

THE PARCHMENT OF KASHMIR

History, Society, and Polity



Edited by

NYLA ALI KHAN



THE PARCHMENT OF KASHMIR

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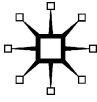
Islam, Women, and the Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan
(2009, 2010, 2011)

The Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism (2005)

THE PARCHMENT OF KASHMIR
HISTORY, SOCIETY, AND POLITY

Edited by
Nyla Ali Khan

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PREFACE

Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity is a work conceived while I was putting the finishing touches on my second book, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*. Working on a monograph on Kashmir while teaching literature at the University of Nebraska-Kearney and the University of Oklahoma, Norman, was stimulating, challenging, and very demanding. It was a long-awaited chance for me to reconnect with my native land; to reestablish emotional, intellectual, and spiritual ties with the land that is an integral part of my being, despite the physical and geographical severance. Writing about Kashmir while being in the diaspora gave me the resplendent chance to revisit the historical events, cultural and literary traditions, political awakenings, religious discourses, and identity politics of the past, some of which have spilled into the present in distorted, revisionist, reinterpreted, or statist forms. Working on the monograph made me realize that in order for my writings to disavow insulated elitist discourses, it was important to connect with indigenous scholars and intellectuals, based in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is they who had witnessed, suffered, grown, and been immersed in political, historical, religious, cultural, and social discourses and events that I could theorize, debate, and intellectually engage with, but lacked the visceral connections that their work could legitimately claim. And that was when I conceived the project of an interdisciplinary work in which I would ask scholars established in Jammu and Kashmir to contribute to a reader on Kashmir.

Given my professional and personal responsibilities, it has taken me several years to complete the manuscript of *Parchment* and to give it the shape I had envisioned a few years ago. I have the deepest admiration for my contributors for being forthcoming, intellectually astute, politically savvy, amenable to suggestions, responsive to my demands, and nurturing a visceral conviction about the resilience of Kashmir. *Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity* is an attempt to shape a much needed discourse on Kashmir that might dismantle the status quo while underscoring the need to create democratic

spaces and revivify the much neglected role of civil society in the state.

I am grateful for the generosity of Mohammad Ishaq Khan, Rattan Lal Hangloo, M. H. Zaffar, Neerja Mattoo, Noor Ahmad Baba, Gull Mohammad Wani, Rekha Chowdhary, Bashir Ahmed Dabla, and Hameeda Naem for sharing their rich and layered insights with me. The University of Oklahoma, Norman, has always provided me with a congenial and energizing atmosphere without which my work would have been more difficult. My mentors and colleagues at the University of Oklahoma have treated my work with an intellectual seriousness and given it recognition, which has encouraged me to work diligently. The finer details of this project would have been askew had it not been for the commendable work of the Computer Lab Manager in the Department of English, University of Oklahoma, Jack Day. My parents, Suraiya and Mohammad Ali Matto, with their reserved dignity, integrity, unassuming pride, and unabated love for Kashmir, have been role models for me. My daughter, Iman, tolerates her mother's idiosyncrasies with the patience of an angel and enlivens my days with her beatific smile. I thank my husband, Mohammad Faisal Khan, for appreciating the work that went into this project and for being by my side even when I was completely immersed in the completion of this book. The call of the mountains of Kashmir is never far from my mind. No tribute that I pay to Kashmir will do it justice. The land of my being and my dreams, *Kashmir*, remains ever ungraspable, irrepressible, and unconquerable.

Nyla Ali Khan

INTRODUCTION



Nyla Ali Khan

There is a plethora of opinions on the political future of the conglomerate of Jammu and Kashmir. Is Jammu and Kashmir a principality? An autonomous unit within the Indian Union? An integral part of India? A subversive unit with the Indian Union? A bilateral issue between the nation-states of India and Pakistan? Is the mainstream Indian understanding and interpretation of the Kashmir conflict the only credible one? Is the mainstream Pakistani understanding and interpretation of the Kashmir issue the only credible one? Do the people of Kashmir have a voice in the matter? Is there a space within Kashmiri society in which the democratic aspirations of the populace of Kashmir could be nurtured? Is there a critical discourse on Kashmir that foregrounds the views of scholars and lay people from the state, even if that discourse is in opposition to the mainstream one?

These questions have been causing irrepressible angst in me for a while now. Can we break the silence? Can we bring the instability to an end, for our generation and the generations yet to be born? A large majority of the populace Jammu and Kashmir is troubled, dispossessed and mocked by the processes of democracy, by United Nations resolutions, by armed insurgency, by counter-insurgency, by militarization, and by revisionist histories. The people of the state are yearning for the right to dignity; the right to live decent existences devoid of bestial militarism; the right to work and enable their families to enjoy the basic necessities of life; the right to hold opinions of which others take cognizance; and the right to an existence in which brutalization, demoralization, trauma, and rage are a thing of the past. In addition to the denizens of Jammu and Kashmir, diasporic

Kashmiris also suffer from the indelible scars of having lost their homeland, and mourn a lost innocence.

