Chapter VI

Perspective of Kashmiri Pandits: The Older Generation

This chapter 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. This generation of Kashmiri Pandits has 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 in-depth interviews with this category of Kashmiri Pandit participants, who have been drawn from Srinagar and Anantnag in Kashmir, and Udhampur, Jammu, Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Delhi, covered a course of time from the past to the present.

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. Here it is also important to understand the role of conflict-induced mass migration in their perceptions and the meaning they are making out of the present reality. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits lived together in a spiritual Rishi and Sufi culture; they prayed in the same shrines, too. 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 discuss 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. What are the overall changes they are observe in the Kashmiri society regarding the Sufi practices? 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 attempt here is to understand if the meaning Kashmiri Pandits of older generation attached to Kashmiriyat is the same as their counterpart Kashmiri Muslims attach, as discussed in the chapter four. To grasp the social construction of Kashmiriyat as per Kashmiri Pandits and the relative significance of the meaning they attached to this idea, I probed into the influences and factors that had shaped their social construction of Kashmiriyat earlier and that they are
reconstructing now. “What does Kashmiriyat mean?”, “What are the key components that define Kashmiriyat”. “If Kashmiriyat means bahichara/brotherhood between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, is that bahichara still exist”. Responses provided by the participants to such questions as these form the thematic substance presented in this chapter.

I

Kashmiriyat: Single Term, Many Meanings

“Kashmiriyat includes hospitality and culture of Kashmir”, “Kashmiriyat is universal brotherhood/bahichara in the Valley”

This part would discuss the perceptions on Kashmiriyat of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in the valley and those who have migrated from Kashmir. According to sixty-two years Girdar Koul (retired principal)

Kashmiriyat includes the culture of Kashmir that is the culture of the land.... Before migration the atmosphere of the Valley was very nice. Kashmiris are basically very affectionate irrespective of being Hindus or Muslims. If someone came to our house we treated him nicely... Hindus and Muslims used to gather at Badamvari with samovar [traditional tea kettle] full of tea, children used to play in the garden. As a whole we used to enjoy that all. There was no threat at all, no one had dreamt of what has been happening for the last twenty years in Kashmir. The Kashmiri language bound all the people in Kashmir together. We had almost everything same, there was no difference, so no fear also. There was not that much communication with the outside world, because of which the whole culture was our own.

Girdar Koul’s description of Kashmiriyat is a portrait of a peaceful valley, where he has spent his life with his Kashmiri Muslim compatriots. For him, Kashmiriyat includes culture of the valley, the love between the people, hospitality and language that bound the society in a single thread of belongingness.

Nandi Koul (professor retired), presently living in Kashmir explained Kashmiriyat in terms of place where the saints were the harbingers of a composite culture. “This place is known as Pirwar, a place of saints. Kashmiris are more in love with learning, spiritualism, brotherhood, nonviolence, philosophy of human brotherhood”. Similarly, Vishan Dhar (retired government employee) said: “Kashmiriyat is our value system, the pure and loving relationship between us”. He goes back to history and describes Kashmir as a land of saints and Kashmiriyat is a “harmonious relationship between the people, the foundation of which was laid by the saints of Kashmir”.

Ramesh Ganjoo (working in government sector), who though has migrated yet lives in Kashmir at present because of his transfer there, does not live in his ancestral house, but in a security zone, says:

Kashmiriyat is universal brotherhood in the valley that we do not find in any part of the world, the humanity, friendly approach, feeling the pain of others, co-workership, mankind, philanthropic approach, and balanced system of society. It was there but prior to 1989. These are above
everything and it is still there. You will not find friendly people like them [Kashmiri Muslims] in any part of the world. I think wrong things happened here because of wrong teachings wrong things were inculcated in the developing brains of the people... If there would have been right teaching and direction it would not have happened.

Ramesh Ganjoo, perceives Kashmiriyat as universal brotherhood and praises his friendly Kashmiri Muslim compatriots and thinks that the meaning he has attached to Kashmiriyat still persists in Kashmir. Dev Sopori (owner of a computer institute) explains Kashmiriyat by giving an example from daily routine of his Kashmir days:

Kashmiriyat is courtesy, hospitality, conduct. Conduct in the sense as it was like in those times. If suppose in my home rice is finished, I just had to convey to Akbar [a Kashmiri Muslim friend] that and he would quickly come with a sack full of rice. He would not ask for money. That thing would be settled later. Sometimes our Kashmiri Muslim neighbours would come to my father for money and he never gave a second thought whether to give money or not, he just gave it, whatever the amount that person had asked. That was Kashmiriyat. After ten years people would say once upon a time there was Kashmiriyat... It is depleting day by day.

Dev Sopori talked about Kashmiriyat in terms of close relation between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. In that kind of relation, material possessions were not important but the trust factor carried meaning. That trust factor was representation of Kashmiriyat in their day to day life. Sanjay Tikku (academician, Chandigarh), talked about an important component that constituted Kashmiriyat:

There are two main important components of Kashmiriyat. One is the culture of Islam and the other that of Hinduism. There are differences like, for example, the pheran of Kashmiri Pandit women may be different from that of the Kashmiri Muslim women, but we were proud of each other. There were no divisions between us. If there was a gap between us we used to counter and cover it up. But now those gaps are open and have come between us. There were the ways to cover those gaps and now those ways [trikke] are also finished. Both of us are alone now, they are getting destroyed there in Kashmir and we are suffering here being out of Kashmir. Basically, our identity is one because we evolved together. There is no question of buildings and property for us, it is the question of our mentality, culture, language which bridge the gap....we were an essential part of each other.

“Kashmiriyat died in 1990. That is finished”/“Everything is changed now”

Ratanlal Dhar (retired headmaster) reminisces about more than forty years of his life that he spent in Kashmir, He said,

Kashmir was the heaven of the world. We were living in peaceful atmosphere of Kashmir, our life was so peaceful. There were brethren relationships between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs... there was Kashmiriyat, bahichara among all the communities in Kashmir and they were there for each other in sickness and happiness. It was very good then, but I do not know what happened later. Everything got changed.

Ratanlal Dhar is astonished by the changing circumstances and he has no hope of experiencing that Kashmiriyat again. Similarly, Suchitra Koul said, “There was a bahichara in Kashmir that is called Kashmiriyat. It was really wonderful and now [sad] it has totally been changed”. When I asked Ganesh Tikku (government employ) if he thinks Kashmiriyat was still there, he replied:

I cannot say anything. May be one or two per cent [sad]. I think it is finished because we are out of Kashmir now and the new generation does not know the Kashmiri language. My daughters do not
know anything about Kashmir. They are living outside Kashmir and never went there. Then how can they know about Kashmiriyat?

Pankaj Mattoo (business man) says, that “Kashmiriyat was so deep inside us; there was bahichara/brethren relationship among the people. But those who are born after migration they are now twenty years old, they do not know about that Kashmiriyat. Years are increasing and I do not think that the government wants to revive Kashmiriyat”. Ganesh Tikku and Pankaj Mattoo, in their narratives explained that there is no future for Kashmiriyat, because the new generation of Kashmiri Pandits has no familiarity with the term and what it connotes. The notions attached to the term are not experienced by them, and so, there is no hope of reviving it. Rohini Dhar (academician), who did not migrate from Kashmir, describes the situation in which Kashmiriyat died:

Before the turmoil of 1990s Kashmiriyat prospered in a very conducive atmosphere. There were no differences. But, in 1986, there was some political problem in Kashmir. Then Kashmiri Pandits thought that they were not secure in Kashmir. Some of them bought property outside Kashmir, but most of the Kashmiri Pandits did not leave at that time. But, during the turmoil of 1989, Kashmiri Pandits were threatened. They were considered as agents of the Indian army who allegedly gave information about terrorists. So, Pandits were forced to migrate at that time and Kashmiriyat died. Kashmiriyat can survive only in a secular atmosphere, when people of all religions are together and people belonging to any religion do not feel unsafe in Kashmir. But, I think, in 1990, Kashmiriyat died.

Rohini Dhar’s narrative shows that the meanings attached to Kashmiriyat represent the secular nature of Kashmir region and Kashmiri people. So, those meanings have no value in the present times. Kashmiriyat perished in 1990, when Kashmiri Pandits had to leave Kashmir; it can survive only in a secular atmosphere, not in a threatening one.

Jagannath Ganjoo’s (worked in PWD government department now retired) perceptions on Kashmiriyat are as follows:

Kashmiriyat means goodwill of all Kashmiris to co-exist, to respect the co-existence, to have mutual respect, to believe in the co-existence, to have that brotherhood. On seeing that brotherhood, Gandhi ji once said that Umeed ki koi kiran nazar ayi tou mujhe Kashmir main hi nazar ayi [the only ray of hope has been seen in Kashmir]. After 1989 that never existed.

KB: Was it there before 1989?

Jagannath Ganjoo: ohh... [Enthusiastically] it was there to a great extent although there was an anonymous elements were coming up. There was special campaign started in the mosque; there were Allah-vale, kind of sect coming up. They brainwashed the youth, established madarsas, fed the young mind with fundamentalist ideas. By the time that young generation grew up and started all this, the atmosphere changed. Then Kashmiriyat started deteriorating.

Mahesh Bhatt said that “Till 1987 that brotherhood was there, no one could even think it would change”.
“Kashmiriyat is a political concept”, “Turmoil gave birth to Kashmiriyat”/ “This is just a romantic idea”

Ashwini Bhatt (principal retired) was annoyed with the term Kashmiriyat and he questioned the authenticity of the meanings attached to it:

Kashmiriyat has been recently used by the media after the migration [of Kashmiri Pandits]. Is it Kashmiriyat to force Kashmiri Pandits to move out of their homeland? Is it Kashmiriyat to set Kashmiri Pandit houses on fire? Or is it Kashmiriyat to encroach upon Kashmiri Pandits’ property? Was it Kashmiriyat to stick the hit lists of Kashmiri Pandits on their doors to convey them to get ready to be killed and thereby creating panic among them. Islam did not allow minority there…. they are exposed now. Indian government popularised the idea of Kashmiriyat; it is done for getting votes... We hate this word Kashmiriyat.

Ashwini Bhatt, thus, questions the very existence of Kashmiriyat. Experiences of turmoil and conflict-induced displacement have made him attach new meanings such “gun-culture” and “non-tolerance” and “political tool” to the notion of Kashmiriyat.

When Phulla Koul (academician) was asked what according to her Kashmiriyat was, she first laughed and then said:

I think turmoil has given birth to Kashmiriyat. What is Kashmiriyat? Kashmiriyat does not convey that we want freedom; Kashmiriyat does not say that we want Pakistan; Kashmiriyat does not mean that only Muslims should live in Kashmir. Kashmiriyat means composite culture that we enjoyed once upon a time. This is now a political concept; this is not the voice from the hearts. Now Kashmiriyat brings money, opportunities, so why not to popularise Kashmiriyat. Only the name Kashmiriyat is left. When one social group [Kashmiri Pandits] is missing then what in Kashmiriyat? Kashmiriyat was composite culture of Kashmir. Now politicians are talking about Kashmiriyat for their vested interest... there are few Pandits still in Kashmir, but if there are two Pandits and hundred Muslims in this scenario, Kashmiriyat cannot remain alive. First get all the Kashmiri Pandits back into Kashmir and then talk about Kashmiriyat. Neither the Kashmiri Muslims nor the Kashmiri Pandits are bad, but the political colour that is given to Kashmiriyat has destroyed everything.

Phulla Koul is aware of the meanings that are attached to the concept of Kashmiriyat, which the people of Kashmir have experienced in the past. However, she thinks that, after the turmoil in Kashmir, it has become very popular and political at the same time. People do not want to associate with the notion, because they do not see any Kashmiriyat in the present times. There is no hope of its revival in future, because of the absence of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmiri society.

When I asked Anmol Bhatt (orthopaedic surgeon) how he understood Kashmiriyat, he seemed annoyed and replied promptly:

Nothing, it is just... I have never experienced Kashmiriyat.... This is just a romantic idea, just to project that people [Kashmiri Muslims] living there are very peace loving. They have nothing against anybody else. They are a kind of law abiding people who are tolerant of others.... There is no such thing like Kashmiriyat.

KB: Was there no brotherhood among people?

Anmol Bhatt: It had never been there. It is the creation of the journalists. They just created stories... There was Islam since fourteenth century. Shah-î-Hamadan was not very tolerant guy, none of these were tolerant. Kashmir was Islamised, by exploitation people got converted. Political power came into their hand since fourteenth century. Every Muslim ruler endeavoured to convert people into Islam and as a strategy they tortured those did not convert and forced them to such an
extent that they had to leave Kashmir. You will find in history that Kashmiri Pandits did leave the valley so many times before. So there is no such thing as Kashmiriyat. Yes, may be in some villages, somebody helped someone a lot and in this way stories of Kashmiriyat have got constructed.

Vrinda Koul (gynaecologist) said Kashmiriyat was something superficial:

It is just a false thing, an idea given by pseudo secularists. Kashmiriyat, what Kashmiriyat? [angry] I do not believe in Kashmiriyat. It was just a slogan. Nobody talked about Kashmiriyat when we were there. And now once we are out they want to give nice slogan and tell people everything goody-goody [about past of Kashmir]. That is Kashmiriyat. What Kashmiriyat? If there was Kashmiriyat then why are we out? I do not believe in any Kashmiriyat.

