INTRODUCTION

It was quite challenging to undertake study in a society, which is torn by violence, mistrust and uncertainty for over a half century, where electoral participation has been constantly low, deep estrangement and helplessness buttress people against the authorities. The resentment spills out into the streets, every now and then, and the credibility of the public institutions is very low. The purpose of the study was to understand the reasons of deep estrangement of people against the authorities and recourse to violence. The Union Government imposed President’s rule in the state after the wide alleged rigged elections to the State Assembly in 1987. The subsequent years were that of misrule and unbridled corruption. Thousands of innocents got killed in insurgency by the militants as well as security forces. Democracy was restored only after 1996. This research is focussed on the role of civil society in the political development of Kashmir since the restoration of democracy in the state. It is envisaged as a counter-balance to the excessive intervention in the social life by the state apparatuses or, contrarily, state apathy towards managing conflict and pluralism. The civil society’s role in modern age of communications is being increasingly considered as critical for the ideals of equity, participation, people-centric development, human rights, accountability, transparency and autonomy. The role of civil society in building and preserving peace is given serious attention. An organized and functional civil society may be considered a remedy to the ills of apathy, anomie, militarism and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. It may also provide a possible avenue towards strengthening of pluralist and deliberative democracy. It may amplify the voices that go unheard. It may enhance government’s responsibility and accountability. The civil society is believed to cement constitutionalism and democratic government. It puts checks on the arbitrary use of power by the government and advances civil rights.

Despite the great interest in peace-building initiatives of civil society, little inquiry was being made into its actual as well as potential role in the political development of Kashmir in a holistic sense. The focus of the present study in the role of cavity in the creation of political culture rooted in the sentiments of equality, legitimacy and commitment leading to the strengthening of civic obligations and capacity-building of democratic political structures and mechanisms. The pace of political development in Kashmir is slow, but it is occurring. Civil society is evolving. It is getting stronger
because of the growing democratic space and urges as well as the role being played by modern means of communication. The issues, which affect people directly, like, militarization, globalisation, nuclearization, fundamentalism, terrorism, commu-
nalism, centralisation, environmental degradation, human rights violations, gender discrimination, etc., are being contested by civil society. Thus, reinforcement of civil society is imperative and it must be strengthened. The culture of apathy and intolerance stands in need of replacement by culture of dialogue, reconciliation and understanding for ensuring peace and democracy.

**HYPOTHESIS**

This research proposal will look into civil society’s role, actual as well as potential, in strengthening democratic governance in Jammu and Kashmir. The focus will be upon the role and contribution of civil society towards institution building, citizenship building and peace building in Kashmir. The scope of the study would be tested against empirical data collected about the actual role of civil society in the political process.

The answers to the following questions will be explored:

*Research Question 1:* What is the role of civil society of Kashmir in the democratisation and stabilisation process in Kashmir? How far can its potential be harnessed and realised?

*Research Question 2:* What critical areas provide for scope of intervention by civil society? What are the bottlenecks? How can this scope for interventions be enhanced?

*Research Question 3:* What is the actual and potential role of various civil society actors and associations? What preconditions are required for their effectiveness?

*Research Question 4:* What are the actual and potential linkages between civil society and political development in Kashmir?

By answering these questions the study may be able to throw light on the immense possibilities the civil society has in store in filling the void created by violence, apathy and mis-governance. Its role in building civic obligations, rule of law and peace leading to the consequent resolution of problems of integration, legitimacy and participation, which may lead ultimately, to the peaceful and democratic resolution of Kashmir conflict, will also be probed.
METHODOLOGY
First, literature review of the concepts of civil society and political development is made. Literature review is made to understand the role of civil society in enhancing good governance across the world and India. The genesis of Kashmir conflict is also probed through rigorous analysis of established literature.

Second, the area under study—Jammu and Kashmir (J&K, or Kashmir), and libraries and offices of various civil society organisations were visited. The trajectory of the process of political developments in Kashmir, and growth and development of various civil society organisations and their functioning were investigated and surveyed. The heads and representatives of various civil society organisations, women’s groups, student unions, recently elected members of the local bodies, and other prominent members were interviewed to know their view about the role civil society can play in improving the democratic governance in Kashmir, and similar other issues.

Finally, this data—literature, interview schedules, office memos, newspaper reports, official records, etc.—were scanned and analysed to compile this thesis.

Organisation of the thesis
The thesis is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1, Conceptualising Civil Society and Political Development, is theoretical in nature. It traces the historical genesis of the concepts: civil society and political development. Then it tries to formulate a working definition of both, after a critical scrutiny of all definitions. The chapter discusses about the nature and scope of civil society as well. It also focuses upon the relationship between civil society and democracy, and civil society and political development.

Chapter 2, Global Civil Society and Civil Society in India, is also based on theoretical framework. It studies the evolution of civil society in the West and its role in securing good governance through tools, like, freedom of expression and right to information. Various case studies have been discussed in this chapter which exemplify the positive role of civil society in enhancing democratic governance in various countries. The evolution of civil society in India has also been discussed. Its nature and various debates about interference between civil society and state conflict have also been discussed. Finally, the actual role and functioning of civil society in securing the historic legislations, like, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the Right to Information (RTI) Act, etc., have been discussed.
Chapter 3, *The Genesis of the Kashmir Conflict*, is the historical overview of the Kashmir Conflict. Political history of the erstwhile princely state has been discussed in this chapter. The transformation and integration of the princely state to the Indian Union and the political developments that entailed the Maharaja of the state to sign the “Instrument of Accession” have been discussed. The interventions of the Union Government and the erosion of special status granted to the state by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution have been discussed. Finally, the alleged rigging of the State Assembly Elections of 1987 that is proclaimed to have plunged the state into violence and insurgency has also been discussed.

Chapter 4, *Return of Democracy in Kashmir and Role of Civil Society*, looks into the developments leading to holding of state assembly elections. The process of restoration of democracy in the state is thoroughly analyzed. The chapter also looks into the role of civil society in these developments. Finally, the chapter based on interviews traces the role of civil society in ensuring good governance in state. The role of civil society organisations in the enactment of the Right to Information Act and spreading its awareness and making it a popular tool has been discussed in detail. Finally, the chapter discusses the role of civil society in making democracy more participatory and inclusive in the state by strengthening the local government institutions.

Chapter 5, *Civil Society, Institutional Building and Peace in Kashmir*, begins with the role played by civil society in the election process of the state and the monitoring of the elections to the State Assembly and the Parliament. Similarly, the role of the civil society organisations in the fight against corruption and ensuring good governance in the state has also been discussed. The stellar role of the civil society in aiding and assisting the state in most of the cases, like, disaster management has been discussed in this chapter. The vital role being played by various civil society organisations in rehabilitation and relief to the flood victims of the state has also been discussed. Similarly, the role of civil society in creating mass awareness regarding the environmental protection and its efforts in pressing the state to take up necessary steps with regard to environmental protection has also been discussed. The role of civil society in generating awareness about the Right to Information Act and its vital role in the passage of historic acts has also been discussed. The role of civil society in human rights protection and peace-building of the state has been discussed in detail.
Chapter 6, *Civil Society in Kashmir—Future Prospects*, is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It professes the possible role civil society can play in ensuring good governance, increasing the responsiveness, accountability and transparency in the administration. It also discusses the potential role civil society in Kashmir can play in strengthening the functioning of local self government and effectively monitoring the developmental programmes. Finally, the chapter discusses about the scope of civil society organisations in creating the environment and civic culture of zero tolerance for human rights violations, exercising the right to information and facilitating mechanisms that can provide adequate security to all segments of society including, minorities, women, tribals and poor.