Chapter VII
Perspective of Kashmiri Pandits:
The Younger Generation

This chapter attempts to understand what meaning the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits makes of Kashmiriyat, the Kashmiri culture and Sufism in Kashmir. The focus here is on their perceptions of current social realities about these aspects and the social realities of the Valley before 1989, which, though they may not have experienced, could have known through different sources. Those Kashmiri Pandits of this generation who have been brought up outside of Kashmir have neither experience of the past reality nor experience of the current reality of Kashmir. However, those who are still living in Kashmir with their families have opportunities to interact with the people with whom their parents, grandparents and ancestors have lived in the peaceful atmosphere of the happier times.

The participants belonged to the age group of twenty to thirty; this category of participants was very young when the turmoil began and some might have been born during the initial years of the turmoil. The in-depth interviews with this category of Kashmiri Pandit participants, drawn from Srinagar and Anantnag in Kashmir and Udhampur, Jammu, Chandigarh and Delhi, covered a course of time from the past (the experiences that they have heard from their elders) to the present (their own perceptions of the reality).

The themes derived from the research participants narratives have been presented in three parts. The first part will attempt to understand the social construction of Kashmiriyat by the young generation of Kashmiri Pandits. They might have heard about the notion of Kashmiriyat, but have no experiential understanding of the meanings that are associated with it. In the present social reality, the meaning that they attach to Kashmiriyat, the influences and the factors that shape their social construction of Kashmiriyat would be discussed in this part. The second part examines the young generations’ perceptions on the Sufi culture and belief system of Kashmir that was an essential part of social and cultural set-up of Kashmir irrespective of religious faith. It also examines as to how the younger generations of those Kashmiri Pandits who have not lived in Kashmir look at these Sufi practices and what they know about the shrines of Kashmir. The third part reflects on the way the younger generation perceives the relationship between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the present times. Thematic substance formed from the responses of the participants in relation to the influence of religion, turmoil, and politics in shaping their perspectives would be presented in this chapter.
I

Kashmiriyat: Single Term, Many Meanings

“Kashmiriyat was something very different culture...sort of brotherhood”/“Kashmiriyat represents peaceful bondage between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits”

Kashmiri Pandits’ of the younger generation might have heard about Kashmiriyat and the meanings associated with it, but for them to connect with the concept and feel attached to it as their parents or grandparents did, would be unrealistic. It is important to know how the perceptions about Kashmiriyat, of those living outside of Kashmir and also those who are still living in Kashmir are framed by their respective locations. The way they perceive the heard realities of the past and by observing the present reality (by those participants who have not migrated) of Kashmir would provide an insight into their construction of Kashmiriyat and the meaning they associate with the concept now.

Reena Raina (x-ray technician) migrated from Kashmir after two years of mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits during 1989-90. She was in her childhood, and was somewhat able to understand a little bit of what was happening in Kashmir. In 1992, when her parents lost all hopes of improvement in the situation, they also left their home and hearth in Kashmir. She has faded memories of Kashmir, as she was born there and spent a few years of her early life over there. She describes Kashmiriyat as:

...something very different culture. It was a different kind of atmosphere, heartthrob of people [dadkan thi sab logon ki vo]. Kashmiriyat means sort of brotherhood/bahichara. People then would sacrifice life for each other... this kind of love was there. No one would do anything wrong to anyone...people were hospitable. That thing we cannot find now. It was there in Kashmir, but the day militancy started everything got destroyed. There is no brotherhood any more.

Being out of Kashmir at a very young age, Reena Riana’s is well aware of the meanings associated with Kashmiriyat: the brotherhood, hospitality and the love among the people of Kashmir which is no more now.

Ranveer Bhatt (completed engineering course) said, “Kashmiriyat represented a peaceful bondage between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits... We are of the same blood, only they got converted. Kashmiri Muslims are converts and they now consider that they are ‘pure Islamic’”. Similarly, Sagrika Pandita (house wife) said,

There was brotherhood/bahichara, but at present that has changed. Now there is a generation of our age which does not know about that. Those old generation people have that kind of feeling, but our generation [Kashmiri Muslims] does not know that Kashmiri Pandits used to live there in Kashmir

Sagrika Pandita also thinks that the older generations may have feelings for each other, but the Kashmiri Muslims of younger generation may be not aware of the fact that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits had brethren relationship between them. Kritika Koul (doing Master Degree
course) explained Kashmiriyat as: “Kashmiriyat means living together, there was good relation among the people in Kashmir, but after migration everything got changed. However, Kashmiri Muslims still come to meet us here in Jammu”

Kaveri Dhar (school teacher) was very young when her family migrated from Kashmir, but she has now taken up a government job in Kashmir as school teacher in her own village, where only the ruins of her ancestral home are left. She said: “Kashmiriyat was love and respect towards each other and that is still prevailing among the people of older generation, the love between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims was very strong there. They [Kashmiri Muslims] respect Kashmiri Pandits even now”. When she joined her job in Kashmir as a school teacher, the Zonal Officer, a Kashmiri Muslim, accompanied her to her ancestral village so that she may not feel uncomfortable and insecure in her own village. Kaveri Dhar said that the Zonal Officer has a lot of respect for Kashmiri Pandits and he told her, “Whatever the Knowledge I have today it is because of my Kashmiri Pandit teachers.” He said he respects them and that is why he came with me because I am a Kashmiri Pandit”. Further, explaining about the people of her village, she said,

There are people among Kashmiri Muslims who have love in their hearts for Kashmiri Pandits. I feel in my village people are so simple and innocent, I do not know from where this external force [militancy] came and that did something to them. I have heard that there was deep love between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, but god knows whose evil eye was cast on them.

Ashutosh Ganjoo (doing his graduation) lives in Kashmir with his parents and is studying there. He was two years old when conflict-induced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits occurred. His views on Kashmiriyat are as follows:

Ashutosh Ganjoo: Kashmiriyat has a very deep meaning and there are so many meanings attached to it. For someone it means a lot and for someone it is nothing

KB: What is Kashmiriyat for you?

Ashutosh Ganjoo: Kashmiriyat is my life. For instance, if I go out of Kashmir, I cannot talk in Kashmiri. In Jammu, people talk in Hindi and English only. When I talk in Kashmiri to them, they [he is talking about the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits living in Jammu] do not understand anything. I told them to preserve at least something of Kashmiri language and Kashmir. The heritage is surviving only because of some Kashmiri Pandits who are still in Kashmir. If they [migrated Kashmiri Pandits] say they are staying in Jammu or Delhi and making temples¹ there, this will not help at all. Kashmiri Pandits who have migrated are able to visit Kashmir only because of Kashmiri Pandits those who are living here in Kashmir.

According to Ashutosh Ganjoo, Kashmiri language and cultural heritage comes under Kashmiriyat, which he thinks is surviving only because of the Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir. When I asked him, what he thinks about composite culture of Kashmir, he said, “All that is finished now, nothing is like that now as it used to be in the past. People will not tell you anything; they are living under fear here now”.

¹ Migrated Kashmiri Pandits has made replica of temple Kheer Bhavani in Jammu, same as it was in Tulmula in Kashmir. During interaction with the participants in Delhi it also came out that those Kashmiri Pandits who are living in Delhi have also made replicas of Hari Parbat and Kheer Bhavani in Delhi, so that they can celebrate festivals like Ashtami and meet as a community in these places.
We used to live together now it is not like that”/ “that brotherhood is not there now”

Priyanka Koul (student of MSc microbiology) was two months old when her parents migrated from Kashmir. She describes Kashmiriyat as she heard about it from the elders:

I heard that there was brotherhood in Kashmir. My parents told me that everybody lived together. People had lot of trust and faith in each other. If someone needed help people used to come forward, but that thing is lost now... There was a lot of faith between the people; they were well acquainted with each other then.

Puja Bhatt (government employee), who has not migrated from Kashmir, understands Kashmiriyat in terms of brethren relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. She said,

may be brotherhood is there but there are very few Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir now and the new generation [Kashmiri Muslims] people have no acquaintances with the Kashmiri Pandits. That is why you will not able to see that kind of brotherhood now. Yes! if Kashmiri Pandits would come back then may be...

Mohit Koul (working in the education sector) who has not migrated from Kashmir, but has not heard the word Kashmiriyat. His expression was completely blank; when I asked him if he knows the term Kashmiriyat, he said: “No, I do not know”. However, he said: “Earlier there was brotherhood between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. We used to live together, but now it is not like that”. Sachin Kachru (works in a pharmacy) said,

Kashmiriyat means brotherhood between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. But that brotherhood is not there now. If I go to my village, they [Kashmiri Muslims] would still treat me with love and respect. But inside their hearts nothing is like that as it was before. Everything seems as drama. They think that we are kaffir and we should be thrown out of Kashmir.

Anup Bhatt (works in private sector) for whom Kashmiriyat is a cultural way of life of Kashmiris, but “there is not that Kashmiriyat now.... One word was being used for Kashmiriyat that was bahichara. That bahichara is no more and how will it be there?”

“Kashmiriyat was... identity of Kashmiri Muslims; this was ... to crush the minority and .... created politically to convey everyone is together”

Manish Koul (research scholar) has a lot of bitterness because of the migration of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland. So, he perceives that Kashmiriyat is a kind of brotherhood, which never existed in Kashmir. His narrative in an outburst of what he felt:

Manish Koul: People say that Kashmiriyat is a composite culture... This term came into being in1930-40. During that time there was an anti-Maharaja campaign begun by Sheikh Abdullah that is also called “Quit Kashmir” movement. Then, the name of Muslim Conference changed into National Conference for wider acceptance, because Maharaja was a Hindu and to get the support of Kashmiri Pandits the concept of Kashmiriyat was used, to show that Kashmiri Pandit are also a part of this campaign with Kashmiri Muslims.... Kashmiriyat was the shield to crush the minority identity and to show that the minority is with the majority... Kashmiriyat is pseudo secularism. This is not a historical term and not a socially tested term, it is a political term. If Kashmiriyat was there during the 1990s Kashmiri Pandits would not have been forced to migrate. They [Kashmiri Muslims] supported that cause. There were posters stuck outside the Kashmiri Pandits’ houses to
tell them to leave Kashmir. If there were strong personal bonds, why they [Kashmiri Muslims] said that they are helpless to save even themselves, so how could they help Kashmiri Pandits. It is in real sense something else. Self-determination movement belongs only to the majority community of Kashmir. If they had taken minority into confidence, Kashmiri Pandits would have not moved out. If Kashmiriyat was there, then why the minority [Kashmiri Pandits] was excluded?

KB: Does it mean that Kashmiriyat was there in 1930-40, and it was not anymore in 1980?