Vrinda Koul considers Kashmiriyat as a pseudo secularist and false idea that she believes never was in Kashmir. If Kashmiriyat means brethren relationship among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, then those brethren relationships are under her scrutiny because of the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits. So she questions the authenticity of the meanings that are attached to Kashmiriyat.

“Religious identity comes first now; Kashmiri identity later”

Abha Bhan (an academician) talked about similarities that bound Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past and the differences that divide them now:

I think, ethnically we have similar identity, but religion has divided us. Ethnically, we are same, we cannot differentiate... May be our dress patterns were different [KP women wears Sari], food habits were different [Kashmiri Pandit eat meat, but not beef]... Language is same, and that is main criteria that bound us. Wherever you find the person who speaks your language, you get to go to that person. Even physical features tell that so and so is a Kashmiri. There were no differences between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. We never had these differences like now.

Abha Bhan’s narrative explains that the language, ethnicity, and physical similarities bound Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past. But, at present, religion has become the dividing factor between them. She further talked about the differences that have grown now:

Yes, there is a gap, but, as I told you, language is a strong binder. 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. They will say that they are Kashmiri or Kashmiri Pandits but they [Kashmiri Pandits younger generation] would not relate with Kashmiri Muslims; they [Kashmiri Pandits younger generation] see them as only Muslims. Religious identity has become stronger now. Earlier it was not dominating but now religious identity comes first now; and Kashmiri identity comes later. The new generation [of Kashmiri Pandits] thinks that all the Kashmiri Muslims staying in Kashmir are bad and they are different from us. Furthermore, Amarnath land controversy has worsened the situation and widened the differences.

Keshav Bhatt (working in the judiciary) having experienced the present reality in Kashmir, as he still lives there, describes Kashmiriyat of the past and the present:

Kashmiriyat means... There was love between us.... Then it starts depleting, not getting better; fundamentalism started deepening its roots, creating differences, tensions during eighties. But still affection is alive somewhere at individual level. However, collectively, I stick to my view point
they stick to theirs. Our [Kashmir Pandits’] religious point of view is completely different and their [Kashmiri Muslims’] is altogether different. Both are completely different from each other.

Narayan Raina (working in agriculture department) totally negates that there was something like Kashmiriyat in Kashmir in the past:

When we talk about Kashmir and Kashmiri identity then we understand that Kashmir has a history of 5,000 years history. Eventually, Kashmir history, when we talk about culture and identity, is broadly Hindu culture and Hindu identity. We [Kashmiri Pandits] belong to Kashmir for more than 5,000 years. But, in 14th century, when Islam came to Kashmir, Kashmir underwent change. Then new culture and new identity came in. But the reality is that most of the people who were converted were Hindus. Their forefathers were Hindus. Some of the Islamic sections like Qureshi, Geelani, and Sayed came from outside. They are foreigners; their forefathers were not from Kashmir... This is one part of Kashmiri identity and I represent that identity which is 5,000 years old...then came this Kashmiriyat word, this is a political word, it is a coined word, what is Kashmiriyat? I have my own identity [annoyed]. To give secular colour to what is happening in Kashmir, to justify what ever happened in Kashmir and what Kashmiri Muslims are doing there for the last sixty years in Kashmir on the credentials of secularism they coined Kashmiriyat.... We are able to understand what is Kashmiriyat? Kashmiriyat is Nizame-i-Mustafa.... this is Kashmiriyat. If Kashmiriyat means secularism then why we are out of Kashmir. They did not tolerate simply two per cent of the population..... For us, there was total compromise, because we had to live somehow. Kashmiri Pandit population did migrate before the eighties. But now they [Kashmiri Muslims] presented that Kashmiri Pandits were occupying all the sectors whereas Kashmiri Muslims were deprived. But this is not true; this was not the fact. I will tell you. See, there was only one constituency Hubbakadal in Kashmir where majority of Kashmiri Pandits were living, so Kashmiri Pandits thought that one MLA could be a Kashmiri Pandit in the assembly from that constituency. What they did they diluted the constituency and mixed it up with other area. So they at last seized that opportunity also. This was the situation there. At every level we compromised. There were no seats in engineering and medical college for Kashmiri Pandits children despite their good merit.... During 1989 they [Kashmiri Muslim] started armed struggle. It was not abrupt because civil society was involved. It was planned, it was a process. We had informed the Central government about this, but central government did nothing. Finally, they killed us. Our property finished. This was the process of cleansing. After we left they looted our residential places, our religious institutions, and our library. So, this Kashmiriyat is a fraud. They are showing to Indian masses this Kashmiriyat. What is Kashmiriyat no Kashmiriyat was there? Kashmiriyat was there only because Kashmiri Pandits kept quiet. They compromised with the situation. When it came on our life, we were under threat, so what option was left there for us? Kashmiriyat is sellable. They are selling by saying that there was Hindu Muslim unity.

KB: Is there a divide now? Kashmir is one region with two identities.

Narayan Raina: Obviously, this is the reality; rather this was the reality. We [Kashmiri Pandits] refuse to be part of Kashmiriyat. In Kashmiriyat nobody belongs to me, that Kashmiriyat represents only Muslims and Kashmiri Islam. I am not the part of that Kashmiriyat and that Kashmir. We are Indians. We refuse any nationality other than Indian. There was no Kashmiriyat, no brotherhood, they are lying. All laws were pro-Muslims to finish the minority [emphasising].

KB: So there was no brotherhood in Kashmir!

Narayan Raina: No! no, brotherhood was there. Try to understand what I am saying. For example, in a village if there were only five houses of Kashmiri Pandits and other of Kashmiri Muslims. Then how could I go against them, I had no other option. This kind of brotherhood existed there. You have to understand this thing.

This long narrative gives altogether a different insight into Kashmiriyat that is quite different from the popular meaning attached to it. According to Narayan Raina, Kashmiri Pandits kept compromising all the time in Kashmir, and that was perceived as brotherhood and love between
Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. He also mentions that Kashmiri Pandits’ accommodation into polity also was not going on well with Kashmiri Muslims. So there was a sort of tussle and undercurrent of tension in the Kashmiri society and it became open with the birth of armed struggle in 1989. As a result, Kashmiri Pandits had to migrate. So, Kashmiriyat is nothing but a fraud, which represents only Kashmiri Muslims and their identity. As a Kashmiri, Pandit Narayan Raina feels no belongingness to that identity.

II

The Perceptions about Sufi and Rishi Culture of Kashmir

This part focuses on the perception of Kashmiri Pandit participants on Sufism and Rishi culture of Kashmir. This generation of Kashmiri Pandit have lived significant years of their lives in Kashmir and have remained closely associated with the Sufi and Rishi traditions of Kashmir. They have had immense faith in the shrines of Sufi saints. The shrines of Sufi saints were revered by Kashmiri Pandits not only in a similar manner but more than their Kashmiri Muslim compatriots as told by the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims participants. Kashmiri Muslims had deep faith in these shrines. That has also contributed towards strengthening the bond of brotherhood/bahichara between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, as both had close association with these practices irrespective of their own religious faiths.

The shrines of Sufi saints were integral part of Kashmiri Pandits’ life and of culture in Kashmir. They used to visit these shrines frequently. However, after the migration, being out of Kashmir, these shrines are absent in their lives. This part would reflect on the impact of migration on their belief system at present. Being out of that cultural context in which various ziyarat/shrines of Sufi saints were an important part of their belief system, it is important to know the significance of Sufi practices and belief system for them in the present context and how they perceive Sufi practices now. How Kashmiri Pandits who are still in Kashmir perceive the Sufi Practices and do they still go to these shrines? The part would reflect on the answers to questions like “How did the Sufi practices contribute in developing the bond between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past?” “If they ever visited Kashmir after migration, did they also visit any of these shrines that they used to visit when they were living in Kashmir?” “Do their children know about these Sufi saints of Kashmir?”

1 See second section of chapter IV
“Kashmiri Pandits have given their own name to these saints, but they used to go together [that is with Kashmiri Muslims] in these shrines”, “Nund Rishi/Sheikh-ul-Alam has said that there should be no bifurcation in the name of religion”

Dev Sopori said that, before migration, he had been to these shrines: “Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits both believed in these shrines.... I had been to Rishi Mol Sahib and Dastgeer Sahib....” Rohini Dhar talked about the contribution of these Sufi saints in developing close bond between people:

There was one Saint in Kashmir called Nund Rishi, also known as Sheikh-ul-Alam, who believed in equality and he said that no one is Hindu or Muslim. He said that we should improve our ways of thinking. He never believed in bifurcation of the people in the name of religion....

Rohini Dhar’s narrative describes the role of Sufi Saints of Kashmir in not letting the religious differences come between the people because, these saints did not believe in division among the people in the name of religion. When I asked Suchitra Koul (working as a manager in private sector) if she used to visit shrines in Kashmir, she replied: “Everywhere, everywhere, Kashmiri Pandits used to visit these dargah/shrines more frequently than Muslims”. When I asked whether her children know about these shrines she said: “My daughter knows everything about these dargah/shrines...it is there in our family [curiosity to know]”. She also told that her daughter, who was one-year old when they left Kashmir, knows everything about Kashmir because she reads a lot about Kashmiri culture and history. Girdar Koul thinks,

Kashmir is the land of saints and their influence is still there. Muslims still believe in Nund Rishi and other Sufi saints. We [Kashmiri Pandits] have given our own names to these saints and they [Kashmiri Muslims] have given their own. But we used to go together and celebrate together. People whether Kashmiri Muslims or Kashmiri Pandits, were saintly, because Kashmir is the land of the saints

Somnath Nehru (worked in sheep husbandry department now retired) said:

Our ancestors did not differentiate in the name of religion. Nund Rishi/Sheikh-ul-Alam was Muslim but Kashmiri Pandits always revered him and called him Nund Rishi. Similarly, Lal Ded was a Kashmiri Pandit, but Kashmiri Muslims revered her and gave the name Lal Arifa. These saints belonged to everyone irrespective of one’s religious faith. We all used to go to the ziyarat/shrines of these saints and celebrate bada din/festival related to particular saint.

The narratives of Girdar Koul and Somnath Nehru explain that, though Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have given separate name to these Sufi saints both have similar devotion towards them. Religion never impedes their fondness and devotion towards these saints and their shrines. Somanath Nehru also thinks that “Kashmiri Pandits are very secular in nature. They would first visit shrines of Muslim Sufi saints and then they would visit their own temples”.

Similarly, Vishan Dhar also talked about the respect Muslims gave to Hindu saints and religious places. He said,

Lal Ded was given the name of Lal Arifa. She was Hindu, but there was no difference. Kashmiri Muslims used to respect our religious places also because that time there was no friction as such. But, during militancy, they set temples on fire. Might be earlier also some friction was there, but it was not explicit.
The extract explains the rise of conflict and its impact on Sufi and Rishi culture of Kashmir.

“Gun culture destroyed Sufi culture”

Pankaj Mattoo said, “We still go to these shrines. The last time when I visited Kashmir, I went to Baba Rishi. I have full faith and I think that is still there”. When I asked that if the same kind of Sufi culture prevailed there, he replied,

That composite culture, that kind of Sufism has vanished now. Fundamentalism has crept in. Both of us have become fundamentalists... Kashmir was the place where there was normalcy, but when gun culture came into place; ... in the name of religion everything can be destroyed.

“After the Kashmiri Pandits migrated where was Sufism left?/That Path is left behind somewhere”

Vrinda Koul said that there was Sufi and Rishi culture that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits followed together, but only before the latter’s migration. She explains:

There was Sufism in Kashmir because we [Kashmiri Pandits] were there and we believed in that. It is not important to go to the shrine, but to grasp what these Sufi saints have conveyed through their thought process that is more important. After the Kashmiri Pandits left Kashmir, where is Sufism? I would never go to these shrines, but my Kashmiri Muslim friends used to visit our temple Kheer Bhavani every year. However, I never went to these shrines [Shrines of Muslim saints she meant here] but some Kashmiri Pandits used to go to these shrines.

Vrinda Koul’s narrative explains that migration has affected the Sufi culture of Kashmir a lot. Although she never went to these shrines, she believes in the preaching and thought process of these Kashmiri Sufi saints that she feels is no more now because migration and conflict have affected the Sufi culture of Kashmir to a large extent. Rita/Sharika Mattoo (teacher) has not migrated and has been living in Kashmir with her family, not in her ancestral house, but in a security zone area. She said,

There was Rishi tradition in Kashmir. Kashyapa Rishi established Kashmir and because of that goodness prevailed there. But I do not know anything about Sufism.

KB: Have you visited Sufi saints’ shrines in Kashmir ever?

Sharika Mattoo: Yes I did during 1984-85, after which I never went to that side. It is not that my belief system has changed. There is also a Ganesh temple near the shrines, I do not go to even to that temple. We do not go to those pathways. I remember we used to live in Hubbakadal and that time my father used go to Hari-Parbat every day, but now those paths are left behind somewhere [sad]. Once in a blue moon, when Kashmiri Pandits do Havan[Hindu rituals of fire offerings], then we go there, otherwise we do not go to that side and in those lanes. But the faith is the same as it used to be.

