or, my favourite, “to strike a balance between creativity and the bottomline.” We now do theatre, children’s education, stand-up comedy and theatre-led corporate training to make our “bread, butter and jam,” to quote Alyque from *A Double Life*.

I was fortunate enough to meet Alyque when he brought Ace Productions’ play “Macbeth” to a Chennai fest in 2006. The fest also had a play by his son Quasar (known as Q) and

**Here was a man known for telling stories on stage and on screen with the same creativity and boldness. He had done it all**



I remember thinking about the infectious passion these two people shared for theatre. Alyque may or may not have known or remembered me, but I am among the countless people in India who have been touched and inspired by his work and philosophy.

Over the last 15 years of theatre entrepreneurship, I have worn multiple hats, lived multiple lives, and I can't help but thank "Hamara" Alyque for it.

You made it easier for us by doing it first. Thank you.

Sunil Vishnu K (sunilvishnu@trainingsideways.in) is the co-founder and artistic director of theatre enterprise 'evam' and theatre-based training company Training Sideways. He has directed over 20 plays, written five plays, and acted in over 30 theatre productions.

## Secular Hymns

T M Krishna's concert in Delhi was a statement on his commitment to democratising traditional music.

M R SHARAN

In Delhi's Nehru Park a few years ago, I attended a concert where Carnatic singer T M Krishna swayed gently as he performed a song his teacher—the great Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer—had bequeathed to him. Midway, overcome by emotion, he fell silent: the tambura droned on, the mridangam (the main rhythm accompaniment in Carnatic concerts) pulsated, and the violin whispered. For minutes, not a word escaped Krishna's mouth. It was riveting.

So, last month I was excited when the newspaper advertised another T M Krishna concert at Nehru Park. Krishna has, over these years, grown into more than a Carnatic legend-in-the-making, someone who challenges conventions within the concert structure. He is the author of a tome on Carnatic music, *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story* (2013); he is a provocative columnist, taking well-articulated positions on caste, class, society, the environment and beyond; he is a Ramon Magsaysay awardee, a cultural icon. His intellectual admirers abound. Yet, in the conservative heart of Carnatic music, Krishna is disliked, for he questions too many traditions and politicises his art.

A few days later, I learned that the concert at Nehru Park was postponed. The Airports Authority of India (AAI), faced with immense opposition from critics—mostly online—of Krishna, succumbed to the pressure. On Twitter, where it is hard to tell the fringe from the mainstream, hate abounded. Krishna was labelled an "anti-national" and an "urban naxal," terms once endemic to the fringe, but now debated on television, in literary festivals, the highest courts, and political speeches. Krishna responded to the cancellation—on Twitter, again—saying he would be willing to perform on the same

day if invited by someone else. A few anxious hours later, an unusual but fitting host stepped up. The Government of Delhi invited Krishna to perform at the Garden of Five Senses for a concert titled *Awam ki Awaz* (the people's voice), in south Delhi.

We plodded through the unusual Saturday evening traffic in Saket and reached the Garden of Five Senses. We were late. A red carpet was laid out along the pathway to the part of the garden where the concert was. In the distance, over what felt like a thousand bobbing heads, sat Krishna, surrounded by his team: R K Shriramkumar on the violin, Praveen Sparsh on the mridangam, and Anirudh Athreya on the *kanjira* (a frame drum). The crowd was an unusual

**As the concert progressed, Krishna repeatedly emphasised both, his idea of India and his understanding of what Carnatic music encompasses**

one: at the margins, where we were, I strained—and failed—to catch a word of Tamil or Kannada or Telugu. The *mamas* (uncles) and *mamis* (aunties) of the Delhi Tamil Sangam concerts were replaced by young men and women in shawls, scarves, and sweatshirts over kurtas, who wouldn't be out of place at a Jantar Mantar protest.

Manish Sisodia, Delhi's minister for education, and Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister, ascended the dais to speak. In what would rank among the shortest speeches made by active politicians, they thanked the organising team and, crucially, reinforced the message that India is for everyone. Krishna said he would let his music do the talking.

Under a starless sky, Krishna—the unquestionable star in our midst—began to sing. He began with a multi-denominational prayer that segued into a Marathi *abhang* by Tukaram. In doing so, Krishna made two things clear. One, the choice of an *abhang* at the start—as opposed to a *varnam* or a fast *kriti* (traditional short compositions sung at the beginning of a Carnatic concert)—indicated his now well-known disregard for the conventional *kutcheri* (concert) format. Two, by invoking a multi-denominational prayer favoured by the man who first conceptualised and popularised the idea of a secular and inclusive India—Mahatma Gandhi—he demarcated his political stance clearly from his opponents' more narrow view of India and its cultural heritage.