Manish Koul: No, not at all, and there was no Kashmiriyat even before 1980, because that time they wanted that all the communities should come together, but the upper-hand should be that of the majority. Minority community could not understand this before 1990.... Kashmiriyat was basically an identity of Kashmiri Muslims. This was the space created politically to convey that everyone is together... why they said that they [Kashmiri Pandits] are Indian agents. If they label us as agents and force us to move out of Kashmir then which Kashmiriyat they talk about. It is self contradicting. In history you will not find this term.

OK! I can say that Kashmiriyat is mine also, it is a sort of way of living, but it has nothing to do with brotherhood/bahichara. Everyone will define it, in her/his own way.

KB: So who do you think represent Kashmiriyat?

Manish Koul: The aboriginals of Kashmir represent Kashmiriyat and they are Kashmiri Pandits exactly. Then in my opinion, Kashmiriyat is the Sanskrit civilisation of Kashmir. That is why I am telling you that the term is not time tested it is a politically fabricated term by Sheikh Abdullah.

KB: You mean to say that Kashmiriyat has been used by political leaders?

Manish Koul: [Promptly] to gain the maximum benefit not only from Government of India, but from international organisations also.

KB: Then what is Kashmiri ethnic identity?

Manish Koul: If we talk about Kashmiri ethnic identity, they [Kashmiri Muslims] say that they are part of Islam. Kashmiri ethnic identity represents the basic civilisation and in that there is no difference [between Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims]. If we say that the very base of Kashmiriyat is Islam, it means they have made Kashmir a part of Muslim Ummah. This is the criteria to make Kashmir a Muslim state. This process is going on.

Manish Koul has no experience of living together with Kashmiri Muslims, as he had migrated with his parents at a very young age. The new emerging realities in which Kashmiri Pandit youth lack the experience of living in Kashmir with Kashmiri Muslims and also out of their home for more than twenty years have developed their perception that Kashmiriyat is pseudo secularism.

Similarly, Avinash Bhan (Mechanical engineer) questions the concept of Kashmiriyat:

It is a pseudo word coined by politicians. This word is a fallacy, there is no basis for this word. Mahatma Gandhi once said that there is a ray of hope in Kashmir, because it was perceived that there was brotherhood among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits... I have not seen that brotherhood on ground. Kashmiriyat is also associated with tolerance. I do not remember the turmoil period, but I can say, when one Kashmiri Pandit got killed, Kashmiri Muslims should have stood for that if that Kashmiriyat existed there. When on the roof top of mosque they voiced that kind of slogans which created panic and fear among minority, was that Kashmiriyat?

When I asked Vishal Bhatt (graduate, unemployed) whether he knew about Kashmiriyat, he replied: “I have never been to Kashmir after 1989. I just remember that we all family members were loaded in a truck that came out of Kashmir, nothing else I remember”. When I explained to
him about the composite culture in Kashmir, he said: “I do not know anything about that composite culture”.

Trivid Kachru (working in a shrine board) thinks that the meaning attached to Kashmiriyat was followed by Kashmiri Pandits only: “We had maintained Kashmiriyat. Have you seen their [Kashmiri Muslims] Kashmiriyat? [He was pointing towards the temple. The idols from the temple were stolen and broken during the peak of turmoil in Kashmir, which was nearby his house] Trivid Kachru is agitated, annoyed and sad about the experience that Kashmiri Pandits went through.

II

The Perceptions about Sufi and Rishi Culture of Kashmir

This part focuses on the views of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits towards the Sufi and Rishi culture of Kashmir. It looks at the perceptions of those among them who are not living in Kashmir. It shall investigate whether they know about the famous shrines of saints in Kashmir and how they perceive their parents’ belief in these shrines. It also examines how those still living in Kashmir perceive these Sufi practices in the present context.

“I have not heard about these shrines”/ “I know about Kheer-Bhavani”/ “The blend of Sufism and Rishi culture we cannot carry forward now”

Sonali Kachru (student of psychology) said, “I have not heard about these shrines, I have not lived there [in Kashmir]”. But she knows about Lal Ded: “Definitely I have heard about Lal Ded. My parents lived there and they have better knowledge of other saints also”. Avinash Bhan said,

Because I was a kid, I have never been there [the shrines]. But, while going to school, there was a shrine of Misha Sahib. It was a practice that while going to school and also while returning we used to bow down in front of that shrine. I might have gone to Makhdoom Shahib, but it is not in my conscious memory. During Muharram we all used to go to Hubbakadal. There used to be a pious horse during Muharram and the saying was that if small children get passed under that horse it will bring good for them. So, Hindu women used to come with their kids and follow this practice. It was not that shrines in Kashmir belonged to Muslims, so Kashmiri Pandits would not go there.

Avinash Bhan mentioned that he has faded memories of visiting the shrines and he is not sure if before migration he had been to the famous shrines of Kashmir, but the extracts shows that he has had a lot of respect towards these Sufi saints and, that is why, as a child, he used to bow down his head in front of the shrines close to his school. Although he moved out of Kashmir in his childhood days, he knows that, in Kashmir, there was no ill feeling among Hindus and Muslims towards each other. So, Kashmiri Pandits used to visit the shrines of Muslim Sufi saints. Asked whether she has heard about Sufi shrines in Kashmir, Sagrika Pandita said, “I have heard that
Kashmiri Pandits used to visit these shrines”, and she remembered visiting the shrine Rishi Mol. Kritika Koul knows about Kheer Bhavani temple in Kashmir, but she has not heard about the shrine of Makhdoom Sahib or Dastgeer Sahib.

Anup Bhatt said he knows a little-bit about Rishi culture of Kashmir: “These things we can know through our grandparents only and they are no more now. The blend of Sufism and Rishi culture we cannot carry forward now”.

Vishal Bhatt said he does not have any knowledge about shrines in Kashmir. Reena Raina has also never visited shrines in Kashmir but she said, “I think my father must have visited, but I do not remember that also”. Priyanka Koul does not know about shrines or even temples in Kashmir. She took time to tell me where in Kashmir her parents used to live in Srinagar city. I asked her whether she knew about Kheer Bhavani temple in Kashmir. She said:

Yes I have heard about that temple and a spring [pool] also near by the temple, water of that spring changes colour into black if something bad is going to happen.

KB: Did your parents tell you about shrine of Makhdoom Sahib or Dastgeer Sahib?

Priyanka: No, I am hearing about these places for the first time.

KB: Have you heard about Lal Ded?

Priyanka: He might be some terrorist; I do not know [laughs]. I cannot talk about the things that I do not know. Even my parents have not told me, so what can I say?

“When Kashmiri Pandits go to these shrines old generation people who serve in the shrines become very happy....there are people who cannot digest the fact that a few Kashmiri Pandits are still there”/ “My Kashmiri Muslim friends also visit the temple with me”

When I asked Kripa Mattoo whether she goes to Shrines while living in Kashmir, first she replied in negative, but then she laughed and agreed that she did: “I went to the shrine of Badrish Baba and Rishi Mol”. Kripa Mattoo knows about the shrines in Kashmir but I observed that there was not much enthusiasm in her when she said she has visited these shrines. Ashutosh Ganjoo, who has also not migrated from Kashmir, said,

Whenever Kashmiri Pandits go to these shrines, the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims who serve in the shrines are very happy to see them. They say to us, “You came after so long. It appears as if it were a dream.” But there are some others who do not feel good over our presence here. They say to us, “You [Kashmiri Pandits] are still in Kashmir. You have not gone yet?” They do not like that some Kashmiri Pandits are still in Kashmir.

During my field visit to Kashmir I saw that in public life one cannot see Kashmiri Pandits unless one searches for them. The questions Ashutosh Ganjoo faced while visiting shrines might be the reason for those Pandits who have not migrated from Kashmir refraining from to visiting these shrines. This might be one of the reasons behind the lack of enthusiasm in Kripa’s response about Sufi culture of Kashmir and her visits to shrines.
Mohit Koul, who lives in Kashmir, believes in these shrines: “Yes I believe, and my Kashmiri Muslim friends also go to temples with me”. While saying that his Muslim friends also visit temple with him I could easily observe a sense of the pride reflected in his gestures.

“Sufism was an instrumental for conversion”/“Sufism is declining in Kashmir”. “There is an emerging sect such as Allah-vale they are anti shrines”

When I asked Manish Koul whether he thinks that, due to the turmoil and migration of Kashmiri Pandits, Sufi and Rishi culture has been affected, he replied:

There was no Sufi and Rishi culture in Kashmir. What is Sufism [annoyed]? Sufism developed in Kashmir to attract people of Kashmir towards Islam. They made shrines, Sufi-Sayed came and they started saying Allah-Allah with tune and rhythm similar to the manner people used to recite Hindu mantras because Hindu roots of the people were becoming an obstacle in conversion... So Sufism started as a strategy to attract people towards Islam. For instance, they started reciting Darud-Sharif based on the rhythm of Gayatri mantra [sacred chant] and people thought it is similar to the bhajan-kirtan, the Hindu way of worship. This started trapping people. Kashmiri Muslims even call Lal Ded a Sufi. She was not a Sufi, but a Shivaite. Nund Rishi was her disciple. But she never used Allah word. Even archives are also distorted. Basically, conversions produced confused identity.

KB: Have you ever been to these shrines?
Manish Koul: No, I have never visited them

KB: Have your parents ever visited them when they lived in Kashmir?
Manish Koul: My Parents never visited shrines. Basically, they distorted our temples and made shrines. My grandparents told me that all this was distortion. Those who are less educated used to go; for me, there is no sanctity in these shrines... Muslims also know that these were tactics adopted for conversion. Now there is no utility of these shrines for them also. Now it is over. They broke temples and painted them with green colour. The story is over. Basically, Sufism is not Islamic culture, because Islam does not believe in idol worship.

Manish Koul’s immediate angry reaction shows that he does not believe in Sufi and Rishi practices of Kashmir. He considers Sufism as “tactics” for the conversion of Kashmiri Pandits when Islam arrived in Kashmir. His family members, according to him, also never visited these shrines even when they used to live in Kashmir. Younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits is relying on the heard realities of the past and the lack of first hand experiences also made them believe that Sufism and Rishism had no significance for Kashmiri Pandits as such. Kashmiri Muslims were in dilemma because of the conversion and they adopted this way of worship. So this did not get them acceptance in the greater tradition of Islam. So, at present, for Kashmiri Muslims also, there is no utility of these shrines they are anti-Islam. Trivid Kachru also shared the same opinion:

Sufism was the instrument used for conversion. Otherwise, in Islam, this is not allowed and this is not accepted. Actually, Kashmiri Pandits who got converted were not able to leave their roots then. So, they started reciting Darud loudly like we do our bahjan-kirtan. They introduced a softer version of Islam and gave it the name of Sufism. Our [Kashmiri Pandit] ancestors accepted it because our religion [Hinduism] is very soft and accommodating. As a community we never
believe in harming any one, that is why brotherhood was there. But now the way Darud Sharif is recited by Kashmiri Muslims is also inviting criticism. Earlier the soft version of Islam was needed but now is said that it not allowed in Islam. I think Islam has harmed Kashmir very much and this Sufism played an important role in making people of Kashmir accept Islam.

