Abstract

Ethnicity could be viewed as a reaction to changing conditions of a group and ethnic groups are often “imagined” communities. Historical processes and shared memories facilitate the formation of ethnic groups. People who once shared a given identity may re-look at/re-define their identity due to some external factors and internal conditions, and this may result in the reconstruction of historically constructed and shared identities. This has happened in Kashmir, where ethnicity is now articulated in terms of religion to assert the Kashmiri ethnic identity. The erstwhile composite identity of Kashmir is thus cracked and weakened by the impact of religion. This study is a modest attempt at understanding the ethnicisation of Kashmiri identity through the infusion of Islam, which has fractured the earlier composite culture of the Kashmir. The interest in and importance of this study stems from the changing nature of Kashmiri ethnic identity and from my experience and perceptions of Kashmiri identity. Being a Dogra from Jammu and Kashmir, I always thought that Kashmiris are the people who lived in the Kashmir Valley. Accordingly, I perceived Kashmiri culture as the culture of the people who live in Kashmir. It did not occur to me that, before the turmoil of 1989, two distinct religious groups, namely, the Kashmiri Muslims and the Kashmiri Pandits, shared a composite culture in Kashmir. The unique set of beliefs and the composite culture of Kashmir and ethnic identity that had evolved over many centuries came under severe pressure in the mid-1980s with the emergence of secessionist forces. The impact of this movement on the composite culture of Kashmir has been phenomenal. Since 1989-90, the nature of Kashmiri ethnic identity started shifting from regional identity to religious identity. The fundamentalist connotation and communal confrontation has changed the earlier concept of Kashmiri identity, or Kashmiriyat, which stands for composite culture. The relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits has come to be understood in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘we’ and ‘they’, and ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’. The relation between the two communities has been transformed.

The present study has sought to understand the changing process of ethnic identity in Kashmir and the mounting importance of religion in the perception of identity for both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. 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
such a 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 s/he plays an active part.

Objectives of the Study
The broad objectives of the study were as follows:

i. 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.

ii. 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.

iii. 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.

iv. 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.

v. 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.

vi. 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 exclusion and inclusion. The study would attempt to explore how, at the level of people, boundaries are defined and try to understand linkages between the political development and reconstruction of boundaries.

The Research Setting
The study was mainly located in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the research setting mainly included Srinagar, Ganderbal, and Anantnag districts of the Kashmir region where predominantly Kashmiri Muslims are staying, and the Jammu region where most of the migrated Kashmiri Pandits are residing. The research participants comprise Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits living in the Valley, the displaced Kashmiri Pandits living in Jammu region, and other key informants in Chandigarh, Delhi, and Ludhiana. The selection of sites in Kashmir was feasibility driven: because of the conflict-ridden situation, I had to be cautious in the selection of the sites. Second, Kashmiri Pandits are scattered in various places: so, in search of Kashmiri Pandit participants, sites in Jammu and Udhampur, where Kashmiri Pandits are living in camps, were chosen. It was also important to know the perception of those Kashmiri Pandits who have left the state and gone to other cities. For this purpose, I visited cities such as Chandigarh, Delhi, and Ludhiana.
The Study Participants

Keeping in view the broad research objectives and the specific research questions, the current research required interaction with both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. Thus, as regards participants, the study covered two sets of people as per their religion, namely, Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, and four sets of people as per their generation, namely, Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of the older generation (about 40–60 years old) and Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of the younger generation (about 20–30 years old). Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of the older generation have lived together under the same structural and cultural conditions in the past. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits of the younger generation have not lived together so because of the mass migration of the latter after the turmoil of 1989-90. The history of shared culture and identities, and their relationships to each other in the past and the present have been brought out by the older generation. To know the present reality, the perceptions of the older and the younger generations of both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have been significant.

The Data: Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research necessitates on multiple interconnected interpretive methods since no single method can capture the subtle variations in continuous human experience. For the study, considerable time was spent on rapport-building. The method of gathering information entailed informal conversations and in-depth unstructured interviewing guided by the research objectives. The interview began with rapport-building, then moving on to specific issues. The interviews were recorded in the form of narratives of the experiences and interpretation of the context of Kashmiri ethnic identity before the turmoil of 1989-90 and after that. The narratives of past experiences helped to understand the ethnic dynamics and their impact in time and space. The method of observation helped in contextualizing the cases and general information collected on the issue under study. Observation also involved visiting the shrines in Kashmir and replicas of temples made by Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu, and these helped me to understand cultural practices and specificities.

