Chapter VIII
Conclusion

Ethnicity is socially constructed; the process of its construction and reconstruction is dynamic. The process involves both self-definition and ascription of ethnic identity by the actors concerned. As Fredrik Barth (1969: 10) has observed, “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves.” The basis of ascription could be language, race, region, religion or a combination of these. Different groups of people originating from the same country can form an ethnic group and develop a common ethnic identity even though they have no common biological bond (Yang 2000). People identify with an ethnic group according to the situation in which they find themselves; the membership of an ethnic group is dependent on its capability to fulfil their economic and political interests. Circumstances are, therefore, important for the construction and reconstruction of ethnicity.

In Kashmir, the area under focus of this study, at the largest level, being “Kashmiri” was an ethnic identity in which religion was not a sharp boundary marker between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. They had socio-cultural similarities which evolved as a composite culture, known as Kashmiriyat. That is, the larger identity of being “Kashmiri” transcended the religious boundaries through routinised interaction between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits.

Although being “Kashmiri” was common between the two communities, religious identity was not obliterated. Thus, Kashmiri Muslims define themselves as “Kashmiri Muslims” and Kashmiri Pandits also define them as “Kashmiri Muslims”. Similarly, “Kashmiri Pandits” define themselves as “Kashmiri Pandits” and Kashmiri Muslims also define them Kashmiri Pandits. When political developments in Kashmir emphasised the differences in religion, especially with the rise of secessionist movement in 1989, the composite identity of being “Kashmiri” came under pressure and the so-called Kashmiriyat was relegated to the margin.

The study set out to understand the process underlying the social construction and reconstruction of Kashmiri ethnic identity. Keeping in view the context and the rationale of the study, its broad objectives were set as follows:

- To understand the shift from regional identity of Kashmiriyat that was based on composite culture to religious identities of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir.
To explore the perception of the people of changing composite character of Kashmiri ethnic identity, and the factors that influence the reconstruction within the context of religious fundamentalism in the socio-political set-up.

To examine people’s perceptions of the political development in Kashmir in the situation of violence (a) to understand people’s way of perceiving the socio-economic factors and socio-political factors that are responsible for the shifting in the nature of the Kashmiri identity and (b) to identify the influence of these forces on the process of reconstruction of Kashmiri identity.

To study the implications of ethno-political processes that have taken place in the life of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits after the turmoil of 1989-90.

To examine the change that has come about in the perception of identity among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits after the turmoil of 1989-90.

To analyze the dynamics of identity politics in the context of recreation of boundaries to define Kashmiri identity. The political conditions are playing an important part in the creation of boundaries in terms of in-group and out-group, or through exclusion and inclusion. The study explored how, at the level of people, boundaries are defined and the linkages between the political development and reconstruction of boundaries.

The methodology of the study was guided by the constructionist approach that aims to understand the social reality as constructed by the participants contextually by attributing meanings to their own experiences (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Drawing from the related constructionist approaches, namely, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology, the study attempted to understand the process of construction and reconstruction of ethnic identity among Kashmiris. Phenomenological approach specifically examines a given phenomenon through the perceptions of the participants. Hence the understanding of the social phenomenon of Kashmiriyat through interpretations offered by the participants at the individual level and internalised by them at the level of their social world of which they are active members. Symbolic interactionists claim that ethnic relations are fluid and variable and ethnic boundaries are unstable and situational, hence shaped by the collective definition of ethnic group reality (Malesevic 2004). Thus, the process depends upon particular historical, social, and political contexts which include the meanings that human beings interpret and construct.

The methodology of the study is briefed by the qualitative paradigm, which involves multiple interconnected interpretive methods to study the social world. The qualitative approach analyzes the social world, culture, and conduct of social beings according to their perspectives. The ontological assumption of this paradigm is that a human being is a subjective and meaning-making being and resides in a world of subjective reality, in the construction of which she/he plays an active part. Following the qualitative paradigm, the method of data collection involved informal conversations, observation, and in-depth unstructured interviewing.
guided by the research objectives. The data in the form of narratives were analysed through thematic matrices. The analysis captured the way participants constructed the reality through their perceptions about the social world in which they live, and arrived at themes and concepts which seemed to correlate with their perceptions. In what follows, I summarise the main findings of the study and delineate the conclusion.