In this Introduction, I am repeating several points made in my earlier book, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*.¹ After reviewing the first edition of my book *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*, published in June 2009, several Kashmiri academics pointed out to me that autonomy was an inadequate solution to the Kashmir conflict. The intractability of the Kashmir conflict has made advocates of conflict resolution rather wary of applying a seemingly workable but facile solution to the complex political conflict. Mainstream media, intellectuals housed in academic institutions, formulators of public policy, and think-tanks are quick to point out that regardless of the bloody and seemingly infinite nature of a political, ethnic, or racial conflict, a viable solution can always be found to dilute the fierceness of a conflictual situation. But one is cautioned against glibly advocating a kitsch solution to the Kashmir conundrum by the complexity of the Kashmir conflict, which embodies the brutalities of nation building devoid of myth or self-infatuation.

Although the idea of self-determination collides with military oppression on the contentious site of nationalism, political accommodation can lead a war-weary people out of the prison of duplicitous rhetoric, political domination, and forceful imposition. The debate among political thinkers, scholars, and policy makers about finding viable ways to do justice to marginalized ethnic minorities in Jammu and Kashmir has seemed infinite. Which is the most viable solution to the Kashmir conflict?

Several questions were asked by the students in my Senior Seminar on World Literature at the University of Oklahoma in spring 2010 during the class discussion on Neeraj Mattoo's translations of Kashmiri short stories *Stranger Beside Me*,² and at the Senior Seminar on Muslim Women's Memoirs, in fall 2011, while discussing women in conflict zones. "What is the political status of Kashmir?" "Can Kashmir exist as an autonomous enclave, the security of which is guaranteed by India and Pakistan?" "This might be a dumb question, but does Kashmir have credible politicians?" "If Kashmir is a nuclear flashpoint, why are most Americans unaware of the complexity of the Kashmir issue?" "Does Kashmir have fields of gold and mountains of silver?" "Are you familiar with the Led Zeppelin song, 'Kashmir'?" "Are any women in positions of decision making in that part of the world?" "Is the exotic description of Kashmir in novels, poems, and travelogues an attempt to dehistoricize and decontextualize the region and its people?" "How is the reductive portrayal of

Kashmir as a romantic and exotic locale going to make the primarily Western readership of, for example, some short stories on Kashmir and Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*³ aware of the political upheaval in the region?" "Why are we talking about political allegory?" "Is there an inextricable link between pedagogy and politics?" "Why can't the intelligentsia in Kashmir and diasporic Kashmiri intellectuals forge a coalition to come up with feasible solutions to the conundrum?"

I have always enjoyed teaching the short stories in *Stranger Beside Me* because some of the stories represent the mythical beauty of Kashmir, on the one hand, and the stultifying atmosphere created by murky politics, on the other. Before getting my students to do a close reading of the stories, I explained the historical backdrop of the Kashmir conflict; the political situations and maneuvers orchestrated by the two nation-states of India and Pakistan; the onset of the armed insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989; the simmering resentment, rage, and alienation of the people of Kashmir that added fuel to the insurgency; the unpopularity of formerly populist leaders whom the masses no longer deemed genuine representatives; the nostalgia of expatriate Kashmiris who had been uprooted, dislocated, and dispossessed; the trauma generated by the loss of innocence in a militarized culture; the exclusionary discourse of Indian nationalism, which over the years has subsumed the discourse of *Kashmiriyat* or a unitary Kashmiri nationalist identity within it; and the erosion of cultural myths, legends, and folklore upon which the edifice of Kashmiri society is built. My students had been unaware of the political swamp in Kashmir prior to our discussion; therefore, it was encouraging to hear them make intelligent comments about world views other than Western-centric ones: about issues of sovereignty, legitimacy of statehood, representative nature of democracy or lack thereof, discourse of human rights and the bounden duty of international powers to protect fundamental rights in politically conflictual environments, pluralism as an antidote to the orthodoxy of ethnocentric politics, the construction of identity politics, and the implosion of the boundary between state and religion.

The issues that my students came up with can be summarized in the following way: the intricate relationship between the political and cultural power that emanates from metropolitan centers and the peripheral territories in which it manifests itself requires the formation of cultural practices that sustain the persistent disparity in power between the center and the "peripheral world." This observation helps answer persistent questions. Is the effective political sovereignty of India over Kashmir achieved by force, by political collaboration,

or by economic, social, or cultural dependence? Does the political sovereignty of India over Kashmir exist in its most potent manifestation in ideological and cultural practices? After delving into the role of discourse in constructions of identities and subjectivities for a long time, I have found that dominant political powers use “discourse”—political, militaristic, gender, religious, and cultural—to disseminate the values that mold the ethnic and cultural identities of the dominated as well as the dominator. The strategy of fortifying domination with structures of knowledge creates an unbridgeable gulf between the “center” and the “margin.”