Sharika Mattoo’s faith has not altered, but she does not tread the old pathways. The location where she used to live earlier has changed. Even though she is living in Kashmir, she has stopped visiting these shrines. Various shrines are situated especially in downtown area (old city) of Srinagar where Kashmiri Pandits used to live with Kashmiri Muslims together. Because of the conflict and the circumstances Kashmiri Pandits faced during the peak of turmoil in those places,
it seems they still hesitate to go to those areas. This ultimately affects the composite Sufi practices; although faith may be there, but practices of going to the shrines together are left behind.

“There is decline in Sufi practices among the Muslims also”/ “It is considered as anti-Islam”

Phulla Koul explains that mass conversion in Kashmir was the reason behind the development of Sufi and Rishi culture in Kashmir. People in Kashmir adopted Islam but could not leave their habits related to previous faith. With their new faith, they held on to the previous culture also. She explains:

We have shrine culture. These shrines are of various Sufi saints and all the people used to visit these shrines. In the past people could not differentiate culture from the religion and at present also people are not able to do so. These shrines belong to the Sufi culture. All are not going to the shrines at present. Now the new sects are emerging. They are against the shrine culture. Under the same roof, in the same family you may find people following different sects like one may be Hanfee, the other may be going to Tablighi or some may be following Jamaat-i-Islami, Allah-vale...they are in a confused state of mind.

Phulla Koul’s narrative suggests that there is emergence of various revivalist movements in Kashmir. This is the reason behind the declining inclination towards shrines among Kashmiri Muslims.

Ashwini Bhatt talked about his father’s visits to the famous shrine of Makhdoom Sahib where nearby there is a temple of goddess Sharika Devi and Lord Ganesha. Kashmiri Pandits used to go to the shrines and temple as well at the same time. But he said that things are not the same as it used to be in the past:

It has got diluted in the last few years because of the fundamentalism. We had various shrines there. When fundamentalism came into Kashmir, it preached the Kashmiri Muslims that this [Sufi practices] is anti-Islam. Otherwise, Kashmir is the only place where after offering the namaaz [prayer] they recite Darud Khani;² this is much similar to the Hindu practices of reciting sacred mantra [chants] or singing bhajan [sacred song]. I have listened in the shrine of Dastgeer Sahib also. The tune is the same as Kashmiri Pandits reciting the mantra. This is something retained from Hindu practices. Though Kashmiri Muslims are now well read, there is one big section that has moved towards fundamentalism.... Earlier Kashmiri Muslims would not eat beef. Nobody used to sell beef openly, because they knew that they were once Hindus and the impact of Sufi and Rishi culture was there which did not allow them to do so.

Narayan Raina’s narration on Sufism in Kashmir is as follows:

Basically, in Kashmir, there was Sufi and Rishi culture. We [Kashmiri Pandits] are Shaivite. Lal Ded was also a Shaivite, but Kashmiri Muslims say that she was a Sufi, which is wrong. Kashmiri Pandits used to go to all the shrines of Muslims. Basically, they were non-Muslims. They recite Darud Khani that is anti Islam. Now that is declining in Kashmir, but there is one section that follows this practice and they are suffocated because of the armed struggle.

Ashwini Bhatt said:

There was Sufi culture. Kashmiri Pandits have reconciled to the fact that they [Kashmiri Muslims] have converted and Kashmiri Muslims have also reconciled the fact that Kashmiri Pandits are minority community so they have to live together. And attainment of the higher path of

² Reciting of verses from Quran in rhythmic manner
spiritualism is in Sufism. That has diluted in the last few years because of fundamentalism. We had various shrines there. When fundamentalism came into the Kashmir that preached the Kashmiri Muslims that this is anti-Islam. Kashmir is the only place where after namaz prayer they recite Darud Khani, the way Kashmiri Pandits does bhajan Kertan [sacred songs]. The tune is also the same, rhythm is the same. Because they were Kashmiri Pandits so they wanted to retain that Hindu philosophy even after conversion. Hinduism is flexible. That time people had this notion that they will accept new faith but they will not leave their own faith.

Pushkarnath Pandit, who is presently living in Kashmir in a rented house, describes the uniqueness of Sufism in Kashmir:

We have spiritual poetry which we called sufiayana kalam. You will not find it anywhere else. This was only in Kashmir. However, it was not permitted in Islam. People of this place did not lose their spiritual identity in any condition which is distinct, neither absolutely Hindu nor absolutely Muslim.... This [Sufi culture of Kashmir] is one factor that is in conflict with the people outside the Kashmir. Even Pakistanis, when they talk about Kashmiri people, say that they do not understand them. We cannot depend on their words... Even Indians say the same thing. I want to be frank enough to say that even the Jammuites [people of Jammu region] do not understand the Kashmiri society. This is the problem and this is going to continue...

Pushkarnath Pandit explains that Sufi culture is a very significant part of Kashmir. Pandits and Muslims lived it since the centuries and it represents their “spiritual identity”. This notion is not well grasped by the outside world because these specificities of Kashmiri ways of life can be understood only by Kashmiris. It also explains that because of lack of understanding of Kashmiri world view by the outside world these processes are considered as anti-Islam. Here the culture is misunderstood as something against religion.

III

Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:
The Nature of Social Relationship

This part of the chapter is an attempt to understand the nature of the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits before and after the turmoil. The focus here is on the perceptions of that generation of Kashmiri Pandits who have lived a significant part of their lives with Kashmiri Muslims. The relationship between the communities has given birth to the term Kashmiriyat and bahichara. Where does these brethren relationships stand for after the migration and how Kashmiri Pandits perceive the absence of Kashmiri Muslims in their lives after the migration? In the present scenario, if Kashmiri Pandits return to their homeland, whether there will the same camaraderie or not? How the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits reacts when the older generation talks about their past relationship and friendship with Kashmiri Muslims? Responses to such questions would throw light on the earlier existing reality and the present reality of the nature of social relationship according to the perception of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits.
“We have the same blood”/ “It cannot be narrated, it is quite nostalgic, we used to enjoy festivals”

Abha Bhan talked about the close bond between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past:

We were close very close. The bond was very strong, and there were warm feelings for each other. Here [in Jammu] we do not have the same kind of bonding as we had in Kashmir. In Kashmir we used to share psychological bonding. We were brought up together; the experience cannot be narrated, it is very nostalgic... we used to enjoy festivals...

Abha Bhan talked about a close psychological bonding and similarity of the mind-set between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits that, she thinks, is beyond words.

Pankaj Mattoo also talked about the celebration of festivals together: “Kashmiri Pandits used to greet Kashmiri Muslims on Eid. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims used to greet us on Shivratri. Shivratri or Navreh was not only Hindu festivals; Kashmiri Muslims would also come to greet us on these occasions”.

Dev Sopori reminiscences the memories of Kashmir:

We used to play cricket together... There were fourteen houses of Kashmiri Pandits in our village in Anantnag district. There was no problem at all between us. There were Muslims houses situated in the surroundings. That time my elder sister was doing B.E. d in Srinagar. Sometime she used to get late in the evening while returning from Srinagar. If a Kashmiri Muslim saw her alone, he would accompany her to our house. This kind of atmosphere was there.

Dev Sopori describes how Kashmiri Muslims used to take care of Kashmiri Pandits’ women by giving an example of his sister. This explains the trust and sense of responsibility towards each other. Dev Sopori also mentions about the cordial relationship between him and his Kashmiri Muslim friend even now:

I have a friend, Tarik Ahmad, in Pampore [name of the place]. He specially went from Srinagar to Delhi to offer his condolences on the death of one Kashmiri Pandit whom he knew very well. See the courtesy. My father was not well at that time. My friend came from Srinagar to see my father. He is even today, ready for blood donation.

But Dev Sopori said that the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims has no value for their friendships because they do not know the intensity of the relationships they once shared in the past. He elaborates:

But Tarik’s son does not know about me. Why would he respect me when he does not know about our past shared relationships. Only we [the generation he belongs to] can feel the loss because we have lost something that we had.

Dev Sopori’s narrative describes the closeness between both the communities in the past and tells that friendships still persist to some extent between the people of the older generation. But he thinks that, for the younger generation, those shared relationships mean nothing, because they have not seen those times and, moreover, they have not lost anything.

Similarly, Suchitra Koul talked about the good relations with Kashmiri Muslims:
It was a wonderful time when I was studying with so many Muslims... it was not like that she is a Muslim and I am a Hindu. I do not see any difference between them and us... My generation had no hesitation. I used to go to my friend’s house. I would eat with my Muslim friends. They used to come to my house. There were so many friends of mine, but presently I am not in touch with any of them. I do not know where they are.

Phulla Koul illustrates the co-operation between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past:

For example, during marriage of a Kashmiri Pandit girl, two cooks were engaged [one for Kashmiri Pandits and one for Kashmiri Muslims]. Muslims used to offer their houses for Kashmiri Pandits’ guests; they used to arrange for their beddings and any kind of help they could provide. My friend was a Kashmiri Muslim. I used to eat at her house. Though our elders did not eat at Muslim household, love was there. I have not seen that kind of culture anywhere except in Kashmir.

This narrative shows how Kashmiri Muslims used to help Pandits during various occasions and, similarly, Kashmiri Pandits also reciprocated. So, there was mutual co-operation. Phulla Koul thinks that is kind of relationship and culture that is rare to see. Similarly, Jagannath Ganjoo said that the relationship was very close: “It was very cordial atmosphere. I will tell you about our vicinity in Rainawari. Relations were like we would invite them for marriage ceremonies. They used to invite us. It was just like a family, very cordial relation. For any monetary help they would come to us. All suddenly changed”.

Girdhar Koul talked about the similarities between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:

Kashmiri people were very peace loving, co-operating, very educated, hardworking, intelligent, and cultured. But in today’s perspective we cannot say like that.... Then language and culture held the people together. Mahatma Gandhi also said in 1947 that the ray of hope was in Kashmir. There was no Muslim identity before conversion. After conversion Kashmiri Pandits became Muslims but their surnames are still the same as Kashmiri Pandits’ like Koul, Pandits, Dhar etc. Our genes are still the same. That is not going to finish so soon. Because of that the bond is still there. We have many similarities. Since Kashmiri Pandits were educated and were not in trade, so we were completely dependent on Kashmiri Muslims for many other things... But later on their [Kashmiri Muslims] mind got transformed. Preaching in the Mosques changed their [Kashmiri Muslims] behaviour.

Girdhar Koul’s narrative shows that conversion could not erase the similarities between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. There were the same blood and genes behind the strong bond between them.

Vishan Dhar also talked about the same lineage of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:

There was a lot of love between us. They were mostly converted Muslims. There is common lineage between us. Why the love was there? Because of the blood; our blood is same, only that they have converted and become Muslims.

The narrative of Girdhar Koul and Vishan Dhar shows that there is recognition on both sides that they have same blood and lineage, and because of this the association was so close till the turmoil of 1989.

Sharika Tikku, at present living in a different place in Kashmir, talked about the area where she has spent her good days:
We had so much love among us and Kashmiri Muslims. We used to eat in our house otherwise lived in each other’s house. This vicinity is not my own here, I do not know from where people have come to live. Obviously, I feel more close to that area where I spent good days of my life. Even though that was Muslim majority area, we had very good relations.

KB: At present do you have the same relations with them?
Sharika Tikku: Yes, with them still we have relations. They came here to meet me to express that love again. But we do not go to that area now, love is still there. Individually, they are good but collectively they have that... We have lived together; we are incomplete without them, they are incomplete without us.

Ashwini Bhatt talked about the unity of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits during 1947:

Over a twenty years relationships has faded, but when we go there we need them. I go to Tulmula, a religious place.... In 1947, Pakistan came [into existence] but at that time the local Muslims did not harm any Kashmiri Pandit ... Then Muslims got killed, Kashmiri Pandits also got killed. Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims were on the streets together... fighting together against the invaders... There was no fundamentalism in Kashmiri Muslims then.

The narrative shows how they fought against the common enemy, Pakistan, in 1947, together. Since an outsider had attached their land, they had to get united. But that relationship, that unity, is no more.

“There was love between us, no one could even imagine something like that would happen there”

Kavita Dhar is upset about the turn of events that affected the past relationships between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits and expresses her sorrow over it:

We had been living together and never thought of what happened later... but when it [turmoil] happened we [Kashmiri Pandits] thought that we are no longer safe in Kashmir. That is why we migrated. Otherwise, before that there was complete love between us [Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits]. They still come to meet my parents and in-laws. We had love between us. I have feelings towards them. But among our children there are no feelings, because children think that we were forced to leave our place...

Kavita Dhar thinks that the feeling of love may still be there in the older generation, but, among the younger generation, it has been replaced by hatred.

“Individually it was good”/ “It was superficially ok”

When I asked Ganesh Tikku whether Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits had good relationship in the past, he replied: “Individually... It was good earlier. We were not after Hinduism, but they were after their religion”.

When I asked Vrinda Koul what kind of relationships people shared earlier in Kashmir, she replied:

It was ok, it was ok, superficially ok. If it was not superficial, then why we are not living there? We were in minority there... that is why we were thrown out. That is why our neighbours only, nobody else were instrumental in our forced migration. If everything was goody goody why would we be out?
When I mentioned that all Kashmiris used to celebrate festivals together, Vrinda Koul was not at all enthusiastic to talk about this. She said,

They used to come. Having lunch is ok but I would not call it Kashmiriyat. But if it was so deep then shouldn’t they have ensured that we do not migrate from Kashmir. It was all superficial, that is what I say.