**Kashmiriyat as a Social Construction**

When, where and how the term *Kashmiriyat* originated became a topic of persistent debate with the separatist movement of 1989 in Kashmir. *Kashmiriyat* is a very subjective term and there are different shades of opinions about it. Here I try to summarise the views Kashmiri Muslims’ and Kashmiri Pandits’ covered by the study. The meaning they associated with the term *Kashmiriyat* in the past, no doubt, varies from those that they associate with it now. *Kashmiriyat* which people perceive as a contribution of Sufi saints of Kashmir like Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani, according to Chitralekha Zutshi (2003), existed nowhere even during 1931. Perhaps, *Kashmiriyat* was not much popular before 1989 and people did not discuss the word *Kashmiriyat*, but they very well understood the meanings that are attached to the term.

Briefly the key findings of the study reveal the differences in the way *Kashmiriyat* was constructed earlier and the way it is being reconstructed now. The components that participants emphasised in the earlier construction of *Kashmiriyat* are different from those they emphasised with reference to the process of its reconstruction. The meaning attached to *Kashmiriyat* by Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits across the generations are very much similar. The participants from the younger generations of both the communities have no actual experiences of *Kashmiriyat* unlike older generation. However, they understood what the idea of *Kashmiriyat* connoted earlier that the older generation has explained it through their archives of memories while describing past in the present.

**Kashmiriyat as a Secular Ideology and Brotherhood**

The participants across the generation and religion emphasised the brotherhood (*bahichara*) among people of different religions in Kashmir while defining *Kashmiriyat*. Participants in villages as well as in the urban setting utilised the word *bahichara* when they talked about the concept of *Kashmiriyat*. Even those who had no idea of the term *Kashmiriyat* understood the concept when it was explained to them by using the word *bahichara*. *Kashmiriyat* is reflective not only of certain ways of life that Kashmiris have but also of their world views. Thus, the
difference in religion did not seem to have been significant in the face of cultural attributes of the Kashmiris. One can see a sense of pride in the gestures of older generation of Kashmiris when they say that “there was brethren relationship/bahichara in Kashmir. Everybody was equal; there was no difference between the people, nobody used to say that they are Muslims or they are Hindus” (participant Gulam Dar: see chapter IV). The gestures of the participants from younger generation may not show that pride when they talk about Kashmiriyat, but they know what Kashmiriyat connoted in the past.

**Kashmiriyat as a Culture of Kashmir**

Another way the participants see Kashmiriyat is as a representation of the way of life and the culture of Kashmir which includes cultural practices such as the distribution of wet walnuts on Shivratri or saying Eid Mubarak and having the same salted tea called noon chai/namkeen chai/kheer chai. Thus, Kashmiriyat emerged as common culture of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims that included food habits and dress patterns. Thus, participants across the generation considered Kashmiriyat as constituted by two main components, namely “culture of Islam” and “culture of Hinduism”. Participants, particularly from older generation, explained about their experiential past in terms of taking part in each others’ festivals which reinforced Kashmiriyat.

**Kashmiriyat as Tolerance**

Tolerance was another very important component that participants emphasised while defining Kashmiriyat. Centuries old composite culture cannot develop without tolerance towards each others’ religion and way of life. Hence, the participants across the religion and across the generation consider tolerance as one of the main component that has strengthened Kashmiriyat. In fact conversion into a new faith did not obliterate the previous faith completely. Residues of previous faith are considered as “legacy” by some of the participants among the younger generation.

**Kashmiriyat as Hospitality**

Another meaning that is associated with Kashmiriyat is hospitality. Generally Kashmiris are considered as very hospitable people. One of the reasons for this nature is that Kashmir being a tourist place is always welcome to people. History also shows that hospitality was very basic to
Kashmiris, and that is why different cultures and various religions came to Kashmir and the people of Kashmir adapted to them well.

**Kashmiriyat as Sufism**

Participants among the older generation expressed that they have experienced Kashmiriyat during urs (festivities related to the memory of Sufi saints). They have also experienced Kashmiriyat through the verses of Lal Ded and Nur-ud-Din/Nund Rishi. The participants who believe in these practices considered the whole process as “culture” and representation of “teacher-taught” relationship. So it has not been perceived as something that is strictly religious in its orientation. Some among the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims mentioned that “Our Nund Rishi/Shiekh Nur-ud-Din Noorani is a living example of secularism... He is the best sign of humanity. Others talk about the difference between Hindus and Muslims, but he never talk about that... His philosophy is related to Kashmiriyat”. People of Kashmir learned philosophy of non-violence, brotherhood from these Sufi saints whom the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits considered the harbingers of Kashmiriyat, composite culture of Kashmir, and peaceful bondage between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits for centuries. The Sufi practices are not strictly bound by any particular religious orientation. Hence, the participants also perceived that Sufism is an important component in the construction of Kashmiriyat.