Let me generalize using the language of postcolonial theory. The totalizing form of the discourse of the center, and its overpowering impulse to exclude, repress, and incorporate threatening forces, generate a dichotomy between the center and its peripheries. The legacy of this polarization is a strongly bounded area of social and cultural knowledge that produces veneration for the monolithic center and obedience of the “margins” to it. The practice of political domination is ratified by the authority of academics, institutions, and governments that formulate a methodology, “surrounding it with greater prestige than its practical successes warrant.”⁴ The ideology propounded by the dominant order reflects and produces its interests. The representatives of the privileged center of the discourse of power (political, academic, cultural, religious, and institutional) silence the voices that are on the fringes of society. In order to achieve this outcome, the hegemonic order creates structures that cater to its unquestioned authority.

The rhetoric employed by mainstream Indian and Pakistani rhetoricians, politicians, academics, and policy makers has become the authoritative discourse of officialdom that separates itself from the realm of the Kashmiri people. It is a dogmatic discourse that has been used to assert its ascendancy among other verbal and ideological points of view. Meanwhile, the cultural identity of the Kashmiri people is damaged by the erosion of their autonomous institutions, by traumas and terrors generated by insurgency and counter insurgency. Still, the cruel politics of these neighboring nation-states has not obliterated the legacy of a rich heritage.

Frantz Fanon, in particular, espoused the attempt to refurbish social and political consciousness in order to undermine racist, ethnic stereotypes.⁵ Although Fanon’s theories were specifically geared to the Algerian national struggle, his characterization of culture as the contentious site where psychological and spiritual emancipation might be achieved is relevant to the Kashmiri context as well.⁶ In the

case of Kashmir, the pervasiveness of prejudicial notions, particularly after 1989, undermined the self-representation and self-construction of the Kashmiri people. The struggle for autonomy and, some would argue, the legitimate right of self-determination in Kashmir quickly forged discourses in order to oppose the discourse of discrimination that had created a sense of marginalization in the populace. Kashmiri scholars, like the contributors to *Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity*, have sought to critique the inheritance of Indian and Pakistani hegemonies and to reconstruct their histories, which includes elements of cultural memory.

Fanon famously propounds an anticolonial nationalism as a therapeutic device to cure the psychological and historical torture inflicted by the dichotomies of the culture of dominance. According to Fanon, the fallacy of the racial and culture privileging of the dominant power is confounded when the natives refuse to follow the trajectory charted out for them by the discursive practices of colonialism.⁷ Cultural nationalism challenges and overthrows the hierarchy of ruling ideologies by enhancing a unity among all socioeconomic classes of an occupied area, which it has failed to do in the Kashmir context. This revolutionary stance can eliminate the petty feuds that exist in an area and can replace them with a sanctified notion of nation. History is no longer imposed on them; now they are able to wield memory as a powerful tool. In this process of nationalist self-imagining, the deployment of allegory, as some Kashmiri short story writers have done in their works, can be used to re-create and preserve a jeopardized way of life. Such narratives rewrite history and create symbols of nationhood. They impart resolvability to a disharmonious history, as I discovered while reading *Stranger Beside Me*, Neerja Mattoo's translations of several Kashmiri short story writers into English. Moreover, through a magic realist novel like *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, my students were able to theorize the prerogative of a people to "redream their own land." Instead of a contemptuous dismissal of the power of myth and fetishes, writers explore these as repositories of culture. This process of recuperation makes the hitherto lost voices of the margin audible.

A multiplicity of voices and perspectives, as in *Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity*, shuns simple decoding. Yet as the foregoing discussion suggests, the major topics in the contributors' understanding of the political and administrative structures of Kashmir include the mainstream ideologies and discourses, plus the counter-discourses that either already exist in an indigenous form or are generated as a strategy to reinscribe the normative forms created by hegemonic ideology. We encourage a revisioning of culture and

society, which recognizes the rich syncretism and plurality of Kashmiri society, culture, and politics, in order to empower marginalized people.

Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity is an edited volume of interdisciplinary chapters that address various aspects of political, cultural, and socioeconomic life in Kashmir. What sets this work apart from other works on Kashmir is that the authors of the chapters are all themselves academics based in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and are well known, well established, and well respected within Kashmiri society, but they haven't had much opportunity to reach an audience outside of Kashmir and outside of South Asia. In this way, the project does the highly significant work of creating a space for subaltern scholars to project their voices, understandings, and interpretations to a larger audience. This is an especially critical project in the context of Kashmir.