Vrinda Koul’s considers those shared relationship in the past as “superficial”. Because, if it was really close and real, then why the Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of their own place. The shared closed relationships are undermined by the new emerged reality which speaks of desertion of those ties in the present circumstances. Vrinda Koul questions the closeness that other participants have talked about. She used the word “superficial” several times to describe the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. She also does not think that having food on some occasion at Kashmiri Pandits’ house means there was Kashmiriyat. The pain of migration seems to have wiped the good memories of Vrinda Koul about Kashmir.

Anmol Bhatt totally refuses to admit celebration of any festival together:

Nothing of that sort happened there [emphasised]. They were living a different life, we were living a different life. Neither we used to be very happy or we used to get the mad in happiness [sarcastic] on Eid, neither they used to do something very extravagant on our Shivratri. It was our festival and Eid was theirs. And with most of the people, even among our relatives, it was like that. I am telling you again, this is very sellable and appealing concept that people were living together with love, but it was nothing like that.

An altogether different view on “togetherness” of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits is arising from this discussion. Anmol Bhatt thinks that since the concept of closeness between the communities in Kashmir is sellable, people want to talk about it, otherwise there was nothing like that. Both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits had a separate world of their own in Kashmir and they lived in it.

“We are from the same lineage but Jihad told that Muslims are only Muslims”, “There is difference now, who knows what is on their minds and what is on my mind”

Vishan Dhar talked about the changed equation of relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:

Love was there but then gun came in Kashmir silently. Earlier Kashmiri Muslims knew that they were from Brahminical lineage. When Jihad came it told them that Muslims are only Muslims, nothing else. They started changing the name of the places. For instance they changed Anantnag into Islamabad. Now it is different, the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims used to respect us. Because they have lived in our homes, they have worked for us. But now the new generation has been taught that Kashmiri Pandits have always exploited Kashmiri Muslims because Kashmiri Pandits were educated and Kashmiri Muslims worked as labour for them. So they wanted that in a similar fashion Kashmiri Pandits should also suffer and Kashmiri Pandit women should work in Kashmiri Muslims’ house as Kashmiri Muslim women used to work in Kashmiri Pandits’ houses. Kashmiri Pandits were educated and Kashmiri Muslims were not. But Kashmiri Muslim did not listen to Kashmiri Pandits who wanted to educate them also. Now there are very less Kashmiri Pandits in state jobs because they strategised to wipe out the Kashmiri Pandits from the state government jobs.
When I asked Vishan Dhar whether the language held them together, giving them a sense of belongingness, he said,

That is spiritual; this is something in our soul because they have separated from us only. I told you that they were also Kashmiri Pandits when forcefully converted into Muslims. We still have same surnames. Everything is the same; older people still have that love and respect for each other. But the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims does not listen to their elders. The situation is like that, if father stops son from doing wrong deeds, the son may kill the father. This is also called militancy. Now the situation is devastated to the extent that there is crisis of trust.

The narrative implies that bitterness has come in between the relationship of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits at present. Although Vishan Dhar recognised the fact that they have the same blood and belong to same lineage, he cannot ignore the fact that the recent developments have transformed the equation of their closely shared relationships.

Kavita Dhar is in touch with her Kashmiri Muslim friend but her children have no idea about their relationship. When I asked her whether the same feeling is there she said:

I think there is a difference. Because we [Kashmiri Pandits] are here [out of Kashmir] they [Kashmiri Muslims] are there [in Kashmir]. What is there in their mind now and what is in my mind no one knows, because a gap has come up between us now. That is natural also because it has been twenty years now. The people whom I respect might not be alive now or might be very old. The children also like them [pointed towards her children] do not know anything about us, whether we used to live in Kashmir or not. The atmosphere was different that time now it is not the same any more. Even I also cannot feel that once we used to live there. In 1999, our house was set on fire. In their heart there was hate for Kashmiri Pandit community at that time. Now may be everything is becoming clear to them also, but, at that time, without thinking about repercussions, they did it. If we have lost our land, our property, they have also lost lives. A mother who loses her son or if he goes to Pakistan that mother can feel how bad the situation is. They are not happy, they are hurt inside. But they have started it and now they are suffering also.

Kavita Dhar’s narrative suggests that not living in the same society has affected their relationships also. Because the older people have either become very old and helpless or expired and the new generation is unaware of the old times when all Kashmiris lived together. There is no communication, no interaction of that sort, between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits at present, which has led to the vanishing of those ties. She also empathises that both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have suffered one way or other because of the turmoil. I further asked her whether she thinks that harmonious relationships can be revived. She replied,

How can we hope now, if it did not change in the last twenty years? I do not think that can be revived. Though they have not got freedom but at least there is by and large only Muslim population living. Earlier people cared about each others’ sentiments like few things they would not do in front of Kashmiri Pandits. But now they openly do anything. They do not need us now because they are also getting education, developing, achieving everything. Earlier we were inter-dependent. They used to help us we used to help them, it is like two sons of the same mother have got separated. Some Kashmiri Muslims still have some feeling, but that also seems mere a formality, because they also come only when they have some work in Jammu, like if they want to meet some doctor or to go to Delhi, it is good for them to live with us rather than living in the hotel. But that real love is no more there.

There is no hope of reviving those ties in context of present circumstances. The dependence on each other is no more there because of living in separate societies. The real feeling of love for each other has been replaced by just formality to show those feelings.
Ratanlal Dhar also talks about a change that has come about during the last twenty years:

That [the old] love is not there. It has been twenty years that I have not gone to Kashmir. I feel scared that if someone would shoot me there. This is the situation. This conspiracy was not of one day; it has been the work of so many years.

KB: Has the old Kashmiriyat changed now?

Ratanlal Dhar: It has changed a lot. Now they invite us to stay for ten-twenty days. This is the trend, for example if today I go to Kashmir, they know I have come to visit Kheer Bhavani temple at Tulmula and I will go back after few days. If they come to know that I have come to stay in Kashmir forever, then they will not tolerate this. They have a feeling for Pakistan. They want to make Kashmir a Muslim state like Pakistan. We cannot live there; they will not let us live there. As tourists we can go there and they have no problem with that, spend money, stay for ten days and then go back. Now they think us separate from them. We are looking for our homeland, but they will not give us that.

The narrative shows that relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandit have become rather pretentious. On the one hand, closeness is pretended, and on the other, little is done to restore the old spirit of these relationships Ratanlal Dhar also mentioned that he has telephonic contact with some of his Kashmiri Muslims friends. I asked him, what kind of conversation happens between him and his friends, He replied: “Very sweetly we talk to each other. They asked me to return to Kashmir and said that Kashmir is mine. But they are not reliable anymore. We cannot trust their sayings now. They say something else and in their heart keep something else. Their youth, whom we taught, picked guns against us”.

Abha Bhan also hints at the hollow relationship by describing the tough times and situation in Kashmir in 1980:

We were having tough time in Kashmir. In my department there were four Kashmiri Pandit women working at that time and one Kashmiri Muslim woman. One day, when I was going to the department, four Kashmiri Muslim men commented that the department belonged to Kashmiri Pandits because majority of the faculty there were Kashmiri Pandits. This, I am talking about was in 1980. After eighties Kashmiri Pandits started moving slowly from Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits were not getting seats in medical college and engineering colleges... There was hatred now, you can imagine. I had twelve-rooms house there. When we left, we had nothing to call our own. Then what will come in the mind of children.

Abha Bhan’s narrative suggests that the atmosphere started changing in the early 1980s itself. It was a change of attitude. Some of the Kashmiri Pandits started sensing the gravity of the situation. At present, hatred has taken place in the mind of children of Kashmiri Pandits towards Kashmiri Muslims because of the loss Kashmiri Pandits suffered due to the militancy created circumstances.

Somnath Nehru said that he still has relationship with Kashmiri Muslims:

We hug each other whenever we meet, because we do not know who was behind that. We welcome them always; whenever they come to Jammu, they come to our house straight. But, we cannot go there, because we are afraid. Even if we go there, there is a constant fear that someone will come and kill us. I never went there after migration, because I do not feel like going there. I have lost whatever I made there with my hard-earned money.
The narrative suggests that one cannot blame the whole Kashmiri Muslim community for whatever happened. That is why he still has that feeling and his Kashmiri Muslim friends come to his home in Jammu. But, at the same time, he cannot think of going to his friends’ home in Kashmir, because of the fear in his heart and the pain of having lost everything there. The fear and the experiences during the turmoil created the mistrust in his heart.

When I asked Keshav Bhatt if bahichara is still there, he promptly said: “No, no that is not there; that is lost... We are nice to each other, but that is only at individual level, not collectively”. Sanjay Tikku thinks that “there is a misconception among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits about each other and the government has also played the policy of divide and rule. We have a sense of insecurity there and now we are trying to adjust outside”. Migration forced Kashmiri Pandits to adjust outside, and the next item of discussion is on the conflict induced migration of Kashmiri Pandits.

“The day Islam arrived, the migration of Kashmiri Pandits started”

Ashwini Bhatt goes back to history and explains that the migration of 1989 is not the first migration of Kashmiri Pandits. There is history behind migration of Kashmiri Pandits. He said,

Migration has been there since the day Islam came into Kashmir; like Jawaharlal Nehru, they migrated long back. Kashmiri Pandits were well read. Kashmiri Muslims do not change with the time... There was religious persecution. People left long back to Uttar Pradesh, as they were not feeling secure in Kashmir. Because, so many Kashmiri Pandits got converted to Islam, we have majority of Muslims in the Valley. That is why Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley have the same dress, same rituals, and same culture, except the religious rituals. Everything is same, and that is why Kashmiri Muslims have this realisation that they are Kashmiri Pandits... They also know how Islam spread, but since they have embraced Islam now, it is very difficult for them to go back.... In 1989, there was no security. Muslims used to scare Kashmiri Pandits by telling them that they were on the hit list to be killed next. Then they started selective killing; so Kashmiri Pandits had to migrate. Kashmiri Muslims blame Jagmohan; that is their way of passing the blame on someone else. He did not do anything. He was not shouting in the Mosques to tell us to leave. Once there was a procession in which they involved Kashmiri Pandits also and voiced the slogan “we will make here Pakistan without Kashmiri Pandits male but with Kashmiri Pandits’ female”. After leaving Kashmir, I came to know what actually freedom is. If I used to go to temple in Kashmir, I used to put tika on my forehead. But, if I went to a place where only Kashmiri Muslims lived, I would wipe that tika/tilak so that no one could identify me even during peaceful days. This fear was there in our mind. During special occasions like Shivratri it was fine but on common days we had to be alert.

The narrative suggests that the coming of Islam in Kashmir created a situation in which Kashmiri Pandits had to migrate from Kashmir earlier. In 1989, Kashmiri Pandits did not have assurance for their security either from the civil society or from the government. So, they were left with no choice but to migrate. But, it is noteworthy that even during the peaceful days, Kashmiri Pandits were under some kind of fear in Kashmir. Similarly, Narayan Raina also thinks that the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits started long back:

Historically, ever since Islam arrived in Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits’ exodus has been happening. But then we migrated and went back to Kashmir; but, if this time we go to Kashmir, we will not migrate from Kashmir again. Kashmiri Pandits’ organisation Pannun Kashmir has this perspective that if Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir, they will return permanently. Second it is publicised
that Jagmohan has forced us to move out of Kashmir. This information should get corrected at
global level. We had not lost our senses that he told us to leave our home and we left. It is a mass
migration; how can a sensible person think that Jagmohan has driven us out.

Girdar Koul said that there was an external factor responsible for the situation in Kashmir that
led to migration of Kashmiri Pandits:

It was all planned by Pakistan and the hard-liner the Jamaati-Islami group... Otherwise Kashmiris
were not familiar to weapons that are now prevailing in Kashmir. Our maximum weapon was
kangri/fire earthen pot; if someone was very angry, he would throw a kangri [laughs]. This AK-47
culture was not there at all. It is probably the deep-rooted conspiracy; neither the state govt. nor the
centre paid attention and we [Kashmiri Pandit] were ignorant. It was an alarm in 1986 when the
temple got burnt. If government had taken steps then, migration would not have happened.
Kashmiri Pandits were made to leave their homeland on the gun point. Their birth place Kashmir
was under the process of Islamisation, and open annihilation of their community... We struggled
maximum and it is not over, it is continues.

Nandi Koul explains the reasons for migration as follows:

One community is there. One community is uprooted. Pakistan wants to make Kashmir a Muslim
majority place. Kashmiri Pandits were considered as spies doing the job of the Central
government. So they thought the right thing to do is to drive Kashmiri Pandits out of Kashmir. If
your life is in danger, you have to migrate to save yourself. In Islam, in the Quran, they also talk
about Hizrat/to migrate to save our lives. So Kashmiri Pandits followed Islam completely and they
left to save their life. I did not migrate though. They started with wiping out the Pandits. I was in
the hit list.

Migration was necessary for Kashmiri Pandits to save their life. Nandi Koul justifies the
migration by saying that the Quran also guides that during the situation of anomie one should
migrate to save her/his lives. So, in a way, Kashmiri Pandits followed the sayings of Quran.

“So many people consider Jagmohan is responsible for migration”/ “If migration had not
happened there would have been more killings of Kashmiri Pandits”

Phulla Koul does not agree with the publicised reality that Governor Jagmohan was responsible
for the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits.