**Turmoil and Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits as a Socio-Historical Marker**

The perceptions and reflections of the participants in the study threw light on the implication of socio-historical processes and the dynamic nature of ethnic identity that get constructed/defined and reconstructed/redefined as per the situations, contexts. Both the Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit participants among the older generation explained that it was in 1931, during the Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra autocracy, when the slogan “Kashmir for Kashmiris” was aired vociferously. In 1947, during the intrusion by Pakistan, the Pakistanis were viewed as intruding outsiders and Kashmiri Pandits were saved by Kashmiri Muslim compatriots, and the Indian army was perceived by all Kashmiris as the saviour. However, the turmoil of 1989-90 followed by the mass migration/exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, changed the situation in many ways. As articulated by the study participants the turmoil was the ultimate outcome of the wrong policies and reckless actions adopted by the Government of India, in the state government rampant corruption, and the discrimination
perceived by Kashmiri Muslims. But the transformation in the societal processes unleashed by the turmoil and exodus dramatically changed the Kashmiri Muslims’ and Kashmiri Pandits’ social world, their culture and conduct, and their social associations and relationships with each other. Thus, the study reveals and that with the awareness of the past construction of Kashmiriyat, new meanings are getting attached to the idea of Kashmiriyat in the present situation.

The participants across religion and generation most often started their narration about Kashmiriyat with the meanings attached to it, like brotherhood, unity of different religions, tolerance, and love between the communities, so on and so forth. “Kashmiriyat is maligned, it has changed now”, this is the next account participants provide when they talk about changes in the present circumstances. They invariably highlighted the turmoil of 1989-90 and mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir in its aftermath as the most important factors that have changed the meaning associated with Kashmiriyat. They, no doubt, perceived that Kashmiriyat was not as popular and politicised as a term before the turmoil of 1989-90. “Kashmiriyat was simply a norm or social reality which was never discussed ... because, for common people, for we people, Kashmiriyat was as natural as you breathe, drink water....” (participant Farhan Ali: see chapter V). There was no intellectual discussion among common people on Kashmiriyat in everyday interaction; they just practised and lived it through different social activities, whether it was taking part in festivals together, marriage ceremonies or welcoming spring together every year after harsh winter.

As result of the “popularisation” and “politicisation” of Kashmiriyat after the turmoil, it is generally perceived as that Kashmiriyat is a “child of the turmoil”. Participants showed their abhorrence towards the idea of Kashmiriyat: they were reluctant to accept Kashmiriyat as a Kashmiri ethnic identity. So, neither Kashmiri Muslims nor Kashmiri Pandits want to associate with Kashmiriyat. There are reasons for the change from “admiration” to “abhorrence” towards the notion of Kashmiriyat. It is not only the younger generation (some of them not even know the term or its previous meanings), but also those who have experienced Kashmiriyat or brotherhood among Kashmiris before the turmoil have expressed annoyance about the term. As an elderly participant questioned, “Why is our identity given the name of Kashmiriyat?” (participant Tabbassum: see chapter IV). The Kashmiri Muslim participants perceives that Kashmiriyat is getting more and more saffronised by “glorifying the Hindu past” and negating the contribution of Islam towards its construction. They hold the Indian media and the Indian state to be mainly responsible for giving this colour to Kashmiriyat. Thus, the perception prevails that Kashmiriyat may have once united the people of Kashmir in under a homogenous
ethnic identity and culture. But, now the term has acquired political dimension and this politicisation has damaged the earlier meanings attached to it.

On the other hand, Kashmiri Pandits questioned the relevance of Kashmiriyat after their “exodus” from Kashmir. Participants among Kashmiri Pandits across the generation asked “where was Kashmiriyat when they forcefully got displaced, when their property was set on fire, and when it was conspired to create panic among Kashmiri Pandit through hit-lists to convey them to get ready to be killed or move out of Kashmir”? For Kashmiri Pandits, Kashmir is “Islamised” now. “The process of Islamisation has started since 14th century” (participant Narayan Raina: see chapter VI), and Kashmiri Pandits who compromise with this gave the name of “Kashmiriyat”. Kashmiri Pandit participants associate new meaning to Kashmiriyat in the changing circumstances, like “gun culture, “non-tolerance towards minority”, etc.

The new meanings assigned to Kashmiriyat by the participants across religion and generation are the outcome of turmoil and the migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir following the separatist movement. However, the study also brought out that the unity and interdependence between the two communities and started weakening with the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan in 1947. For Kashmiri Muslims, Pakistan became the reference group; they started feeling that they are more close to Pakistan whereas Kashmiri Pandits’ association with India and Hinduism became stronger.