This book provides a forum for scholars from Jammu and Kashmir to voice their opinions and articulate their arguments vis-à-vis the labyrinthine Kashmir issue. Voices from Srinagar, Kashmir, and Jammu articulate opinions that deconstruct the dominant perspective. The chapters in this book, in questioning the status quo, enrich and make more nuanced our understanding of the political, cultural, and socioeconomic complexities of Kashmir. Readers might find some of the arguments voiced in these pages perfectly legitimate and opening up a much needed space for analyzing the intricacies of the Kashmir issue; they might disagree with others or find them particularly opprobrious. We certainly don't intend to force any opinions down the throats of the readers. Speaking for myself, I aim to make more layered the understanding of the readers vis-à-vis the once paradisiacal, now dismal land of my childhood, my dreams, my political and spiritual awakening, and my hopes.

When I asked the contributors of *Parchment of Kashmir* to highlight their perceptions of the Kashmir conundrum and the notion of *Kashmiriyat*, I wanted them to foreground their subjectivities, underscore their particular locations in the culture, and explain what was at stake for them in the arguments they were making. I wanted them to highlight the indigenous Kashmiri point of view. I wasn't looking for "dispassionate" or "objective" analyses, but the analyses of subjectivity, which is what the writers have done. In this cross-disciplinary work, some perceptions present the reality of empirical situations, which can be restricting; in some, the theoretical construct of *Kashmiriyat* is romanticized, but that is the revival of strategic essentialism in these fractured times.

The concept of *Kashmiriyat* is not only cultural but political as well, which can be revitalized by the resuscitation of cultural institutions and the redressal of political grievances. Those contributors who have focused on the pluralistic identity of Kashmir are of the firm opinion that although caste and socioeconomic divides exist in Kashmiri society, they are not institutionalized or religiously sanctioned. Although the authors of this collection have chosen not to focus on caste/class hierarchies, with which some readers might take issue, I emphasize that there is no monolithic “Kashmiri.” Kashmiri society, like other South Asian societies, is by no means egalitarian or unpatriarchal. A rigidly entrenched gender hierarchy also exists in Kashmir; some substantive attempts have been made to deconstruct such a hierarchy. The role of women in a conflict zone; the reconceptualization of a woman’s identity in a politically militarized zone; intersectionalities of class, education, ethnicity, and religious identity in theorizing a woman’s identity; and women’s agential roles or lack thereof are issues that can no longer be relegated to the background. Any attempt to homogenize Kashmiri society or the politico-cultural discourse on Kashmir would be a dangerously flawed exercise.

People on the margins of society lack the same access to political, religious, cultural, and economic discourses and institutions as those in positions of privilege and power. It is important for readers to keep in mind that the contributors to this work are not making any attempt to homogenize the political, cultural, or social discourse on Kashmir, but are writing from certain positionalities. A couple of the arguments in this collection might seem old hat to the “initiated” but are not known to the younger generation, which is not as familiar with the multiple discourses on the palimpsest of Kashmir. The authors of the essays in this collection do not share consensual opinions of every aspect of the Kashmir imbroglio, which adds to the richness of this work. Narrative structures in this work are constituted by the variables of race, gender, education, marital status, social class, and nationality, which generate complex conventions and relations of power. Some chapters might be romanticizing *Kashmiriyat*, but there is no strategic endeavor to gloss over class differences. I shall assume my editorial authority to observe that one of the limitations of some of the essays in this collection is the lack of a nuanced and piercing critique of the violence perpetrated by armed insurgents, militants, and mercenaries against Kashmiri civilians. The venality and dissipation of mercenaries and some armed insurgents, who later donned the cloak of political legitimacy, should not be overlooked by Kashmir analysts. Also, the remorseless militarization of the region, ecological and economic

plunder, negation of legal procedures, lack of infrastructure, and virtual erasure have fueled the hitherto restrained anger and resentment in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It is ironic that pro-Pakistan separatist groups in the Kashmir Valley gloss over the arbitrary exercise of authority in the Northern Areas, and glibly declare that these areas chose their geographical and political affiliation, legitimizing the lack of fundamental rights in that region.

Because of the calls for *azadi* (independence; a fluid concept with more than one interpretation) raised in the Kashmir Valley, and the brunt of militancy and brutalization of the sociocultural ethos of Kashmir borne by the Valley, the contributors have focused on the situation in this specific province of Jammu and Kashmir. I would like to emphasize that the contributors to this work have interpreted the indigenous philosophical foundations of *Kashmiriyat* and the dynamism within it. A nostalgic interpretation of the notion of *Kashmiriyat* that was deployed successfully in the Kashmir Valley in the 1940s in order to create an alternative epistemology to the discourses of Indian nationalism and Pakistani nationalism is not totally out of place in this work. The readers might find that some of the chapters on Kashmiri identity overlap at certain points. But the overlap underscores the salient point that despite the radicalization of the youth in Kashmir, the pluralism and dynamism of Kashmiri society haven't been depleted. The tradition of *Rishiism* is not dead and buried in the Valley: it continues to bolster a cultural and religious identity that the militarization of Kashmir has not been able to do away with. To that end, the *vaakhs* of Lal-Ded and the *shrukhs* of Nur-ud-din Wali form a very important part of the vernacular of semi-literate and illiterate people in Kashmir. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I emphasize that any unitary discourse that claims to encompass the reality of Kashmir would be lop-sided and suspect.