Kashmiri Muslims says that migration happened because of Jagmohan. He did not go to Kashmiri
Pandits houses. If he had done this, then he would have come to my house also. I would also have
migrated then. I tell you what happened during turmoil. They used to stick the hit-list, in those hit-
lists they kept the name of those Kashmiri Pandits whom they would kill on a particular day. When
people used to see their name in a hit-list they would disappear overnight because of fear. During
the curfew, they allowed the vehicles in which Pandits moved out of Kashmir. Government only
provided help thinking that why should innocents be killed. Muslims have done blunders, but why
should Kashmiri Pandits suffer. Kashmiri Muslims would say that Jagmohan is responsible for
migration, but would not say that the names of Kashmiri Pandits appeared in the hit-lists. They say
that Muslims were also killed forgetting that they had opted for Jihad, but Pandits were not
involved in that.

The narrative suggests that those Kashmiri Pandits who have not migrated are questioning this
publicised reality that Governor Jagmohan is responsible for the migration. On the other hand,
there was threat to the life of Kashmiri Pandits. There was no other way for them to escape the
danger but to migrate from their homeland.

Similarly, Dev Sopori said: “Jagmohan played a good role. Many people consider Jagmohan
responsible for migration, but at that time, in that situation, if migration had not happened there
would have been more killings of Pandits. But he would not have thought that migration would be that long”. Mahesh Butt: Said “the situation was so bad that we had to leave. First I sent my mother and sister and we thought we will stay back. But once we came out of Kashmir, returning was next to impossible, then because militants were killing ruthlessly...” The migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir clarifies that they were not the part of the separatist movement. The next theme would discuss the exclusion of Kashmiri Pandits from the separatist movement.

“They [Kashmiri Muslims] did not convey anything to Kashmiri Pandits”/”Kashmiri Pandits were considered as agent of Indian government”

When I asked Suchitra Koul if there were no instances when she heard or observed that Kashmiri Pandits were included in the movement, she replied: “I do not think so, I do not think that something like that happened. It is not in my knowledge”. Girdar Koul thinks that Kashmiri Pandits were in government jobs, so they were considered as agents of the Indian government. He explains:

Since Kashmiri Pandits were educated so they were employed in government departments. They [Kashmiri Muslims] thought that Kashmiri Pandits are anti-movement and anti-Pakistan... So, ultimately they said that Kashmiri Pandits were agents of Indian government and assumed that they would not let their [Kashmiri Muslims’] movement succeed till they were there. So, they thought they should force Kashmiri Pandits out of Kashmir to make their movement successful. They made strategies, trained their own people and in all the Mosques on the loudspeaker they used to play the slogan: ‘We will make here Pakistan, we will establish here Islam, Kashmiri Pandits have to move out’. These kinds of messages were played at the same time everywhere in Kashmir. This they did to frighten Kashmiri Pandits. Then they started selective killings of Kashmiri Pandits who were on good posts.

The narrative shows that there was an upsurge of anti-India sentiment and since Pandits were in government jobs, they were considered as agents of the Indian government. There was rather fear that movement would not be successful if Kashmiri Pandits remained in Kashmir. So, they were to be driven out of Kashmiri through different strategies. The slogan was Islamic in nature, and it created the mentality among Kashmiri Pandits that they did not belong to this euphoria.

Narayan Raina said Kashmiri Pandits were away from the movement:

The reality behind everything is that there is no freedom struggle in Kashmir; there is fundamentalism in Kashmir. This is communalism, who is involved in freedom struggle? Only Muslims despite the fact that there were people in Kashmir who belong to other religions also. We are part of Kashmir and we are Indian, then why should we become part of that movement. The state is multicultural and multiculturalism is the identity of the state. Seventy eight percent of the people are with India only twenty-two percent are with this so called freedom struggle and among them also there are number of opinions about this movement. Kashmiri Muslims’ one section is with India, one is with Pakistan, and some others want an independent Kashmir. They themselves do not know what they want. The freedom struggle is a myth. This has become an industry to make money nothing else

Narayan Raina perceives that the movement was not about freedom, but it is just fundamentalism and communalism. Because it did not have the consent of all the sections of society, only Kashmiri Muslims were involved in that. He also perceives that all Kashmiri Muslims were also
not part of the movement, because there were various opinions about the movement among the Kashmiri Muslims also. So how can Kashmiri Pandits be a part of that industry which is created only to make money?

Phulla Koul explains why Kashmiri Pandits could not become the part of separatist movement:

Kashmiri Pandits were not taken into confidence. They were not given protection. When Pandits told to Muslims that they were leaving Kashmir Muslims expressed helplessness by saying that they couldn’t even save themselves, how could they save the Pandits. Among Kashmiri Muslims right from small child to an old man everyone knew what was going to happen and when. During nineties there was Islamic slogan they used to voice in cities, in villages everywhere at the same time. It was so well conspired that though living in the same society, we were so ignorant about all that.

Phulla Koul’s narrative shows that Kashmiri Pandits were neither included in the movement nor were given protection. On the other hand, Kashmiri Muslims told them they could not protect them in that situation and so they had to leave. So, there was no question of participating in the movement with Kashmiri Muslims.

When I asked Kavita Dhar why Kashmiri Pandits were not involved in the separatist movement, she replied:

They did not directly convey anything. They started this with killings of people. In fact, their main aim was freedom. But, if Kashmiri Muslims had not excluded Kashmiri Pandits, they would have got freedom by this time, because Kashmiri Pandits were educated. There was love between us but there was dominance of Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Muslims used to work in our home, in our fields. But when Kashmiri Muslims created fear for Kashmiri Pandits, then we had to leave Kashmir.

“It is all politics boundaries are widening not narrowing, Kashmiri Pandits also are more towards Hinduism now”/“We are moving on parallel tracks, we associate with Bharat they associate with Pakistan”

Sanjay Tikku thinks that this is the work of fanaticism and politics:

A Muslim priest needs fanatic Hindu priest to keep himself alive. If there is no fanatic Hindu priest whom will he tease…? So we have both and both are enjoying. They give instruction to others and they themselves can do what they want to do. Religion is a way of life but religious institutions are used by the politicians. Politicians are responsible for all this. They have created unrest in Kashmir. Those who are in power will sing in praise of the government and those who are in opposition, sing in praise of Pakistan. What is all this? Politicians survive with this only. They have destroyed the country. For them, it is necessary that Kashmir should be a problematic issue.

The narrative suggests how the religious institutions get exploited to separate the people. Sanjay Tikku thinks that politics and politicians are responsible for creating these kinds of barriers between the people. He is sad about the fact that the real identity of Kashmiris’ is finished: “The leaf of chinar is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. That identity cannot match any other identity of Kashmiris’, but that is finished [sad]”.

Sanjay Tikku further talks about the destruction of symbols that represented the composite identity of Kashmiris:
Kashmir was known as the abode of Rishis and saints. There was one place in Kashmir where temple and shrine were situated adjacent to each other. That place got burnt. These are the things fatal to culture. Why these representations of culture got destroyed? To destroy our history and our identity. This way Islam cannot be established, because Islam is the religion of piece. Perhaps things will be normal, but we are already paying a huge price. It is difficult to cover up the loss because we have lost the evidence of our identity. This is an irony: Urdu is only Islamic, Hindi is of Hindus, Ayurveda is Hindu and Unani is Islamic. What is more tragic than this? When I was studying in a convent school of Srinagar, all Kashmiri Pandit children used to study Hindi and all Kashmiri Muslim children would study Urdu. When I questioned my uncle about this difference, he could not answer me. This is everybody’s fault, who created this division... I think we should do away with religion. If one wants to follow particular religion, no problem, follow it. But, it should not affect culture. Culture is a very different thing. We used to eat the same mutton and haak saag [local vegetable of Kashmir]. We have the same language, but with little difference: for instance, they would say abb [water] and we say poun [water].

The destruction of those symbols which represent the composite identity of Kashmiris is another way to wipe out the real culture of Kashmir. The languages like Urdu and Hindi are getting “religionised”. According to Sanjay Tikku, all this destruction happened in Kashmir because of using religion in politics, and this has created the division despite the fact that both communities belonged to the same culture and linguistic ethnicity.

Abha Bhan said that religious boundaries are becoming strong:

Boundaries are widening not narrowing; Kashmiri Pandits are moving towards Hinduism. Obviously, we are Hindus, but earlier we used to enjoy Eid with Kashmiri Muslims, they used to enjoy Shivratri. That was Kashmiri identity, now the religion has become a stronger identity. Whether Kashmiri Muslims over there have become religiously very staunch inwardly or outwardly that I do not know, but they have become religiously very conscious. I do not need a stamp of secularism, I am secular and because of that secularity I am out of Kashmir. I know what it is, people may not come openly... They [Kashmiri Pandits who are still in Kashmir] are staying there at the cost of their identity. They are not showing that they are Kashmiri Pandits. They are behaving like Muslims. It is very sensitive.

The extract emphasises that both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are becoming religiously conscious. Kashmiri identity which used to represent the composite culture of Kashmir is undermined by religious identity. The boundaries have become very strong now. Secularism has just become a stamp, which is not needed by both. According to Abha Bhan, Kashmiri Pandits who are living in Kashmir are doing so at the cost of their religious identity and lack the freedom of expression.

Keshav Bhatt has not migrated from Kashmir and so he has had both the past and the present experiences of living in Kashmir. Comparing the past with the present, he says, “There was no such fundamentalism earlier among the people in Kashmir. Now people are more religiously fundamentalist... but we are close to each other at the individual level”. When I asked what his Kashmiri Muslim friends say, when they sit together, he replied: “They stick to their own view point. I stick to mine, when we talk about government policies”. Keshav Bhatt’s narrative provides a picture of the emergence of strong boundaries among the communities because of the different political and religious aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. Although individual relationships still exist to some extent, collectively they are going parallel lines.
When I asked Rohini Dhar whether religion has become very important in Kashmir, she replied:

Religious boundaries are there, they might not be apparent, but they are there and they have widened... Now there is largely one religion prevailing in Kashmir... All are Muslims here, and who will save me? Everywhere there are mosques now. There is a mosque in Kashmir University, why not a temple and a gurudwara along with that mosque. How we can say that there is secularism in Kashmir [angry]?

KB: Earlier was it not like that?

Rohini: No it was not like that. All this started in 1990, when militancy began. Earlier there were not many religious differences.

KB: Why?

Rohini: Earlier we used to live together and the earlier Islam was different from the present day Islam in Kashmir.

KB: Is this change sudden?

Rohini: It was not sudden, slowly after 1986 changes came. In 1987, because of the rigged election, militancy started.

The narrative shows that earlier the religious boundaries were not that much strong in Kashmir.

Change began in 1990 because of the political reasons, specifically the rigged election of 1987 fueled the sentiments of Kashmiri Muslims and whole scenario got changed after that. It seems Rohini Dhar has lost faith in the centuries of friendship between the two communities when she says “All are Muslims here who will save me”.

Ashwini Bhatt said, “We [Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits] are totally moving on the parallel tracks that are totally different and that are not going to meet because the ideologies are different. We want India, they want Pakistan; we are Hindus, they are Muslims”. When I asked Ashwini Bhatt whether these parallel tracks were not there earlier, he said,

See, before the emergence of India and Pakistan, we both were associated with each other rather. They did not associate with Pakistan and we did not with Bharat. There was no India and Pakistan before 1947... Problem came up when Pakistan started creating problems. Some time a person has to associate with the organisation and a country. In the heart of Muslims, Pakistan zindabad [long live Pakistan] and, for Hindus, Bharat zindabad [long live India].

The narrative suggests that after the emergence of Pakistan, there emerged the reference groups for both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, one associated itself with Pakistan and other with Bharat/India. Now both are on parallel tracks and there is no meeting point because of sharp religious and ideological differences.

“The base was religion and they were fighting not for Kashmir but for religion”/ “Kashmiri Muslims were used by the politics of separatism”

Vishan Dhar talked about the Islamic slogans during the peak of the separatist movement:

Government is using them in its politics. We are kaffir/non-believers for Kashmiri Muslims. We are idol worshippers. We had to mourn if Pakistan got defeated in a match. It was a problem for us.
We had to pretend, internally something else and externally it was something else. Silently, they made strategies to make us to leave Kashmir. Earlier also we made compromises to live in Kashmir; we had to adjust and that we did. At last they betrayed us. Now they are telling us to return to the Valley. All this is politics. Kashmiri Muslims have destroyed their own selves also.

The narrative shows that there were undercurrents on the basis of religion because Kashmiri Pandits were associating with India and Kashmiri Muslims, with Pakistan. A simple cricket match between the countries could provoke these kinds of sentiments. It used to happen even when it was perceived that the Kashmiriyat was existing in Kashmir. But, during in the 1990s things got changed forever, religious boundaries became stronger as it had never happened earlier.