Hence the association of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits with each other started weakening since then. In the same breath though the participants from the older generation among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits also talked about the unity that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits showed when Pakistani intruders enter into Kashmir. However, the participants perceive that the turmoil of 1989 was the culmination of the process which sharpened the boundaries between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits following the exclusion of Kashmiri Pandits and their own seclusion from the separatist movement and their migration/exodus from Kashmir, which has its implications for social ties and collective consciousness of being Kashmiri.

About the present reality, the participants’ accounts reveal that they do not believe in “something called Kashmiriyat”. “It may or may not have existed in the past but does not exist anymore”. Meanings that it connoted have withered away. Now Kashmiriyat just does not mean simple living and love among the people of different communities. Thus, Kashmiriyat does not mean simplicity, harmony and love anymore; it has just become a political tool in the hands of politicians. It has been perceived as a tool by Kashmiri Muslims through which the
Indian state is trying to justify its “occupation” of Kashmir. As a result, both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are relooking into their history to redefine their identities and their associations.

**Implications of Broken Ties**

**Changes in the Social Relationships**

The turmoil and mass exodus have changed the Kashmiri society both demographically and culturally. The centuries old ties between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are broken. The harmonious nature of social relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits is considered as an important component of Kashmiriyat. Historian Mohammad Ishaq Khan describes the then prevalent relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits as “symbiotic” (Khan 2004: 80). “Kashmiris systematically maintained differing Hindu and Muslim conceptual frameworks within a single society” (Madan 2011: 71). The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits not only affected but transformed the social structure of the Kashmiri society and those harmonious relationships and dismantled those ways of living together differently. The older generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are nostalgic about the past and they find it difficult to narrate it in words. Taking part in social activities together, helping each other, singing the same songs in marriages and going to the shrines on various occasions together is a part of the archives of collective memories of that generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits which had been a part of that web of social relationships. The residues of those closely shared past relationships are still persisting at the individual level. Participants from both the communities and across the generation admit that, even though at the individual level relationships might be still persist, the trust has been “replaced by suspicion”, “love by bitterness”, and “co-existence by compromises”. There is no more mutual dependency and the equations of relationships have changed. The relationship has been penetrated and vitiated by religious orthodoxies and political aspirations.

There are some participants among the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims who have friends among young migrated Kashmiri Pandits. They visit each other once in a while, but they have neither lived in the same society nor interacted with each other on regular basis. Kashmiri Pandit children have heard “stories” about Kashmiri Muslims which has bred hatred and anger in their heart towards Kashmiri Muslims, they are held responsible for the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. Perceptions about each other have changed over the
generations. Looking at the present reality, no one can say that fundamental nature of Kashmiri ethnic identity would be the same as it was earlier. Even Kashmiri Muslim participants believe that, because of the prolonged conflict in Kashmir, the trust has been weakened among Kashmiri Muslims also. Rebuilding the trust between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits is very difficult in the present circumstances.

Participants of the older generation from both the communities perceive that even individual relationships can persist only as long as their generation lasts. There is no certainty about the future. Thus, the present reality is covered by doubt, suspicion, and uncertainty in the wake of the prolonged violence. The present younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits has nothing to tell their future generations about each other because they have no archives of collective memories as their parents have and which they share with them. Thus, the erasure of cultural memory embodied in inter-community relations between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits appears inevitable.

**Differences in the Collective Consciousness of being Kashmiri**

Kashmiri Pandits are scattered and they are now living in different cities and towns. It is not that they are not conscious of being Kashmiris. The participants from the older generation have definitely spent a significant part of their life in Kashmir; so among the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits one can see the consciousness of being Kashmiri. The participants from younger generation also have that consciousness. The consciousness of being Kashmiri among the older generation transcended the religious boundaries in the past. “The good days that we spent together is holding us and them. The people [younger generation] who have not seen those times, for them this identity [pause], they will not be able to understand Kashmiriyat” (participant Abha Bhan see chapter VI). That kind of collective consciousness does not develop without “living together” and that too in a peaceful atmosphere:

They will say that they are Kashmiri or Kashmiri Pandits but they [Kashmiri Pandits younger generation] would not relate with Kashmiri Muslims; they [Kashmiri Muslims] see them as only Muslims. The new generation [of Kashmiri Pandits] thinks that all the Kashmiri Muslims staying in Kashmir are bad and they are different from us (participant Abha Bhan: see chapter VI)