My attempt is not to propound a particularistic political and cultural ideology, but to highlight the nuanced opinions of indigenous scholars. It is my sincere hope that readers of the book will take this opportunity to engage with the subjectivities, historical understandings, political opinions, and traditions of scholars from the "fringe."

NOTES

1. Nyla Ali Khan, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011).

2. Neerja Mattoo, ed. and trans., *Stranger Beside Me: Short Stories from Kashmir* (Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1994).
3. Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (New York: Granta, 1991).
4. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 16.
5. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
6. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 117.
7. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 111.

PART I



CONSTRUCTIONS OF KASHMIRI
IDENTITY WITHIN THE
OVERLAPPING DISCOURSES OF
KASHMIRIYAT, ISLAM, SAIVISM,
AND SUFISM

CHAPTER 1



EVOLUTION OF MY IDENTITY VIS-À-VIS ISLAM AND KASHMIR

Mohammad Ishaq Khan

My earliest experiences of Islam were as a Muslim child waiting for months for the two most important Muslim festivals, *Eidu'l-Fitr* and *Eidu'l-Azha*. The former is celebrated joyously after observing fast for the entire month of Ramadan, in remembrance of a devotee's successful struggle against the desires of the self, while on *Eidu'l-Azha*, Muslims perform the ritual of slaughtering an animal in memory of the devotion of Prophet Abraham to his Lord. *Eidu'l-Azha* follows approximately 69 days after the first *Eid* of the year. I waited eagerly for the two *Eids*. For Muslim children like me, these two festivals were great times to rejoice, and continue to be so for Muslim children today. We joined the elders in congregational prayers at *Eidgahs* or mosques and prostrated before Allah. We, the children, weren't solemn believers. We often giggled and laughed during acts of prostration, and I remember disturbing the adults while they were deeply involved in prayer on several occasions. I also noticed some of our elders burst into tears while praying. As childhood faded into adolescence and youth, I tried to comprehend that seemingly strange behavior of the elders on happy occasions like *Eid*. Slowly, I realized that they did not invoke Allah merely for help in states of distress and helplessness, but more importantly, for spiritual union with Him. They understood Allah as the *Nourisher of the Worlds, the Compassionate and the Merciful*. Some examples from my mother's life reinforced this image of Allah in my mind. She had received no formal education

except that she had attended, for some time, a *maktab* attached to the mosque in her locality. She felt sorry about being illiterate. "The beauty marks on my face made my father cancel my admission in the *maktab*. He feared someone would cast an evil eye on his beautiful daughter," she laughingly told me. The marks that she referred to were dents on her skin caused by smallpox.

Like most traditional Kashmiri women, she had learnt the rudiments of *namaz*, which she performed as the nights in Srinagar melted into dawn. Her most passionate and loud prayer, recited in our native Kashmiri language, as she prepared for *namaz* was *kul jahanas yaeri* (May the whole world be blessed!). She invoked the various titles of Prophet Muhammad (Peace of Allah be upon him) as *Hayatun-Nabi* and those of the great Sufi of Baghdad, Sheikh Abdu'l-Qadir Jilani, highly venerated in Kashmir as *Dastgir* (the helper). After her *namaz*, she implored Allah in the most humble manner. The tears flowing from her eyes made me think about my relationship with Allah, Islam, and my society. But that relationship did not evolve in a certain imaginative direction until the political upheaval of August 9, 1953, following the dismissal of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

I was around eight years old when my father swore to take revenge against his Kashmiri Hindu neighbors, the Thusoos, following their bizarre expression of glee by clapping and embracing one another at the news of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's arrest. The news was announced on Radio Kashmir, Srinagar, while we were having breakfast in a room on the first floor of our house next to that of the Thusoos. I never forgot the words of my father uttered in deep anguish and anger: "See these ungrateful Pandits. They are celebrating the dismissal of their saviour. Didn't *Sher-e-Kashmir* protect them during the tribal invasion of 1947?" But Baba's tantrums did not last long. We continued to enjoy cordial relations with our Hindu neighbors. Our earnest participation in each other's festivals and marriage ceremonies was proverbial until the mass exodus of the Pandits from their homeland, following the onset of militancy in the Kashmir Valley in 1989.