Kavita Dhar talked about the way religion has played its role in Kashmir scenario in 1989:

This all started in 1986 with the burning of temples. They were planning internally and we were ignorant about all this. Then there was slogan, we want freedom/hum kya chate azadi. The base was religious. They were fighting in the name of religion. If they had projected that the fight was for Kashmir and that they will not harm Kashmiri Pandits, then they would have stopped Kashmiri Pandits, from moving out of Kashmir. They did not say that we all were together. Rather they started killing Kashmiri Pandits. Till 1999 my maternal uncle was in Kashmir. One day suddenly militants came and opened fire on those Kashmiri Pandits houses, then army evacuated those families safely from the village. If the movement was not based on religion, then why did they specifically choose Kashmiri Pandits to kill? So, this has created the differences between us. We were like two sons of the same mother, but suddenly a different air blew. They used religion; I am not saying that it was Kashmiri Muslims only. There was politics also behind it. Pakistan was also involved to use Kashmiri Muslims and in the process Kashmiri Pandits lost everything.

The narrative of Kavita Dhar suggests that religious base of the movement created differences between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. Religious slogans explicitly gave the message to Kashmiri Pandits that the fight was not for Kashmiris’ by all Kashmiris but is for Islam and by Kashmiri Muslims. That was the turning point which created the boundaries between the communities. However, she thinks that Kashmiri Muslims got manipulated politically also. When Rajiv Pankaj Mattoo was asked whether Kashmiri identity is undermined because of religion, he said: “Now it is Hindu versus Muslims and things also started with religious tone. All Muslims are not the same; some are obviously missing us, the way we miss them”.

Ganesh Tikku said:

They are after religion. Muslims are good individually but collectively they are not good. Collectively, they cannot go against Islam, but individually they are good. They killed those Kashmiri Pandits who were on good official ranks. They want Jammu & Kashmir separated from India. Some want it to go with Pakistan; some want it to be independent. Pakistan has provoked them. Kashmiri Muslims complain that when they go out of Kashmir, people from other parts of India doubt them. But when Kashmiri Pandits go to Kashmir, Kashmiri Muslims also suspect us.

The narrative also explains the still persisting individual relations between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits because the collective consciousness of Kashmiri Pandits associated with Hindus and that of Kashmiri Muslims associated with Muslims do not come in between them.

Phulla Koul said:

I do not know whom I consider responsible. Among Pandits, people were educated so they were at higher position, so they had grudges against them. They were not that much educated. So they thought how we could suppress Kashmiri Pandits, because they belonged to different class. Then Pakistan contributed in this. And religion is just an excuse. However, they got success at least in
one thing, to eliminate the Pandit community from Kashmir. Now there is no competition for them, all government jobs are occupied by them [Kashmiri Muslims]. ... Kashmiri identity is broken into two parts. But the Hindu part of that identity is also not intact, I can say that is also finished,... Only the name of Kashmiriyat is left. When one social group is not in the society how can that identity remain intact. Kashmiriyat was a composite culture. These politicians have gone mad, they talk about Kashmiriyat. If there are hundred Muslim houses and two Kashmiri Pandits houses in an area then how can Kashmiriyat survive? The politicians should have made efforts to get the Pandits back. They should adopt the policies and through those policies they could make an effort to revive the composite culture. Neither the Pandits nor the Muslims are bad but it [the whole situation] has been given a different colour [of religion] by the politicians; it is only because of that everything is finished.

According to Phulla Koul’s narrative, Kashmiri Muslims were going through a sense of perceived discrimination. Because government jobs mostly were occupied by Kashmiri Pandits as they were educated. Religion became ‘an excuse’ and this is the colour that politicians used given for their vested interests.

Ramesh Ganjoo said, “Politics, political game plan, ministers, and state ... have manipulated things which have caused the bitterness among the people and society”. Jagannath Ganjoo thinks that wrong polices of government are responsible for situation in Kashmir:

Since 1947, because of the wrong polices of the Congress government, separatism in Kashmir was gaining roots directly or indirectly... Sheikh Abdullah was also encouraged by Pandit Nehru [the then Prime Minister of India] who wanted to be a monarch. It was a Muslim majority place. They easily exploited sentiments of Muslims by saying that Islam was in danger. Even educated persons among Muslims would not go into the root of this; they would not see that who said this and why. As soon as they heard Islam was in danger, they, without considering it right or wrong just follow it.. Since1947, it is like that.... After the emergence of Pakistan, the seed of separatism came. Somewhere on the religious lines also people [Kashmiri Muslims] were thinking that they belong to Pakistan. This was all dirty politics and wrong polices of the Congress. 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.

Jagannath Ganjoo further elaborates on the role of separatist leaders in the exploitation of the sentiments of people in the name of religion:

Religion has played a greater role. They [Kashmiri Muslims] exploited Islam for their own cause. During Friday prayers in the mosque there used to be huge public assemblies. That time Election was there. Sayed Shah Geelani, a separatist leader, had a public rally in the village. I tell you how he exploited the people’s sentiments. He told the people that India had ordered that Kashmiri Muslims will not bury the dead, but burn them. And I asked my Muslim friends how they said that he was a learned person, what he has told people that is not true. I further asked them whether they were stooped from offering namaz anytime or denied religious rights anywhere? They exploited people in that way. But in 1947, when Pakistan entered Kashmir, there was an example of unity of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, that unity saved the population irrespective of religion, until the Indian army came to the rescue.

Jagannath Ganjoo’s narrative shows that with the emergence of Pakistan seeds of separatism were sowed, because somewhere Kashmiri Muslims started associating themselves with Pakistan. Second, the political tactics of the Indian government removed faith from the heart of Kashmiri Muslims towards Indian governance. Religion became the tool in the hands of separatist leaders to manipulate the innocent people. All this destroyed Kashmiris and Kashmiriyat. Sharika Mattoo thinks that the problem with Kashmiri Muslims is that they can be easily manipulated in the name
of religion: “There is a stress on religion, and not on being Kashmiri. The education system is also religion-centric here”.

Vrinda Koul talked about the penetration of religious identity:

Basically, the religious identity emerged. They [Kashmiri Muslims] are all converts and ethnically we are the same. Superficially, everything was fine; we were following our own religion, they were following their own religion. But even at that time they used to tease Kashmiri Pandit girls. Those things were there. If India won a [cricket] match they would break the windows of Kashmiri Pandit homes. On 26th January, there would be a blackout. These things were there at that time also. But we never bothered about them. All that became acceptable. If Pakistan won a match there was a celebration, but if India would win a match there used to be a blackout. These things were in good old times there.... during nineties, friends became indifferent, but not enemy. If they were good friends, why they told us to leave?

Similarly, Anmol Bhatt also thinks that ethnically Kashmiris are the same, as they have the same genes: “Our generic stock is same, only what has changed that a group of people converted. That conversion changed their mind drastically that they started perceiving that Kashmiri Pandits do not belong to Kashmir... Regional identity was the same, but religion has fractured everything”.

Nandi Koul said, “Identity is moulded by Islam and it is getting more and more radical. When you move more and more towards radicalism, it definitely undermine the regional identity”.

Pushkarnath Pandit reminisces the time of 1947 and speaks about the instances that explain the Kashmiri unity and how the differences came between the two communities:

Before 1989 there was an attempt to make them [Kashmiri Muslims] to realise that Muslims have a different identity – the course induced by Pakistan. It is amazing to learn that Pakistani rangers came to the outskirts of the city. The Muslim majority [in Srinagar] did not welcome them. There were mohllah [area] committees organised by the people to ensure the safety of the people. At night they used to patrol. They had told the people to live normal life as they were here to save their daughters and sons. When the Indian army came here, I was at Lal Chowk, and it was amazing that Muslims were cheering them. It was Muslims who guided the army about the location of Pakistani rangers. This was possible only here, not anywhere else, because of the fact that most of the Muslims here are converts [from Hinduism] and they did not follow radical form of Islam.

Pushkarnath Pandit throws light on the fault of the political leaders in Kashmir:

But the whole problem now is the political leaders... every politician is exploiting the weaknesses of the people. Politicians will not suffer any moment, as they keep their children safe away somewhere else and exploit the situation over here. That is the problem.

“Composite culture is finished”/“That was distinct identity of Kashmir that is vanished”

Phulla Koul had seen composite culture flourishing in Kashmir and she is currently witnessing its disappearance also: “I have seen those times in Kashmir when there was composite culture. Now there is a homogenous society in Kashmir, and there is no composite culture as such”. When the society has lost an important component of its composite culture, it is natural that the essence of that culture also fades. When I asked Pushkarnath Pandit whether he thinks that the composite culture of Kashmir has been damaged, he replied, “It was a totally distinct identity of Kashmir,
not composite culture. I told you that religion as it was practised here was not orthodox religion, but spiritualism, which is vanished”.

Nandi Koul said, “Kashmiri culture is affected because of radicalism. Islam is a peaceful and disciplined religion. When it moves towards radicalism, it becomes painful. Now Kashmir is purely Islamic. There is no question of composite culture there”. Rohini Dhar thinks, “Even after normalcy, if Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir, culture will not be the same in Kashmir as it was in the past”. There are wounds in the hearts of Kashmiri Pandits. So, even if they return to Kashmir, it will take a long time for them to mix up with people and create the kind of atmosphere that prevailed earlier.

“That culture will not be there, Pandits are settled outside”/“Those Kashmiri Pandits who have not migrated will also move out slowly”

Suchitra Koul said, “That Kashmir [The Kashmir of the past], that culture, will not be there again; Kashmiri Pandits are settled outside now and the new generation will never go back to live in Kashmir. Similarly Keshav Bhatt also said:

I do not think that composite culture exists in Kashmir now... when the minority community has left the Valley. Nobody is going to return, and those who are staying there are least bothered about composite culture ....those Pandits who are staying there will also leave. For instance, my son is working outside, he will not come here. So I also have to leave one day.

According to Suchitra Koul and Keshav Bhatt’s narratives there will be no composite culture in Kashmir because Kashmiri Pandits will not return to Kashmir, and Kashmiri Pandits who are still living there do not bother about composite culture and slowly they will also move out of Kashmir.

Anmol Bhatt does not want to talk about composite culture that existed in Kashmir in the past. He was annoyed and said: “Culture is a baggage and now it should be done away with because culture separates people”. Vrinda Koul got annoyed the moment she heard phrase composite culture from me and said: “We do not want that composite culture. We have had enough of composite culture; because of that composite culture we had to move out of Kashmir. We do not want to go back to that damn thing again”. Narayan Raina said, “There was composite culture as long as Kashmiri Pandits compromised with the situation and lived there”.

“Composite culture was not a myth”, “There is a positive response from Kashmiri Muslims to Kashmiri Pandits at present”

Composite culture though lived by the Kashmiris for centuries together has suddenly started appearing to be a myth to them, because Kashmiri Pandits feel that it existed only when they made sacrifices and it vanished when they left the scene. Mahesh Bhatt said,

That [the composite culture] was there, ... but people who came from outside provoked Kashmiri Muslims in the name of Islam. Then they lost the track. But, yes, the older people have that culture in them, those who have lived with us.
Pankaj Mattoo still has the hope that the culture of brotherhood between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits can revive: I think it can happen, life changes, life moves in a circle”.

Ramesh Ganjoo also thinks that composite culture is reviving, because after his transfer to Kashmir and living with Kashmiri Muslims there he is observing positive interaction among the people.

It has been more than twenty years that Kashmiri Pandits migrated from Kashmir. There are speculations whether they will return to their homeland or not. There are various efforts by the governments such as providing them jobs over there and offering them packages to encourage them to return to Kashmir. What do the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits think about homecoming of Kashmiri Pandits who had migrated earlier?

“There is no question of returning to Kashmir”/“I want to go back after retirement but atmosphere should be conducive”

When I asked Ganesh Tikku about the government’s packages to Kashmiri Pandits to encourage them to return to the Valley, he said:

Nothing, this is all politics, government just wants to fill up the posts. Suppose some lady takes up a job there, what if people harass her, she will not go there. I know one Kashmiri Pandit woman who has joined a job in Kashmir. People started annoying her so she at last left the job.

KB: Do you think of returning to Kashmir?

Ganesh Tikku: There is no question of my returning to Kashmir. No one can live there permanently. The atmosphere has changed now. Now there is smoke everywhere in Kashmir. It does not shine. Now it is totally different there.

KB: Do you think that the earlier atmosphere can be revived?

Ganesh Tikku: No. It is very difficult now. There ia a settled fear and mistrust in our hearts. [Nahi Nahi abb bahut mushkil hai dar aur tou beth gaya na dil mein. Shak ki bimari jo hai]

Thus, despite various schemes encouraging Kashmiri Pandits to return to Kashmir, Ganesh Tikku does not like to give a thought about returning to his homeland. His doubts about security and his experience of his visit after migration have made him think that his own place has become strange to him. The changed atmosphere, mistrust and fear are obstacles that may not allow him to think of returning to Kashmir. Vishan Dhar said: “What will I do in Kashmir now. I will not have freedom of expression there”.

Jagannath Ganjoo has a longing for Kashmir, but he is sure his children do not have that:

I may go, but my children will not go. I have two sons. They may want to go, but as tourists. We are afraid of going there because there are hundred per cent Muslims now. I have Muslim friends, but fear is established in our heart. Kashmir is a sort of history for us now [laughs].

Girdhar Koul thinks that there is tremendous gap between the new generations of both the communities:

We have also moved on with time. The new generations of both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have a tremendous gap. The people of my generation knew the value of birth place
because of our past and attachment, because of our inter-community and intra-community linkages. The younger generation lacks this.

KB: Have you ever discussed with your son about Kashmir?