Drawing on the broad research questions, a tentative guideline for questions was used to ensure that relevant issues were not missed out. However, in due course, as new lines
of inquiry emerged, they were incorporated into the interviews. Besides the primary data that was gathered through fieldwork, secondary information was gathered from archival sources, newspaper reports, and articles from Internet.

Following the qualitative approach and the constructionist paradigm, theoretical sampling method was adopted for data collection. There are different contextual dimensions in the reconstruction of Kashmiri ethnic identity such as age, education, socio-economic status, gender, and religious boundaries. Keeping these dimensions in view, potential research participants were identified for data collection. The intent of sampling was to maximize divergence in responses to get the diversity in data, until there remained nothing new to know. Hence, data collection ended with reaching theoretical saturation.

Data analysis began with the transcription of the recorded data. The interviews had been recorded in English and Hindi/Urdu. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and those in Hindi/Urdu were then translated into English. The data was analyzed using the qualitative narratives. Analysis captured the way the participants constructed the reality, through their perceptions about the social world in which they lived, and arrived at themes and concepts, which seemed to correlate with their perceptions.

The information recorded as narratives was supplemented by field-notes, written records of observations, and non-verbal communications. The data analysis proceeded with the objective of discovering concepts and emerging patterns within concepts with similarities and differences. After identifying broad themes and breaking them into sub-themes, thematic codes were created and quotations of actors were classified under these codes. Finally, linkages between various themes were ordered into chapters by focusing on research questions and objectives that guided the study.

The Organization of the Thesis

The thesis has been organized under eight chapters. The first chapter, being the ‘Introduction’, presents the background and rationale of the study, spells out the objectives and research questions, explores the literature on various relevant concepts and theories of ethnicity, and explains the methodology of the study.

The second chapter, titled ‘Kashmir: A Historical Background’, outlines the socio-political history of Kashmir. This chapter delineates the early history of Kashmir. It briefly discusses how the Jammu and Kashmir state came into existence. It traces the
historical events in Kashmir such as the uprising of 1931, Quit Kashmir Movement, and Accession of the State Jammu and Kashmir to India. It describes the ethno-religious Nationalism of Kashmir from 1990 to the current situation over there.

The third chapter, titled ‘Understanding Kashmiriyat’, analyzes the scholarly perspectives on Kashmiriyat and scrutinizes its various components. The attempt here is to explain how the idea of Kashmiriyat came into existence. It includes the different perspective of scholars on the idea of Kashmiriyat and the current debate on it. It briefly describes the Sufi saints who are considered as harbingers of Kashmiriyat such as Lal Ded/Lal Arifa and Shiekh Noor-ud-Din Noorani/Nund Rishi. It includes verses of these saints which emphasises their humanistic philosophy, which is considered as one of the significant components of Kashmiriyat.

The fourth chapter, titled ‘Perspective of Kashmiri Muslims: The Older Generation’, analyzes how the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims makes meaning of Kashmiriyat, the Kashmiri culture, Sufism in Kashmir and the social relationship among the people in Kashmir. It is based on the analysis of narratives obtained from in-depth interviews with that generation of Kashmiri Muslims which has personal experiences of Kashmiriyat before the onset of turmoil in Kashmir. They are a generation of people who have spent the significant years of their life with their Kashmiri Pandit compatriots; this generation covers the age group of around forty to sixty. The in-depth interviews with this category of participants covered a course of time from the past to the present, focusing on the key components of Kashmiriyat as it existed before 1989 and the changes this idea has undergone since then. The themes derived from the research participants’ narratives are presented in three parts. The first part deals with Kashmiri Muslims’ views on Kashmiriyat. It presents their perceptions of Kashmiriyat, that is, the meaning they make out of the past reality and that of the reality as it exists now. The second part focuses on their narrations on Sufi practices, their beliefs about Sufi Islam, and the impact of Islam on Sufi practices and belief system. And the third part reflects on the nature of social relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits before and after the turmoil. The focus here is on the influence of religious turmoil and politics on the changing perspective and practicality of Kashmiri ethnic identity, or Kashmiriyat.