The participants from the younger generations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have heard about the nature of harmonious social relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits that existed in the past. This they have heard from their elders and different sources. Faded memories also help some participants among the younger generation of both the
communities to recall that. These “heard realities” are relate to relishing and absorbing each others’ traditions and celebrations of various festivals or about the deep trust in their relationship. But the participants expressed that sometimes it is hard for the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits to believe that relationships were really harmonious, because if they have any memories, they are only of the turmoil and exodus. They believe in that reality only which they construct out of those last memories of the turmoil, secondary stories, and problem they faced because of their exodus. Conflict induced displacement has had its impact to such an extent that the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits is not ready to believe that past “heard reality” which their elders tell them once existed. Thus, they embrace Kashmiri-ness of Kashmiri Pandits, but not relate to Kashmiri-ness of Kashmiri Muslims. Similarly, the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims cannot relate to Kashmiri Pandits.

**Withering of the Composite Culture**

The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits has implications for the once composite culture of Kashmir. The younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims is experiencing predominantly one culture. The Kashmiri Muslim participants of the younger generation reflected that to know about that composite culture they are dependent on their parents/elders or they have to read books, because there is no opportunity for them to actually experience it. There are remnants and residues of Kashmiri Pandits’ existence in Kashmir that Kashmiri Muslims younger generation has seen. For example, there are ruins of Kashmiri Pandits’ houses and the older generation talks about Kashmiri Pandits and past realities. But they have not lived with them, they have not seen the inter-dependence between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits and some of the younger generation participants have not even seen Kashmiri Pandits. Obviously, as said, “If there are two Pandits and hundred Muslims in this scenario, Kashmiriyat cannot remain alive” (participant Phulla Koul: see chapter VI)

The participants from the younger generations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have only an idea of the relationships that the older generation has shared. The Kashmiri Muslim children have no familiarity with mixed culture that people in Kashmir had experienced earlier. During the turmoil, no one, neither the government and nor the civil society, might have thought to preserve those emotional ties. It was also not possible because the “wound was fresh” then. There is always an after effect and that is realised now by Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits both. The participants among the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits expressed that they feel strange to talk about the past phenomenon and past
composite culture to their children. They are helpless to find a method or a formula to get the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims acquainted with Kashmiri Pandits and their culture. So, for one (older generation), it is the loss of friendship and emotional ties, for the other (younger generation) it is just an “alien” thing.

However, turmoil and migration have strengthened their religious ideologies and political aspirations but weakened their regional, social, and spiritual identity. During field work, I visited the replica of Kheer Bhavani temple in Jammu and I was told that Kashmiri Pandits have not made a replica of any of the shrine that they used to visit in Kashmir like Makhdoom Sahib, Dastgeer Sahib, or shrine of Nund Rishi/Nur-ud-Din known as Charar-i-Sharif. On the one hand, the fundamentalist Islamic movement in Kashmir is posing challenge to this Sufi belief system and labels it as anti-Islamic, and on the other hand, Kashmiri Pandits are no more enthusiastic or inclined to visit these shrines now because of the circumstances. For those who are living outside of Kashmir, this culture has been left behind for good. Thus, an important component of Kashmiriyat has weakened.

**Differences in Political and Religious Aspirations**

The outburst of militancy with fundamentalist fervour and voicing of religious slogans created panic among Kashmiri Pandits. Non-involvement of Kashmiri Pandits in the movement, the migration/exodus resulting from the separatist movement, and the role of politics in the emerging reality shows the differences in the aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits for themselves and for Kashmir. “Boundary markers are there. We are on the one side and they are on the other side opposite to us” (participant Rasool Malik: see chapter IV). Kashmiri Muslim participants from the older generation think that the religious ideologies of Hinduism and Islam have undermined the Kashmiri aspect of their ethnic identity. “In the recent time religion has played the divide and rule role.... religion was the binding force earlier...Now it is the dividing force...” (participant Maqbool Butt: see chapter IV) How the different ideologies have separated the two communities was clearly stated by an elderly Kashmiri Muslim participant: “When we say “long live Pakistan”, “we want freedom” obviously Kashmiri Pandits do not feel good. They do not like it, not at all. They may not retaliate but they do not appreciate it”.

The Kashmiri Pandit participants perceived that the separatist movement had “religious overtones” and therefore their community distanced itself from the movement. They explained present relations between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims as being on “parallel tracks”
or on “opposite sides”, because one wants complete “integration of Kashmir” with India and other wants “freedom or to merge with Pakistan or more autonomy”. The Kashmiri Pandit participants perceive that they are secure with India only and have no future with Kashmiri Muslims. The mixing of religion and politicised religious orientations are behind the present reconstruction and redefinition of Kashmiri ethnic identity, which is certainly negating the unique composite cultural identity of Kashmiris. When Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of the older generation go into the archives of their memories, they feel that, in the name of religion, division has been created between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits through different “political game plans”.