Girdhar Koul: It makes no sense for him. He thinks that I am telling him a story. For him world has moved too much forward. People of my generation definitely want to return, but it should be safe there. For example, if I go there, under compulsion, my son will also come to look after us, then he can see the glimpses of what I try to tell him now. I think this can pave the way, but that is too far right now. I do not see anything of that sort happening in the near future. After twenty years, all Kashmiri Pandits will be out of Jammu and Kashmir state because our children those who have gone out for studying and doing jobs will settle down there only; they are not going to return. That [Kashmiri] identity will be lost; they will not speak in Kashmiri at all. Kashmiri Muslims also have lost control over their younger generation. That is why they became militants.

Dev Sopori thinks that it is not possible for him to return to Kashmir now because of his settlement in Jammu:

I do not need job or money to go there. Because there is no good atmosphere now. They [Kashmiri Muslims] will not accept us. When once I went to my village, people met me with love and affection. People in my village were hugging me, kissing me. Their mud clad hands got imprinted on my shirt. When I returned from Kashmir, I did not wash that shirt for long because of those imprints of their hands, those expressions of love. But there was so much of insecurity in my heart even then.

Suchitra Koul also thinks the new generation will not able to adjust with each other:

Kashmiri Pandits’ new generation does not know anything about Kashmir. Even the Muslims, I do not think, have this concept that they will live like friends. It will never happen, it will never happen KB: Given a chance, would you want to go back and stay in Kashmir?

Suchitra Koul: Me, personally? I will not, because I am settled in Chandigarh. I do not think anybody will go to Kashmir and settle down there now. When I visited Kashmir recently, I was wearing dehzoor\(^3\), but the next day I removed it, because I was feeling insecure. I do not know why, but fear was in my heart... I did not see those known Muslim faces also. I felt as if Pakistanis are now living in Kashmir. I was recollecting in my memory everything that was not there.

Sharika Tikku thinks that there is uncertainty in the situation in Kashmir. That is an obstacle in the way of Kashmiri Pandits’ homecoming:

If rumour is there that Kashmiri Pandits will return then something will happen again. Kashmiri Pandits hesitate to come back. I know there is no danger now, I am living here; but those who have left twenty years back will be afraid naturally. Because the time of 1989 is still in their mind when there was so much of terror in the society.

When I asked Abha Bhan whether she wants to return to her homeland, she first narrated experiences of her first visit to Kashmir after migration:

It was my psychology that was playing its role. I landed in Srinagar. First, I was afraid of going there. When I landed there, there was a feeling whether I should go down or not. When I landed I sat down, then we went to the hotel. I saw everywhere green hoardings green banners... after sometime I was feeling a little bit secure, so I went out with friends to call on my family. One shopkeeper recognised me and asked to pay my salam [to greet] to my uncle and tell him that Kashmir is not complete without them [Kashmiri Pandits]. I think the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims miss us, but the younger generation, I do not know about them, because they have also not seen that composite culture, they are living only with Muslims.

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\(^3\) The ornament that married Kashmiri Pandit women wear in their ears.
Abha Bhan’s daughter also visited Kashmir with her once: “I took my daughter there once. She stayed with a Muslim family and interacted with the people and children there. She liked the place, but on the fourth day of stay, she fell ill and said that she wanted to go back [to Jammu] as she was not feeling good there...” Her daughter could not feel that Kashmir is her hometown, even though she was born there. Abha Bhan has an urge to return to Kashmir, she expressed it many times during our conversation:

After retirement I will go back. I do not want to stay here because the climate of Kashmir is different. People crave to go back to Kashmir. If we get the chance we will go back ... but the atmosphere should be conducive.  

KB: Can you go back and take your position in your department?  
Abha: I feel like. Why should I not go there? I have not gained anything in my profession, because I am a migrant I would not get promotion being a migrant here in Jammu. When you think of all this, it hurts. I think hatred also does not serve any purpose. But how can I go back there? I do not know what will happen, everything is uncertain. And, frankly speaking, someone else is working in my post. If I go there, that person will be displaced. So I will not be welcome there.  

For Kavita Dhar, trust is an important factor that has eroded between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:

During summer, it is very difficult to live in Jammu. Children also regret our leaving Kashmir. They feel it is a nice place and all. Even at present we can go to live there, but only in a rented house and for month or so because that [old] atmosphere is not there. If we want to return [to Kashmir] then safety is the issue... Earlier there was trust, but we cannot trust the new generation. Even those with whom we have lived earlier it is difficult to trust. Then, how can we trust those whom we have not seen at all. Government is trying to take Kashmiri Pandits back to the Kashmir because Kashmir is incomplete without Kashmiri Pandits. For that, there are packages and job offers. Only those who have no option and are unemployed will go.  

The narrative points to the uncertainty whether or not the new generation of Kashmiri Muslims will accept Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandits are afraid to go to that area in Kashmir where their ancestral property is situated. They can only live only in a rented house, and that too in different area.  

Ratanlal Dhar also said he wants to go back to Kashmir:

I feel like going there. Who wants to leave his home? I miss my house and everything day and night. I do not feel that peace, that happiness here in Jammu. But they [Kashmiri Muslims] do not want us back [laughs].  

KB: What do your children say?  
Ratanlal Dhar: Our children are born and brought up here. Some are twenty years old some are 21-22; they do not know anything. We can go there, but as tourist only.  

KB: Do you think that your children will be able to live in Kashmir in future the way you have lived there?  
Ratanlal Dhar: No, there is no question of living there. We can go there for ten-twenty days as a visitor. If I tell them [Kashmiri Muslims] that I have come there to live forever and I will construct a house for me, they [Kashmiri Muslims] will not bear this. They want to make Kashmir Pakistan and Pakistan is a Muslim state.  

KB: Do you think that Kashmiri Pandits have future there?
Ratanlal Dhar: No, no, nothing. You can ask everyone. I am not saying anything wrong.

Similarly, Phulla Koul also thinks that there will be no acceptance for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir:

Kashmiri Muslims will not accept Kashmiri Pandits now, because they have to share everything with Pandits e.g., jobs. If some Kashmiri Pandits will come back they will come only for government jobs. Now those Pandits who are living in Kashmir will also move out. I am living in a government flat and I will also move out because I do not have a house in Kashmir, only ruins of my house are left.

Phulla Koul also said that the Pandits who had not migrated earlier are also planning to leave; she is also one of them who do not want to live in Kashmir any more.

Pushkarnath Pandit is still in Kashmir, but his only daughter who is in Bombay wants that her parents should not live in Kashmir any more:

This is the dilemma of Kashmiri Pandits. For instance, my daughter is settled in Bombay. She is not going to come back. Her daughter is going abroad. Now we are in Kashmir my daughter questions me every day that what the heck you are doing there all alone. When you have a beautiful house in Bombay and all comforts, why do you want to suffer there in Kashmir. This is a major problem.

Pushkarnath Pandit also said: “For Kashmiri Pandits, migration was a blessing in disguise…”

Sanjay Tikku has different views and thinks that it is high time that Kashmiri Pandits should return to Kashmir, otherwise it will be too late then:

Whatever the local people say, the government should create conditions so that we can think of homecoming. Otherwise our future generations will not be able to identify themselves with other Kashmiris. We will have to mediate between them. Twenty years are over now. Even our emotions will dry up. No one will bother to go there once the wounds heal up. They would consider it wastage of time to speak about it. If, today, I go to Kashmir, I will not go to Mughal garden, rather I will go to my place, my home. Even today, if I get a chance, I will go to Kashmir.

Sanjay Tikku’s emphasises shows that one has to remember the good experiences of living together to return to Kashmir rather than focusing on experiences of the turmoil. But, then, government has to play a positive role.

On the other hand, Mahesh Bhatt is sure that no Kashmiri Pandit shall return to Kashmir now:

I am telling you the inside story that no one will return to Kashmir now because no one wants her/his life in hell. For instance, if you talk about me, I am like half here and half in Kashmir, because I have lived one part of my life in Kashmir. If I want to return to Kashmir, I cannot leave my children. Our older generation wants to go there, but the younger generation will not let them go there. Simply, we do not want to go there for one reason or the other, whatever effort government does we do not care now. Like my generation people may want to go, but for the generation next to us it is difficult to go back. I still have longing, but my parents are no more, and if they were alive they would have definitely liked to go.

Kashmir may have been described as heaven on earth, but for Mahesh Bhatt it is no less than a hell and now, especially for Kashmiri Pandits. The longing to return to Kashmir will be there in the heart of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits, but they do not dare to return to Kashmir.
“The only way Pandits can come is that we should have a separate area for Pandits”/ “The homeland should be given the status of Union Territory and directly controlled by the constitution of India, there should be no article 370”

Keshav Bhatt who has not migrated from Kashmir said,

Now people [Kashmiri Muslims] are saying that Pandits should come back, but the only way Pandits can come is that we should have a separate area for Pandits.

KB: Do you think people will come back?

Keshav: That is the only way people will come, otherwise not.

KB: But earlier both Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandits used to live in the same neighbourhood. If they live in separate areas, will the composite culture survive?

Keshav: Now that time of composite culture is gone.

On the other hand, Abha Bhan is not in favour of a separate home land for Kashmiri Pandits: “I do not think that it is good idea to be alienated. This is not right I think we should live the way we used to live there in composite culture then only there will be real home for us in Kashmir”.

When I asked Girdhar Koul whether there should be separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir, he said:

Kashmiri Pandits’ organisation “Pannun Kashmir”4 has given this concept that there should be a separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir. Whether it is visualised or not, but this slogan will be there that Kashmir is mine also. We can claim it, nobody can say no to us. This is our right. But the question is whether there will be any area in Kashmir without Kashmiri Muslims, will the government give us such place? I think Kashmiri Muslims want Kashmiri Pandits back, but only as tourists not forever.

Thus, Girdar Koul doubts that if demand for a separate home land for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir will be fulfilled.

Narayan Raina is categorical that there will be no homecoming for Kashmiri Pandits until there is a separate homeland:

I tell you, if we return to Kashmir, we will return permanently. Our organisation Pannun Kashmir said this. There should be internal reorganisation of the Jammu and Kashmir state because there are few people who have made hostage to the state. They are doing whatever they want. Jammu people are suffering, Ladakh people are suffering, because of them. Even in Kashmir other sections are suffering because of small section of people. Why should we suffer because of them? We need separate homeland in Kashmir for us and it should be given the status of a Union Territory... And in the rest of the Kashmir let the Kashmiri Muslims decide what they want... We will not go to Kashmir which is Islamised, where there is vandalism and intolerance.

KB: If there is a separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits will the old bond be there?

Narayan Raina: It is possible, man is a social being, but only in case their ideas are same. But, if they say “Pakistan zindabad”, then how can friendship be there. This is not acceptable to me. We do not have friends, that love is lost... the gap is becoming wider and wider. Children have no concept of that friendship. They have seen the place as tourists. It is not acceptable, the place belongs to me [I cannot be tourist there]....

4 Pannun Kashmir is an organisation of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. It has raised the slogan of separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir.
Thus, Kashmiri Pandits perceive that at present Kashmir is Islamised and it is not possible for Kashmiri Pandits to live there. Kashmiri Pandits want a separate homeland and with the status of a union territory.

Ashwini Bhatt thinks that there is no meeting point for Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits now:

We are on the diversion line. We are moving apart. I cannot see any chance of meeting unless until majority community changes its mind-set. Second, we were forced to move by the majority community; so, majority community must invite us back. That is not likely to happen. Majority community has no voice now because there are fundamentalist voices only... Our children will not get jobs in the Valley. A lot of things have diluted in these 20 years, our relations, our contact, our authority, even political authority. We had little political authority earlier but then we had our Kashmiri Muslim students who were MLA, MP and head of the panchayat. They used to give respect to their teachers. I do not have any students in the Valley at present whom I know. I like Kashmir because it was my home. Emotions are there, but my children only half likes it. My daughter was born in Delhi, but she will not go there... I do not see any future there in the Valley for me.... I have sold my house in Kashmir. People have sold land in the villages. Our temples are occupied by Kashmiri Muslims. We do not have a vote bank. That is also one reason that government does not pay attention to Kashmiri Pandits. We never have any MLA in the Assembly. We want Kashmiri Pandits should be rehabilitated. Government of India is not doing this; they can identify an area in Kashmir where all the Kashmiri Pandits could live together.

When I asked If Kashmiri Pandits are going to live in segregated area how the relationship would be normal with Kashmiri Muslims, Ashwini Bhatt replied:

But we will have security, at least... If they keep me in the midst of ten Muslims houses, can I live there? How much time it will take to get out of fear? Now I have tested him, he is a man eater. You are telling me to again live among man eaters. He will kill me even if you give me hundred assurances that he is not going to kill me. Fear will not go from my heart. Now I cannot live with them. When we were there, there were secular schools. Now it has become an Islamic sphere. They will teach our children the Quran and tell our daughters to wear scarf. We will not send our children to these schools.

Ashwini Bhatt regrets that no effort has ever been made by the government to take Kashmiri Pandit children to Kashmir as the government is doing for Kashmiri Muslim children to take them to different parts of India for interaction with the outside world. But no interaction has taken place between Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit children in Kashmir, no such kind of camps in Kashmir were organised by government where young generation of both the communities could interact so that the fear that has established in mind the and heart of the people could subside.