Kaveri Dhar, who migrated during turmoil but recently she has joined government job in Kashmir has been living there in rental house, said: “Sufism is vanishing in Kashmir slowly. Because there is an emergence of a sect called Allah-vale, they are anti-shrines”. Sachin Kachru thinks that external factors are responsible for wiping Sufi culture of Kashmir:

Now, Sufism is being washed away. Pakistan has destroyed the Sufi culture of Kashmir. Now Kashmiri Muslims are adopting whatever Pakistan follows. Few Kashmiri Muslims are still following it and they are very good, but they have to do what others say and follow. They also cannot do anything. Not even ten per cent of Sufi culture has remained in Kashmir and after twenty years this ten per cent will also vanish.

KB: Have you visited the shrines in Kashmir?

Sachin Kachru: Yes, I have been to Hazaratbal and Baba Rishi during my childhood.

Ranveer Bhatt also endorses this same argument:

In Kashmir there was Sufism but at present a culture of fundamentalism is growing there. There are now elements like Jamaat-i-Islami. At present whatever Kashmiri Muslims are doing is neither the culture of Kashmir nor of the people living there. Kashmir was known for Sufism and Rishism, it was known for its saints. Lal Ded, Nund Rishi they were revered by both the communities by different names. However, Lal Ded was a Kashmiri Pandit, but to develop the psychology among the younger generation that there was only Islam in Kashmir they start giving Islamic name to the shrines of these saints. They want to demolish the Hindu roots of Kashmir. Those who are born during these last twenty years know only about Islam, nothing about Sufism, because they have been brought up in that Islamic culture. They do not support secularism now....

KB: Do you believe in these shrines?

Ranveer Bhatt: Why not, definitely I believe.

KB: Do you think that, because of Islam, Sufism has declined in Kashmir?

Ranveer Bhatt: I will not say that is because of Islam, but it is because of extremism and fundamentalism. Every religion is good but extremism is not good for any religion. I think, in Kashmir, Sufism has comparatively declined. Those who still visit shrines may be going under the influence of their family or parents. There is a huge difference now.

III

Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:
The Nature of Social Relationship

This part of the chapter focuses on the perceptions of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits of past and heard realities of the nature of social relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. Those who were eight or nine years old when they left Kashmir might have faded memories. How the younger generation perceives those past realities and makes meaning out
of the present reality of Kashmiri Pandits’ social relationship with Kashmiri Muslims would be discussed in this part. Attempt will be made here to examine the transformation in the nature of social relationship in the present context, according to the younger generation, and what are the factors that they think are responsible for it. Does the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits feel a sense of belongingness for Kashmir and Kashmiri Muslims? It will also record their views on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir and the possibility of their returning to the Valley? How do they perceive the role of politics and religion in making and breaking of the social relationship between the two communities?

“I have heard that there was love between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits”/ “There was no gap in the past but now there is a gap”

Sonali Kachru talks about the relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri in the past:

I think people in Kashmir also feel that Kashmir is not the same anymore. They [Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims] lived together earlier. I know few people who still have connection. They did not feel that they are Muslims and we are Hindus. There was mutual respect and emotions for each other. Today, it is only on individual level if somebody could maintain, otherwise it is not there. I do not know anybody there, I have no body there [in Kashmir], no friends no connection.

Priyanka Koul has heard from her parents that there was a good relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits

I have heard that Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits were together in their happiness and in their sorrows. In all their problems they were there for each other. At that time there was no difference between them. But terrorism fractured everything. Now there are differences of religion, we do not want to hear about each other. The relationships started fracturing because people stopped interacting with each other during the turmoil. Everybody was concerned about one’s own safety. For instance, in Chandigarh, people from all the states come to sell art and artifact so Kashmiri Muslims also come for that fair. But my parents give us clear instructions that whatever we want we can buy, but there is no need to interact with Kashmiri Muslims. My parents still have fear in their mind.

Sagrika Pandita talked about the gap that has emerged in the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits:

There was no gap between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in the past. They used to help us a lot…but now that gap is there. Older generation had mutual respect, but younger generation will not have the same perspective about Kashmiri Pandits. For instance, I heard that during Janmashtami they used to see procession very happily. They did not touch because they knew that they cannot but they used to be there. But, the younger generation has no idea of that. Kashmiri Pandits also used to visit them on their festivals. Kashmiri Pandits never used to eat in a Muslim house, but they [Kashmiri Muslims] did not feel bad about it…they knew that

When I asked Mohit Koul what differences he has been observing in the nature of social relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits while living in the present Kashmiri society today, he replied:

There was brotherhood among Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, they lived together. But now that thing is not there.
KB: What are your experiences of living here?

Mohit Koul: I think it is not good for Kashmiri Pandits to live in Kashmir now.

KB: Why?

Mohit Koul: Because of militancy there.

KB: But I think it is a bit better now.

Mohit Koul: No, militancy is still there in the villages. Kashmiri Pandits who have a job here have to stay for that. There are only Muslims now, Pandits are very few.

Ashutosh Ganjoo explains whatever he has heard from his father about the society of Kashmir in the past:

I have heard from my father that there were no Hindu-Muslim differences in Kashmir. They used to visit each other’s house frequently. They used to cooperate with each other during marriages. When Pakistan attacked Kashmir in 1947, Kashmiri Muslims saved many Kashmiri Pandits. The irony is that those who were that close started forcing Kashmiri Pandits to leave Kashmir.

KB: Being in Kashmir you must have the experience of the relationships today?

Ashutosh Ganjoo: There is a huge difference now. That old nature of relationship would not be there. That time is gone now. It is finished. There is very little connection.

Similarly, Vishal Bhatt talked about heard realities and his perceptions about that are follows:

I have heard about the culture and people over there. I heard that people were very good and that they used to respect us, but in the name of their community and religion they have lost their senses. They do not think logically. They just go with whatever they are taught. That is their weakness, that is the difference... I think atmosphere was not good there because one was in majority and we were in minority. I heard that the change started coming in 1964, I think there was militancy before 1986, but the gun came only later... At present, we are very different from each other. Our language has changed. We are physically and mentally away from Kashmir.

Kritika Koul said, “I have heard that there were good relationships between us [Kashmiri Pandits] and them [Kashmiri Muslims]. There were family relationships with them. But after migration things got changed. Kashmiri Muslims still come to our house here. We cannot relate to them like as our parents did”.

“We are fed up with listening about the past now; like they tell us we used to wish Kashmiri Muslims on Eid, they used to wish us on Diwali”, said an irritated Ranveer Bhatt. Similarly, Kaveri Dhar said, “Older generation, specifically of 60-65 years of age who have spent their life with Kashmiri Pandits, come and hug me. They say they feel as if they are meeting their friend because I am his daughter”. Kaveri Dhar gets love and recognition on the basis of past relationships of her father with the villagers, because the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims shared the relationship with her father not with her in the past.
“The relationship was always strained”

Reena Raina talks about the emerging differences before the beginning of the turmoil that she remembers:

It was very good atmosphere in Kashmir. Our Kashmiri Muslim neighbours were very good. I had Kashmiri Muslims friends, we used to lunch together like brothers and sisters. As we grew then we understood the emerging differences between the new generations’ thinking and older generations thinking. They started to differentiate that they [Kashmiri Pandits] are Hindu and we [Kashmiri Muslims] are Muslims. Their religion is this, ours is that. This kind of thinking started developing. Though I was very young, but I remember. In schools these things were emerging, I had friends, who never talked about the differences of religion before, suddenly started differentiating them from us and seeing that there is a gap. That gap was not there, my father’s Kashmiri Muslim friends never talked like this. They never saw that gap. Those who were in sixty, their thinking was different from those who were in twenty, thirty and forty at that time. I have a Kashmiri Muslim friend who came to study in Delhi some five or six years ago, she used to visit us when she was in Delhi, now she has gone back to Kashmir.

However, Manish Koul thinks that there was no harmony in Kashmir Society also. He said,

Relationship was always strained; children would get instruction from their parents not to go into Muslim locality. My parents and my grandparents told me that Muslims used to make fun by calling us daali-Bhatt [one who eats pulses], which means we are weak... they used to tell our [Kashmiri Pandit] children they will cut their jeneu/sacred thread. This kind of harassment was there. But Kashmiri Pandits would ignore all these small things. Kashmiri Pandits were always ghettoised in Kashmir. There were specific areas in Srinagar city like Hubbakadal, Rainawari, and Karan Nagar where Kashmiri Pandits used to live.

KB: Did your parents have no relations, even at individual level, with Kashmiri Muslims?

Manish Koul: Personally they used to wish each other, but we never used to inter-dine; intermingling was not there.

KB: Do you think that similarity of language and culture was there?

Manish Koul: That is not same, at least. Second thing is that Kashmiri Pandits’ culture is not dependent on Muslim culture. Kashmiri Muslims talk about fourteenth century onwards but we felt why they talked about the culture after conversion only. There is visible difference between our way of life and their way of life.

KB: Is there no belongingness of language?

Manish Koul: There is no belongingness of language. No connection when things are politically motivated, communally motivated. When they converted, language remained the same. But, for instance, in Jammu, there are Dogra Muslims, but they have no bonding with Dogra Hindus. When there was Amarnath land agitation, Dogra Muslims did not participate in that. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims identify themselves with the Muslim brotherhood. There is Islamic culture. The discourse of Tablighi Jamaat and Jamaat-i-Islami was there during my parents’ time too. They might say that they were Hindus earlier, but this movement of 1990 has changed that thought of their Hindu past.

KB: Did you hear that they used to celebrate festivals together?

Manish Koul: I never heard or saw that. I just remember the burning of temples, threats, warnings that is all. My parents also told that there was nothing like celebrations of festivals together... We were doing our work, they were doing theirs. In 1980 Kashmiri Pandits were not able to take out procession on Janmashtami. They could only go to Hindu areas. Otherwise, Kashmiri Muslims
used to pelt stones on the procession. Since the Police was also helpless so we used to change the route. This was the situation there, and that is why Kashmiri Pandits came out of Kashmir. There was no harmony. It was bound to happen. We were compromising and in 1990 that resilience also ended. There was no compatibility. I wish we could come out of Kashmir earlier so that we could have settled by now; there we lost our property that our parents and grandparents made.

Manish Koul talked about the strained relationships, which he thinks were always the same there. He has not experienced peaceful life in the Valley. He only remembers the time when turmoil started and Kashmiri Pandits left Kashmir under fear. He considers celebration of festivals together as business because there was economic reason and Kashmiri Muslims used to sell things to Kashmiri Pandits during their festivals. Thus, he believes in the Hindu past of Kashmir and perceives that Muslims always believed in the Islamic past. Hence, language could not sustained any belongingness.