The participants also expressed that the recent controversy about Amarnath land transfer (see chapter II) once again made both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits to fall prey to the politics of separatism and Hindutava. After partition in 1947, there emerged new reference groups for Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits both: the former started identifying and associating itself with Pakistan, and the latter, with Bharat/India. In spite of this, there was no apparent divide between the two, as they were held together by common cultural history and language. However, both the Kashmiri Muslim and the Kashmiri Pandit participants across the generation perceived that now there are sharp ideological differences, and there is no meeting point between them.

The religious ideologies of Hinduism and Islam have undermined the Kashmiri aspect of their ethnic identity. “When you move more and more towards radicalism, it definitely undermines the regional identity” (participant Nandi Koul: see chapter VI). The politicised religion as a boundary marker has made them to move on parallel tracks. The religious dimension has become more important in Kashmiri ethnicity than its cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and regional dimensions. There are instances in the narratives of the participants when they expressed that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are “separate” and “different” now because their aspirations stand apart from each other.

Participants also think that wrong policies of state and central governments also responsible for creating the present situation.

Since 1947 because of the wrong polices of the Congress government, separatism in Kashmir was gaining roots directly or indirectly... It was later in 1987, the National Conference and the Congress started militancy by poll rigging. It is all the dirty politics which destroyed Kashmir and Kashmiriyat (participant Ramesh Ganjoo: see chapter VI).

It is widely perceived that the institution of religion was exploited to separate the people and to create different kinds of barriers among them. In the words of a Kashmiri: “The leaf of chinar is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. That identity cannot match with any other identity of
Kashmiris’ but that is finished [sad]”. Despite, the fact that both the communities belonged to the same cultural, regional and linguistic ethnicity, Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have become religiously more conscious and politically motivated.

There are Kashmiri Pandit participants who would like to define and interpret Kashmiriyat on the basis of “Sanskrit civilisation” of India, whereas Kashmiri Muslims see their future with the Muslim brotherhood. Their brotherhood/bahichara with each other that is said to be represented through Kashmiriyat is no more now. There is no interaction between them to see each others’ goodness and earlier identity of being Kashmiri.

Kashmiri Pandits would accept Kashmiriyat as a “Sanskrit civilisation” otherwise it would be considered only as ethnic identity of Kashmiri Muslims. On the other hand, Kashmiri Muslim participants across the generation perceive that Indian state also emphasises Hindu past as a part of Kashmiriyat, that does not go well with Kashmiri Muslims. They also perceive that the government of India strategically glorifies the Hindu Raj and tries to eliminate the discourse of Shah-i-Hamadan to negate that contribution of Islam towards the construction of Kashmiriyat. Both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are important components of Kashmiriyat, but in the changing scenario both have no inclination to acknowledge Kashmiriyat which once represented “secular ideology” of Kashmir. Thus, religion and different political aspirations ultimately undermine the ethnic identity of being Kashmiri and “whatever Kashmiriyat they have constructed together”. The concept that first they are Kashmiris has been washed off their memories, so now they are Hindus and Muslims and “others” for each other. There is endless blame game between the two communities: Kashmiri Muslims perceive that Kashmiri Pandits maligned them as a community, and Kashmiri Pandits consider Kashmiri Muslims responsible for their exodus.

**Similarities and Differences in Emerging Boundaries**

Ethnic identity is defined through various features which are ascribed to members of an ethnic group. However, the prominence of different features so ascribed depends on the context. An ethnic feature can be more pronounced in a particular situation and it may get influenced by the context itself. In the present situation, the focal point for both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits is their belongingness to different religion, not the composite culture. Somewhere the similarities of language and culture still latently create the feeling of belongingness among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, but at the same time their belongingness to different religious faiths undermines the similarities of language and culture. The present situation is also
witnessing reconstructing the past as when some participants say that “there was nothing like Kashmiriyat”. The existence of Kashmiriyat in the past is itself getting questioned by both the communities in the present context.