In my experiences with Islam in Kashmir, the years 1953 and 1989 are strongly linked. The year 1953 was a turning point in Kashmir's modern history from both political and religious viewpoints. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the towering leader of Kashmiri Muslims, was put behind bars for championing the cause of Kashmir and Kashmiris rather than Islam by India's champions of democracy, socialism, secularism, and nationalism. His long imprisonment gave birth not only

to never-ending periods of political instability in Jammu and Kashmir but also to the formation of different attitudes to Islam and identity politics among Kashmiris. In the aftermath of his arrest, Kashmiri society was mainly divided between his followers and those of the Delhi government. An overwhelming majority of Kashmiri Muslims and a considerable number of Muslims belonging to the regions of Jammu and Ladakh adored the Sheikh; a minuscule minority of Muslims of all regions of Jammu and Kashmir and most of the non-Muslims in the state followed the government in Delhi. The differing viewpoints politically divided the Hindus and the Muslims of the state and led to the birth of a very strong anti-India sentiment among the Muslims.

Sheikh was in prison, and his deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, who shook hands with Delhi, was appointed the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Bakshi ruled Kashmir for 11 years—the long period during which he made a sustained but abortive attempt at bringing about the integration of Kashmir with India at political, economic, cultural, and emotional levels. Delhi backed him for realizing such a cherished goal, but only insolently. Freedom of the press was curbed; only public meetings supporting the views and policies of the ruling gang could be held; and thousands of supporters of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah were arrested. My father, Ghulam Ahmad Khan, then owner of the Kashmir Guest House in Lal Chowk, Srinagar, the most popular rendezvous of the state politicians until the late 1970s, had to suffer three months' imprisonment in 1955 for having given refuge to Sofi Mohammad Akbar, the only close companion of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who later vehemently opposed the Indira-Sheikh Accord of 1975.

My father's arrest made my mother invoke Allah's help more and more loudly in the early hours of morning. But this was not enough. At such a time of personal crisis, someone advised her to seek the help of a *pir* who lived and still lives in Batmaloo. I remember accompanying my mother to the house of the *pir*, popularly known as Nab Jinn. The *pir's* prediction that my father would be released after three months turned out to be true. The release of my father was great news and, indeed, a huge event for us, the always cheerful children of the Khans of Magarmal Bagh. Our immediate neighbors were Pandit families and *Gurkhas*. The latter held high ranks of colonels, majors, and captains in the Indian Army. For several weeks, the visits of relatives, neighbors, friends, and supporters of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to our house did not abate. There was a *jashan* in our family. But this *jashan* was different from the one that Bakshi used to arrange so lavishly in the Mughal gardens to hoodwink the world into believing

that Kashmiris were with him and with India. The *jashan* of small children in the Khan family was one of celebrating the freedom of the soul from chains of oppression and slavery. A small team of six children (Ashraf, Bashir, Ishaq, Rashid, Mushtaq, and Iqbal) could always be seen playing cricket in the big lawns of their house, but during those days of celebrations, they were up in arms against India. They looked at poor Kumar, Vijay, and Vinod (Our Kashmiri Pandit counterparts) with disdain and vengeance for no fault of theirs. I can never forget the extreme warmth and nobility of culture of such neighbors and playmates. But then so tremendous was the impact of the family *jashan* on our embryonic political consciousness or psyche that we could not suppress our anger against the oppressor. And the moment our *Gurkha* friends peeped through their windows out of curiosity to look at the rush of visitors to our house, we would force them to retreat to their barracks by booing.

There was yet another source of enjoyment for us in the aftermath of our father's release from the Central Jail: a feast served to *Pir* Ghulam Nabi and his entourage of 12 disciples every fortnight. One positive dimension of the spiritual assemblages (*khatam-i-sharif*) preceding sumptuous meals was certainly devotional love inculcated in our young minds for Islam and its holy personages. But I also remember one such occasion when a meeting was arranged between Begum Abdullah, spouse of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and a political and social activist in her own right, and the *pir* at our house. The extent of terror struck by Bakshi through his network of spies can be gauged from the fact that Begum Abdullah was forced to wear a *burqa* that evening to enter our house not through the main gate but via the premises of Dr. Ali Mohammad Jan, the most celebrated physician of the Kashmir Valley. Begum Abdullah was so distressed that she earnestly appealed to the *pir* several times for the release of her illustrious husband. What the *pir* said is not difficult to recollect, considering that whenever *Pir* Ghulam Nabi happened to meet me by chance, he would recount the exact words uttered by him in 1955: "Don't worry. Your husband will be released. Bakshi will go one day. And Sheikh Sahib and you will rule Kashmir again."

Paradoxically, *Pir* Ghulam Nabi enjoyed spiritual ascendancy for a brief period only. He later chose to join the state Congress party rather than cultivate inner piety. I have often wondered why the *pir* gave up his noble profession of cheering human souls. But then what has given me inner solace is that my father did not live long to see the unimaginable metamorphosis of his great political and spiritual heroes into degraded versions of their former selves in a brief period. He died

quite early at the age of 47 in 1956, when Bakshi was at the acme of his power.