“Now we do not focus on the word Kashmiri, but on Muslims and Pandits, it happened in such a way that the repercussion is very clearly stated”/ “Now we hate Kashmiri Muslims because we suffered a lot”

When I asked Sonali Kachru how she looks at the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits at present, she responded as follows:

When you say Kashmiris, everybody starts differentiating Kashmiri Muslims from Kashmiri Pandits... This distinction was not there earlier, but that came when Kashmiri Pandits were forced to migrate. Now we do not focus on “Kashmiri” word but on Muslims and Pandits.... The connection between them is not there anymore.... Change is there definitely. We have disintegrated. Kashmiri identity, Kashmiri culture has disintegrated. Nothing has been left as it was or as it should be.

Sonali Kachru is disheartened that relationships have changed. Culture is fractured and identity is disintegrated. Kashmiris are disintegrated into Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. She thinks that those gaps should get bridged and this is the responsibility of not only Kashmiri Muslims but of all Kashmiris collectively:

People say that there should have been a platform ten years ago where they could meet, but we should talk about what we can do right now. We can do it now, in some way can we bridge it and we can make that connection again. I do not know, but personally feel that at that point of time it was not possible because the wound was very new, there was a lot of remorse, lot of discomfort. Even if they had tried to be nice to each other it would have not helped them. It was like fresh wound, in a fresh wound even if my enemy puts an ointment I would never believe him. Probably that distrust is still moving on.

Kripa Mattoo thinks that people are nice in Kashmir, but the next generation will have no acquaintances with Kashmiri Pandits:

People are nice here... But the coming generation of Kashmiri Muslims would ask who are these Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandits’ younger generation thinks that Kashmiri Muslims have betrayed us. Earlier Kashmiri Muslims used to work on our field, that is why they say there was brotherhood. Now it is not like that, because they have a lot of money now, even Kashmiri Pandits’ land is in their possession, some bought, some occupied. Otherwise things are fine; like when my grandmother passed away, Kashmiri Muslims also came for her funeral....

Meenakshi Bhan thinks that, in place of harmony, hatred has taken roots:
There is nothing [pause]. But there is a very bad feeling for them. It is a kind of hatred for them. We were living peacefully following our way of life, culture. Especially, my grandparents faced a lot of problems. It was very-very difficult because they had been living there for ages. It was easy for us to live in other culture. We were young, but for them it was very difficult. Now we hate Kashmiri Muslims because we suffered a lot.... I do not have memories of celebration of festivals with them because I was very young [when we migrated].

The suffering of Kashmiri Pandits has left them with hatred towards Kashmiri Muslims. The perceptions about Kashmiri Muslims have changed in the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits. Tina Suthu said, “Now if I think about Kashmiri Muslims, the first thing that comes to my mind is that they are Kashmiri Muslims, they must have had contacts with militants. This is fixed in our minds now”.

Avinash Bhan said that, even though he does not remember much, he remembers that where there were cordial relations, but there were differences also. He said:

I was a kid that time, so I do not know much. But I remember one of my best school friends was a Muslim. When situation started getting bad in Kashmir, he would inform my parents that he had heard that in Masjid something was going to happen and would warn my parents not to go out that day. That way it was a very cordial relationship. Some clashes might have happened but that was not at very big level. My father’s close friends were Kashmiri Muslims. They used to visit us on Shivratri. I remember that I used to visit my school friend on Eid and used to take lunch at his house. We used to play together. But during India-Pakistan match we knew who is going to support whom. It was there, yes it was there. In my conscious memory, on Independence day, I never saw an Indian flag. But during 1985-86, I was able to understand a bit that there are religious differences between us. They have had religious attachment to Pakistan. Individual to Individual there were good relationships but collectively it was different. They would not support India, my father’s friends were not orthodox, but they could not support India directly. There was pressure on them. These things are in my conscious memory.

“There will be no brotherhood”/ “People got separated because of religion, because of terrorism, because of the havoc that had been created there”

When I enquired of Trivid Kachru who lives in Kashmir and had not migrated, whether he thinks that there will be that kind of cordial relationship again that existed earlier, he questioned me instead: “Do you think so?” But he responded himself promptly: “No nothing can change now. No brotherhood will be there, because if you break the wood you cannot fix it again in the same manner. There will be more crises because all this is political”.

Endorsing the same opinion Puja Bhatt also lives Kashmir said, “We were together, but it is different now. Because our generation is very different and Kashmiri Pandits left here are very less in number, so how can relationships be there. People do not know who Pandits are. We cannot hope for that brotherhood in Kashmir now. May be, [no enthusiasm] if Kashmiri Pandits comes back then...”

Other participants feels the same way and narrate the same story; either they are unaware of those cordial relationships, or they feel everything has vanished because of breach of trust. As Priyanka Koul said, “I do not have any idea about their relationships much, but I have heard that people were well connected to each other. They were together earlier but got separated because of religion, because of terrorism, because of the havoc that had been created there. Otherwise,
Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits were together. Only after terrorism they were divided”. And Vishal Bhatt thinks “we do not match each other mentally and physically anymore. They come here [to Jammu] we go there [to Kashmir] but I have not been to Kashmir. My parents went, but could not adjust there even for few days”.

Ashutosh Ganjoo a non-migrant explains his present relationships with Kashmiri Muslims in Kashmir:

Yes, I do have Muslim friends. Few of them do not know who Kashmiri Pandits are. They asked who I am? They are from that area where there is no Kashmiri Pandit living at present. They ask me about symbols I wear like this kadda [iron bangle]. They ask me why I wear this, this is sin in Islam. Then I tell them that I am not a Muslim, I am a Kashmiri Pandit, but they do not know who Pandits are. I take them to the library to explain them who are Kashmiri Pandits. There are some young boys who wonder when Kashmiri Pandits ran away from Kashmir long back why I have not left. They feel bad that I am still living in Kashmir. Some friends are good also. Things have changed here that earlier concept of relationships is not there.... That composite cultural identity is finished nobody will tell you this, because people have fear in their heart... now we cannot trust them. Village atmosphere is still better, but in urban areas it has changed...

Ranveer Bhatt thinks that, with the changing mind-set, relationships also changed: “We are the same blood and have the same language. Only they got converted and their mind set has changed, they see themselves as Muslims only. There was a feeling among them that Kashmiri Pandits were landowners and Kashmiri Muslims would work in their fields”. The perceived relative deprivation changed the mind set of Kashmiri Muslims and, after conversion, for them, being Muslims was rather significant because of which other similarities of the gene pool and language got overlooked. Hence, the situation is completely changed now, as Sachin Kachru said: “They see us as a enemy and we also see them as an enemy”.

Thus the discussion above has brought out that the nature of social relationship as perceived by the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits is changing as a result of which the brotherhood has been replaced by enmity. The next theme would discuss the young generations’ belongingness to Kashmir and what difference do they feel in their belongingness to Kashmir and their parent’s belongingness to that place and people over there.

“Belongingness is there, “it is my native place”/“We are Kashmiri Pandits they are Muslims”/ “there is no possibility of any connection”

I asked Ranveer Bhatt whether he feels some belongingness to Kashmir; he said, “Absolutely, belongingness is there. Sometimes I feel if Kashmir is not for Kashmiri Pandits then it should get destroyed completely. If it is not ours’ [Kashmiri Pandits’] it should not be others’ also”. Akash Koul has no Kashmiri Muslim friends but their former Kashmiri Muslim neighbour of Kashmir comes to meet them in Jammu sometimes: “Our neighbours come, we are in touch with them, but I do not know about their children. If I had been there, obviously friendship would have developed. He has no hope that any friendship can develop in future: “That is not going to happen; you must have heard this: Rehiman dgaha prem ka... once grudge has developed between
us, there is no possibility of reconciliation. They are in majority and they have political control also...The hatred between us will percolate down from generation to generation”.

Sonali Kachru explains how she feels belongingness to Kashmir:

I will tell you about myself, I have never gone to Kashmir. I was born in Amritsar and all my education happened in Delhi. Definitely, I know that there are lots of things that are common between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. When we say we are Kashmiris, the next question people often ask “Kashmiri Pandits or Kashmiri Muslims”. It does not make much difference; I believe probably people just want to know it. That is what I feel. Regarding how I feel about Kashmir is [pause] I have been not personally much attached to Kashmir. I went to Kashmir when I was very young, I never lived there. Still I know the fact that our roots are there. My in-laws’ house was there, my parents house is there, and I have heard from my father that they have lived there. This and that he used tell us lots of things. Belongingness is completely different. Till this date there is a streak of hope that we will get that back, but it has not yet happened. It does not seem to be even happening. That somehow I also can sense and I also feel bad about. Disputes are really getting stretched, elongated. They are not getting solved. I think, instead of finding solution, they are just making a mess and creating more problems.... My husband knows more than me because he has lived there. He has gone through that turmoil of running out of his house. I remember he went to Kashmir few years back to see his house. He took pictures of his house where he used to live. But I could sense what my husband and his father felt. There is a lot of lapse, it is very sad. Talking about it makes me very emotional even though I have not lived there I feel oh! my god why cannot I have it despite the fact that it was mine.

KB: Do you see the difference between you and your elders in the feeling of belongingness?

Sonali Kachru: I still feel equal belongingness, even though I have not lived there. Question here is not whether I have lived there or not, at least knowing that this is my place, I would want to go back. That opportunity I am not getting; the opportunity of recreating peaceful atmosphere, settling there, at least going there even as a visitor I am not getting.

This long narrative shows that the Sonali Kachru, who has not lived in Kashmir, feels Kashmir is her also, she is rooted there. However, though there is a difference in connection as compared to that of her parents and grandparents.

Anger can be sensed through this outburst of Ranveer Bhatt, “it should get destroyed completely. If it is not ours’ [Kashmiri Pandits’] it should not be of others also”. Expression of helplessness is manifest in Sonali Kachru’s lament, “I feel .... why cannot I have it despite the fact that it [Kashmir] was mine”. Whereas Ranveer Bhatt feels no connection to Kashmiri Muslims, Sonali Kachru thinks that there are lots of similarities between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, although Kashmiris are categorised into Muslims and Pandits and this is a stark categorisation.

Priyanka Koul told me that she does not speak Kashmiri. When I asked her if she felt any belongingness to Kashmir, she said, “Obviously, it is my native place where I have taken birth. I was 2-3 months old when I left Kashmir”. When I asked her whether she felt that, being Kashmiri she could connect with Kashmiri Muslims, she explained:

Basically, Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits can connect in the sense of being Kashmiris. Kashmiri Muslims live in Kashmir and they are Kashmiri and they also know Kashmiri language. But their religion is Islam and they are Kashmiri Muslims, we cannot connect to them. They are completely different from us, they are separate categories we are Kashmiri Pandits they are Muslims.
“There will not be any difference in belongingness but there will be no belongingness at all to Kashmir”/ “They [Kashmiri Muslims] also have no belongingness to Kashmiri Pandits”

Mohit Koul thinks that the connection from that other side is also broken. As he lives in Kashmir, he explains things according to his own experience of living there. He said, “New generation of Kashmiri Muslims has no idea about Kashmiri Pandits. They also have no belongingness to Kashmiri Pandits; they do not know anything about Pandits....”.