As the concert progressed, Krishna repeatedly emphasised both, his idea of India and his understanding of what Carnatic music encompasses. "Baro Krishnayya" in Maand raga, which was beautifully rendered, was made even more moving by his pithy recounting of the manner in which the idol of Gopala Krishna in Udupi turned to face the great saint-musician Kanaka, who was denied entry on account of his caste, according to legend. Over two-and-a-half hours, we heard songs in praise of Jesus, Allah, and Rama; songs in Malayalam, Bengali, Tamil, vernacular Hindi, and Kannada; songs by classical composers, rebellious saints, contemporary poets, and even songs from movies.



The bulk of the crowd was swept away by Krishna's performance. They cheered loudly when the *taniyavartanam* (percussion solo) rose to a crescendo. They laughed when Krishna cracked a joke. The crowd shouted requests that were non-traditional: "Poromboke" (a Carnatic song with lyrics in vernacular Tamil that Krishna originally performed in a bid to save the polluted Ennore creek in Chennai), and an Arabic song "Salatullah Salamullah Alah Taha Rasoolillah." During "Rasoolillah," Krishna even encouraged the crowd to sing along! People still left in trickles after every song, but that only left the faithful happier: for the last quarter of the performance, everyone could be seated.

"Nadopasana" in Begada raga was the centrepiece of the concert: in his adept rendering of the *sangatis* (musical variations of a particular line in a song) and *swaras* (notes), Krishna showcased his complete mastery over the art form. It left some of us salivating for more of the sort: a deeper examination of a raga, a *vilamba kala kriti* (a slow tempo song),

a *neraval* (extempore improvisation) that goes on for more than a few minutes, but that never arrived. Instead, Krishna gave us a stunning "Amar Jonmo Bhumi" (Dwijendralal Roy's Bengali composition, which M S Subbulakshmi sang to a great reception most famously during her last public concert in 1997). For much of the song, this was a solo performance as the violin and the mridangam were set aside. It was only Krishna and his audience. The slow, dreamy rendering reached out and pulled us in. As he glided past notes, they seemed to linger in the air.

Like that winter concert in Nehru Park many years ago, Krishna was consumed by his music and, in turn, had his audience captivated. Only, now, it was a slightly different Krishna and a very different audience.

M R Sharan (sharanidli@gmail.com) is a graduate student in the PhD programme in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, focusing on issues in development economics. His research attempts to better understand the linkages between state policy, politics, citizens, and government.

# Economic & Political WEEKLY

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March 31, 2018

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## Kuttanad after the Flood

The central and state governments must find a long-term solution for the constant flooding woes of Kuttanad in Kerala.

KRISHNANUNNI R, VISHNU ACHUTHA MENON

**W**e recently visited Kuttanad, after the Kerala floods. Kuttanad, in Alappuzha district, is not just another tourist destination. Commonly known as the "Venice of East," for its rich backwaters and paddy fields set like jewels upon the crown of Alappuzha, it also has unique geographical traits. Situated 2.2 metres below sea level, the abode of Vembanad—the largest lake in the state which stretches from Alappuzha to Ernakulam district and is dotted with houseboats—is also home to a variety of unique flora and fauna. Another peculiarity of this terrain is the four major rivers—Pampa, Manimala, Meenachil, and Achankovil—that run through it. These rivers and lakes help the land abound with fertility and aid water-intensive paddy cultivation. However, these waterbodies also often distress people with constant floods and droughts.

The recent monsoons, which unleashed catastrophe across Kerala, struck Kuttanad harshly, making life for its inhabitants more miserable. Even though Kuttanad has seen worse floods before, this unexpected trauma has left a scar that will take time to heal. The green hues from Kuttanad's paddy fields were completely wiped out, where 9,907 hectares of paddy fields that were expected to harvest 50,000 tonnes were drowned, amounting to about 90% of the cultivation having been washed out. Roadways were not navigable and rowboats became the mode of transportation, with shortfall of basic amenities making life for its inhabitants even more miserable. People were forced to flee to relief camps and other safe spots, making them "climate refugees," and even now they continue to nurse fears that all this may happen on a large scale in the region again. Kuttanad was affected drastically, and major efforts are required now to resurrect its tourism industry. Backwater fishing, which constitutes a major source of earning for the people of this region has collapsed too, whereas usually the rainy season is considered to be the season of bounty for the fisherfolk because of the abundance of fish.