Given a free hand to rule Kashmir at his will, Bakshi's regime became the symbol of repression, nepotism, and corruption. The two elections that took place during his reign in 1957 and 1962 were rigged. Millions of rupees flowed into Kashmir from Delhi. Out of this, some amount was spent on developmental projects. True, some progress was registered in the educational and economic spheres, but it was counterbalanced by the reign of terror. Any citizen could be kept behind bars for a period of five years. He could be rearrested for another such long term after having been released from a five-year incarceration.

Despite his tyranny, Bakshi appeared as a benevolent ruler, thanks to the propagandist strategies of the sizeable number of *goondas* (goons) in his pay. He founded a "peace brigade," apparently with the noble aim of helping the poor, but with the main object of terrorizing and silencing the supporters of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. I still remember how much hatred the youth in all schools and colleges nursed in their hearts and minds against Bakshi, his *goondas*, and the "peace brigade," deridingly called *khoftan faqir* (beggars at night) in local parlance.

But all liberal grants from Delhi were not invested in developmental and peace projects. Enough evidence exists to show that most of the money filled the coffers of the Bakshis, who purchased estates in Srinagar and the rest of India through dubious means. The assets of the Bakshi family, according to the enquiry commission report of a former Supreme Court judge, Rajagopala Ayyangar, had risen from Rs. 10,000 in 1947 to Rs. 1.25 crores in 1964, when Bakshi was made to resign under the ingenious Kamaraj Plan.

Beneath the razzmatazz of Bakshi's rule brewed the incipient and sullen resentment of Kashmiris against the Indian occupation of Kashmir. The imprisoned Sheikh was the "Lion of Kashmir," who symbolized faith in the Islamic principles of struggle and sacrifice. "Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah would not have met such a fate at the hands of his trusted lieutenant," argued the adherents of pro-Pakistan ideology, "had he not thrown his lot with an infidel (*kaafir*) like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Had he accepted the counsel of *Qaid-i-Azam* Mohammad Ali Jinnah for the integration of the Muslim majority princely state of Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan, Kashmir would not have come under the rule of the Hindu communalists." In the popular estimation, Nehru, the cunning Brahmin who subjugated Kashmiri Muslims, was the person who betrayed his friend, Abdullah. Kashmiri Pandits' support for Nehru and his henchman, Bakshi, made

their loyalty to the Kashmir cause questionable. Kashmiri Muslims saw Nehru and his community of Kashmiri Brahmins as communalists masquerading as secularists and liberals. Although such images of Brahmanism versus Islam molded my socio-religious consciousness quite early, they did not turn into preconceived notions in my mind as a result of a pleasant daily social intercourse with my Pandit compatriots.

Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits differed politically and maintained conflicting attitudes to the history of Kashmir, with some honorable exceptions, but showed a remarkable degree of tolerance, respect, and concern for each other in their daily lives. Until 1989, nobody could have imagined the exodus of the Pandit community from Kashmir. I cherish the memory of my life during the mid-1960s and 1970s at my ancestral house in Magarmal Bagh, Srinagar. Beside our kitchen was the beautiful garden of Pandit Arjun Nath Thusoo. The huge, but now abandoned, house of the deceased *tehsildar* of the Dogra regime (1846–1947) caught fire in mysterious circumstances in November 1992. Its ruins often rekindle memories of its grandeur and the absentee landlordism that once characterized the social order in Kashmir, and also of my days spent in its proximity. Every morning, the grand old lady of the Thusoo family plucked flowers in her garden for *puja*. The moment my mother felt the presence of the beloved “queen” (*raza bae*), as an average Pandit woman was respectfully addressed by a Muslim, near the window of our kitchen, she would leave the steaming samovar to exchange greetings with her. The women greeted each other with the same phrase in Kashmiri: *Salam Haebi* (May peace be upon you!). A friendly chat continued often until the children of our joint family cried for a cup of tea, as traditionally it was the mistress of the house who controlled the samovar, and no child or adult could enter her territory.

In spite of periodic political upheavals, Kashmiris were at peace with themselves, with their neighbors, and with Kashmir. Muslims and Hindus greeted the spring with the *Badamwari* festival, as flowers blossomed in almond gardens. They relished tea and water nuts, and never forgot to pay a visit to the shrines situated on the Hariparbat Hill: the shrine of *Sufi* saint Makhdum Sahib and the temple of Hindu goddess Parvati, Sharika. On the Sikh festival of Baisakhi, the citizens of Srinagar filled the Mughal gardens. Kashmiris loved to celebrate the festivals of the four communities, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian, and they always found reasons for family picnics in the enchanting meadows and mountainous resorts of the valley they loved so much. Pilgrimages to holy sites dominated the

social and religious life. In certain areas, Muslim shrines (*asthans*) and Hindu shrines (*asthapanas*) stood facing each other in the same spaces. Pandits made pilgrimages to Muslim shrines and visited the living *Sufis*. Kashmiri *Sufi* poetry largely takes its themes from the esoteric message of the Koran and *tasawwuf*. But certain themes taken from the Hindu *shastras* are also occasionally used, in the true manner of Sheikh Nuruddin Rishi, for the wider dissemination of the spiritual and social ethics of the Koran. Kashmiri *Sufi* poetry was and continues to be sung at the abodes of the living *faqirs*. Hindus and Muslims sat together in such gatherings and listened to *Sufi* music in rapture.