Avinash Bhan explains that difference of belongingness in terms of generation to generation:

I am giving a drastic statement: there will not only be any difference in belongingness, there will be no belongingness at all to Kashmir. My father has lived his prime life in Kashmir and I have lived there for some ten years. I do have some belongingness, but my son, born in Chandigarh and one year now, what belongingness would he have with Kashmir. He will only know that he is a Kashmiri Pandit. What to speak of belongingness. The coming generation of Kashmiri Pandits will not even be able to speak in Kashmir.

The narrative shows that, being out of Kashmir, Avinash Koul has lost the touch with Kashmir; he has not visited Kashmir after the migration.

Similarly, Vishal Bhatt has said, “I see myself as a tourist in Kashmir; since I have not seen anything of Kashmir, how can I feel any kind of belongingness to Kashmir. I cannot say about roots, because I have not lived there. For example, a child who is brought up in Bombay will not be able to know about Jammu; he will not be able to connect to Jammu”.

Sagrika Pandita said that she does not feel that connection with Kashmir as her parents feel, “I feel, I want to see, but I cannot stay there. We do not have that much belongingness, but when I think from my parents’ perspective then I feel how difficult it is to detach yourself from your place. We are settled here [in Udhampur] now. If we have to leave this place how bad will I feel? Similarly, for them also it is different”.

Kaveri Dhar, after taking up job in Kashmir, started feeling that connection with the place and people over there. She said,

Frankly speaking, Dogras of Jammu are Hindus, but we do not feel connected to them. Our culture is different, our language is different. But, when I go to Kashmir, I feel oh! They [Kashmiri Muslims] are my own, though their religion is different, they speak the same language that I speak. I do not feel that I am different from them. My father says that individually nobody is better than Kashmiri Muslims in this world, particularly the older generation; they cry whenever we meet them. But those who are young say I am Hindu girl... the problem is that while I am in Kashmir my co-workers ask me when would I go to my home [Jammu] and while in Jammu people would ask us when would we go to Kashmir.

Kaveri Dhar’s perception changed when she started living in her village and started interacting with Kashmiri Muslims and seeing similarities of culture and language between her and Kashmiri Muslims. But, she faces a dilemma: on one side, Jammu people think that Kashmiri Pandits’ real place is Kashmir, and on the other, Kaveri Dhar’s co-workers [Kashmiri Muslims] in Kashmir feel that her real home is in Jammu. Kaveri Dhar does not feel attached to Dogras of
Jammu even though they are from the same religious faith. But the similarities of culture and language develop a feeling of closeness with Kashmiri Muslims.

The next theme is about the perceptions on the migration and factors responsible for the migration, according to the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits.

“They perceive Jagmohan wanted to kill Muslims through bombardment, so he evacuated Pandits first”.

Ashutosh Ganjoo explains the reason behind the migration of Kashmiri Pandits:

It was a strange wave that came in 1990... When neighbours became militants, because militants used to come to their house. They used to give them money. One day our neighbours said, the situation is not good here better you should leave. During 1990 we left Srinagar city and went to our village in Kashmir to live with my grandparents. We stayed there for three years, and then we returned to our home in Srinagar again. They [Kashmiri Muslims] were not educated so they got trapped politically. Basically, Kashmiri Muslims have emotions and feelings, so they could not carry militant ideal for a long time. That is why Afghani militants came in the next phase of militancy. I have read and also heard from Kashmiri Muslims that governor Jagmohan has evacuated Kashmiri Pandits. They perceived that, since Jagmohan wanted to kill Muslims through bombardment, he evacuated Pandits first. But, the question is, why did not he come to my parents and tell them to leave. There were hit lists and through those hit lists they used to convey the message to leave by tomorrow or get killed. This was the situation here from 1990 to 1997.

Mohit Koul said, “I was just six year old when tehrik started ... Pandits were scared, so they left. I heard that governor Jagmohan told Kashmiri Pandits to leave, but there was Pakistani pressure. Similarly, Manish Koul said, “This is wrong to say Governor Jagmohan had a role in migration. During 1986 also Kashmiri Pandits migrated but at that time Jagmohan was not there. It was a process of Islamisation and they [Kashmiri Muslims] blame Jagmohan”. “Jagmohan was like a god to us because of whom we were saved. Otherwise government wanted us to die there only”, Vishal Bhatt said.

“Because of militancy Pandits got migrated” / “We were under fear that somebody would come and kill us”

Puja Bhatt said “the situation was tense there. People were scared. In our village one Kashmiri Pandit was killed and other left under fear”. Kripa Mattoo said, because of militancy Pandits got migrated: “Actually militants used to come. They killed people, they looted them. Once they kidnapped one Kashmiri Pandit for interrogation, so all Pandits left then. We were also supposed to leave, but my grandmother was not well that time so we could not leave”. There was a threat to the life of Kashmiri Pandits, so they left Kashmir as per Kripa Mattoo’s narrative. “My uncle was in CID (Criminal Investigation Department) and, therefore, the militants were after us. That is why we left. They had killed one or the other in every village, so there was terror. I think still Muslims have their contact with militants” said Tina Suthu.

Avinash Bhan was on a holiday with his relatives in Jammu when migration took place:
I was supposed to go back in February. Then militancy started. In March 1990 my parents came and told me that things are not good there so I should stay in Jammu with my relatives. After some time we will see when we can go there but that time did not come, we could not go there and I have not seen Kashmir after that.

The heard past realities make Priyanka Koul perceives that Muslims are responsible for Kashmiri Pandits migration:

I heard the situation was very bad there. Muslims are responsible for the migration of my parents. They threw them [Kashmiri Pandits] out. They were standing outside our house and telling us to leave Kashmir otherwise we would be killed by them. My mother was newly married then. She took her gold only and they left Kashmir. I feel negative about Muslims. Because they wanted to occupy the whole Kashmir, so they drove Kashmiri Pandits out of Kashmir.

The narrative shows that migration has developed hatred in Priyanka Koul towards Kashmiri Muslims because she has heard from her parents and other sources about their experiences of turmoil in Kashmir. While Reena Raina said that her family did not move during the mass migration, rather they waited two years for improvement in the situation:

Kashmiri Muslims say we migrated ourselves, no one forced us. Sometimes Kashmiri Muslims come to us and said these things. We were feeling like we were guests in our house. We were under fear that somebody would come and kill us. To go out was difficult. Even my family migrated little later from Kashmir. I and one other Kashmiri Pandit girl were there. One day something happened in our school. That day my father decided that it was wrong now to stay in Kashmir, and then we shifted. Even now young Kashmiri Muslims boys come here to sell Kashmiri goods like shawls. Once my father called them to our house. My uncle asked them why they allowed militancy to destroy Kashmir. They replied that they were hardly two years old when militancy started. They do not know anything. You can complain to my father, but I do not have any answer to these questions. I do not even know that there were Hindus staying in Kashmir, one of them said. May be they know through other people that Kashmiri Pandits were living there but they have not seen.

Kaveri Dhar is upset and said, “Sometimes I think of killing those who have done this to our community. We had a joint family, everyone is scattered now. My father’s business is finished. We started hating them [Kashmiri Muslims]. But when I went to Kashmir I saw people and found them good...” Kaveri Dhar’s perception changed a bit about Kashmiri Muslims after taking up job there and living with the people over there. Similarly, when other participants visited Kashmir after migration, what experiences were formed? would be discuss in next theme:

“I was mesmerised by the view”... “I said I will say namaste why should I say salaam”/ “We can see the love in their [older generation people of both the communities] eyes, they cried they were very happy”

Meenakshi Bhan visited Kashmir once after migration. She explains her experience as follows:

I went to Kashmir in 2006. When the plane was landing; I was mesmerised by the view. I saw my roof. I loved that place so much. In traditional Kashmiri houses there happens to be a store on the roof top to keep rice and other eatables for the whole year. It was a fresh breath. It was so good. At that time my father had a job there for one year; so my parents were there... our driver was a Muslim, so my mother wanted me to say adaab or salam to that driver. I said I would wish him by saying namaste, why should I say salaam when in my culture we pay respect to other people by saying namaste. If he wants to respond by saying salam, I am fine with that. Then I went to see my house. There was a picture in my mind of my home. When I saw my house, there were three-four
storey buildings in the surrounding, there are so many houses there now. One girl saw us and told me that they miss us [generally Kashmiri Pandits]. Although, I did not know anybody there, we all were in tears. I saw my yard where me and my brother used to play. There were my fathers’ Kashmiri Pandits colleagues, we met them. We went like tourists for ten days that time. I recall everything, I feel sad.

Similarly, Kritika Koul visited Kheer Bhavani temple in Kashmir on the festival of Ashtami. Many Kashmiri Pandits go there to celebrate this festival every year. She said,

Yes we go there to celebrate the festival in Tulmula.

KB: Did you interact with people over there?

Kritika Koul: With them [Kashmiri Muslims] we did not interact much. But our parents meet them and they hugged each other. We can see love in their eyes; they cry, they seem very happy to see us. The older generation has that connection. But the younger generation goes there just to enjoy, seeing beauty of Kashmir, because there is no emotional attachment for them.

Anup Bhatt visits Kashmir frequently because of Amarnath pilgrimage. He said,

We have faded memories, but when we go there we can recollect many things slowly. I go there for Amarnath pilgrimage. We did not visit our home for six years because of fear, but later we could gather courage and then dared to go to Srinagar also... weather is so good there, it is not the same here in Jammu.

Kaveri explains her experiences of living in Kashmir after taking up a job there:

It was beyond my imagination that I would go to Kashmir and do job there. I saw my burnt house there. I live in a rented house there in my own village.

KB: How do people there treat you?

Kaveri Dhar: They treat me very nicely. They try to help me in everything. But I feel insecure; in my village, I am the only Kashmiri Pandit, so I cannot stay there alone. My father stays with me there. I cover my head there [like other Muslim girls] because you have to hide your identity there for security, because out of ten people nine people may be your supporters but one may consider you a kaffir [those who do not believe in Allah, non-Muslim]. They may think that I am a outsider.

KB: Do you feel that you are an outsider there?

Kaveri Dhar: I feel so, but my father is welcomed by everyone there, because he has spent thirty five years of his life there. I was a kid then and nobody remembers me, nobody knows me and whenever I go there they say she is Kashmiri Pandit girl [bolte hai bhatta koorr hai].... the new generation has no emotions, they have religious boost only. There is lot of emphasis on religion in Kashmir. On the basis of religion, they can kill a Hindu.

KB: Before visiting Kashmir, what was in your mind?