The fifth chapter, titled ‘Perspective of Kashmiri Muslims: The Younger Generation’, examines the perspectives of the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims about the current social reality, and the social reality of the Valley before 1989, which, though they may not have experienced, could know through different sources. The
participants belong to the age group of twenty to thirty. This category of participants was very young when the turmoil began and some might have even been born during the turmoil. The societal set-up in which this generation was born and brought up is significantly different from that of the older generation. The chapter is an attempt to understand the younger generation’s perception of Kashmiriyat, Kashmiri culture, Sufism in Kashmir and the nature of social relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. The in-depth interviews with this category of participants followed a course of time from the past (the experiences of their elders that they have heard) to the present (their own experiences). The themes derived from the research participants’ narratives have been ordered into three parts. The first part analyses the social construction of Kashmiriyat by the younger generation. This generation of Kashmiri Muslims has not experienced Kashmiriyat that their parents and grandparents have experienced. The meaning that they attach to Kashmiriyat in the present context, and the influences and factors that are shaping their social construction of Kashmiriyat would be discussed in this part. The second part examines the younger generation’s perceptions on the Sufi practices and belief system in Kashmir. The third part reflects on the way the younger generation perceives the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the present context. It shows how the influence of religion, turmoil and politics is shaping the perspective of the younger generation on Kashmiriyat and Kashmiri ethnic identity.

The sixth chapter titled, ‘Perspective of Kashmiri Pandits: The Older Generation’, examines the perspective of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits on Kashmiriyat, Kashmiri culture, Sufism in Kashmir and the social relationship among the people in Kashmir. It is based on the narratives obtained from in-depth interviews with that generation of Kashmiri Pandits which has personal experiences of Kashmiriyat before the turmoil and consequent mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir with the eruption of turmoil in 1989-90. The Kashmiri Pandits of this generation have spent significant years of their life in Kashmir with their Kashmiri Muslim compatriots before the migration, in peaceful atmosphere of Kashmir. This generation covers the age group of forty to sixty. The chapter includes the in-depth interviews with the Kashmiri Pandits who have migrated and also of those who are still living in Kashmir. The themes derived from the research participants’ narratives are presented in three parts in this chapter. The first part deals with the Kashmiri Pandits’ perspective on Kashmiriyat. It presents their perceptions of Kashmiriyat, that is, the meaning they make out of past reality and that of the social reality as it exists now, that is, after the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits
from the Kashmir. The second part focuses on their narration on Sufi practices, their beliefs in the shrines of Sufi saints in Kashmir, and how being out of Kashmir has been affecting their belief system. It also discusses whether Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir visit these shrines of Sufi saints and whether their belief system is intact as it was before 1989. And the third part would discuss the perceptions on the nature of social relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits before and after turmoil.

The **chapter seventh** titled, ‘Perspective of Kashmiri Pandits: The Younger generation’, deals with the meanings the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits makes of *Kashmiriyat*, the Kashmiri culture and Sufism in Kashmir. The focus here is on their perceptions of current social realities about these aspects and the social realities of the Valley before 1989, which though they may not have experienced could have known through different sources. Those Kashmiri Pandits’ of this generation who have been brought up outside of Kashmir have experience of neither the past reality nor the current reality of Kashmir. However, those who are still living in Kashmir with their families have opportunities to interact with the people with whom their parents, grandparents and ancestors have lived in the peaceful atmosphere of the happier times. The participants belonged to the age group of twenty to thirty; this category of participants was very young when the turmoil began and some might have been born during the initial years of the turmoil. The in-depth interviews with this category of Kashmiri Pandit participants, covered a course of time from the past (*the experiences that they have heard from their elders*) to the present (*their own perceptions of the reality*). The themes derived from the research participants narratives have been presented in three parts. The first part will attempt to understand the social construction of *Kashmiriyat* by the young generation of Kashmiri Pandits. They might have heard about the notion of *Kashmiriyat*, but have no experiential understanding of the meanings that are associated with it. In the present social reality, the meaning that they attach to *Kashmiriyat*, the influences and the factors that shape their social construction of *Kashmiriyat* would be discussed in this part. The second part examines the young generations’ perceptions on the Sufi culture and belief system of Kashmir that was an essential part of social and cultural set-up of Kashmir irrespective of religious faith. It also examines as to how the younger generations of those Kashmiri Pandits who have not lived in Kashmir look at these Sufi practices and what they know about the shrines of Kashmir. The third part reflects on the way the younger
generation perceives the relationship between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the present times.

Finally, the eighth chapter summarizes the main findings of the study. It contextualizes these findings in the framework of the larger debates on ethnic identity construction. It explains how Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits constructed Kashmiriyat earlier, what was the important meanings they associated with historically constructed and shared identity called Kashmiriyat, and the changes in their perception over time. This chapter discusses the new meanings associated with the idea of Kashmiriyat that is far from its original connotation of composite cultural identity. It analyzes the implications of these changes in the perceptions of the people and its impact on their social world, on their culture, conduct, and their social relationships.

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