Of the several migrant Pandits who visit the shrine of Khirbhawani at Tullmula in Kashmir, a considerable number are also disciples of the living *Sufi* Rahman Sahib. One can see them, even today, at the latter's residence during the annual celebrations at the temple of Khirbhawani. I am always amazed to find migrant Pandits from different parts of India in conversation with him, over the phone, throughout the year. The *Sufi* was not born blind; he lost his vision as a result of penance long ago. But he has a heart that can see both spiritual and social reality better than one who refuses to see contrarily. He recently renovated the mosque founded by his grandfather and *murshid*, the revered Asad. His *Sharia* consciousness notwithstanding, Rahman Sahib listens to music devotedly. Interestingly, some of his Pandit devotees still arrange *Sufi* musical evenings for him when they invite him to Delhi.

About six years ago, the ecstatic *Sufi* revered by Hindus and Muslims alike was Sultan Sahib of Butasgam. Such was the devotion of Professor Rattan Lal Hangloo to the *Sufi* that he would always talk about his exalted spiritual status in glowing terms. Often finding me distressed after my mother's death on September 24, 1980, Hangloo arranged a pleasure trip for me to his home in Hangalgund. I stayed at his residence, which is in picturesque surroundings, for a night. He showed me an old manuscript of his ancestor, the famous Pandit saint Mirza Kak of Hangalgund. It was a rewarding experience for me to discover Mirza Kak singing in praise of one God. I often hear in my mind the echo of the word *Tawhid*, used by the Mirza in his mystical poetry. The tragic thing is that I have not been able to get at such a rare manuscript in spite of my close and intimate relationship with Hangloo (Professor of History at Central University, Hyderabad). I visited the *samadhi* of Mirza Kak that evening. But I hurriedly left that serene site without praying for the peace of the deceased noble soul. Indeed, I was struggling with my reason anchored in a superficial understanding of the *Shariah* about the permissibility of praying for

the peace of the departed soul of a Hindu saint. The point will recur later in this account of experiencing Islam in the Valley of saints.

Next morning, the meeting with Sultan Sahib turned out to be an ethereal and mesmerizing experience. A spiritually intoxicated soul like him would usually abuse and beat his visitors in the true manner of *malamatis*. The latter were *Sufis* living in several regions of the Muslim world who sought to hide their spiritual attainments by behaving in a manner outrageous in terms of religious law. But Sultan Sahib talked to me without sounding paranormal. "What is that in your right hand?" asked the well-built *qalandar*. "Cigarettes for you, Sir," I quavered. The moment I handed the packet of cigarettes to him, he threw it out of his window and roared, "You must never smoke. Do you get me?" I nodded.

Before my meeting with Sultan Sahib, I used to smoke on rare occasions like wedding ceremonies, picnics, etc. Or, sometimes, I would smoke in the true manner of pseudo-intellectuals who would engage in pointless discussions either at the Srinagar Coffee House or elsewhere. Even then my total consumption of cigarettes annually must not have been more than a packet. Realizing that it was now no use indulging in such frivolities, I there and then resolved not to smoke in future. Also, I came to believe somehow that my meeting with Sultan Sahib would not go up in smoke in spiritual terms. Of course, my first meeting with Sultan Sahib for the fulfilment of a worldly desire had occurred several months earlier, but my last meeting with him was extremely significant for my future spiritual life.

In my youth, in the early 1960s and 1970s, some Pandit *Sufi* saints, like Nand Mout and Lala Sahib, lived in Kashmir and commanded immense respect among the Muslims. Nand Mout would occasionally visit the Thusoos. I saw him on two or three occasions, alighting from our neighbor's car to listen to the entreaties of the Muslims who would assemble around him. He would issue immediate orders for the redressal of their mundane problems in a manner that suggested he was the real ruler. Once, Professor Ghulam Mohammad Rabbani, my colleague at Kashmir University, told me an amazing story about Nand Mout. Soon after retiring from government service as a college teacher, Mr. Rabbani met Nand Mout by chance. Nand Mout asked him, "What do you want?" Rabbani replied, "Job..." The intoxicated soul (in spiritual terms) there and then verbally issued an order that Mr. Rabbani be appointed a lecturer at Kashmir University. I never had any reason to disbelieve Mr. Rabbani. During my association with him for two or three years at the university, I found him to be a thorough gentleman, knowledgeable, but at the same time, with an inclination toward the *Jamiat-i-Ahl-i-Hadith*, the organization that