Kaveri Dhar: There was aggression inside me. When Kashmiri Muslims used to come to our home in Jammu to meet my father, I did not feel like even making tea for them. But people of my village have given me so much love, children are also happy that some Kashmiri Pandit teacher teaches them.

The next theme would discuss the perception of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits about the prospects of Kashmiri Pandits returning to Kashmir permanently.
There is no security for even those who are living in Kashmir/After graduation I will move to Poona/ “If I get a job outside I will leave Kashmir”

When I asked Kripa Bhatt, who lives in Kashmir, if she would continue to live in Kashmir, she laughed and said, “Who told you. I think it is rather good outside. I think after graduation, I will move to Poona, because there is everything there” During conversation with her she also mentioned: “I keep dupatta/scarf on my head. Here, in Kashmir, all women do so [laughs]. When I go to Jammu or Poona, I do not keep dupatta/scarf on my head”. Kripa Bhatt does not want to live in Kashmir much longer there are many other young Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir who also want to leave Kashmir one day. Even Kripa said: “May be my uncle and my parents also will move out of Kashmir”.

A similar conversation took place when I met a young Kashmiri Pandit girl. She covered her head like most young Kashmiri Muslim girls. I did not ask her about it, but she herself said, “you must be thinking why I cover my head. This is nothing because of some pressure. This we do out of our own choice”. I said, “I did not ask you about that”. To this she replied, “I knew that you could ask this”. Kashmiri Pandits who are living in Kashmir seem to feel some insecurity, so they do not want to get identified as Kashmiri Pandits in the public life of Kashmir. Moreover, the growing sense of insecurity is forcing some them to think of moving out of Kashmir.

Trivid Kachru gives various impediments to the homecoming of Kashmiri Pandits:

Indian government says that they will get back Kashmiri Pandits and give them safety here in Kashmir. But first they should think of giving security to those Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir. I think Kashmiri Pandit identity is finished. We are Indians, we are used by the Indian government. Now they are saying they will provide jobs to migrant Kashmiri Pandits if they return to Kashmir. And there are people among Kashmiri Muslims who do not like the return of Kashmiri Pandits. They say that the situation is fine now, but actually nothing is fine. I tell you, in the real sense, there is something different inside, because both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits cannot live together now. There is no meeting point for them. They will not accept each other. Earlier the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits was very submissive but the new generation is not so. They will not keep quiet, they will not accept if someone said something to them. They are not going to bear that. There will be a constant altercation.

Ashutosh Ganjoo thinks that Kashmiri Pandits will return to Kashmir. He said,

There are differences in ideology of the new generation of Kashmiri Pandits. Some want to save their cultural heritage, some are just interested in going abroad and settle there because there is nothing left in Kashmir now. Some are settled in Delhi they are adjusted there. When we go out of Kashmir to meet our relatives, we also think of settling outside, but then we think what will happen to this temple, who will take care of it [he is talking about temple near his house that he and his family take care of]. Only few people can think like this. Most people want to move out. They all are earning well then why will outside they return to Kashmir?

But Mohit Koul, who is working in Kashmir and has not migrated, thinks that the government now wants Kashmiri Pandits back in Kashmir.

KB: Do you think that they will return?

Mohit Koul: May be.
KB: Do you think the atmosphere will be fine when they return?

Mohit Koul: It may be ok, but it will take time

KB: Do you think that they will be an accepted by Kashmiri Muslims?

Mohit Koul: The older generation of Kashmiri Muslims want Kashmiri Pandits back, but the younger generation does not know about Kashmiri Pandits.

KB: How do the Kashmiri Pandits living outside look at Kashmir today?

Mohit Koul: They say Kashmir is Pakistan now. Those who left Kashmir at that time, their children are settled in Delhi, Bombay, and Bangalore. They will not come back now. They have sold their properties also. Here also, till the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims is there it will be ok, but after that nothing will be left in Kashmir for Kashmiri Pandits.

KB: Are you going to settle in Kashmir or you will also move out?

Mohit Koul: I will be there till I have this job. If I get a job outside then I will also move out of Kashmir... I have no aim to live here, only because of job I am here. We have sold our house, I am staying on rent here.

Thus, the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits perceive that Kashmir is not the same anymore, even people like Mohit Koul who live in Kashmir will do so till they have some reason to be there. The older generation of Kashmiri Muslims still feel connected with Kashmiri Pandits, but the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims has no emotional attachment with them. There is also no hope of return of Kashmiri Pandit migrant community. So, there is a void in the life of Kashmiri Pandits who are still living in Kashmir. There is nothing to which they can look up to. They are also looking outside for economic resources so that they can also move out of Kashmir.

Puja Bhatt who stays in Kashmir said: “We have settled in Kashmir now so we will not move out of Kashmir... I wish migrant Kashmiri Pandits should return” If they do not return, there will be only one community by and large... I feel bad to see their empty and ruined houses; we do not know when they will return to Kashmir. There are only two Pandit houses in our village now. We visit each other only. Muslims also visit us sometimes”. Puja Bhatt is the only participant who said that she is settled in Kashmir and has no plan to move out of Kashmir. But there is a desire that the whole community should come back so that there are more Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir.

“I have a desire to return, I have right to enjoy my land but I cannot go back”

Tina Suthu wants to return to Kashmir. She said,

I want to go there, but our parents will not allow us to go there. They do not even let us visit Kashmir. I asked them for my admission in Kashmir University, but they did not let me do that. They cannot trust them [Kashmiri Muslims] now. If all Kashmiri Pandits return together then it would be a different thing. Then parents will have no problem.

KB: Do you think that the atmosphere will be the same if you return to Kashmir?

Tina Suthu: I do not think so; it cannot be, because the trust has been broken between us and to rebuild that is very difficult.
Sonali Kachru has strong desire to return to Kashmir:

I would love to go there, why not. I am working in Delhi, but we have a house in Jammu. You may think if I am not staying in Jammu why would I stay in Kashmir. But I do come back to Jammu. Only because of economic factors, I am in Delhi. For that matter, everybody goes out of the house for work, but we keep coming back to our home also. I cannot think to go back to Kashmir. There is a constant fear, which does not let Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir.

KB: What stops you? I think the situation there is better now.

Sonali: Now-a-days it is better, but it is not as good as other places where people can settle down. Hope to go back is there, whether we will able to go back or not, this question is still there. The hope is there from the last twenty years, willingness is there, desire is there, but its happening is like a dream. Hope will always be there...

“There is insecurity”/ “There is no employment”

Meenakshi Bhan does not have even any desire to return to Kashmir permanently. She said,

We do not see ourselves going back to Kashmir, it is totally different. Even if we want to return, we cannot, because our profession, our work would not allow us to do so... may be after retirement. But I do not think even that is possible because there is a kind of hatred in our hearts. We can go for ten fifteen days for holidays that is it. Despite the fact that Kashmir belongs to Kashmiri Pandits, we cannot go there.

Avinash Bhan also thinks it is very difficult even to think that Kashmiri Pandits will return to Kashmir:

I think it is very difficult because there is no sustenance. I think important not only to return for to our roots but it is equally important to know from where our bread and butter will come... Second thing is security, for instance, if I go out of my home in the morning, it is not certain whether I will return alive in the evening or not, because I belong to a particular community. Socio-economically, it is not possible. We are up-rooted, we do not have a house there, Kashmir is not the same for us now. So one would think about safety of his family rather than his emotions, culture or his roots...

Priyanka Koul said, she does not want to settle down in Kashmir even though the desire is there:

...We want to return, but if something happens there, then? For some days we can go there as a tourist. If they [Kashmiri Muslims] come to know about us through some ornaments that Kashmiri Pandit women wear like dehzoor they can identify us. Then it is not safe in the long run for Kashmiri Pandits. Circumstances are like that. Now we are well versed with this place [Chandigarh]. There are many Kashmiri Pandits living here. We get together or Shivratri, on Navreh [Kashmiri Pandit celebrate new year on this day]

Rena Raina expresses her fear in the same manner:

Even at present when we talk about Kashmir, our eyes are full of tears. We have desire to go there, but we cannot go... There is fear inside us and that fear will not let us go there. Only as a tourist we can go. There is no question of returning there forever.

The fear and desire are co-mingled, but the fear is overpowering the desire. So the perception prevails that it is not safe for Kashmiri Pandits to stay in Kashmir because of their past experiences and future uncertainties.

Sagrika Pandita is in a dilemma whether she will be able to adjust in Kashmir or not:

I want to see Kashmir. But to go there and to stay forever [pause], I do not if I will feel safe there.
Separatist leaders have also said that they will welcome Kashmiri Pandits.

Suppose they do welcome us. But they cannot keep eye on every one, for everyone there will not be security guards. The most important thing is trust, who knows who has changed. What has changed and how much...

Similarly, Anup Bhatt said, “Kashmiri is a good as a tourist place only, for me. We would love to return to Kashmir but what will we do there, and how would we survive?” Even he is not interested in any job policy or package for Kashmiri Pandits by the government. He said, “I am telling you, we youth are career oriented. What we will get out of a government job. When we think that there are only Muslims, there is kind of risk there”.

When I asked Vishal Bhatt if he wanted to stay in Kashmir, he promptly replied: “No, never, this is not possible at all. Once gun has entered, the situation cannot be normal there. Moreover, if Kashmiri Pandits go back, then they [Kashmiri Muslims] will have to return their property”. His sister Rita Bhatt interrupts and explains the reason why they do not want to return:

If Kashmiri Pandits return then Kashmiri Muslims have to leave their property. They do not want Kashmiri Pandits back for this reason also. They come here and tell us why we do not return to Kashmir. And then they [Kashmiri Muslims] also admit that gun is there, but we are with you. When they create fear of gun, then who wants to return. Whenever my elder brother goes there, we feel so scared until he returns. So how can we go there when there is fear inside our heart?

“Job policies and packages are politics”, “Kashmir is Islamic republic”

Manish Koul’s response to the question on returning to Kashmir is as follows:

Our forefather’s experiences were not good and ultimately our experiences are drastic in Kashmir. In the Jammu and Kashmir, minority is not protected. Hindus are shunned out from Kashmir, they are killed but there is no commission set up by India. For first time in 1989 Kashmiri Pandits have completely come out of Kashmir. Migration happened earlier also and then some got converted also, but this time we have moved out of Kashmir with our own religion. Our property is finished but our religions have not got changed this time. Recently there is a job policy to take Kashmiri Pandits back, but they want us to sign a contract that whatever will be the situation you will not move out of Kashmir again. They are not able to understand that this is a religious problem, this is political problem, this is a social problem and there is a security problem. The agreement is a blackmailing tactic. Community will go back on its own terms. Now we have got jobs outside. We are stable economically also. We young people are sensitizing our community about what had happened to us. We want to go back, but on our own conditions. If converts of 14th century are saying that Kashmir is theirs’, then our belongingness to Kashmir is five thousand years’ old and our right is first on Kashmir. There is a yearning to go back. This is an insult for us that we are out of our homeland. For example, when we go out of our home, we definitely want to return one day. Our grandparents died in front of us. They wanted to see Kashmir; we have seen sufferings of our elders. They caught and suffered many disease and psychological problems. When we youngsters see all this we burn with anger.