The present process of emerging boundaries is not a sudden one. Participants emphasised differences even while speaking of similarities. For instance, the older and the generation of Kashmiri Muslims are both aware of the fact that they got converted and they were once. The historical process of conversion played dual role of binding Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in one thread of Kashmiri-ness and differentiating them as Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in their religious orientations. They acknowledge that they are from the same “gene pool” and “ethnically they are the same”, they have same cultural history, they have prayed in the same shrines, and they speak the same language. At the same time, the differences are also emphasised by the participants. For instance, as stated by a participant, “Kashmiri Pandits kept their selves separate from Kashmiri Muslims in many ways their salan/cuisines would be different, their pharan would be different. Their hair style would be different. This is the fact”. When one says that Kashmiri Pandits kept themselves separate from Kashmiri Muslims always in many ways whether it was difference in “pharan” their “wazwan/cusine” (Rasool Malik: see chapter IV) and their different “hair style”, all these small differences are getting more emphasised in the present context of emerging boundaries between the communities: “the style of beard and hairdo, clothes, food, and eating habits.... and all kind of visible differences can serve as starting points for creating ethnic boundaries” (Sekulic 2008: 457).

Slight difference in language are also taken into consideration for instance, Kashmiri Pandits use more Sanskrit words while speaking Kashmiri language, while Kashmiri Muslims use more Persian and Arabic words. They participated together in festivals and marriages, but avoided inter-dining. So there were occasions of exclusion and inclusion that symbolises the process of demarcation and association between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits.

The developments since 1947 and following years are explained by the Kashmiri Muslim and the Kashmiri Pandit participants, especially by the older generation of both the communities, in terms of “elite tussle” and “undercurrents” between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. The Kashmiri Muslim participants of the older generation perceived that Kashmiri Pandits hold a monopoly of the state government jobs as they were an educated community. So, the feeling of relative deprivation and discrimination among Kashmiri Muslims were brewing up. At the same time, the Kashmiri Pandit participants of the older generation participants also perceived that they had no say in the political system of Kashmir.
The differences and similarities emerged through the process of social interaction in everyday life of social-world. The social interaction between the people makes them aware of distinctions at latent level; those differences can be manifested during assertions of identity to sharpen the boundaries which are may be based on religion, language, region or any other ethnic feature that can be emphasised in a given context. In Barth’s own words: “The critical focus of investigation...becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.... If a group maintains its identity when member interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion” (1969: 15).

During the turmoil, and even in the present context, Kashmiri Pandits perceived Kashmiri Muslims as “militants”. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims perceived Kashmiri Pandits as “Indian agents”. Hence any ethnic feature to which people feel connect to in a particular situation, can become the potent source of group action and conflict (Malesevic 2004). In the present social construction of Kashmiri ethnic identity, religious ideologies and political aspirations have a prominent place. Small differences, exclusion and inclusion that get established during the social interaction among the groups also get emphasised with broader differences in ideologies and political aspirations. There are some standards for inclusion and exclusion that self-conscious ethnic groups or communities lay down. Sharpening of ethnic consciousness has led to the transformation of ethnicity from ethnicity-in-itself to ethnicity-for-itself (Brass 1991; O.Patterson cited in Gill 2000)

Today, Kashmiri Pandits prefer to refer to the culture and Kashmiri identity that is “five thousand years old”, that is Hindu identity, and Kashmiri Muslims want to emphasise the identity they were ascribed through conversion, that is, Muslim identity. Both Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandits negate the ascription of composite Kashmiri culture and identity in present context. In the words of Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1970: xxxiii), “ethnic groups owing to their distinctive historical experiences, their cultures and skills, the times of their arrival and the economic situation they met developed different distinctive economic, political, and cultural patterns. As the old culture fell away – and it did rapidly enough – a new one, shaped by the distinctive experiences... formed and new identity [get] created”.

Prospects of Kashmiri Pandits’ Homecoming?

Today, mistrust between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits is as deep as that trust that once existed and hatred is now as intense as love once was. Accordingly, the prospects of Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir are marked by many questions.

The Lost Trust and the Fear Factor

The older generation of Kashmiri Pandits has strong affinity with Kashmir and there is an urge among them who had migrated to return to Kashmir. However, most of them do not want to return in the present condition of uncertainty, insecurity, and a state of constant fear. Kashmiri Muslims also believe that the fear established in the heart of Kashmiri Pandits is an obstacle in their homecoming. The trust between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits that had once been established is no more now. One can read the fear, suspicion and mistrust among Kashmiri Pandits in a query like: “What will I do in Kashmir now. I will not have freedom of expression there”. Kashmiri Pandits doubt if “They [Kashmiri Muslims] will accept us [Kashmiri Pandits]” (participant Vishan Dhar: see chapter VI). There is no question of trust between the new generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits because there is no connection. The participant among older generation of Kashmiri Pandits doubt that there will be friendship among younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. The younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits are brought up in a different society and culture, and the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims never get a chance to mix with Kashmiri Pandits at the everyday level of interaction. Hence suspicion, mistrust towards each other is obvious.