The first question we encountered from the locals while witnessing the problems of Kuttanad was: "When normalcy has been restored in other parts of the state, why is Kuttanad struggling to get back on its feet? Kerala is witnessing such a flood for the first time in a century, whereas flooding is a frequent occurrence in the waterlogging-prone Kuttanad." While the enthusiasm shown by the state government in

facing the disaster was quite appreciable and the floods have provided a valuable lesson on the need for proper water governance, the question that needs to be addressed is: With Kuttanad being a flood-prone region, why has the government not taken steps to find a permanent solution for this?

Poor drainage facilities is one of the prime reasons for the floods, and has not yet been dealt with. The role of unscientific road construction, which has curtailed the natural flow of streams and rivers, is undeniable in this catastrophe. In the land of backwaters and the abode of the largest freshwater lake in the state, people were struggling to access fresh drinking water, with those in isolated regions having to travel around seven kilometres on rowboats to get to drinking water. "Water, water, everywhere, /Nor any drop to drink" sums up the global drinking water crisis, and Kuttanad remains a classic example. As per a study conducted

by the Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM), Kozhikode, more than 80% of its people depend on contaminated water, and a large proportion of these people still use water without proper purification.

It is essential to take holistic measures to resurrect Kuttanad and make sure that its people are safe because the contribution of this place is indispensable to Kerala. The tale of Kuttanad has immense significance and, as the land lies below

sea level and the threat of climate change grows stronger, both the country and the state have to take initiatives to preserve Kuttanad's unique biodiversity which possesses immense cultural and economic value.

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**The recent monsoons, which unleashed catastrophe across Kerala, struck Kuttanad harshly, making life for its inhabitants more miserable**

### LAST LINES





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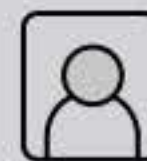
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March 07-08, 2019 New Delhi

The conference is aimed at discussing theoretical and empirical research on emerging areas in e-commerce and its linkages with services trade and investment. It intends to invite research papers investigating new opportunities, issues and challenges on these subjects. The paper may examine growth and trend in e-commerce in India and globally, FDI in e-commerce, regulation of e-commerce activities, e-commerce and trade agreements including WTO and FTAs, e-commerce and logistics, payments systems, Fintech and Block Chain Technology, Cryptocurrencies etc. Papers on any other issue pertaining to the theme of the conference are also welcome. All papers will be peer reviewed. Selected papers will be published as an edited book or as working papers. There is no registration fee. Accommodation and Full/partial travel grant will be available for the authors selected for presenting papers during the conference.

#### Important Dates:

- |                              |                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Full Paper Submission     | January 15, 2019  |
| 2. Paper acceptance decision | January 31, 2019  |
| 3. Conference Dates          | March 07-08, 2019 |

#### Submission Guidelines:

The full paper should be about 7,000 words including references. The first page should contain the title of the paper, name and contact details of the author(s) and an abstract of no more than 300 words. **Please make all your submission to [servicesconference@iift.edu](mailto:servicesconference@iift.edu)**

For any assistance or query, please contact:

**Dr. Pralok Gupta**

Associate Professor (Services and Investment)

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Sarla Anil Modi School of Economics, NMIMS Mumbai

in collaboration with TIES

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- Policy Formulation, Implementation and Evaluations
- Public Policy and Administration

A **Research Colloquium** on the day of the conference will be organized for the students of economics.. Papers or research proposals not exceeding 7,000 words should be submitted as MS Word document via email to [shreya.biswas@nmims.edu](mailto:shreya.biswas@nmims.edu)/[anand.b@nmims.edu](mailto:anand.b@nmims.edu).

#### Important dates:

Last date for paper submission: 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

Notification of accepted papers: 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

Visit <http://economics.nmims.edu/samsoe-activities/third-annual-economics-conference-march-2019/> for further details

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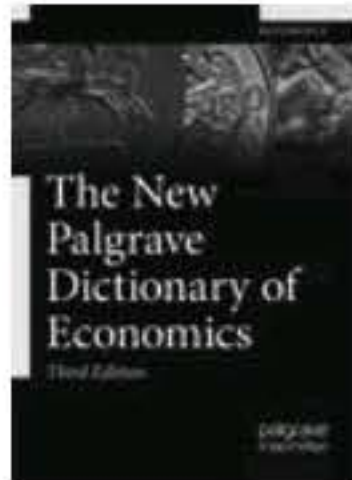
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