The narrative shows that the experiences of parents and the memory of turmoil is letting Manish Koul perceive that the minority is not protected in Kashmir. Job policies are also perceived as one of the tactics to drag Kashmiri Pandits to Kashmir and force them to live in whatsoever is the situation there. So the Kashmiri Pandits do not see them as a positive step in their rehabilitation in Kashmir.
Sachin Kachru perceives that there is politics behind this saying “we welcome Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir”. He explains:

They say they will welcome us. This is all politics, just to tell the world that we are together.... Kashmiri Muslims also tell us that come back to Kashmir. We also say that we will come; Kashmir is our own this and that. We cannot say in friend circle that you people are now Pakistani. There is no place for us, no security for us, attacks are happening even on army camps, then where is the security. We still have land there. They come to persuade us to sell our land to them, but we will not sell as they offer very less amount.

Similarly, Ranveer Bhatt said:

It is very difficult to return to Kashmir now. The gap between both the communities is deep-rooted. Kashmir in one sense has become an Islamic republic. Ethnic cleansing has changed our connection now, we are more connected to Jammu because here I have my friends now. They are Dogras of Jammu and those Kashmiri Pandits who are living here in Jammu. Now, we have inclination towards Jammu. But yes, we do desire to see Kashmir, to go there. But there are very less chances of our going back to Kashmir.

Kaveri Dhar, who is presently in a job there does not want to settle in Kashmir, because she thinks “Kashmiri Muslims dominate there, they consider Kashmiri Pandits inferior.

“We will go back but we want union territory under Indian constitution”/ “Living with Kashmiri Muslims is very difficult”/ “We want separate homeland”, “Fear and threat will be there also”

Manish Koul said that there is only one condition to return to Kashmir, that is, the separate Union Territory for Kashmiri Pandits. He explains:

We will go back but we want union territory there... Among all the organisations of Kashmiri Pandits such as Pannun Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandit Conference, All India Kashmiri Samaz, and Delhi Kashmiri Samiti, there is consensus on the homeland issue. We do not want special status. We suffered because of that. We want that kind of structure where Indian constitution would apply completely.

KB: Don’t you think Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits have future together?

Manish Koul: There is no future together. Geelani has said that Kashmir will be an Islamic state and nothing else. How can we live under the banner of Islam?. We have no future with Kashmiri Muslims. We see our future only with India; they do not see their future with India.

The narrative shows that Kashmiri Pandits do not see future in Kashmir with Kashmiri Muslims. If there is anything that creates the possibility of their return, it is the separate homeland or union territory for them without any special status. Similarly, Ranveer Bhatt said, “the only solution is union territory for Kashmiri Pandits with in India. Living with them [Kashmiri Muslims] is very difficult now”

Vishal Bhatt said, he agrees with the demand of separate homeland but his sister Rita Bhatt again interrupted and said “But if militants will throw bomb there, then all the Kashmiri Pandits would get killed”. Meenakshi Bhan thinks that separate homeland is a good idea, but she rather prefers separate Kashmiri societies in various other cities of India than in Kashmir.
Thus, the idea of a separate homeland is acceptable to some younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits, but it does not appear to reduce the fear among them. The discussion above brought out that most of the participants do not want to return to Kashmir and some of them support the idea of a separate homeland. The next theme would discuss the role of religious and political factor in creating the separation between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits and the unmaking of composite cultural identity.

“There is a clash of religious identities, social identities and political identities”/“Kashmir identity is nothing different from Sanskrit identity of India”/“They try to interpret Kashmir as part of Islam”

Manish Koul talked about the perspective of the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims towards Kashmiri Pandits:

I will tell you about one incident. I went for an interview in Kashmir. One young Kashmiri Muslim boy, may be in his twenties, was also there. Obviously, he had not seen me and I had not seen him before. I asked him what he thinks about us [Kashmiri Pandits]. He said that he has not grown up with Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandits are out of Kashmir because you were against our freedom movement. You are Indian agents. Kashmiri Pandits talked about Indian nationalism, so you are Indians. When I questioned him what about the land that is of Kashmiri Pandits’, he said your land your homes are there.... He also said that there is no ground where we can meet each other. I told him that my perception is the same as his that we cannot meet now. Even during Amarnath controversy, the younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims was influenced by saying that this land is not of Hindus.... In their mind somewhere they think that they did a great job by throwing Kashmiri Pandits out of Kashmir. So, why they will let them come back in Kashmir. If I go to my house in Kashmir they will question me why I have came back to Kashmir.... There is a diversion politically and religiously both ways. They identify themselves not only with Pakistan but with whole Muslim brotherhood. That is why they say Nizam-i-Mustafa will prevail in Kashmir. There should be political empowerment of Kashmiri Pandits. Society can never be regenerated until there is political empowerment. There should be Indian constitution, not Article 370. Muslim regime always tried to Islamised Kashmir. They changed the name of various places for instance they call Hari Parbat as Koyhe-Maharan, Shankracharya has become Takhte-Suleman, Anantnag is Islamabad. If this is not Islamisation what else is this?

KB: If you have to define Kashmiri ethnic identity, how will you do it?

Manish Koul: Kashmiri identity is nothing different from Sanskrit identity of India. Kashmiri identity itself is the Sanskrit culture of India. Muslims are converted people; they try to interpret Kashmir as part of Islam. I think conversion developed neurosis of Kashmiriyat and Kashmiri Muslim identity is a part of that neurosis of conversion process which took place in the fourteenth century. Now they are not ready to reconcile at all with the aborigines that is, Kashmiri Pandits. Fine, if they got converted but those who did not convert also belong to that culture. Basically, those who are the original habitants of Kashmir represent Kashmiriyat. We are the roots of Kashmir and obviously roots are very important part for a tree.

KB: Then who do you think represents Kashmiriyat?

Manish Koul: Aborigines of Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits exactly. If that Kashmiriyat is the name of identity then my Kashmiriyat is different for me, that is, Sanskrit civilisation. Sanskrit civilisation is Kashmiriyat of Kashmir. Now Kashmiriyat has been used to gain the maximum benefits from the Government of India and international organisations.

KB: How you understand Kashmiri ethnic identity?
Manish Koul: If we talk about ethnic identity then they will say that they are part of Islam. Kashmiri ethnic identity is the basic civilisation of Kashmir and in that there was no difference. But, if we say that Kashmiriyyat is based on Islam, then we have to say that they have made Kashmir a part of Muslim Ummah... There is a politics motivated by religion in Kashmir... It was religion based politics: The clash of identities would always be there. Kashmiri Muslims say, that they are not a part of India. Kashmiri Pandits say, they are a part of India. Kashmiri Pandits got punishment for being Indian. When you humiliate someone and forced him to leave his home and hearth, there will certainly be a feeling of revenge inside him.

Kritika Koul said: “Earlier it was different in Kashmir, people used to live together. But now the thinking has changed. Even though I feel we should live together again, but we now focus more on Hindu culture and they are more inclined towards Muslim culture...” Sachin Kachru thinks that “Hurriyat Conference is playing political game through religion”.

“If it [religion] did not hamper before this turmoil why it is hampering now?”

Sonali Kachru questions about religion coming between the two communities:

We were together a part of Kashmir. We are saying now that religion is coming in between the two communities. But religion did not hamper before the turmoil, why it is hampering now? Only because of the Islamic influence ... earlier it was not there.

KB: Do the Kashmiri Pandits think that they are more secure among Hindus than among Kashmiri Muslims?

Sonali Kachru: I think the younger generation may not be thinking like this because it does not make difference living among Hindus or living among Kashmiri Muslims... I think religion is not responsible. If we say religion is responsible for any kind of destruction, I think we have to restructure our thought. It can never be a religion, because religions have to have sense of binding. It can never have a sense of destruction.

Similarly, Anup Bhatt said: “Politics in Kashmir is a livelihood of many, and mass movement started on the basis of politics and religion. Religion alone cannot do anything unless until politics is involved”.

“There is politics behind the using of religion as a tool”

Meenakshi Bhan feels that there was politics of Pakistan which taught the people of Kashmir and changed the mind set of Kashmiri Muslims:

I believe Pakistani politics has done it slowly and gradually. Militancy started in 1989, but they [the Pakistani] used to come before also to instruct them [Kashmiri Muslims] that is they [Kashmiri Pandits] occupy everything despite the fact that they [Kashmiri Muslims] are in majority. You will be deprived; your rights will get curbed, these kind of feeling was getting developed in Kashmiri Muslims. I think Pakistan has played a vital role.

Similarly, Reena Raina talked about politics behind the use of religion as a tool in Kashmiri society:

They infused the concept of religion in young children, like they are Hindus we are Muslims, they do not belong to our religion, etc. They started telling people that Pakistan is their own. I was young and studying there. In school also these kinds of things were happening. Kashmiri Muslim children were saying all this. These children did not know what is this all about but it was
inculcated in their mind. This is all politics, otherwise Kashmiri Muslims were not like this, nothing of this sort were there in their mind. They were taught to do that. They were taught that Kashmir should get liberated... I think that Kashmiri identity is lost somewhere.

Politics and perceived deprivation among Kashmiri Muslims thus played a significant role to divide people of Kashmir. The religious divisions were infused in the minds of young children. The concept of Hindu-Muslim separatism was not there in Kashmir before, but it was implanted and Kashmiri Muslim started identifying themselves with Pakistan. This was not in the nature of Kashmiri Muslims, but they were taught to do that because of which Kashmiri identity got lost somewhere.

Trivid Kachru thinks that politics is playing a big role in Kashmir. He narrates an altogether different story:

I think government has done all this in Kashmir and religion also came in. Now we are divided, they are Kashmiri Muslims and we are Kashmiri Pandits. It has become like this but earlier it was not like this. Once this happened in Kashmir before turmoil also, which is called Tarke Moulla, which means Kashmiri Muslims would not talk to Kashmiri Pandits and if any Kashmiri Muslim does this she/he would be known as kaffir [those who do not believe in Allah, non-Muslim]. All the ties should cut off with Kashmiri Pandits. My father told me this and he also told that his Kashmiri Muslim friends would come during the night to convey him that they want to talk to us and do not want to cut off the relations. These gaps were there... but politics played a role in widening that.

Avinash Bhan thinks that religion is hardening the more boundaries between the two communities, he said:

Religion definitely has played a role. In Kashmir particularly, religion has played a very big role. It is not new. It has been a factor [emphasizing]. I was a child then [when turmoil started] but I have seen religion as a factor I was too young to understand role of religion in this sense. But I remember Kashmiri Muslim children used to tease us and make fun of the name of “Kheer Bhavani attham attham” [Ashtami is the festival Kashmiri Pandits celebrate in Kheer Bhavani temple. Kashmiri Muslim children used to tease Kashmiri Pandits children for the name of that festivals]. Other than religion there is no significant reason, even we had same culture, same cuisine, same attire, and same language.