Kashmiri Pandits who visited Kashmir post mass migration saw changed Kashmir and feel it is impractical to think of return. Somewhere the urge to live there is alive, but how and when this dream would be realised is a big question. They can only visit Kashmir as tourists, but to build a house there seems very doubtful, because there may be a problem of acceptance and accommodation. Another doubt among Kashmiri Pandits is that Kashmiri Muslims will feel insecure if Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir, as there would be more competition and they will have to share land, jobs, and everything with Kashmiri Pandits. They feel the same problem will erupt again there that had happened twenty years ago.
Declining Roots of Belongingness

Kashmiri Pandits of older generation may still have that belongingness to Kashmir and people over there. The participants even expressed that their grandparents who really had connection died with the desire to go back to Kashmir and meet their Kashmiri Muslim friend again, but very few of that generation is left. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims also expressed that “Our elders left this world with a dream and desire to meet their Pandit friends again; they died with that desire only” (participant Tabbassum: see chapter VIII). The gap of twenty years is itself a big challenge, but it is not big enough to forget very recent history of Kashmir. So, Kashmiri Muslim youth are aware of the fact that Kashmiri Pandits also belong to Kashmir as much as Kashmiri Muslims belong. But most of the Kashmiri Pandits do not see any future for their community in Kashmir now. The Kashmiri Pandit participants from the younger generation did not deny that they do not belong to Kashmir. But there is definitely a difference. Most of them see themselves as “tourist” in Kashmir. Even those Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir confess their desired to leave Kashmir gradually.

Response to Job Policies and Packages

Most of the migrated Kashmiri Pandits have sold or lost their property and are settled outside Kashmir. If they return to Kashmir they have to start from the scratch. The state and central governments have proposed various schemes to encourage Kashmiri Pandits to return to Kashmir, but the results are not much encouraging, as few young Kashmiri Pandits want to take up jobs in Kashmir. Most of the Kashmiri Pandits youth are earning well outside Kashmir. Even those Kashmiri Pandits who have taken jobs in Kashmir expressed that they do not want to settle down in Kashmir forever and they will leave when they get any better job outside Kashmir. Because perception prevails that there would be “religious problem”, there would be “political problem”, there would be “social problem” and there is a “security problem”.

Demand for Homeland

“The only way Pandits can come is that we should have a separate area for Pandits” (participant Keshav Bhatt: see chapter VI). Kashmiri Pandits across the generation expressed that if they are to return to Kashmir they would not return to earlier Kashmir. Their past collective memories of harmonious relationships are clouded by the memories of turmoil and they think that “now
that time of composite culture is gone”. They do not want to send their children to those schools where they perceive education is “religion oriented” Hence, they want a separate homeland in Kashmir with the status of a Union Territory and which is controlled by the Government of India without the imposition of Article 370. They want a homeland with tight security where they would be “politically empowered” and where they would have freedom of expression.

The composite culture and Kashmiri ethnic identity can revive only if Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits start living together once again. But, the demand of a separate homeland leaves very less scope for that. Even though the desire to see Kashmir is there among Kashmiri Pandits there is no yearning to reside there because of the separation that has emerged and the ethnic boundaries are hardening on religious lines.


The narratives of the participants across the religion and generation leave us with less or no hope of reviving the once harmonious secular identity subsumed under the term Kashmiriyat. If Kashmiri Pandits do not return to Kashmir, the existing mono religious culture would be the only reality for coming generation. On the one hand, the older generations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have drifted apart from their old ways of living together, creating common cultural patterns, and collective experiences. On the other hand, the younger generations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have distinctive experiences which are mutually exclusive.

Historical memories influence the psychology of people to sustain their social construction of ethnicity; the present gets fabricated by using the past. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits participants also preferred to go back to history to reconstruct the present. But both exerted their preferences to different parts of history to reconstruct Kashmiri ethnic identity in the present social reality. For one (Kashmiri Pandits), five thousand years old history is notionally significant, and for other (Kashmiri Muslims), the history after 14th century is instrumentally significant.

What comes out of this study is that ethnicity is belongingness with actual or fictitious past and that the feeling of belongingness or connection also becomes a vital part of one’s self-definition. Ethnic groups also put up the past symbols in newly fabricated ethnicity whether it is to re-establish the group to improve the future of the members. The sense of belongingness to an ethnic group influences the thinking, perceptions, feeling, and behaviour of the members (de Vos 1995).