Pankaj Mattoo wants to return to Kashmir:

Pankaj Mattoo: If I get a chance I will definitely go, whether my children go there with me or not...because children will have their own life. I do not have land there now, but I do not need land I just want to go because I have spent good part of my life there. I miss that era. Our organisation Pannun Kashmir has made a demand for a separate homeland. If we get that separate homeland then our Kashmiriyat will also revive?

KB: If there is a separate homeland, how will Kashmiriyat revive?

Pankaj Mattoo: Now ‘that’ Kashmiriyat will take time to revive. But in the beginning it will be our Kashmiriyat [he meant culture and language of Kashmiri Pandit will be safeguarded]. First we should get the place where we can talk in Kashmiri, our Kashmiri culture gets revived, then after that the composite culture will start reviving slowly.
On being asked Rohini Dhar also feels that Kashmiri Pandits will return to Kashmir in the near future if there is a will to get them back.

Actually, what happened, Geelani Sahib said that he will do what Pakistan tells him to do. He still says that they are with Pakistan. Then how can Kashmiri Pandits live in Kashmir. If they want to make Kashmir Pakistan then how can we live in Pakistan...Earlier Pandits used to live in the same village, same colony, but that time there was no problem between Pandits and Muslims. Now if they kill a Pandit, the Muslim neighbours will make an excuse that they do not know who is the culprit... That is why it is better to have separate homeland for us.

KB: Do you think there will be no danger then?

Rohini Dhar: Yes, Kashmiri Pandits can become targets even then. But there should be secure homeland with complete security....

KB: Do you think then there will be a good relationship and composite culture?

Rohini Dhar: We are not complete without each other, that is there. That is why Kashmir is called Rishiwar an abode of saints. That is still there at some level because when Kashmiri Muslims go to Jammu they stay with Kashmiri Pandits and when Kashmiri Pandits come to Kashmir they stay with Kashmiri Muslim friends. That is alive somewhere, but if Pandits come permanently and buy land in Kashmir, then Kashmiri Muslims are not going to accept. Kashmiri Pandits can stay for sometime but not forever. I am observing some changes. Our temples, which were kept closed for years are opening.

One reason why Kashmiri Pandits want their separate homeland is that the religious tone of separatist leaders has created the perception among Kashmiri Pandits that there will be Islamic dominance in Kashmir and in that kind of atmosphere they cannot live.

The next theme would discuss what the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits thinks about the relation of younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits.

"Younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims does not know much about Kashmiri Pandits"/"Younger generation of both the communities do not have not that connection"

Anmol Bhatt said that he talks to his daughter about Kashmir and she understands very well what he wants to convey to her:

Of course I have told my children what we have gone through.... by God’s grace they are mature enough to understand. But individual relationship is a very different thing. My daugther’s best friend is a Kashmiri Muslim; her parents have also moved out of Kashmir and are living in Ludhiana. They migrated at the same time from Kashmir when I did.

KB: Do they [her daughter and her Kashmiri Muslim friend] know the history of Kashmiri Muslims’ and Kashmiri Pandits’ relationship in the past?

Anmol Bhatt: No, no both of them have faint idea. Her friend goes to Kashmir often. But their relationships are normal as it would have been anybody else’s. They are not bonding because they are Kashmiri. They do not talk in Kashmiri, my daughter still knows it. Memories are so short that you tend to forget what happened in the past. I wish my daughter never had to live with Muslims, but she should know the history so that she can decide what should she support and what she should go against. I do not tell her that we are good or bad. I just tell her what happened that time.

KB: Does it affect her friendship with her Kashmiri Muslim friend?

Anmol Bhatt: I do not think so. She is too objective for that... They talk normally, there is no difference.
Phulla Koul’s family had not migrated and her son was also with her, but has now moved out of Kashmir for his studies. She said that her son misses his Kashmiri Muslim friends, but he also says to her: “Mummy I will not come back to my home in Kashmir forever”. After having been born and brought up in Kashmir he does not want to live anymore in Kashmir. She also says that “Now children are more aware and know the reality”.

Nandi Koul, who has also not migrated from Kashmir, said, Kashmiri Muslim child does not know about Kashmiri Pandits much. One day my wife and I were on outing. She wore sari and bindi. On seeing her, young children got excited and started saying see, see she is Kashmiri Pandit woman. Their expression was like they are seeing some new animal in the zoo. Elderly people meet with respect even now. I am residing in Kashmir only because of their friendly behaviour towards me, because of their hospitality.

Suchitra Koul talked about her daughter’s inclination towards Kashmir despite of her upbringing outside Kashmir: I have a daughter who had spent only one year in Kashmir because she was born there in 1988. But my daughter knows more about Kashmiri culture than any Kashmiri Pandit child of her age because she has read so many books on that subject. She knows all culture of her grandparents’ time. She knows each and everything... She wants to go to Kashmir and stay there. She supports Kashmiri Muslims. She does not think negative about Kashmiri Muslims.

Suchitra Koul’s daughter has not gone away from the culture of Kashmir even while living in exile. She has a soft corner for Kashmiri Muslims. Keshav Bhatt has not migrated and has been living in Kashmir. So, I asked him whether the younger generations of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have any connection at present, he said, “My son was not born in Kashmir... that connection is not there”.

I told Abha Bhan that, while talking to a Kashmiri Pandit youth, I had observed anger that he had retorted that there was no brotherhood in Kashmir and all this talk is a myth. She explained why that youth could have that opinion: “They have not seen that. So, for them, it was not there, they do not know it”.

Pankaj Mattoo thinks that there is no need to tell the children about the past: My children are very young. We do not talk to them anything about Kashmir. The thing that is gone, that is past; there is no need to think about that. We think about future. If we talk to children about that time they will get confused over what we are talking about. Old time will not come back.

Thus it appears that some of the older generation people are not very keen to talk about the past to their children because somewhere they are certain that their children are not going to go back to Kashmir to live there again. I asked Ashwini Bhatt whether his children know about his Kashmiri Muslim friends. He said, Yes, they know, but hardly have we met. Now we talk on telephone. My son has no Kashmiri Muslim friends. He also feels that we were forced to move from Kashmir. There is anger in the younger generation because we have lost our land. Like Jews were thrown out of Israel, we are now wandering Jews... There was nothing, no fear in Kashmir before... now I go there as a
stranger. Twenty years have passed now; new generation [of Kashmiri Muslims] has come up there. That generation is fundamentalist

Sanjay Tikku thinks that, in building a bridge between new generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, the older generation has to play an important role: “It will be easy, but the older generation has to play the role of glue, mediator. But they are there for only short period of time, because they will also die after some years. After ten years, the situation will be completely different. Culture is to be experienced, not to be read in the history books only”

Similarly, Narayan Raina said,

The tragedy is that the whole gap came between the generations. Older generation is like a bridge between five thousand years old history, twenty years old history of Kashmir and what is going on now. I am bridge between the history and these twenty years. This is our responsibility to educate them about that history. But now we have to absorb ourselves in national history because in the state there is no future for us. The way culture should be passed and communicated to new generation it did not happen with that intensity because, after migration, we had to struggle for everything and our priorities got changed.

Sharika Tikku said that the new generations of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have no connection:

They [Kashmiri Pandits of younger generation] cannot know anything when they are not living here in Kashmir. My brother-in-law’s children come as visitors. They do not know anything about the past that we have seen practically. They will read in the history books only. They will not be able to see it. There are very few Pandits in Kashmir now. But Kashmiri Muslim children who go out of Kashmir for studying become good friends of Hindus. They understand what Kashmiri Muslims have done to Kashmiri Pandits during the nineties. I told you, the younger generation will read about the past only in the history books.

These narratives emphasise the point that Kashmiri Pandits are of the younger generation only like visitors, not residents, of Kashmir. So, it is very difficult for them to feel that connection with the place and people over there. As Jagannath Ganjoo said, he has the same belongingness for Kashmir because he has spent the beautiful years of his life there:

I cannot forget those beautiful days [nostalgic], my school days, those happy days, beautiful days. I feel for my birthplace and environment till today. Definitely, it is the same feeling for me. But, for my children, it is not the same and not the same for grandchildren. Therefore, my grandchildren will never go there and even my children will not go there. ... As far as I am concerned, people of my age feel for that brotherhood and mutual respect. You would not believe this that my Kashmiri Muslim friends’ son was with me for four years in Jammu. He was studying in Jammu. My son and he used shared the same bed, he was just like my son.

Jagannath Ganjoo compares his belongingness to Kashmir and people to that of his children and grandchildren. He concludes that there is definitely a difference in that, because he has spent beautiful days of his life there, but his children do not have that kind of experiences and her grandchildren have no experiences at all. He also thinks that his children and grandchildren need not go there now, as nothing is left for them there.
Summary

To summarise, there are various meanings attached to Kashmiriyat through which participants understand Kashmiriyat: such as “universal brotherhood in Kashmir”, “goodwill of Kashmiris”, “includes culture of the land”, “hospitality and courtesy”, “it is made up of two components one is Islam and the other is Hinduism”, “Kashmiriyat means evolving together” “it represents the harmonious brethren relationship between the people of Kashmir”. These are the ways through which participants experienced Kashmiriyat in the past and understood it. But, with the changing social reality, meanings attached to Kashmiriyat are also changing.

The new meanings attached to Kashmiriyat are as “gun culture”, “non-tolerance”, “political tool”, “child of turmoil”, “superficiality”, and “just a romantic idea”. The discussion with the participants brought out that earlier there was brotherhood and love between the people. Hence, Kashmiriyat existed in the past in Kashmir, but after the turmoil things changed. Keshav Bhatt’s, thinks “fundamentalism” is responsible for depleting Kashmiriyat. There were the ways (trikke) to “counter and cover-up” those gaps in the past as Sanjay Tikku said, but they are no more there now. That is why Vrinda Koul perceives Kashmiriyat as “superficiality” at present and Anmol Bhatt has not at all experienced Kashmiriyat even while living in peaceful Kashmir and Narayan Raina thinks Kashmiriyat represents only “Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Islam”, that is the “identity of Kashmiri Muslims”. So, Kashmiriyat has become “pseudo-secularism” and just a “romantic idea” now.

Thus, the meanings attached to Kashmiriyat in the past are changing with the changing reality. The past might be different, but when the actors talk about that past in the present, the present reality also contributes to the present interpretation of the past. Because changing social reality is not only the process to construct the present reality, but it may also be used to interpret the social reality of the past.

Kashmir is also known as Pirwar, a place of saints and the people who valued learning, spiritualism, brotherhood, and non-violence. These saints are known as harbingers of Kashmiriyat. Discussion on Sufis and the Rishi tradition of Kashmir brought out that the philosophy of brotherhood and non-violence given by these saints evolved as a composite culture of Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits, like their Kashmiri Muslims compatriot, were regular visitors to the shrines of Sufi saints before the turmoil. Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani is called as Nund Rish by Kashmiri Pandits and Lal Ded is called as Lal Arifa by Kashmiri Muslims. Although different names are given to the same saints by the people, they revered these saints in a similar manner and celebrated festivals (bada din) together in their memories. This had strengthened social bond.

The older generation of Kashmiri Pandits participants think that, after the turmoil, the Sufi culture that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits shared has been destroyed. After migration
of Kashmiri Pandits, the shrines of Sufi saints have disappeared from their life and even those Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir do not visit these shrines as they did earlier.

The “spiritual-identity” of Kashmiris was neither Hindu nor Islamic in its orientation. The world outside Kashmir cannot understand this worldview of Kashmiris. Hence, these practices are dubbed as anti-Islam. So, the older generations of Kashmiri Pandits participants also think that, among Kashmiri Muslims, Sufi practices are declining because of the revivalist movement. Turmoil and migration have strengthened the religious identity of the people and weakened their regional, social and spiritual identity. Those who have not migrated and still having faith in these shrines hesitate to visit the shrines because of the situation of fear that is prevalent. Those who have migrated and have not visited Kashmir after their exodus obviously cannot continue those practices. Even though belief system of Kashmiri Pandits might be intact, those symbols and practices in their lives are not there anymore. During my field work, I have seen the replica of temple of Kheer Bhavani in Jammu and I am told that Kashmiri Pandits community have made replica of famous Hari-Parbat in Delhi also. But I have not seen the replica of any shrine of Kashmiri Muslim saints out of Kashmir. On the one hand, the revivalist movement in Kashmir is posing challenge to this belief system and labels it as anti-Islamic, and on the other hand, Kashmiri Pandits are not so excited to visit these shrines now because of the troubled circumstances. Thus, the survival of Kashmiriyat is not possible without the blend, the mixing and specifically when one component is missing and the other is under the pressure of emerging processes.

The past is nostalgic and difficult to narrate in words. Taking part in social activities together, helping each other, singing the same song in marriages and going to the shrines on various occasions together are all a part of the memories of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits. The residues of those closely shared past relationships are still persisting at the individual level. However, the trust has been replaced by suspicion; love, by bitterness; co-existence, by compromises; the dependency is no more; and the equations of relationships have changed. The identity of Kashmiris has been penetrated by religious phenomenon and different political aspirations. The new boundaries are in the process of emerging. Most of the participants of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits see no future for their community in Kashmir. Most of them said that Kashmiri Pandits will return to Kashmir only under one condition, that is, the formation a separate homeland for them in Kashmir.

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