When I asked Sagrika Pandita whether she thinks that politics is responsible for the current situation, she replied: “I think in this case religion is the main factor because they thought that only Kashmiri Muslims should live in Kashmir”. Ashutosh Ganjoo said,

That atmosphere in which Hindus and Muslims [Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits] used to live together is no more. May be you will find this in villages, but in urban areas it has completely vanished. I think during 1990-1998 the Hindu-Muslim differences have come up to such an extent that they [Kashmiri Muslims] used to tell Kashmiri Pandits that certainly you have to die whether today or tomorrow. These kinds of comments were there, even now if they see some Kashmiri Pandits they still comment. There is fundamentalism in Kashmir. However, there are some Kashmiri Muslims who still have good relations with Kashmiri Pandits; they saved the property of Kashmiri Pandits and send to them to Jammu. Even at present whenever Kashmiri Pandits come they stay with their Kashmiri Muslim friends. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims stay with Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu also. I think all the political parties, local or at national, do not want that situation should get better in Kashmir.

Vishal Bhatt thinks migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir was a turning point in breaking and changing the Kashmiri ethnicity:
When we were forced to migrate, the Kashmiri identity finished... Politics definitely played its role and religious influence was there. Central Government also favoured Kashmiri Muslims... Our property is no more ours now. Kashmiri Pandit women cannot wear bindi there. If we go back to Kashmir, they will kill us. We cannot go to our own village we cannot stay there for more than fifteen days.... I am not saying all Muslims are bad there....The biggest mistake of Kashmiri Muslims is that they excluded Kashmiri Pandits from the movement, otherwise they would have got freedom by this time. Kashmiri Pandits knew that they [Kashmiri Muslims] wanted to make Kashmir as an Islamic state, so there was no future for Kashmiri Pandits in an Islamic state.

Ranveer Bhatt thinks that, instead of culture, religion was made the base of Kashmiri separatist movement:

This separatist movement started on the basis of religion. If they would have made culture as the basis of the movement then they would have got freedom by now. Because of the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits, it has become a religious issue; they had the support of Pakistan also. If Kashmiri Pandits had been in Kashmir, definitely, it would have been a cultural issue.

KB: Has religion affected Kashmiri identity?
Ranveer: A lot and from both sides. Kashmiri Pandit children who are born and brought up outside Kashmir are totally inclined towards Hinduism. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims children in Kashmir they have not seen Kashmiri Pandits. I am brought up here and I go to temple here. But if I was born in Kashmir, definitely, I would visit shrines of saints also. My orientation would have been different. The younger generation of Kashmiri Muslims has no Kashmiri Pandit friends, so their wavelength has also changed. Actually, this division started in 1947, but it burst in 1989, for which the Government of India is responsible, because the error in the election of 1987 is responsible for militancy in Kashmir. National Conference and Congress party closed all the democratic ways by poll rigging.

Ranveer Bhatt’s Friend Nishant Mattoo thinks that “they [Kashmiri Muslims] wanted to establish Islam, so there is no question of secularism then”. But Ranveer Bhatt does not agree, that all Kashmiri Muslims want that. He said: “That is Jamaat-i-Islami thing, that is different”.

Nishant Mattoo: But they are fundamentalists.
Ranveer Bhatt: Fundamentalists are in India, also. Are Hindus are not fundamentalists?
Nishant: As compared to them, we are more tolerant. There is a difference in mind-set.
Ranveer Bhatt: There is ignorance also. They used to say that they will not open an account in SBI because this bank belongs to kaffir. They differentiate by saying that they [those who lives outside Kashmir] are from India, they will not say that that they are from Bombay, Delhi... boundaries have developed. Even those Kashmiri Muslim scholars get killed who support secularism.

Ranveer Bhatt’s narrative shows that culture was no where addressed in the separatist movement, so it has by default become a religious issue after the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. Second, Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit children both are living in different societies. Kashmiri Pandit children’s orientation is more towards Hinduism. Kashmiri Muslim younger generation are living in religious singularity. They have no exposure of composite culture Kashmir.
Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the perspective of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits on Kashmiriyat, Sufi and Rishi culture and practices and the nature of social relationships between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims. This category of Kashmiri Pandit participants explained Kashmiriyat in terms of “different culture, “language and cultural heritage”, “sort of brotherhood”, “peaceful bondage between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits”, “love and respect towards each other and a way of life”. There were few participants who are not familiar with the concept of Kashmiriyat. For instance, Mohit Koul who is living in Kashmir has not heard about this word and has no idea about Kashmiriyat. But he talked about the brotherhood that used to exist in the society of Kashmir.

Since the participants have not experienced Kashmiriyat or brotherhood in Kashmir, they have obviously no idea of that way of life. But most of the participants are aware of the changes that turmoil and migration has brought about in the recent times. Hence, it has come out that there is no Kashmiriyat of that sort which their parents and grandparents have experienced. As Priyanka Koul said, “Kashmiris are divided now, I am a Kashmiri Pandit and they are Kashmir Muslims; divided in categories now”.

There is a kind of aversion towards the concept of Kashmiriyat also. For instance, Manish Koul thinks that Kashmiriyat was the identity of “Kashmiri Muslims” only and was politically created because there is no history behind this term and also the term is not “socially tested”. If there was any brotherhood in Kashmir it was only because of Kashmiri Pandits, because they are a harmless community. So, the meanings associated with Kashmiriyat are changing and now it does not represent the brotherhood among Kashmiris, rather it conveys more of pseudo secularism.

Discussion on Sufism brought out that the young generation of Kashmiri Pandits is not well acquainted with the Sufi and Rishi culture of Kashmir. Some might have visited the shrines in Kashmir before the migration. There are participants who do not know the name of the shrines of Muslim saints. Although some know about Lal Ded, there are some like Priyanka Koul who thinks that Lal Ded might be some “terrorist”. It is difficult for the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits living in a different setting to developing this belief system which appears meaningless also. It might be significant to the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits in the past and present also, even though they do not have the opportunity to visit these shrines on a regular basis. But, for the younger generation, these shrines are of no significance. Even those participants who are still living in Kashmir did not have much enthusiasm to talk about the shrines of Kashmir or Sufi culture of Kashmir. Perception also prevails that those culture and practices are finished now. Those Pandit participants who visited these shrines after migration though
received affection from the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims who are serving in these shrines, also faced the comments and gazing eyes of few people for their still being part of Kashmiri society at present. This might be the reason behind the lack of enthusiasm; hence Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir avoid going to these public places to avoid those reactions and gaze. As a result, one of the important components of Kashmiriyat that represents the composite culture of Kashmir is fading away.

Some participants also think that Sufism and Rishism was not the representation of composite culture of Kashmir, but tactic to convert people of Kashmir to Islam. It has also come out that the culture of Sufism is replaced by extremism in Kashmir, because now the utility of Sufism is over now. There are challenges posed to the Sufi practices and shrine culture from external factors and from the Kashmir society by those who consider it anti-Islam. Hence, the Sufi practices are in the process of decline in Kashmir. So, for Kashmiri Pandits who are living out of Kashmir, it is not possible to keep that Sufi culture alive or pass it on to their children because the younger generation has no original experience required to keep alive. Those who are living in Kashmir no more visit these shrines on a regular basis as they did in the past.

The harmonious nature of social relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits that the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits has heard about existed there before the turmoil erupted in Kashmir. The participants have heard about this kind of relationship that existed in the past, but most of them have only heard about it, not actually experienced it. Few participants have some memories that they talked about like celebration of festivals together and visiting each other on special occasions. There are participants like Manish Koul who do not believe that the relationship was harmonious because he thinks “minority was under the pressure of majority there”. Manish Koul has most of the memories of turmoil, not that of before the turmoil. Children who grew up outside their homeland with those last memories obviously have bitterness and do not want to believe what they have read or heard from other sources. They believe only that reality which they construct out of those last memories of the turmoil. There are participants like Visal Bhat who have no memories at all, but also do not believe on heard realities. He has doubts that he expresses when he says “I do not think that atmosphere was ever good there”. Conflict-induced migration has had its impact to such an extent that younger generation is not ready to believe that the heard past reality did exist. There is a difference that participants feel in their belongingness and their parents’ belongingness to Kashmir. Most of them see themselves as tourists in Kashmir, not as residents of Kashmir, in future.

Participants who have visited Kashmir after the migration talked about their experiences of visiting Kashmir after migration. Kritika Koul, who visited Kheer Bhavani, saw the glimpses of those relationships between the older generation of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits that constituted Kashmiriyat. Kaveri Dhar’s perception about Kashmiri Muslims changed. She found
them very loving and caring after taking up a job in Kashmir. She is going through a state of confusion. On the one side, she says, she feels she is an “outsider” in her village, as people over there think she is a “Hindu girl”. But, on other, she says, because of the same culture and language, she is more connected to Kashmiri Muslims than Dogras of Jammu.

Even after having good experiences, Kaveri Dhar does not want to stay forever in Kashmir. There is no meeting ground left where Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmir Pandits can connect again. There is fear among Kashmiri Pandits that, even if they are given a separate homeland, there will be no security. Even those who are living in Kashmir and have not migrated think that Kashmiri Pandits should not live in Kashmir, as Mohit Koul said: “It is not right for Kashmiri Pandits to stay in Kashmir now”.

Although Sonali Kachru thinks that to bridge the gap is the responsibility of all the Kashmirirs, but no one sees that possibility at present, because religion and politics have already played their role in straining the centuries’ old ties between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. There is nothing left between them except hatred. Ranveer Bhatt thinks that both religions played a role because “Kashmiri Pandit children who were born and brought up outside Kashmir are totally inclined towards Hinduism whereas Kashmiri Muslim children in Kashmir have not experienced that fellow-feeling”. The participants who are living in Kashmir among Kashmiri Muslims also have no hope that the differences between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits can be bridged collectively because the required atmosphere is no more the same now and religion has become the dominant important factor of their identity rather than region, culture and language.

There is no trust left between the two communities. One has become Indian and the other has become Pakistani for each other. Kashmiri Muslims see only Indian agents in Kashmiri Pandits, whereas Kashmiri Pandits see only militants in Kashmiri Muslims. There is no interaction between them left to see each others’ goodness and earlier identity of being a Kashmiri. Both are important components of Kashmiriyat, but in the changing reality one can accept Kashmiriyat only either as Sanskrit civilisation or as Kashmiri Muslims’ identity which had never existed and represented composite Kashmiri ethnic identity. Kashmiriyat is not “socially tested” term, but rather a “politically fabricated” tool for them.

***